



SHREWSBURY PUBLIC LIBRARY

COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUPS

SUMMARY REPORT 2023

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS = 24

- **FOCUS GROUP #1** (1/10/23 6:30-8:00PM) = 9
- **FOCUS GROUP #2** (1/17/23 6:30-8:00PM) = 10
- **FOCUS GROUP #3** (1/28/23 10:00-11:30PM) = 5

1. WHAT ARE THE VERY TWO WORDS YOU THINK OF WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT THE LIBRARY?



- Books
- Children's Programs
- Children's Room
- Community (3)
- Community Center
- Convenient

- Education
- Engagement
- Facility
- For Everyone (2)
- Excellent Resource
- Free
- Friendly
- Fun
- Great Selection (2)
- Happy
- Information (2)
- Learning
- Online
- Open (2)
- Resource (3)
- Socialization
- Valuable
- Warm (2)
- Welcoming (5)

2. WHAT DO YOU AND YOUR FAMILY LIKE THE MOST/LEAST ABOUT THE PROGRAMS THE LIBRARY HAS OFFERED?

POPULAR PROGRAMS

- **Children's Programs:** Summer reading program (3) || Baby and Me programs || Drop-in crafts || Halloween program || Infant Explorers || Live animals || Storywalk || Teen Advisory || Tinker Time || Wimpy kid book release
- **Adult Programs:** Author talks/visits (3) || Cooking events (2) (online cookbook book club with guest speakers, Indian cooking class) || Adult reading challenge || "Being Mortal" programs || Civil rights/social justice programs || Computer instruction ||

Decluttering program || Distinguished Author program with Ibram Kendi || Foreign films || Job hunters' program || Meditation sessions on Zoom || Involved with memory café || Music/Concerts || Painting workshop (dot mandala) || Reading at the cemetery || Tuesday Spanish Club || Spanish classes || Ukulele class

DISAPPOINTING PROGRAMS

- Human Library: It was not well-attended.
- Yoga via Zoom: She didn't feel as "connected" as she does in in-person sessions.
- *"Nothing"*: Response of most focus group attendees.

REASONS SOME ATTENDEES DON'T ATTEND PROGRAMS

- Scheduling conflicts (2)
- Attended programs when her kids were young, but not now.

HOW TO IMPROVE PROGRAMS

- Schedule children's programs at times when working parents can attend (e.g., evenings). (3)
 - Working parents find it difficult to attend daytime programs.
 - Would like working parents to be able to attend children's programs.
 - Accommodate working parents' schedules.
- Improve marketing of upcoming programs.
 - Not always aware of programs.
 - She is not on social media, so she doesn't hear about programs.
 - By the time the newsletter is received, there's not enough time to register.

SPECIFIC PROGRAM IDEAS

- DEI-focused programs.
- Teen-focused foreign language programs.

COMMENTS/FEEDBACK

- The Library is doing important DEI work.
- Offering meditation via Zoom made the program very accessible.
- Good to work with schools to offer a summer reading program. It kept kids engaged.
- Likes the Beanstack application.
- Likes the Library being a community forum.
- Avoid inviting conflict by taking on partisan topics. For example, the Library hosted controversial figure Ibram Kendi as a speaker, which was an implied endorsement of his views.
- Library offers a nice variety of programs. There are interesting opportunities.

- Library offerings are fantastic, but they need more resources.

3. LET'S BRAINSTORM SOME NEW PROGRAM IDEAS SPECIFICALLY FOR ADULTS. **OUTDOOR PROGRAM/SERVICES IDEAS (20)**

Programs (17):

- **Hikes/Walking (7):** Dedicated walking group || Guided hikes with QR code || Guided walks to explore Shrewsbury hubs || Hikes of historical significance || A meetup of women walking and having coffee || Nature hikes || Nature walks with Parks and Rec || Partner with Shrewsbury Trails to develop hikes.
- **Couch-to-5K Program (2)**
- **Misc. Ideas (8):** Bird Watching (partner with Mass Audubon society) || Boot camp, like Weight Watchers || Geocache || Letterboxing || Shrewsbury Garden Club (what to plant and when) || Speaker events at Dean Park Pavilion || Traveling storytime (various spots in the community) || Use the gazebo, parks, etc. as program locations.

