

BCLA Community-Led Interest Group Meeting
February 26, 10 am-12 pm
Surrey Libraries, City Centre Branch, Dr. Ambedkar Room (Room 418, 4th Floor)

In attendance in Person: Tania Tong (SL), Elliott Kennedy (Lookout Society) David Kerr (SL), Kelty Roberts (VPL), Andrea Lukic (BPL), Ann Johannes (CPL), Iona Stachura (SL), Kate Shuttleworth (SFU), Catherine Bellamy (SL), Jenny Fry (SL, during introduction), Jamila Saleh (SL), Ravi Basi (SL), Tania Tong (SL), Nicole Sousa (BPL), Shideh Taleban (NVCL)

In attendance via Teleconference: Leila Meshgini (WVML), Tara Thompson (ORL)

Kelty welcomed everyone, thanked Surrey Libraries for hosting today's meeting, and initiated a brief round of introductions.

1. November 15th, 2019 meeting minutes approved

2. Guest Speaker - Elliott Kennedy, Lookout Society:

Elliott Kennedy is the current Coordinator of the Steve Cobon Building, one of Surrey's three modular housing facilities, as well as a long-time [Lookout Society](#) employee in various positions including cook, supervisor, outreach coordinator, and more.

Lookout operates 30+ sites in 10+ BC communities as far north as North Vancouver and as far south as Chilliwack. They have over 800 employees. In Surrey alone, they run 3 modular housing sites with 161 units total (Steve Cobon – 60 units, Nickerson Place – 46 units, and Nancy Gerard – 55 units). There are plans to expand to several other sites, including one at the current location of their Guildford Shelter, bringing the total number of modular housing units in Surrey to 250. Currently, each single occupancy unit is around 200 square feet and includes a fridge, microwave, and private bathroom (\$375/month rent). Each building is staffed 24hr/day and has an onsite coordinator to provide support to residents and staff.

Lookout collaborates closely with BC Housing as well as several other operational teams including an ICM (Intense Case Management) team, outreach team, shelter team, & ACT (Assertive Community Treatment) team. They also partner extensively with other service provider agencies (e.g., Options, Rain City, Surrey Memorial Hospital, local police and mental health workers, etc.) and have additional community connections via their participation in the Whalley CAC (Community Advisory Committee).

BC Housing coordinates access to the modular housing units. They employ VATS (Vulnerability Assessment Tool) and SHR (Supportive Housing Registry) as tools to match clients with the best housing for their needs.

Outcomes since opening on June 28, 2018:

- 350 OPS (Overdose Prevention Sites) visits per month at each site
- 2.8 average overdoses per month at each site (trending downwards since last May)
- 2 tenants per site on IOAT (Injectable Opioid Agonist Treatment)
- 13 tenants rehomed (6 through other rentals, 5 through permanent supportive housing, 2 through hospital)

Shideh asked about useful tax supports for people in vulnerable situations as NVCL currently partners with the CRA to offer programs at the library. Elliott responded that older peoples often need help with their tax returns to get the most out of GIS, CPP, and OAS. There is volunteer-based tax assistance available at Lookout.

Iлона inquired about how successful modular housing has been and what are next steps. Elliott replied that it has been a huge success overall with drug use down dramatically, but has its own challenges such as evictions, deaths. Most deaths have been caused by people self-discharging from the hospital before it was time for their release; the flip side is that more people have been able to get necessary surgeries as a result of having reliable housing. No specific details regarding next steps, but BC Housing is actively looking to secure additional sites in Surrey.

Iлона asked about the process for securing one of the units for rent. Elliott said that access is based on need and that there is no waiting list. There are 6 agencies that weigh in on tenancy (i.e., bring forward candidates) whenever there is an opening.

