

## **INTRODUCTION Part 1: Community**

The Fort St. James Public Library acknowledges that our work takes place on the unceded homelands of the Dakelh Nations.

Founded by Simon Fraser in 1806 on the shores of Stuart Lake, Fort St. James is the gateway to a chain of rivers and lakes that traverse 400 kilometres of central British Columbia. The population of the Fort St. James area, including the municipality itself, rural areas and First Nations, is approximately 5,000 people. There is an established forest industry, a burgeoning mining sector and a growing tourism industry. The downtown core, near the District of Fort St. James office, hosts restaurants, retail shops, banks and a government service office. The library is located right beside the downtown core.

Fort St. James and area have played a significant role in history. Visual reminders of this history are evident throughout the town. Among the more prominent are:

- Fort St. James National Historic Site
- Ancient burial site of Carrier Chief Kwah
- Our Lady of Good Hope Catholic Church
- Monument to legendary bush pilot Russ Baker

Some of the First Nations communities served by Fort St. James include:

- Nak'azdli
- Yekooche
- Binche
- Tl'azt'en (Tache)
- Takla Lake

The town's important cultural, educational, and community institutions include:

- Fort St. James Public Library
- College of New Caledonia
- The Key Resource Centre
- Fort St. James National Historic Site / Friends of the Park
- Community Arts Council / Pope Mountain Arts Centre
- Music Makers (an amateur theatre company)
- Fort St. James Senior Association
- Fort St. James Community Foundation
- John Prince Research Forest

**INTRODUCTION Part 2: Strategic Plans**

The *Strategic Plan 2016-2021* for the Fort St. James Public Library outlines four goals, each with three or more focus areas:

- Community Connections
- Professional Development
- Technology Engagement
- Environment

The Provincial Strategic Plan, *Inspiring Libraries, Connecting Communities*, as developed by the Ministry of Education, Libraries Branch, set out four priorities for libraries throughout the province:

- Fostering Connected Communities
- Building Capacity
- Working Together
- Sustaining Our Success

As it has in the past, the strategic goals of the Fort St. James Public Library closely align with those of the Ministry of Education, Libraries Branch.

**Correlation between Ministry of Education, Libraries Branch Priorities and the Fort St. James Public Library Strategic Plan 2016-2021**

MELB Priorities	FSJaPL Priorities	Notes
<p><i>Fostering Connected Communities: advancing access to information and resources</i></p>	<p><i>Technology Engagement:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep software as current and relevant as possible</li> <li>• Improve digital equipment for staff and patrons</li> <li>• Increase digital access and digital literacy of staff and patrons</li> <li>• Valuable and easy to use website</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning for new software and tools on Public Use computers</li> <li>• Planning for Maker Space equipment</li> <li>• Staff Technology Training sessions</li> <li>• Patron technology sessions with Head Librarian</li> </ul>
<p><i>Building Capacity: enabling inspiration and innovation</i></p>	<p><i>Professional Development:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff training sessions</li> <li>• Team building activities</li> <li>• Board Education</li> </ul> <p><i>Technology Engagement:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase digital access and digital literacy of staff and patrons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff Technology Training sessions</li> <li>• Informal staff training with Head Librarian</li> <li>• New digital literacy resources and courses</li> <li>• Opening the mezzanine for patron usage</li> </ul>

	<p><i>Environment:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve study areas and reading areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing a partnership with the College of New Caledonia's Learning Hub</li> </ul>
<p><i>Working Together:</i> creating lasting and sustainable partnerships</p>	<p><i>Community Connections:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creating and strengthening partnerships with community and regional organizations</li> </ul>	<p>The FSJaPL Strategic Plan does not specifically mention partnerships and cooperation with other libraries, but we work regularly with the North Central Library Federation and member libraries.</p>
<p><i>Sustaining Our Success:</i> enhancing governance and demonstrating impact</p>	<p>The library is committed to measuring, reporting, and evaluating all data on services and programs throughout our Strategic Plan.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Library Board is reviewing major statistics on a monthly basis.</li> </ul>

Progress of Fort St. James Public Library's Strategic Plan:

Community Connections

- The library has not established any satellite libraries, nor have we started work on creating a mobile library. We have been working to establish partnerships with other organizations, which may result in collection and resource sharing.

