

Working Group on the Status of Libraries in Vermont

Meeting Minutes

Friday, November 12, 2021 from 10 am-12:20pm

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

Testimonials: Dana Hart, Linda Donigan, Amy Olsen, Karson Kiesinger, Bree Drapa, Jane Ramos, Meg Allison & Karen McCalla (VSLA)

VTLIB staff members: Tom, Janette, Josh, April

Working Group Business

Tom began the meeting by mentioning that this was the first meeting with testimony. He said that some testimony was received after the meeting agenda was set, but that he was willing to stay later to hear testimony that was not on the agenda.

Working group members then introduced themselves. Tom said that working group documents & videos would be on the VTLIB website.

After introductions, a discussion ensued about the working group meetings. Tom noted that the group was limited to 12 meetings, and that meetings may need to be longer to accommodate all of the testimony. Tom suggested that possibly the meetings could be moved to weekends or after-hours. Working group members contributed thoughts and asked questions about potential times and challenges:

- Kelly said that she did not think the work could be done without extending the length of meetings.
- Andy asked if more meetings could be added. Tom replied that the law would have to be changed to have more than 12 meetings.
- Wendy asked if testimony needed to be read out loud in the meeting, since testimony was submitted beforehand in writing. Tom replied that there could be a choice for people giving testimony.
- Meg asked to know the meetings way in advance, as she would need a sub for her school library if the meetings were longer.
- Karen asked to keep the meetings during normal working hours, and Jeannette wanted to make sure that the meetings would be on a day that would not be during her library's open hours.
- Susan asked about the three remaining meetings on the schedule that were not devoted to a specific topic but to testimony, and if these were extra meetings. Tom replied that he suspected more testimony would come in after the topic-specific meetings and that the working group would need to be open to hearing that, and bringing people back to ask more questions. Susan mentioned the non-topic meetings could be used to study how other states are doing things, and to write the final report.

Ultimately, a motion was put forward by Tom to vote on a suggestion by Christopher Kaufman Ilstrup, which was to have four-hour working group meetings split into a morning session and an afternoon session, with a break in between. 10 people voted to approve this suggestion, so it passed.

Tom said he would send a Doodle poll to schedule the next working group meeting.

Tom began the testimony portion of the meeting.

Testimony

Dana Hart – Dana is the director of Ilsley Public Library in Middlebury.

Programming is a backbone of the Ilsley Public Library. Our ongoing assessment of library programs (through statistics, surveys, and anecdotal feedback) demonstrates that Vermont communities are hungry for programs and, if programs are offered, they will be well attended and will enrich community members' lives. Ilsley's experience with programming also demonstrates that thoughtful, engaging programs require substantial funding and staff time. Public libraries are often asked to do more but are not supported with adequate resources. Programming is an essential service, and in order to provide programs libraries need dedicated funding.

There is great demand for programs in Middlebury, so we devote significant resources to programs. Three years ago we added a full-time position specifically to allow us to meet growing demand for programs; in 2019, pre-pandemic, the library planned or sponsored 900 programs which were attended by over 18,000 participants. The library has a five-person programming team that meets three times a year to make sure our programs are in alignment with the library's mission, are meeting the needs of our community, and are reaching underserved populations (reaching underserved populations often means meeting those populations where they are, and library programming regularly takes place outside of the library building). I am attaching a document we use to guide and evaluate our library programming. Ilsley is able to provide rich and engaging programs because we have 1) a dedicated programming budget (about \$13,000 annually), 2) adequate staff hours dedicated to programming, which includes time for planning and evaluating programs, and 3) an understanding at the admin/trustee level that many of these staff hours need to take place outside of the library building.

During the pandemic, we promptly canceled all in-person programming, along with the rest of Vermont libraries. Over the following year and a half, we continued to provide programs in three distinct ways, which changed the way we think about 'library programs' at Ilsley.

