

## Case Study: Calgary Public Library

### Background

- Name of library: **Calgary Public Library (CPL)**
- Location(s): **17 locations in Calgary, Alberta, Canada**  
The first branch of CPL opened in 1912. Today, the system consists of 17 branches, serving Calgary's population of 1 million people. CPL is Canada's second largest public library system in terms of circulation, and consistently ranks as one of the best performing public libraries in North America.
- Size of collection: **2,300,000 items**
- Size of staff: **738 staff; 198 teen page staff**
- Annual budget: **Operating budget of approximately \$40 million**
- Sources of core funding: **80%: City of Calgary**  
**10%: Province of Alberta**  
**10%: (est.) Other sources, including fines, fees, donations**
- Population(s) served: **1 million**

#### 2006 Snapshot: Literacy and Learning, CPL

Customer Circulation:	13,564,539
Library visits:	5,680,429
Programs:	6,976
Program attendance:	108,748
Outreach and off-site programs:	3,442
Outreach and off-site program attendance:	139,508



## Literacy programs or projects at CPL since 1990

Projects and programs addressed in this Case Study reflect those designed for all ages.

### I. Projects:

#### **It's a Crime Not to Read**

*It's a Crime Not to Read* is an early literacy program coordinated and facilitated by CPL that connects Grade 2 and 3 students at participating schools with books, reading, life-long learning and positive community relationships. This true collaboration has made a meaningful difference in the lives of over 500 students, this current school year alone.

Once a month, Library staff and a Police Officer visit classes of Grade 2 and 3 students in the partnering school. The Police Officer reads aloud to the children from books selected by Library staff, illustrating the importance of developing strong literacy skills and encouraging the children to set personal reading goals for the coming month. The Police Officer is a positive role model from the community and a mentor to the students. Each student receives a free library card, and the importance of using library resources is reinforced. A selection of books from CPL is brought to each program, and the students are encouraged to borrow items of their choice. This allows parents to support reading at home and instills in the students a love of life-long learning. A number of special events take place throughout the year, and each student receives a gift book at the end of the program.

Originally piloted at one school in 2002, *It's a Crime Not to Read* is presently taking place at 8 Calgary schools, involves staff from 6 Library locations, and Police Officers from 5 Districts. The 1<sup>st</sup> program was funded by the Rotary Club of Calgary East, with the current programs now being funded on a yearly basis by 6 Calgary Rotary Clubs and one corporate sponsor.

Funding: \$20,000/year

#### **Stories on Wheels**

The Stories on Wheels program overcomes barriers by bringing books and stories directly to at-risk preschool children and families, in all parts of Calgary. This free, fun and interactive program allows children who have limited access to books to discover the magic world of story and reading, and encourages them to access library resources. Each program consists of a series of regular visits and allows participants to develop skills as they listen to stories and engage in fun literacy activities.

Programs are delivered by a staff specialist using the Library Community Van, which is designed to bring a variety of library programs and services to those for whom lack of transportation is a barrier. This program allows the Library to collaborate with other agencies and partners, to reach significantly higher numbers of low-income children, youth and families.

Stories on Wheels started in the fall of 2006, with 3-year initiative funding supplied by The City of Calgary Civic Partnership Fund. In the first 12 weeks, 89 programs were delivered to more than 1,100 children and their parents; 154 new library cards were issued; and 1,406 books and library materials were circulated. Demand continues to grow. In March 2007, staff delivered 41 Stories on Wheels programs to 142 adults and 357 children. Visits to Calgary Housing complexes, and Calgary churches through the "Inn From the Cold" program are regular. Funding: \$90,000/3 year period



## **II. Programs:**

### **Reading Advantage**

The Reading Advantage program started in the fall of 2000. It is a one-on-one coaching program for adults who want to improve their basic literacy skills. Participants are matched with volunteers and meet for 2 hours, once a week in any of the 17 Library locations. It is ongoing in nature; Learners are not limited to a specific number of months in the program but can join at any time throughout the year and remain until their goals are achieved. On average, Learners remain in the program for over 1-1/2 years. They can specify which location they prefer, the time or day of the week, and whether they want a male or female volunteer. Reading Advantage is confidential in nature. Only the assigned volunteer and program coordinator are privy to information regarding the participants' involvement.

This adult literacy program is designed for Learners who are fluent in spoken English, but for whom reading and writing are difficult. Learners with limited English skills are referred to an ESL program at the Library or elsewhere. Learners are assessed upon entering the program, with yearly reassessments taking place. The program follows a "student centered individualized learning" philosophy and can accommodate Learners with up to a grade 7 reading comprehension level. Volunteers receive 13 hours of initial training plus ongoing opportunities for supplemental training. This program is coordinated by a core funded part-time staff member, and currently has approximately 50 matches. We are seeing increased need for an ESL basic literacy program, as well as one aimed particularly at youth.

Funding: \$28,000/year

### **Reading Buddies**

Reading Buddies started in the summer of 1999, moving to 3 yearly sessions in 2001 (spring, summer, fall/winter). This 8-week program encourages children to read, fosters good reading habits, offers the supportive environment required to develop strong literacy skills, and makes reading fun. With a staff facilitator, teen volunteers work with struggling young readers in Grades 1 to 3, giving them the opportunity to read one-on-one and participate in fun literacy activities.