Professional Development

- The Head Librarian provided technology training sessions to the staff. The material in these courses was aimed at helping the other staff both with their duties at work as well as their own personal comfort with technology.
- The Head Librarian provides casual technology training throughout the day and for projects given to the staff.
- The Board and Head Librarian have participated in a number of webinars, courses, and conferences. These includes the NCLF conference, program and service planning, and ILS usage and best practices.
- Staff have taken courses from the College of New Caledonia on Operational First Aid.
- Staff evaluations and feedback opportunities are being performed regularly.

Technology Engagement

- The Head Librarian has planned software upgrades and enhancements for the public use computers.
- The Head Librarian has been providing training to increase staff's digital literacy.
- The library has been unable to purchase new technology for public use, but we have been talking with an organization who is interested in providing the library with a 3D Printer.
- WiFi usage has increased, but the collection method relies on staff noticing the usage and needs to be more accurately recorded.

#### Environment

- The Library Board has been evaluating plans to use our mezzanine space more effectively. This included discussions with members of the community regarding what they feel would be important for the library.
- The Board is preparing to open the mezzanine space as a general reading and study space, as well as a young adult space. This space would also be used for library programs and community meetings and events.

### **INTRODUCTION Part 3: A Period of Transition**

2017 was a year of transitions for the Fort St. James Public Library. Some of the changes showed outwardly, but many were only felt internally. The first change involves the unplanned change in management, with regards to both with the Board and Head Librarian. The second change was in regards to the management of the library's finances and the reigning in of expanding expenses.

Several of the new Board Members from 2016 were unable to continue volunteering for the Library Board during 2017. The Board needed to re-enlist former Board Members to assist during this transitional year.

The former Head Librarian was forced to retire much earlier than planned, and with little time to oversee or prepare for his replacement. He was willing and able to work part-time for a period, and then volunteer his time in the Spring to finish the necessary reports and create documentation, but the library was without a Head Librarian for over a month. Many things were lost with the former Head Librarian, including his expertise with the community, the collection, and several ongoing plans.

Unfortunately, among the things lost during the transition included work and efforts the former Head Librarian made in partnerships. There are a variety of reasons the partnerships did not continue with the new Head Librarian. Some other organizations had a change in management in the Spring, as well, and their priorities and goals shifted. In some cases, the relationships were not made known to the new Head Librarian, and there were no introductions or follow-ups. Finally, the new Head Librarian has been working hard to familiarize himself with the current state, systems, and procedures of the library, as well as solidifying the core duties and responsibilities the library has performed and upheld within the community.

In addition to the change in management, this year the library had to review and make changes to our expenses. The library's expenses had been growing faster than its revenues, increasingly, each year for several years. The Library Board had to use a significant amount of the reserve funds to cover the expenses incurred in 2015 and 2016, and the new Head Librarian had to get the library's costs under control. With sadness and regrets, spending had to be cut across the board for staffing, programming, and collections. Staff hours were reduced for the majority of the staff, including some downsizes that were made to the staff at the end of 2016. The two full-time staff members would perform their regular duties as well as the duties of the part-time staff as much as possible. Many programs had been halted in late 2016 and early 2017, and could not be reintroduced later in the year. The collection of materials had been temporarily halted, but reinstated just prior to the retirement of the former Head Librarian.

We are ever grateful to the grants from the provincial and municipal governments, and other groups, as these sustained our core operations.

This period of necessary changes had setbacks for the growth of the library, but they also brought opportunities.

The new Head Librarian has skills and perspectives that are valuable for the library and the community. Chief among them is his comfort with technology and digital literacy skills, which have benefitted both the staff and the community. The staff have received formal technology training sessions on skills such as search engines and practices, browsers and browser tools, and Microsoft Excel. The staff also receive informal training and support daily as they perform their duties. The staff use these skills in their personal lives as well as during working hours. Many in the community have also seen the new Head Librarian's technological knowledge as an opportunity to receive help with their various devices. There have been regular requests for both short impromptu aid as well as more in-depth guidance sessions throughout the year. Additionally, the new Head Librarian's interest with policies and policy development has been valuable to the Board as they review the library's Policy Manual.

The Board has been working hard exploring new funding partners and opportunities. In the past the library did not often lobby for more funding or applied for grants available, but the library's growth in the past few years has proved that we must increase our revenues to meet the demands of the community. Through their works, the Board raised more money in 2017 than they had in any previous year.

By the end of 2017 the library was able to reduce expenses such that we were not over budget. This was the key goal of the library in the year, and while we understand that it came at a significant cost to staff, programs, and the collection, we are relieved that the problem was managed. Our new goal is gradual and sustainable growth to the service levels that the community needs.

#### 2017 Goals:

1. Improved management of library finances.
2. Find replacements for the Board and Head Librarian positions that were vacated.

