

Annual Report

April 1, 2023 – March 31, 2024



West^{tern} Counties
Region^{al} Libr^{ary}

From Our Board



In 2023-2024, libraries continued to play a vital and central role in reflecting and serving local community needs, providing a safe, welcoming space for people of all ages, backgrounds, and interests.

During the pandemic, libraries adapted to meet the unique needs of their communities, providing essential healthcare resources and accessible services. Viral test kits still remain available in our communities because of libraries being a central and accessible point of community contact.

In the post-pandemic world, libraries came back stronger with the successful implementation of the SamePage, a partnership of eight regional libraries across Nova Scotia. The libraries work together to improve your library experience, providing an equal opportunity to connect to library resources for learning, discovery, and improved quality of life. SamePage provides more items to borrow, more resources to access, and major upgrades to the library catalogue.

Libraries returned to being a safe community space, meeting social needs for gathering and connection.

Current and future goals for Western Counties Regional Library staff are a commitment to collaborate with the provincial government's Accessibility Directorate, with municipalities and post-secondary institutions, prioritizing accessibility and inclusivity.

A framework of inclusivity will be fostered through a culture of belonging, by creating an environment where everyone feels valued, respected and empowered to participate fully.

Our libraries will serve as important community hubs; committed to equity, diversity, and inclusion and leading the way towards a more accessible and inclusive society.

Into our future, as a valued anchoring community institution, libraries will continue to lead, mirroring the type of society we aspire to be.

Sherry Thorburn Irvine
Chair

From Our Executive Director

It is with great pleasure that we present our 2023-2024 Annual Report.

As you sift through the pages, you will see that our libraries are buzzing with activity.

Alongside our community partners, we've delivered over a thousand programs, including a series of technology support workshops for seniors and a spring income tax program for low-income earners.

The library loaned out over 238,000 books and other materials, an increase in loans over last year.

With the support of our stakeholders, partners and members, we continue to evolve to meet the needs of our communities.

We hope that you join us in celebrating all that is libraries: the people, the places and, among other things, the books.



Erin Comeau
Executive Director

Library as Space & Place

“Thank you, McKay Memorial Library for a very helpful and free tech support appointment this morning! My long-time Kobo question was answered!”

— Mimi Champagne, Shelburne

“I come to the library because I need to use the computer. It’s like a home away from home. I don’t know what I would do without a library in my life.”

— Weymouth library user



10,175
Active Members



195,582
Items Borrowed



106,850 In-Person
Visits
87,967 Virtual Visits

That’s 534 Visits Per Day



42,515
Digital Loans

457,187 Digital loans and articles read



Library as Space & Place



Summer technology trainer Cameron Brown, right, helps Elizabeth Earl learn more about her laptop and its capabilities. The funding for the intern position was made possible through a partnership with @NS.

1,066 

Children's &
Adult
Programs.*
Enjoyed by



8,722
People



* Includes passive programs

We help people connect digitally

Older adults in Barrington, Clare, Digby, Shelburne, Weymouth, and Yarmouth participated in basic technology skills workshops. They learned to use settings on their tablets and mobile devices and about ways to connect with services and community. They also received tips on Internet safety.

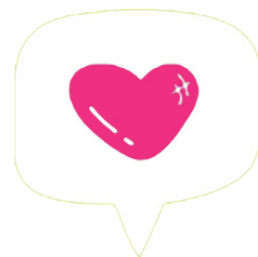


Virtual Care Technician Lacey d'Entremont, left, provides some one-on-one help registering for virtual health care with Nova Scotia Health through the Maple app in late June 2023. The library teamed up with Nova Scotia Health to help people learn about the new virtual health care services available to them.

Library as Space & Place

We welcome everyone and share interactions that people have enjoyed over the year

Author readings, paint nights, science clubs, group meditation, art exhibits, LEGO clubs, puzzle exchanges and drop-ins, needle craft afternoons, book clubs, story times, travel and historical presentations.



