

PRINCE OF WALES NORTHERN HERITAGE CENTRE CONSULTATION 13 September 2013

Responses from Alison Hopkins, Territorial Librarian, Public Library Services
Note: Responses relate primarily to NWT public libraries

SERVICES

1. How would you describe the services Canadians, including Aboriginal Canadians and new Canadians, are currently receiving from libraries and archives in the North?

Libraries provide a window to the larger world and a reflection of the local reality. NWT libraries provide a safe space for exploration, recreation and research. Libraries are a place to access knowledge, learn to read, explore one's history and culture, listen to a story, join a club, watch a DVD, learn how to use an ipad, communicate with a friend, find a recipe and dream. In small communities, libraries also serve as a community centre, a place to meet and socialize, as well as to display art or other cultural elements.

NWT public libraries include materials about local history and interests, including predominant cultures, stories, and recreational interests. NWT public libraries also include materials with information about the rest of the world, other cultures and exposure to other areas of interest. There are books for all ages, DVDs, ebooks, periodicals and research information. There is access to materials from across Canada using interlibrary loan.

Public libraries offer a variety of programs for all age groups. From January to March, 2013, 20 public libraries offered 1000 programs, attended by 14,000 people or 33% of the total population. These programs include a sewing circle, family computer night, a cupcake challenge, drumming and hand games, robotics club, and a Pokemon club. Afterschool programs are especially popular in small communities with few other options.

Library managers provide instructional assistance in using library materials including computer resources. Computer resources are used for school projects, resume writing, reading newspapers and communicating with friends in other communities. During their visits, 31% of all library customers use computers.

2. Libraries are currently hybrid operations, constantly pulled toward traditional services by many core users and pulled, equally, by a concern for relevancy from other users and potential users. What issues are libraries facing as they try to make the transition to new service models?

In the NWT, library services are pulled between two different kinds of customers; recent immigrants from Southern Canada who expect the same services available in large urban libraries and individuals without a history of library use or a history of printed literature in

their culture. Over the past 5 years, the GNWT has funded the creation of public libraries in 13 communities, all of which had no history of public library services. The needs in these communities contrast sharply with the needs of the 5 largest communities where library customers ask for services they have used in Edmonton or Toronto. In the NWT, our struggle is to balance the needs of both. This means adding ebooks and other remote services, while also stocking newer libraries with materials to attract people without a history of library use. With a population of just over 43,000 spread over 1 million square kilometres with 11 official languages, this is a challenge.

Our main issues are:

- Balancing the needs of a diverse, but small population with limited budget
- Supporting community managed libraries with expertise and encouraging local autonomy
- Introducing library services to those without experience with them
- Providing access to a diverse range of materials
- Supporting literacy growth
- Maintaining a modern system and determining when to adapt new technologies

3. How do libraries and archives measure outcomes of their service and community impacts?

In the NWT, we gather information on the number and types of programs, program attendance, circulation of materials, questions asked, computers used and number of customers. Some libraries use customer surveys to evaluate the effect of some of their programs. Most outcome measures are informal, such as getting feedback from library customers on what they think of the library.

4. What needs to be done to facilitate libraries in cataloguing, storing, and providing access to research data? Who would be an appropriate partner in providing these services?

NWT Public Library Services provides cataloguing services for all public libraries. Research in the NWT is coordinated by the Aurora Research Institute, which we work with and assist on occasion. Research can also be accessed through other facilities such as Aurora College, Legislative Library and the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND AWARENESS

1. Would Canadians know of, or understand the contribution you make to library/archival service in Canada?

In the NWT, the contribution my office makes to library services in Canada is known primarily to those in public library management.

2. Describe the services provided directly to users, and if they are consortial in nature please describe the mechanisms in place to define, refine and measure the impact of the services.

Our office primarily serves public libraries in the NWT. However, we do provide a number of services directly to users.

