



ANNUAL REPORT

April 1, 2020 – March 31, 2021



WESTERN COUNTIES REGIONAL LIBRARY CHAIR'S REPORT

Like a coastal lighthouse planted on a rock, public libraries have towered high and shone brightly for all people throughout history, guiding communities into harbours of learning and individuals into inlets of inclusion. The significance of public libraries is accentuated by the reality that they have stood the test of time. It speaks voluminously that public libraries have been free and accessible to communities - just like ours - for centuries.

In fact, the Romans started a practice of gathering scrolls in dry rooms wherein citizens could gather to have free public access to information and ideas.

Even after the largest empires have fallen, public libraries still stand - like indestructible beacons - because they promote individual growth, community well-being, literacy, equality, inclusion, access to information, and social opportunities which are free and accessible to all.

Have you ever wondered why public libraries have emerged resilient, even through times of war, famine, earthquake, epidemic, economic depression, and, most recently, a global pandemic? Isn't it because human beings cherish free, safe and accessible spaces which are devoted to equal opportunities for all people to experience timeless classics, freedom of thought, books/movies, new ideas, access to information, and stimulating social/learning opportunities?

At Western Counties Regional Library, this past year has been without precedence in testing the strength, purpose, and passion of our local libraries. The global pandemic, our social lockdowns, and an ongoing lack of provincial funding have brought a myriad of challenges to our staff, administration, and library board. Yet, in the indestructible tradition and timeless spirit of libraries, we remain both resilient and radiant in serving our communities and the people we all love. And so, in serving you, we are grateful for your patience and patronage during this past year!

I wish to conclude with an effusive and heart-felt thanks to our front-line staff who have gone to extraordinary lengths to deliver uninterrupted library service to our communities throughout this pandemic year! Thanks, additionally, to our director and proficient administrative team who have worked tirelessly behind the scenes to make our regional libraries the very best! Finally, I wish to thank our board for their friendly optimism, wise guidance, and unflinching support during my time as chair.

Shaun Hatfield
Chair

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

The year 2020 is certainly one for the history books. On March 22, the Government of Nova Scotia declared a state of emergency to help contain the spread of COVID-19, which resulted in the library temporarily shutting its doors to the public.

In the months that followed, Western Counties Regional Library staff worked tirelessly to develop a pandemic re-opening plan that would see us safely welcome people back to our libraries.

While our buildings remained closed, we continued to interact with patrons through virtual programming, telephone, social media, email and regular (postal) mail. We increased and diversified our digital collections, and expanded our Books-by-Mail service to serve all patrons. Although public computers were not available, people relied on our outdoor WI-FI (available at all branches) for Internet access.

We helped patrons sign up for library cards, find and download books and other materials, select books to be delivered by mail, and connect virtually with people. Where staff were available, they worked with outside organizations to provide related services including a COVID hot-line for seniors in Digby and a book selection and mailing service for teachers who wanted to provide reading materials to students without Internet access.

Those first few months following the province-wide shut down were rather unsettling. However, on June 29th, and with the support of our Board and the help of our municipalities, Yarmouth Public Library & Museum, Shelburne Library Building Association, and Nova Scotia Provincial Library, we safely welcomed people back to our branches, offering in-library browsing, computer access and borrowing services. By the fall, we resumed outreach services to seniors' residences. By early 2021, we re-introduced in-person programming.

In a year where we all experienced unusual amounts of uncertainty, one thing remained; people continued to look towards their library for information, entertainment, and connection, and, as always, the library met those needs.



Erin Comeau
Executive Director

Regional Highlights

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Western Counties Regional Library bolstered its digital collections. New services included streaming movies, a collection of over 7,000 digital magazines and newspapers, digital books and K-12 interactive learning materials for students, art and craft video classes taught by top designers and artists, and self-directed online learning courses covering a variety of topics including business, design, web development and multimedia skills.

With the shift to online programming, patrons throughout the region were able to participate in the popular mid-week break presentations. Creative writers honed their skills in a series of workshops given by local authors Julian Mortimer Smith and Sylvia Gunnery. Book clubs continued to meet virtually while waiting to return to in-person gatherings.

Because in-person children's programs were not taking place, the library launched a grab-and-go program, which comprised of themed creative activities neatly prepared for children and their caregivers to take home and enjoy. Children also participated in virtual story times, puppet shows, and craft and science programs.

The library branches in Clare, Digby and Weymouth hosted eight in-person and virtual art exhibits in 2020-2021.

When the library re-opened to the public, it supported the public health fight against COVID-19 by becoming distribution centres for free re-usable masks for adults and youth, distributing thousands of masks (provided by Nova Scotia Health) to individuals and businesses in the Tri-Counties in the first few weeks of the initiative.