Reading Buddies features a variety of interactive programming components. Each weekly program of 1.5 hours in length includes group activities and buddy reading, participation in Reading Adventures, storytelling, and literacy related games and crafts. This program currently has one core-funded, full-time, permanent staff person devoted to it, as well as two full-time staff members working in term positions. In the summer of 2007, 22 sessions are taking place (154 individual programs), for close to 350 young readers, and using 330 teen volunteers.

Funding: \$50,000/year

### **Computer Buddies**

Computer Buddies started in the spring of 2002. Using technology, participants develop literacy and lifelong learning skills. Under the direction of library staff, teen volunteers help elementary students discover that there is more to computers than just playing games. Students learn how to search topics on the Internet and how to create documents in Microsoft Word, Excel and Power Point.

The program has been adopted as a core program delivered by Community Services staff, with an average of 9 programs being offered at Library locations for three 8-week sessions per year. This



coming summer, an additional full-time term position is being added allowing 14 Computer Buddies programs to be offered; one off-site.

### **Read With Me/ Read ‘n Roll**

The Read With Me and Read ‘n Roll programs pair adult volunteers with young struggling readers, who meet for an hour per week at a Library location. Read With Me was introduced in 2002, offering concentrated support for young struggling readers in Grades 1, 2 and 3. By 2006, it was obvious that the need for a similar program for older children existed, and using the same model, Read ‘n Roll was launched for students in Grades 4, 5, and 6. Both programs help children discover the magic of reading and encourage the development of a lifelong reading habit, through a variety of fun reading-based learner centred activities.

Participants selected for the program are generally recommended by teachers who feel that they would benefit from one-on-one support. All parents and children are interviewed prior to the program to discuss expectations, eligibility and to determine the potential participants’ reading level, interests and challenges. A flexible schedule is developed, based on the availability of the volunteers, and needs of the child’s family.

Both of these programs continue to be a popular choice for parents who are looking for *intensive* literacy assistance for their children. There are currently close to 100 pairs meeting at Calgary libraries, with 55 potential participants remaining on a waiting list. Almost half of the children currently in the program speak English as a second language. Therefore an ESL training component is being added for volunteers, and ESL resources are being specifically selected and added to the “kits” located at each location. Further expansion to include junior high students is being explored.

Read with Me was started with core funding and was originally coordinated by one part-time staff person. In 2006, with funding provided by CanWest’s Raise-a-Reader initiative, this position has grown into a full-time term position.

### **Every Child Ready to Read @ your library®**

Every Child Ready to Read @ your library® is an early literacy initiative started by the American Library Association. Based on the latest research, it is an integrated approach to literacy that seamlessly connects sharing good books with six important skills necessary for reading success. The 3 individual workshops recognize that parents and caregivers are a young child’s most important teacher and have a tremendous influence on getting children from birth to 5 years old ready to read.

CPL currently has approximately 30 staff trained to offer these workshops, both in Library locations and more importantly, out in the community. They have been offered as a stand alone workshop, or in series; often in partnership with another family literacy program or organization.



## Story PALS

Since April 2006 CPL has partnered with the Pet Access League Society of Calgary to offer “**Story PALS**”. PALS is composed of individuals who after completing a training course with their pet, volunteer in hospitals, nursing homes, correctional institutions and after care facilities in Calgary.

In 6-week sessions, struggling readers 6-12 years old are paired off with a trained therapy dog, coupled with the dog’s handler, for one-on-one reading sessions. Children who are struggling readers have an especially hard time reading aloud in front of peers and adults. During their interaction with dogs, the children forget their limitations. Dogs provide rapt attention and children can read aloud without fear of criticism or interruption. This type of program has multiple long-term effects: providing an opportunity for children to increase their reading level and improving their confidence and self-esteem. This program is currently being offered at 4 Library locations.



## Analysis

Public libraries and specifically CPL play a significant role in building and supporting literacy in our community. By offering resources, including ‘informal learning spaces’ to Calgarians of any age who wish to improve their literacy or continue their own learning, the Library fulfills a vital community service. Calgary is rapidly growing, and has an increasingly diverse population, requiring that resources are offered beyond Library doors. Access to programs, services, and collections directly related to literacy is therefore provided in library locations and off-site.

Each Library location has its own specific literacy collection, with the largest being at the Central Library. Learners and program facilitators from a variety of other programs and community agencies make heavy use of these collections. 2006 saw a reorganization of the collection to reflect Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced levels. Many of these resources are used by ESL students and teachers. With great demand, it is a challenge to keep fresh collections on the shelf, and a separate collection for use in our adult basic literacy program was developed. A comprehensive literacy community has been established on the CPL website, which highlights programs and services and offer literacy links, some of which will be interactive.