1. Borrow-by-mail: NWT residents without libraries in their communities can receive books and DVDs through the mail for no cost.
2. Online library system: The online library catalog is funded and supported by our office.
3. Ebooks and reference databases: provide customer assistance if libraries are unable to

3. In the digital era, what support for researchers do/should libraries provide?

In small, remote communities, public libraries provide access to materials. Through interlibrary loan they provide access to a huge variety of materials. Academic libraries provide greater access to online databases and periodicals for students of distance learning.

4. What in your opinion are the specific roles of libraries and/or archives and/or museums and other heritage institutions in community building and memory building?

Libraries provide a safe place to gather and share. They are also a place to collect information and materials, especially around local history. They are a place to display art or other items that have meaning to the community. Libraries are also a place to foster and encourage literacy in the community.

NEW DIRECTIONS

Digitization

1. What are the main challenges of born-digital material for your institution?

This is generally not of primary concern. However, it is important that citizens be able to access government information, including that which is posted online. Libraries continue to be a location for this access. When the GNWT created Aboriginal language apps, the GNWT supplied public libraries with ipads, so that all residents would be able to use these apps.

2. What will be the function of a brick-and-mortar library or archive in the future?

In the NWT, the brick and mortar will continue to be a community centre, a place to attend programs and cultural events, and to meet and socialize. It will continue to be a safe

space after school to study and read, and a place to access technology such as computers and ipads. In many communities, it will continue to be the only place in the community where written material is available.

Education

1. What changes, in your judgment, are necessary in the professional education and training of librarians/archivists in the 21st century?

I would like to see more librarians with an adventurous spirit, interested in trying new things and taking risks. I would like to see less focus on technology and more on community development.

2. What conversations do you think need to take place with library, archival, and information studies programs about staff requirements, and have they begun?

This is outside my area of expertise. However, I will note that many of the smaller NWT libraries are managed by individuals who have never even been to a library before being hired in their position. Many do fine with a few days training, although my office maintains the database and does most of the collection development.

Resources

1. Public libraries are primarily funded by local municipalities, with little funding from any other level of government. Most towns and cities are too small to support needed technology. How do we encourage the creation of library systems (or consortia) that can meet the increasingly sophisticated technology-driven needs and vital digital resources of libraries?

The situation in the NWT is considerably different from what is described in the question. Policies of the GNWT support technology within public libraries.

In the NWT, the majority of public libraries are funded solely through the Government of the NWT. A small percentage of them are augmented through community funding.

The majority of NWT public libraries share space with school libraries. They have access to technology resources in the schools, including computers and the Internet. All but two public libraries in the NWT use the GNWT's Internet access.

The GNWT purchases the integrated library systems used by all public libraries in the NWT as well as a reference database and an ebook collection. Ipads have also been purchased for all libraries to provide access to GNWT and other educational apps.

2. What percentage increase to your current budget would permit you to realize the aspirations of your users? If you received an increased budget and consistent adequate resources, describe your library/archives in 2020.

Public Library Services currently supports public libraries in 20 communities in the NWT. 13 communities do not have public libraries. With additional funding, all communities in the NWT will have public libraries of some kind.

In 2020, public libraries in the NWT will be vibrant community centres. Each community will adapt their public library to meet local needs. In all cases, libraries will be safe, and drug and alcohol free. In some places, the libraries will primarily be for afterschool and homework programs. In others, there will be a variety of programs for all ages.

Residents will feel pride and ownership of their library and be invested in the future. People of all ages will visit, some to sit and talk, some to attend programs, some to study and some to contact friends around the world. People will talk about what is happening at the library and suggest changes and programs to the library manager.

All library managers are long-term local residents, invested in their communities and trusted and respected locally. Managers are selected due to their ability to meet local needs and not necessarily due to education.

There will be access to the Internet, probably computers as well as handheld devices. There will be a variety of materials, from local history to DVDs or newer as yet unseen technology to books for all ages. Residents come in and ask for materials that they don't see on the shelves.