



How To Make Your Local Library More Available to the Literacy Needs of Your Community...

**by Cynthia Major,
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Library**

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more available to the literacy
needs of your community..."

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**Hopetown Adult Education Center
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction
Setting up a local library
Advertising
Grand opening
Pleasant atmosphere
Bilingual services
Introduction to local groups
Rules of a library
Memberships
Flexible hours
Inviting other municipalities
Updated research area
Local history section
Updated periodicals
Meetings for parent organization
Computer services
Tutorial services
Personal contact with seniors
Help available to the illiterate
Books on wheels
Books in large print
Listening tapes
Audio and video cassettes
Reading circles
Student projects
Student volunteers
Grandparent's Day
Prenatal classes on literacy
Special orders
Rotation of books
Restocking the shelves
Conclusion

INTRODUCTION

A library is much more than a place with books, tapes, periodicals, encyclopedias, etc., more than even the people who make it work. A library is a gathering of ideas and information - organized and shared.

A library must carry material which interests most of the people most of the time in order to be successful. Different people of various ages, interests and needs use the public library.

In the following document, we will learn how to set up, run and expand a public library in a rural area which serves many communities.

SETTING UP A LOCAL LIBRARY

When you are hired to become the librarian in a local library, you should be familiar with the needs of your community as well as those around it. If you live in a rural, isolated area such as most communities on the Gaspé, you will find that the majority of the population are not familiar with the functioning of a library. It is your job to show them how to use it to their benefit.

To make books easier to find, those of the same type or genre are commonly kept together. Stories are kept in one section, science books in another and so on. There are separate sections for magazines, tapes, children's books and pocket novels. With this in mind, you must choose a system in which to catalogue your books. The Dewey Decimal System is very popular in most libraries. Books are marked or coded in different ways. On the spine of a storybook or a novel there may be such marks as PB for picture book, an E for essay, J for juvenile or an F for fiction. Regardless of how they are marked, the books should be in alphabetical order using the author's last name. These same books should be in order by title, such as V.C. Andrews' Midnight Whispers before Danielle Steele's Wings.

The story of someone's life is marked B for biography. These are also put in alphabetical order by the last name of the person the book is about. There are also collective biographies which have to be grouped separately according to authors.

In the Dewey Decimal System, there are ten main subjects. Each subject has a three figure number. The number 400, for instance, represents language, 500 is science and so on. In each number, the first figure is the key to the main subject. All books that begin with 5 are about science and all books beginning with 4 are about language.

Each main subject is divided into ten parts. Literature (800) is divided into American Literature (810), English Literature (820), German Literature (830), French Literature (840) and so on. Each part of the subject can be divided into ten smaller parts which explains the decimal in the Dewey Decimal System. It is not necessary to memorize this system. However, it is important to understand how it works.

As for cataloging your books, our books are in catalogue form also using the Dewey system. When information is wanted, you will find this handy because browsing may just take too long.

When setting up your library, you will find that if the children's section is kept separate from the quiet reading area reserved for adults, your members will be more appreciative. Another important aspect of your library is the atmosphere. A well lit, brightly decorated, clean and comfortable atmosphere will most certainly attract the eye - and the member.

ADVERTISING

There are many ways to advertise the opening of a library. You can start this procedure as soon as you know the opening day.

Most people read the local newspapers, so make sure that your opening is published weekly in both official languages. Have it announced on your local cable TV , channel as well as several radio stations. Make attractive, eye-catching posters to put in local stores and community bulletin boards. Contact all elementary and secondary schools along with CEGEPS - again in both languages. Try to have a notice sent home with the students. Contact the mayors of each municipality and have them announce it at their monthly council meeting. Visit the various local churches and have the ministers speak about your new library in the announcements at Sunday services.

If you are a person who socializes a lot, stress how important a library is, how it can serve all who use it and how it can reach out to those who do not or cannot come. Tell them that the material in the library, as well as you, the librarian are there for them. Take the time to visit the surrounding villages and let them know that the library is open to everyone and that they will be served as if it were their very own.

GRAND OPENING

The official opening of the library is mostly taken care of by the municipality, the regional school board, the local CASA chapter or whoever holds the responsibility for the project. It consists of a public declaration stating that the library has officially opened on the given date of that year.

In general, all mayors, councillors, chairmen from local organizations, the media, the clergy, merchants, etc., are invited to attend the ceremony and to browse through the library.

The purpose of a grand opening, other than making everything official, is to have the participants spread the information locally.

