

# Western Counties Regional Library Annual Report



**2025 - 2026**

# From Our Board:

As Chair of the Western Counties Regional Library Board, I wish to communicate our annual report in a spirit of partnership and shared responsibility.



## **Libraries: Cornerstones of Community**

Our libraries remain universally accessible, safe, public spaces. They are open to all, without barriers or appointments, contributing vital communal space to the people we serve.

As social infrastructure, libraries are interwoven into the fabric of Digby, Yarmouth, and Shelburne Counties. Our services reflect and respond to community needs, shaped by an ever-changing social and economic landscape.

## **Libraries: Partnership and Stewardship**

The Western Counties Regional Library Board acknowledges the importance of our provincial and municipal funders, and the commitment of our key stakeholders. Together, we work to ensure library services are delivered within a framework of sustainable and stable funding.

We recognize that fiscal pressures create strain on systems and on the people those systems serve. In that context, the Board remains committed to serving the public professionally through programs and services that are responsive to community needs, while working diligently with our provincial and municipal partners toward stable, sustainable funding.

## **Libraries: Our Core Mandate**

Our mandate is clear: our people and our service delivery. The Western Counties Regional Library Board looks forward to continuing to work with the Province of Nova Scotia, our municipalities, and all stakeholders to ensure that libraries continue to meet the needs of rural Nova Scotia today and into the years ahead.

Respectfully submitted,  
Sherry Thorburn Irvine  
Chair, Western Counties Regional Library Board

# From Our Executive Director:



We are pleased to present our Annual Report, highlighting the many services and activities that took place across our library system over the past year.

Our libraries are vibrant gathering spaces, bustling with activity and connection. Together, our dedicated staff, along with our community partners, continue to provide meaningful services to residents throughout Digby, Shelburne, and Yarmouth counties.

This year, we delivered more than 1,000 programs attended by over 10,000 people and loaned more than 251,194 books and other materials, reflecting the continued growth in library use and community engagement. As our communities evolve, so do our services. By combining the expertise of our staff with the knowledge and support of our partners, we continue to adapt and respond to emerging needs.

Public libraries occupy a unique place in our communities. We welcome everyone. From children's science clubs to technology training for seniors, our libraries bring people together to learn, connect, and thrive. We are proud of the positive impact our libraries make every day and remain committed to fostering welcoming spaces where people, ideas, and opportunities come together.

We invite you to join us in celebrating all that libraries represent: the people, the places, and, of course, the books that continue to enrich our communities.

Erin Comeau  
Executive Director and Regional Librarian

# Library as Space & Place

“Thanks so much for having me share my Lucy with you and your special guests. It was a great way to spend an evening. Now you know where to find me if you ever need crustacean entertainment again! 😊”

– Author Pam Wamback to Barrington branch library on June 5, 2025.



A boy decorates lobster cookies at author Pam Wamback’s return visit to the Barrington Library.



**10,087**

Active Members



**183,437**

Items Borrowed



**67,757**

Digital Items Borrowed



Community Outreach Manager, Breanne Muise, guides older adults at the All About Apps and Cybersecurity program at the Weymouth Library.



**109,566**

In Person Visits

**78,458**

Virtual Visits



Grade 7 students from École secondaire de Clare visit their art exhibit at the Clare Library.

# Library as Space & Place

**1,079**

\*Children's and adults programs.

Enjoyed by

**10,426**

people.



\*Includes passive programs

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Yarmouth MLA, Nick Hilton, tours the library Headquarters.

## Let's talk about periods!

This year we used funding from our Period Poverty grant from the Government of Nova Scotia to host the Own Your Flow: Period Product Giveaway! This was a campaign across all 10 of our library branches. People learned about period underwear, reusable pads, menstrual cups, and menstrual discs. They could also enter into a draw to win reusable period products.

Our project coordinator, Mahala Sears, led information sessions where people learned more about these products. Sears held a session at each branch. We also had informational programs presented by nurse practitioner, Maria Ceschiutti. She shared information about periods, perimenopause, and menopause. These were at the Barrington, Shelburne, and Yarmouth branches.

At the end of the campaign we gave away products to a total of 77 people! Winners were from Digby, Yarmouth, and Shelburne counties.