- 1. Digital Programs. The library immediately pivoted to holding as many planned programs as possible remotely, primarily using Zoom. Benefits of remote, digital programs are that they allow patrons to connect in real time, providing a sense of community. It also increased accessibility for patrons that have a difficult time making it into the library building for programs. For our youngest patrons, digital Storytimes provides a sense of continuity and security. Drawbacks are that patrons started to experience Zoom fatigue as the pandemic wore on. Going forward, we plan to utilize remote meeting technology occasionally, as a tool to extend access to programming.*
- 2. Outdoor Passive Programs. The library worked with the town, local businesses, and homeowners to install Books on Sticks in several areas around town. These storybook walks were immensely popular with young children and their caretakers. After evaluating the program and discussing its value with local daycares and schools, the library has decided to continue to operating Books on Sticks in perpetuity. Benefits include giving caregivers something fun to do with their children at a time that works best for them; promoting outdoor excursions; and placemaking benefits for downtown Middlebury. A drawback is that it is a time intensive program to maintain, requiring ongoing maintenance and updated stories.*
- 3. Take-and-Make Passive Programs. The pandemic caused the library to redirect much of our programming budget to developing Take-and-Make projects for both youth and adults. These are bags that can be picked up at the library and completed at home; bags include an age-appropriate craft and instructions. Youth bags tend to focus on a STEAM theme. Again, after evaluating the program and noting overwhelmingly positive community feedback, the library has decided to continue to offer Take-and-Make bags as part of our regular programming going forward. Benefits include reaching new library users (many caregivers would ask if they could take extra take-and-makes for their neighbors,*

who didn't regularly visit the library and wouldn't have otherwise seen the bags), and, again, allowing patrons to participate on their own time. A drawback is that these craft bags can be costly to create.

Our patrons have let us know how much they value in-person programming, and we are slowly returning to in-person programming as it allows. The library is the heart of the Middlebury community, and in person programs provide many important benefits which cannot be replicated by digital or passive programs. But we learned during the pandemic that library programs can adapt to meet patrons where they are and can provide cultural enrichment even during periods of great upheaval. We learned that passive programs (site specific programs and take-and-make crafts) play an important role in allowing us to reach patrons that prefer to complete activities on their own, or cannot make it into the library for regularly scheduled programs for any number of reasons. We also learned that we can extend the reach of certain programs by hosting them on a digital platform, allowing patrons to Zoom in remotely. As we move out of the pandemic, Ilsley will rebalance our programming budget to accommodate more passive programs and will utilize remote digital access for programs more frequently.

During her testimony, Dana mentioned she provided Tom with a document her library uses to guide and evaluate programming.

Tom asked Dana: "If you could have one thing to enhance programming what would it be?" Dana replied that she would like to have more flexible physical spaces.

Jeannette asked Dana what her library's programming budget is, and Dana replied that Ilsley does not have programs as part of their operating budget, which comes from the Town of Middlebury. Ilsley's programming budget comes from the Friends of the Ilsley Public Library, a 501c3. She said she suspected this was the case 10-20 years ago, when library programming was not seen as essential like collections, and the library would ask the friends group for donations to do little extra programs. Over the years, programs have become an essential service, but they are still funded by the Friends, and the Friends provide about \$13,000 annually. Dana said the library also applies for additional grants, like the Rotary that gave the Ilsley about \$2000 for the past three years. Jeannette thought it was important to note that even one of the biggest libraries was relying on fundraising for their programming budget.

Andy asked Dana if Ilsley tracks the demographics of attendance at programs and which demographics represent the largest group that participates in Ilsley programming. Dana replied that her library has recently started to track demographics in their programming stats on Google Forms, considering age, gender, and if they're attracting people from underserved populations (Dana specifically mentioned lower-income groups). She said that the librarian hosting the program makes a judgment call about who was in attendance and their demographics like age and gender. Dana said the system is far from perfect and at this point they are just trying to get an idea of attendance based on their own observations. Andy followed up and asked how their programs break down, giving an example of what he sees at the library in Essex Junction, where programs are attended by young children with families and elders. Dana did not have statistics with her but said she would follow up. She noted that the smallest participation group is teens and people in their 20s, but that the majority of their programs are attended by small children and their families (she noted they get people in their 30s and 40s because of this) and seniors.

Tom asked about the Ilsley's "books on sticks" and other programming that came out of COVID, and if there was anything not in Dana's testimony related to lessons learned from COVID. Dana said she learned how important it is for people to be able to come together as a group and have a social interaction, and that there isn't really a way to replicate the library as a physical space that draws people together.

Susan asked Dana if she had data about the number of staff hours per week that are spent on programming or what percentage of staffing budget is related to programming. Dana said she could follow up, but that she was talking to her youth librarian about the number of hours she put into programming each week. The librarian was able to track, but that her numbers would be different (from someone newer to programming) since she was experienced, and that different programs require different amounts of time. Dana wanted to underscore that the Ilsley just added a 40 hour a week programming position to the library two years ago, and she said about 15 hours a week of that position is dedicated to adult programming, and the position was meant to expand programming.

Tom concluded this portion by saying that the working group would take additional testimony after the meeting and would put it on the website.

Linda Donigan – Linda is the youth services librarian at Bennington Free Library.

