

# Shelves and Shuffling: Rearranging the Tumbler Ridge Public Library

By Jacob Fehr.

The Tumbler Ridge Public Library's roots were showing in 2008. The library's carpet was original, and the basic layout had not changed much since 1985. The ceiling was dark purple, the carpet dark green, and the shelves and an office built in early 2009 were seemingly oriented to block as much light as possible.



Dark Library. Photo by TRPL Staff.

In 2010, we reorganized some areas of the library during my tenure as Interim Head Librarian, but our efforts largely amounted to window dressing. Shelves were moved to open up the left side of the library and create a small reading area in the corner, but the library still felt dark and cramped.

## New Beginnings

In late 2010, Paula Coutts joined our library as Head Librarian. On her very first day, she spent some time telling senior staff members that the library's layout, flooring, and ceiling were in dire need of updates.

## Tentative Steps

In January 2011 a minor reorganization of the paperbacks led to a day-long effort by senior staff to completely rearrange the left side of the library. The end result was a much brighter and more open side

of the library, but the center and right side were still trapped in the 1980s.



Break from Rearranging. Photo by TRPL Staff.

## The Outside World

Meanwhile, the Community Centre that houses the library was undergoing an extensive renovation of the building envelope. In April 2011, the library was required to move shelving and furniture to leave a five foot zone of free space along every exterior wall while the library's windows were replaced.



Five Foot Zone. Photo by TRPL Staff.

### The Point of No Return

Staff members assisted maintenance staff removing the old carpet, and then tarped all the library's shelves, furniture, and computers in preparation for the ceiling painting.



Tarped Shelves. Photo by TRPL Staff.

The ceiling painting required the library to close for two days due to overspray. Those two days were the only time the library was not open for business while our flooring and rearranging project were underway.

During this time, the senior staff began designing the new layout. I personally spent three days measuring shelves and furniture to create a layout map with individual pieces we could move as needed.



Library Layout Map. Photo by TRPL Staff.

One day, while we were discussing the new layout, Sharon Bray, our children's librarian, asked "What if we got rid of the office?" Community Centre

maintenance staff pulled down the temporary walls used to construct the office, and the library flooded with light from the previously blocked windows. We finalized our layout plans and made full use of the space vacated by the office.



Office Wall, Half Removed. Photo by TRPL Staff.

Our contractor, Chris Weir, started work on October 2, 2011. He painted all the library's walls then began to install the flooring while library staff frantically moved books and shelves around him.



Early Progress in Flooring. Photo by TRPL Staff.

In spite of extensive planning by library staff, shelves were often moved twice -- once to clear space for Chris to continue working, and once to place the shelves in their final location.





Flooring and Shelving in Progress. Photo by TRPL Staff.

### Relief

Though there were still some minor adjustments to be made, the project was officially completed on October 19, 2011.



Photocopier's Eye View. Photo by TRPL Staff.

The resulting layout is much brighter and more welcoming to our clients. One client noted about that library's openness that "it looks like you tied a rope to each end of the library, pulled, and stretched it out!"

Our children's area in particular has garnered a great deal of attention. It's far more spacious, further from the library entrance, and self-contained in a way it could never be before. In addition, it serves as a combined open space that can be used for adult programming in the evening when needed.



New Children's Area. Photo by TRPL Staff.

We're very proud of the hard work we put into the library's rearranging. That said, I extracted a very important promise from Paula when we neared the end of the project: I made her promise that we wouldn't be moving any more shelves for at least five years.

*Jacob Fehr is the Head of Technical Services at the Tumbler Ridge Public Library.*