PLEASANT ATMOSPHERE

A pleasant atmosphere is a necessity in every library in order to incite the users who invariably make it come alive. Most importantly, a librarian must always have a pleasant attitude which comes from a desire to help people.

As for decoration, a few pictures and posters on the wall are attractive to the eye. Creating a theme for each holiday or special occasion is also fun. For example, you could make a display of summer books in the children's section. If you keep art supplies, perhaps the children could draw a picture of a summer activity to help decorate the library while the parents are browsing. You might want to leave a few magazines or recipe books on a table for members to glance at while they wait to be served (you might be busy helping a youngster or reading the cover a book to an elderly person).

To ensure proper use of the library and also to maintain this pleasant atmosphere, your rules such as no smoking, no eating and quiet activities must be kept at all times and apply to all members.

BILINGUAL SERVICES

In a public library, it is very important to greet and serve your members in their own language. If you live in a small municipality where the majority of your people are anglophones, this does not mean that you should only carry English books or vice versa. The neighboring municipality may have a francophone majority - as in most areas of the Gaspé. It is of utmost importance that your schedules, notices, rules and posters be written in both official languages. If you hold any extra activities such as reading circles, group meetings or others, they should be offered bilingually as well.

INTRODUCTION TO LOCAL GROUPS

After the official opening of the library, a good way to increase the membership is to invite local groups in to see it. As you probably know, news travels very quickly by word-of-mouth. Encourage groups to use the facilities to hold their meetings, which will certainly increase the public awareness of your library. Make a brief introduction stating the importance of reading and incite these people to pass the word on to those who do not have access to reading material as well as to those who do but would like a vaster selection.

RULES OF THE LIBRARY

The rules of a library should be kept to a minimum, but they should be firmly enforced. Remember that a library is a place for leisure.

The first rule should be that all books must be signed out by and returned to the librarian on the promised dates. The library must be food, drink and smoke-free in order to protect the books and to maintain that pleasant atmosphere which we spoke about earlier. The books, tapes, magazines, etc., should not be damaged intentionally in any way. Keep in mind that silence is golden - especially in a library. Out of consideration for others and to insure the proper atmosphere for reading and research, silence must be respected by all at all time.

If you enforce these rules and serve all members with equal respect and dignity, you should not have any problems in expanding and maintaining your membership.

MEMBERSHIPS

Some local libraries charge a membership fee and some do not. In some cases, a small fee must be charged to provide the public with a librarian. In other cases, public funding can pay his/her salary. However, in your library you may want or even need to specialize in the hard-to-teach, neglected and forgotten. These include the uneducated, elderly, school drop-outs, rural poor and minorities - which are especially evident in isolated areas such as the Gaspé. Many of these people have reading, learning and financial problems. If you want to bring hope to the hopeless and a feeling of belonging to the outcast, then pure professionalism is not enough. You may need to use a little discretion and a lot of heart when faced with charging money to these people. It is understood that a librarian should have a contagious enthusiasm for reading. Nevertheless, in our special environment, he/she should also be willing and able to help others who may find reading to be a great obstacle and be sympathetic to the needs of his/her community.

FLEXIBLE HOURS

Serving the public requires flexible hours from the server. For instance, if community groups hold their meetings in the library, you may be required to be free in order to lock up. Another example is that perhaps some of your members work late hours and they may call you to find books for them which they

could pick up on their way home. If you operate on a rotating book system where you exchange a portion of your books tri-annually, you may want to put in extra hours to arrange these new books so that they are ready and on display when you open next. Not only is the member pleased with this but it also makes your job easier - imagine that you are unpacking and organizing books and fifteen members come in to be served - that would definitely be hectic! Just a bit of friendly advice: Ask yourself how generous you really are with your time before going into the library business.

INVITING OTHER MUNICIPALITIES

A public librarian should take a personal interest in inviting other municipalities to use the library. A letter may be sent to the municipal office, but it is preferable that the librarian attend their council meeting and explain how the library is set up and which services are available. This shows others that you are serious about seeing your library succeed and that you are involved enough to present your plan in person. An added bonus of this personal approach is that you will see new faces and be able to recognize some of these when they come into the library. These people will surely be impressed and you will benefit from a good reputation, which will lead to increased membership.

UPDATED RESEARCH AREA

It is important for a library to have various sets of encyclopedias, atlases, science texts, dictionaries, etc., displayed for easy reference. With today's technology, it is also highly recommended to have access to a computer with a CD Rom. With these services, if someone is working on a research project, you can help them find the required information in a matter of minutes. With your know-how and friendly service, you will definitely be a hit with students.

