

**PROPOSAL FOR INCREASING PARTICIPATION
OF THE VANCOUVER PUBLIC LIBRARIES'
CHILDREN AND INFANT LITERACY PROGRAMS**

For

Christie Menzo

Acting Manager of Children's and Teen Services

Vancouver Public Library

Vancouver, British Columbia

By

Jenny Bachynski

English 301 99C Student

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ABSTRACT

The Vancouver Public Library (VPL) has wonderful and diverse infant and youth programs for the public. These programs are free and accessible to anyone at all library locations across the city. The library programs are extremely important for Vancouver as they provide positive long-term impacts for the city by having literate, educated citizens. Infants also benefit greatly from being read aloud to - it increases brain development and other forms of literacy: phonological awareness, letter knowledge, and vocabulary.

The VPL does a fantastic job in offering programs that will help youth excel, but everyone would benefit by increasing the promotion of these programs to new parents, people unfamiliar with library culture, and most importantly, low-income families.

The final recommendations to the VPL in order to increase attendance are:

- 1) Use resources outside the library to promote the infant programs
 - Through the use of pamphlets and posters in locations where new parents spend time (doctor's offices, transit, birthing classes, etc.)
 - Have pamphlets sent home from the hospital with new parents in the same way the BC Health services sends out information on infant health.
- 2) Connect librarians at the DTES náča?mat ct Strathcona branch with other social services in the DTES (such as SheWay or the DTES Women's shelter) in order to increase attendance in areas where women and children may need more support.

INTRODUCTION

Library Background

The Vancouver Public Library (VPL) is an invaluable institution used by a diverse group of people throughout the city of Vancouver. Libraries offer many opportunities that can be overlooked: access for people of all backgrounds to exercise their right to learn, create, communicate, use resources, and meet like-minded people. Many of the infant and children's programs are founded on the importance of reading aloud and face to face conversation - both practices that promote literacy and language in young children. Prioritizing the success of these programs is extremely important for two specific reasons. Firstly, children's literacy greatly benefits children, as well as provides positive long-term impacts for the city by having literate, educated citizens. Secondly, the longevity of library usage will be determined by the next generation's interest in reading; people's literary interests benefit from starting at an early age.

Scope of Report

The VPL offers fantastic programs that help youth excel, but increasing attendance of the programs would be beneficial for everyone. As a parent in the community, I see young families unaware of the excellent, free resources available. There are three important questions to unpack:

- 1) What are the reasons behind families not using the programs?
- 2) Do families understand the importance of reading aloud to infants and children in order to promote literacy and language?
- 3) How is information about these programs being spread, and how can we extend the reach of that information?

Methods

The primary data has been collected from three specific avenues: VPL's Acting Manager of Children's and Teen Services, Christie Menzo, has provided stats on branch attendance and variations between branch programs. The VPL Content Marketing Lead, Mairin Kerr, has provided information on the marketing channels used. Data was collected from families, pertaining to how they utilize the programs. I have also interviewed Servane Phillips, a woman who helped bring a free children's music program to Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. This data and feedback concludes that there are ways in which to connect more with families who are unfamiliar with the VPL programs. It will be up to the VPL to decide if these recommendations work within their budget and resources.

DATA SECTION A: SURVEYING FAMILIES

Young Families' Participation

A survey was sent to different Vancouver families across the city with young children (preschool age or younger). The goal was to gain insight into how informed new parents are about the VPL children's programs, their usage of the programs, and what factors prevent participation. Of the people interviewed, 72% of them knew about the programs and 28% had not heard about them or seemed conflicted about their knowledge of them. Interestingly, everyone who knew about the programs also stated that they use, or have

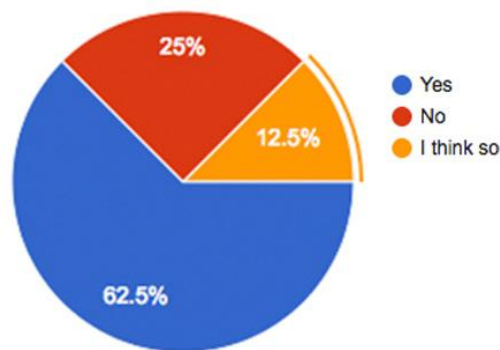


FIGURE 1: DO FAMILIES KNOW ABOUT THE VPL PROGRAMS?
 Source: Google Survey

used the programs. Families who have children in full-time childcare, still use the programs on weekends, or encourage their caregivers to attend. These statistics highlight how the VPL is fulfilling a specific need for young families in the city, and that many parents have a strong interest in early literacy for their babies and children.

