



WHITINSVILLE SOCIAL LIBRARY COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUPS SUMMARY REPORT 2022

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS = 6

- **Focus Group #1** (4/12/22 10:00 am - 11:30 am) = 4
- **Focus Group #2** (4/13/22 6:00 pm - 7:30 pm) = 2

1. WHAT IS THE VERY FIRST WORD YOU THINK OF WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT THE LIBRARY?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Books (x3) • Calm | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enlightenment • Helpful | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiet |
|--|--|---|

MISC. COMMENT: Enlightenment in various forms (books, movies, CDs). The Library offers a lot.

2. TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY AND ABOUT THE LIBRARY PROGRAMS AND SERVICES YOU USE. OR, IF YOU DON'T USE THE LIBRARY, PLEASE SHARE WHY NOT.

- Pre-pandemic, one participant visited the Library to browse the books and magazines. Post-pandemic, she used the ILL to order books and quickly get in and out of the library. Misses the feel of a book and a place of respite. Loves the smell of the Library and books.
- A participant's husband and she reserve books, which she picks up at the Library. They get a lot of books on CD, especially for her husband. She gets physical books. She loves to sit in the Library and read, but she doesn't do it frequently.
- A participant's wife likes physical books and orders them. When COVID began, he started reading on his tablet. The best part of reading on his tablet is that you can make the print bigger. He read 39 books during the pandemic. He has a book reserved and is waiting for it now. When he goes shopping, he glances at the newspapers and then accesses interesting articles via the Library's periodicals.
- A participant generally reserves books through CW/MARS. She picks up books in person. When she returns them, she browses the books. She's been using the Library for 60 years. She likes:
 - Everything about the building; it's welcoming, soothing, and enlightening.
 - That there are books in the front, near the entrance.
 - The memoir club is meeting this week.
 - That there's a place in CWMARS for lists, which she uses
- A participant attended a Civil War program and another interesting one about space exploration. As an engineer, the participant is interested in these kinds of programs.

- One participant noted that she doesn't usually see things on the board for adults. Seems like they're just for kids, but kid-focused activities don't interest her.
- A participant doesn't look for activities that are going on at the Library. She just retired, so she looks forward to attending them in the future. She just started volunteering and joined the Friends group.
- One participant has a teen and an elementary-aged child. The family primarily uses the book hold system. When his children were young, they attended Library programs, like tutoring, donuts with dad, etc. Sometimes, their teen visits the Library after school.
- A participant has four young children and visits the Library weekly. Children's Librarian Heather is a great resource for questions. She loves reading new releases and young adult books.

3. WHICH LIBRARY RESOURCES OR MATERIALS DO YOU VALUE THE MOST?

- Participant values historical fiction and some classics. She read as many of Dickens' and Hemingway's works as possible. She enjoys their use of language; it's beautiful and eloquent.
- Over the years, the participant read a lot of detective stories. The TV show, *Spencer for Hire*, was based on a series of books based in Boston, and many local places were mentioned. He read the Wright Brothers' book. He relates to these kinds of books.
- The participant likes fiction—specifically novels. Has a list of favorite authors. Since she started volunteering, I've been exposed to the section on nonfiction, and I find many of these interesting.
- The participant is a passionate cookbook addict. She has about 300 of her cookbooks—they are timeless. She also likes instructional books about something she's trying to learn. She also likes DVDs (Agatha Christie, Poirot, et al.). She loves the vernacular of the '30s. Doesn't usually go for fiction.
- None of the participants thought the Library should get rid of anything. Even if they aren't personally interested in a particular Library offering, they wouldn't want other people not to be able to access it.
- The participant values children's and adult nonfiction, new releases, and young adult books. She used to love the STEM kits and backpacks for kids to borrow.
- The participant makes recommendations to librarians regarding what books and materials shouldn't be in the young adult section. I also make recommendations for books they should get.

4. LET'S PRETEND WE'RE DESIGNING OUR OWN LIBRARY—WHAT WE THINK IS THE PERFECT LIBRARY. WHAT DO YOU SEE WHEN YOU IMAGINE IT?

INTERIOR IMPROVEMENT IDEAS:

- **Reconfigure/Add Spaces (x5):** We should create new spaces that are cozy with soft lighting, so you can cozy up with a book and have a nice cup of coffee - like Barnes & Noble. (x2) || Ideally, children's and adult areas would be separated by a sound barrier. If they were enclosed, you could have a more comfortable adult space. There

isn't much room in that space, and there isn't enough land to enlarge the space. || It would be nice to have more space for the books. || Why can't we move the children downstairs so that there is a quiet place for adults upstairs?

