Working together: community-led libraries toolkit

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WORKING TOGETHER: COMMUNITY-LED LIBRARIES TOOLKIT

The toolkit is available at:
http://www.librariesincommunities.ca

WHAT IS WORKING TOGETHER

Vancouver Public Library initiated the Working Together project in 2004 to develop methods for libraries to work with low-income communities through a community development approach. Funded as a demonstration project by the Office of Learning Technologies of Human Resources and Social Development Canada, funding was available for four years. Four libraries were involved in the project: Vancouver Public Library, Regina Public Library, Toronto Public Library and Halifax Regional Libraries. Each library system hired a community development librarian. The Community Development Librarian developed new ways of collaborating and partnering with community members, while working with community members to address questions of service equity, systemic barriers, and inclusive library practices.

During the course of the project, two main objectives were sought:

1) Through establishing ongoing relationships with socially-excluded people, work collaboratively with socially excluded communities to articulate and respond to their library service wants and needs
2) Identify and examine systemic barriers to library use for socially excluded people and propose policy and procedural change to address these barriers including the development of an inclusive service planning model

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY-LED SERVICE PLANNING MODEL

A community-Led Service Planning Model focuses on working collaboratively with the community. Building relationships and partnerships with the community in order to consult wit them is the foundation of this model. Understanding the community's needs as the community expresses and prioritises them is essential to developing and enacting the Community-Led Service Planning Model. This approach ensures that socially excluded community members, as well as socially mainstream community members, are represented in library planning, services and policy development. The Community-Led Service Planning Model builds inclusive libraries that are proactively welcoming to all community members.

THE COMMUNITY-LED LIBRARIES TOOLKIT

The Community-Led Libraries Toolkit discusses the techniques used by the Project staff as they worked with their communities both to identify and eliminate barriers to service and to develop and test a service model in which socially excluded people can actively participate as equals in library decision making and planning.

The toolkit has some specific objectives:
- To increase libraries' understanding of the unintended consequences of traditional library policy, procedures, and practice.
- To improve our understanding of the different ways libraries have traditionally involved communities and to promote a community-led approach for service to socially excluded communities.
- To support lasting improvements in the provision of inclusive and accessible library services for socially excluded communities
- To facilitate the empowerment of socially excluded community members through participatory service planning processes
- To foster constructive and collaborative working relationships between libraries and socially excluded communities

To achieve these objectives, the Community-Led Libraries Toolkit provides philosophical and practical guidance for all stages of the library service planning process, from developing an understanding of community and needs identification through library policy development, service planning, day-to-day customer service, staff development, and evaluation.

The toolkit is comprised of three main sections:

Part 1: Includes background and context for the Project and its experiences

Part 2: Discusses systemic barriers to library service and presents the Community-Led Service Planning Model. It also includes eight Tools for use in conjunction with the Community-Led Service Planning Model. The eight tools are: Community Entry, Community Mapping, Relationship Building, Partnerships, Program Planning, Computer Training, Collection Development, and Customer Service.

Part 3: Identifies and discusses the institutional conditions necessary to support the inclusive public library, including discussion on policy development and application, staff development, and service evaluation.

The toolkit is available in PDF download on the Working Together website at
http://www.librariesincommunities.ca

CONTACT

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