



NORMAL PUBLIC LIBRARY



ANNUAL REPORT

While 2021 was another year shaped and defined by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Normal Public Library remained agile and flexible in meeting our community's needs. As guidelines and best practices evolved throughout the year, staff created and adapted library services, programs, and collections to connect and engage our patrons within a constantly shifting environment. We continued to leverage our invaluable community partners and relationships to reach individuals and families at home, within our community, and in our physical spaces to meet people where they were most comfortable. With safety and health at the forefront of our efforts, we prioritized friendly service, adaptability, and equity to optimize the library experience for all.

HIGHLIGHTS OF 2021

- Continued offering and improving our virtual services, curbside pick-up, browser packs, and home delivery to provide our patrons with multiple options for accessing the library
- Maintained a healthy and safe facility while balancing services and safety for our community and staff
- Streamlined hiring and implemented library-wide cross-training, to make optimal use of staff and provide consistent, high-quality customer service throughout our facility
- Provided a wide array of virtual and hybrid in-person/virtual programs across a variety of platforms, including Baby Rock, Tuesday Tales, Jam Session, STEAM Club, Sign and Sing interactive story times, Move and Groove scavenger hunts on Zoom, Knitting and Crocheting Club, Poetry is Normal, Teen Writing Workshop, financial planning workshops, and more
- Convened the Remembering 9/11 Project, which incorporated a poster-session from the 9/11 Museum and Memorial in our art gallery with oral histories collected from local residents
- Resumed in-person programming within the library as well as at the Community Activity Center, including the much beloved train show, genealogy programming, An Inside Look with Heartland Theatre, Seed Swap, Hauntings and History of Bloomington-Normal, Kickapoo of Central Illinois with Bill Kemp, and many others
- Returned to in-person outreach at schools and senior residential facilities, including at Bloom Community School, Unit 5 schools, McLean County Juvenile Detention Center, ARC, Evergreen Village, Evergreen Place, Blair House, and Meadows at Mercy Creek, among others
- Updated our public computers as well as our scanning, copying, and printing equipment, and completed a grant-funded Wi-Fi assessment
- Continued our partnership with Unit 5 to create library card accounts for all students, mailed directly to the students
- NPL Foundation, and its first-ever part-time Development Coordinator, continued to garner financial support for NPL
- Established regular communication with NPL users through a biweekly email newsletter promoting library news, programs, and tips
- Combined all acquisitions, processing, and cataloging functions into a single department to optimize efficiency
- Continued lease of 57 additional parking spaces, which is much appreciated by our patrons
- Awarded Illinois Public Library Per Capita Grant in the amount of \$77,433.08 to provide funding for resource sharing and collection development
- Awarded ARPA-funded Bouncing Back from the Pandemic: Developing Resources for the Local Workforce Grant in the amount of \$47,675 to provide funding for local workforce development, including classes, learning circles, guest speakers, and the installation of sound-proof meeting pods
- Added budget lines for digital content and advertising
- With staff from Bloomington Public Library, presented a session at the Illinois Library Association's annual conference about services for families and individuals on the autism spectrum
- Developed our 2021-2024 strategic plan
- Added three new trustees to the library's board, welcomed many new staff members, and celebrated four retirements

SERVICES

As it became clear that 2021 would again be a unique year for all of us, staff renewed their commitment to offering services that prioritize adaptability and accessibility. We knew that strengthening our communications, providing more options and opportunities for programming, and approaching outreach creatively would all be integral to providing exemplary service to our community. To accomplish those goals, staff:

- Remained active on local boards and committees, including Human Service Council, Central Illinois Community Educators, East Central Illinois Area Agency on Aging Reducing Social Isolation Committee, Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Council, among others
- Actively sought out in-person outreach opportunities for seniors, students, and families in settings outside the library's building, including at events and fairs
- Provided free books via our Books on the Go service at the McLean County Jail, School Street Food Pantry, Carle BroMenn Behavioral Health and Addiction Unit, Carle Cancer Center, and Uptown Station
- Maintained and promoted the ability to apply for a library card online



- Purchased two Owl devices to deliver a superior virtual/in-person hybrid programming experience
- Increased "Take and Make"-style programs that encourage patrons to get creative at home with materials and ideas provided by NPL

- Partnered with the Town of Normal for the PCs for People event
- Provided summer activity kits to Unity Community Center

Curbside service continued to be incredibly popular, averaging over 60 curbside pickups per day. Requests for our contactless home

delivery service increased, partially due to a wonderful partnership with Faith in Action. We provided fresh collections of large-print materials, including new books, to five senior living facilities every six weeks. As we learned more about COVID-19, we were able to adapt our quarantine procedures for materials and devise a safe, efficient method to get materials to patrons in a timely manner.