In response to The Working Group for the Status of Libraries call for testimony, I am submitting statements regarding two program initiatives that have a significant impact on my practice as a youth services librarian and the programs we offer at Bennington Free Library.

1. Vermont Early Literacy Initiative (VELI):

Now more than ever, our libraries are providing expanded services and outreach to children and families. Librarians work continuously to improve the cognitive content of our programming, as we elevate the traditional story hour into meaningful learning experiences for children. Thanks to VELI, Bennington Free Library & many public libraries throughout the state have been able to do this. Thanks to our VELI training, we know that in order to be successful learners and communicators, young children need multiple experiences with books, frequent and interesting conversations with adults, and diverse and repeated early learning experiences. Thanks to VELI, our public library has been central in providing these learning opportunities throughout our community, even during the pandemic. VELI began in 2010 and has been a guiding light ever since...we hope that this important work can continue with the support of the Vermont Department of Libraries.

2. Museum ABC's:

The Museum ABCs program is a collaboration between Bennington Museum and Bennington Free Library. The program is intended for children ages 3 to 5 and their adult companions and supports early literacy and a lifelong love of museums and learning. Now in its eleventh year, the innovative and hands-on program has impacted the lives of hundreds of pre-school children. Children and families have explored art, objects and historical concepts in the galleries of the Museum, engaged in storytelling and fundamental literacy exercises, and created artwork based on monthly themes. Children ask and answer questions, share their opinions, make observations and work collaboratively. In partnership with Bennington Free Library, thematically appropriate children's books are shared during each session and families can further explore books which are available in the Children's Room.

This year Museum ABC's received an A.D. Henderson Foundation grant to fund expansion and outreach of the program intended to serve our neediest families. This was a significant move forward especially during the pandemic. We intend to build on the momentum and continue with our mission. The Bennington Museum and Bennington Free Library "bookend" Main Street making the Museum ABC's message very clear: local libraries and local museums can work together to create community by supporting children & families.

Tom asked Linda if she could have one thing to enhance programming, what it would be. Linda replied that she would like more funding, more time, and a greater emphasis on outreach into the community.

Susan thanked Linda for highlighting VELI and echoed the sentiment of the incredible impact VELI had on Vermont libraries. She noted that before VELI, story time was considered entertainment, but after VELI the library and the community started to think of it more as an educational piece. Linda replied that she is glad that VELI has a home at Vermont Humanities Council and that she still uses pieces from the trainings in her work. Christopher commented that Vermont Humanities is happy to have VELI/Vermont Center for the Book at the Humanities Council, and that the programming will be continuing and is being adapted (and that more staff time and funding for it would be helpful.)

Wendy asked Linda where her funding comes from. Linda said that her library does have a program budget but that she spends time writing grants and raising money that way (donations.)

Amy Olsen – Amy is the director of Lanpher Memorial Library.

The Lanpher Library is led by the idea that as our community grows and changes, we will do what we can to also grow and change to meet the needs of our community. We are continually assessing our programming, reaching out to local organizations as community partners, and listening to our community members to learn more about what is important to them.

1. *Children's Programs*

The Lanpher Library holds 2 year-round, weekly story time programs.

Night Owl Story Time on Monday evenings at 6:00 started 16 years ago as a 6 week program where children were invited to come to the Library in their pajamas and participate in a "bed-time story time". When the 6 weeks were over, the father of one of the kids said: "Really? This is the last one?" Since he worked during the day, he liked that he was able to join in story time with his kids in the evening. We've met almost every Monday night since.

Wednesday mornings at 10:00 is Story Time for 0-6-year-old. We have participated in Vermont Early Literacy Initiative (VELI) and VELI Stem and have incorporated these practices into our story time programs, so that we are intentional about planning our programs to help children gain the skills they need before they learn to read, and also to inform the adults so that they too can use early literacy skills in their daily lives with children.

Each winter we hold an 11 week "Red Clover Program". Each week for 10 weeks we explore a different book on the Red Clover list and on the 11th week, children vote for their favorite. We submit their votes to VTLib and hold a short "reveal" program after the state winner is announced.

Summer Reading Programs.

Using the annual Collaborative Summer Library Program theme, we hold a series of special programs for school age children throughout the summer to engage them in reading, goal setting and winning prizes when they set their goals.

Monthly Junior Naturalist Programs

Sponsored by a variety of local businesses, the Outreach Educator at the Lamoille County Conservation District comes to the Lanpher Library once/month to excite children on a different topic specific to the outdoors in Vermont. Snakes, Trees, Bees, Winter Adaptations, Tracks and Traces...

