

## **Working Group on the Status of Libraries in Vermont**

### Meeting Minutes

Friday, January 14, 2022 from 10 am-12 pm, and 2-4 pm

Working Group members present: Tom McMurdo, Christopher Kaufman Ilstrup, Maria Avery, Meg Allison, Kelly McCagg, Andy Kolovos, Jeannette Bair, Susan O'Connell, Wendy Sharkey, Karen McCalla, Denise Hersey

Testimonials: Peter Langella, Frances Binder, Randal Smathers, Margaret Woodruff, Mary Danko

VTLIB staff members: April Shaw, Josh Muse, Janette Shaffer, Joy Worland

Meeting called to order at 10:05 am.

### **Working Group Business**

Discussion on how (and when) to put together the group's final report. Jeannette Bair suggested writing sections while each topic is still fresh, and Susan O'Connell agreed but also said that it could make sense to wait until testimony on all topics had been seen. Tom McMurdo suggested that they revisit the topic at the end of the meeting.

Jeannette brought up that some of the testimony documents in Google Drive are not labeled very instructively. Tom said that the Department will post the documents to our website and include clearer names.

### **Testimony**

**Peter Langella** - Librarian at Champlain Union High School in Hinesburg former president of the Vermont School Library Association (VSLA), and he also teaches the Designing Curriculum Course at UVM's School Library Sequence. Peter said that his focus was not on stats, but on the collection flowing out of the library to be part of the school curriculum. He quoted a recent statement by the VSLA Executive Board on intellectual freedom, including:

Our National Standards say that school libraries must facilitate “opportunities to experience diverse ideas by promoting the use of high-quality and high-interest literature in formats that reflect the diverse developmental, cultural, social, and linguistic needs of all learners and their communities.” Building diverse and inclusive collections is one of our core values.

We want to make it clear that books and materials that represent, honor, and affirm all races, ethnicities, genders, sexualities, abilities, languages, religions, classes, immigration statuses, and more must be present in every Vermont school library. Going further, these books and materials are essential resources for learning and life. Author Roxane Gay said that “stories have given me a place in which to lose myself. They have

allowed me to remember. They have allowed me to forget. They have allowed me to imagine different endings and better possible worlds."

The key thing for me and many other Vermont librarians and schools is to crate collections that honor, represent, and affirm our students and communities. Some of the ways that's changed over the past several years is an increase in Manga – students love Manga, and are able to see themselves in those stories, and having the words and pictures simultaneously makes for really intuitive learning. We've also expanded books in languages besides English, both so students who are learning can find fiction and non-fiction and not just textbooks, and students whose home languages are not English can find something engaging and fun. Additionally, we've removed fines and checkout limits, and created self-checkout stations to allow students to access materials on their own terms. Finally, we are trying to make up for the lack of books that have represented many of these groups by making sure the vast majority of our current purchases are honoring and affirming the identity of everyone.

Meg Allison asked if Peter could elaborate on the idea of the library's collection influencing the school curricula. Peter said that while we could work on displays and programming to make sure that the books and resources are flowing out into the school, we also need to make sure we're partnering with the departments to make sure the resources are becoming part of the curriculum. My colleague Christina Dealey and I both teach our own classes; Christina a hybrid social studies class and me a creative writing class, both of which are focused on learning through the new engaging books that are written by authors of predominantly marginalized identities. I also teach a social justice class where students do deep identity work before researching injustices displayed in books throughout the library.

Meg said that Peter and Christina's work and leadership is an inspiration, and asked about Project Lit. Peter explained that Project Lit is a nationwide book club. In addition to the traditional book club version, where students participate for a 30-minute block, we've also partnered with 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade humanities classes on an embedded unit where we go through all of the amazing project lit books. This dramatically expands our reach, both in a book discussion setting that is free from grades, as well as in a more traditional classroom setting.

Tom McMurdo said that you are clearly engaged with this, how could this be expanded to other schools and what do you think is the way forward statewide?

