

A Day in the Life

Library Lockdown in New Zealand

For this and the next installment of this column, I'll be focusing on libraries here in New Zealand.

As the world continues to grapple with COVID-19 and how library services are now and what they will look like after the pandemic, here in New Zealand, we're seeing what public library life is like in a country where COVID is still very much around, but not exactly part of our daily lives. We're aware that the pandemic is still going on, but at the same time, we've moved into what post-COVID life looks like.

To give you an idea of this, I had some great chats with folks from the South Taranaki District Libraries system. While it's a small system, it sure is mighty—it has great employees, bold ideas and programs, and a great leader in Cath Sheard (She was part of my first-ever column, from the September 2017 issue of *Information Today!*). I was keen to not only get insight into what post-COVID library services look like, but also to give you a chance to understand how librarians work and educate themselves here in New Zealand. What I've found (and what I hope you'll find as well) is that we're all in the same boat when it comes to public libraries. We can all grow and



Tyla Winter

learn from each other, and we should all be listening to what each other is doing. Without further ado, let's talk with Tyla Winter.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN WORKING IN LIBRARIES? WHAT IS YOUR ROLE AT THE SOUTH TARANAKI DISTRICT LIBRARIES?

I have been working for South Taranaki District Libraries for just over 3 1/2 years now. I completed my final year of high school in November 2016 and straightaway started working for South Taranaki District Libraries in December of that year as a library cadet. I have since completed my cadetship and am now a LibraryPlus officer.

CAN YOU TALK ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE IN LIBRARY SCHOOL? WHAT WERE SOME OF THE THINGS YOU STUDIED, AND WHAT WERE SOME OF THE BIG THINGS THAT YOU HAVE LEARNED AND APPLIED TO YOUR DAY-TO-DAY WORK?

I graduated in May last year through the Open Polytechnic and received my level 5 diploma in information and library studies. I had a really good experience doing my papers through the Open Polytechnic; they made things very straightforward for someone new to doing online study. I actually learned a lot just working in the library, but by doing these papers, I was able to understand the reasoning behind everything we do.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE PROJECTS YOU HAVE BEEN WORKING ON?

I have been working on filming and editing our South Taranaki Books Alive sessions based on the 2020 New

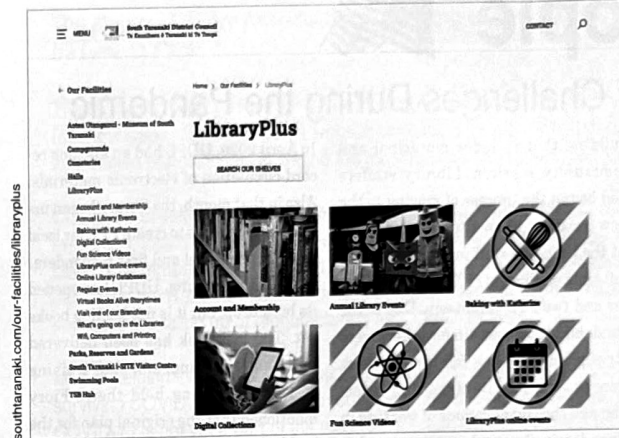
Zealand Book Awards for Children & Young Adults, so that kept me quite busy. South Taranaki District Libraries often has training sessions, either districtwide or within a branch, so that is where I have learned to film and edit these videos.

Also, South Taranaki District Libraries is running virtual STEAM sessions each week on our Facebook page, so at the moment, I'm trying to come up with new activities that can be part of these sessions. It's been a bit slow to get going, but we are starting to work with our local primary schools and kindergartens again, as well as doing our afterschool programs (book club, STEAM, arts and crafts, games, virtual reality sessions) for children and teens.

WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE MOST PRESSING ISSUE FACING LIBRARIES IN NEW ZEALAND?

South Taranaki District Libraries is very fortunate to have a supporting council and an individual who has done a huge job in providing us with funding. But I have heard about other libraries around New Zealand that only have a small budget to work with—especially now for some libraries due to COVID-19. So that is definitely an issue when trying to provide their community with good, current programs while having to constantly think strategically on how to use the budget wisely.

SEEING THAT COVID-19 IS STILL A HUGE FACTOR IN THE WORLD, AND YET, HERE IN NEW ZEALAND, WE'VE ALMOST BEATEN IT, CAN YOU SHARE YOUR LIBRARY LOCKDOWN EXPERIENCE? WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO CLOSE DOWN AND THEN REOPEN?



Let's just say it was crazy! It was a huge learning curve for me. I was actually on my lunch break at home when I was watching [Prime Minister] Jacinda Ardern announce that our country would be moving into Level 3 [restricted activities]. That meant that libraries would be

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closed. I decided to cut my lunch break short and get back to work and inform the staff. About 2 minutes later, our libraries and cultural services manager called and said we had to get everyone out of the library and lock the doors. Once everyone was out of the library, we had a team meeting and rewatched Jacinda's update. That afternoon and the next day, staffers were cleaning the libraries from top to bottom. At this stage, there was some confusion around who was going to be working from home.

The day after that, we were in Level 4 [full lockdown]. This meant we had to

stay home and could only really access petrol stations, doctors, chemists, and supermarkets. I received a call from my manager saying we were all going to be working, so within days, South Taranaki District Libraries staffers were fully equipped to work from home. We did welfare calls to our patrons, signed schoolchildren up with library cards, had Zoom meetings and professional development, signed people up with Skinny Jump Wi-Fi modems, did some indexing of our genealogy books, and offered online activities such as storytimes, cooking videos, science videos, shared reading groups, book clubs, etc. We were all very busy during Level 4.

After 4 weeks, we moved back into Level 3. This meant we were now able to do a "click and collect" service for our patrons, which we were running Monday–Friday, 11 a.m.–2 p.m. At the Hawera Library,

we split staffers into two groups, with group one working on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and group two working Tuesday and Thursday. We were split into two groups so staffers didn't go expanding their "bubble" too big. Patrons were able to ring us or use our online library catalog to put books on hold. We would then pick them off the shelf, quarantine them for 3 days, and then the patron would come to the front step of the library to pick them up. It was really nice to be back in the library, even if it was just for 3 hours. It was still expected of staff to work from home when not working in the library.

A couple of weeks later, we went to Level 2 [reduced restrictions]. This meant we were allowed to have the public back in the library. But we had to do contact tracing, we weren't allowed any more than 25 people in the Hawera Library at a time, there was 2-meter distancing between people, we moved our couches and big tables out of the library so people stuck to social distancing, and our public toilets were closed. If someone touched a book on the shelf and decided they didn't want it, they had to put it through our returns slot, and we would quarantine it for 3 days—this was the same for normal returns too. We were in Level 2 for almost 4 weeks. Now we are in Level 1 [staying prepared in case of restrictions], so that means the toilets are open, our tables and couches are back, programs have started back up, there is no longer a limit on people allowed in the library at one time, and no more contact tracing. Everything is pretty much back to normal.

Justin Hoenke is a human being who has worked in public libraries all over the U.S. and is now based in Wellington, New Zealand, where he works as a team leader of libraries and community spaces for the Wellington City Libraries. Before this role, he was the executive director of the Benson Memorial Library in Titusville, Pa. His professional interests include public libraries as community centers, library management, video games, and music. Hoenke writes about libraries, music, and life at justin@thebrarian.com. Send your comments about this column to itletters@infotoday.com or tweet us (@ITNewsBreaks).