

CANADA - SASKATCHEWAN EVERY LIBRARY CONNECTED PROGRAM – 1998 - 2000

FINAL REPORT

I. GOALS

The Saskatchewan province-wide *Every Library Connected by the Year 2000 Program* was integrated with the *Industry Canada CAP Program*, to become the *Canada-Saskatchewan Every Library Connected Program*. The new program had two goals:

- To increase public access to information via the Internet; and
- To ensure that every library was connected to the Internet to conduct library business online.

II. BACKGROUND

The intent of the Canada – Saskatchewan Every Library Connected program is expressed in the preamble to the Agreement:

- *The parties will work cooperatively to enhance public access to the Information Highway for residents of the province of Saskatchewan;*
- *The parties desire that public libraries in Saskatchewan be able to use the Information Highway to conduct library-related business by the year 2000;*
- *The parties share a commitment to developing public Internet access for all Saskatchewan residents.*

III. THE PROJECT

A total of 284 Saskatchewan public libraries participated in the project, which resulted in almost 500 public access computer workstations being placed in Saskatchewan public libraries.

- Due to the tremendous success of the program, a number of libraries that had declined to participate at its inception had a change of heart.
- At the same time, a shift in thinking about delivery of library service to sparsely populated rural areas occurred. Several regions ceased rural bookmobile operations due to the high costs associated with this type of service, and began to establish capacity to deliver a minimal level of

service via pick-up and delivery locations that had a public access Internet work station. This allowed the public to access information as well as library resources and services.

- Consequently, library systems were busy installing public access computers in these new locations even in the final days of the program.

IV. PUBLIC INFORMATION

- The most popular, and likely the most effective, means of the promoting the program was through the distribution of mouse pads and screen savers. These were supplied to every location that received a computer.
- Mouse pads were also distributed to promote the program at conferences, conventions and other meetings and events throughout the duration of the program. E.g. the Saskatchewan Library Association Conference, the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association (SUMA) Convention, the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM) Convention, etc.
- The proof of this effectiveness was experienced at the 2000 SUMA and SARM conventions at which delegates almost always accepted the additional mouse pads but indicated that they already knew the program was operating in their local library.

V. PROGRAM EVALUATION

1. Benefits to the Community

The Canada/Saskatchewan Every Library Connected Program is having a tremendous impact on each of the 294 communities that have received computers. “This project has been an excellent one for improvement of information, literacy and technological skills in our community.”

∞ Access to Information is Equitable

Having Internet access in the library means that information can reach everyone, regardless of his or her socio-economic status. “Since most of our Internet users are from low-income families, I feel that it gives them the opportunity to ‘keep up’ with regard to technology and information at their disposal.”

∞ Saskatchewan Communities Connect with Government

The Internet “brings government closer to people” by linking them to information on health, jobs, pensions, housing, business opportunities and the many other services offered by the various levels of government.

∞ People Stay Connected

Because of the geographic distances that separate many families in Saskatchewan, residents place particular importance on their access to e-mail. Whether it's seniors keeping up with their children, vacationers accessing their home e-mail, or hockey players in a junior hockey league staying connected with their home town, all benefit from their ability to connect to people outside of their communities.

Examples abound of travelers stopping in a small library to check their e-mail:

- “Being situated on the Trans-Canada High way during the summer and well into fall we have several people each week travelling across the country stopping in to check their e-mail on the way.”
- “Travelers from Japan and Norway both had access to their e-mail”, this in a town of 406 habitants.
- “We have had people from Australia comment that it is great that a small town has contact with the world. I think that is the bottom line, contact.”
- “One patron who was moving to Philidelphia [sic] did research about the city before his move.”

Access to e-mail also makes a difference for parents whose children are working in foreign countries:

- “The most interesting thing to happen on our computer has been the man whose son was working in Japan during the earthquake there. After several days of being unable to access him by phone, he decided to try E-mail. He used the library to set up an e-mail account and was in contact with his son the next day. This was a man from a community with a population of with a population of 347.”
- “Another resident originally from India, and living here for some years now wanted access to newspapers from India and used the computer here to locate some. I believe he has since purchased his own computer to use now and also to contact his kids who are scattered across the country.”

Y Children Get a Head-start, Parents Learn and Seniors are Revitalized

Education in Saskatchewan is benefiting from the local library's access to the Internet. Home-schooled children and retired teachers use the Internet to do research and seniors appreciate the opportunity to stay informed.

