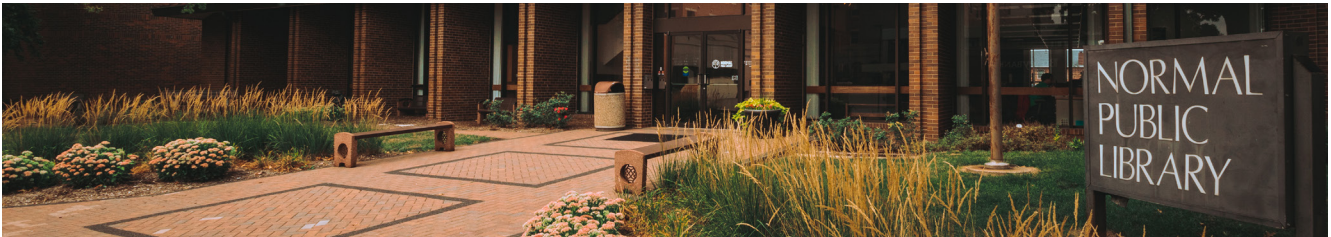# NORMAL PUBLIC LIBRARY

2020

ANNUAL REPORT

COVID-19 defined 2020 and shaped how Normal Public Library offered library services, programs, and collections to our community. The challenges of 2020 demonstrated the vital importance of an innovative, equitable, accessible, and dynamic public library. As we all transitioned to staying at home and away from others, NPL staff worked diligently to keep our patrons informed, entertained, and connected. We leveraged our partnerships and relationships to expand our reach beyond our facility, all the while working hard to complete some long overdue updates and improvements to optimize the safety and accessibility of our spaces.

HIGHLIGHTS OF 2020

- Quickly pivoted during COVID-19 to best serve our community
- Added online library card application and virtual tutorials to provide access to digital content
- Greatly expanded contactless curbside pick-up service; added Browser Pack service
- Developed and delivered over 300 virtual programs—including story times, book clubs, LEGO, poetry, and more—via Zoom, Facebook Live, YouTube, and Instagram
- 3D printed face shields and ear guards for local health care workers
- Collaborated with Parks & Recreation staff to create story walks
- Modified Summer Reading Program and 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten to continue remotely
- Recognized by Library Journal and School Library Journal for our efforts during COVID-19
- Outreach successes included library cards for Unit 5 students, expanded home delivery
- Giving Tuesday success enabled development of "NPL for All" accessibility app
- Normal Public Library Foundation continued growing; hired Development Coordinator
- Grants received included Illinois Public Library Per Capita; Digital Network Access; PPE for Staff and Patrons; CDBG Funding for Unit 5 Literacy Packs; ALA Mini Grant for Digimakers
- Provided 3,000 books in 1,500 literacy packs for families in the Unit 5 school district and 480 books directly via CDBG funding

- Expanded communications via bimonthly newsletters, informational flyers, and local partners
- Eliminated overdue fines and DVD fees
- Implemented auto-renewals and standardized check-out periods
- Alphabetized DVD collection for easy, intuitive access
- Shifted NPL Board meetings to Zoom and YouTube
- Improved cleaning protocols and equipment (including electrostatic disinfecting and sanitizing sprayers), added custodial staff, built adequate stock of PPE and essential cleaning supplies
- Created resource lists of books and movies to help support and heal our community
- Formally assessed usability of our website via free University of Michigan study
- Constructed three accessible, single-occupancy, all-gender restrooms on main floor
- Continued lease of 57 additional parking spaces
- Proactively positioned our budget to prepare for any possible impact due to COVID-19
- Provided 3,142 free books to kids and teens through our Summer Reading program to encourage literacy and reading for fun throughout the summer months
- Hosted our first Yule Ball—a large fundraiser party based off of the *Harry Potter* book series—at the Bloomington Country Club

SERVICES

Once it was clear that we would need to radically shift our service model to adapt to a rapidly changing pandemic landscape, our staff got to work immediately. Within a few days of our facility closing, staff:

- Launched a full slate of virtual programming for all ages
- Created a portal for virtual library card registration
- Added a website chat feature to answer patron questions in real time
- Produced how-to videos to help patrons access our electronic resources in our virtual branch
- Revised our Personnel Policy to include additional emergency closing procedures
- Adjusted our leadership structure to provide stability and continuity throughout COVID-19

normalpubliclibrary

SWIPE FOR

NPL@HOME
JULY 20–26
ACTIVITIES
& EVENTS

Liked by laura.in.color and others
normalpubliclibrary A full lineup for next week! We have programs for all ages, on a variety of platforms. We hope to "see" you or your family at one of these fun programs!
July 17, 2020

As we learned more about how to deliver in-person services safely, staff worked together to expand our fledgling curbside service into a fully-formed contactless delivery service. By implementing a safe quarantine process for our physical materials and instituting safeguards for staff, we were able to place over 157,000 items in the hands of library patrons. To serve those who were unable to utilize curbside, we expanded our contactless home delivery services to any Normal patron who did not feel comfortable coming to the library, and we provided fresh collections of large print materials to five senior living facilities every six weeks.