#### 2017 Outcomes:

1. The library was able to reduce expenses and hold off on infrastructure upgrades, such that we did not draw upon our reserve funds.
  - a. Provincial Grants were almost wholly devoted to the current operations of the library, and not towards expansion of services or programs.
  - b. New funding through grants were explored, and these opportunities are being further reviewed and utilized.
  - c. Discussions are underway with community and regional groups to provide funding in proportion to their community's use of the library.
  - d. Board and Staff time and resources were stretched, but all with understanding towards our goal.
2.
  - a. Former Board Members were called upon to help the library through our transitional period.
  - b. A qualified new Head Librarian was hired in time to oversee the Summer Reading Program.

The Fort St. James Public Library Grants Report to the Libraries Branch will focus on the following three areas:

1. Developing and strengthening partnerships
2. Service enhancements and facility planning
3. Library usage

While the year had struggles, the library has been able to continue core operations with the generous work and support of the Libraries Branch, NCLF, our community, and many others.

### **DISCUSSION ITEM 1: Developing and Strengthening Partnerships**

It was vital for the library to connect and reconnect with community partners during our transitional period.

Four organizations, in particular, were a focus for us in 2017:

- Nak'azdli Whut'en
- Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako
- College of New Caledonia Learning Hub
- Nechako Valley Community Services Society

For many years the library has been attempting to strengthen our relationship with the Nak'azdli. Their community members include some of our most frequent patrons and users of the services we offer. We know that their community and our organization can areas of mutual support, but we also understand that this will be a long and organic process. The Library Board met with Nak'azdli Whut'en representatives and the Chief and Council throughout 2017 to discuss what our relationship may entail.

Both the Nak'azdli and the various communities throughout the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako represent a significant number of our regular patrons. But, these groups are not funding the library to a degree that represents their usage, and we rely heavily on the Provincial Grants and Municipal District. We have been meeting with these groups, requesting that they consider helping to pay for the resources that the people they represent use. We are hopeful that in the coming years we will be able to increase our funding from these groups, and continue to serve their communities to the best of our abilities.

The past years' planning and revitalization of the children's area continues to be a great benefit to the community and library. The kid's area is used daily, and many people in the community take pride in the equipment and resources available. It is invaluable for programs such as the annual Summer Reading Club and Nechako Valley Community Services Society's weekly story time program, which they provide with the assistance of the College of New Caledonia's Learning Hub.



The popular children's area. The furniture in the middle is easily movable when more room is needed.

The Learning Hub was an invaluable partner to us throughout 2017. They had approached us prior to our Summer Reading Club with the hope of using the program as a way to distribute books throughout the community. This was a great opportunity to both send more books to families and homes as well as to offer rewards to Summer Reading Club participants. The Learning Hub and library have been working to support each other in other initiatives. We have been supporting them in their projects and advertisements when we can, and they have been putting on educational programs and courses we are unable to provide. In early 2018 their staff changed, and the library is already working with the new manager to discuss our partnership.

The library is now partnering with Nechako Valley Community Services Society and the Learning Hub to provide a children's story time each week. The library was unable to maintain a children's program during 2017 due to a shortage of staff and resources, so the partnership was invaluable for us. The library is providing the space, some collection and office materials, and handling the registration, while the other organizations run the program. The story time has become a very valuable program for many families in the community, and we have solid regular attendance.

We are grateful to all of the organizations that supported us throughout the year:

- Ministry of Education, Libraries Branch
- North Central Library Federation
- BC Libraries Cooperative
- Municipal District of Fort St. James
- Nak'azdli Whut'en
- Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako
- College of New Caledonia's Learning Hub
- Nechako Valley Community Services Society
- Early Childhood Development Committee
- Community Arts Council of Fort St. James
- Fort St. James Secondary School
- Fort St. James Community Foundation
- Community Futures British Columbia
- Mount Milligan Community Sustainability Committee

2017 Goals:

1. Further develop a partnership with the local First Nations Band.
2. Encourage community organizations to use the available library resources for programs.

2017 Outcomes:

1. Nak'azdli Whut'en has provided a generous one-time grant to the library, with the understanding that the funds will be used both for operational costs and for resources valuable to First Nations peoples.
  - a. Nak'azdli Whut'en and the library understand that their partnership will take a long time to develop, and that we must have regular discussions to discover the best ways we can support each other.
2. Nechako Valley Community Services Society and the College of New Caledonia's Learning Hub are running a weekly story time program, which has had been an invaluable and steady service for families with young children.