- “The teachers at the local school have asked that I do not allow any kids to use the Internet until at least 3:35 pm on school days - seems there is a stampede to get coats, boots etc, so the kids can beat each other here to the library!! It is also a stampede when they hit the library doors trying to beat each other in!!”
- “Another rather neat item, I have noticed that when some parents come to see just where on the Internet their children are looking, they end up getting Internet lessons from their kids, and very often you here [sic] the child say to the parent, No, you don't want to go there- It's a waste of time, You wouldn't like that Mom, or Dad, you really need to think about that, it probably isn't true.”
- “It is continually used by the local school kids for e-mail and chat and some research.”
- “We have also had a request from two students who wish to do correspondence courses & have no at-home computer.”
- “We are getting many children in who don't have computers at home.”
- “The elementary teacher brought her class down here to learn about the library resources and using the library computer for that as well as the one at school.”
- “Mabel, a retired teacher, has re-vitalized her skills by receiving training from the University of Regina's Learning Technologies for Older Adults Program. She has trained four other seniors to be tutors. Now up to 35 seniors meet at the Library Mondays at 1pm to learn how to use the Internet and email to family and friends.”
- “Seniors appreciate the time free and training introduction to the use of this modern technology.”
- “Have interested senior to help other seniors learn how to use internet”
- “I have quite a few seniors who are getting quite good at sending e-mail. Then, once they've mastered e-mail, they are more interested in learning how to do other things.”

⌘ Citizens Learn New Skills, Earn More

The *Every Library Connected* program is giving many people hope for a better life.

- “One of my patrons was a waitress (minimum wage), her husband was a laborer (again minimum wage). They have two children. She wanted to take a computer course to get a better job and approached social services and unemployment insurance and was told she didn’t qualify for funding and to take out a loan if she wanted to take the course. Of course being so low income, they didn’t qualify for a loan either. One day while in the library asking about a plant book, I suggested she go on the internet and get info about some specific plants. I showed her how to connect and search and helped her a couple of times and she found what she wanted. She came back three more times and started going to some government sites. She found info on funding for low-income families to upgrade themselves, printed the info and took it to someone in Weyburn. She is now taking her computer course (she is about half done), has passed each section so far with honors (over 90%) and after speaking to someone about doing her 2 weeks practice in an office, was told if she was any good she could have a permanent job. Needless to say she is thrilled with the Internet, me, and most of the entire Library for making it all possible. Her husband is now studying to get his GED (studying a book he got through the library) so the whole family has benefited from ‘*Every Library Connected*’.”**
- “Mike, a summer student, used a new computer contributed by the *Every Library Connected* program to create community heritage web content, and, at the same time, develop his virtual portfolio for future employers and post-secondary institutions to which he has now successfully applied.”**
- “Clint, a local Information Technology worker, developed his networking skills installing the Library’s LAN.”**
- “It has been used frequently for job searches by various ages.”**
- “Irene, a student, used the Library’s computers to create and print her resume. She now has work.”**

⌘ Business Flourishes

While citizens make connections to business opportunities by using the Internet, Saskatchewan businesses are winners with the introduction of *Every Library Connected* computers in local libraries. Many of the computers were purchased from local merchants. Local consultants have been hired to install and maintain the computers and train library patrons, and students. Local groups and computer companies have developed and are maintaining community web sites.

- “The Economic Development and Recreation Office is right next door to the Library and uses the site on a daily basis.”
- “One fellow was using it to find home based business opportunities.”
- “Jerry, a local entrepreneur, learned how to market his manufactured goods on the Internet by attending e-commerce classes at the Library.”

⌘ Healthcare Gets a Boost

- “We have a local Arthritis support group, and a few of its members have braved the Internet and feel they have found very useful information to assist others in the group.”
- “Our Local Assisted Living Program (funded by the Regina Health district, and designed to provide various programs, and assistance to seniors and handicapped people so they are able to live in their homes) has made extensive use of the Internet for all kinds of information on health, aging, etc. This most certainly has been a direct benefit to our community.”
- “Jane, a nurse, recently found work in the medical profession by checking job banks at the Library on our Community Access Centre terminals.”