The Normal Public Library Foundation (NPLF) continued to be an essential partner in helping us offer services, programs, and collections far beyond what our budget allows. This year, we were thrilled to see the Foundation grow to employ a part-time Development Coordinator, who established the NPLF newsletter, ran a successful campaign for NPL's Library of Things, and created the First Edition Club, an easy way for supporters to give on a monthly basis. NPLF completed another successful annual campaign, receiving generous support from both individuals and corporations.



While we were again unable to hold our large biannual book sales, the continued success of the ongoing sale area on our first floor elicited positive feedback from patrons, and we remain committed to keeping that area stocked with fresh, new items each week. We continue to receive quality donations from our generous community, and the sales from the ongoing book sale have roughly equaled the dollar amount we earned from our larger sales in years past.

PROGRAMS

While the beginning of 2021 saw most of our programming in a virtual or passive format, we were able to creatively expand our offerings as the year progressed. We proudly provided 404 programs across all formats this year. Some of the highlights included:

- Winter Reading for all ages (690 registered)
- Nine StoryWalks throughout the year at parks and schools in Normal and in Uptown Normal (2,005 participants total)
- Summer Reading (2,692 registered)
- Teen Take and Make Crafts (over 300 kits distributed)
- Poetry is Normal Presents, funded by NPLF and featuring poets including Susanna Lang, Christina Lovin, Denise Duhamel, and others

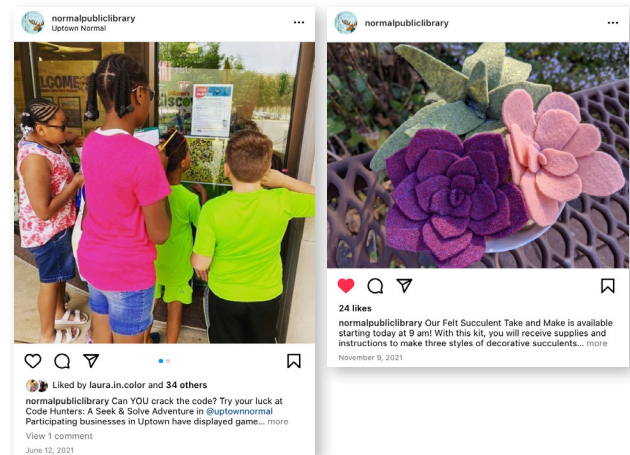


- Baby Rock at Anderson Park (242 participants in 6 sessions)
- Teen Dungeons & Dragons and Game Nights on Discord

- STEAM Club
- Winter Wonderland crafts and activities for all ages (245 participants)
- Code Hunters in Uptown Normal with Uptown Partners
- Enhanced program offerings for adults, including Dinner in an Instant, Genealogy Basics, Hauntings & History of Bloomington-Normal, Kickapoo of Central Illinois, Vision Boards, and DIY Spa
- Virtual Classroom Visits (over 50 in 2021)
- Leaf Man interactive StoryWalk: borrowed by Oakdale and Parkside elementary schools and saw a combined 680 students participate. Lending the StoryWalk allowed us to reduce transportation barriers for families who couldn't get to the park where the walk was originally installed
- And many others!



Continued collaboration with our valued community partners served to enhance and expand our program offerings, and we were thrilled to be able to work with Heartland Theatre, Communication Junction, Normal Parks and Recreation, Children's Discovery Museum, Uptown Partners, and many others. These partnerships remain essential to our efforts to engage and reflect our wide, diverse audience with our programming.



With the hiring of a new programming librarian this year, we have been able to greatly expand our offerings for adults. Our take and make crafts in particular have been a hit, including a felt succulent, macrame plant holder, and a DIY spa kit. Programs about local history, genealogy, and utilizing some of our specialized crafting equipment like our Silhouette have also proven popular.

COLLECTIONS

This year was our first full year of being fine-free, and we continue to receive support and positive feedback from our community regarding this change. Providing accessible, diverse collections is extremely important to us at NPL, and we remain committed to using data-driven decisions to update and streamline our physical and digital collections. To accomplish this, we use special library databases to identify areas of the collection that need additional or updated materials, and order materials specifically to fulfill those needs.

