

Library Services

Computers

The library has three computers for public usage. Each computer has Internet access and MS Office software. We provide wireless access for those patrons wishing to use laptops in the library for Internet access. The computers are very popular and patrons must read and sign the Internet Usage Policy as well as sign in each time they wish to use the computers. Usage is limited to ½ hour unless no one else is waiting to use them. Printers are available as well as a photocopy machine.

There are four staff computers: one for the director, one for the circulation desk, one in a small office for processing materials, and one recently added to the children's room in the basement for checking out books.

The purchase and maintenance of the library computers and software are now part of the larger Town capital computer plan. This has resulted in new flat screen computers, upgrades to the XP operating system, and updated applications for staff and patrons.

Outreach

For the past three years the library has maintained a small collection of books at Northbrook Village, Berlin's senior housing. A volunteer visits there every other Wednesday to maintain the collection, deliver books and take additional requests. Recently, a book club has been started at Northbrook and the library supplies the books for discussion.

The Berlin Public Library does not have handicapped access and has been serving the elderly, the ill, and the handicapped by delivering books and other materials.

Reference

All staff is required to know how to provide simple research by using the hardcopy reference materials, by looking information up on the Internet and by using various databases. The director provides more in-depth research when needed.

Website

The library launched its website in 2006. The website has a link to Berlin's Catalog and other libraries in MA, a calendar of events, links to databases, web resources, Friends and Trustee information, helpful information on the library and its policies, and sections for

children and young adults. The url for the website is <http://www.townofberlin.com/Library>. The website receives over 1,600 hits a year.

Newsletter

A newsletter goes to every household (approximately 1200) in Berlin four times/year. Included are an events calendar, news about the library, information from the Friends and Trustees, partial listings of new materials, and a memo from the Director.

Programming

Programming is held for all age groups. There is a line item in the library budget for programming and we seek grant money from the Community Partnership for Children and apply for grants from the local Cultural Council. The Friends also help in sponsoring programming. This past year we aggressively went after the huge pool of local talent in Berlin and had several successful programs that did not cost the library anything.

Berlin's 1870 Town Hall recently re-opened after being renovated and the library now uses this wonderful space for programming that we cannot offer in our small library.

Photocopier and Fax Service

The library provides a place for townsfolk to make photocopies and to send and receive faxes. A nominal fee is charged.

Needs Assessment

Methodology

The Trustees, Director, and a hired facilitator developed two sets of 10 questions that were used in four focus groups. One Focus Group was made up of past and present Trustees and current Staff, excluding the Director. The other three groups were made up of patrons, non-users and town officials.

Each focus group was ninety minutes in length, and limited to twelve people. The facilitator recorded all sessions.

The facilitator submitted a final report in both hardcopy and CD-ROM.

After ascertaining the main issues, goals and objectives were written and reported back to the Town by means of the library newsletter.

Data Gathering

Being a small public library in a small town we have the advantage of knowing most of our patrons by name. The library provides a place where town people happen to meet and be social. The staff is very friendly and we have the opportunity to gather much useful data about people's responses to our services, materials, and programs on a daily basis.

In addition to this informal approach we also organized more formal focus groups to gather data to specific questions. These questions were structured to elicit comments from participants about how they use information, how much time and money they spend on information, and when and how they use the library for their informational and recreational needs.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

Our main strength lies in our excellent staff. The staff is well educated, friendly, knowledgeable, helpful, and consistently shows a willingness to go above and beyond. There are staff members of various ages and this is helpful when serving patrons from different age groups.

The staff members all live in Berlin and can greet most patrons by name when they walk through the door. Personalized service is encouraged and every attempt is made to make sure each patron has their needs met.

The Director has a good working relationship with Selectmen and other Town officials. She keeps them informed of what is happening in the library and works with them to everyone's mutual benefit.

All townsfolk are kept informed via a quarterly newsletter, through the library website, by the use of local cable, school backpack mail, posters around town, and constant interaction with patrons.

The library staff, the Trustees, the Friends of the Library, and volunteers work well together and have mutual respect for the role each group plays.

The central location of the library is a big plus. We now have hours that are consistent and helpful to working people.

Our programming spans all age groups and programs are well attended.

