

Co-opetition and your Library

By Anne DeGrace.

"We call it co-opetition," said Ben Hyman from the BC Libraries Co-operative (BCLC), speaking at the Kootenay Library Federation Conference in Fairmont Hot Springs in early October. "We're trying to get past the post together."

A lover of etymological hybrids, my ears perked up. Co-opetition means that when it comes to the entities we compete against—in our case, galloping progress against a backdrop of resource challenges in a rapidly changing society—we're better together: as a cooperative of libraries, and as connected communities.

BCLC connects us practically through systems and support and culturally through development of data-gathering projects for public use—a Canadian Cultural Cloud. BCLC is there at the starting gate, encouraging everyone to reach the finish line.

In the team sport that is libraries serving communities, keeping limber is important, and that's where the KLF conference came in. Think of it as ditching the retro Adidas for high tech gear, the better to pound the track (and save our knees). The better to get past the post.

There are 19 Kootenay Libraries in the KLF. The conference theme *Beyond Books: The Library as Community Hub*, is a nod to our changing role in this digital age: as navigators, connectors, and leaders.

There were workshops to make us better hubs, such as *Connecting the Unconnected: Library Assistance for Those Who Need it Most* with Louise Richards from the Elizabeth Fry Society and Janet Freeman from the Lawmatters program, about connecting marginalized people to resources for legal information and for understanding rights and responsibilities.

From the Outside In: The Community-Led Library, with VPL's Neighbourhood Services coordinator Beth Davies, demonstrated the value of listening to the community so as to be as welcoming as possible. So the migrant worker in Creston, the gay teen in Salmo, or the senior in Nakusp can leap the potential high-jumps of language, discrimination, or mobility.

Seniors Central explored how we best provide elder-friendly health info (think: Seniors' Games!) and

Bringing Them In focused on The Teen—that immortal cohort that insists it will never grow old, but will meanwhile have the best footwear.

For the movers, shakers, policy-makers and torch-bearers, there were sessions on partnerships, politics, proactive boards and other things that don't begin with P so are therefore not in this sentence (Metaphors and alliteration are my, uh, valued teammates.)

The e-Universe was especially well represented, with focus sessions such as *Social Media Savvy for the Swamped Librarian* with Sabina Iseli-Otto, and *Taking Off!*—training on the multitudinous e-Reading devices in this complex digital world that is quickly becoming home—among other technology-based sessions.

To that end, KLF director Joanne Richards—who with assistant Helen Graham made up the endurance component of the Conference Marathon—scored big by getting CBC *Spark* host Nora Young as keynote speaker.

Along with *Spark* fame—CBC's signature show about culture and technology—Young is the author of *The Virtual Self: How Our Digital Lives are Altering the World Around Us* (McClelland & Stewart, 2012). It's a fascinating look at our obsession with self-tracking, which includes everything from Facebooking and Tweeting to digitally tracking our every move: where we've been, what we eat, and yes, that morning run.

It's an interesting phenomenon that raises questions about how we are experiencing life (or not) but also plugs into Big Data, the information-collection phenomenon that was the focal point of Young's address.

Big Data is what happens when our compulsive self-tracking inadvertently shapes our society's future as the data we create is collected and applied, directing outside agendas (beneficial or parasitic), so that even as we think we're controlling our lives, we're being controlled by the trends we create. It's big, scary stuff that holds enormous potential for bad and good.

How can Libraries contribute to the good? By working together as keepers of culture and identity. By being the community hub through which we better

understand ourselves, celebrate our individualities
and our commonalities, learn, and be inspired.

By being co-opetitive: a relay of Libraries racing as a
team for a finish line that will always be moving. One
foot in front of another on the track, striving to
understand and embrace the changing world and
the road ahead.

There are only winners, here.

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the Nelson Public Library.*