

AMESBURY PUBLIC LIBRARY

BACKGROUND

The Amesbury Public Library is located on the north shore about three miles from the New Hampshire border. The Library serves a population of around 16,500 residents in a small 11,000 square foot building constructed in 1902. The City of Amesbury is situated along the rushing waters of the Powow River and the Merrimack River, and is home to historically significant people, events and innovations that helped shaped our region, state and country. Amesbury is home to John Greenleaf Whittier, famed poet and abolitionists, is believed to be the site of the first American factory to produce machine-made nails and held the distinction of manufacturing the finest carriages in the world.

The Library collects materials in all areas in order to enrich the lives of our patrons including print, audiovisual, electronic, and digital resources for all ages and interests. The Library has a robust and eclectic collection of local history and genealogy materials that are very popular. The Library has expanded its collection recently to include a library of things, a graphic novel collection, a video game collection and Book Club Kits. The most popular services include programming especially children's programs and story times, e-book and e-magazine resources, inter-library loan and museum passes.

ISSUES FACED

Project SET offers librarians the chance to expand their skill set, work collaboratively with librarians from all types of libraries across the state, and the chance to develop their leadership skills. Assistant Director, Kim Butler, asked to attend Project SET when she was new to the administrator position in 2015. The former Assistant Director was recently promoted to Director and Kim had only been at the Library for about a year. The Amesbury Public Library staff had gone through a tough stretch of having a new Director every few years and needed some stability. The new Director was hoping to provide that to them in order to better serve the community and felt that Project SET would help Kim gain the confidence she needed in her leadership skills to help the staff move forward.



ACTIONS

The Amesbury Public Library has a relatively small staff of ten full-time and three part-time librarians. The Library is open 55 hours a week including three nights a week and Saturdays. With a limited staff this requires the Assistant Director to work an evening and on occasion weekends and to fill in at any all public desks depending on vacations, meetings or staff illness often at the last minute. We were able to accommodate the once a month meeting schedule through the summer and fall. Other staff were very understanding of Kim's participation in the program and were willing to pitch in and cover some of her shifts.

Kim chatted with her Director about what she was learning and working on throughout the project and was allowed time during her work schedule to work on projects or do research. Updates about the project and highlights were also shared at staff meetings.

POSITIVE OUTCOMES

Kim's participating in Project SET helped her to grow as a leader and in her confidence in her position at the Library. She has taken a more active role in staff development and helping staff to find learning opportunities and she has led trainings for our staff and presented at the Massachusetts Library Association Conference. She is working with her Director on a series of staff trainings on customer service that can be presented together at a conference using the skills she learned through Project SET.

Kim also formed professional connections with her Project SET class and has used those connections to benefit our Library. She has reached out to her colleagues for help with projects, advice on collection development, and for support and advice. Kim has also made a solid connection with the MLS consultants which has proven helpful to the library when it come to training, state-wide initiatives, and grants. Kim has volunteered to work as mentor for the incoming cohort for Project SET and is looking forward to working with new groups of librarians to help them develop their skills as library leaders.

NEGATIVE OUTCOMES

The only small negative for the Library was desk coverage when Kim was out of the building. However, staff were very generous and stepped to up help with coverage when she was out.

LESSONS LEARNED

The Amesbury Public Library is a challenging space to work in and requires a very flexible and forward-thinking staff. Project SET encourages librarians to think creatively and thoughtfully about issues, problems, and obstacles; any opportunity to encourage staff to develop these skills and abilities is valuable to any type of library.

The information from this case study was collected from interviews with staff members at the Amesbury Public Library including Project SET participants Kim Butler and Library Director Erin Matlin.