Peter answered that there are two main parts. The first is leadership: In 2003, the Agency of Education eliminated the school library liaison, and shifted librarians under education technology. If there was someone there who was more familiar with our work, and able to integrate it into the curriculum at the Agency of Education level, I think that would be a real improvement. The second concern is staffing: At CVU, we have 2.5 FTE certified librarians for 1,300 students. Having those people along with a support staff members allows us the freedom to do these creative things, rather than doing administrative/clerical work all the time. So many librarians are on an island by themselves, and just keeping the library going day-to-day leaves

no time to work on programming or curriculum. There's language in the educational quality centers that says each school with 300 students must have at least one full-time librarian and sufficient support staff, but many schools ignore that. Meg will have the stats, but I believe in the past 10 years something like 10 percent of librarian FTE have gone away and almost 50 percent of the support staff have disappeared, really limiting what library programs are able to do. Unsurprisingly, it relates to equity issues that more strongly impact schools that are rural, schools with more students in poverty, schools with more English language learners.

Tom said that we see the same thing in public libraries, with staff who are performing all of the tasks managing the library as well as the building. Wendy Sharkey asks Peter where he finds the books to fill in gaps in the collection, and how do you know when his collection truly reflects his community?

Peter said that he starts with the traditional ways to find books like journals, but he also follows social media to keep up with the authors that students are following on TikTok and Instagram. In terms of judging your collection, despite our work at Champlain Union we still have a long way to go, because whiteness and cisgender maleness have permeated so much of the collection for so long. And we still buy great books by authors who hold those identities, but in numbers that are smaller than the books we're buying to account for the decades of the table being weighted the other way.

**Wendy Sharkey** – I work at the Bennington Free Library. Traditionally, libraries have held a collection of books, but now they are so much more. We also have DVDs, audiobooks, non-traditional items, and downloadable and streaming services. The majority of our collection is books (55,000), which account for 64% of our physical circulation numbers, followed by DVDs (3,500) which account for 33%, audiobooks (3,400) which are 2%, and the balance is non-traditional items. That includes snow shoes, which have been so popular we've had to buy more, a telescope, a backpack with binoculars and nature books, puzzles, a moisture meter, and backpacks with books and manipulatives. Many of these items are bulky or won't fit on traditional shelves, so even though we'd like to expand our holdings to include things like ukuleles, cake pans, garden tools, and seeds, we need to figure out the storage space first. Downloadable items have a small but loyal following, and are a good way to reach the more tech savvy patrons. Hoopla has been especially popular, as well as Overdrive though the hold times can be a challenge.

We have a dedicated room to house local history, such as a list of local National Registry of Historic Places sites, rural sites and structures surveys, high school yearbooks, and subject files on local and state topics. Last year, we digitized our high school yearbook collection. The shared collection of the Catamount Library Network combined with the courier service dramatically increases the selection for patrons. A shared catalog does have its drawbacks, with at least 21 different catalogers with different skill sets, and training is key. She has been working to diversify the collection, and is just starting a diversity audit to analyze the entire collection.

Andy Kolovos asked about the relative use of digital vs. physical items, and if so, why? He also asked about the split of Adult vs. Children. Wendy said that electronic use was slow and steady, but was still nowhere near the circulation numbers of physical items. She felt that had a significant amount to do with age and tech savviness amongst many of their patrons. At Bennington, about 2/3 of circulation is for Adult materials, and 1/3 for children's. Andy also asked if there was a collection development policy or whether it was dependent on the approaches of staff. Wendy explained that though there was a policy, it is not very detailed, and that though book purchases are impacted by staff, they're also driven by patron requests. Andy asked about reference materials and print vs. digital. Wendy explained that though they still have print reference items, it's certainly smaller than it was. Staff are always ready to help patrons with the online materials, which are more comprehensive and up to date.

Kelly McCagg asked whether Bennington offered one-on-one tech training, which Wendy said yes but typically by appointment. Kelly felt at Colchester the training made a big difference for older or less tech-savvy patrons accessing resources on their phones or tablets.

Susan O'Connell asked about lending within the Catamount network, and whether it seemed to be a challenge for less techy patrons? Wendy said that 2/3 of request are patron-initiated, with the other 1/3 having staff involvement. She felt that as long as patrons had access to a computer and the internet, patron-initiated requests were not a big challenge.