⌘ Leisure, Hobbies, Every Day Life: the Internet Benefits Everyone

- **“Some brides-to-be are using the Internet to plan their weddings.”**
- **“Many local crafters are finding free projects & patterns.”**
- **“One couple planned their holiday with info from ‘the net’.”**
- **“Robert, an investor, uses the Internet daily to check on the markets.”**
- **“Jason, a local youth, locates parts for a car he is rebuilding.”**
- **“In less than nine months, with only two workstations, we have provided over 2,200 hours of access at a constant average of 350 individual bookings a week. Our site is so busy we regularly refer individuals to our partner site...”**

2. Impact on libraries

⌘ Library Services for Today's World

Internet access has improved the library's ability to provide current information on an unlimited range of subjects. As more libraries consider the Internet a library resource similar to books, they expand their ability to provide individualized service that “people are looking for these days.” Whether the target is research, educational, cultural or recreational reading, most libraries report that they have become the educational resource centre they should be.

⌘ Automation Accelerates in Libraries

One Regional Library describes the impact of the *Every Library Connected* program on its Region:

- **“A by-product of this product has been that it has had very positive affect on the on-going automation of the Region. Branch staff who previously had no computer experience have now begun to see the benefits of automating their library functions (a number of small branches decided to purchase software licenses to use the Region's Integrated Library System). In addition, having all our branch libraries connected to the Internet has allowed the Region to automate the Interlibrary loan service (additional computers from the Computers for Libraries Program were installed at the same time as the Industry Canada computers to serve as staff workstations). Furthermore, the availability of a public Internet computer at each branch library has allowed the Region to use a web based catalogue to act as an OPAC at the rural branch libraries.” (Lakeland Library Region *Every Library Connected Project* Final Report)**

- “Better service (weekly) for pick-ups and delivery of library material...users will have access to all library materials as opposed to the bookmobile.’

⌘ Access to the Internet Means Success for Libraries

One after the other, libraries that received computers through the *Every Library Connected* program report an increase in the number of new patrons that have registered at their local branches.

- “Usually, if [the patrons] come to use the computer, they will also take out books. Anything bringing patrons into the library is a success.”

The *Every Library Connected* program has also given the libraries the ability to offer new programs and services and reach audiences that are typically difficult to reach.

- “People come into the library that weren’t coming before.”
- “We went from 3 years ago, fundraising for 1 computer to, just 3 years later, an automated library and 7 computers for public use.”
- “From January 1, 1999 to Nov. 30/99, we had a total of 678 patron visits on our public computers...we are pleased to see the significant increase in patron traffic.”
- “Customer response has been so enthusiastic that over 6,000 computer bookings were made in 1999...”
- “We feel it has brought the library more into the public eye again and especially helped us regain contact with the young people who are very hard to get into the library in their teen years.”
- “Computer use begets book transactions and vice versa.”

3. Partnerships achieved

Saskatchewan communities have contributed to the success of the *Every Library Connected* program. Several organisations have given moral support to local libraries, provided them with information on training and grants, helped promote the program, and contributed to the purchase and maintenance of the computers. Many have also provided space and are ensuring the sustainability of the program by funding the Internet connections on an annual basis.

The partners include: schools and school boards, students, the local Chamber of Commerce, the United Way, Crown Corporations, the Municipalities, Regional colleges, Recreation Boards, Regional Economic Development Associations and Economic Development Boards, Universities, theatre groups, Credit Unions, Community Centres as well as local Internet groups.

VI TRAINING

Libraries report that more than 8,300 people have received computer training in formally organised sessions. Additionally, librarians have given one-on-one training to thousands more walk-in patrons and continue to help them find information.

Librarians themselves received training ranging from intensive three-day sessions to a few hours every few weeks supplemented with detailed instructional manuals. The courses introduced the staff to basic computer literacy, to Windows 95, to the Internet and to several library specific programs such as online catalogues, circulation modules and inter-library loans software.

The overall goal of the training effort has been to help library staff and patrons use the Internet as another means of library service.

- “The combination of funding for training and additional new computers through the *Every Library Connected* program has been crucial in providing the means for the instruction to be carried out on an ongoing basis...It should be noted that the training funding has allowed the training throughout the past year to be carried out without adversely affecting the workload of other Headquarters staff. This has been a definite advantage to the functioning of the regional library as it has allowed Headquarters staff to continue on with the regular day to day operations of the library. The funding has also allowed us to more effectively meet (our) training objectives and timelines.”

