



Nanaimo Correctional Centre Book Club Wins International Award

Local Librarian Receives Award for Correctional Facility Book Club, Recognized by American Library Association

NANAIMO, August 15th, 2016 – A program out of the Nanaimo Harbourfront library has received international recognition from the [American Library Association \(ALA\)](#) for a book club and library established at the Nanaimo Correctional Centre.

The [Presidential Citation for Innovative International Library Projects](#) award heralds from the largest Library Association in North America, and awards **innovative contributions to international librarianship**. The American Library Association awarded five projects in total. Two of those projects awarded belonged to librarians at the Nanaimo Harbourfront branch of [Vancouver Island Regional Library \(VIRL\)](#).

The **Nanaimo Correctional Centre (NCC) library** initiative was led by Jennifer Seper, a librarian from the Nanaimo Harbourfront branch of VIRL.

According to Jennifer Seper, the program has been beyond successful. "I started the program in April of last year as a partnership between VIRL and the NCC with a simple plan to improve their library. Since that time, we have started a book club with 18 participants and a pending agreement that will allow inmates to request specific materials directly from the library."

The Nanaimo Correctional Centre (NCC) is a medium security prison that houses offenders from across the province. Seper approached the centre with a partnership as a means of increasing access to materials and in effort to increase literacy levels in an otherwise marginalized area of the community. Statistics show that the vast majority of the incarcerated struggle with literacy and that those that increase their literacy rates while incarcerated have a lower recidivism rate, making literacy-focused programs essential.

"Our librarians at VIRL are creative and think out-of-the-box. It's just another example of Vancouver Island Regional Library doing incredible work in our communities." Says Rosemary Bonanno, Executive Director of Vancouver Island Regional Library.

The program gives inmates the opportunity to learn how to discuss their feelings and opinions and to accept differing opinions from others in a no-confrontational way – developing skills and transitioning them to environments outside of the centre.

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Press Release

"I asked my mom to guess what I was doing while I am away. She guessed a bunch of things and when I finally told her I was in a book club, she just could not believe it. She was so happy."
Comments an NCC inmate and book club member.

About the Correctional Centre Book Club and Library

The Vancouver Island Regional Library Correctional Centre program started in April of 2015, with a partnership between VIRL and the Nanaimo Correctional Centre. The project, initiated by Jennifer Seper, began with a simple plan to improve the existing library at the centre but then grew to include a book club and a pending agreement that will allow inmates to request specific materials directly from the library.

The Nanaimo Correctional Centre (NCC) is a medium security prison that houses offenders from across the province. Under direction by Jennifer Seper, VIRL approached the centre with a partnership as a means of increasing access to materials and in effort to increase literacy levels in an otherwise marginalized area of the community. Statistics show that the vast majority of the incarcerated struggle with literacy and that those that increase their literacy rates while incarcerated have a lower recidivism rate, making **literacy-focused programs essential**.

Book club discussion are a good match with the therapeutic values of the inmate program as it gives inmates the opportunity to learn how to discuss their feelings and opinions and to accept differing opinions from others in a no-confrontational way. Titles read so far include *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, *The Golden Spruce: A True Story of Myth, Madness and Greed* (which all 9 members loved), and *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* which was universally loathed by all, but the facilitator. Feedback from the group and the prison wardens has been very positive. One inmate told Jennifer that "I asked my mom to guess what I was doing while I am away. She guessed a bunch of things and when I finally told her I was in a book club, she just could not believe it. She was so happy."

About the Award

The ALA Presidential Citation for Innovative International Library Projects began as an ALA Presidential initiative of Dr. Loriene Roy, ALA President in 2007-2008. Recipients are selected by a committee of the International Relations Round Table (IRRT) through a nomination process. For more information, please visit the IRRT [web site](#). IRRT is a Round Table of ALA with a mission to develop the interests of librarians in activities and problems in the field of international library relations.

For a list of past award recipients, please [click here](#).

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Vancouver Island Regional Library (VIRL) is the fifth-largest library system in British Columbia. We serve over 430,000 people on Vancouver Island, Haida Gwaii, and Bella Coola on the Central Coast through 39 branch libraries, a virtual branch, and a books-by-mail service. VIRL's holdings number one million and include books, magazines, CDs and DVDs. Administrative offices are located in Nanaimo.

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