Services (3):

- **Lend sports equipment (2):** Kayaks and ski/snowshoe rentals.
- Passes to use kayak at Regatta Point.

ADULT PROGRAM IDEAS (17)

- **Cooking Classes (6)**
- **Music Classes (2):** 6-week instruction on musical instruments and ukulele classes
- **Misc. Ideas (9):** 50% of new adults are moving back home, so offer more meditation workshops || CPR classes || French conversation club || Mindfulness workshops || More non-fiction book clubs || Partner with Garden Club || Writing workshops.

MULTIGENERATIONAL PROGRAM IDEAS (16)

- **Family-Friendly Programs (4):** Family dance || Family yoga || Make Way for Ducklings Day (a parade of kids dressed up)
- **Game Nights (3):** Board game night || Family game nights || Game night
- **Community Building Programs (2):** Building a sense of community and learning about each other and Programs with community members sharing information and having conversations about different ethnicities.
- **Misc. Ideas (10):** Adults and teens joint book club || Clues and mystery type of program || Cooking || Escape room || Fine arts for kids and adults || Food and concession stand || Girls Who Code Program || Movie on the Common || Puppet show || Teens assisting older folks with technology.

COMMENTS/FEEDBACK

- College kids want to feel like they're part of the Library.
- Inform community members how they can engage with the Library.

- “The Library is the quiet hero in the town.”

MISC. UNRELATED IDEAS

- Create a co-working space.
- Offer tool rentals.
- Partner with schools to develop, promote, and deliver programs that support the school’s curriculum.
- Provide information about the community (e.g., trails committee).
- Serve as a centralized repository of comm events and organizations.
- Share librarians’ recommendations for podcasts.

4. WE’RE ALWAYS CONSIDERING WAYS TO IMPROVE THE LIBRARY’S INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR SPACE. WE’D LIKE TO HEAR YOUR IDEAS FOR HOW THE LIBRARY’S PHYSICAL SPACE BE IMPROVED. WHAT ENHANCEMENTS WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE?

INTERIOR IMPROVEMENTS (50):

- **Café/Coffee Nook (14):** A true café || Comfortable chairs in coffee place || Hanging out space with coffee.
- **Makerspace (9):** Avid quilter wants quilting space in the makerspace || Community digitization space || Craft center || Craft room || Makerspace with collaborative spaces.
- **Wayfinding (6):** Layout is confusing to first-timers. Need a map. || Map for each floor || Need more signs || Offer a wayfinding app to find your way in the Library || Signage of categories should be better || Space is less conducive to browsing than at Northborough Free Library
- **Improve Displays (5):** Add displays || Add more space to really display and highlight books || Create theme-based book selection displays || More colorful displays || Neatly display of books in bins.
- **Décor/Interior Design (5):** Children’s art to be displayed || Create a lounge-like atmosphere || Larger display space for artwork || Make the teen room more welcoming || More welcoming tones and colors.
- **Dedicated Spaces (4):** Offering more quiet study space would be very good || Small gym || Teen space without books. Just a hanging-out space. || Use meeting room space for many purposes
- **Misc. Ideas (7):** Add comfortable furniture || Expand everything for greater flow || Improve accessibility of books. The top and bottom shelves are difficult to browse. || Increase facility’s size and scope || More cozy chairs || Reconfigure/move the book collection to create more space || Update the lighting in the teen area to be more teen-friendly, like Worcester Public Library

EXTERIOR IMPROVEMENTS (10):

- **Expand Use of Courtyard (3):** Like the courtyard for adults to use || In the evenings, have firepits for families in the courtyard || Underused courtyard could be used for more.
- **Weather Protection (2):** Build a protected permanent structure || Add an overhead tent.
- **Misc. Ideas (5):** Add exterior lights to enhance safety || Electrical outlets/power charging stations outside || EV charging station || Natural gardens with native plants that are an extension of the seed library || Picnic tables.

