



**SASKATCHEWAN
LIBRARY
TRUSTEES'
ASSOCIATION**

**BRIEF
TO
HONOURABLE DON MORGAN
2013**

LIBRARIES DO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

INTRODUCTION

The Saskatchewan Library Trustees' Association (SLTA) extends its gratitude to the Government of Saskatchewan for the opportunity to prepare and present this Minister's Brief, and for the support shown by this Government for Public Libraries in the past.

Russ Marchuk's letter to Mayor Eton of Humboldt dated June 12, 2013 expresses very well the pride we have in our exceptional library system. It also covers the Public Libraries Act and our governance so there is no need to provide that in this Brief.

As an advocacy organization we speak for thousands of Saskatchewan residents who see public libraries as an essential service for any advanced society.

We believe a library's primary function is to provide a wide range of services to our patrons from young to old, every day, without qualification or fee.

In an age when literacy is a basic requirement for self-reliance and success the value of having this enabling resource cannot be overstated.

The range of programs is extensive and varied. We invite the Minister to visit our website (www.slta.ca) to further explore these programs.

Libraries and other public services are faced with the challenge of adapting to technological change. Interestingly, libraries have always been at the vanguard of access to knowledge and information. Technology now requires us to provide our services in an altered manner.

Our libraries provide the service of an interface between user and the information they require to achieve their goal.

The quotation "It isn't what you know, it is what you do with what you know" applies to the vital role libraries provide. When our citizens want to do something, our libraries help them get it done.

There is no shortage of information available to Saskatchewan residents but there is a definite lack of ability to mine and utilize that information. Our library staff will continue to assist citizens in accessing the information and services they need. It has become clear to the SLTA, however, that we have much more to do in promoting the diverse range of services that libraries offer. To this end the SLTA will be embarking on a "Promoting Saskatchewan Libraries" campaign this fall.

This revolution in technology and access to information provides your government with an opportunity that has never been available before. The opportunity is to help a large proportion of Saskatchewan citizens become self-sufficient and self-reliant.

Opportunities

The age of innovation provides Saskatchewan with opportunities that never existed before.

There is no impediment holding Saskatchewan back from utilizing the most productive tools ever available to humanity.

Our libraries are already connected world-wide, twenty four hours a day every day and accessible to every person in Saskatchewan.

Libraries play a significant role in helping the Province achieve some of their stated goals.

Opportunity One: Improve Student Achievement Through Enhanced Programming

The May 15th *STF Bulletin* reported the following: “Repeating an oft heard theme, Marchuk commenced his presentation by confirming the government’s ambitious espoused goal of being the best in part of its 2020 Vision that is focused in a large part on leading the nation in graduation rates while at the same time reducing the gap for First Nation and Metis students”.

The libraries of Saskatchewan provide an essential resource to help the Minister and the Saskatchewan Government change the record of the past and attain this goal. Libraries are deeply committed and involved in literacy programs for children from birth to adult education. The Library system of Saskatchewan is within easy reach of First Nations patrons. Libraries are open in the summer which is when our First Nations students start to fall behind. With a modest increase in funding these programs could be expanded throughout the Province.

Below I include information from Paul Andrews’s article, *Finnish Mathematics Teaching from a Reform Perspective*.

A study of Finnish education, which leads on PISA (international academic achievement tests) tests supports the concept that in order to achieve academic results you have to:

- a) Do something differently;
- b) Concentrate on literacy;
- c) Libraries are a valued and essential resources to achieve these results.

The first quotation that brings light to this complex problem is “**In studying foreign systems of education we should not forget that things outside the schools matter even more than things inside the schools**” (Sadler 310).

“Indeed, reading is valued so highly that not only is the Finnish library network among the densest in the world but Finns borrow more books than individuals in any other country” (Sahlberg 2007).

This study strongly supports the premise that the library system in Saskatchewan is a resource that with minimal funding dedicated to literacy coupled with other programs would have a significant impact on reaching the goals the Minister has set.

As community-based resources, libraries are ideally situated to deliver the kinds of services that would support these goals. Without additional resources, however, increased summer and evening programming remains out of reach.

Suggested Application:

1. The Province should develop a long-term plan for the update, revitalization, modernization of the provincial library system. This plan should include physical building, equipment, program, and staff that meet the needs of 21st century Saskatchewan residents.