Rate of Attendance

As suspected, the 37.5% of the families who haven't ever used the programs are not using them because they don't know about them. The survey found that 25% of families had their child/children attending a VPL program on a weekly basis, another 25% attended less than once a month, and 12.5% attended at least once a month. So, how are families finding out about these programs? A considerable amount of the participants - 67% of them - found out about the programs through word of mouth. The most common way being through friends and family, but also knowing people who work at the library, as well as Facebook parent groups. The other 33% found out about the programs from

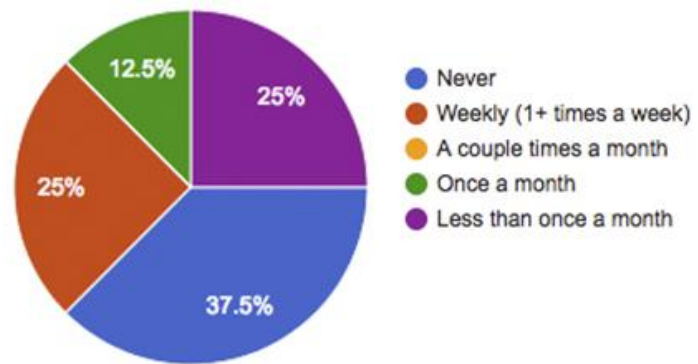


FIGURE 2: FAMILIES' PROGRAM USAGE
Source: Google Survey

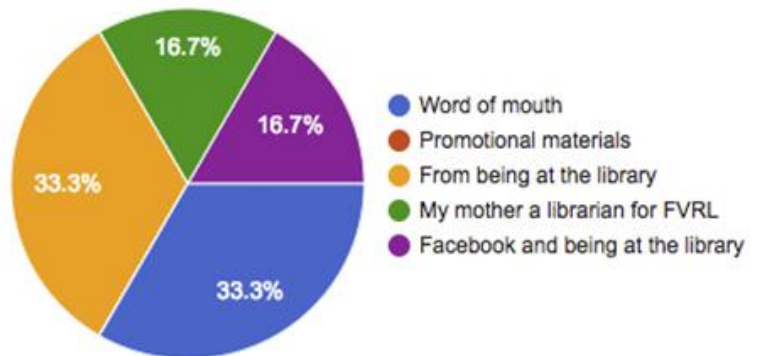


FIGURE 3: HOW FAMILIES FIND OUT ABOUT PROGRAMS
Source: Google Survey

most common way being through friends and family, but also knowing people who work at the library, as well as Facebook parent groups. The other 33% found out about the programs from

already being at the library: through librarian's suggestions, or promotional materials in the vicinity. While 12.5% of the participants have seen outside advertising of the programs, none of

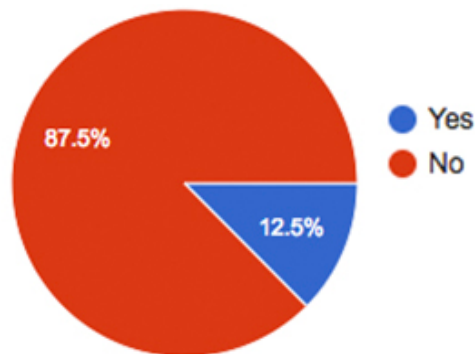


FIGURE 4: HAVE YOU SEEN OUTSIDE PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS ABOUT THE VPL PROGRAMS?

Source: Google Survey

them used this as a reason for finding out about the programs. 87.5% of participants haven't ever seen any promotional advertising throughout the city for these children's programs.

Factors that Prevent Participation

The first year of maternity/paternity

leave taken by many parents in Canada can increase attendance. This becomes more complex as new babies are added to the family, children head off to preschool, or parents go back to work.

Of the participants, 14% of them completely stopped using the programs once they went back to work or a child started attending school. It was also shown that certain preschools and daycares have librarians visit the schools to provide similar programs to the children. The primary reason for not attending was scheduling. Every participant would attend more if their schedules allowed for it - this was the case for parents who were working out-of-home jobs, as well as those working as full-time parents. Over 50% of the participants pick other paid activities for their children because they fit better into their schedules. The second most common reason - as 25% of the participants declared - was smaller class sizes. A less common, but voiced reason, was having the desire for programs where young children can attend without mandatory parental attendance.

