



Knowledge for Life.
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November 8, 2021

Working Group for the Status of Libraries in Vermont
c/o The Vermont Department of Libraries
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Dear Working Group for the Status of Libraries in Vermont,

My name is Mary Danko and I am the Library Director for the Fletcher Free Library (FFL) located in Burlington, Vermont. The Fletcher Free Library was founded in 1873 and moved into a beautiful Carnegie building built in 1904. In 1981, a new addition increased the size of the library to over 46,000 square feet and included a beautiful 3-story glass curtain wall. The library had over 240,000 visits and over 380,000 circulations in 2018. The library has a budget that is over \$2.3M, has 27 employees and is open 7 days a week.

I am excited to be able to provide input on the topic of programming in public libraries. Library programming is a vast topic as public libraries serve community members of all ages and abilities with a diverse selection of topics designed to educate, inform, inspire and delight. As with all library services, library programming is free and open to the public. Public libraries' commitment to equity is a key tenant of all of our library services and programming is a key part of that. All public libraries work hard to be ADA accessible, however needed funding for building modifications and improvements to serve those with disabilities are often not prioritized by towns.

I have divided the programming topics into categories that I believe are meaningful and relevant to current needs of Vermont communities.

EARLY LITERACY

Early Literacy library programming serves children from infants to preschoolers. The impacts of Story Times, Music Programs, Language Programs (for example, Spanish Musical Kids is provided at FFL) and guided Play Programs are well documented through

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empirical research as having positive impacts on both the children and their families. When our youngest folks participate in library programming that instills a love of reading, builds a database of broad vocabulary, and facilitates a powerful connection to reading, they also gain dozens of kindergarten readiness skills that set them up for success for their entire education. Equally important, families learn how to better engage with their young children by learning early literacy techniques through modeling by librarians at these various programs.

YOUTH – Ages 6-10

The challenge of providing robust programming to this age range never seems to deter our Vermont Youth Librarians. Book Discussions, STEAM Programming, Art Programming, Chess clubs, Robotics Clubs, Coding Clubs, Read with a Dog, and Author Events are just some of the programming you can see at any Vermont library on any given day. Youth programming occurs year round and at all times, often targeted during afterschool hours, weekends and during school vacations.

Summer Challenge programs are deserving of a special mention. Once only about summer reading, public library summer challenge programs have expanded to include meaningful STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) activities that work to address academic summer slides in all learning areas. Equally important, public libraries provide robust programming during the summer months so that families can keep coming back to the library for more learning and more books. Some libraries, the Fletcher Free Library included, provide support for various camps in their communities or even put on some of their own summer camps.

TWEENS & TEENS

It is well documented that public libraries are often an important lifeline for Tweens and Teens. Developmentally this age group is hungry for meaning and connection. Public library programming often provides accessible entries into learning worlds that are creative and exciting without the pressure of being graded like in school. Writing programs, Makerspace programs, Poetry programs and Manga Clubs are just some examples of programming for this age group. In addition, this group learns about leadership through programming by getting involved in library Teen Advisory Boards and volunteering to assist with programs.

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ADULTS

Adult library programming covers a wide swath of topics, all meant to provide life-long learning, civil discourse and community engagement through stories. The list of phenomenal programming is never ending but some examples of Adult programs are Book Discussions, Author events, Lectures, Crafting, Cook Book Clubs, Music performances, Poetry events, Gardening & Homesteading, and Writing Clubs.

Three special mentions are warranted in the area of Adult Programming: English Language Learning/Citizenship, Technology Programming and Workforce Development Programming

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING/CITIZENSHIP

Many Vermonters don't realize that public libraries often provide classes for English Language Learners and Citizenship classes. As a trusted institution, public libraries are successful at bringing expanded learning to immigrants and refugees.

TECHNOLOGY

Public libraries were one of the first public entities to provide free and easy access to public computers and internet connections. Along with the physical needs (supplying PCs, Laptops and/or tablets) of connecting folks to the internet, libraries provide strong technology programming to help folks learn the basics of computers to the more complex. Basic classes like Introductions to word processing, spreadsheet applications, slide show presentations, and more advanced classes like website design are just some of the offerings. Our library also loans hotspots and laptops to the public.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Public libraries give support to those seeking employment and those wishing to grow their careers in a variety of ways. Programs can include resume writing, creating a website, and effective job searching. Libraries offer computer classes that target job seekers and instruct them on how maximize all the functions in the Google Suite (Docs, Sheets, Drive, etc.) which can help job seekers manage their resumes, cover letters and employment correspondence.