Annual Author Visits

A local family observed children coming and going from the Lanpher Library and wanted to donate money to support children using the Library. The donation is used to host an author visit each year.

Annual Mystery Ingredient Challenge

In February, March and April of 2021, we hosted a Mystery Ingredient Challenge" for students in grades 4-8, based on the Food Network TV show, "Chopped". This program was during a time when, due to Covid, we weren't holding in-person programming. It was so popular that we've made it an annual event to take place each year in February. The Lamoille Retired Educators group loved this idea and has sponsored the 2022 program.

Students who were interested signed up in advance. They picked up their bags of 4 "Mystery Ingredients" (for example, in February it was goldfish crackers, carrots, a Granny Smith apple and a beef stick). Students had a week to create an original recipe using the 4 ingredients plus any others from their own pantries or refrigerators. Their recipes could be "inspired by" an existing recipe, but students were asked to create their own version. We aided any family who wanted it (no questions asked) to purchase additional items to make their recipes. In their mystery ingredient bags, each participant got a "recipe card" for them to write down their recipe and also a "score card" for fun.

Students had a week to:

- Send/email a photo of their original recipe*
- Send/email the recipe they created and used*
- For fun, if they wanted to, send in the score card so we could know how it tasted!*

We are currently working with the Green Mt. Technology & Career Center's Culinary teacher to adapt this program for use with culinary students.

2. Adult Programs/Community Programs

Monthly book discussion. Free and open to all. Copies of the book are available in advance and obtained by the library through Interlibrary loan. Regular participants take turns working with the librarian to choose a title and facilitate the discussion.

Programming specific to Seniors:

- We host monthly programs at a local senior community center with topics of interest to the folks who attend. We've had everything from a visit from VINS with live raptors, Living Wills, Falls Prevention, Music & Memory, Fire Safety, Bird Identification, and more.*

We host 12 weeks/year sessions of Seated Yoga.

We partner with Lamoille Neighbors, an organization that has built a network of volunteers to help folks age in their homes for as long as possible. We've co-sponsored author visits with Madeline Kunin and Bill McKibben; facilitated book discussions using the VT Reads titles; and co-sponsored virtual programs of interest during Covid.

The services/programming for seniors is funded by an annual gift to the Lanpher Memorial Library from the Copley Trust in Morrisville, VT.

- Programs that evolve naturally...
A local Civil War history researcher published two books of letters to home written by Lamoille Co. soldiers during the Civil War. She did a majority of her research in the Library and we hosted*

book launch parties with Civil War reenactors reading the letters and even a 90-year-old great grandson of one of the soldiers reading the letter written by his great grandfather.

The Hyde Park version of "Chronicling America" series was compiled and published. The Library held a release party for the book and a program called "Stories of Yesteryear" where folks who grew up in Hyde Park told stories and remembrances to all in attendance. This evolved into regular periodic "Stories of Yesteryear" programs and these evolved into a history walk along the Main Street of Hyde Park Village. We hosted "History Walk Tours" with a local resident who told stories of Hyde Park's past to those who walked along.

Often, a program is developed out of a conversation with a Library patron. Examples:

-A Hyde Park resident is co-founder of the Vermont Holocaust Memorial. The Library invited her to lead a program. This program developed into a regular partnership for programming, education and support.

-The Friends of the Green River Reservoir group has members who are regular library users. They provided a series of programs with photographers of the wildlife around GRR, a game warden telling stories about his work around GRR, history of GRR.

-A retired Biological Science professor at Johnson State College (NVU Johnson), lived in Hyde Park and led interactive programs on healthy soil and growing food.

Some programs are developed out of conversations about needs from community members. Examples:

-A group of women were talking about how they felt unsafe walking alone on a local trail. We hosted a women's safety talk with the Sheriff and a local victim's advocate. They listened to the concerns of women in attendance. Offered ideas, tips, and info. on laws. Out of this talk, the Sheriff had 2 police officers, myself and one of the women in attendance trained to teach women's self-defense classes through RAD.

-When the term "Fake News" first became a more prominent issue recent years, we hosted a talk with Professor of Journalism at Johnson State College (NVU Johnson) to inform folks how to find accurate information.

-We were hearing a pattern from community members wanting to have big community meals. We worked with a local chef and a local church to host "Stone Soup Suppers". Community members donate a soup ingredient and drop it off at the Library. The local chef looked at the donations and from them, and with assistance from volunteers, created 3 large pots of soup. The church provided the space, and we hosted annual Stone Soup Suppers for the general community. Often we'll have music, a group game, or other activity to bring folks together.