**DISCUSSION ITEM 2: Service Enhancements and Facilities Planning**

During 2017 the Library Board began planning the next major service and facilities enhancements. The two areas of focus were digital literacy and space repurposing.

Community Futures Stuart Nechako approached the Head Librarian in 2017 with the desire to provide the library with a 3D Printer for community access. The Library Board recognizes the importance of digital literacy and skills, and the library's vital role in the community to provide both information and tools, and understands the importance and success of Maker Spaces. The Board did want to be careful, however, and ensure that plans and procedures were established, and questions answered, before accepting the 3D Printer. To that end, the Library Board has been doing research and has contacted other libraries with 3D Printers. The Fort St. James Secondary School, unexpectedly, received the exact model of 3D Printer that was offered to the library. The Head Librarian was invited to the school and received a demonstration of the machine and necessary software. The Board will make their final decision in 2018.

The library also subscribed to a digital learning platform, Gale Courses, which we hope people use to increase their digital literacy and comfort, as well as in other areas. We believe this subscription will give members of our community the opportunity to develop their skills with computers and the internet, no matter what course they sign up for.

The mezzanine space in the library has been underutilized in the past few years. Originally planned as a space for community displays, events, and meetings, the space has largely served as an additional storage area, the Head Librarian's office, and space for the very occasional community meeting or library event. The Board is planning to reopen the area to the general public as a seating and lounge space, and possibly a teen area with the Young Adult collection. The space would also be valuable for programs and events not suitable for the children's area. This repurposing has involved planning for new furniture, upgrades to the facility, policy revisions, and a review of all safety concerns. The Library Board recognizes that the space may have to be updated in phases, and that the ways in which the community uses the space will guide further developments.



Part of the mezzanine, with some of the furniture purchased in 2016 set up. We are looking into what other furniture and equipment is necessary before we open up the space.

2017 Goals:

1. Explore the possible opportunities of developing a Maker Space.
2. Increase digital literacy and resources available to the community.
3. Use our limited physical space more efficiently.

2017 Outcomes:

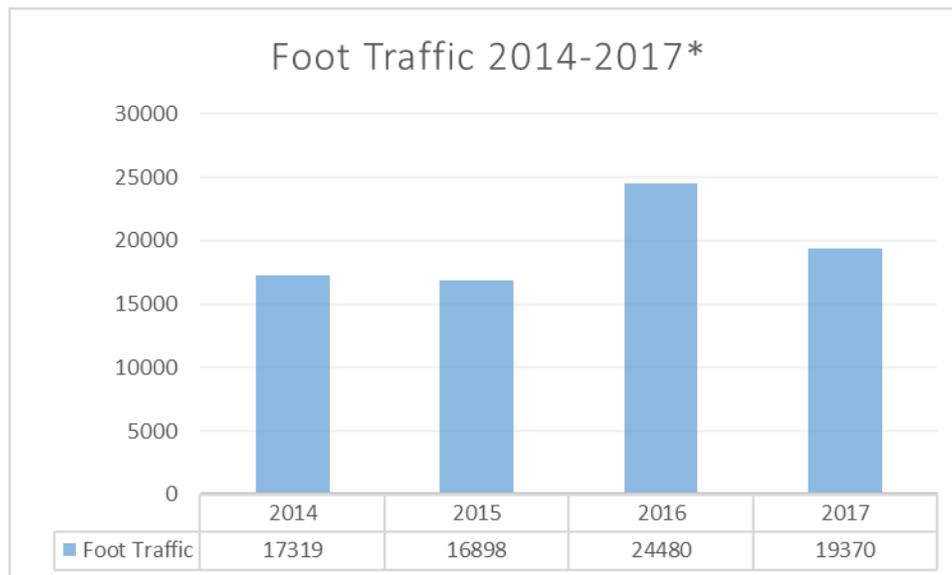
1. The Library Board is confident in their understanding of the benefits and costs of being a home for a 3D Printer, and will make the decision in 2018.
2. We continue to provide a variety of digital resources for patrons, and help get them started using the platforms, and have subscribed to a new online learning platform.
3. We will be opening the library's mezzanine for general usage—for study, reading, casual meetings, or whatever use the community needs.

**DISCUSSION ITEM 3: Library Usage**

Because the Library's resources were stretched from previous years, resulting in reduced programming and other outreach in 2017, library usage was generally lower than it was in 2016. However, the previous year's growth and outreach did result in an increase in usage from before 2016's numbers.