**Frances Binder** – Has been the school librarian at Colchester High School since 2019. She serves just over 700 students. Their collection has 8,000 print items, which is about 40% fiction and 33% informational and narrative non-fiction, with the remainder being the professional collection, biographies, graphic novels, and a few special collections. Fiction books are on average 10 years old, and non-fiction is about 18. We're active at sending and receiving in Clover, but our one big wish is that we could be directly on the courier program. Though we can collaborate with the Burnham Memorial Library, it still requires staff time to get back and forth which can be challenging at a school. The library is adequately staffed with a librarian and full-time library assistant, and is sufficiently budgeted, which allows us to take on bigger projects that we might be able to otherwise. This includes a large-scale EDIS audit of the fiction collection, as well as ongoing collection development, routine selection and deselection, addition of digital resources, and ongoing EDIS audits of orders going forward.

Areas for improvement include updating the non-fiction collection. We offer access to a range of ebooks and audiobooks through the Vermont School Shared Digital Collection, though many students tend to prefer physical copies. They are predominantly used when they are assigned in class, though there was some usage during the remote and hybrid learning periods. We also offer ebooks, audiobooks, and enhanced ereaders through a service called TumbleBooks, which gets used through our special education department. We also have a collection of Playaways and some individual mp3 players, predominantly for students with various learning challenges.

Frances explained that one of their biggest goals is continuously assessing their collection for diversity and representation, and striving to offer students the fullest range of stories and voices. This is also true in their programming and displays, as well as their own professional learning. They use student and teacher input to discover how to use their collections to best serve students, to support education and research and just a plain love of reading. The school librarian position involves a wide range of roles – instructional partner, teacher, leader, information specialist, administrator, advocate – and necessitates a large amount of ingenuity and flexibility. Trying to shift the perception of libraries from extra to essential is one of our biggest ongoing challenges. It has been important to engage in conversations and share resources with school librarians across the state and nation, as well as reading and learning independently, and seeking out professional development. Another challenge has been a simple loss of space; in the last few years we lost our library classroom and about half of our storage space, and the library is used by many different groups for different things, creating a real push and pull.

Kelly McCagg suggested that the Burnham Library could drop off materials directly if that would help with the process.

Tom McMurdo mentioned that VTLIB is always looking for creative solutions around the Courier system, and that a further discussion with April Shaw might be of benefit. He also asked about the justification for the loss of space, and Frances explained that it was just due to a growing population and new faculty. Tom asked if there were any statewide solutions that she could see helping the current situation. Frances suggested that she appreciated Kelly's offer earlier, but that it would still require work on somebody's end, and that expanding the Courier service to all schools who wanted to participate would be a real change. She also reiterated Peter's earlier suggestion about missing the AOE liaison and having a voice at the table. She felt that many people don't have a good handle on what school librarians do, or the work that is required.

Jeannette Bair pointed out that an expansion of the Courier system to schools without a significant increase in budget would mean a significant decrease in support for public libraries, and is not sure that most school libraries would have the volume to justify the library-cost after discounts. Tom McMurdo responded that that is true, but that increased participants and increased volume of items could help make a case for increased funding. There has also been significant progress in adding libraries. Wendy Sharkey pointed out that when libraries are not able or interested in joining the system, there are postal costs to both the sending and receiving libraries that are likely higher than the actual Courier costs.

**Karen McCalla** – School Librarian at Mill River Union School. This is a 7-12 High School that serves around 300 students. They have a collection of between 10-15,000 items, as they're in the midst of a large deselection process. They've made an effort to remove non-narrative items, because they don't get used, and so the non-fiction is looking more exciting. The fiction collection is genrefied, which makes it easy for students to browse and find what they want. There is a large collection of graphic novels and manga because it is very popular.

