

Librarian's Report for 2021

2021 saw another year of the COVID-19 pandemic and its continued impact on libraries. The Fort St. James Public Library maintained many of the COVID-19 restrictions until July 1st, 2021, when restrictions eased throughout the province. Staff made plans to bring back in-person programming and other library events when the province was scheduled to enter Phase 4 in September. Then the restrictions and mask mandate returned, halting plans for in-person programming indefinitely. Staff showed immense compassion and patience in enforcing the mask mandate while also providing alternatives to patrons who didn't want to, or could not, wear masks.

Due to COVID restrictions, the staff put their focus into creating passive programs, that is, programs that patrons could partake in without need for staff or other patron interaction. Desk Assistant Lyra created a pirate path in children's area, a fun winding path featuring activities like spelling, counting, spinning, and hopping, for young children to use. This proved to be so popular that staff at the Salt Spring Island Public Library heard about it and contacted us about using the path in their own children's area. Lyra also created two activity binders for children. These binders contain activities that teach numbers, words, colours, and matching, to name a few. The books are laminated for easy cleaning, with one book designed for toddlers and one for slightly older children.

Assistant Librarian Jenny started the program 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten, which aims to encourage lifelong learners with passive programming options for our very youngest patrons. Jenny also filmed three children's story time videos, featuring books from local authors, for the library's YouTube page. Desk staff Kyla and Lyra worked hard at decorating the windows in the children's area for the seasons, with snow people and pine trees in winter and birds and budding leaves in the spring.

In the YA section, the Library Director created five activity kits for teens to use. These activities (colouring and drawing, found poetry, origami, friendship bracelets, and sewing) were specifically created with teens in mind. Two adult kits were also made for those who want to colour or do origami. The library also held its first photography contest for young adults, with the top three winners being displayed on a wall in the YA section.

In late May of 2021, the remains of 215 children were found in unmarked graves at the site of the former Kamloops Residential School. In memory of the children, the library lowered our Canadian flag to half-mast for over 6 months and after, purchased an "Every Child Matters" flag, to be hung prominently in the library building. The staff also set out a display of adult non-fiction books about residential school, and the Library Director continues to add to and update our collection of Indigenous materials.

While adhering to COVID restrictions, the library held several in-person events. Member of Parliament Taylor Bachrach held a Q&A in July with library patrons. Patrons were able to sit down and have a face-to-face interaction with Bachrach before the September federal election.

The book sale returned after a year's absence. Whereas before the book sale had taken place twice a year, this year the sale was held only once, starting on October 26. It was intended to run for a week but proved so popular that it was extended for two more weeks. The book sale was a success with patrons; foot traffic doubled during the weeks, and the sale ultimately brought in \$2,352, which went to the purchase of the first of six new public computers. The new desktop computers have shown measurable improvement over the old computers, both in speed and in technical problems.

Along with the renewal of our Gale Courses subscription, the library added two new subscriptions to online learning sites NicheAcademy and LinkedIn Learning, free for anyone with a library card. In February 2021, with support from the Board, the library got rid of late fines for all library materials, joining a growing number of BC libraries who have elected to do the same. By removing these fines, the library removed the stigma and shame that came with late fines, and saw a return of more patrons and materials to the libraries.

Thanks to a generous grant from the Kimberley Foundation, the library was able to add over 60 new Large Print books and over 30 new physical audio books to the collection. These were added to the collection all at once so as to provide patrons with the benefits of the grant as soon as possible. The library tree came back out in December 2021, as always, adorned with mittens, hats, gloves, and other winter gear free for anyone to take with them.

2021, like 2020, brought with it difficulties arisen from the pandemic, as well as the fallout from the discovery of unmarked graves of Indigenous children throughout Canada. As Library Director, I am grateful to have faced these challenges alongside the Board, staff, and District. The Board and District have continued to provide guidance and leadership, and staff have stepped up in many ways to support our community. The community too has been there, letting us know they appreciate our efforts, and giving us advice and encouragement. Despite these challenges, and in some cases, because of them, we have continued to build and grow our library, to offer new events, activities, interactions, and materials for our community. I know that, whatever comes in 2022, we will be able to face it head-on and not let it stop us.

Karli Fisher
Library Director
May 14, 2022