- **Increase Maintenance/Repairs (x3):** Needs lots of maintenance as the building is beginning to deteriorate. || The Grandfather clock should work all the time. It's often not working. || Inside and outside need upkeep.
- **Add Signage (x2):** I asked my girls about this last night. One of them came up with the idea that books should be grouped with signage, like in Barnes and Noble. More signage is needed. || Nonfiction is all downstairs, and it's open to the public. Nobody knows it's there.
- **Misc. (x4):** A new facility needs to be on one floor for disabled individuals. || Wants a bigger teen room with comfy, cozy spots to sit. || Cubicles for privacy || Tables with built-in phone chargers.

EXTERIOR IMPROVEMENT IDEA: The Library needs to invest in fixing up the grounds. Some trees need to come down. More planting is needed.

MISC. IDEA: Participants agreed that the Library should offer a community gathering room that is available to rent. (x2)

MISC. UNRELATED IDEAS:

- **Programs (x3):** Sponsor "meet the director" programs so community members can get to know who she is. || Offer an occasional historical tour of the Library. On a tour, someone could teach attendees how to use CWMARS. || Offer activities for tweens and children (culture, art, language, etc.).
- **Collections:** Toys for kids to play with (blocks, animals, play kitchen, etc.) while a caregiver reads to another child.

5. HOW CAN THE LIBRARY'S PHYSICAL SPACE BE IMPROVED?

- **Increase Accessibility (x3):** We need to make the nonfiction area more accessible. || Accessibility is difficult from the front. || All one level would be ideal.
- **Misc. (x3):** Move the children downstairs and nonfiction upstairs. || Upgrade the building's energy efficiency. The old steam furnace is not efficient. || Parking isn't great.

MISC. UNRELATED IDEA: Promote the Library's volunteer program. While the participant volunteers for long shifts, you can go volunteer for one hour a week.

6. HOW CAN THE LIBRARY IMPROVE ITS PROGRAMS AND SERVICES?

- **Program Ideas (x3):** Offer a variety of book clubs of different genres. || Offer community resources besides books, like educational classes on tough topics:

Medicare info, investing for beginners, mutual funds, buying a first home, nutritional literacy, parenting, how to plan a wedding, life skills, parenting a child with a disability, etc. || Need more author talks, cultural events, and learning events for adults.

- **Add In-Person Programs (x2):** Offer more in-person events || No parent of young children wants to do Zoom events. Resume in-person storytimes, crafts, etc.
- **Misc. Ideas (x2):** Offer more adult programs. Everything seems to be tailored to either young kids or seniors. || Offer activities on Saturday afternoons and late afternoons during the week.

MISC. COMMENT: The Senior Center and schools present programs about many of the topics mentioned. The Library could provide information and refer people to their activities versus offering duplicate versions at the Library.

UNRELATED IDEAS—ENHANCE MARKETING (x): People don't know that this is Northbridge's library, not a private library in Whitinsville. Communicate this more effectively, so people understand the Library is for everyone. (x4) || Outdoor sign is just focused on kids' programs. It's challenging to find information about adult programs. Better marketing for adult programs is needed. (x2)

7. DO YOU AND YOUR FAMILY ACCESS LIBRARY INFORMATION AND RESOURCES ONLINE?

- **Online Library Information Sources (x9):** Several participants don't use Facebook (x6) || One participant visits the Library's Facebook page || Participant rarely accesses the Library's website. Gets all her Library information from Facebook. || Participant visited the Library website when she first moved here. It was pretty easy to navigate.
- **CW/MARS (x2):** Likes the face recognition on CW/MARS website || No one has issues with the CW/MARS website

MISC. COMMENTS:

- WorldCat is used by librarians to get rare books. People can access this catalog and ask the Library to request the book for the patron.
- Kanopy is a streaming service that patrons can use to access movies through the Library.

8. WHAT TECHNOLOGY DO YOU THINK THE LIBRARY SHOULD FOCUS ON OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

- **Offer Classes/Technology Support (x3):** Provide instruction regarding how to use devices and programs. || Help children research different topics, especially STEM. || Offer programs for gamers, animation, computer programming, and robotics. We need an open forum for kids to learn fun things.

- **Enhance Access to Devices/Applications (x3):** Would love for kids to have access to expensive computer programs the schools use (e.g., Adobe Photoshop). || I see people borrow Kindles || Offer Lego and robotics software kids would like to use.
- **Misc.:** Would love for there to be one application to provide access to all the book catalogs (e.g., CW/MARS, MESCOAN, etc.). It's a small annoyance to have to move from one app to another, but I wish it was more seamless.