Mahala Sears, upper right, developed a hands-on tablet training program for library branches in Barrington, Digby, Shelburne, Weymouth and Yarmouth.



People get their tax returns done at the Digby library in March. Thanks to a partnership with the Community Volunteer Income Tax Program, library branches in Digby, Shelburne and Yarmouth had volunteers available to help with tax returns for low-income earners.



Darrin White of the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for Nova Scotia discusses online safety and fraud prevention in February at Yarmouth library.

Branches by the Numbers

Barrington

	1,028 Members
	332 Program Participants
	12,100 Visits
	17,384 Items Borrowed
	689 Computer Bookings
	7,903 Wireless Connection





Outreach & Book Deposits:

Bay Side Home
Home Away From Home Family Day Care
Ocean View Christian Academy









Youngsters learned how to build a log cabin with the kits provided by Skills Canada Nova Scotia at Barrington library in January.

Clark's Harbour

	229 Members
	43 Program Participants
	3,041 Visits
	2,653 Items Borrowed
	133 Computer Bookings
	3,886 Wireless Connections

Clare

	615 Members
	346 Program Participants
	8,888 Visits
	11,871 Items Borrowed
	762 Computer Bookings
	3,027 Wireless Connections

Outreach & Book Deposits:

École Stella-Maris
Foyer Celeste



People flocked to the Clare library to swap out and pick up craft supplies in January. Leftover items were given to local organizations.







Digby

	1,488 Members
	1,049 Program Participants
	11,988 Visits
	30,987 Items Borrowed
	781 Computer Bookings
	4,757 Wireless Connections

Outreach & Book Deposits:

Digby Preschool Co-Op

Lockeport

	310 Members
	574 Program Participants
	4,039 Visits
	8,963 Items Borrowed
	255 Computer Bookings
	3,490 Wireless Connections
<u>Outreach & Book Deposits:</u>	
MacLeod Surf Lodge Nursing Home	
The Fox and Hare Daycare	









Lockeport library's weekly Scrabble Club provides an important chance for people to socialize while stimulating one's brain.









Shelburne library's Science Club offers a wide range of experiments and learning for young people.

Shelburne

	1,378 Members
	866 Program Participants
	11,995 Visits
	26,773 Items Borrowed
	760 Computer Bookings
	5,936 Wireless Connections
<u>Outreach & Book Deposits:</u>	
King Street Family Centre	
Mary's Abide Awhile Home Limited	
Roseway Manor Inc.	

Pubnico

	248 Members
	11 Program Participants
	3,450 Visits
	4,609 Items Borrowed
	271 Computer Bookings
	2,132 Wireless Connections
<u>Outreach & Book Deposits:</u>	
Nakile Home for Special Care	









A display highlights International Day of People with Disabilities in December at the Pubnico library.









Sheila and Patricia share a laugh. The Westport library Fibre Group meets regularly to work on needlecrafts and socialize.

Westport

	109 Members
	143 Program Participants
	2,168 Visits
	2,749 Items Borrowed
	22 Computer Bookings
	1,867 Wireless Connections
<u>Outreach & Book Deposits:</u>	
School Street Market in Freeport	

Weymouth

	749 Members
	367 Program Participants
	7,830 Visits
	11,586 Items Borrowed
	517 Computer Bookings
	5,359 Wireless Connections
<u>Outreach & Book Deposits:</u>	
Maison Jerome	
Weymouth Consolidated School	









Weymouth library offers display and exhibit space each month for local artists and artisans such as this quilt exhibit by Cindy Cromwell in January 2024.



Families enjoyed taking advantage of the summer Discovery Centre tour to dabble in some fun science experiments and games.

Yarmouth

	3,913 Members
	2,151 Program Participants
	41,351 Visits
	72,907 Items Borrowed
	4,071 Computer Bookings
	11,971 Wireless Connections
<u>Outreach & Book Deposits:</u>	
11 local seniors residences	



Partnerships help strengthen library programs and community ties. A weekly story time at the Yarmouth library is led by staff from Parents' Place Family Resource Centre.



