



Physical Literacy in the Library Or, how we ended up loaning out rubber chickens

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A book, a magazine, a tennis racquet anyone? Families in Lethbridge, Alberta now have a new opportunity to try out some options to have fun and keep fit, thanks to the availability of sports equipment at the Library.

Lethbridge, a picturesque city of 95,000 nestled in the Old Man River valley is home to the Lethbridge Public Library (LPL) system. The library system has 2 branches and a bookmobile. The system circulates over 1.25 million items per year and has a collection size of approximately 431,000 items, now including rubber chickens.

In June of 2013 Tony Vanden Heuvel, was hired as LPL's new CEO. Since, he reminded us, LPL came into being in 1910 because of the community, he advocated that our collections should contain items that the community wants, as well as more traditional library materials. He directed management to stop navel gazing and to get out into the community, make friends, find out what they need, and bring them back to the library. That's where it all started.

Feeling slightly overwhelmed we started talking and asking our contacts about what they saw as needed in the community. Many organizations talked about the health and wellness of the community. We had people inside the library saying, "There's nothing else to do in the community." Moms from our Books and Babies Book Club talked about not having a place to play inside in the winter for free. With all these ideas and needs swirling about, we were sent to talk with Dr. Mary Dyck, kinesiology professor at our local University of Lethbridge. She solidified our ideas with local research focused on physical activity in the community. What she found was there is a large "free play" gap in Lethbridge, as opposed to organized sports activities. This led us to the concept of physical literacy and its importance as foundational skills in everyone's lives.

But why physical literacy in the library? Why not ecological literacy or media literacy or any of the other adjectives that get tacked onto literacy these days?

After discussion we felt that physical literacy had the advantage of being a foundational skill for everyone in the community. For example, we need to be able to move in various ways from cradle to grave, e.g., reaching: reaching for a cup, reaching for a ball. Think about all the physical movements required to put on a jacket and get to the library. Basically physical literacy enables an individual to move with competence and confidence and thus to want to move more.

The health related benefits of being able to move include improved chronic disease resistance, cardiac function, and improved bone density. Psychological benefits include enjoyment, reduced depression, anxiety, increased social connections,

getting out outdoors, and learning and mastering new skills. People who can move with competence and confidence become more independent. They can move and take care of themselves by being strong, flexible and able to endure. Children can learn fundamental movement skills which in turn will provide the foundation for lifelong daily activity.

We must consider the reality: most Canadian children are not receiving the required amount of daily physical activity for healthy development. Seven percent of five- to eleven-year-olds and four per cent of 12- to 17-year-olds in Canada meeting recommended guidelines of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity daily. Canadian adults are not participating in the required amount of weekly physical activity to maintain health (150 minutes per week). Canadian children have insufficient skill levels to participate in everyday physical activity (biking, running, jumping, playground games and equipment). WE have a public health issue -- and the PUBLIC library can help.

Because Lethbridge has so many organizations who are willing to help the community with foundational movement skills, it was easy for the library to supplement, not replace or create, the work that was already being done in our community. For example, the University of Lethbridge, PLAY Lethbridge, PLAY Coaldale, Lethbridge College - Be Fit For Life Centre, and the Lethbridge Sport Council all have existing programs or skill building activities. Further, our Toy Library provided an example of a collection that we could model this effort after. We proposed a pilot project of a circulating sports collection. We received \$2500 for the project.

The project aimed to:

- Encourage physical activity through physical literacy kits.
- Integrate the current infrastructure of the local libraries with the city's recreational space, and
- Provide accessible equipment and instruction to allow children, youth and families to be outdoors and physically active.

One of the first things we did was to get a "jock" to help us out. We were able to secure an Applied Studies student, Cristina Miller, from the University of Lethbridge in exchange for an honorarium paying for the cost of one of her courses. She was invaluable as she helped us source the items for the collection, organize and assemble the collection, and promote the collection in the community. Customers can borrow basketballs, baseball kits, soccer balls, skipping ropes, horseshoes and lawn darts, pickleball, Hi-lo scoopball, beach volleyball, and our now famous rubber chickens and rubber pigs: all motivational throwing tools. Because of our existing relationships with the Sport Council and PLAY Lethbridge, we were able to integrate the library into their activities and become a host for their first ever Physical Literacy Summit at our Crossings Branch. We've also received national recognition through a 2016 Royal Bank of Canada Learn to Play Leadership grant.

We keep the items in big Ziploc bags catalogued as a kit; each item is barcoded. We wrote on the items with marker. Each kit contains an instruction booklet that in very basic terms outlines how to use the kit. The instruction booklets also contain a contents page with the barcode, and a "first time" user survey that gets returned to us. We keep the kits in a big Rubbermaid tote housed wherever there is accessible space. The kits circulate like the regular items, for three weeks. There are some exceptions: patrons cannot place holds on the items, nor can they renew them. We also ask that they return the items to the location from which they were borrowed.

We measured the success of the pilot project through first time use surveys, circulation statistics, and staff and customer feedback. Thankfully the response has been overwhelmingly positive so we are looking to expand the project in 2016.

For more information, please contact us. We love to talk about our rubber chickens.
Data and more information on physical literacy can be found at <http://www.physicalliteracy.ca/>

Details and FAQs at www.lethlib.ca

Jenny Cofell coordinates children's programs and collections for the Lethbridge Public Library system. An avid oral storyteller, she shares her love of songs, rhymes, and stories with friends, family, and anyone who wanders into the library. She can be reached at jenny.cofell@lethlib.ca.

Barbara Longair, after working in various academic and public libraries, landed her dream job managing a busy and dynamic children's department. She gets to share her dedication to Early Literacy with her fantastic colleagues and the community and loves that part of her work day involves tickling baby toes. She can be reached at barbara.longair@lethlib.ca.

Lisa Weekes has worked in a variety of roles in academic and public libraries, as well as in research for the provincial government. At Lethbridge Public Library, Lisa is responsible for adult collections, programs, and services. Community partnerships and outreach are her personal and professional passions. She can be reached at lisa.weekes@lethlib.ca.