VII. SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES

While Saskatchewan libraries greatly appreciate the generosity of Industry Canada for introducing the benefits of the Internet to their local communities, many are concerned that they will not be able to sustain the principle of universal access to information that the Canadian Government is promoting through the *Every Library Connected* program.

As the Lakeland Library Region points out:

- “ It is our feeling that libraries should be very careful not to promise services which they are unable to maintain. For many members of the general public the presence of a public access Internet computer at the public library is becoming an expected service. The challenge for the regional library system will be to find ways of sustaining this service with the limited budget and resources available to it.”

1. Maintenance, Upgrading and Ongoing Technical Support

As computers age and software becomes outdated, small town library boards will struggle to find the funds necessary to maintain or replace them. Many have indicated that they may have to abandon the service if they cannot find adequate resources to upgrade their hardware.

- “This project probably would not have been possible if not for the Industry Canada Youth grants which allowed the Region to hire technicians to set up and install the workstations. Industry Canada should be commended for recognizing that the regional systems probably did not have the human resources needed to carry off this project on their own. The problem comes when these grants end and the burden for ongoing technical support for these computers falls to regional staff. The Region has found that the addition of 34 public workstations has significantly increased the amount of technical support it must perform. This technical support is now done by the professional librarian staff at headquarters, staff who were already managing full work loads before this project began. In realization of the need for a permanent staff member to perform technical support the Region is considering creating a new position in the fall of this year. In order to do this however, another headquarters position will have to be eliminated and the work done by that person redistributed to other staff members.”
(Lakeland Library Region *Every Library Connected Project* Final Report)

2. Training

Several regions have full-time trainers and all have hired youth for temporary contracts to do training. Despite this effort, many are concerned that on-going training of patrons by local librarians places a significant burden on staff who must add this function to their already full workload.

- **“With the installation of the public access Internet computers, training for both staff and the public was carried out in the Region. While staff training was performed by personnel from regional headquarters, some of the public training was carried out by youths hired with the Industry Canada Youth Employment grants. With the ending of the Youth Employment grants all training will have to be carried out by permanent regional staff. What with the ongoing rapid evolution of the Internet we imagine that training will become a continuing issue with both staff and the public. While we are working at developing more advanced training for the public and are committed to providing ongoing training for our staff, this must be carried out using available resources. Once again these are added demands being made on already thinly stretched resources.” (Lakeland Library Region *Every Library Connected Project* Final Report)**

3. Telephone lines/High speed lines

Libraries are struggling with paying ongoing costs of telephone lines and Internet accounts. High-speed landlines are not available in most rural communities and even if they were, most local libraries could not afford them. They will have no capacity to deal with the demand or need for high-speed lines, which is growing with increased technological capacity. Large files, voice and visual images, and increased public usage all require higher bandwidth.

Although the price of high-speed lines recently decreased to 192 Kbps @ \$450.00/month but this is still unaffordable for small libraries. The biggest concern is what will happen after June 30th, with the impact of CRTC deregulation. Current subsidy levels suggest that the cost of dial tone will increase dramatically. There are no estimates of the impact on data lines.

Many libraries have commented on these sustainability issues:

- **“It has caused a great financial strain on our local board. We have to fundraise to pay the costs of Internet access, maintenance of computer and replacing hardware when needed. The latest CRTC ruling will put us in such financial constraints that we may not be able to continue this service.”**
- **“If the CRTC ruling goes through we may not be able to afford the telecommunication charges, so all the work will be down the drain.”**

- **“The mandate of Industry Canada was to provide a free computer and free Internet access to all public libraries in Canada. With the CRTC ruling, will we be able to pay the doubled or triples rates? The cost to libraries of providing this service should have been included in this plan!”**
- **“We’re not sure how the recent CRTC ruling will affect our phone rates ...whether any changes [to the number of users] will be met or not at this point.”**
- **“Even without any significant increase in telecommunications costs it is possible that a number of branches will find the continuing monthly payments to be too onerous a burden and decide to terminate their Internet connection. In such a scenario it is doubtful that the Region would be able to absorb the cost of these telecommunications charges. It is essential therefore that a means be found to subsidize Internet line costs at public libraries in rural areas.” (Lakeland Library Region *Every Library Connected Project* Final Report).**

**Marilyn Jenkins, Acting Director
Library Cooperation & Networking
Saskatchewan Provincial Library**