In similar fashion, we had a historical recipe pot-luck. Folks could take a look at a 100+ year old cook book from Hyde Park Ladies and create a recipe inspired by one in the book. We served them at a pot luck supper at the church.

- We partner heavily with other community organizations. Years ago, I organized quarterly meetings at the Library and invited leaders of local groups and organizations to come and share info. about their organization. Through these meetings, strong partnerships developed that helped us plan programming for the larger community:
*-Annual "sneak peek" performances. The Hyde Park Opera House is located just down the street from the Lanpher Library. Each year the Library gets to invite the community into the Opera House to a sneak peek at one of the shows. The performers will get a chance to practice a scene, or a musical number, or a sneak look at how the make-up for the show CATS is put on the**

actors...in front of a live audience, and the community gets a chance to see what they're working on.

-When a Homeless Shelter opened up down the street from the Library, we started programming specific to fair housing issues in partnership with the "Lamoille Community House".

-The Regional Solid Waste Management District does regular programs at the Library to help explain new laws re: recycling, composting, hazardous waste, etc. We also started a Composting book discussion series with them and other Lamoille Co. Libraries joined in. We now have sets of books for other libraries to borrow for similar partnerships and discussions in other areas of the state.

-The Clarina Howard Nichols Center, the local domestic and sexual abuse survivor shelter reached out to us to help them with a programming series. We co-facilitated a book discussion with them using the book "Know My Name", by Chanel Miller.

-The Lamoille Restorative Center is located near the Lanpher Library. In partnership with them, we held a 4-week program for mothers whose lives have been affected by incarceration. Their JOBS program works with youth to develop employment skills. We're working with JOBS intern right now who are curating a community art show at the Lanpher Library called: "Waking Up to Social Change".

-We worked with the Racial Equity Alliance of Lamoille (REAL) to create a community reads program using the book "Stamped: Racism, Antiracism and You", by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi.

-Global Campus, a post-secondary education opportunity for adults with disabilities meets regularly at the Lanpher Library to research topics they are teaching. Occasionally, we get to host one of the classes taught by the participants as an off-campus event. History of Whoopie Pies! All about Tim McGraw! The Art of U.S. Postal Stamps!

- *Movie License*

With the VT Dept. of Libraries Public Performance Movie License, we've been able to show movies in the Library.

School winter break movie days inspired a local family to donate a popcorn machine to the Lanpher Library.

We have also sponsored books to movies programs and discussions over the years as well.

COVID IMPACT

Of course, many of our regular programs moved to virtual or outdoor format.

Attendance is lower.

"Take and Make" programming became popular. We put together a "Story Time" and parents could take it home to do with their children.

We aren't able/willing to hold large gatherings.

Tom noted that Amy's testimony underscores the fact that libraries are really the gathering place of the town in many communities in Vermont and that library programming provides different people in the community with opportunities to be involved. He mentioned he enjoyed the testimony about the father and story time and how important it is for dads to be involved.

Tom asked Amy if she could have one thing to enhance programming, what would it be. Amy answered that she would like more time to dedicate to planning and thinking about programming, and perhaps even a

programming committee to help with set up and clean up. Amy mentioned that Green Mountain Public Access Channel records a lot of their programs (including Zoom virtual programs) and put them on TV so that people who can't come to the library can be reached.

Andy thanked Amy for the detail in her testimony, and noted that it emphasized how libraries can help organizations bring programming to their constituents and how libraries are serving as social service sites.

Wendy asked Amy how many people run the programming at Lanpher. Amy said it is mostly herself (although she isn't a solo library) and roping in volunteers.

Karson Kiesinger – Karson is the reference and adult services librarian at Bennington Free Library.

Public library programming combines socialization, education, and empowerment in ways only the public library can offer. Bennington Free Library's programming for adults focuses on exposing people to opportunities and services in the community and includes a variety of partnerships. We began offering workshops co-hosted with the Bennington Department of Labor office five years ago. Programs included offering a Job Club encouraging community members to drop in the library to meet with a Job Center Specialist, (The library's downtown location is easier to access than the local DOL office.), hosting a CCV Job Hunt Helper in 2018, and presenting an annual "Model Employees" event featuring a fashion show demonstrating interview and workplace attire, conversations about professional behavior and soft skills, and an opportunity to connect with other jobseekers. In addition to economic development, our programs have supported public health through a RiseVT grant-funded community walking initiative in the summer of 2019. Walks featured downtown recreational facilities and businesses, the farmers' market, local history, and a dietician sharing healthy snack ideas for busy parents during a stroller-friendly walk. Our library also secured funding through RiseVT to begin our snowshoe collection, which we are increasing for the 2022 season with support from a local snowshoe manufacturer.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted our operations and services significantly, we've leveraged relationships with community partners to offer new services to seniors. We began a monthly online book club in collaboration with Green Mountain RSVP in October 2020 which is still going strong. Additionally, we are offering a book delivery service to homebound seniors with support from Green Mountain RSVP. Adapting is our "new normal," so when our library was closed to visitors we expanded our outreach and distributed books for all ages at Shires Housing food distribution events in August and December of 2020. We took advantage of flexibility offered by a longtime programming partner, the Vermont Humanities Council, and extended our Vermont Reads 2020 programming through June 30, 2021. Making use of a generous donation, we purchased Chuck Taylor Converse sneakers for Southwest Tech graphic arts students to design, using art to relate to the themes of Angie Thomas' Vermont Reads 2020 book, The Hate U Give.