The Town is very supportive through appropriations to run the library efficiently and effectively.

Weaknesses

Accessibility is the number one concern. Six steps lead to the main entrance of the library and are not navigable by many elderly or handicapped people.

Steep steps lead from the main room to the children's room in the basement. These steps are dangerous to people of any age and there have been several falls down the steps.

Our two bathrooms are tiny and do not permit access for anyone in a wheelchair.

Parking space is limited and patrons must back out onto a main street.

The library is not conducive to sitting and reading as the only chairs available are hard and uncomfortable.

The library does not provide early morning or late evening hours and it is not open every day.

Staff is working in cramped spaces and there is little privacy for the director to hold meetings. There is minimal storage space and no staff break area.

There is no display space other than on top of bookshelves.

Because of the size of the library, many programs cannot be held here.

The children's room and the adult space are on different levels making it difficult for parents who want to browse adult books while their children are getting books or playing.

The library has many outdated materials that have not circulated in many years.

Opportunities

We have a strong Friends group that brings in additional monies through various fundraisers to help the library.

We have many talented people in Berlin whom we have been using to provide wonderful programs for children, teens and adults at no charge to the library. As grant money becomes harder to find we will continue drawing on our town's resource of people.

The library has started working with other groups in town to co-sponsor events. This is a win-win situation for all.

We get a lot of feedback about how well we communicate. We will continue using all the means of communication we now employ and look for additional means.

We are working on making the library more appealing to patrons – new lights, new carpeting, more open space, better seating, and a nicer computer area for patrons.

The Berlin 1870 Town Hall has recently been renovated. The library will use this wonderful space for those programs that we cannot hold in the library.

We intend to focus on what we do well and make sure that we continue to communicate this to townsfolk.

Threats

We are surrounded by towns with much larger libraries with larger collections and who can provide more services.

The Town has requested flat budgets for several years now. This has a great impact on what we can provide if we do not take in sufficient additional income to offset the Town appropriations.

Grant money is not as readily available and we need to become more creative in coming up with monies for programming or relying on townsfolk to do programming free of charge.

Teens do not use the library as much as we would like. We have sponsored programs and few teens show up. We have tried including them in some adult programming but their attendance is still minimal. It just may be that a nearby mall has more appeal than the library.

Large bookstores now have café's that allow you to eat and read. This is a very popular trend but because of mice problems in the past we do not allow food or drink in the library.

There is little privacy at computers and no comfortable seating for reading.

People do tend to socialize in the library and sometimes the noise level makes it difficult for others who desire a quiet atmosphere to do work.

People continue to disrupt others by using cell phones in spite of signage requesting they turn the cell phone to vibrate.

More and more people now have a home computer and are able to look up information, request books and download books.

People have busy lifestyles and expect library service to be as streamlined as possible.

Service Areas

Our small size dictates the service areas that we feel we can manage successfully. We are already doing a good job in each of the areas we have chosen and this has been reflected in the comments that have come out of the focus groups. In our planning for the future we have considered the focus groups' desire for expanded or new services in each of these three areas.

1. Current Topics and Titles

A library that provides current topics and titles helps to fulfill community residents' appetite for information about popular cultural and social trends and their desire for satisfying recreational experiences.

The Berlin Library has a very good collection of current fiction and non-fiction books for children and adults in hardcopy and in audio-books on tape or CD. We subscribe to over sixty adult and children's periodicals. We subscribe to **Bookmarks**, a book reviews publication, which patrons can borrow. Additional book reviews are available through links on our website.

GOAL: To provide current library materials that our patrons want and need to fulfill their desire for recreational reading, listening and viewing

OBJECTIVES:

- Add a monthly list of new materials to the library website
- Ask the Friends to provide additional museum passes for the patrons
- Work with the Friends to provide comfortable seating for the patrons who want to read in the library
- Find opportunities for patrons to donate current titles
- Find opportunities for patrons to donate books in the memory of someone
- Provide patrons with a means to easily request books for purchase
- Purchase more than one copy of the most popular new materials to decrease the wait period

2. General Information

A library that provides general information helps meet the need for information and answers to questions on a broad array of topics related to work, school, and personal life.