DATA SECTION B: BRANCH ATTENDANCE

Branch Numbers

The VPL takes monthly stats on the attendance of branch programs. The two branches that consistently have the the highest branch attendance are the Central Library (located in central downtown Vancouver) and the Mount Pleasant branch (located on Vancouver's populated Main street). There is a large fluctuation on a monthly basis of branch attendance, which would make it inaccurate to rank the branches by popularity. There seems to be two correlations that can be

	JANUARY 2018		FEBRUARY 2018		MARCH 2018		APRIL 2018		MAY 2018		JUNE 2018	
	Programs	Attendance	Programs	Attendance	Programs	Attendance	Programs	Attendance	Programs	Attendance	Programs	Attendance
Central	91	3485	103	3881	80	2804	100	3594	112	3891	81	3056
Britannia Branch	30	955	31	1084	21	648	27	767	38	1226	23	1320
Champlain Heights Branch	18	357	22	432	19	305	24	518	26	630	33	1252
Collingwood Branch	10	240	12	300	15	333	14	335	18	950	33	2371
Dunbar Branch	22	620	32	689	16	434	31	870	35	781	19	641
Firehall Branch	7	238	12	417	8	244	11	398	10	437	27	1369
Fraserview Branch	23	421	22	529	17	357	14	405	18	797	40	1466
Hastings Branch	20	378	16	275	17	245	19	374	24	665	27	1381
Joe Fortes Branch	18	459	23	582	17	399	18	448	16	429	18	600
Kensington Branch	25	692	27	801	23	588	25	771	32	1258	38	1593
Kerrisdale Branch	15	320	22	428	18	399	19	458	16	519	20	1023
Kitsilano Branch	19	1063	19	872	15	542	18	821	18	827	24	1412
Marpole Branch	12	235	14	180	12	229	21	385	20	465	39	1248
Mount Pleasant Branch	29	1511	34	1543	22	889	28	1359	56	2560	43	1293
néca?mat ct Strathcona Branch	24	344	30	541	36	518	26	607	31	472	34	749
Oakridge Branch	22	821	22	893	17	761	20	829	30	1685	41	1785
Renfrew Branch	26	661	24	604	26	723	24	951	32	873	53	1965
South Hill Branch	11	248	10	216	16	315	10	238	16	675	16	725
Terry Salman Branch	25	956	32	1197	22	908	32	1126	36	1452	25	1222
West Point Grey Branch	16	409	15	373	10	308	19	646	28	1052	26	1544
Total	463	14413	522	15837	427	11949	500	15900	612	21644	660	28015

	JULY 2018		AUGUST 2018		SEPTEMBER 2018		OCTOBER 2018		NOVEMBER 2018		DECEMBER 2018	
	Programs	Attendance	Programs	Attendance	Programs	Attendance	Programs	Attendance	Programs	Attendance	Programs	Attendance
Central	95	3437	144	4392	70	2808	106	3682	128	4272	57	1978
Britannia Branch	13	421	10	340	15	527	28	1038	31	976	13	402
Champlain Heights Branch	11	402	8	786	16	474	28	734	29	571	15	310
Collingwood Branch	15	418	9	172	11	462	9	216	13	245	9	150
Dunbar Branch	24	502	17	388	11	280	21	409	16	391	9	208
Firehall Branch	15	445	2	160	14	443	24	654	28	722	8	207
Fraserview Branch	14	383	12	723	9	219	19	591	24	723	7	218
Hastings Branch	16	423	10	513	7	177	15	334	17	388	17	290
Joe Fortes Branch	20	450	17	260	14	555	49	1338	21	523	36	513
Kensington Branch	20	681	10	223	24	1282	33	1074	27	906	15	413
Kerrisdale Branch	23	578	17	870	12	371	20	576	20	640	11	185
Kitsilano Branch	20	669	15	1081	16	762	25	1191	25	904	8	374
Marpole Branch	19	507	13	532	18	372	17	362	19	277	8	103
Mount Pleasant Branch	38	1492	17	817	19	1034	34	1610	30	1538	12	715
néca?mat ct Strathcona Branch	20	253	17	291	12	192	21	366	21	414	14	244
Oakridge Branch	22	1066	14	714	18	1340	24	1121	24	1129	8	191
Renfrew Branch	31	1099	23	777	23	1524	28	679	29	680	22	492
South Hill Branch	15	504	12	418	10	497	12	250	4	81	2	34
Terry Salman Branch	22	924	8	1432	28	1041	34	1175	29	1005	12	602
West Point Grey Branch	16	388	9	217	13	837	19	525	16	375	8	190
Total	469	15042	384	15106	360	15197	566	17925	551	16760	291	7819

FIGURE 5: VPL BRANCH PROGRAM ATTENDANCE STATISTICS - ANNUAL

SOURCE: VANCOUVER PUBLIC LIBRARY - CHRISTIE MENZO - ACTING MANAGER OF CHILDREN'S AND TEEN SERVICES

made: first, branches that offer more programs have higher attendance (a testament to the quality of the programs), and secondly, areas of higher population density have higher attendance. This is evident because the Central Library (which has the highest attendance) is in a population dense centre, as well as the Mount Pleasant area.