Beyond that, Karen wanted to focus on changes that might occur at the state level. She currently has a full-time assistant, but knows that most school librarians don't have that luxury, and isn't sure whether she will go forward. Her collections-related suggestion is for a more deliberate way to collaborate and not reinvent the wheel at every library (school and public), when it seems like so many of us are trying to do similar things. For example, we could create a "capsule collection" of books that came out in the last 6 months that my students have loved that meet these diversity benchmarks, which might be a huge timesaver. She also echoed Peter and Frances' suggestion of an Agency of Education liaison. Karen also said that the material review sessions that VTLIB used to offer were really helpful, and repeated the suggestion of some sort of Courier options for schools.

Jeannette Bair asked about possible collaborations with the local public library in terms of collections, and limiting redundancies through collections development. She suggested that particularly if you were able to share an ILS that might simplify the process significantly. Karen said that in her particular case, the school is not very close to the library, which is in turn not open that many hours. Additionally, they have students from six different towns, which complicates collaboration. They do collaborate with the largest local library, but most of the others are volunteer run or very small. Karen did agree with the idea of a shared system, though it would have to meet everyone's requirements. Though Clover is great, her students don't typically use it for searching.

Denise Hersey asked more generally about resource sharing in the state, catalogs, and what terms like Clover mean. Tom McMurdo gives a brief summary of how Clover and the Courier works, and a comparison to other states (such as Connecticut).

**Randal Smathers** – Director of the Rutland Free Library. By Vermont standards, we are a large library. We have 80,000 print items, are the largest library in the Catamount system, and participate in GMLC's Overdrive system (including Overdrive Advantage). Digital content is very popular with our patrons – last year during COVID 20% of their circulation was via download or streaming. We also offer Kanopy and Freegal. This is partially because we have a large endowment that is limited solely to materials. Rutland has four MLS librarians, and each of the other three cover part of the collection. They loan about 6,000 items annually through Catamount, and another 800-900 through ILL. That's overall about 2,000 less than we receive, making them a substantial net lender. They're happy to do that, but even just in terms of the Courier system there's a significant financial for the privilege of loaning our items out to other libraries.

Randal explains that he thinks Catamount/Rutland is really coming up against the limits of the volume of ILL and consortial lending that can be managed. They are a big library, but they find themselves out of space because the circulation area was not designed to lend to 20-odd other libraries. Randal says that they are looking at a significant expansion, a large piece of which is getting more space for the Courier and ILL. He feels that Clover and Courier are designed and funded as a one-size fits all approach, when that is not really accurate – it's actually a hub and

spoke model, but isn't treated as such. In talking with other directors at large libraries, they are facing similar issues. Randal would strongly encourage the state to explore ways to maximize the ability of the large libraries to function as these hubs, to update the organization and increase the support. With their volume, a library like Rutland could handle five Courier deliveries a week, but they have neither the staff nor the money necessary.

Randal also spoke about how Clover is not directly connected with ILS's (in their case, Catamount), requiring a couple of separate searches to potentially find items for patrons. His suggestion is to look at the roughly 100 libraries in the state on Koha as a starting point.

Randal makes a case for statewide borrowing, as a way to improve the overall choice and experience for borrowers. Borrowers who can afford it may just go to Amazon, where things are instantly available, but folks who rely on library services get second class service. This is both unfair, and bad for libraries, if we are seen as the second-class choice. Given the opportunity to get books from other libraries, the public is happy to do it. With a popular book, we'll buy 2-3 general copies, 1-2 large print, a CD audiobook, and then a couple of copies on Overdrive Advantage, so we're looking at roughly 7 copies – we can afford that because of our endowment, but most libraries can't. Randal says that when the state decided to cut support for the central library function, it was intended to save money, but in fact it's a false economy, and just increased the spending and spread it through all of the individual libraries. From the top of my head, I would guess that we are ultimately spending 5 to 10 times more for a poorer product.

Tom McMurdo thanked Randal for his perspective, and said that he thinks it's good for the Department to be pushed, and have issues identified from those in the field. Randal said that he wasn't critiquing staff in the Department, just that the state's decision to dramatically shrink the department was a false economy.