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It is also worth special mention that public libraries often put on very large events, either singularly or with partners. The Fletcher Free Library has offered large events such as: Irish Festival, Grow with Google, Seed Swap, Burlington's Highlight (New Year's Eve programming), and children's theater programs.

SENIORS

Public libraries often have special programming for Seniors that include books discussions, lectures, and recreational programming. We often partner with Senior Centers and Senior Housing facilities to provide programming that supplements their program offerings.

OUTREACH

For every one of the programs mentioned, they also occur outside the library's walls through outreach. Early Literacy Story Times are coordinated to take place in home day cares and with partner organizations like Head Start. Youth programming happens in After School programs in partnership with the school district. Summer Challenge programs are taken out to parks and nutrition sites throughout cities and towns all summer long. Tween/Teen programming often travels to the middle & high schools and various city afterschool programs offered by other organizations.

These outreach programs are intentional to ensure that populations that are experiencing challenges receive free, quality services that meet their needs.

EXHIBITS

Oftentimes public libraries are the only space where community members can share their art or hobbies. The public library supports exhibits of community talents often with opening receptions and coordinated programming. Not only do these kinds of programs promote community interaction and facilitate connections, they often offer opportunities for folks to get to know each other more intimately, crossing divides that can be cultural, racial, or socio-economic.

Furthermore, public libraries often partner with other community organizations to promote learning. The Fletcher Free Library has been proud to host Exploring Human Origins (A Smithsonian Evolution Project), the 1619 project (Hampton History Museum) and Hostile Terrain (Undocumented Migration Project) for just a few examples. These

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partner exhibitions have brought numerous community members into the library space for wonderful connections and thought-provoking conversations.

MEETING ROOM SPACE

It is important to consider providing meeting room space to the community as programming. This library service involves managing reservations, staffing and set-ups. Additionally, it includes technology support, which can be extensive as librarians support a variety of technological devices.

PASSIVE PROGRAMS

Passive library programming has grown steadily over the past decade. This type of programming involves having interactive materials out for engagement for all ages, often with a display component. It might be a craft or STEAM activity for youth or it could be a Poetry Writing prompt for teens and adults. It is often connected to other programming in the library or a theme of the month. This type of programming allows for folks who might be timid about attending a program but still lets them participate in a collaborative way that makes them feel a part of the community. It is also another way that the library promotes the love of lifelong learning.

A FOCUSED LENS ON EQUITY and RACIAL JUSTICE

Over the past year and a half, public libraries have been more assertive in ensuring that programming includes themes of equity and racial justice. Many book discussion programs have centered on Black/ Indigenous/People of Color (BIPOC) stories and/or were books by BIPOC authors. Many lecture programs were purposefully planned to engage on some of the most challenging issues facing our communities and the treatment of the BIPOC community.

COVID 19 IMPACT

During COVID-19 public libraries needed to be innovative and pivot sharply to continue to provide programming for their patrons. Libraries innovated to attempt different approaches to provide library services in a safe way during this very challenging time. This often included embracing outside activities and technology, such as Zoom. Below are some examples of programming that were added or adjusted due to COVID.

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- Provide virtual Book Discussions, Story Times, Computer classes and Speaker Events via Zoom.
- Start and maintain a YouTube channel with fun, interesting content.
- Create short videos on Instagram and Facebook demonstrating how to use online services and short, bite-size programming.
- Provide instructional programming that helps folks understand library online resources like Ancestry, Overdrive, Kanopy and more.
- Utilize outside space as much possible.
- Create StoryWalks® in parks & story experiences in windows so families have fun, literacy outdoor activities.
- Design Scavenger hunts.

One of the challenges of making these shifts was, and still is: funding. Libraries are under pressure now to provide virtual and hybrid programming to meet the needs of the community with tight budgets.

Author Deb Fallows recently interviewed me. Her article beautifully sums up the Fletcher Free Library's experience during the beginning and mid parts of the pandemic. Here is the link if you would like to read it: <https://www.ourtownsfoundation.org/libraries-lead-the-way-again/>

Thank you for taking the time to take in this testimony. I hope you can better understand the richness and impacts that public library programming brings to a community for folks of all demographics and of all circumstances. I would be delighted to engage with anyone who would like further information or has questions.

Thank you again,



Mary Danko
Library Director