

Manchester Community Library

When our 2019-2020 fiscal year began on August 1, 2019, no one could have predicted a pandemic looming on the horizon. This past March, just 13 days after 72% of Manchester voters approved our level-funded appropriation request, we were heartbroken to temporarily shelter our beautiful building and pause access to our physical resources to ensure the safety of our community. Your support and the generosity of our steadfast donors enabled us to remain nimble as we pivoted our programming and resources to the virtual space. Because of your investment in your public library, we were able to thoughtfully and safely reintroduce our services to the community in new and innovative ways.

The challenges of COVID-19 also presented a myriad of unanticipated opportunities. Every day has been different, and we continue to listen, learn, grow, and evolve in ways that demonstrate the relevance of our mission and organizational agility. Needless to say, we much prefer the term “physical distancing” to “social distancing” as our connections to those we serve have only deepened over the past year.

Back in March, 816 books were checked out in a *single* day—more than ever before. Since then, over 90% have been returned and loaned out again. Indeed, the spirit of community and an abiding commitment to one another is alive and well at the MCL! When the physical collection became challenging to access, we pivoted and invested thoughtfully in our digital collection. Now, in addition to the nearly 19,000 print books, 1,448 audio books, and 2,600 DVDs, members have access to over 42,000 e-book titles, 6,500 e-audiobooks, and nearly 2,000 e-magazines. Since the launch of Curbside Lending in June, we have filled over 1,000 orders for patrons interested in honing cooking skills, getting lost in the latest mystery, or traveling to foreign lands via DVD.

The digital divide has long challenged rural communities—ours is no exception. In an effort to support the most vulnerable among us, a key priority when reopening our physical space was serving those who lacked access to computers and Wi-Fi. To that end, we launched Sit & Surf, providing onsite computer use and support from our Information Technology & Instructional Librarian. We also used grant funds to invest in an external router that expanded parking lot access to our internet service. We further grew our technology services with the launch of a new website and a more accessible library catalogue. When safe, we opened the entire collection for onsite browsing, including children’s, youth, and adult books, audiobooks, and DVDs.

Of the 179 adult programs offered in FY20, many were sponsored cooperatively with other community organizations—from the Vermont Department of Labor to Southwestern Vermont Medical Center to Equinox Village. Each of these partnerships expands the populations we are able to reach and support. Though run by our professional librarians, the success of many of our programs would be impossible without the efforts of our 80-plus volunteers. In addition to our many adult programs, our Youth Services Librarian coordinated 150 children’s and young adult programs with over 5,000 attendees. Much to our delight, Story Time, a favorite of children and caregivers alike, expanded its audience when moved to the virtual space. We have had similar success with other virtual programs, including our Community Mindfulness classes.

The benefits of supporting the Library with tax dollars are many and yet as we look to level-fund our town appropriation for the second year in a row, the cost remains around 1% of a Manchester tax bill. We stand committed to operational and financial transparency and to ensuring that every dollar is thoughtfully invested. To that end, we are wrapping up our third annual financial audit. We are heartened that mass vaccination efforts have begun. While we remain optimistic and forward thinking, we anticipate ongoing challenges in the first half of FY22 to our key revenue streams (e.g., facilities rentals, membership fees, corporate giving) due to the pandemic. Accordingly, our budget reflects a deficit which will be covered by our Operating Reserve Fund. Nevertheless, we have increased our Individual Giving goal by \$30,000 and our Fundraising Events goal by 87%. In fact, as a percentage of our overall budget, our projected FY22 budget is the least reliant upon taxpayers than any other in recent years. Still, we are committed to investing more heavily in our core business—books, media, e-resources, and programming for all ages.

As we continue to reimagine and expand our delivery of services, the town’s support bolsters our commitment to our vision: to be a hub of the community through our role as a trusted resource; providing unique, essential, and innovative services; and by creating a welcoming, stimulating environment for learning and social connection. The Board and staff continue to strive to ensure that the MCL is a place that is open to all, especially in the most challenging of times. We welcome your questions, comments, and suggestions and invite you to join us as we continue to respond to the ever-changing needs of our diverse community. Most importantly, we are grateful for your continued support.

Board of Trustees: Bob Allen, Dave Citron, John Clark, Clark French, Fran Fauver, Susan McManus, Katherine Monahan, Kate Orme, Linda Oskam, Dave Quesnel, and Nancy Wolf.

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Respectfully submitted,

J. Violet Gannon

Executive Director