

Bree Drapa, Director
Westford Public Library

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PROGRAMMING:

Programming is a vital library service, especially to small, pastoral communities. It provides enrichment and child care when the schools cannot. It offers equity and a sense of belonging to groups of varying ages and economic backgrounds. Older adults or people who live alone can find friendship and the opportunity for human interaction. People become emboldened to enter the library for a program, knowing they won't be expected to check out a book or use a computer.

Programming can be challenging for libraries with just one paid staff person, as was the case at Westford until very recently. Adult programs are typically scheduled for after hours. Children who attend programming after school are used to me helping them, then excusing myself to attend to patrons at the desk. Once COVID occurred, I informed my board that I would need to hire an additional substitute to cover the desk, while I conducted programs outside. I couldn't be expected to run across the street every time someone needed to check-out materials. This was an unbudgeted expense, but the board understands how imperative programming is to our rural community.

No other profession is more creative than librarians when it comes to stretching dollars. Our ability to knock on doors to find free or affordable experts in our own neighborhoods not only saves funds, but builds a sense of community. These home-grown resources also guarantee diverse programs sure to please the toughest of customers. It is this same Yankee ingenuity that allowed us to weather the pandemic with relative composure.

Having a small staff resulted in the ability to pivot quickly to respond to community needs in the face of the COVID shutdown. We were able to offer curbside service a week after closing our physical building. We expanded our digital presence to include book reviews on our YouTube channel, online library card registrations, additions to our digital collections, as well as online programming for all ages. Our adult book discussion even prefers meeting online to meetings that require wearing masks. As a result, we have been able to have two Vermont authors zoom in to our discussions. Our partnership with the Conservation Commission has blossomed during the pandemic to include story hikes, poetry walks, and a passport program along the trails. Programming with the schools has evolved into after school snacks and hygiene products in the library restroom (the only public one in town)—not ideal, but we are keeping the lines of communication open.

Libraries are resilient, flexible, and creative allowing for equally fantastic programs.