Library technology trainer Cameron Brown, centre, helps Ron Doucette with the library's Sphero Bolt robots while Emilda Doucette looks on at the Western Nova Scotia Exhibition in August 2023.

Making a Difference

Deliveries to residences make a difference

A library delivery of books and movies to a seniors residence provides access to things that would be out of reach for some of its tenants.

"The service is good," says Calvin Fenton, who lives at The Willows in Yarmouth. Library clerks visit The Willows on the first Wednesday of every month.

Almost all library branches do deliveries to various seniors residences in the Tri-Counties. Yarmouth library staff do four days of deliveries a month to eight seniors residences.

Fenton did not know that people could borrow movies from the library. Another resident, Donald Smith, told him about it.

"I never thought of libraries for movies, just books," Fenton says.

Two years ago, Smith was in the common area at The Willows when a library clerk told him he could borrow movies and television shows from the library with a free library card.

"I don't have cable," Fenton says, adding that there are no video-rental places anymore and he can't afford to buy a lot of DVDs. "To me, that's a waste of money."

Although the library delivers, Fenton and Smith walk to the library to pick up their shows most of the time.

Without a computer, they



Calvin Fenton holds a movie he borrowed from the library. He discovered the library had movies because of a visit by Yarmouth library clerks to his residence.

rely on the library clerks to help them find the movies and television series they want to watch if it is not available on the shelves.

Because Fenton is unable to browse the library's online catalogue from home, he also creates a list from the previews on the items he borrows.

Both Fenton and Smith would like to see a greater selection at the library, but are grateful the library is there for them.

"They (library clerks) all take care of me," Fenton says. "The library is a good thing for people who can't afford (to buy movies and books)."

Like Fenton, Smith doesn't have cable but does have a

DVD player.

"Can't afford (cable)," he says. "I get movies and box sets and that helps me out a lot."

"I had problems sleeping at night," he says. "Then I throw on a movie, and I'm good."

He has been able to watch some of his favourite old TV shows, including **Matlock**.

"It was good to get a new library card, and, now, they know me and Calvin," he says.

Yarmouth library clerk Nick Cook finds people are very grateful for the service.

"To people who use it, it is absolutely essential to them," says Cook. "With no mobility, no car, no family, it can be very isolating. Without it, they have no access to reading for diversion, entertainment, and enrichment."



Donald Smith can't afford cable and says the library helps him out a lot.

Working with the Community

We work with community members and organizations to provide valuable programs and services. Here are some highlights:

- Volunteers from Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) Community Volunteer Income Tax Program helped older adults and low-income earners file their income taxes.

- The Kespu'kwitk Métis Council celebrated National Indigenous Peoples Day and shared indigenous cultures through, drumming, singing and fire-free smudging.

- Waste Check and Region 6 Solid Waste Management worked with the library to host community Halloween costume swaps in Digby, Shelburne and Yarmouth. The swap provided free shopping for those needing new costumes and diverted gently used costumes from the landfill.



Al Comeau of the Kespu'kwitk Métis Council demonstrates drumming and singing during National Indigenous Peoples Day on June 21.

- Community members in Clare participated in a craft supply swap and all leftover supplies was given to a local senior home.
- A representative from the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for Nova Scotia led an information session on online safety and how to prevent scams and fraud in Yarmouth.
- Members of the Clean Energy and Equity Network delivered an information session about retrofits and energy efficiency in Shelburne, helping people discover how simple changes can save them money and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Shelburne County Family Resource Centre, Barrington Municipal Recreation Department, and Parents Place (Yarmouth) delivered preschool story times and hosted community playgroups.
- SuperNOVA Dalhousie University led a week-long summer science camp in Shelburne.
- Sou'West Nova Transit provided free rides to and from library youth and family programs in Shelburne Counties.

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Working with the Community

- @ NS hired Cameron Brown as a technology trainer to provide one-on-one sessions for people who wanted to learn how to use their computers, tablets or mobile devices in Yarmouth.