As we assessed how we could be of help to our community's frontline workers, we put our 3D printers to work by printing face shields and ear guards for McLean County Emergency Management. This project was recognized by other local businesses with 3D printers, who kindly donated filament so we could increase our output and continue our efforts, and received a large amount of positive feedback
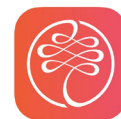
via social media.

With most of our community sheltering in place at home, we worked to synthesize and improve our communications output by finding new ways to inform our residents about services available at NPL, including:

normalpubliclibrary
Normal, Illinois

Liked by cait.hallatt and others
normalpubliclibrary Our 3D printers have been hard at work printing ear guards and face shields for our local frontline health care workers! We feel honored to be able to put our printers to use on this project.
Special shout out to staff members Feras and John for getting the printers up and running even while we are closed!
#librariesofinstagram #normalpubliclibrary
View all 2 comments
April 13, 2020

- Sent out 18,000 flyers in the Town water bill that explained how to get a library card, use our e-resources, and access our virtual programs from home
- Added Constant Contact to send bimonthly newsletters to over 26,000 patrons
- Utilized Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram to interact with our followers on a daily basis through live videos, Q&A prompts, virtual costume contests, and polls
- Launched a Roll20 account as well as a Discord server specifically for young adults in our community to have a safe, secure space to interact and enjoy teen programming

The Normal Public Library Foundation (NPLF) remained essential in helping us offer services above and beyond what our budget allows, and this year we were happy to see the Foundation grow and adapt to help us deliver exceptional programs and services during COVID-19. We were able to complete and launch our accessibility app, NPL for All, which was funded by NPLF's 2019 Giving Tuesday campaign. The app provides information and insights about the library's building and services for individuals and their families, and has already been downloaded 401 times from the app stores.

While we were not able to hold our beloved biannual used book sales, we were able to set up a small ongoing sale area for patrons to browse when our facility reopened. We resumed accepting donated items in early summer, thanks to the temporary addition of a standalone shipping container in our leased lot. Lastly, NPLF hired their first staff member who hit the ground running, accomplishing

many tasks that have been on NPLF's agenda for some time. His work soliciting monthly donations, compiling a database of donors, creating a separate NPLF web presence, and running NPLF's 2020 Annual Campaign will help NPL be better than ever going forward.

PROGRAMS

Although COVID-19 drove the majority of 2020's programming online, we did have a few months at the beginning of the year to enjoy some in-person programming at NPL. Those programs included:

- Autism Café
- Totally 90's Party and UnValentine's Day Party (for teens)
- Pop-Up NPL at various senior living sites, the ARC, and the Children's Discovery Museum
  - Tech-It-Out
  - Reel Classics
  - Fairies and Magical Creatures with Jon Etter
  - An Inside Look with Heartland Theatre Company
- Yule Ball fundraiser based on the *Harry Potter* book series
- Tuesday Tales, Baby Rock, and Lapsit Story Hour
- Sensory-Friendly After Hours and Storytime
- One-Shot RPG's with Red Raccoon Games
- After School Art Club with Illinois Art Station
- Mo Willems Birthday Bash
- LEGO My Library
- Unit 5 Reads
- And many others!

Over 300 programs were held virtually in 2020, including:

- Summer Reading Program
- 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten
- The Polar Express Experience
- Tiny Book Concerts
- Teen Writer's Workshop

- Poetry is Normal and Poetry is Normal Presents
- Tea and Paint Classes
- Escape Rooms
- Make It!
- Animal Crossing with NPL (a popular Nintendo Switch game, especially during quarantine)
- Dungeons and Dragons on Roll20
- Kids Book Club, Teen Book Club, and Zoom Book Club for adults
- And many others!

Michael VanCalbergh
@MVCpoet

Replying to @NPLTweets

Are you all planning on doing this again? My daughter gasped so loudly when she heard that people from the library played Animal Crossing too that I thought she would faint.