Like many things in public libraries, adult programming changed significantly to adapt to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Like many people, I've struggled to find footing as I transitioned from a very successful, first-ever library mini golf event inside our library at the end of February 2020 to closing our doors less than one month later. I moved events online, offered adults creative outlets through take-and-make activity bags, and I am again offering small programs requiring masks with limited attendance. These adventures in adaptation allowed me to appreciate the uniqueness of public library outreach and programs. Most recently, over the Labor Day holiday weekend and the return of Bennington's beloved Garlic Fest celebrations, one of our youth services librarians and I hosted a table at our local farmers' market. We've done this for several years so the venue wasn't new, but on a whim we decided to give away a collection of Beanie Babies and small stuffed animals donated to the library. It's difficult to put into words how much joy this small act brought everyone who visited with us. Some of the sincerest expressions of wonder and gratitude came from adults; those who preferred to "leave a toy for someone else to enjoy" regaled us with nostalgic memories and struck

up conversations with others nearby. It was just one morning, and all the tiny critters had found homes within three hours, but for each person we met there was a moment of connection. It can't be easily distilled to hash marks and quantifiable data, but it speaks to "community identity and resiliency" very clearly.

Karson also noted that the movie licenses were popular pre-COVID, and that they have done other collaborations, like with the American Association of University Women & their local cable access channel.

Tom mentioned he loved the mini golf in the library idea. He also noted the snowshoes and that in the next working group meeting, they would be talking about collections and non-traditional items (like snowshoes) that are available at libraries.

Tom asked Karson one thing she wished she had to enhance programming. Karon replied that time and money would be great, but also mentioned the Owl Pro camera, which would help for hybrid meetings like their senior book club. She said that some people want to meet in person again, but some people cannot, so they will never lose the online piece. Tom explained what an Owl Pro camera is and said that some people put those in their ARPA grant proposals.

Tom asked Karson what adaptations from programming during COVID she would take into a post-COVID world, and Karson replied that just maintaining connections and doing whatever is working instead of overanalyzing.

Karson noted that she is a solo programmer with a limited budget and that grants like she received from Rise VT for the snowshoes are very helpful. Tom noted that librarians are good at doing outreach to places that people wouldn't necessarily consider library-related.

Bree Drapa – Bree is the director of the Westford Public Library. She is mostly a solo librarian but has an assistant who works some hours.

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.

*Bree said that access to the school has not always been available, but that she has visited outside to advertise the summer reading program and celebrate book awards.

Tom thanked Bree for her testimony and noted that she really demonstrated how small & rural librarians need to multitask.

Tom asked Bree what would be the one thing she would have to enhance programming, and Bree replied that money, flexible space, staffing, and supplies would be helpful. She said that she does have a programming budget that she tries to increase every year, because the library programming is so essential to the town and the town sees the value in it.

Andy appreciated Bree mentioning the childcare role that her library serves, and that many libraries around the state provide actual childcare services, which is another social service role. Bree replied that she was able to work with the school and now the library is a bus stop so children can go to a safe place after school. She said they have an unattended minor policy but that any child 9 and up can use the library without their parent, and some walk or take the bus to the library.

Andy noted that Bree wasn't trained as childcare provider, and asked what kind of support she or librarians in general would be helpful to that role. Bree replied that she is a former teacher and parent of 3 so she does have some training, but that in general librarians are giving and supportive people. She said that legal help would be useful, like having the state pay for background checks since Bree's subs and staff work one on one with vulnerable populations and it is nice to have them vetted. She noted that they couldn't have just anyone working alone with children.

Bree also said that VELI was helpful, and that kids need space and attention, and things like computers, books, snacks after school, use the bathroom, and to check in with a trusted adult.