Factors that Promote a Branch

In terms of branch usage, the family's location almost always determined which branch they attend. The study showed that 100% of the participants' primary reason for choosing a location was proximity to their home. While proximity is the most important factor, there were others as well; 33% of the families had secondary reasons that included: avoiding busier branches, attending for a beloved librarian, or being in a different part of the city for the day. Interestingly, the Mount Pleasant branch and the Central Library branch were the two branches that were singled out as branches people would travel to visit. There is not a strong correlation in the branch attendance numbers to conclude that income levels affect the programs success: what seems important is that families know about the programs and they have a library close to where they live.

DATA SECTION C: PROVIDING SOCIAL PROGRAMS IN THE DTES

Literacy and music are both engaging activities that aid in infant brain development. This section explores how to provide parents in low-income areas with these types of programs.

Interview with Servane Phillips

Servane Phillips is a lawyer who has helped organized a free Music Together program in the DTES for single mothers. Music Together is a program built on the foundation that children learn best when parents are immersed with them in a musical environment of singing, imitation, and

play. I was interested in hearing from Ms. Phillips about the attendance of the music program, what specific challenges or successes were experienced, and how word was spread about the program. The program had handpicked women and children who would attend on a weekly basis - this was not a drop in program and one that usually cost \$170 per semester per child. Ms. Phillips expressed that while there were women who initially signed up then didn't attend, most of the women who attended the first class did continue to participate in the whole semester.

Promoting Attendance in the DTES

What was the driving factor in creating an enjoyable and effective class for all the participants?

According to Ms. Phillips, it was having a teacher who was open minded and didn't make assumptions about someone's situation or home life. Everyone needed to feel that they were in a safe space to ensure continued participation. While there was an array of different ages and



FIGURE 6: MOTHER AND CHILD AT A MUSIC TOGETHER CLASS
SOURCE: MUSIC TOGETHER AT THE YWCA CRABTREE CORNER

abilities of the children attending, Ms. Phillips said that every child made social, musical, and behavioural leaps, and many of the mothers felt new connections with their children. How did the women find out about this program? Ms. Phillips believes that the success of this program was due to having help from other institutions in the DTES (in this case the YWCA) to connect

the right people together. The people at the YWCA already worked with these families and knew what programs would suit them best and if they had stable enough lifestyles to attend regularly.

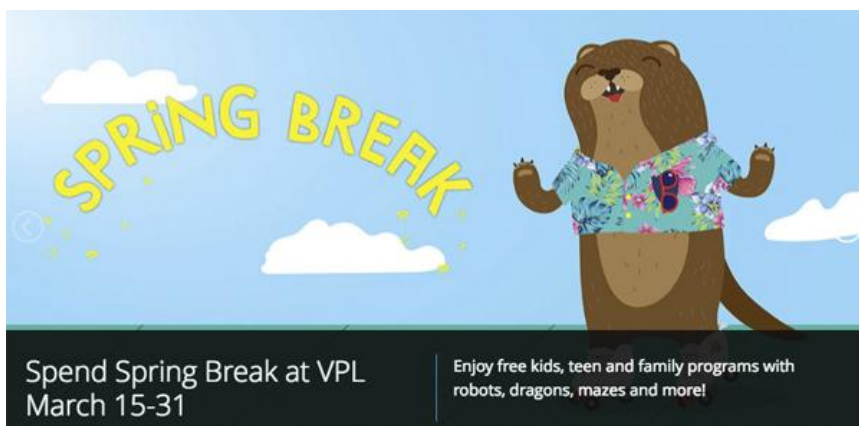
Vancouver's DTES Branch

Vancouver's Downtown Eastside branch (the n'ca?mat ct Strathcona Branch, highlighted in red in Figure 2) is an area with different challenges for drawing attendance: a higher concentration of citizens struggling with addiction, mental health issues, and poverty. The n'ca?mat ct Strathcona branch has below average attendance, but is not glaringly lower than many other branches. The data does show a significant difference in the n'ca?mat ct Strathcona branch and the Mount Pleasant branch: in August 2018, both of the branches offered 17 programs that month, and the n'ca?mat ct Strathcona branch had 291 participants while the Mount Pleasant Branch had 817 attend. Due to demographics of the DTES, the VPL offers Cantonese baby story times as well as all the other story times offered at all other locations. We can use information from Ms. Phillips to understand that instability in the community can affect attendance, and different strategies may be necessary to promote the VPL programs.

