

The Importance of Libraries in Our Digital World – An interview to librarian Mary Graf -

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“Public libraries are an essential part of a democracy,” says librarian Mary Graf. “Funded by the community, they exist to provide equal access to information and enrichment to everyone in the community, regardless of age, income, education, or social status.”

Graf has been the Youth Services Librarian at Brownell Library in Essex Junction, Vermont since 1993. With a background in Educational Psychology and Elementary Education, Graf has also worked in Montessori schools and two other libraries in New York before settling into her current role. [...]

Technology has expanded research potential and changed the way we navigate information, and there is an over-abundance of media options available for taking in non-fictional and fictional stories. Card catalogs and the little card pockets in the back of books are relics of a simpler time, but libraries are far from obsolete.

Libraries Improve Education

My love of reading and writing has provided me with entertainment, escape, and employment. The time we spend snuggled together to read is one of my favourite parts of the day, but as we lose ourselves in a story, I am not lost on the fact that reading to my kids improves their language and literary skills. Public and school libraries and the librarians who run them play a vital role in our children’s learning too. [...]

The librarians themselves are the carpenters, but their tools are books, real paper books. Students concentrate better and understand and retain information better when they read off from paper compared to reading from a screen. [...] “Modern screens and e-readers fail to adequately recreate certain tactile experiences of reading on paper that many people miss and, more importantly, prevent people from navigating long texts in an intuitive and satisfying way. In turn, such navigational difficulties may subtly inhibit reading comprehension. Compared with paper, screens may also drain more of our mental resources while we are reading and make it a little harder to remember what we read when we are done.” [...]

Libraries Bridge the Gap

Librarian Mary Graf reminded me: “Brownell Library has helped to bridge the digital divide. People have learned to use computers here and many have come in to submit online job applications, make airline reservations, set up email accounts, or look at family photos on Facebook. Librarians offer assistance, and those who need tutorial help can make an appointment with our Volunteer Tech Helper.”

Librarians are also essential to English language learners (ELL). Immigrants and refugees depend on libraries to find books in their native language and find comfort in books that reflect their culture; ELL students also rely heavily on school librarians for reading skills. [...] Perhaps this goes without saying, but is still worth repeating, students living in poverty may only have access to books, reading instruction, computers, and internet access at their local libraries.

Libraries Enrich Communities

Libraries do more than provide resources and education; they provide opportunities for people to come together and to network, creating a sense of ownership and belonging in their community.

Graf referred to her library as the living room of the town. Programs and groups of all ages enjoy quality speakers, knitting groups, book discussions and pot luck dinners. Family movie nights, LEGO building clubs, and children’s story and music times fill libraries with parents and children looking for quality (and free) entertainment. [...]

Many public libraries offer teenagers leadership roles through Teen Advisory Groups, and while it's not surprising that teenagers benefit from libraries when it comes to school work, they can also be found in the library for fun. [...]