# Library as Space & Place

## Media Literacy at the Library

Community Outreach Manager, Breanne Muise delivered programs on how to spot misinformation on social media. Programs were presented at our Barrington, Digby, Weymouth, and Yarmouth library branches.

Muise also delivered similar programs to Tri-County Regional Centre for Education students in grades 5 to 9. She presented at Islands Consolidated School, Lockeport Regional High School, and Saint Mary's Bay Academy.



Community Outreach Manager, Breanne Muise plays a game with Islands Consolidated students to analyze if a post is true or misinformation.

## 1-on-1 Technology Help

The library provides one-on-one technology help for patrons who have difficulties using their devices. Community Outreach Manager, Breanne Muise and Systems Administrator, Ryan McKenzie lead these sessions.

Our winter Technology Trainer, Maisie Hayward, offered many more sessions. When asked about the importance of them, Hayward says, “The world is forever evolving and sometimes it can go way too fast, especially technology... it is unfair on those who didn’t get the chance to evolve with it. There will always be people that need help and this work allows for that.”

Library user, Barbara Comeau says that these sessions are very helpful. Technology does not come easy to her and she often needs help with her tablet or Chromebook. She ended her technology help session by saying, “I was stuck before I came today and now I’m unstuck”.

# Branches by the Numbers

## Barrington

**1,107** Members  
**2,012** Program Participants  
**16,704** Visits  
**24,383** Items Borrowed  
**624** Computer Bookings  
**8,338** Wireless Connections

### Outreach and Book Deposits:

- Bay Side Home
- Home Away from Home Family Daycare
- Ocean View Christian Academy



Cathy from YREACH reads Say Hello at the Digby branch.

## Clark's Harbour

**219** Members  
**418** Program Participants  
**3,409** Visits  
**3,767** Items Borrowed  
**116** Computer Bookings  
**2,439** Wireless Connections

### Outreach and Book Deposits:

- Clark's Harbour Elementary School

## Clare

**645** Members  
**307** Program Participants  
**8,242** Visits  
**9,792** Items Borrowed  
**699** Computer Bookings  
**2,898** Wireless Connections

### Outreach and Book Deposits:

- Foyer Celeste



Patrons made beeswax wrap and learned about bees with beekeeper Meghan Pond at the Barrington branch.

## Digby

**1,424** Members  
**3,193** Program Participants  
**15,173** Visits  
**30,746** Items Borrowed  
**829** Computer Bookings  
**3,691** Wireless Connections

### Outreach and Book Deposits:

- Digby Preschool Co-Op
- Digby Neck Consolidated School

# Branches by the Numbers

## Lockeport

**279** Members  
**549** Program Participants  
**4120** Visits  
**7,186** Items Borrowed  
**319** Computer Bookings  
**2,761** Wireless Connections

### Outreach and Book Deposits:

- The Fox and the Hare Daycare
- Lockeport Elementary School
- Surf Lodge Nursing Home



Two patrons choosing seeds to take home from the Lockeport branch seed library.

## Shelburne

**1,182** Members  
**1,464** Program Participants  
**10,372** Visits  
**23,073** Items Borrowed  
**1,127** Computer Bookings  
**4,427** Wireless Connections

### Outreach and Book Deposits:

- King Street Family Centre
- Mary's Abide Awhile Home Limited
- Roseway Manor Inc.

## Pubnico

**250** Members  
**4** Program Participants  
**2,544** Visits  
**3,926** Items Borrowed  
**75** Computer Bookings  
**1,641** Wireless Connections

### Outreach and Book Deposits:

- Nakile Home for Special Care



A group of people socializing at the Westport branch Fibre Group program.

## Westport

**131** Members  
**146** Program Participants  
**2,371** Visits  
**2,228** Items Borrowed  
**22** Computer Bookings  
**1,291** Wireless Connections

### Outreach and Book Deposits:

- Old School Stop and Shop in Freeport
- Islands Consolidated School

# Branches by the Numbers

## Weymouth

**723** Members  
**458** Program Participants  
**7,938** Visits  
**16,512** Items Borrowed  
**662** Computer Bookings  
**4,272** Wireless Connections

### Outreach and Book Deposits:

- Maison Jerome
- Weymouth Consolidated School



Patrons learned to make healthy and hearty salads at the Weymouth branch. This program was made possible by the Food Security Initiative grant from the Government of Nova Scotia's Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage.