Opportunity Two: Supporting Newcomers

Our libraries have proven their value to patrons who want to improve their English. We hear constantly from our new Canadians: “My first stop was the public library”. They are familiar with libraries in their country of origin and find their local libraries to be a helpful settlement resource. The English as Second Language patrons always are grateful - not only for English instruction, but also for the assistance of volunteers in finding a job, getting citizenship, enrolling in school, and getting a license.

These language programs rely on two critical components. The first is technology. There are excellent programs available for language instruction. In order to satisfy this ever-increasing demand adequate technology is a minimum requirement, especially in rural areas.

The second requirement is the most important. Volunteers are the lifeblood of many programs offered by our libraries including English as a Second Language. These volunteers are bright, literate, devoted to books, to reading, and to the understanding that comes with knowledge and information. Unfortunately it is proving more difficult for libraries to recruit and retain volunteers, and the success of these programs (and by extension, the success of New Canadians) is dependent on adequate staff and volunteer resources.

Regardless if the work is to be done by staff or volunteers, we do not currently have the resources to satisfy the demand of our clientele. In order to continue to support the growth and prosperity of Saskatchewan’s population, libraries must be able to effectively deliver training and support to New Canadians.

Suggested Application:

1. Technological equipment supplied to all libraries to aid and enable English as an Additional Language programming.
2. An in-service program designed to upgrade provincial library staff to the 21st century library, and the role and function staff will play.

Opportunity Three: Technological Innovation and Digital Literacy

Our libraries are changing. Libraries today are information centers; they are places where citizens go for help to find information and improve their digital literacy skills.

We have an existing library system that is struggling to service the needs of Saskatchewan people. We have bought and paid for this library system and now we have to invest to increase the potential for contemporary service delivery.

Our libraries provide inspiration, assistance, motivation, hope – all required to produce a winning Province. The current pace of technological change poses a challenge to libraries’ ability to remain current and relevant. Libraries need to have the resources to update computers and programs to meet public expectations and need.

Suggested Application:

1. Provide funding for a common baseline technology for all libraries to have available for patrons.

Opportunity Four: Literacy and Skill Development

Literacy is easy to take for granted, but there are many Saskatchewan residents who struggle with these basic skills.

The rate of functional illiteracy in Saskatchewan remains shockingly high. We in Saskatchewan cannot afford to have only 52% of our population over 16 years of age read at or above the level determined to be essential for living and working in a modern society (Southeast Regional Library). Each person who comes to the library and learns how to read and use technology is one less burden for the rest of the taxpayers. **That is a wise investment.**

Suggested Application:

1. Provide funding for a career choice program for adolescents (available online) available from every library in Saskatchewan.
2. Provide funding for expanded programming and hours for staff targeting literacy initiatives.

Opportunity Five: Telling our Story

Libraries have the potential to help our citizens become more productive and move Saskatchewan forward. The rest of the world has moved on, now it is our turn to revitalize and modernize our provincial library system. The SLTA will be working on promoting libraries in the coming year, and we would welcome the support and participation of the Provincial Government in telling the story of Saskatchewan libraries.

We can assure the Government that there is a library community in Saskatchewan waiting to be more and do more to make Saskatchewan even greater than it is.

Asking Package

In collaboration with the Provincial Library network and patrons, both present and future, the SLTA requests the Provincial Government to consider the following:

1. Libraries in the province play a vital role in achieving stated government objectives;
2. Government funding has failed to keep pace with inflationary pressures;
3. For libraries to **CONTINUE** to offer the **PRESENT LEVEL OF SERVICE** to patrons, an annual **MINIMUM OPERATIONAL GRANT OF INFLATION PLUS 2%** is required;
4. Any special projects will require additional funding;
5. The Government of Saskatchewan has a unique opportunity to achieve its mandates by making more effective use of the library system.

Work Cited

Marchuk, Russ. *Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation Bulletin* (13 May 2013): n. pag. Print

Andrews, Paul et al. *Comparative Education Review*. 2nd ed. Vol. 57. Chicago: University Chicago, 2013.
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Southeast Regional Library. Environmental Scan 2011. Southeast Regional Library, 2011.