5:24 PM · 5/6/20 · Twitter for Android

Faye Andris Wow!! You are doing a great job!!
Love · Reply · Message · 5w

Bailey McDowell Thanks so much for putting this together! So cool
Like · Reply · Message · 1w

Sheila M. Hufeld Bravo! You guys are great!!
Love · Reply · Message · 5w

Kimberly Knight Thanks for doing this! My son had a great time and hopes you do it again.
Like · Reply · Message · 1w

We were able to add new and exciting components to these programs such as take-home craft and prize packs, while maintaining the reading challenges, themed story times, and engaging programming that patrons have long enjoyed from NPL. To provide a small snapshot of our 2020 programming, we had 2,700 patrons participate in our Summer Reading challenge, presented over 530 programs both virtually and in-person, and distributed approximately 750 craft and activity packs to kids, teens, and adults.

We continued collaborating on programming with our valued community partners, including Heartland Theatre, Communication Junction, and ISU and IWU's music departments. Some of our most popular partnered programs were Story Walks in collaboration with Normal Parks and Recreation, which provided a safe and healthy way to enjoy a library program outdoors. These interactive walks got our patrons outside and into our Town's parks, enjoying stories and poems that incorporated literacy with movement and a bit of fresh air! Our timely switch to virtual and socially distanced services were highlighted in School Library Journal as well as Library Journal, two widely read,

national publications for the library profession. Though 2020 separated us physically from our community for much of the year, we were able to maintain our role as a place to stay up-to-date on vital information, even in a virtual environment. NPL was heavily involved with providing information on Census 2020, voting locations, and Child Abuse Awareness Month. As the summer unfolded and we

witnessed the protests against racial injustice happening locally as well as nationally, NPL staff worked to create resource lists of books and movies that helped our community contextualize and understand the events they were seeing. We continued this model for Juneteenth, Pride 2020, and Hispanic Heritage Month, and received many likes, shares, and positive responses on social media.

COLLECTIONS

One of the most impactful changes we made to increase accessibility to our materials was to eliminate all overdue fines, including outstanding balances on patron accounts, and implementing auto-renewals and standardized checkout periods on all materials. Research has shown that charging fines for late materials does

not increase materials retention but instead discourages library use, especially amongst those who are financially vulnerable. This change allowed us to truly provide a welcoming experience for all of our community members, regardless of their income or previous fine balance. Additionally, we removed the one-dollar fee for renting movies, eliminating the barrier of cost from that collection and opening up our audiovisual collection for lending to other area libraries, and in turn, their
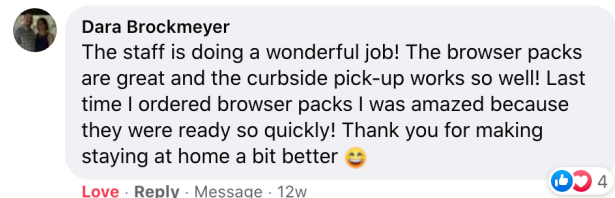
collections to our patrons. Another very popular change was the alphabetizing of our DVD collection. A 50-disc cleaner was purchased to efficiently and effectively prolong the life of our audiovisual collection, with approximately 6,873 discs cleaned thus far.
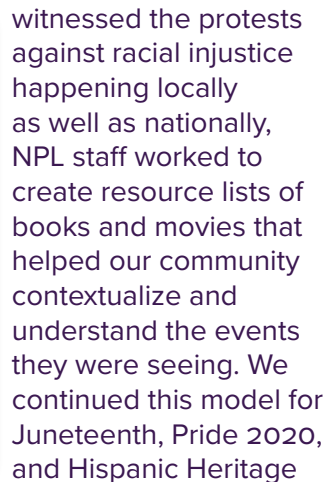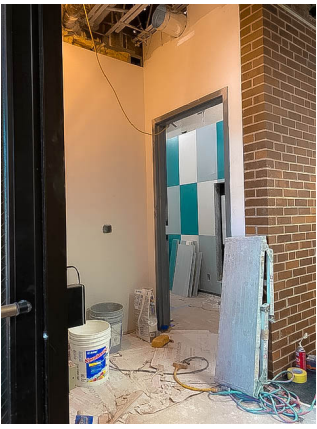
Digital content proved to be extremely popular this year, comprising 23% of our annual circulation versus 10% in 2019. Patrons were able to access free streaming movies, e-books, e-audiobooks, music, games, and more through Hoopla, eRead Illinois, BookFlix, TumbleBooks, and others. The ability to provide these resources to our community, despite our facility being closed and staff sheltering at home, was invaluable to our patrons.

As the year progressed, we heard from patrons that browsing the library's stacks was an experience that was sorely missed by many. In response, we introduced Browser Packs, a "personal shopper" service that provided 1,327 patrons with 11,845 items selected for their particular tastes. Browser Packs have been extremely well received by our patrons and we plan to keep the service available indefinitely.

