

SEEKONK PUBLIC LIBRARY

BACKGROUND

The Seekonk Public Library is a small public library located in Seekonk, MA, which serves a town-wide population of 13,800 residents. Its unique location, situated on the Massachusetts/Rhode Island border, means that patrons hail from both states. The median age of Seekonk residents is slightly higher than the state average, and like most of the state, the community is aging as a whole.

The Seekonk Public Library has both traditional print collections and a growing digital collection of items. Fourteen public computers are available for patron use. Video games are a favorite option for many patrons, but the two most popular collections at the library are the children's books and the adult DVD collection. When compared to other SAILS libraries of similar population size, the Seekonk library has both a larger collection and a higher circulation. Seekonk library patrons definitely appreciate what their public library has to offer!

ISSUES FACED

The decision to send Ben Phinney to Project SET wasn't a difficult one to make, especially since another staff member (Michelle Gario) had already been through the program. Ben showed an interest in leadership skills and professional development opportunities, and so Project SET was a natural next step. When the 2018 application went live, Seekonk Director Peter Fuller passed the information along to Ben.

As a first-year Project SET graduate, Michelle's experience in the program was slightly different, but equally valuable. She was excited to read about Project SET when she received the brochure, and knew it would be a great opportunity to meet and network with colleagues statewide. A chance to develop public speaking skills and work on her leadership and professional skills was also exciting. She felt encouraged to apply, as her library maintains a budget for professional development and is proactive about ensuring staff participation in professional conferences and activities.



The Seekonk Public Library is always looking for new ideas and new approaches to library issues. Project SET was a great resource for this type of information. Seekonk is in the midst of a major, multi-year building project, and leadership from staff members will help to ensure community buy-in.

ACTIONS

Michelle was able to attend all the sessions of Project SET, with other library staff members covering the public service desk while she was away. Her direct supervisor checked in regularly about her progress in the program, and the Associate Director of the Seekonk Public Library attended the final session.

POSITIVE OUTCOMES

Michelle enjoyed the opportunity to meet and learn about the work her colleagues at other libraries are engaged in. It was a great opportunity for her to get to know the staff of the Massachusetts Library System, and the work they do. The training sessions hosted by Project SET staff and visiting speakers were unique and informative. While preparing her talk for the 2015 MLS Annual Meeting, Michelle was also given the opportunity to speak at NELA as well. Having the public speaking and leadership training from Project SET gave Michelle added confidence to speak at the regional event.

According to Seekonk Public Library Director Peter Fuller, both Michelle and Ben are more confident in their day-to-day work, and more willing to set their own direction as self-motivated staff members. He sees both an openness to new approaches, and a willingness to experiment. Michelle and Ben have taken on leadership roles in their respective areas at the Seekonk Library, and there is a definite benefit to having strong leaders among the professional staff. The Seekonk Public Library also benefits from the ever-widening network of professional contacts that Michelle and Ben have made as a direct result of their participation in Project SET.

NEGATIVE OUTCOMES

While their director Peter Fuller acknowledges that it was difficult at times to have staff absent, he noted that other library staff did an excellent job of covering in when needed. He has observed no other negative outcomes as far as his staff's participation in the program.

For her part, Michelle is glad that the time frame of Project SET was shortened from a year to six months. She felt that a whole year was a bit much with winter snow travel and cancellations.

LESSONS LEARNED

Both Ben and Michelle are very grateful to have a library staff that supports professional development, and encourages participation in meetings, conferences, and programs. Library Director Peter Fuller noted while it's sometimes a challenge to balance personal and professional objectives with that of the larger organization, deriving satisfaction and fulfillment from work sometimes requires an innovative response to the organization's limitations.

Ben became more aware of his library in a professional context. While at times he feels like his library is a quiet building with not much happening, familiarizing himself with library trends on a more macro level helped to explain some of the problems they face, and put them into a clearer context. He also realized that while he might not feel very innovative at his library, getting involved with the larger library community revealed that many of the programs at his library were in fact quite forward-thinking, and might help other libraries with similar issues.

Exposure to Project SET has significantly enhanced both Michelle and Ben's ability to think creatively and thoughtfully when developing programs and library services, according to Peter Fuller. He credits their enhanced abilities as a direct result of exposure to the ideas of other library professionals as a part of Project SET.

The information from this case study was collected from interviews with staff members at the Seekonk Public Library including Project SET participants Michelle Gario and Ben Phinney, and Library Director Peter Fuller.