## Yarmouth

**4,040** Members  
**1,875** Program Participants  
**38,693** Visits  
**73,420** Items Borrowed  
**3,522** Computer Bookings  
**10,939** Wireless Connections

### Outreach and Book Deposits:

- 10 local seniors residences



Systems Administrator, Ryan McKenzie speaking to expo-goers at the 55+ Wellness Day expo held at the NSCC Burrigge Campus in Yarmouth.

# Teaching New Skills

## Kids learn food prep at the library

A snack time program at the library helped youngsters learn about healthy foods and how to prepare them. Various programs ran in the fall at four library branches for youngsters aged two to 12.

“Learning food literacy skills at a young age is very important,” says Mahala Sears, the library’s project coordinator. “It is not widely available in our communities.”

Children made their own healthy snacks and learned to clean, chop, peel and prepare food in a safe way. This program was popular with both children and parents. The majority of children attended multiple sessions, Sears says.

“I love it,” said a mother who attended all four sessions in Yarmouth with her daughter. “It allows the child and adult to socialize.” She said her child “gets to listen to another adult,” and “it is something different.” The program has increased her daughter’s interest in being in the kitchen and helping out.

“It is very important to start learning about food and nutrition, and how to prepare them at a young age to be able to build skills for the future,” Sears says. “We have had quite a wide age range attending. The little ones seem very empowered and confident while getting the opportunity to make their own snack.”

Another mother who attended the program with her daughter in Yarmouth watched her daughter come out of her shell. “Iva loved it,” she says. “She was not social.” She is now, she says.

Parents are frequently asking when the next program will be. Digby library clerk Jady Samson watched parents and children enjoy attending the program. “The kids have been loving it, and the parents said it’s a nice way for their kids to start making snacks independently,” Samson says.

Many of the parents asked Sears about where to purchase the child-safe tools. “I have some very budget friendly suggestions for them,” she said.

This program was funded by the Food Security Initiative Grant through the Government of Nova Scotia’s Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage.



Project Coordinator, Mahala Sears taught children aged 6 to 12 how to prepare a nutritious snack at the Digby branch.

# Meeting the Needs of the Community

## Parent group builds connections at the library

Over the past year a parent group formed and began to meet at the Yarmouth branch to socialize and play. We were able to interview Dede Whitten, who started the group and Kristina d'Entremont, who goes with her son.

Whitten says she and her family recently moved to Yarmouth. She found it hard to get to know and build connections with people in town, so she started a group to meet with other parents of young children.

By the end of summer 2025, the group began to meet at the library. They also attend the Yarmouth branch's Storytime program on Thursday mornings.

d'Entremont began attending the Storytimes with her son when he was about 4 months old. She says, "The first year as a mom is a really big year... Post-partum depression is common and knowing there was something going on that I could attend with my baby was really helpful... [The library] is a community space with no barriers for us to access it. There are no fees to attend, it's welcoming and the kids section is nicely tucked away, so we don't feel in people's way. It feels like you can let the kids explore."

Both mothers brought up a lack of programs in the community that are available for babies. Whitten says, "They're things I never thought about until I had a baby. It's really invisible until you're there and you're like oh, this is why everybody says they're lonely."

They identified the library as an important space for themselves and their families. Whitten says, "The library [is] one of the only third spaces in all of downtown Yarmouth. We use it often."

While discussing their move to Yarmouth, d'Entremont added, "The space is open to explore... I wanted to encourage a love for books and reading with my son. It's also nice to see what other people and their children are interested in reading. We want to continue exploring books with our son as he grows up."



Dede Whitten and her son at the Yarmouth branch.

# Working with the Community

## Volunteer Income Tax Clinics

The library participates in the Canada Revenue Agency's Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP) as an organization every March and April. Through it, we provide free income tax clinics to people with low incomes. It has been very successful with 685 tax returns filed during the year.

Our volunteer tax filers have seen an increase in the amount of people looking to have their taxes filed. Volunteer Donna Simmons says, "More and more people are taking advantage of the program and needing it. The cost of tax filing is high and people on a fixed income cannot afford it."

Volunteer Julia Gal, adds that besides the cost, barriers to filing happen when people are "unfamiliar with using a computer, do not have access to a computer, or are not comfortable using the CRA UFile software."