Jeannette asked about the policies and procedures related to kids getting off the bus at the library, and where the library is responsible and where it is not. Bree replied that in the library's unattended minor policy, they make it clear that they are not operating like a school. Kids 9 and up use the library as freely as an adult, they can't monitor when and where they are going. Bree says that she sends parents copies of that policy when they ask if their kids can come over, and that she knows the kids and their parents since they are in a small and rural community. She said that she also has kids help out with library tasks and the kids enjoy that.

Bree shared some COVID takeaways. She said her virtual storytimes did get views but she would not want to continue them, and that she will continue to focus on storywalks. She will continue to do monthly book reviews of adult books, and provide access to the library's Zoom account for local groups.

Tom noted that programs like Bree's virtual storytimes often reach people outside of the community the library is in, and that is something the working group should explore.

Jane Ramos – Jane is the director of the Sherburne Memorial Library in Killington.

Killington has a very large senior community and we provide a variety of programming for this age group that includes:

Monday Movie Matinees

Art Programs

Take & Makes

Hosting Bone Builders

Book Groups

Author Visits

Trivia Challenges

Game Days

During the pandemic, we met them where they were. Meaning we knew that one of our local restaurants provided drive through meals one day per week, so we met them there with book reviews, puzzles, hand drawn crosswords, word searches, and anything we could come up with that would keep them sane and occupied during the pandemic. We also sent cards, letters, and made phone calls to keep them connected to the library. Book deliveries and curbside service were big hits. We hosted movies in the building social distanced on multiple days so that a good number of folks could participate without there being too many in the room at one time. What we do for seniors is what they have asked me to speak about at the ARSL convention in Reno this month.

I think it's also important to note that Vermont libraries get together to produce a Fairy Tale Festival that pulls in people from all over New England. We've had a consistent 1000 folks every year who enjoy seeing programming from a number of libraries all over the state. The festival remains free and open to the public. We also give away free books to both children and adults. The entire event is funded by donations from the public and takes about \$10K each year to host.

Tom noted that the Fairy Tale Festival was another example of a library having reach outside of its own community.

Tom asked Jane what she would have to enhance her programming, and Jane responded that her library has a programming budget of \$5,200, and that she is in a community with a lot of support so she doesn't really need anything. However, she has been a one-person librarian and realizes how important funding is. She said that since her library does well with programming, she wanted to take the opportunity to show off Vermont libraries and that is why the Fairy Tale Festival began. She said that Fairy Tale Festival calendars go out to libraries, and then when sold the libraries get some of the profits, and the festival gets a part of the profits.

Meg Allison & Karen McCalla – Meg & Karen are school librarians and represent the Vermont School Library Association (VSLA) on the Working Group. Meg summarized testimony submitted by the school librarians.

Meg mentioned that 12 school librarians had submitted testimony, and that she noticed that school libraries have become sites for social justice and diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. She said unlike public libraries where you don't know who is going to walk in the door, school librarians know who is going to walk in the door when they promote programming and it is different from instruction. She said that schools provide author events, speakers/experts programming specifically for students or for the local communities, and providing professional development for faculty and staff. She said that school librarians, like public librarians, are often multi-tasking with small budgets, and there is inconsistency in whether or not school libraries have programming budgets.

Meg apologized for the testimony coming in late. She said that the testimony had some themes, like how integral school libraries are as places in schools where students can engage in all sorts of conversations and there can be connections with local community stakeholders. She mentioned challenges specific to school libraries, like losing administrative support and library support – especially related to staff – and that school librarians are asked to do more with less year after year. She said however that school librarians are innovative and integrate STEM programming and other things that expand their roles beyond providing instruction. She said that many decision makers still see school libraries as warehouses for books, rather than integral parts of the learning community. However, school librarians rose to the challenge during COVID and hybrid-schooling which has caused so many social-emotional and behavioral challenges for students. School libraries are busier than ever and more necessary than ever, and that is why advocating for approval for adequate staffing of certified school librarians and tech integration positions are important.

Meg then gave the opportunity for the other VSLA representative, Karen McCalla, to speak. Karen began by saying that one of the amazing things about school libraries is that librarians work with students in a context where they don't give grades, which is unusual in a school. This allows for a non-evaluative relationship with students. Karen also commended public librarians and was hopeful for more public and school library collaborations on programming, and encouraged the working group members to read the full testimony.

Jeannette also encouraged the working group members to read the testimony and described her experience as a school librarian and seeing staffing and budget cuts first-hand. She also gave some examples from the testimonies of one librarian teaching 13 STEM classes at three different schools, and another seeing 100 students in an hour. She mentioned that the standards for school librarians have dropped, since it used to be that a school was required to have a full-time librarian for every 250 students and that is gone now.