Wendy Sharkey agreed that a single shared catalog would be a great improvement. Tom reiterated that we can't compel any library to do anything in regards to their ILS. He said that the Department has tried through Clover to centralize access, though to Randal's point it does require jumping through a number of hoops. Randal adds that their current discussion is whether they should enable patron searching in Clover, but the challenge is that you don't really want to enable them to jump ahead, you want them to go through the steps – local, consortia, statewide, WorldCat. That would be great for them, but we're afraid they would jump straight to WorldCat because they don't want to do four searches.

Andy Kolovos asked about the comparison between digital and print usage. Randal explained that they are up to 20% digital usage, they were at 15% before COVID, but five years ago it was more like 3-5%. That is partially due to the Libby app just being simpler – it used to require multiple visits before a patron was really comfortable with the app, and now it may only take one visit. Audiobooks have been the biggest driver – 2/3 of our downloadable usage is for downloadable audio. They had Acorn through RBdigital, and they offer Kanopy, which is great

for those into art house films and such. But physical DVD usage has dropped dramatically, as many users have moved to streaming. We often get requests for video items that are only available from a given service, which is usually not put out on DVD. Randal also explained that only a few of their users are download-only; most who download also checkout print materials. Andy asked about print reference items, and Randal stated that it was considerably shrunk, and that it would be even smaller without the VT Statutes.

**Margaret Woodruff** – Director of the Charlotte Library. Firstly, when I started as a youth services librarian here 20 years ago, I looked forward to the semi-annual materials review sessions with enthusiasm and expectation. This helped to boost the quality of collections at individual libraries, and across the library community. It was also nice to hear that someone else enjoyed a series or had patrons who were really interested, and that even if you couldn't get the item for your collection, you knew where you could find it.

Secondly, we are lucky to have a local history curator, who is able to support community members and visitors, as well share their expertise with other staff. Margaret feels that it would be beneficial to allot funds and training for such activities at the state level. These activities can improve collaboration with a local historical society as well as the Vermont Historical Society.

Lastly, Margaret thinks that it is crucial that our collections should not be a barrier but an open door, and this means that collection development needs to be proactive. We need to provide resources for all community members, including those who may not feel comfortable due to language or technological barriers, as well as refugees, new Americans, and anyone else who might not yet use the library.

Andy Kolovos asked about physical vs. electronic usage. Margaret said that due to COVID, electronic use is up while physical is down, just because of limited physical access, and the challenges in letting patrons know about new items and the collection. Andy also asked about reference materials to which Margaret said that they the local history items, but that other aspects had moved further and further to digital. However, kids who come in the building still love to look at the big atlases. She also mentioned that digital and information literacy is an important piece related to the use of digital reference resources.

Tom McMurdo brought up the idea of marketing for libraries, and reaching current non-users, as asked if Margaret had any thoughts on what we could do statewide or locally to help with that? Margaret mentioned that the VLA Public Library Section created a series of infographics that could be tailored to individual libraries, but in a similar vein they might not have done a great job of marketing these marketing materials – meaning that some libraries took them and ran, but others didn't really know how to use them. Perhaps having a webinar on how to use those materials would be start. She also mentioned an interesting program that the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission had a program on housing, which relates to libraries in a

number of ways, and where they said that it's not enough to work with the community you have – you need to work with the community you will have.

**Mary Danko** – Director of the Fletcher Free Library. Mary wanted to expand on a few things from her written testimony. First off, she brought up the challenges of digital resources. As an example, a patron might see *State of Terror* by Louise Penny and Hillary Clinton for sale as a Kindle book for \$15. But for a library to purchase it through our vendor is \$60, and that's for a two-year license. To get the audiobook through Amazon would cost \$18, but for a library it's \$100 for two years. As another example, *The Island of Missing Trees* by Elif Shafak costs \$9.45 for a Kindle or \$63 for a library in perpetuity, while the audiobook would be \$28.35 but the library copy would be \$148. Mary's point is that it's a complicated and volatile market, with changing prices, varying licensing models, and limited options to share even within the state. But maybe with increased collaboration we could find ways to improve our economies of scale around this.

Mary goes on to suggest a real expansion is necessary to improve our ability to share digital and physical collections, and emphasizes that it will take a big investment of time, money, and leadership. She feels that there are many ways we could improve collection sharing among libraries, and that at is core this is an equity issue.