With health protocols firmly in place, in-person programs resumed in January 2021, and, in partnership with the Community Volunteer Income Tax Program, the library offered free income tax return clinics, a well-used and important service for low-income earners, in Digby, Shelburne and Yarmouth

All 10 branches of Western Counties Regional Library helped promote *From Me To You*, an initiative of Engage Nova Scotia to encourage Nova Scotians to connect with each other in February and March during the pandemic.

The library branches continued to partner with government to help inform the public, including the distribution of posters outlining changes to the Nova Scotia Human Organ and Tissue Donation Act.

2020-21 REGIONAL LIBRARY NUMBERS

Activity

Registered Members	10,566
New Registered Members	960
Library In-Person Visits	42,051
Library Virtual Visits	50,474
Information Questions	7,679
Summer Reading Club Participants	183
Digital Loans (Overdrive and RBDigital, hoopla, PressReader)	32,916

Regional Stats

Population Served	56,124 *
Public Access Computers	25**
Library Branches	10
Number of Staff	47***

* Statistics Canada estimates of the population as of July 1, 2020.

** Restricted numbers because of the pandemic.

*** Includes full-time, part-time and casual staff.

Branches at a Glance

Barrington Snapshot

"I wouldn't have made it (without the library)," says Sally Smith. "I am on a limited income and I can't go out and buy books. It saved my life."

She has a sister in Ottawa who is surprised at Sally's ability to find the wide range of books through Western Counties Regional Library. She says the library is all about borrowing books. She says she can use the digital services, but prefers having the physical book in her hand and loves being able to visit the library and see the staff.

"I haven't been treated with anything but respect and consideration. I've missed that contact (because of the pandemic). I still stick my head in and say 'Good morning.'"



Barrington senior library clerk Michelle Cook gets creative doing a science program via video on Facebook.

Outreach & Book Deposits:
Bay Side Home

	1,011 Members
	361 Program Participants
	4,684 Visits
	7,132 Items Borrowed
	10 Summer Reading Club Participants
	358 Computer Bookings
	5,270 Wireless Connections

Clare Snapshot

Artist Jennie Morrow recently moved from Yarmouth to the Meteghan area. Morrow had agreed to put on an exhibit in early March before the pandemic hit. "I was happy to share my work." When everything shut down on March 16, 2020, Clare library clerk Darlene Gaudet was determined to help share Morrow's work. She took photographs of the art and shared them on the library's Facebook Page, a new piece every day. "I don't know how many people saw that," Morrow says. "It probably did put my work out there. I appreciate her doing that." To put the public interest in the virtual exhibit in perspective, Morrow's painting Curious Cows reached 1,039 people, garnered 75 Likes, 31 Loves, 2 Wows, 24 comments and 10 shares on Facebook.



Some of the Grab-and-Go kits helped homeschoolers with class projects such as this beaver puppet.

Outreach & Book Deposits:
Au Logis de Meteghan
École Stella Maris
Foyer Celeste
Su Martha au Bord d'la Mer
Notre Jardin d'Enfance

	735 Members
	259 Program Participants
	2,604 Visits
	4,613 Items Borrowed
	47 Summer Reading Club Participants
	269 Computer Bookings
	1,213 Wireless Connections

Clark's Harbour Snapshot

"(The library) is a lifeline to the world," says homeschooling parent Julie Cunningham of Clark's Harbour library. The family has no Internet at home, using the library's Internet. The family also borrows DVDs for its movies, documentaries and television series. Access to the library's books and audiobooks has been critical to successfully homeschooling her children. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Cunningham calls library clerk Ruth Ann Atkinson, and Atkinson prepares all of her material for pickup. The library has been a vital source of teaching material. The family borrows a book on whales, dolphins and porpoises every summer that they can't find anywhere but at the library. She relishes the personal and social connection made at the library. "We really like Clark's Harbour library."



This trio made these Pokemon pencil holders from a September Grab-and-Go kit at Clark's Harbour library.

Outreach & Book Deposits:

Ready Set Learn Preschool
Miss Bethany's Preschool Centre



265 Members



223 Program Participants



1,711 Visits



1,340 Items Borrowed



14 Summer Reading Club Participants



78 Computer Bookings



6,029 Wireless Connection

Digby Snapshot

Since Christopher Wright moved to Digby in 2006, Digby library has been an essential part of his research work for two books, as well as online papers. "Arctic Cargo: A History of Marine Transportation in Canada's North published in 2016 and *Of Penguins and Polar Bears: A History of Cold Water Cruising in 2020*, would not have been as comprehensive without the active assistance of the library staff in identifying the availability of books and papers, and arranging for their delivery." He says Digby library clerk Joanna Jarvis "went above and beyond" her duties to track down an essay only available through the Evelyn Waugh Society in the United Kingdom.



