

BCLA Community-Led Interest Group Meeting Minutes

September 20th, 2019, 10am-12pm

Vancouver Public Library – Central Branch – Level 7 – Morris J. Wosk Boardroom

In attendance in person: Shideh Taleban (NVCL), Mikale Fenton (NVCL), Ann Johannes (CPL), Eleonore Shaffer (VPL), Nicole Sousa (BPL), Janeen Parent (FVRL), Heather Deforest (SFU), Kelty Roberts (VPL), Andrea Lukic (BPL), Andrea Lam (BPL), Lynn Brockington (WVML), Dionne Pelan (UBCLE), Mariah Gastaldo (BPL), Victoria Gomez (ischool), Mary Ellen Glover (COV Homelessness Services)

In attendance via teleconference system: Ilona Stachura (SPL), Kate Shuttleworth (SFU), Nick Ubles (WVML)

Kelty welcomed everyone and we introduced ourselves. She invited two guest speakers: Dionne Pelan from the UBC Learning Exchange (and member of the Downtown Eastside Literacy Roundtable) and Mary Ellen Glover from City of Vancouver Homelessness Services.

1. May 28th, 2019 meeting minutes approved

2. UBC Learning Exchange/Downtown East Side Adult Literacy Roundtable (Dionne Pelan)

Dionne is the Coordinator of Computer and Drop-In Programs at the [UBC Learning Exchange](#) (UBCLE) on 612 Main St. UBCLE has been operating for 20 years to provide community-based programs and activities in support of adult literacy. They partner closely with a number of other organizations to provide these services, and are always open to working with new groups.

Dionne is also a member of the [DTES Adult Literacy Roundtable](#), a group of adult educators who collaborate together on projects and share resources at monthly meetings. As a result of community consultation in the DTES, the UBCLE & Roundtable identified a number of technological needs – namely, while many/most people have tech like smartphones, they don't necessarily know how to use them. They also may be unable to afford data plans and so rely heavily on free public wi-fi, which has since been provided across Vancouver. Data security/privacy has also been identified as an important concern.

The 2 big initiatives spearheaded by the UBCLE & Roundtable have been the development of Linkvan and the implementation of Pop-up Tech Cafes:

- [Linkvan](#) is a mobile-optimized website geared towards low-literacy, low-income people living in the DTES. It uses GPS data to direct users to the nearest social services (shelter, food, medical, hygiene, tech, etc.). Soon to be available as an Android app for download on Google Play. Currently working to create similar service for New Westminster.
- Pop-up Tech Cafes began in 2016 as weekly 2-hr Friday morning sessions in Oppenheimer Park. In addition to representatives from the UBCLE & Roundtable, sessions were staffed by 2 community ambassadors and a librarian from Carnegie. Due to consistently high turnout and demand, there are now 6 weekly tech cafes at various locations, including the Carnegie Learning Centre, Wish, Watari, and Eastside Works.

There was a question about device lending in general and how to pair device lending with people who have no fixed address? Dionne responded that it is a challenging issue and it really depends on the organization, but this is not something that UBCLE does. They have a computer lab on site, and several

laptops that they bring to the tech cafes. They often refer low-income clients to organizations like [Free Geek](#) where people can volunteer in exchange for free, second-hand computers. SFU/UBC also hold phone drives to collect students' old devices to be redistributed to those in need.

There was a question about whether they provide tech support for visually impaired people? Dionne answered that they can only effectively help people who already have an assistive device (e.g., DAISY player) or software (e.g., JAWS). Normally, she would try to connect them with an organization with access to these assistive technologies. In some cases, these organizations can also subsidize the purchasing of such devices/software.

There was a question about what libraries can do more to encourage literacy outside of the library walls? Dionne suggested better training for staff, particularly around digital literacy skills and working with homeless/vulnerable patrons. Overall, though, she had a very positive opinion of public libraries and their role with respect to improving digital literacy and creating safe, warm, welcoming spaces for these populations.

3. City of Vancouver Homelessness Services/Carnegie Outreach (Mary Ellen Glover)

Our second guest speaker was Mary Ellen Glover, a Planner from the [City of Vancouver Homelessness Services](#), based out of their main location – [Carnegie Outreach](#) at 392 Powell St. They have homeless outreach workers at 7 additional locations across the city. They accept anyone who self-refers on a first-come-first-served basis; they are extremely low-barrier and do not turn anyone away. Their services are geared towards Vancouver residents, but they also help people from different municipalities connect with relevant organizations. They have about 20 staff members in their team and see approximately 100 clients per day. Capacity is often an issue for them.

Services provided:

- 311 calls related to outdoor sleepers are often redirected to them. They often have personal relationships with these individuals, and so will go out to meet them.
- They liaise with BC Housing, supportive housing organizations (Lookout, MPA, PHSA, Rain City, Atira, etc.), and local SROs to locate housing for clients. They also offer a rent supplement program for clients to help them with their deposit to secure an apartment or to top up small amounts of rent.
- They have strong connections with other social service organizations and so often do referrals for additional assistance with specific issues (e.g., mental health, substance abuse, employment, etc.).
- They assist people with replacing personal ID by helping them fill out forms, taking people on weekly trips to ICBC, and providing a safe place to store the originals so that they aren't lost or stolen.