### **Literacy Programming:**

CPL has sought ways to respond to the needs of Calgarians. In the late 90's, programs were developed to assist Calgarians with literacy challenges. 2001 brought a new collaboration to CPL: the Connect Calgary Project. This project, one of twelve Smart Communities projects supported by Industry Canada, was instrumental in transforming the lives of many residents of the community, including youth, seniors, new Canadians, customers of Multilanguage Services, the economically disadvantaged, and persons with disabilities. This project, which had a digital literacy focus, allowed staff to reach a new audience, and develop programs and services to meet the needs of this group. It became clear that basic literacy was an underlying issue with this population, and resources to meet this need were allocated.

In 2003, a new position, Literacy and Learning Advocate, was created to oversee and grow literacy programs and services at CPL. The incumbent is involved not just with adult basic literacy initiatives, but is responsible for services aimed at the entire life span: reading readiness, family literacy, early literacy and early reading challenges, adult basic literacy, seniors literacy and digital literacy. Each Library literacy program has experienced increased enrolment and participation in the last few years.

All CPL literacy programs are free of charge, but each participant must have a valid library card while they are active in the program. There is a registration processing fee for public library cards in Alberta, however fees are waived for those participants who are financially disadvantaged. In 2006, fees for over 5,700 cards were waived.

Many of CPL's literacy programs rely on volunteers. In 2006, 1,349 youth, adult and senior volunteers enriched the lives of others by contributing over 25,000 hours to the Library.

### **Digital Literacy:**

Connect Calgary demonstrated how information and communications technology can enable individuals at risk, service providers, volunteers, and the public at large to access needed community services through the Internet. The Library's contribution to Connect Calgary took a variety of forms: besides providing frontline access to computer technology, a major thrust was the design and implementation of innovative library programs and services for Calgarians at risk, service providers, volunteers and the general public.

A number of excellent technology programs continue as a core service at Library locations. Some of these programs are offered in languages other than English, to connect with Calgary's diverse population. One particularly successful technology program is Cyberseniors, a program designed for seniors who are exploring computers for the first time.

As well as on-site learning opportunities, CPL continues its tradition of reaching out to all members of the community. In June of 2006, an initiative was developed with the aim of reinvigorating Connect Calgary partnerships. As part of this program initiative, learners are connected to CPL with the provision of a free library card, and are welcomed to the Library and the collections, services and programs through a library tour. This program has developed partnerships with homeless shelters, immigrant serving agencies and other community organizations.



### **Community Partnerships:**

Many of the literacy programs described above are offered in collaboration with other organizations. Although time and effort is required to establish successful and ongoing partnerships, CPL's administration is committed to purposeful partnerships, which maximize strengths, reach new library users and build community. CPL's profile in the community has been significantly raised as a "go to" literacy service provider as a result of these efforts.

Recent developments illustrate this commitment. In 2003, the Community Services Department was developed, allowing for a consolidated and collaborative approach to address community trends, and to identify, develop and implement best practices in program and service delivery. Similarly, a Literacy and Learning Community Centre, created in the recently renovated Forest Lawn Library, indicates growing support for literacy and learning initiatives and presents excellent opportunities for community partnership. Besides supporting literacy and lifelong learning for residents, the Centre provides space for collaborative endeavors between the Library and partner organizations. In 2006, 523 events took place in the LLCC for 5700 attendees. Besides offering space for much needed programming, groups such as the Sudanese Grandparent's Group are able to utilize the LLCC for their weekly meetings.

Adult learning and literacy initiatives are regularly taking place in partnership with community organizations. The 2<sup>nd</sup> adult learner and tutor conference (STAR) took place in early 2007 and was planned in collaboration with 4 Calgary organizations. Word on the Prairie, an extension of the national festival, Word on the Street, will highlight adult learners and showcase what literacy and learning means to them, in print and pictures. The end result will be launched in fall 2007 at the Word on the Street festival in Calgary. Plans are also being made for an extensive city-wide celebration of learning to coincide with International Literacy Day and International Adult Learning Week, which will be called Champions of Learning.

One of the most successful and outstanding partnerships is the "It's a Crime Not to Read" program. A partnership between CPL, Calgary school boards, and the Calgary Police Service, with the financial support of service clubs and a corporate sponsor, the program helps disadvantaged children in primary grades, together with their families, experience the joys of reading and develop a lifelong reading and learning habit. The impact of this program is substantial: reading levels have improved, positive relationships with the Police are cemented and self-esteem is boosted. Further expansion and the possible creation of a replicable model of this program are currently being explored. This program was the recipient of the 2005 *Mayor's Excellence Award for Educational Partnerships* in the category of *Literacy Support and Enhancement*, and the American Library Association's *Marshall Cavendish Award for Excellence in Library Programming*, 2007.

### **Literacy Awareness and Advocacy**

CPL also plays a key role in raising awareness of literacy needs, through spirited advocacy efforts. High profile programming takes place yearly at CPL on Family Literacy Day, January 27<sup>th</sup> and International Literacy Day, September 8. Raising awareness of literacy issues and of the literacy resources available to Calgarians at their Library is key. CPL's Literacy and Learning Advocate represented the Library community in development of a provincial literacy policy proposal through 2005 and 2006. Participation in adult literacy and learning discussions, round-tables, and community consultations is ongoing.

Submitted by:

Diana Villeneuve

Literacy and Learning Advocate, Calgary Public Library

---

