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Shelburne Public Library highlights the important role libraries have in societal well-being

On Jan. 30, the Canadian Urban Libraries Council released a first-of-its-kind National Social Impact Study on libraries in Canada, exploring the role public libraries play in community life and social wellbeing by drawing on data and lived experience from more than 18,000 respondents across 26 Canadian public library systems.

It concluded that public libraries aren't just public spaces but vital social infrastructure ? the network of physical spaces, facilities and organizations (i.e. schools, parks, libraries, recreation centres) that foster social connection, well-being, and community resilience. Social infrastructure acts as a foundation for civic engagement and public health, distinct from, yet supported by, physical infrastructure.

The report contained several key findings, listed below.

Libraries matter to individuals, communities and society

For individuals, the library supports personal growth by offering a safe space outside the home, access to unbiased information, and opportunities to explore and invest time in personal interests. For the community, the library provides the opportunity to build new connections in an open, shared space. At the societal level, libraries contribute to making society more equal, inclusive, and less biased.

Libraries deliver impact across four dimensions

Libraries exhibit demonstrated emotional, intellectual, creative, and social impact. The highest impact scores are seen in the intellectual and emotional dimensions, especially for collections and programs. The social dimension generally scores lower, though collections stand out as inspiring ?empathy,' and programs stand out with high scores across all three parameters of the social dimension, showing that programs create community, relations, and empathy.

Collections are still a core library service

Despite many opportunities for Canadians to access literature and content outside libraries, their collections remain a core service. It is the most used service pillar, used by a total of 91 per cent of library users. Programs are the least used service (35 per cent) but have the highest impact score of all service pillars, illustrating that those who do use programs experience them as highly impactful across all four dimensions.

Broad support among non-users

Although not all Canadians use their local public library, a large majority of nonusers believe the library plays an important role. Seventy per cent of non-users agree that a public library is one of the most valuable resources a city can offer its community. And 83 per cent of non-users agree that it is good for children to have a relationship with their public library while growing up.

The full report is available at: culc.ca/project/social-impact-study/

Visit the Shelburne Public Library to find out about all the amazing opportunities available. From engaging programs to puzzles, to passes to museums and parks, we have something for everyone.