

With a little help: BC Libraries 2020 visions begins at home

By Anne DeGrace.

Two heads are better than one. We get by with a little help from our friends. Aphorisms, sure, they are as true as ever in this new millennium, proving that the more things change, the more they stay the same.

What we're finding at the Nelson Library is that the challenge is great, the demand greater: our patrons, in the digital age, want more, better, faster, and—there are more of them. As economies and social realities change, the Library has never been more important. It's big, and it can stretch budgets and staff as it squashes new initiatives for lack of resources, a slippery slope if there ever was one. That is when extra heads and good friends become gold.

There's no question that libraries are changing, even as our values stay the same. Tuned-in, online, and connected in myriad ways, we have to constantly change the way we do things in order to meet the needs of the public we serve. With demands come opportunities: we need to find partners, make connections, and find as many friendly and like-minded heads as we can if we are to be the best we can be.

It was with this in mind that the Nelson Library went looking—and found partners.

The Nelson Library is a municipal entity where funding is concerned, our tax region as narrow as the valley in which we nestle. The greater region is without service as a part of the tax base: residents who wish borrowing privileges pay a subscription fee. A frequent question from newcomers who live outside the municipal boundaries is: so where is my library? A fair question—and one that has always been a tender spot politically.

Considering that, of the 1.4% of people in BC without taxation-based library service, 30% of them live in the Regional District of Central Kootenay, Library service in this region is clearly overdue. Changing the taxation situation takes a great deal of will, a supportive electorate, and probably an expensive referendum, not something about to happen overnight. But clearly, it was time to take the high

ground and make something happen. And so some friends were called in to help.

This spring, the Library partnered with School District #8, Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy, the Regional District of Central Kootenay, and the City of Nelson to give Slocan Valley folks a taste of rural delivery library service—and along the way will assess its success, and look at ways to expand into other areas. This six-month pilot is made possible, in part, by a Community Connections grant through the Ministry of Education.

As a result we've managed to bring, at least for now, the library to the people. And it was no small feat of cooperation to get there. With the help of School District bus drivers, the friendly people at the Winlaw Strong Start Centre, and our own professional staff, Library books are now making their way up the Valley in a mobile Library service.

Every week at Winlaw School, Library cardholders can choose from a hearty selection of books and audiovisual materials. Weekly training sessions show Valley folks the full scope of Library opportunities. Navigating the Library catalogue, placing reserves, and interlibrary loan orders are covered, as well as great services like Askaway, online databases from engine repair to newspapers, and how the newest kid on the block, Library-to-Go, puts your favourite author onto your iPod and into your head, just like that. People, so far, have been stoked.

The best part is how the Nelson Library's efforts to provide service by partnering with other organizations are in keeping with the goals of the BC Libraries 2020 vision. In this vision, collaboration is key for realizing equitable access to information, resources, and services, social, economic, and cultural development, and a literate society.

How to get there? By creatively partnering with other types of libraries, and like-minded organizations and initiatives across the Province.

It's clear: we need to find ways to reach out across economic and social sectors if we are to find ways to forge the best services we can deliver in this online, interconnected world. There is a beautiful symbiosis in the alchemy of interconnectedness: we all benefit. Because ultimately, what we'll have is a society of literate, informed, happy people, and where does that leave us?

With a lot more friends. And with friends, anything's possible.

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