

CUPE BC 2023 CONVENTION LIBRARY COMMITTEE REPORT

The CUPE BC Library Committee is a small but mighty committee. It is a multi-sector committee representing CUPE library workers in public libraries, K-12, colleges, and universities. The Committee met both virtually and in person this term to discuss issues facing library workers as our Province and the country struggled through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Library workers in all sectors delivered hundreds of thousands of service transactions to their patrons, continuing not only their online access to valuable programs and services but gradually going back to in person programs, and vital support to all no matter what their economic or social status. Libraries were able to pivot and adapt to the changing needs of their communities so they could face the challenges brought on by the pandemic, reinforcing their place as important community anchors and economic drivers. Even though they adapted and tailored their programs to meet changing times, they continued to maintain their core functions.

Promoting digital literacy that enables patrons to find and use information they need, with free internet services to all, is one of those core functions that filled an important gap for many. This was particularly vital to families facing economic challenges, many lacking the funds to access technologies such as computers, internet, tablets, or smartphones. The significant rise in the cost of living forced some families to make difficult decisions on where to focus their budget, reaching out to their local library for some of those basic services.

We cannot forget the role libraries play in teaching children to read, instilling a love of books at an early age, as well as the role they play in teaching them important social skills through storytime programs geared towards specific age groups. Nor can we forget the role libraries play in keeping children reading and learning during the summer months with fun, innovative activities such as the Summer Reading Club.

Libraries do not limit themselves to services for children; they are a gathering place for many, provide lifelong reading and information to adults and seniors, resume building and job searching skills, and are a welcoming space for new immigrants and refugees. Libraries' focus continues to be facilitating equitable access for all. It is one of the few institutions whose aim is to lower the barriers, offering a welcoming environment to all regardless of their economic status, ability, or cultural experience. Access to books, reading, information, journals, research materials and other resources is a basic right that libraries uphold.

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Despite the value libraries in all sectors provide, funding continues to be an issue, a financial struggle that libraries have faced for decades. Recruitment and retention became a troubling trend for many libraries. High cost of living in BC, has made it harder to recruit and retain qualified workers for the wages that libraries are paying. This has had a significant impact on staff. Some libraries are unable to replace staff and work short staffed, hours are not replaced when staff leave or retire, more tasks and work are downloaded on existing staff, vacations are postponed or denied. This has a significant impact on mental health, with some library workers leaving or having to take stress leave.

Another issue faced by libraries and library workers is the increase in health and safety concerns. As our social infrastructure changed, libraries faced increasing pressure to provide not only a welcoming space for all, but to address the needs of our at-risk population. Library workers find themselves having to change and adapt, often foregoing their reference skills for skills needed by social workers. Library workers faced increases in incidents, ranging from verbal abuse to physical abuse. One of the consistent themes discussed during our meetings was how much libraries and library workers were underestimated by the public they serve. The committee felt that while libraries and library workers were recognized, the public failed to understand the range of skills and abilities needed to provide all the services the libraries offer.

The committee also found that the irreplaceable and unique service libraries provide to their communities is not fully recognized by their communities and the politicians. The committee discussed the need for a public awareness campaign, a Public Employee contribution for Library month October 2023 focusing on “*Libraries Are More Than You Think*” and addressing how library work has changed toward a focus on engagement and community support. The committee also recommended a province-wide survey for all locals with library workers to gather data related to workplace violence.

Truth and Reconciliation

The Committee discussed ways they could honour and take action toward Truth and Reconciliation. The Committee resolved to make Truth and Reconciliation part of their regular agenda by taking the time to discuss both one of the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, and one of the articles in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People at every meeting. They also requested that CUPE BC send a digital copy of the Indigenous Reading List Rack Cards they created for the 2022 Convention to all locals with library workers in their local, along with a letter encouraging locals to engage with employers/library boards to have the rack cards at their locations available for staff and public.