Kelty wondered about how “temporary” the housing situation is, adding that temporary housing in Vancouver is supposed to mean ~6 months yet residents typically remain for 2+ years before they are able to find alternate accommodations. Elliott commented that the buildings themselves may only be scheduled to reside in a particular location for 1-2 years, but the reality is that it can takes residents 2-3 years to arrange permanent housing. In Surrey, there is a fair bit of movement to Ted Kuhn Towers, a permanent supportive housing facility. When asked if there were many tenants who were ready to move into non-supportive/market housing rentals, Elliott said that this was not a realistic option for most residents. Eviction is a last resort strategy at Lookout, but most landlords aren’t nearly so lenient, meaning that a tenant who has even one bad day in a market housing situation might soon find themselves back on the street. Market housing often presents a number of other barriers in terms of affordability and the requirement for clean criminal record checks.

Catherine asked about the location of the new site. Elliott replied that the new Guildford modular housing units will be at the same location as the current Guildford Shelter.

Andrea inquired about barriers to accessing modular housing. Elliott mentioned that they try to keep barriers to a minimum, but residents do need to be capable of caring for themselves. For instance, people who have dementia or are incontinent are not candidates for housing. Pets are allowed. Couples must reside in separate units, which could be viewed as a barrier, but in practice Elliott has seen this work out well for both parties; it gives each of them a space of their own to retreat to when needed and both parties remain housed in the event of a breakup.

Leila asked about library visits and onsite library programs. Elliott expressed appreciation towards Surrey Libraries for their regular visits to the 3 modular buildings (David) and shelter (Catherine). He added that library outreach efforts have been a huge help as many residents are avid readers. A scheduled book club program hasn’t been implemented, however David has brought over discarded book club sets.

3. Terminology discussion for marginalized library users

Ilona asked what terminology other library systems use (or have heard used) when referring to the type of people who community librarians most often reach out to. Terms that came up during this discussion included: marginalized; vulnerable; street-involved; street-entrenched; rough sleeping (British term); homeless; barriered; no fixed address.

Several people expressed a preference for moving away negative wording and towards people-first language. For example, Leila uses “people experiencing homelessness” or “people experiencing addiction” rather than “homeless person” or “addict” to convey that these are systemic rather than personal issues. Likewise, Catherine likes the term “barriered” more than “vulnerable” because it puts the onus on mainstream society for not providing necessary resources.

Elliott and Kelty both noted that in their experience, people who are actually in the situations described often don’t seem to care that much about terminology, generally using words like “homeless” and “addict” to describe themselves.

Tara mentioned that she tries to ask people their names and what terminology they prefer to use. At ORL, “rough sleeping” is a commonly used term.

Andrea mentioned that she does outreach at the Burnaby Youth Custody Centre and tries to avoid language that is punitive in nature (e.g., inmate, prisoner). At the centre, she uses first names (despite last names being the convention at this facility); in reports, she uses the generic term “youth.”

Kelty commented on how there is a big distinction between what we call people when interacting with them and how we might refer to them when writing up a report. Obviously, individual names are ideal for in-person situations, but they cannot be used for reporting purposes as this would be a breach of confidentiality. She added that when putting out a poster to announce library visits, VPL doesn’t ask people to assume a particular group label/identity (e.g., are you a marginalized person?), but rather asks if they are in a particular situation presently (i.e., are you facing barriers to using the library?).

Ilona expressed that she was really hoping to find the “magic word” to use when writing reports, but this may simply be impossible.

Ravi noted that language and terminology changes over time, and so will constantly need to be revisited. She reiterated Elliott and Kelty’s earlier point about individuals using words when referring to themselves and others that we might shy away from (e.g., Indigenous people often prefer the term Indian). Ravi added that in May, SL will be hosting a 3-part Surrey Neighbourhood Safety Series on the topic of homelessness myths.

4. Outreach visit discussion

Nicole asked what everyone does during their shelter/modular housing outreach visits.

David (SL): Visits the modular housing facilities every month, with a circulation staff member coming along every 2nd or 3rd visit to do library card. He generally sets up a table with books and other giveaway items. Usually visits around lunch time for about 2 hours. Hangs out, chats, sometimes does home delivery, sometimes brings a laptop to offer tech help. He also sometimes brings colouring sheets and

crayons (Kelty offered to share the instructions she created for using MS Paint to print out large, multi-page, communal colouring sheets).

Shideh (NVCL): Visits once a month for an hour between 2-3 pm. Promotes programs such as the warming station, waives fines, gives away donated books.