Paint Night at the Digby library was very popular, overcoming the challenges of maintaining health protocols.

Outreach & Book Deposits:

Digby Elementary School
Digby Neck Consolidated School
Digby Preschool Co-Op
Learning Grove Childcare Centre
Terrific Tots Screening
Tideview Terrace



1,679 Members



1,004 Program Participants



5,233 Visits



10,102 Items Borrowed



6 Summer Reading Club Participants



410 Computer Bookings



2,280 Wireless Connections

Lockeport Snapshot

For Dayle Eshelby, Lockeport library has been invaluable.

“It’s been a resource, a place that has been meticulous about respecting all protocols. It is welcoming to all different levels of the community,” she says. Although she is not a user of the library’s digital services, she enjoys borrowing books and attending presentations and events.

She is impressed with the level of service provided by Lockeport library clerk Danielle MacAuley-Williams.

“It is incredible some of the stuff the library comes up with,” she says.

Something she finds at the library that she can’t elsewhere is access to local information and authors.



Lockeport library user Dayle Eshelby holds a sign for a photo she submitted during the #whyilovemylibrary social media campaign in the fall of 2020.

Outreach & Book Deposits:

MacLeod Surf Lodge Nursing Home
Atlantic Heights Rest Home Ltd.
The Fox and Hare Daycare



357 Members



549 Program Participants



1,851 Visits



4,530 Items Borrowed



3 Summer Reading Club Participants



393 Computer Bookings



2,149 Wireless Connections

Pubnico Snapshot

Marjorie Cunningham has borrowed and read over 1,600 books from the Pubnico library, having played a role in the birth of the branch in the old church.

“I read all the time,” she says, adding that it doesn’t matter the genre or topic. She will read the back cover and make her book choices from there, borrowing seven or eight books at a time. She says it is very important to have a library. She used to belong to a book club, but it got too expensive, she says. She quickly discovered she could borrow all the titles from the library that the book club offered.



Pubnico library clerk Mahala Sears does a virtual Halloween craft program on Facebook.

Outreach & Book Deposits:

Nakile Home for Special Care
Pont du Marais



318 Members



541 Program Participants



1,129 Visits



1,877 Items Borrowed



3 Summer Reading Club Participants



88 Computer Bookings



2,047 Wireless Connections

Shelburne Snapshot

Retired teacher and historical researcher and writer Lewis Jackson says McKay Memorial Library is a real asset to the community and the staff “has always been exceptional.”

Libraries have been a fundamental part of his life, and Western Counties Regional Library has been “just incredible,” providing him access to collections such as the library’s H. R. Banks Nova Scotiana collection, a rich repository of books, journals, pamphlets and articles by and about Nova Scotians, and material from academic libraries across Canada.



This bench, framed photo and books were donated to McKay Memorial Library in memory of former library clerk Suzanne Grear, who died on June 12, 2020.

Outreach & Book Deposits:

Mary’s Abide Awhile Home Limited
Roseway Manor Inc.



1,182 Members
657 Program Participants
3,471 Visits
9,124 Items Borrowed
3 Summer Reading Club Participants
614 Computer Bookings
2,773 Wireless Connections

Westport Snapshot

Mike McKinnell uses one word to sum up what the library means to him and his wife Lauren, “Salvation.” The couple moved from the Ottawa area to Brier Island in the winter. Once they had completed their two-week quarantine, the library provided them with access to all kinds of books, magazines and DVDs. They had no Internet to start and limited cellphone coverage. “We use the DVDs because why wouldn’t you,” he says. The couple can order in books, magazines and movies. They found the library was an important first place to establish many social contacts, putting them in touch with the community. They enjoy making use of the free, high-speed wi-fi available at the library to download movies and access the Internet, something they can access even when the library is closed.



The December Westport library Grab-and-Go kit included everything one needed to write a letter to Santa.

Outreach & Book Deposits:

Individual seniors



158 Members
147 Program Participants
567 Visits
1,206 Items Borrowed
0 Summer Reading Club Participants
26 Computer Bookings
1,964 Wireless Connections

Weymouth Snapshot

Louis Comeau has used the library constantly since 2006. "It has served me very well," he says. "The computers were/are wonderful useful tools for doing my work, ordering movies without my having to buy a computer of my own."

He says the library clerks have helped him navigate the technology and instructed him how to properly use the computers. It has also helped him access entertainment he couldn't afford otherwise.

"The amount of money I have saved in movies from the library is incredible. I have read countless books of interest and love this cozy atmospheric place. Thank you so much!"

Outreach & Book Deposits:

Maison Jerome



Needle craft afternoon at Weymouth library.



