

## Book Clubs and Programs at the Library:

At the August 16, 2024 Library Board Meeting Kathy Miller brought forward some concerns and questions that patrons had asked her during the Public Comment portion of the meeting. These concerns were:

1. The number of library sponsored book clubs
2. Author talks
3. Musicians

Ashia Gustafson later emailed Kathy asking for some more information this is the information Kathy Miller provided:

Thanks for seeking more clarifying information. I gather that one of the patrons I heard from is more of a nonfiction reader and feels like the opportunities for serious book discussion have been watered down with the newer alternating schedule. In addition, this person wishes that book club members could be more involved in suggesting titles or topics. Another is really into sci-fi and wishes there were chances to discuss books of that genre. And, as we've talked about before, there are several who continue to comment that the library should actively sponsor a mystery book club so that it would be included in the library newsletter as an adult option. Another comment that I've heard is that the library has moved so far into craft and makerspace activities that some of the traditional library emphasis on encouraging reading as an adult leisure and learning activity has been lost. We obviously can't satisfy everyone's individual wishes, but I think it is important to listen and keep lines of communication open. Beyond bringing patron comments to our Board meetings, offering periodic surveys can also help people feel like they've had a chance to share their thoughts and concerns.

When decisions are made to make any changes to programs, or to continue to have such programs, Mikaela, Nancy, and Ashia look at the very basic cost benefit ratios. What are the attendance numbers? What is the community impact of the program? Does this information justify continuing a program? Do the attendance number justify having a program/speaker/musician back again or doing something similar?

In addition, we consider the Library as a third place within our community. This term refers to a place outside of work and home where our community can come to socialize, connect, learn, interact, or just be. Aside from offering a place to sit, read, study, or work, staff look at programming as a way to offer a third place for the community, because those events serve as a way to bring people with common interests together. When we consider programming opportunities, we take into consideration how we might be able to both serve existing patrons and reach new and varied groups within the community.

**Book clubs:** the decision to combine the non-fiction and fiction book club into one book club came about by looking at the numbers and noticing that many of the same people attended both book clubs. Many times, a fiction book club discussion would be taken over by the non-fiction book club book discussion so the book clubs were naturally blending together already. The statistics have also proved that the combination of book clubs was a good decision. In 2023 the fiction book club averaged seven (7) participants at each meeting. Non-fiction also had an average of seven (7) participants in 2023. So far in 2024 we have an average of eleven (11) patrons per meeting with the combined book club, so we're already seeing an attendance improvement after combining the clubs.

As has been discussed, the Booked for Murder mystery book club had become a very small group of participants and it was hard to justify the Library continuing its participation as a result. In addition, the structure of Booked for Murder doesn't lend itself to traditional book club facilitation, so we made the decision to give the club over to its existing members to continue. We do provide more support for this book club than we traditionally would other private groups meeting here, as the meeting room is booked out for the year for the group and we do hang up any posters the group gives to the Library. We only include Library-sponsored events in our newsletter, so including Booked for Murder as it stands is not possible. If the Library were to start a mystery book club, it would not stay in its current format, which would most likely cause some ruffled feathers as well.

Mikaela has tried to start other types of book clubs that the Library sponsors, including the Pop Reads book club. The books circulated wildly, but an average of four (4) people showed up to the discussions. Cost benefit says that this is not a successful program and should not be continued. She also hosted the Small Bites Literary Club where folks could come share and discuss whatever they're reading, and attendance at that averaged five (5). As a result of low attendance, both programs have been paused indefinitely. Mikaela and Nancy have been discussing a "Read Your Own Book" book club, which is sort of a play on a genre book club in that people would come to the book club and talk about the book they are reading and hear about books other people are reading, but this is in very early planning stages.

Overall, attendance and anecdotal evidence is showing that people interact with book clubs in different ways than they used to. Many plan book clubs with their friends or coworkers with the events hosted at someone's home with drinks, snacks, and socializing. The Library is competing for time within a busy community schedule, and these traditional book clubs don't seem to be the hit they used to be.