DATA SECTION D: MARKETING THE VPL PROGRAMS

VPL's Promotional Channels

The VPL has diverse promotional channels that are in place to spread information about the



library children's programs.

I spoke with Mairin Kerr -

VPL's Content Marketing

Lead - to understand the

scope of these channels.

FIGURE 7: VPL FAMILY PROGRAMS WEBSITE BANNER
SOURCE: VPL WEBSITE - WWW.VPL.CA

The two main channels are brochures and posters. There are brochures that summarize the children and teen programs for that period, and posters for each individual program and series. These are distributed across all 21 branches, as well as community centres. There are also homepage sliders for VPL.ca, which promotes events when people are visiting the website. A handful of other channels are offered for people who already use the library: weekly e-newsletters which highlight the programs and targets caregivers and parents, a monthly e-newsletter sent to subscribers about teen programs, and wonderful social media accounts (Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook). In terms of outside promotional tools, teens run their own accounts to target other teens, and some programs have partners so that networks can expand (for the VPL as well as the partnering businesses).

How Often Channels Change

Brochures are refreshed quarterly, the posters get updated annually, and the social media techniques change more regularly - depending on the trends and what is working best. What about the differences of promotional channels per branch? There is consistency throughout the branches. The main difference is they do work with local partners in order to target specific areas - this being the example given when asked about ways they promote the children's programs in the DTES.



FIGURE 8: VPL BABY PROGRAM POSTER SEEN IN LIBRARY
SOURCE: FIREHALL LIBRARY BRANCH

DATA SECTION E: CHILDREN'S LITERACY

The Benefits of Children's Literacy

There are an array of reasons as to why the library is such an important institution. Pamela Chen's "Associations between Public Library use and Reading Aloud among Families with Young Children" demonstrates the strong correlation between reading aloud and a child's brain development. People may think that because a young baby or child is too young to read, that literacy is not important, but emergent literacy proves otherwise. This type of literacy includes phonological awareness, letter knowledge, and vocabulary (221). The strongest predictors of emergent literacy is reading aloud between children and adults - this doesn't only provide linguistic benefits but cognitive and social ones as well (221). According to Chen, parents who had taken their 6-18 month old child to the library, felt they were better informed about the library programs for children. Thus, showing that people who are immersed in library culture tend to have children who are read aloud to more, and as a result have higher emergent literacy skills (223).

The Benefits of Libraries For Young Children and their Parents

Libraries offer different value than reading at home. Libraries give children a chance to be their own gatekeepers. In "World Book Day: Without libraries we are less human and more profoundly alone" Nicola Davis shows that when children are very young, their book options come to them through their parents; they are already domesticated. Libraries allow children to seek out their own interests and secure a sense of agency. Davis offers that libraries and the

people who work within them provide humanity. They create a human experience, which makes us (and children) feel more alive and less alone - something that is invaluable for new parents.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

The findings show that people who know about the library programs have used them or are using them. There seems to be some drop off in attendance of the infant programs as children hit the one-year mark and parents go back to work. While this does seem unfortunate, it is important to highlight that reading aloud in the first year of a child's life increases emergent literacy, and also builds library habits in young parents. Another key finding: the correlation between family incomes and attendance is less important than proximity to a library. The DTES branch (the area of the city with arguably the most poverty) still had consistent attendance numbers, although below average. In terms of promotion, the VPL does an outstanding job in promoting the library, and people who use the library are taking advantage of the wonderful programs offered. The only issue is that people who are fully unaware of the VPL programs aren't finding out about the library through outside promotional channels.

Recommendations

The quality of the VPL programs are fantastic - the only criticism found was that class sizes could get a bit large, which only solidifies the need for these programs. The promotional channels that target people who are in the library or are already immersed in VPL culture (through social media or other outlets) are effective and informative. My two main recommendations would be as follows:

- 1) Use outside resources to promote the infant programs throughout the city. Ideally, this would include targeting all people who have just had a child and may not be receiving word of mouth about the programs. When a parent comes home from the hospital in BC, they are given educational materials from BC Health Services which offers resources. The VPL could consider this type of strategy for getting parents attention early on. Alternatively, having pamphlets distributed in places where people with children frequent (doctor's offices, or transit) would be effective as well.
- 2) Create more attendance at the DTES náca?mat ct Strathcona branch by connecting with other social services in the area, such as SheWay or the DTES Women's shelter. If resources allowed, librarians could hold promotional story time classes at these other locations, in order to offer women and children a safe and familiar space to learn about the importance of literacy. The hope would be that these women would eventually feel comfortable enough to attend programs at the library and establish healthy library habits.

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