Our Library of Things grew not only in popularity, but also in number this year. We added many new items, thanks in part to a successful fundraiser by the Normal Public Library Foundation. We purchased new tech

toys, several ukuleles, outdoor games, craft kits, CD players, and so much more. These items were especially sought after as people continued to look for activities that could be done at home and in small groups, and most importantly, were free.



Our physical collection spaces improved this past year as we:

- Moved our biographies closer to our nonfiction section to create more seating and study space
- Provided more spacing in our new items shelving to allow a better experience browsing for those visitors using wheelchairs or walkers
- Colocated all science fiction books on the main floor and shelved short stories in alphabetical order within fiction to improve the patron experience
- Removed unused copies of older items to limit use of the our highest shelves, making our collection easier and safer to access
- Purchased new and classic items in science fiction and horror to round out existing materials
- Added monthly displays to highlight fiction, nonfiction, AV, and other items on a selected theme, such as games, royalty, baking, etc.



Digital content remained extremely popular, comprising 9% of our annual circulation for the year. Patrons are able to access free streaming movies, music, TV, e-books, e-audiobooks, magazines, and more through Hoopla, eRead Illinois, OverDrive, and more. This year, we added Kanopy (streaming video content), LOTE Online for Kids (stories in languages other than English), and Craftsby (craft tutorials) to our virtual branch. All content on these platforms is available to Normal residents at no cost. As these resources can occasionally come with a bit of a learning curve, we increased training both in and outside the library on how to access these resources, including at the senior facilities we visit.

SPACES

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the many challenges and opportunities available to us in our current space, and we took advantage of our time in 2021 to reimagine and revitalize many of the physical spaces that our patrons know and love. The grant-funded accessible restrooms on our first floor were fully completed in 2021, and we also completed an accessibility audit with the Town to understand how we can continue making our facility as barrier-free as possible for all patrons.

Spaces for people to meet and gather are consistently in high demand, especially as we have seen communal spaces become increasingly scarce as the pandemic continues. To address this need and give patrons more space to gather safely, we added seating in the center area of the first floor, in our biography area, and in our cafe area. As we were placing tables and chairs in the cafe, we barely had them set up before patrons were sitting down to read their newspaper or get on their laptop!

In our Children's area, 2021 saw the return of our tech playground and the reopening of our extremely popular Discovery Room. While these spaces were closed, we fielded questions daily from patrons about when they could expect their return, so we were thrilled to be able to reopen both of these spaces in a way that prioritized the health and safety of patrons and staff.





Our public gallery space hosted works from regional artists bringing arts, photography, and crafts to our community including life-size paintings by Rick Lewis, quilts from fourteen members of the Hands All Around Quilt Guild, and several works of art by our very own library staff.

MOVING FORWARD

This past year found us innovating, creating, and adapting to provide the highest possible level of service for our community. While the challenges and uncertainty of COVID-19 continued to shape the scope of our services and programs, we are proud to have responded with new and exciting opportunities for our patrons that were met with enthusiasm and joy. We continued to forge new partnerships while nurturing and growing our existing connections, all of which will serve us well in the future as we develop and deliver effective and impactful services, programs, and collections to our community.



Moving into 2022, Normal Public Library intends to build upon the changes made during our second pandemic year by closely following our 2021–2024 strategic plan and the goals therein. We will continue to prioritize programs, services, and collections that are intuitive, user-friendly, and inclusive. Hybrid programming that offers both virtual and in-person attendance will remain a vital option as we move forward, and we will continue to offer browser packs and curbside pickup indefinitely.

Though we do not know what the next year will bring, we will do our best to proactively and positively meet any new or ongoing challenges. Our patrons and our community remain our focus, and we are excited to see how we grow together in 2022!





WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2022

- Continue to deliver exceptional services, collections, and programs for all ages in various formats, including in-person, virtually, hybrid, and off-site
- Continue optimizing our resources, including our staff, budget, and spaces
- Launch an updated and more user-friendly website
- Work with the Library Planning Committee to advance discussions regarding the library's space challenges
- One-on-one appointments with librarians to assist patrons with tech help, using library resources, genealogy, and more
- Programs for adults funded by the Illinois Humanities Council and the Road Scholars Speaking Bureau
- New book clubs for adults, including Romance Me and Book Brunch
- Continue to implement the goals and priorities outlined in the 2021–2024 strategic plan, with a focus towards best serving the public
- Possible abatement project
- Advocate for consideration and prioritization in the Uptown South planning process
- Draft a marketing and communication action plan
- Enhance collections, services, and programming for families and individuals in our community who do not speak English as their primary language