LOCAL HISTORY SECTION

A local history section is an important part of your library. After all, if members are unable to find information concerning their heritage in the local library, where can they find it? For instance, a small town such as Hopetown is definitely not in the encyclopedias - it is barely on the map! You can obtain interesting and significant information from local authors, artists, magazines, newspapers, heritage centers, churches, municipalities and other such valuable resources. You may also want to get a recent photograph along with a story that has been passed down through the generations from each family in your municipality. This service will not only be beneficial to the community since it is a form of archive, but will also entertain members and perhaps increase their numbers.

UPDATED PERIODICALS

Remember that libraries are not just about books, periodicals are also a necessary stock item. Some people do not have the time or interest to read books but are fascinated by magazines which are also a quick read. They are also an important part of research material. They should be updated regularly with subscriptions renewed annually. In order to please most people, your magazines should cover as vast an array of genres as possible.

MEETINGS FOR PARENT ORGANIZATION

The librarian should try to organize parents to hold at least a couple of meetings per year in the public library. This will show the parents how important books are for their children, how the books have changed and the services which are available. It could also encourage the parents to pick up a good book to read. There is no better way to set a good example for your child than to let them see their parents involved. Another added bonus: You appear focused on parental opinions and ideas which helps you to be known and trusted.

COMPUTER SERVICES

Computers do not merely provide us with information, but can also be used to incite learning. We can communicate with other countries and cultures by computer. They can provide a stimulating and fun doorway to learning - especially for those who do not like to read. Information on a variety of subjects can be obtained through different programs such as Compton's Electronic Encyclopedia and others. A computer can also be a useful tool to share books as in rotating libraries. You can find out where a certain book is by punching it into a computer, then, you simply order it. In whatever way you set up a library, a computer is a definite asset to your job and the smooth running of the library.

TUTORIAL SERVICES

Since you are aware of how vital your services are to the success of the library, you may want to explore every possible way to increase your membership and library's popularity. Tutorial services are surely to be appreciated by both students and parents. You may want to do the tutoring yourself or you can ask for volunteers. You would be surprised at how many older students and retired teachers would love to donate their time to help other children learn. If you are approached by a student who needs help or if you are aware of this yourself, you might want to contact the child's teacher for suggestions and material.

From the beginning, you should make it clear to the students that you are there to help but not to do their work for them. It is also necessary to discourage them from using the library as a local hang-out. The schools in the area should be contacted frequently and requested to send home a reminder informing parents and students of the services available.

PERSONAL CONTACT WITH SENIORS

The importance of the elderly is sometimes overlooked in our youth-oriented society. We should not overlook the important roles that they have played in establishing our communities. They are a significant resource which can work in favor of the local library by both the increased membership and as possible volunteers.

Most of the seniors we know have never been offered a library service. It is the duty of the librarian to make herself known to these people by getting out in the community and introducing the services offered. This can be done by attending church services, golden age clubs, putting an ad in the local papers, going to visit or simply having an evening at the library just for seniors.

You may find that they have a great interest in reading. If so, you might ask for volunteers to come in and record books on cassettes. These taped stories could be stored in the library for the visually impaired. They might also like to tell their own stories which could be doubled for the local history section.

If you provide the seniors with time, interest and a friendly atmosphere, you will create many strong friendships and learn a lot about your community all the while enriching your library.

HELP AVAILABLE TO THE ILLITERATE

The first step towards helping the illiterate is communication. Before you can get them into your library, you must become their friend. Once you have accomplished this, introduce them to your library with the auditory section. You could also teach them some easy, educational games. Find out their interests and have picture books available for them to look at. When you feel they are comfortable with you, ask them if they would like to learn the basics in education. If they show a serious interest, you could arrange an interview for them with your local Adult Education Center. Remember that these people do communicate; they simply cannot read. Because of this, they probably know many stories "by heart". You could make

them feel very helpful by asking for their stories to be recorded on tape as you may have done with the seniors.

BOOKS ON WHEELS

Books on wheels can be provided by the librarian (perhaps with the help of other members). It consists of delivering and returning books to neighbors/members. Our senior citizens find this service very helpful if they do not have transportation or if the weather does not permit them to go out. Sometimes you may even find volunteers to drive them to and from the library. This service is also useful or even necessary for the handicapped.

BOOKS IN LARGE PRINT

Many books in large print are available through the rotating library. These books are specially designed for people who cannot read finer print. They are also used for beginning adult students.