Denise Hersey pointed out that at UVM there are a lot of challenges around differing licenses and licensing costs from different vendors, and that she knows of some academic consortiums who work together on licensing. She wondered if there was an equivalent for public libraries. Mary explained that Green Mountain Library Consortium (GMLC) has been working on this kind of collaboration for over 10 years, but it doesn't include everyone, and it's a relatively small volunteer run organization. Realistically, that means that libraries may end up going on their own for a product, rather than trying to coordinate on every contract – but she feels there is great potential out there for more of that.

Meg Allison asked about ebooks and the necessity for patrons to have devices, which becomes an equity issue. Mary explained that at present they are not lending devices because they don't have sufficient capacity, but they have recently added laptops and hotspots. She feels like there's a great deal of work necessary to get these programs started, but that maybe if there were a group of libraries working together on it they could all support one another, and make it an easier process.

Along those lines, Tom McMurdo wanted to recognize all of the work that GMLC has done with e-content, and that with something like 160 libraries they have probably reached everyone who is interested in participating. The state is in process on a new ebook/audiobook vendor, and though things are close to finalized he can't share much information yet. Tom also talked about the issues with the current ebook/audiobook licensing models, and the challenges of maintaining content and low holds at a reasonable price.

Andy Kolovos pointed out that the e-vendors have a lot of information, but aren't necessarily sharing all of it, and that limits libraries negotiating positions. For example, if the library is charged for a title for 26 uses, but something like 10% of users never make it past the first chapter, that's not exactly a fair proposition. Andy also asked Mary about the relative use of physical vs. electronic items. Mary explained that e-audiobooks got big when they appeared, and have continued to keep growing over time, between Overdrive and Hoopla. Ebooks grew initially, but have since kind of plateaued. One caveat is that during COVID, patrons who had been hesitant to adopt finally came on, but in many cases these "late late adopters" required a lot of patron support. And now that things are receding a bit, we're seeing some folks moving back to physical books. E-Audiobooks though, continue to grow, which is great because people are recognizing that reading a book doesn't just mean physically reading. It allows patrons with physical issues or who are auditory learners to more easily read, as well as giving people options for reading while doing many other things – commuting, cleaning the house, and so on.

Andy asked about reference materials and print vs. digital. Mary answered that digital has dramatically increased in importance, while the print collection and usage has gone way down. She pointed out that the State's offerings of Gale are really important, for both patrons and staff, and that it's important for every library to have access to that. But Mary also suggested that in current times, with misinformation and disinformation so common, it would be great to have even deeper shared and peer-reviewed content.

Jeannette Bair wanted to bring up the issues with pricing and ebooks/audiobooks, and how the industry is ripe for charges of price fixing. Between pricing, and limits on using and transferring content, it's really upsetting, and isn't survivable for small libraries. She said that she realized ALA is not going to lead a strike to convince libraries not to purchase next year, but she feels that something needs to be done since the industry is holding all of the cards; with a physical book you can give it away, you can sell it on a secondary market, and there should be more equity with the digital market. Jeannette also expressed concern with another potential competing service through the state, and the example of patrons putting holds on multiple items but never removing the second one once they get their item.

Tom McMurdo agreed with Jeannette's points, and mentioned that some state's are moving to legislation to try and level the field around e-content at libraries: for example, the Maryland law which basically compelled Amazon to make their content available to libraries if they wanted to sell audiobooks in the state. in the meantime we can keep working on improving our shared collections.

**Susan O'Connell** – Director of the Craftsbury Public Library. Susan pointed out that much of what we've heard today has been from larger libraries, and though smaller libraries have many of the same problems they also have some differences. In addition to her written testimony, she wanted to focus on two specific points. The first is the juvenile material reviews sessions that the state used to offer. She thought about why it was so important for juvenile materials rather than adult ones. One aspect is that the adult collection is constantly getting refreshed,

because regular patrons have been browsing it for years and in some cases decades; on the other hand, the various stages in the juvenile collection are only going to be accessed for a few years, so it's possible to create a somewhat more static but finely curated collection. At many of the smaller libraries, the children's librarians may not have the experience in collections development that a director might have for the adult collection, so having someone who is really looking at the best of what is coming out is quite helpful. A related piece is around diverse collections, and having someone who can help guide development would be very valuable.