COMMENTS/FEEDBACK:

- Areas are very segmented.
- Independent wandering to explore the building can be enjoyable.
- The layout of space and organization of materials at Northborough Free Library is better.
- Lots of attractive spaces.
- Need to confirm space is wheelchair accessible.
- The space is very comfortable.
- Very user-friendly space.
- Why isn't the courtyard used?

MISC. UNRELATED IDEAS:

- **Programs (6):** Learning oral history || Learn financial literacy || Occasional Saturday morning tours would be good. || Recycling programs || Repair Day: Bring skilled people to repair stuff. || Teen advisory members could run a business (e.g., healthy snacks)
- **Services (3):** Have certified people help people use the Library of Things and makerspace equipment. || Rent the Library space for birthday parties. || Share staff-curated selections of books to read.
- **Collections (2):** Tool library || VHS converters
- **Management and Operations (1):** Accommodate emotional support animals.
- **Marketing (1):** Increase outreach to non-English speaking community members.

UNRELATED COMMENTS/FEEDBACK:

- Great job being done with limited resources.
- Library deserves more resources and public support.

5. WHAT ADDITIONAL TECHNOLOGY NEEDS SHOULD THE LIBRARY FOCUS ON IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM IDEAS (9):

- **Application/Software Classes (4):** Adobe Photoshop || Classes to learn how to use apps || Cyber security programs || How to use software (photo editors et al.)

- **Media Literacy (2):** How to evaluate info || How to identify legitimate sources of info (media literacy)
- **New/Emerging Technology (2):** AI learning || Learn about Chat GPT
- **Misc. Idea (1):** Typing class for young adults.

TECHNOLOGY COLLECTIONS IDEAS (6):

- **Add Devices (3):** Create a technology “petting zoo” for people to access and try devices they may not be able to afford or that they want to “try before they buy.” || Drones || Offer access to assistive devices for people with challenges (hearing devices, vision enhancement devices)
- **Expand Digital Resources (3):** Increase e-book and e-audio materials. || Integrate Libby and CWMARS applications for books and e-books. || Reduce the number of DVDs and offer more streaming resources. DVDs take up space in the Library.

TECHNOLOGY MARKETING IDEAS (4):

- **Collaborate with Local Schools/Colleges (4):** Collaborate with schools and review H.S. clubs to develop complementary programs || Collaborate with Tower Hill. They experienced an uptick in programming offerings this year. || Explore potential program collaborations with schools/colleges || Recruit interns from colleges to support the Library’s technology initiatives.

TECHNOLOGY SERVICES IDEAS (2):

- Develop a Library application to promote the Library’s activities.
- Consider having teens help adults with their technology needs.

COMMENTS/FEEDBACK:

- Applauds the Library for providing access to Libby.
- Appreciate the hotspots.
- Offer more writing and fewer tech programs for kids.

MISC. UNRELATED IDEAS - PROGRAMS: Game nights for adults || Historically themed programs where people dress up.

6. THE LIBRARY WANTS TO SERVE AS MANY COMMUNITY MEMBERS AS POSSIBLE. HOW CAN THE LIBRARY IMPROVE ITS OUTREACH AND DELIVERY SERVICES?

OUTREACH IDEAS (12):

- **Target Groups (10):** Elderly/Seniors (2) || Demographically diverse populations || Homeless people || Neurodivergent young adults || New residents || New adults || New parents || People who don’t have computers || Portuguese immigrants.
- **Misc. Ideas (2):** Develop a program like “Welcome Wagon” for new residents || Work with COA to engage seniors.

COMMENT/FEEDBACK: College students think of stress when they think of libraries.

