Partnerships

Partnerships can come in a variety of forms. Whether you’re looking for ways to: bring First Nations families into the library, have accurate content in your programs, get SRC materials and books into the communities or run a complete program in a community, there are an array of potential partners to help along the way.

The communities themselves will be your biggest and most important partners, remembering that no two communities are alike. Foremost in the whole process is being aware of, and respectful of, the proper way to approach the communities with ideas and plans. Respect the knowledge and protocol of each community. The last thing anyone would want to do is tell the communities what we think they need, or should be doing. Instead, we can ask if there’s anything we can do for them, to help in any way. (By providing reading logs, manual and program ideas and materials, handout masters to photocopy, gently-used books for the families to read, a way to loan library books to their program or community members, help download audio- and digital-books from the library’s website, or piggy-back on any other summer programs they may already be running). It is extremely beneficial to have personal connections or contacts in the communities, and First Nations staff in our libraries, to guide and educate in proper protocol and procedures.

Learn as much about the community as you can. The communities around Prince Rupert each have their own websites, with a wealth of information on the community, their history and culture.

Individuals you may already know within their community, or yours, can help guide you.

Our library has new connections in two of our communities through people who have recently returned or relocated there. One was a fellow partner at our SuccessbySix table, and one worked with our local Health Unit. Both have expressed a desire to have our library involved in their communities, and we’ve been invited to meet community leaders about this possibility.

Look to your local school district for resources and connections. The Prince Rupert School District has an Aboriginal Education department, complete with a mirad of resources and locally produced material. I am hoping to borrow some for this year’s SRC. They also have a Sm’algyax online talking dictionary, which we can put to good use for wordsearches and other activities.

Find out if the schools in the communities are part of the public school system, or if they are independent schools. Prince Rupert and Hazelton have both within their service areas. You may already have contacts in the school district that can guide you to the right person to approach. And if you are having trouble reaching the independent schools, you may get help through the community’s band office. The schools or band offices may also be helpful at finding space to run programs or locate bookshelves/totes in the community.

Share your ideas with your coworkers and board members. You never know what connections they may already have, or know who to ask. In our case, a board member learned through his day job that Hartley Bay is interested in connecting with us, and having books in the community and possibly on their ferry.

Sometimes ideas come to fruition only to fall away, or fall apart, for a variety of reasons. The timing could be wrong, there could be a lack of people or resources to carry it through or continue on, the community may have more urgent priorities, or protocol may require things be set aside until a later date. It’s important to not give up, but accept that now may not be the right time. Things may change, and it may work in the future. It’s important to recognize the difference between offering ideas and pushing them on others.
In our case, I thought that having books on the Lax Kw’Alaams ferry would be a good way for families to pass the 45 minute trip. We donated a tote of books and magazines, but we were never contacted to refill it. We brought another box of books, but when we weren’t contacted again, we set the project aside and may try it again in the future.

Funding, or lack there of, can definitely make or break any plans you may have. But partnerships, past or present, can sometimes be a saving grace.

Hazelton has developed strong connections with the public health nurses in the area, and often uses the health centres in the villages as venues for their programs. They also have close connections with the early childhood services in the area.

Hazelton had used grants from Success by Six to fund their facilitators in each of the communities, at the cost of $1,000 per site, averaging 7-10 sites each year. With the demise of Success by Six, they have applied to the Bulkey Valley Child Development Centre for funding, but have yet to hear back. In the meantime, they have applied to the local health authority for a grant to get them through this summer. They feel that without those long-standing relationships with Northern Health and the Child Development Centre, their SRC outreach programs would be facing huge difficulties this year.