Susan also brought up resource sharing, and her experiences in Ireland where it was easy for patrons to get an item available anywhere in the country in just a few days. While that is true in many places, Vermont is not one of them yet. Susan ended by saying that the independence of our small libraries is important, but there's a place for both independence and collaboration (freedom and unity) to move forward.

Andy Kolovos asked about the use of physical vs. digital content, as well as reference materials. Susan explained that Craftsbury had not offered ebooks/audiobooks to their patrons, but that they've recently been collaborating with the nearby Albany and Simpson Libraries to get them automated, creating a shared collection of all three libraries. As part of that, Albany is offering digital services to patrons from all three. Susan elaborates that this is one of the situations that makes no sense at many libraries, where multiple libraries will be paying individually to cover the same patrons. In terms of digital reference, they have the state's resources, which serves as a valuable backstop, but there isn't really a print reference collection as such anymore.

Meg Allison brought up Susan's reference to finding the term "Everyday Diversity" during a materials review session, and that we'd already discussed the way that collections development can be dependent on a librarian's own approach and preferences. Based on that, she asked Susan what topics she thinks would be important to embed into professional development around collections. Susan explained the Everyday Diversity came up during a materials review session with Grace Greene, asking participants to not just remember this one example but to take it with them constantly as they work on their collection. Susan also brought up the idea that we're collectively doing a good job of reviewing how diversity looks in terms of gender, skin color, and other pieces that we hadn't been considering, but that we were often not thinking about things like socioeconomic diversity, and the rural/urban (or at least less-rural) divide. These differences really matter in our communities, and it can be challenging to find relevant materials.

Kelly McCagg thanked Susan for coming, and for giving the perspective from one of the smaller libraries. She appreciated that Susan had found a temporary fix for some of their issues like collaboration and e-content, but that it doesn't solve the larger issues. Tom McMurdo agreed, and said that a big part of what the working group can do is to set up some guideposts towards more potential regional or statewide cooperation. Shifting to the model in Ireland, or California, or Connecticut, where a patron can easily get an item from anywhere can seem daunting, but

the changes that have taken place in Vermont over the last 10 years – from VALS to Clover, the Courier System, VOL free for all libraries – does show that progress can happen.

Jeannette Bair thanked Susan for bringing up the importance of the material review sessions, and talked about its absence since Grace Greene's retirement, and the hope that the state might be able to offer that program again. Susan agreed, and suggested that sometimes we don't know what we need until it's gone. Jeannette pointed out that it is particularly crucial for small libraries who don't even have a children's librarian and where one part-time librarian has to cover everything. Susan said that is definitely true at Craftsbury: You need to have new adult content all the time, and if you feel you have a decent juvenile collection it's the thing that gets dropped when there isn't time.

Tom McMurdo said he had talked with some colleagues, and it was interesting that there wasn't an adult material review session. Susan pointed out that the Rapid Reviews sessions would happen at VLA, but while they were wonderful to have, they didn't feel as crucial.

### **Working Group Business**

Tom asked about scheduling of the next session. He felt that Fridays work well, and was looking at March 18 or 25, with a similar 10 am-4 pm structure with a break in the middle. After some discussion, March 25 seems to be the best date. The next session is about facilities.

Karen McCalla asked for clarification on what end-result the legislature is expecting from the committee. Tom read the appropriate section from the statute:

Report. On or before November 1, 2023, the Working Group shall submit a report to the House and Senate Committees on Education. The report shall contain:

1. specific and detailed findings and proposals concerning the issues set forth in the information listed above;
2. recommendations for updating the statutes, rules, standards, and the governance structures of Vermont libraries to ensure equitable access for Vermont residents, efficient use of resources, and quality in the provision of services;
3. recommendations related to the funding needs of Vermont libraries, including capital, ongoing, and special funding; and
4. any other information or recommendations that the Working Group may deem necessary.