The most common types of clients for the program are older adults, immigrants, and people with income assistance. John Lukeman has been a volunteer with CVITP for 20 years. He says, "Sometimes, you'll be doing someone's taxes as a temporary resident and over the years you get to see them become Canadian citizens."

Some clients find it reassuring to see our volunteers every year. Lukeman says, "People are comfortable seeing the same faces. With filing your taxes commercially, you don't always know the person doing your taxes."

Simmons has a similar sentiment, mentioning "I've gotten to know a lot of people. I've heard some people say, 'Oh good, it's you again!' as they came in. It made me feel happy." She adds that for older adults, the social aspect of meeting with a tax filer is valuable.

We have free income tax clinics at our Digby, Shelburne, and Yarmouth branches. At our Shelburne branch we partner with Our Senior Services to host the clinic.



Patrons listen to Selina Power from Canada Revenue Agency's CVITP. She informs them of tax benefits and credits available to older adults. Attendance was both virtual and in person at the Yarmouth branch.

# Improving our Services

## Library Accessibility

We continue to work to improve accessibility at the library. In March we created a new Accessibility Committee for our library.

The committee plays an important role to help the library become accessible. It gives advice on finding and removing barriers to persons with disabilities. It helps the library fulfill its responsibility to provide accessible services under Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act.

We received a grant from the Nova Scotia Department of Communities Culture and Heritage to help upgrade our service desks, for accessibility. With the Municipality of Digby and Town of Digby's help, we upgraded the desks in Digby and Weymouth. We continue to work with municipalities and towns in the region to upgrade the service desks in the eight remaining branches.



Adrien LeBlanc (sitting) and Barry Faulkner (standing) as they assemble the desk in Weymouth. Both are employees of the Municipality of Digby.



The new seated circulation desk built at the Digby branch.

# Library Support



Public libraries in Nova Scotia are required to raise 3% of their annual operating budgets through local fundraising efforts. Western Counties Regional Library relies on the generosity of community members, patrons, and supporters to help meet this requirement.

We would like to thank everyone who donated money to the library this year. Every contribution played a meaningful role in supporting library services and helping to keep our libraries open and accessible to our communities.

We would also like to recognize the dedication and hard work of the volunteers who serve on the Shelburne Library Building Association and the Yarmouth Public Library and Museum Board. Through their ongoing commitment and stewardship, the McKay Memorial Library and the Izaak Walton Killam Memorial Library buildings continue to be maintained and operated for the benefit of residents throughout the region.

## A special thanks to our:

### Summer Reading Club Prize Sponsors

- Centre sportif, Université Sainte-Anne
- Digby Area Recreation Commission
- Digby Canadian Tire
- Fundy Restaurant & Dockside Suites
- Mariners Centre
- Nova Scotia Museums
- Municipality of the District of Barrington
- Municipality of the District of Shelburne
- The Shanty Café
- White Perkins Associates Chartered Professional Accountants Inc.
- Wilson's Home Hardware in Barrington

### Grant Funders

- **Community Volunteer Income Tax Program** – Income Tax Clinics in Digby and Yarmouth.
- **@NS** – Virtual Programming
- **Old Ladies Home Society** – Accessibility improvements to the Yarmouth branch service desk
- **Nova Scotia Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage** – Serving People Better (Accessibility) grant.

# Library Support



## Regional Library Finances

### Expenditures

	2024-2025	2025-2026
Salaries and Benefits	\$1,532,073	\$1,521,728
Library Materials	\$ 196,278	\$ 150,441
Other Expenses	\$ 332,008	\$ 351,354
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$2,060,359</b>	<b>\$2,023,523</b>

### Revenues

	2024-2025	2025-2026
*Province of Nova Scotia	\$1,426,500	\$1,492,500
Municipalities	\$ 460,700	\$ 447,800
Other Revenues	\$ 220,958	\$ 240,087
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>\$2,108,158</b>	<b>\$2,180,387</b>

\*Includes \$132,000 in Bridge Funding from the Department of Communities, Culture, and Heritage.



Mary Eldridge (left) and Barb Rodney (right) from the Old Ladies Home Society give their donation to library Deputy Director, Shannon Raynard.



People purchase baked goods and plants from the Lockeport Friends of the Library Plant and Bake Sale.