Susan asked Karen & Meg about a trend she has noticed, where technology integration has been folded into the role of school library media specialist and what effect that has had on the services school librarians provide, especially programming. Meg replied that many school librarians wear two hats, especially at smaller schools, and have two certifications; their roles are blended, but it also varies from school to school. However, she said for the most part that those people are doing more school library work, and that it is not good that there isn't a consultant at the Agency of Education for school librarians (but there is one for educational technology.) She said that they are doing advocacy at the AOE level to have a consultant for school librarians. She said that librarians started doing more educational technology work when Vermont students were given their own computers at school. Karen agreed that a lot of the work she does is related to educational technology, and that she has an assistant now but doesn't know how long that will last since her budget has severely decreased and they are just getting by with what they already have. She said that despite having fewer students, the need is still great (or greater.) Tom asked Karen to elaborate on that, and she replied that the student of today is different especially concerning technology, and after COVID they are dealing with significant trauma and difficult behaviors in the school building.

Tom asked Karen what COVID adaptations she would retain related to programming, and Karen replied that the access to eBooks, audiobooks and online resources became so much more important, and she did a lot of work to make those more accessible during remote learning—and as a result, more kids used them, and kids who wouldn't have necessarily tried them did. As a result, kids are now more comfortable using those resources. During the pandemic she had curbside delivery, and she has maintained those easier ways for kids to pick up print materials rather than come into the library, as well as an online reservation system where they can just pick up a book that has already been pulled.

Meg replied that students are eager to be back and her circulation numbers are up. She provided opportunities for students to check out books even though they couldn't come into the library, and that kids still want to read print books even though they had access to digital and audio books. She said that they will continue to have Zoom events after school where students and staff connect with community members, and have author visits virtually, especially considering Vermont winters. She said they will continue to use social media to connect with students and the wider community about library programming.

Tom asked what Meg would envision for the school library consultant role at AOE, and what they are missing now without that role. Meg replied that they are missing an advocate at AOE who understands how complex a school librarian's role is. She referenced Peter Langella's testimony about how school library staffing has gone down in the past 15 years or so, and agreed with Jeannette that they are not in compliance with educational quality standards. Without support staff, school librarians are having to do clerical work that takes time away from collaboration with teachers, student instruction, and meeting other student needs. She said that while school librarians do have educational technology duties, that is not the majority of their work and there should be someone who understands the school library portion of things at AOE to help schools meet education quality standards.

Karen echoed that without support staff, school librarians have to do clerical work instead of the teacher collaboration that is important for student success. With school library representation at AOE, Karen thinks that perhaps the education quality standards pertaining to school libraries would be enforced more rigorously.

Tom noted that is similar to what has happened with public library standards and that not having enough staff at libraries can hurt morale and impede services.

Karen finished by saying that like public libraries, school libraries have limited staffing, resulting in too little time and too little money to have quality programming. She said that programming is the first thing to go, and yet her students appreciate it more than almost anything else she offers- so it is really important. Meg agreed and said that programming is essential to create belonging especially for students from underserved and historically marginalized populations, and for them to have discussions about important social justice issues like LGBTQI+ issues, sexual harassment and rape culture, and other things that empower them to be change agents once they leave school.

Jeanette asked about programming that costs money, and whether grant funds for programming would be more useful than a line item in their budget. Meg said that in her budget in 2015 there was a line item for a security system that would cost far more than the few books that would be lost by not having it, and would show students they weren't trusted—so instead she used that money for programming, especially programming representing historically marginalized voices that she co creates with her students. She said her budget does freeze in April but she knows ahead of time. She has also gotten grants like for Vermont Reads and from the Vermont NEA to host conversations, so they can complement each other. She said if the programming line item was removed from the budget it probably wouldn't go back but it can be enhanced in ways that provide opportunities outside school hours to connect with the wider community.

Karen agreed that many schools are utilizing grant funding but that if the grant reporting requirements are too onerous, schools won't pursue that funding.

Working group business: Tom said that the next Working Group meeting would be in January and would be about collections, and that the meeting would be scheduled as soon as possible. Tom reiterated the testimony would be put on the Working Group page on the VTLIB website along with other Working Group documents.

Wendy wanted to make sure that everyone had enough time to submit testimony and that the deadline was very clear. Tom replied he would ensure clear messaging to the community and that if there was more programming testimony they could potentially include that at the beginning of the January meeting. Tom encouraged the Working Group to promote the meeting.

Meeting was adjourned at 12:20pm.