### **Author Talks:**

Author talks tend to be either expensive with a good turnout or low-cost/free and not well attended. The Library hosted four (4) author talks in the 2022 – 2023 time-frame. The most successful was Mary Woster Haug's author talk, with 31 attendees, and the majority of which were friends and family, as Mary is a well-known Brookings resident. Mrs. Woster Haug's author talk was paid for and was in partnership with PFLAG.

The other author talks were:

Linda Grover, 11 attendees, \$200

Colin Mustful, 9 attendees, \$200

Mary Winters, 7 attendees, Free but from Sioux Falls and not well known

Averages: seven (7) attendees per event, \$19 per patron. While we don't have an official threshold for cost per patron for events, this is well above what we feel comfortable with.

More often than not, it is the author that approaches the Library about hosting an author talk. The Library usually books the One Book South Dakota author, unless the Book Festival is in Brookings, and the Humanities Council likes to spread the One Book author around the state a bit, so we are not always guaranteed an author talk from them. The price for more well-known authors gets exponentially more expensive the more popular they are, so allocating the funds for more well-known authors is a challenge. For example, we looked into having Native American author Anton Treuer come to BPL from Minnesota, and his cost was \$3,000 plus travel and lodging. His fee to speak via Zoom was \$1,500. We've considered hosting events where authors join us via Zoom, as the cost is lower then, but we have found that Brookings Library patrons are disappointed when they attend and the speaker isn't in person. They would like to physically meet the author. We are always open to author suggestions, and we'll evaluate the cost in relation to our budget!

### **Concerts:**

Concerts are fairly well attended when we are able to book them, but they are an expensive program option. Mikaela has a goal of two (2) concerts per year.

Concerts also need to fit all of the following criteria:

- a) fit the budget
- b) fit the schedule
- c) fit the musician's touring schedule
- d) fit the venue (what is too loud, too big of a set-up, requires too much tech, etc.)
- e) be something that might bring folks in.

Concerts in 2022:

Claude Bourbon- Guitar- 19 attendees, \$600

Sana Illahe- Pakistani Music- 25 attendees, \$75 because local student

Concerts in 2023:

Curtis and Loretta- American Folk Songs - 27 attendees, \$600 (we paid \$300 as we split with the SD Arts Council)

Averages: 24 attendees per event, - \$41 per attendee to host

With concerts, we're also competing for community attention with other venues, such as the Performing Arts Center and we're trying to be mindful of not stepping on their, or other venues', toes.

### **Crafts and Makerspace Programming:**

Historically, adult programming was done by the Community Services Coordinator alone. Staffing turnover, staff skills, and grant funding has allowed us to add additional programming on top of what has traditionally been done. The Community Services Coordinator does the majority of adult programming, and the Tech Services Librarian/Programming Supervisor does added technology and Maker Lab classes on top. Because of this, there is more adult programming happening in general; it's not taking away from the type of programs we already offer.

Since Nancy was hired as Tech Services Librarian/Programming Supervisor in 2017, she has worked to offer more technology-related programming, and that is reflected in the current Strategic Plan, as well as previous Strategic Plans. The Larson Family Foundation awarded BPL a \$45,000 grant in late 2021 to jumpstart the Library's Maker Lab, and Nancy has primarily worked on those efforts while Mikaela continued her efforts with the rest of adult programming. The goal of the space is to offer hands-on learning opportunities with new technologies, hobbies, and skills, allowing us to provide a third place that focuses on active learning. While these classes and workshops aren't literacy and reading focused, they are tremendously popular with the community and are no less valuable.

Overall, the amount and variety of adult programming has gone up drastically at the Brookings Public Library since 2019. These programming efforts focus on reading and literacy, cultural awareness, technology, skills/hobbies, socializing, and more. The ways in which our community interacts with the Library shifts over the years, and our programming will continue to shift as well.