LISTENING TAPES

Many short stories are currently available on cassette. You can also buy cassettes with complete novels recorded, lessons in another language, exercises and almost anything that you would read in a book. These are of enormous help to the visually impaired, teachers with combined levels, language students, the illiterate, children and just about anyone who would rather listen than read. Sometimes people with short-term memory problems find listening tapes helpful for repetition (which apparently helps them exercise their memory).

AUDIO AND VIDEO CASSETTES

It is recommended that you keep an audio and video cassette section in the library. These can be organized and loaned out by using the Dewey Decimal System. You might want to show the videos to children or adults on what might be a "movie night" or a "morning matinee". In both the audio and video cassettes, you want to keep a variety in order to meet the interest of most members.

READING CIRCLES

As we all know, it is of utmost importance to read to your children and to incite them to read. Unfortunately, not all parents have the time or the qualifications to do so. In a reading circle, a group of children come together in order to be read to. The librarian, a student or elderly volunteer may do the reading. If the children are old enough, they could take turns reading to each other.

To set up a reading circle, contact parents in the community with younger children part of the reading circle, you could hold a book trade where the children bring in their old books to trade with others. You might want to set aside one hour of your library time for this activity. As part of the reading circle, you could hold a book trade where the children bring in their old books to trade with others.

STUDENT PROJECTS

If your municipality sponsors student projects during the summer, you will find the student employees very helpful at the library. Many children need tutoring in order to keep up their grades. If you live in a bilingual community, you could offer second language tutoring to the children using the resources of the library and the student employees. Not only does this help the children at school but it also gives the English and

French children an opportunity to meet and create friendships which will ultimately benefit the community and increase tolerance among the different cultures.

STUDENT VOLUNTEERS

Student volunteers are another important resource which the library can use. They can help to find a book, file one, answer easy reference questions and so on when the librarian is busy. In order to create a rapport with this group, the librarian should be outgoing, unflappable, imaginative and socially aware of what they like to do. He/she can also ask them for their opinions in order to set up programs for them.

GRANDPARENT'S DAY

Getting the senior citizens involved in the library is always easier when younger children are involved. Very few people will say "no" to their grandchild. Perhaps at your next Saturday morning reading circle, you could ask the children to invite their grandparents to come in the following week to read to them. The children may want to make a special treat at home to bring in to share with all the grandparents while serving them tea (being very careful, since it is a library). If this proves to be a success, you might find yourself with more members and volunteers to make listening tapes.

PRENATAL CLASSES ON LITERACY

You should reserve a section of the library for parenting books. Parents, both new and old will find this section very helpful.

It is a common fact today that the earlier you start reading to your baby, the better is for him/her.

As the librarian, you may want to organize information sessions for expectant mothers. You could set aside an hour for them to come in and browse through the books you carry concerning childcare. It would also be an ideal time to share tips, information and knowledge. Lasting friendships and more literate preschoolers could be a final result.

SPECIAL ORDERS

If you receive your books from a lending library as we do in Hopetown, you will discover that you have access to almost any book that has ever been published. The rotating library in Cap Chat has a total of 500,000 books on hand. If they do not have a certain book when we order it, they will buy it and send it to us. We, in turn, must pay a small fee of \$1.15 to cover the cost of the special order forms and postage. When the member returns the book, it must then be returned immediately in case another library wants to borrow it.

ROTATION OF BOOKS

The rotation of books occurs every four months. At this time, two thirds of the books, cassettes, art displays and educational games and books are exchanged. With this process your members will always have new books to choose from.

RESTOCKING THE SHELVES

Every library receives many donations of used books. Sometimes we receive more books than we have space to keep. If you hold a book sale for the books that you have doubles of, the money can be used to buy others.

You may also want to involve the community by asking graduates, seniors, various groups or municipalities if they would like to donate money to buy a certain book (like a French-English dictionary) for the library. They could also choose their own subject and book which would reflect their interests. In order to make their donation official and to show your gratitude, you could inscribe their name inside the book so that when they visit the library, they will know that their donation is there and appreciated.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would like to express my personal feelings about a public library.

A library is a very resourceful center of knowledge which, with a bit of imagination and creativity, can become anything that the community desires. For instance, if the community has a high level of illiteracy, the library can be an instrumental tool to reach out to these people and benefit the community at the same time.

All in all, the devoted librarian is the most important aspect of any public library since it is he/she who plays the role of intermediary between the community, interest groups, funding organizations, volunteers and our children - all of whom will hopefully support and continue the tradition.