Dara Brockmeyer
The staff is doing a wonderful job! The browser packs are great and the curbside pick-up works so well! Last time I ordered browser packs I was amazed because they were ready so quickly! Thank you for making staying at home a bit better 😊

Love · Reply · Message · 12w   4

Kristin Guerrero
We picked up our browser pack last week and my kids have LOVED it!! Our library really is the best!

Love · Reply · Message · 12w   2

Kelly Maciuba
Totally agree! If you describe interests, format, they do a great job finding things. Covid or not, hope they keep the browser packs permanently.

Love · Reply · Message · 12w   2

Heidi Zimmerman
I tell everyone about this wonderful service. You guys need to take a bow !! 👏👏👏

Love · Reply · Message · 12w   2

FACILITIES

While our facility remained closed for the spring and summer, big changes were happening to our physical space to make it more welcoming

and user-friendly. Utilizing a state Live and Learn Construction Grant, we renovated both of the restrooms on our first floor and added an additional restroom, creating three accessible, all-gender restrooms for our patrons to use. Additionally, we:

- Worked with Normal Parks and Recreation to address several landscaping issues around our building, including removing a tree, adding a rain garden, and new plantings
- Completed replacement of the west roof
- Replaced all lighting in our parking lot with LED lights
- Created more efficient mailroom space for accepting deliveries

For many organizations, COVID-19 presented a financial challenge that will be felt far beyond 2020, and the library was no different. The library took swift action to prepare for the uncertainty ahead, including:

- Adjusted our budget to proactively position us for any possible changes in our budget caused by COVID-19
- Left two full-time positions vacant
- Identified funds for additional cleaning, PPE, and sanitizing supplies
- Ended contracts for electronic resources that were underutilized
- Purchased two electrostatic disinfecting and sanitizing sprayers
- Built a supply of cleaning and PPE supplies from various local and national sources
- Transitioned to a new structure of six part-time custodial staff, allowing for coverage any time our facility is occupied

Grants were vitally important to several projects this year, and we were thankful for funding from:

- Illinois Public Library Per Capita Grant ($65,621)

- PPE grant ($500)
- Digital Network Access grant ($10,000)
- ALA mini-grant ($700)
- CDBG/HUD grant ($7,500)

These funds allowed us to expand Wi-Fi access, give away free books and crafts to children in the Unit 5 school district, and purchase essential PPE for our staff, amongst other things.

MOVING FORWARD

We found new and exciting ways to connect with members of our community that forever altered our idea of what it means to provide robust, responsive services. We forged collaborative partnerships and meaningful connections that will help us sustain and grow our library's reach in the years ahead, and confirmed that our library means much more to our community than just being a place to get a good book—though that is certainly important to us!

Moving into 2021, Normal Public Library fully intends to build upon the foundational changes that were made to our services, programs, and collections during 2020. As we complete our strategic plan for 2021-2024, our focus remains on providing the best possible library for our community. We worked with the University of Michigan on a website usability study, which we will use to improve the functionality of our website. Our virtual programming continues to improve as we learn more about what our patrons enjoy (or don't!) about our offerings, and we will continue to provide options for contactless and curbside service indefinitely.
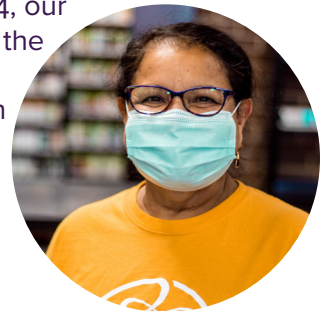
Though we do not know what 2021 will look like for our community, NPL has some exciting projects and plans in the works to make library services more inclusive, accessible, and dynamic.

WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2021

- Continue providing optimal digital content options and robust physical collections
- Remain prepared to respond to challenges and opportunities presented by COVID-19
- Continue to optimize health of patrons and staff through a safe and clean facility
- Complete 2021-2024 NPL Strategic Plan and Implementation Plan
- Optimize staff structure to best serve our community within our organizational capacity
- Continue to emphasize and prioritize Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion as we move forward
- Complete Wi-Fi assessment; install new and improved Wi-Fi infrastructure

- Continue optimization of current facility to best serve the community; facility master plan
- Create communications plan and advocacy plan; update technology plan
- Continue to grow NPL Foundation support, and identify supporters and event sponsors
- Deploy new public computers
- Update NPL website to create a cleaner, more user-friendly experience
- Continue to support traditional and innovative programming for all ages
- Replace exterior signage
- Convert most interior lighting to LED via grant funding