There was a question about how they cope with mental illness and substance abuse? Mary Ellen answered that staff have a good relationship with relevant organizations and clinics, in addition to having a variety of backgrounds on their team (most are not social workers though). With regards to substance abuse, Mary Ellen's indicated that "people should be able to stay awake on the day that we are helping them. If they can't, we ask them to leave for the day and try to come back another day". They try not to have any barriers other than capacity while working with vulnerable populations, however people obviously need to be in a state of mind where they are able to receive aid. They always work directly with the individual rather than with concerned family members.

Mary Ellen was asked for suggestions regarding programming at libraries. She mentioned that bringing in a social worker on a regular basis to ask people what they want might be useful. The CRA has a community outreach worker (Karen Martin) who goes to Carnegie Outreach once per month to help clients fast track some of the challenges that people have with taxes – Mary Ellen directed anyone interested in setting this up at their library to look under Revenue Canada’s [outreach program](#) for more information. Janeen added that at FVRL they started bringing in an outreach worker 2 months ago. It’s important to understand that in the first few months you might not have anyone show up, but that it picks up after people get a chance to test it out. Word of mouth is really important. Consistency also builds trust and lets people know they can count on these services.

HIFIS (Homeless Individual and Families Information System) is a new provincial database for all organizations that receive funding from BC Housing. Still working out kinks (privacy concerns), but hoping that this will lead to better sharing of data and a better picture of the overall homelessness situation. Someone added that Burnaby just opened their first shelter (Douglas Road Shelter) and they are already at capacity.

Mary Ellen mentioned that they are looking for locations to use as [warming centres](#), which are spaces that become open to the public on particularly cold nights (when remaining outdoors could be potentially life-threatening). Participating organizations aren't expected to provide staffing, security, supplies, or clean-up – just a warm indoor space for people hang out overnight when all the shelters are full. If anyone knows of a Vancouver organization interested in becoming a warming centre during 2019-2020 winter, please direct them to contact Mary Ellen.

4. Review Terms of Reference

No recommendations for change at present. Terms will be sent by email.

5. Student Representative – Interested candidates?

Only one student was present at the meeting, so invitation will be sent by email.

6. BCLA 2020 Conference – CLIG proposal ideas?

BCLA 2020 conference will be from April 15-17 at the Richmond Sheraton. Proposals likely due in fall, registrations starting in January. [UPDATE: theme announced as “Libraries, Democracy, and Action”. Proposals due on December 2, 2019.]

CLIG proposal ideas:

- Mikale suggested that presenters from last year look into how different libraries approach a similar issue and let conference goers know about how different systems approach a particular program or type of outreach. Democracy, community mapping, com-led toolkit.
- Kelty mentioned possibility of doing a panel with representatives from public and academic libraries to compare/contrast.
- Victoria suggested that ischool student(s) be involved in the proposal/panel.
- Janeen was interested in learning about our different approaches to working with Indigenous communities.
- Mikale suggested looking at poverty reduction approaches taken by different library systems. Kelty added that this could be narrowed further, for example by focusing on a single element

such as food insecurity (food bank & community meal partnerships, library programs on cooking/foraging for food, referrals and public awareness efforts, etc.).

- Eleonore mentioned that VPL Community Librarians may be doing their own proposal this year.

Please contact Kelty (kelty.roberts@vpl.ca) & Shideh (staleban@cnv.org) with additional suggestions or if interested in participating in the conference proposal.

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

Eleonore would like to hear from Community Librarians who have a dedicated budget since she is in process of writing proposal for VPL's Community Librarians and would appreciate feedback on how it works in other systems. Mikale suggested creating a proposal outlining how much each branch will require.

Mikale mentioned that Rachel Cargle will be coming to Lower Mainland to host a talk on "Unpacking White Feminism" and is in need of a venue. Any suggestions can be directed to Mikale. [UPDATE: this has been resolved].

Heather mentioned that she and a few colleagues are thinking about writing an article on community-led approaches in academic libraries.

Ilona via teleconference asked about what kind of training libraries are doing to improve outreach skills?

Answers:

- Kelty pointed out that Ryan Dowd's [Homeless Library](#) training is used by lots of systems, notably the Halifax Public Library.
- In the Tri-Cities, they held a session on intersectionality for all customer service staff to attend.
- VPL developed an in-house training workshop on community-led practices and rolled it out for information staff in 2019.
- NVCL has a quarterly all-staff meeting with guest speakers to talk about different topics such as mental health, dementia, etc.
- FVRL staff attended the Dalai Lama Peace Center Heart-Mind Conference training.
- Kelty suggested informal, everyday practices such as developing the habit of sharing relevant tips, community resources, & webinars with colleagues via intranet/email.

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

Fridays 10-2 appear to be a good fit for all. Next meeting will be in November, place and date TBD.