Catherine (SL): Brings books for checkout to the shelter (used to bring discards for giveaway), accepts returns, sometimes accompanied by circulation staff member. Blackout poetry a current interest.

Nicole (BPL): Does similar monthly visits, but book donations have not been popular so now focuses on tech help. Brings laptops and often assists with BC Housing applications, which is a difficult process to help out with. Kelty expressed surprise that there are no dedicated support workers onsite to assist residents with their applications. Catherine suggested partnering with a community organization who can provide the type of assistance needed. Shideh mentioned income tax and resume writing programs are potentially worthwhile additions based on the feedback that they've heard from the shelter.

There was also a discussion about how different library systems have vastly different rules about what is and is not permitted with respect to: whether discarded collection items can be given away; whether or not, and to what extent, volunteers are allowed; whether librarians can register new library cards or only circulation staff.

5. BCLA Conference Session

Kelty briefly highlighted upcoming sessions at the BC Libraries Conference featuring CLIG members. Members who were present at today's meeting (Tara, Ravi, & Kate) also had an opportunity to tell us more about their session in their own words. A full listing each session with dates, times, and descriptions will be shared by email.

- What happens outside happens inside: Navigating the intersections of community engagement, democracy, and patron-centered service (feat. Eleonore Shaffer)
- Trans inclusion in libraries (curated by Allison Jones)
- Richmond Indigenous collaborative table (feat. Anne Bechard)
- Student government, advocacy, and library work (feat. Victoria Gomez)
- Finding a place for community-engaged library work in and beyond the academy (feat. Heather De Forest & Adair Harper)
- Accessible libraries for everyone (feat. Tara Thompson)
- How can we help? InterLINK libraries supporting staff mental wellness (feat. Jenny Fry)
- Newcomers and the public library: On being Canada's unofficial welcoming committee (curated by Kelty Roberts; feat. Ravi Basi & Shideh Taleban)
- The community scholars' program: Building capacity by making paywalled research more accessible (feat. Kate Shuttleworth)

Leila added that WVML received a small grant from SFU for her and Nick Ubels to present on civic engagement and climate change, however the exact details have yet to be confirmed.

6. Remote circulation/card registration in different library systems

| | Integrated Library System | Mobile Solution |
|---------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| David (SL) | Horizon | BLUEcloud (app) |
| Kelty (VPL) | Horizon | MobileCirc (app) |
| Shideh (NVCL) | Workflow(SirsiDynix Symphony) | |
| Tara (ORL) | Polaris | Polaris Leap (web client) |
| Ann (CPL) | Polaris | Polaris Leap (web client) |
| Nicole (BPL) | Horizon | MobileCirc (app) |

Although Kelty and Nicole both have access to a tablet with the MobileCirc app, neither actually use it for community visits. It takes a long time to register new borrowers and there is no ability to waive fines; both prefer to take down patron information on paper and then deal with it in Horizon back at the library (caveat: it is important to let patrons know how long it will take before their card is activated or their fine waived).

Several systems also take a MiFi internet hotspot with them on visits where wi-fi is not reliable/secure.

7. Roundtable (upcoming training, projects, successes/failures, etc.)

Andrea (BPL) – Interested in the impact of unions of unions, especially with regard to volunteering restrictions. There are lots of youth who want to volunteer at the library but can't because of union regulations. She would appreciate any suggestions for workarounds. She is also interested in connecting with teen librarians at other systems.

David (SL) – Shared a series of brochures that they produce at the library to suggest free and low cost resources to people who are experiencing barriers. These brochures are divided by category and include: education/ESL and citizenship; activities in the community; legal services; housing; health services; food and transportation; employment and income. It is a lot of work to keep them up to date, but they are very useful to give out at community visits as well as within the library. Time is set aside every summer for major updates and revisions. Ann (CPL) brought up the [Tri-Cities Community Resources Map](#) & Shideh (NVCL) brought up the [Food Asset Maps](#) (multiple municipalities) as additional reference resources for low income individuals.

8. Next Meeting – Date? Location? Guest speakers?

Next meeting was supposed to be in May, but due to the current COVID-19 situation, it might change. Place and date to be determined.