Factors that affect PARTICIPATION

There are many factors that affect participation in traditional Summer Reading Club programs, offered by libraries around the province, but more so by those living in remote communities.

Most, if not all, of the remote communities on the north coast and interior do not have easy access to books, for adults or children. The school libraries are open during the school year, but only during school hours, only for the students, and usually not during the summer. This means that adults and preschoolers have no access to books at any time, and school-aged children only have access during the school year.

The reality is that even if we can get reading logs into the communities, and people in the communities who want to use our resources, the lack of access to books makes it pretty hard to run a summer reading program.

Lax Kwalaams school is renovating their building to enable access to the school library after-hours, and possibly during the summer, for all members of their community! We will then be able to donate books for their library to use or give away to their families.

The Rupert Library is also promoting setting up library accounts in the villages so that the residents will have access to audio and digital books off of our website, but the cost of devices to access the books can definitely be an issue, as can the cost of internet access. There is also an issue of reliable internet connections in both remote and not-so-remote communities. Members on this panel have experienced such issues on a regular basis, including during both of our Skype calls in preparation for today!

The distance from some of these communities to the local libraries makes library visits nearly impossible. Residents in the western-most communities in Hazelton’s service area must travel 75 kms, one way, to visit the library. That’s the equivalent of traveling from downtown Vancouver to Abbotsford! There is no public transportation to some of the communities and inadequate transportation to others. In addition, many people do not have driver’s licences or access to vehicles.

Prince Rupert’s four communities lie north, south and west of us. Lax Kwalaams lies 30 kms to the north, and is accessible only by a 40 minute car and passenger ferry ride and a 40 minute drive, at the cost of $32 for car and driver. Metlakatla is reached by a 15 minute ferry ride, costing $9 one way for adults. Unfortunately the ferry only runs during the day, on weekdays. Kitkatla is 60 kms southwest of Rupert and is serviced by a twice-weekly passenger ferry, at the cost of $31 per adult one-way, or a 20 minute floatplane flight at the cost of $115 each way. Hartley Bay is the farthest south, at 90 kms. The ferry ride is 3 1/2 hours long and costs $60 per adult, while the floatplane flights are one hour long and cost $260 each way. As you can see, the cost of ‘coming to town’ is prohibitive for many families.

The cost of hiring someone to run a summer program is also a huge factor. Lax Kwalaams was able to secure a grant three years ago to run a 4 week program, but not since then. Prince Rupert does not have the budget to send staff, or hire staff in the communities, but could possibly partner with the communities if they are applying elsewhere for such grants. Hazelton has relied on Success by Six funds for their satellite SRCs, but with the demise of Success by Six, they are having to look elsewhere for funding.

With the schools being closed over the summer, there is also the issue of finding space in the remote communities to hold programs, and preferably at no cost. Hazelton has been fortunate in never having to pay for a venue to date.
Delivering books and materials into remote areas can also prove to be difficult, as there is a charge to ship freight by air or by boat. In the past Hazelton has partnered with the ‘Lit Limo Book Bus’ to deliver donated books into the communities, but unfortunately the bus has failed its safety inspection and is off the road right now.

Creativity and flexibility are invaluable. Sometimes there are events in the communities that call for both. It could be that the community is busy fishing, so your program may need to be moved by a week or two. Or it could be that members of the community have passed away, and changes be made to accommodate the grieving process.

Above all, it is imperative to be patient with the process. You never know when small seeds that have been planted years ago bloom into something well-worth the wait!