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Summer Reading Club

CUPE BC continued to sponsor the BC Summer Reading Club (SRC). Children and adults enjoyed the variety of fun, innovative programs provided by library workers across the province. Library workers were able to go back to providing this valuable program in person, welcoming children ages 5 to 12 but also providing fun activities for those under 5.

The [BC Summer Reading Club](#) (SRC) is BC's largest literacy program for children and families, reaching over 200 communities across our province. This fun interactive program offers free activities to thousands of children in our province, while at the same time encouraging their love of reading and helping participants retain the reading and language skills they acquired during the school year.

As stated by the BC Library Association (BCLA), the theme for the 2022 SRC was *All Together Now!*. Each year, the BCLA works with an artist to provide illustrations. For 2022, BCLA worked with Vancouver-based artist and illustrator Elaine Chen, who perfectly captured the theme's spirit in her beautiful artwork. Her artwork and characters illustrated the different ways children can experience connections in this world. The Summer Reading Club runs from July to August and over 163,000 children in our province participated in the program and were proud to receive their SRC medals with the CUPE BC Logo upon completion of their reading log. This program not only provides fun, free activities that promote literacy, but it also celebrates and highlights the great work our members do in delivering these services. It is a great way to encourage parents and CUPE members to visit their local libraries. It also connects members from all sectors to reading and literacy.

BC Library Association (BCLA)

Our relationship with the BCLA continues to grow. Our participation in their annual conference and CUPE BC's sponsorship is a valuable partnership, building understanding and increased positive space for unionized members at the conference. It ensures that our voices, challenges, and ideas are heard. The 2023 conference will be held at the Sheraton Vancouver Airport Hotel from April 12 - 14. We encourage all locals with library workers to join BCLA and send delegates to the conference.

We were very pleased that our submission to the 2023 BCLA conference was accepted. The theme of the conference "*Windows, Mirrors and Sliding Glass Doors*" fits in with the ongoing discussion the committee had around the need to improve diversity, equity, and

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inclusion in libraries. This theme of insight, reflections and transitions speaks to the role of libraries and library workers: the work we are striving to do in our communities, the work we are doing in CUPE BC and within ourselves.

The committee discussed the growing need to ensure that library workers in all sectors are treated fairly and equitably regardless of race, ability, sexual orientation, or gender identity. What libraries strive to provide for their community should also be reflected in their relationship with their staff. Our session “*Libraries: windows to their community*” will explore the benefits of hiring a workforce that reflects the diversity of their individual communities. Can libraries truly serve their community and their patrons without having that diversity amongst their staff? A library that embraces the benefits and the challenge of hiring a diverse workforce leads to a library that is successful and truly integrated and rooted in their community. A diverse, knowledgeable workforce can help enhance and grow the library collection, enhance, and grow library programs, and be truly welcoming to all populations in their community.

Our presenters will share some of their stories, successes, challenges and hope for the future. The committee will also be participating in the trade show with an information booth and will be sending two members of the committee to the conference. Some libraries are already doing the work and leading the way in making spaces more inclusive and equitable. We would like to highlight Xwi7xwa Library at the University of British Columbia (UBC). The Xwi7xwa Library is the only Indigenous-focused academic library in Canada. As stated on its website:

“Xwi7xwa Library is a centre for academic and community Indigenous scholarship. Its collections and services reflect Aboriginal approaches to teaching, learning and research. Everyone is welcome to visit the Xwe7xwa Library”.

We encourage all CUPE members to take the time, if they are able, to visit this amazing library and explore their website (<https://xwi7xwa.library.ubc.ca/>).

Organized And Unorganized Libraries

Our organizing team is doing amazing work but there are still libraries in our Province that are unorganized. The Committee discussed two issues:

1. Compiling a current list of CUPE locals with library workers so that we can enhance communication with all library workers.
2. Compiling a list of unorganized libraries.

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The Committee would like to thank our staff advisors Carmen Sullivan and Tracy Mathieson for their invaluable help and support.

Respectfully submitted:

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