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SLA Conference Report

On May 2-4, 2018, I attended the Saskatchewan Libraries Conference and CFLA National Forum. My attendance was made possible through the Continuing Education Grant from SLA and sponsorship from the Saskatoon Public Library. The conference impacted my professional development in a couple ways. I created new contacts in the library world and improved relationships with existing contacts both in SPL and other librarians throughout Saskatchewan. After the conference, I found myself inspired to try new ideas and be more creative in my problem solving. An unofficial theme of the conference seemed to be “Just because the library already has a system on how to do something doesn’t mean it has to stay that way.” Because I will be starting a new position at SPL in July as Neighbourhood Librarian at the Dr. Freda Ahenakew Branch, I feel more prepared for the community engagement and networking aspects of the job.

There were a few presentations, lectures, or seminars that stood out to me during the course of the event. The CFLA Forum kicked off with a panel on Artificial Intelligence. I am the first to admit that I do not have a whole lot of knowledge about what artificial intelligence is. To be honest, I still do not fully understand many aspects of it. There was a lot of talk about math equations that I do not believe I have any hope at ever comprehending; however, it did provide me with the reassurance that robots will not have an uprising and take over humankind any time soon. I was inspired to think about how artificial intelligence (AI) can be used to help the library’s efficiency rather than threaten it. I would love to one day see AI contribute to collection development. Currently with SPL’s system, the people doing the ordering and sending materials to each branch are not the same people who are withdrawing the items that are not circulating. Furthermore, even though collection services has access to statistics, items that are stolen or missing do not show up as circulating and therefore are not treated as something we need to order more of even though they may be in high demand. If an AI program was used to analyze which materials are most popular and do not circulate at each branch and give suggestions for collection development, our patrons would have better access to the materials they want.

Another presentation that had a big impact on me was “Really, how safe is your library?” from Kitty Pope, CEO of Windsor Public Library. She explained that Windsor Public Library only has two rules: 1) Don’t bother anyone and 2) Don’t do anything illegal. Therefore, sleeping in the library is allowed at Windsor Public Library, which I found to be quite interesting. The branch I work at is located in inner-city Saskatoon, and safety issues often arise as a result of that. Many of the safety issues Pope discussed reflected challenges my branch has faced. Pope’s suggestions on how to ensure safety for both staff and patrons of the library were quite useful. She suggested an annual security audit with police where they will walk around and provide advice on how to make the library safer. I like this idea for two reasons: 1) Obviously I don’t see a downside to a professional’s opinion on making our library as safe as it can be, and 2) Libraries and police can have a somewhat contentious relationship as we value our patrons’ privacy first and foremost and often can’t help police very much when they come in. I’d like to see a better working relationship between my branch and the local police. Another small but effective

suggestion Pope had was to train staff to walk around the library every hour and make eye contact with patrons. This seems somewhat trivial, but the impact of being present in every area of the library rather than just at the desk would really make the library feel like a safer space for everyone.

Lynda Monahan and Judy McNaughton's "Relational Artists, Collaborations and Community" presentation demonstrated how many possibilities there are with creating partnerships with artists and community organizations. Their presentation got me very excited about my new position as Neighbourhood Librarian and the opportunities for partnerships that I will have in that position. McNaughton and Monahan formed partnerships with hospitals, prisons, seniors' centres, and other organizations. Most of the time the partnership became a writing group that McNaughton, the relational artist, would run while Monahan would seek out and establish partnerships and facilitate the group's needs. Some suggestions that were provided on running these writing groups were: have a balance of light-hearted and heavier assignments/topics; the organizer must also do the assignments and be willing to be open if you expect that of the group you're working with; and find ways to get the group comfortable opening up to you (McNaughton achieved this by bringing her dog with her to the first time meeting with a group). I found McNaughton and Monahan's presentation inspiring and look forward to forming partnerships of my own once I am more involved in community engagement as Neighbourhood Librarian.

In conclusion, I am grateful I had the opportunity to attend Saskatchewan Libraries Conference and CFLA National Forum. It was great to see what other librarians throughout Saskatchewan and other parts of Canada are achieving through their community engagement and passion for improving library services. It made me hopeful for the future of libraries and motivated to me to make a difference in the community of my own branch's lives by offering them programs and services they truly need.