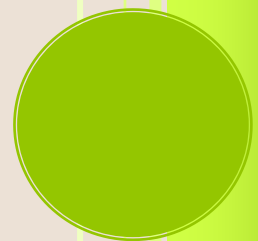


THE HAZARD LIBRARY IDEAS BOX

Lisa Semenza – Director's Brief – INFO 287 –
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Image from “Libraries Without Borders” website

Objective: Using the library’s newly acquired laptops a new outreach model is being proposed to reach potential users who do not have access to the library or internet-based technology.

Executive Summary: Within the rural area in which Hazard Library Association resides there remain many households for whom broadband internet service is not available or affordable. Although many people are able to access the internet via smartphones, their data plans are often insufficient to meet their needs for downloading, upgrading, or streaming information. Due to the widespread nature of the geographical area, there are also residents who do not have the transportation needed to access the library in person. A new outreach initiative is being proposed that will bring internet service to users in the Southern Cayuga area via wifi hotspots and laptop computers. A “pop-up library” model, as used in the Libraries Without Borders “Ideas Box”, will be followed, with books and other materials made available for check out, along with assistance for use of technology, in a variety of community based locations. The target audiences will be seniors, Hispanic families, and families with children.

Introduction: John Horrigan (Pew Research, 2015) reported that people are more likely to be lifelong learners if they have access to technology. Basic digital skills are a gateway to all kinds of learning (Digital Promise, 2016) but people who are more geographically isolated often do not have the access to the technology needed to learn and perfect those skills. Lack of access affects nearly all aspects of American life, including economic success, educational achievement, positive health outcomes, and civic engagement (IMLS, 2015). Limited internet access is a global problem, with Nygren (2014) reporting that internet access is vital to gain “full citizenship in a digitized democratic society” and even those who are “digital insiders” and have access to the internet often need further assistance to learn how to use the internet more effectively to meet their information needs. While it might be expected that developing countries would have difficulty accessing the needed infrastructure for internet services, it has been found worldwide in developed nations, including Australia, Canada, China, Great Britain, Sweden, and the United States, that rural areas continue to lag behind in meeting the broadband needs of their citizens. Libraries remain vital in closing this “digital divide” by being able to provide access to those in need.

Hazard Library serves all of the Southern Cayuga Central School District which covers a geographic area of approximately 162 square miles in the Townships of Genoa, Ledyard, Scipio, and Venice (Data USA, 2019). Within that area are a number of large dairy farms which employ Hispanic workers. Previous outreach efforts have not been successful in encouraging the families of the workers to utilize library services within the library itself due to language and transportation barriers. Previous outreach to these workers in particular has been conducted in conjunction with the King Ferry Food Pantry, and to families in general via our “Bookmobile”, however the scope of these programs has not extended beyond provision of books to include technology access and training.

Background Information: According to their website, the concept of the Librarians Without Borders “Ideas Box” began in 2010 as a response to the earthquake in Haiti. It was found that in the aftermath of the destruction, residents had a need to fill in accessing information and online services. The Ideas Box has expanded to meet the people’s needs in a variety of locations including refugee and displaced persons camps, rural and isolated communities, and underserved urban spaces and indigenous communities around the world.

As described on the [Librarians Without Borders](#) website

“The Ideas Box is highly-durable, easy to set-up and energy-independent. Within twenty minutes of unloading the box, users will have access to a satellite internet connection, digital server, a power generator, 25 tablets and laptops, 6 HD cameras, 1 large HD screen, board games, arts and crafts materials, hardcover and paperback books, and a stage for music and theatre. Our expert team also ensures that each Ideas Box is customized to meet local needs by collaborating with organizations, leaders and members within the community.”

I would like to adapt this idea, on a smaller scale, to be able to meet the needs of our rural community, where they are located, rather than expecting that they will be able to come to the library in light of their varying age, language and transportation barriers. The boxes can be customized to meet the needs of the population being targeted.

Outreach Plan:



The first step in the plan would be to acquire the needed Wifi Hotspot. Anticipated cost for this would be approximately \$100 for the device and \$40/month for the service.

Information gained from other libraries in the Finger Lake Library System has indicated that there are 2 libraries that currently have hotspots that are used both for remote events and to allow patrons to borrow as needed. One other library is actively seeking a grant to allow implementation and a number of other libraries are interested in exploring this option as well. Borrowing of the equipment by patrons has seen less interest than anticipated, however use for remote events has been beneficial. The Verizon Jetpack MiFi has been recommended due to cost and connectivity, and this unit served both my home and the library successfully in the past.

In addition to the MiFi, the smaller scale “Ideas Box” would include:

- 2 laptop computers, 3 tablets (already owned by the library)
- Books aimed at the target audience which would be available for check-out
- Card and board games
- Craft materials
- Educational materials and pamphlets aimed at the target audience

It is anticipated that there are multiple sub-groups of the community who would benefit from having access to this technology in their home or a familiar setting. These would include:

- **Senior Citizens** – Among other uses, assistance could be provided within their homes, at church, or the Senior Center for accessing medical information, filing taxes, and completing the 2020 census. They could have access to the library catalog to search for and order desired books and materials.
- **Hispanic Farm Workers** – With the help of a translator, families would have the ability to learn how to use technology to assist them in gaining medical, social, and educational information. They would also have access to the library catalog and to benefit from Mango Languages via the library system in order to assist them in learning English. Spanish language books will be made available to borrow and activities conducted to entertain young children while their families are engaged in computer use. Families could participate at their homes, the Food Pantry, or on the farms on which they work.
- **Families lacking transportation** – During the past few years we have offered the services of a bookmobile to deliver books to children as a means of encouraging reading during the summer months. This service could be expanded to offer access to technology and training to older family members while also providing them with books and materials. They could also participate at the Food Pantry or at local gathering locations such as a church or fire house.
- **Library programs in off-site locations** – Due to lack of space, library programs are often held at a local church which does not offer wifi access. The library has also participated in community activities at various locations. Use of the Ideas Box and MiFi hotspot could help to supplement these offerings by allowing people to register for library cards, check out books, and have access to information while at these programs.

Conclusion: Bridging the digital divide is essential for meeting the 21st century needs of *all* of our citizens. More frequently all aspects of life are becoming conducted in an online format, even to the extent of applying for any type of employment. Jan Holmquist (2013) has encouraged us to bring the library to where people are, either in person or via technology. In order to better satisfy the needs of our community members we may now need to meet them where they are located rather than expecting them to come to us. Through use of portable technology and an “Ideas Box” planned to meet the needs of the target audience, Hazard Library will be able to expand its audience and patron base to everyone in the Southern Cayuga community.

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