859 Members



276 Program Participants



3,304 Visits



5,660 Items Borrowed



29 Summer Reading Club Participants



374 Computer Bookings



2,416 Wireless Connections

Yarmouth Snapshot

Barb and Eric Ruff rely heavily on the library, using it as a source of books, eBooks and audiobooks. Avid travelers and birders, they have also been regular presenters and attendees at the Yarmouth library's Mid-Week Break series. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the library moved its programming online. "We've enjoyed the Mid-Week Break program and appreciate being able to stay at home to watch the programs," says Eric. "We've presented two or three of the programs which have, in turn, been a learning experience for us which has added to our knowledge of computer techniques." As presenters, the virtual presentations have enabled the couple to share their experiences with friends and families who live elsewhere – including Halifax, British Columbia, England, the United States and Norway. "We're pleased with how well the library has attempted to serve the public during the pandemic. We feel that the library is a vital service in our community."

Outreach & Book Deposits:

12 local seniors residences



The Yarmouth Chapter of Toastmasters International met at the Yarmouth library when it re-opened for in-person programming.



3,871 Members



1,414 Program Participants



17,497 Visits



26,105 Items Borrowed



68 Summer Reading Club Participants



1,826 Computer Bookings



6,250 Wireless Connections

LIBRARY SUPPORT

The past year has been very challenging because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The library chose not to pursue prize donations from Tri-County businesses for the 2020 Summer Reading Club because businesses were hard hit by the pandemic lockdowns and public health measures.

The library did go ahead with a modified version of its 2020 Adopt-A-Book campaign. People responded in a big way to the campaign, pushing it well past its goal. The final tally for the eight-week campaign was 924 books adopted valued at \$25,206. Businesses, organizations, individuals, staff, former staff, board members and the library's Friends groups in Lockeport and Shelburne stepped up to help the library surpass its fundraising goal during a very difficult and trying moment in history. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the library delayed the campaign that was set to launch in April 2020 until September, shortening it from three months to eight weeks.

<u>REGIONAL LIBRARY FINANCES</u>					
Expenditures			Revenues		
	2020-2021	2019-2020		2020-2021	2019-2020
Salaries and Benefits	\$1,138,352	\$1,100,245	Province of Nova Scotia	\$1,360,500	\$1,172,967
Library Materials	\$ 200,176	\$ 182,045	Municipalities	\$ 373,500	\$ 373,500
<u>Other Expenses</u>	<u>\$ 517,314</u>	<u>\$ 352,672</u>	<u>Other Revenues</u>	<u>\$ 121,842</u>	<u>\$ 88,495</u>
Total Expenditures	\$1,855,842	\$1,634,962	Total Revenues	\$1,855,842	\$1,634,962



Training and Development Manager Shannon Raynard prepares Grab-and-Go kits for the library's 10 branches.



Office Manager Yvonne LeBlanc prepares COVID-19 cleaning supplies for the library branches.



Headquarters clerk Karen Comeau prepares books by mail during the library's first shutdown.

Library Critical Resource for Homeschoolers

The Hatts

The Hatt family uses the library services bi-weekly if not weekly to pick out books, DVDs or other material the family has ordered through the library.

“We homeschool, so this resource is very important to us,” says Megan Hatt. While the pandemic has reduced the number of regular visits for the family, they continue to use the library for such things as its grab-and-go kits and digital services in addition to picking up material.

“We have enjoyed doing the crafts and the kids always look forward to getting the next one.”

She says one of the kits fit with their school curriculum, relating to the fur trade during the 1800s.

“It was neat to have it tie into our studies and now they are on the wall in our school room!”



The Hatt children play Roll-A-Dragon in January after picking up the Grab-and-Go kits from the Clare branch.

The Mullens

Ashley Mullen makes the 25-minute drive in from Salmon River with her family to the Yarmouth library to access the necessary resources to homeschool Austin, Brookland and Gauge. “The library is essential,” she says. “There is no way we could homeschool without the library.” When the library was closed during the early days of the pandemic, it was very hard for the Mullen family, but the re-opening and contactless holds pickup service helped greatly. “There’s no way I could afford every book and store every book for school,” she says, adding the elimination of library fines has helped her manage things better.

For the children, the library gives them access to the wide range of reading material from graphic novels to books. “I like to read because it increases my imagination,” says Brookland Mullen.



From left, Austin, Gauge, Ashley and Brookland Mullen spend time reading at the Yarmouth library.

Digital Services Provide Lifeline During the Pandemic

Having gone through months and months of living through a pandemic, Leanne Mullen is grateful for the free use of the library’s digital services.

“I have downloaded many audiobooks from the Libby app. I mostly enjoy reading, but being at home I find myself doing daily indoor tasks listening to a new audiobook.”

“I have also referred to the Creativebug app to find new knitting or crochet projects, and I’ve read a few magazines online!”

“The library’s digital services, all for free, have been greatly appreciated and enjoyed during this time. Thank you so much!”