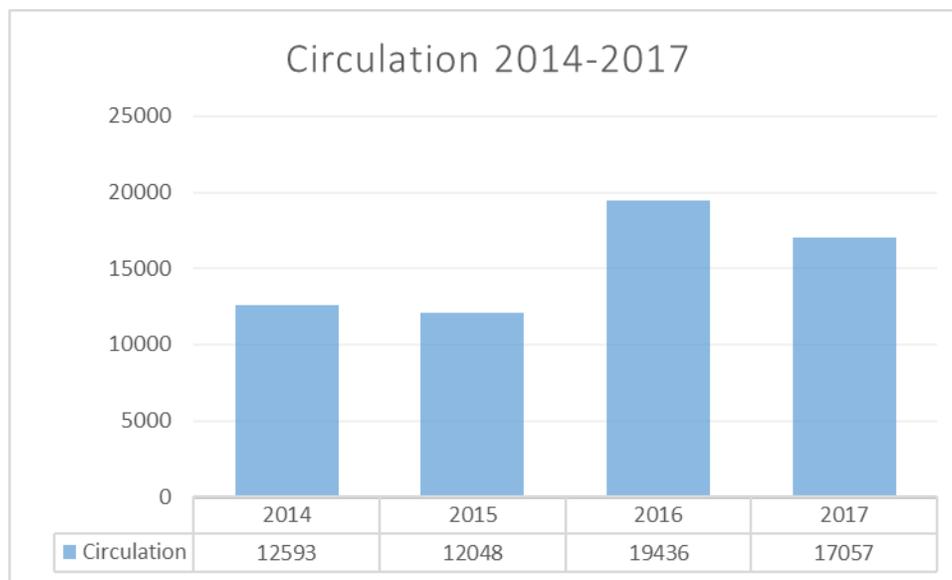
The foot traffic and number of items circulated are representative.

**GRAPH 1: Foot Traffic 2014-2017**



\*In early 2017 the automated foot-counter unit broke and was replaced by a hand-held tally counter. This change in data collection method may affect numbers presented.

**GRAPH 2: Circulation 2014-2017**



The core services, equipment, and facilities that the library provided throughout the year sustained the community needs, but were not enough to continue the library’s growth. We believe that the lack of programming was a central reason for this decrease, and are looking for more ways to offer programs with the resources we have available.

The need for DVD resources increased in 2017, as the last remaining movie rental business in Fort St. James went out of business. Of course there are streaming alternatives available outside of the library, and DVDs can be purchased, but the cost is prohibitive to some. We have purchased a supply of the DVDs from the business before it permanently shut its doors, and we have been gradually adding them to our collection.



LEFT: The DVD aisle in the library. The DVDs most recently added to the collection are displayed in the top right, and many patrons will check there first to see what's new.

RIGHT: The back wall has four columns devoted to children's DVDs.

We still face the same challenges in usage experienced in 2016:

- Funding levels do not meet growing demand
- Staffing levels are insufficient given the volume of work
- Facilities and equipment are in need of expansion and updating
- Service needs to be extended into more areas of the community

We are working to overcome these challenges, but it will not be a quick process. We expect funding and staffing levels to be an issue for us for the next couple years, and overcoming these two challenges are necessary before we can expand facilities, equipment, and services to the level we believe the community needs.

#### 2017 Goals:

1. Maintain library usage at sustainable levels.

#### 2017 Outcomes:

1. The library did not have the levels of usage as we did in 2016, but we did have growth compared to the years prior to 2016.

### **CONCLUSION**

Fort St. James Public Library has concluded another exceptionally busy year, but in different ways than we've had previously.

- The library lost our Head Librarian, who had excelled at his work for the library, with the community, and with our partners. His work and passion for the library is still felt.
  - This challenge did present the Board with an opportunity to hire a digital native, and a person who needed the experience for his future in libraries.

- We had a lot of struggles with staffing and programming due to financial troubles. But, we are confident that we will be more responsible with our finances going forwards.
- Many of the new Board Members of 2016 left the Board in 2017, or late 2016, and Board Members of the past were called back to fill positions.
- The Board brought in more funds through grants and donations than ever before, both to cover operational and programming costs, and is working diligently to strengthen partnerships with external organizations.
- The Board has been reviewing and revising our Policy Manual.
- The Board is exploring expanding service through digital initiatives and facilities repurposing for 2018.

The Library Board understands that we have a lot of work ahead, especially in regard to partnerships and programming, but we are also excited for the opportunities we know we have. We believe that the progress we make in the coming years will have to be slower and more measured than it had been recently; we have to ensure that our resources are not stretched any further.