- The library branches are a gathering place and an important service to newcomers to the region. Many newcomer families attend programs regularly, encouraging new friendships and a sense of belonging.

- People who need to fax government documents, such as rebates for seniors care and home heating, and legal documents such as custody agreements use the library fax machines.

- Local businesses send people to the library to set up an email address to access benefits such as an app to receive points and rewards. At least one local drug store sends people to the library to set up email so they can get email notifications and sign up for appointments.

- The library provides space and publicity for local artists to hold exhibitions of their artwork. The exhibits bring people to the library and raise awareness of the local talent in the community.

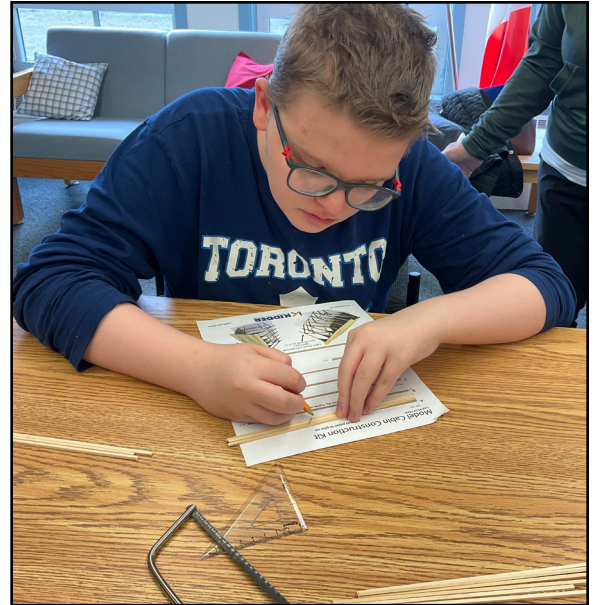
- The library continues to do outreach and book deposits to various schools, seniors residences and locations. As Calvin Fenton, a recipient of library outreach services said: "They (library clerks) all take care of me. The library is a good thing for people who can't afford (to buy movies and books)."

- The library is a valuable resource to homeschoolers. They receive all kinds of information and guidance on a wide range of resources from library clerks.

- There are adult children of parents in palliative care who borrow material from the library for their parents to provide them with comfort, entertainment and mental stimulation during a difficult time.

- The library acts as a social hub for older adults, attending regular programming such as Scrabble, board games, book clubs and knitting groups. Participants value the social interaction and challenges which are important for mental health and maintaining cognitive function.

- The library continued to work with Nova Scotia Health to distribute COVID-19 rapid test kits and were drop-off sites for people to return their pulse oximeters to Nova Scotia Health. All library branches offer free menstrual products in the washrooms.



Skills Canada Nova Scotia provided kits so that children and youth could build their own log cabins, teaching them valuable skills.

Becoming More Accessible

Library Playaways rekindle love of reading

Barry Crowell has lost much of his vision through age-related macular degeneration (AMD), but he has gained a love of reading through Western Counties Regional Library's Playaways.

No longer able to pursue his art, read, write or drive, Crowell, 83, had friends suggest a visit to his local library in Shelburne.

"They said 'Why don't you go to the library and check out the audiobooks'," Crowell says.

He hadn't been to the library in years, but found the clerks at McKay Memorial Library extremely helpful, guiding him towards the library's Playaways, one of the newer additions to the library's collection.