MISC. COMMENT: The Library is a place where we don't need technology. Physical books should be encouraged there, so they remain part of our culture.

9. ARE THERE ANY BARRIERS TO SERVICE—THINGS THAT IMPEDE YOUR ABILITY TO RECEIVE THE SERVICE YOU WANT OR NEED FROM THE LIBRARY?

- **Late Fees/Fines (x16):** Fines are not a detriment to using the Library. The Library is a community service. We have to share. (x4) || Fines aren't too much of a usage detriment to low-income residents (x4) || The Library does a great job reminding people of when things are due, and the fines are negligible. (x4). || Fines don't bother me. It's not a barrier to my family's use of the Library. || I recognize I come from a place of privilege and can replace a book or pay a fine if needed. || You're more likely to take care of a book if you have a reason to return it. || It's such a minimal fee. I don't think many people realize this, but the librarians will work with you and waive the fee. There is a way to get around them.
- **Hours (x5):** The hours are great. (x4) || A participant said hours are not convenient. The Saturday hours are too short. Families with kids in sports can't come. She knows the Library's open late during the week, but it's difficult for working parents to get there.
- **Misc.:** We need more new, popular books in circulation. Waiting for holds takes too long. It's frustrating.

10. HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO HAVE A GOOD LIBRARY IN OUR COMMUNITY?

- **Very Important (x6):** I'd be outraged if the Library closed. (x3) || The Library is a very important resource for all ages, generations, and socioeconomic groups. || I would be devastated if the Library closed, but I know some peers with young children who never go to the library and just wouldn't care. || I would be concerned and worried if the Library closed, but I would find another way to get my books.
- **Library Advocacy (x3):** In the past, the Library was temporarily closed until the town was in better financial shape. When it closed, it had a big impact on the community. People need to speak up for the Library to ensure it receives the necessary funding. || Participants never knew you needed to vote to support the Library's budget. (x2)
- There's a warm feeling in the Library. The participant loves the workers.
- This is a community full of families. The Library does quite well for such a small town. People in other towns are shocked that it offers so much.
- Our Library is in the middle of big city libraries with lots of space and programs and small community libraries that offer nothing but books on shelves.

11. WHAT ISSUES NOW FACING THE TOWN DO YOU THINK MAY IMPACT THE LIBRARY?

- **Funding Pressures (x3):** Funding may become an issue because so many people aren't aware of Library and what it offers. I know someone who lives right behind it and has never been inside. || Economic support needs to be pushed. || Economize. You can get a lot of community members to do things for free.
- **Need for Increased Advocacy (x2):** What has been spent on the Library in the last five years? There needs to be advocacy. All these programs are not free. Unless people advocate for these things, they don't happen. (x2)
- **Interest in New Programs (x2):** We should have TED Talks at the Library. || Library should provide retraining or career refocusing programs due to changes in the economy.
- **Misc. Potential Challenges (x5):** Will the Library be appreciated and used in the future? It's a big concern for the next generation. || Books could become obsolete. || Tech could grow and take over. || People may stop wanting to gather. They may only socialize online. || Library may get to a point where books aren't on their shelves because they are just constantly in circulation. || Library needs to increase its marketing to let people of all ages know what it offers, especially those mid-range adults.

MISC. COMMENT: I don't feel book banning would happen here. This town is tolerant/embracing.

12. WHAT COULD THE LIBRARY DO TO BETTER SERVE THE COMMUNITY AND THE TOWN OF NORTHBRIDGE? WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE?

- **Provide Opportunities for Community Members to Connect (x2):** The town has a nice mix of older, long-term residents and newer families with young children. We need to offer ways to bring them together—to help them connect. || It's very difficult as an adult to make friends. Bringing back game nights, knitting clubs, and other clubs enable adults to meet new people and get together.
- **Increase Marketing of Friends of the Library (x2):** Encourage people to join the Friends group. || You can't find info about joining the Friends group in the front of the Library. It needs to be advertised more.
- This is an expensive area, so both parents in a family often work. It would be wonderful to have a place for kids to walk to after school or on Saturday afternoons to hang out, do homework, and have fun.
- Have teens come to the Library to volunteer and learn about the Library. Have teens teach programs and support services, such as helping the elderly with technology.

MISC. COMMENT: When the Library closed over the winter due to COVID, it was the biggest loss to my family.