

Sharon Ellingwood White, Director

Alice M. Ward Memorial Library, Canaan

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The Alice M. Ward Memorial Library in Canaan, VT plays a vital role in local public health and Emergency Preparedness. Canaan is the Northeast corner town in the state of Vermont, Essex County, bordering East Hereford, Quebec, Canada and West Stewartstown, NH. In over 575 square miles of the most rural and geographically isolated part of the state of Vermont: Essex County has 0 hospitals, 0 pharmacies, 1 high school, and one primary care office that is 40 minutes one way from Canaan on bare roads, and further on snowy roads. There is little health equity in this part of the state and the needs are often not recognized in Montpelier.

In addition to Canaan our patrons come from from the tiny VT towns of Norton, Lemington, Averill, the Gores and Unincorporated areas, Bloomfield & more as well as bordering NH towns.

To understand the role we play you must understand the inequities and health disparities in this area from the rest of Vermont. The "local" face of public health for this area is one hour and ten minutes- one way- from Canaan- in Newport, Vermont.

Recently, this library was contacted by a member of the Newport office from the volunteer Medical Reserve Corps for the Be Bright at Night Campaign, and the library connected them with a local community group to distribute their lights for walkers at a public meeting. It is often through our library that contacts are made to the rest of our community in the area of public health. It is often the library making these introductions and bringing the services to town. We are recognized as a partner with knowledge and integrity.

When COVID-19 vaccines first became available in 2021, our 80 & 90 year old age banded residents were being asked in winter to drive an hour and ten minutes *each* way to Newport or Derby or even St Johnsbury for a vaccine. All of our hospital, pharmacy and primary care services are located in New Hampshire due to our geographical isolation from Newport/St J but at the time- persons could only get a vaccine in their home state. NH would not take us. Even with a pharmacy just over the border. The inequity in this was astounding. It was the library that advocated to the AHS and the Governor and soon vaccine clinics came to the Beecher Falls VT (Canaan) Volunteer Fire Department station, the Upper CT Valley Hospital in Colebrook, NH went through many hoops to get in the VT vaccine system, and later vaccines came on mobile vans. The library worked hard to answer questions and phone calls, and to promote these sites.

Later, the same thing happened with COVID 19 test kits. Distribution sites again were in St J and Newport but not Canaan and the entire Eastern side of Essex County along the NH border. Again, we advocated for these kits, and to this day we are a busy test kit distribution site.

When there is not hard infrastructure in a rural area, there is our active, vocal, advocating library. At town meeting last week a resident stood up and said "our library is the best thing going in this town." We were thanked just not for our library work but for "what we do for the community."

We act as a heating center, a cooling center, we host meetings with local community members to have meetings with Hireability, or NH students who are VT residents, or who are adult learners, to meet with VSAC for their college plans to further their education. We open our space for family custody visits. We assist many adults with paperwork for the IRS, the DMV, Social Security, hunting & fishing licensing, sample election ballots, we promote & host meeting warnings on our sign, promote Efficiency Vermont

and the Heat Squad, NEKCA, fuel assistance and more. WIC and the Dolly Parton Imagination Library are offered at our weekly Playgroup for birth -5 year olds. During COVID-19 this library drove 40 minutes each way to food drops in Brighton VT from the VT Foodbank. We live in a desert for 3 Squares, Everyone Eats, Veggie Van Go, and the VT Foodbank. The library has used programming money in the past to help the school support a food backpack program. It would be nice if we could get equity in this area yet it does not come. Local dollars pay to meet the need.

With the Canadian border next door, we provided hundreds of encounters to local persons and visitors passing through Canaan to help with their ArriveCAN app services to cross in to Canada. We provided translation services, and wifi, and staff time to help stranded strangers from afar, and elderly residents trying to reconnect with their siblings and family after the length of the pandemic.

There is no end to what we do here as critical rural infrastructure to our community. A rural library with welcoming, professionally trained staff is well poised to pivot and help with whatever walks in the door. The hardest problem with this is I am staffed only 25 hours per week because of the difficulty in cost in local dollars to hire me full time. The staff paid full time with the luxury of benefits do not reach this area. I do not have time to respond to queries like this from the Working Group. Just this month I am working on VTLIB grants, Summer Reading plans, the annual report, plans for the Capital Project needs assessment and running a very busy library in half the time I need to run a library. Rural libraries need a lot of staff and to be funded where we can fill in the cracks for social infrastructure and Emergency preparedness. We do this, and more. Thank you for the opportunity to provide input, and if you have any questions, please contact me at any time.

Sincerely,
Sharon

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