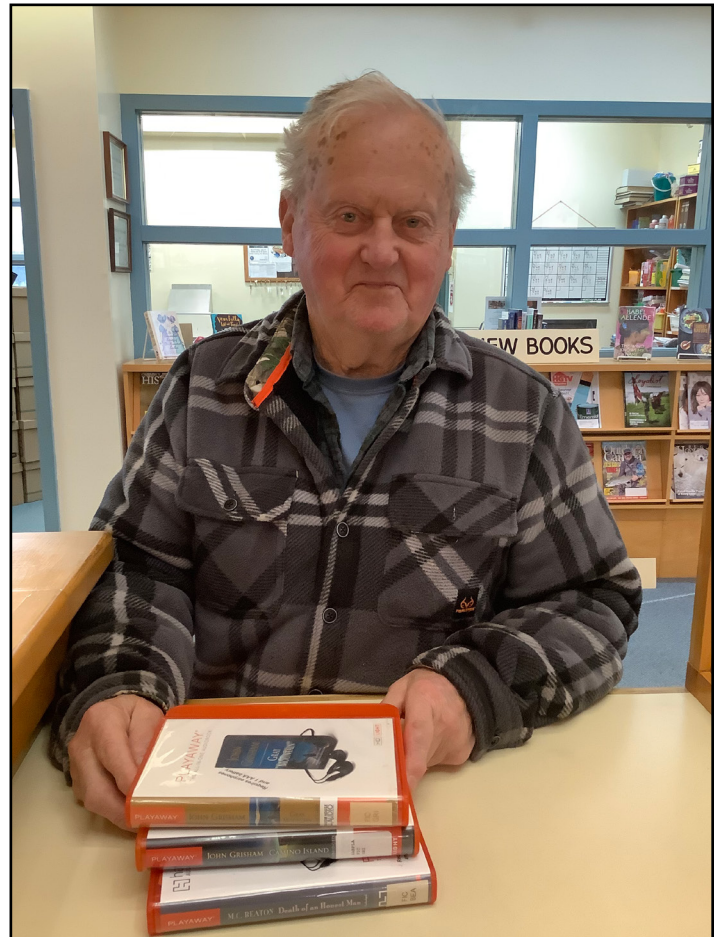
A Playaway is a pre-loaded audiobook that gives library users the portability and freedom to take audiobooks everywhere. They are similar in size to an iPod and do not need to be connected to the Internet or downloaded. Borrowers require their own headphones and suitable batteries.

"Playaways are very popular," says Lydia Hunsberger, Manager of Collections and Digital Services at the library.

Crowell has been borrowing Playaways for the past several months. Because he needs a drive to the library from his Gunning Cove home, he gets to the library every two weeks.

He says he makes lists of titles he is interested in and the clerks are great at tracking his lists and his interests to avoid repeats.

"They (library clerks) picked out books for me," he says. "The clerks are very helpful."



Barry Crowell picks up a stack of Playaways from McKay Memorial Library in Shelburne.

He says overall, the books he has borrowed, he has liked, but sometimes the accents used in the recordings can be challenging.

He would also like to see more of his favourites, older authors such as Louis L'Amour and Farley Mowat. He enjoys James Patterson, but at times, finds his stories can get "quite gruesome."

Regardless, his discovery of the library Playaways has rekindled his love of reading.

Library Support

Businesses continued to support the library's Summer Reading Club, providing prizes for the children's, teen and adult club.

Book sales and regular giving continued to help the library meet its annual fundraising goals.

Giving Tuesday on Nov. 28, 2023 is an annual push for people to give to charitable organizations following the Black Friday, Cyber Monday shopping events. The library received over \$1,100 in donations on that day.

Regional Library Finances

Expenditures

	2022-2023	2023-2024
Salaries and Benefits	\$1,303,094	\$1,462,493
Library Materials	\$ 164,718	\$ 200,434
Other Expenses	\$ 452,069	\$ 415,156
Total Expenditures	\$1,919,881	\$2,078,083

Revenues

	2022-2023	2023-2024
Province of Nova Scotia	\$1,360,500	\$1,360,500
Municipalities	\$ 447,800	\$ 447,800
Other Revenues	\$ 111,581	\$ 269,783
Total Revenues	\$1,919,881	\$2,078,083



Library branches such as McKay Memorial Library in Shelburne provide valuable meetings spaces for groups like the Nimble Thimble Quilt Group.



School children learn about the public library and its services during regular class visits to library branches. Pictured, two students from Carleton Consolidated Elementary School explore a book on astronomy during a visit in October 2023.