Denise Hersey said she wonders if there will be gaps in our understanding based on the testimony, and whether it would make sense to organize the group so that individuals could be trying to identify these gaps. Tom McMurdo agreed that that was a good idea, and feels that the working group is setup in a way where the members can reach a lot of different people through their networks. He did point out that Open Meeting Law limits our ability to plan outside of meetings, but there would be a certain amount of independence for individual members.

Andy Kolovos mentioned that because of his professional experience, he would be more than happy to reach out to certain libraries and do some data gathering with a series of questions. Tom McMurdo asked about the possibility of a survey, but Karen McCalla suggested that folks who have not responded to requests for written testimony may be unlikely to respond to a survey, while a personal appeal might work better. Karen also asked if the group was specifically limited as to the number of meetings that could be held, or could additional meetings take place? Tom clarified that we do have 3 meetings on the end of the project after testimony, to work on the report.

Karen McCalla suggested it might make sense to break into smaller groups of people and start setting some deadlines to start outlining and pre-writing a sort of structure offline. She also suggested that having the major discussions in a meeting rather than back and forth in email is probably preferable.

Tom McMurdo pointed out that the statute says that the group is limited to 12 meetings in terms of per diem payments, but that there could be flexibility for non-compensated sessions. However, people had effectively signed up for 12 meetings when joining the group, so he is hesitant to ask people to attend, but is also concerned that we could be under some time pressure at the end of the project.

Susan O'Connell expressed an interest in potentially meeting later in the project if necessary, and a willingness to attend additional meetings if necessary. She also mentioned that it looks like folks at school libraries are doing a great job gathering testimony, and wondered if they could share any tips that they might have. Susan also admitted to feel trepidatious about submitting testimony despite being in the group, and wondered if the group could do a bit more marketing to explain exactly what they are looking for.

Denise Hersey agreed that that is a great question for the school library folks, and mentioned that she and Maria Avery are not getting a lot of feedback from the academic libraries. Part of why she was interested in interviewing or some other approach to try to cultivate more input. Denise also agreed that it may not be time to look at additional meetings, but longer term she is already investing quite a bit of time and so is willing to invest more if that's what's needed to make the end product the best it can be.

Meg Allison appreciated Susan's comment that testimony itself could be a barrier for participation. She said that Vermont school libraries have strong leadership and listserv, and that despite everything that is going on many librarians have been willing to make time to write testimony. Meg noted that many librarians offered written testimony, but that finding time to provide live testimony was challenging around staff schedules. It might be possible to use some of the testimonial time to work on the actual report, but on the other hand she didn't want the committee to be martyrs, to volunteer extra time without compensation, or to expand on the initial boundaries. Meg agreed that two years down the line, she will not

remember specifics that came up in sessions. Tom McMurdo suggested the group revisit this down the line, and plan normal testimony for the March meeting.

Karen McCalla wanted to revisit Susan O'Connell's question about strategies that the school librarians in the committee have used to successfully solicit testimony. She explained that they put together a form with some guiding questions so that people could write as much or as little as they wanted, and gave the option of using the form to those who wanted it. Tom McMurdo said that the group could potentially adopt that model across the board. Wendy Sharkey asked about the listservs, which are currently used, but whether there might be a different approach or venue. Susan O'Connell suggested that having someone post to the listserv who is not from VTLIB might help, and that we could also direct folks to the previous testimony to get a better idea of what it could look like. She asks whether posts from multiple members on multiple lists could help increase participation.

Tom McMurdo emphasized that folks should feel free to take this and run, whether that means interviews, forms or whatever, as long as the submitters know how the testimony will be used. He also wanted to remind everyone about the ABLE Library, and to mention that it can be relatively easy to qualify if you have a relevant condition. In some cases it can be a temporary condition, even a physical injury where you can't hold a book. Tom said that he has several blind members in his family, and he is a big booster for ABLE and the National Library Service.

Meeting adjourned at 3:40 pm.

The next meeting will take place on Friday, March 25, from 10 am-12 pm, and 2-4 pm.