MISC. UNRELATED IDEAS:

- **Services (3):** Create a reading service for blind community members. || translation services || Offer transportation to the Library.
- **Technology (3):** Create a mobile application that includes program reminders and notifications with pop-up reminders (2) || Reach to H.S. students to promote access to Mango Languages and the benefits of having a library card.
- **Programs (2):** Offer activities that build human connections || Provide instruction for e-books, etc.
- **Collections (1):** Offer Resources to help parents who may not have college educations (e.g., help students with HW).
- **Management and Operations (1):** Harness the situation of after-school middle school students.

7. ARE THERE ANY BARRIERS TO SERVICE—THINGS THAT IMPEDE YOUR ABILITY TO RECEIVE THE SERVICE YOU NEED OR WANT FROM THE LIBRARY?

- **Website (8):** The calendar on the Library website is difficult to navigate || It's challenging to find programs/resources on the website || Event information should be obvious on the website. Don't use Facebook exclusively to promote programs. || Make it easier to register for programs || Make Sunday hours information more prominent/clear || Navigating between CWMARS and the Library website is challenging || Online catalog isn't user-friendly. || Website needs a refresh. Can use talented community members to update it.
- **Technology Challenges (3):** Logging in to databases || Tracking for ILL books is difficult || Wait times for books/e-books is long. Interest drops due to long waits.
- **Hours (2):** Morning hours should be more consistent || Be open on Monday holidays so more people can visit the Library. Alternate staff who work on the Monday holidays.

MISC. IDEAS:

- Offer mini-tutorials (quick and digestible) to learn about new services.
- Sponsor an elementary school day or teen day (volunteers)

COMMENT/FEEDBACK: Need an unlimited budget for Library.

8. WHAT ISSUES NOW FACING THE TOWN/STATE/COUNTRY/WORLD DO YOU THINK MAY IMPACT THE LIBRARY?

- **Ideological Partisanship (6):** Anti-democracy sentiments || Book banning in other states || Book bans || Faux American sentiment of rugged individualism || Gender issues || Move to restrict books based on ideology/politics.

- **Digital and Media Literacy Need (4):** Digital literacy || Focus on timely topics || Heightened awareness of current issues (e.g., Ukraine) || Need to catalog visual media (real vs. “deep fake”)
- **Health and Safety Concerns (4):** Another pandemic || Need to be aware of gun violence || Mental health of all ages || Physical safety.
- **Changing Demographics (3):** Maintain a sense of community || Need to embrace our community’s diversity || POC need to feel more comfortable—a safe and comfortable place.
- **Media Literacy (3):** Classes on misinformation || Offer instruction on how to use media || Polarization and media book club.
- **Town Population Growth (3):** Anticipating how to extend services to an increasing population || Capacity of the Library and staff || Will the Library outgrow the space?
- **Environmental Challenges (2):** Environmental issues || Impacts of climate change
- **Economic Downturn:** Inflation and recession concerns
- **Library Mission/Focus:** Difference between library and community center
- **Patron Changes:** Increase in digital-only or virtual patrons.

COMMENT/FEEDBACK: Hope our library never has to deal with book banning.

9. WHAT COULD THE LIBRARY DO TO BETTER SERVE SHREWSBURY? WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE?

- **Continually Solicit Community Feedback (2):** Conduct more sessions like this to get community feedback. Ask community representatives to share their thoughts. || The Library can sponsor more conversations like this.
- **Increase Library Advocacy (2):** Advocate more for the Library || Librarians can serve as ambassadors in the community talking about the Library.
- Bring a marketing director on board (e.g., a volunteer).
- Expand e-book access to include collections in NY or OH.
- Offer a pop-up Library on the other side of town.
- Partner with Shrewsbury Youth and Family Services to minimize stigma.
- Provide staff with DEI training.
- Publicize Library usage statistics to increase the community’s awareness of the Library’s offerings and general popularity.
- Reach out to the H.S. assistant principal in charge of student clubs to identify potential programs and volunteers.

COMMENT/FEEDBACK: She hopes the local government backs the Library when speakers like Ibram Kendi are invited to speak at the Library. She questions the idea that libraries should remain neutral.