



## Director's Annual Report: FY20

At ICPL, we pride ourselves in providing access; it is one of the seven values we use in designing our work and is an idea we focus on daily. While we hold the idea dear, even in the most predictable years, “access” is an unwieldy and complex concept. In a year like this one, the word access takes on new meanings and becomes more of a puzzle than usual. FY20 brought numerous opportunities to assess the ways we have championed access in the past, how we prioritize access in challenging times, and how we aspire to provide access in the future.

### July 1, 2019-March 13, 2020

The first eight and a half months of the year, we were able to focus on access in largely traditional ways, and we made strides in reducing barriers to our spaces and services in a multitude of ways.

- The AIM Student Card was issued to 15,283 learners. Working with Iowa City Community School District, North Liberty Community Library, and Coralville Public Library to offer a no-barrier card for youth allowed more students more access across the region. By the end of the fiscal year, 727 student borrowers had checked out a combined 5,152 materials.
- We made building enhancements to ensure all patrons have access to amenities and services. We added a power-assist door in the Admin suite and a water bottle filling station on the second floor. Aging, damaged shelving was fixed in the Children’s area, and soft furniture from multiple high-use areas of the building was reupholstered. The well-loved Book House from the Children’s area was so well used, it outlived its usefulness and was removed.
- Throughout the summer, Children’s and Teen services staff provided meals and snacks to young patrons, helping meet the basic needs of our community and allowing youth to enjoy the library without the added stress of hunger.
- Collection Services staff presented information about eBook publishing at the Iowa Library Association’s annual Johnson County Legislative Reception, focusing on new publishing practices obstructing access to library eBook users.
- ICPL was recognized by *Little Village* as having the “Best Public Restroom” and as being the “Best Library” in the CRANDIC, recognition that speaks directly to our commitment to access for all.
- We tried some new programming with a twelve-week, lecture-based course on *The Odyssey*, which drew such a diverse, enthusiastic audience that we started a similar course on *The Iliad* almost immediately following it. It was the brainchild of Janet Freeman, former Library Board of Trustee member and professor.
- In partnership with the Pilot Club of Iowa City, staff curated a new collection of large print books to ensure the children’s collection is accessible to all young readers.

- The jDVD collection was reorganized into a single, browsable collection, making these resources more user-friendly and easier to navigate.
- Library administration gathered community and staff aspirations and ideas for the future of ICPL through facilitated conversations focused on the next strategic plan.
- Staff worked with Maureen Sullivan to develop the framework for a new, five-year strategic plan.
- Multiple changes were made to the Board of Trustee meeting packets—including the ongoing development of a graphic overview of quarterly financials, the addition of a consent agenda, and a written director's report—in an effort to simplify the delivery of information to the trustees and provide information in multiple ways to accommodate preferences in formats.

In addition to these projects and initiatives, the first part of the year provided some opportunities to think about ICPL's legacy of access and how that has impacted the community. We celebrated the Library's 123<sup>rd</sup> anniversary (123 years at 123 S. Linn Street) with an all-ages cookie reception, children's programming, and displays throughout the building. We wished some long-serving staff well as they shifted into retirement (Maevie Clark, Heidi Lauritzen, Mary Estle-Smith, and Juanita Walker had a combined 112 years of service to ICPL). We welcomed enthusiastic new staff into the open roles (Jason Paulios, Jeffrey Guentert, and Amanda Mae Monson Ray all brought fresh ideas and passion to their positions).

### **March 14, 2020-June 30, 2020**

Despite a strong start, the year did not continue as planned. In mid-March, ICPL abruptly closed the physical building in response to the increased number of COVID-19 cases in Johnson County. All events and programs were suspended, all staff and volunteers were sent home, and we were faced with reevaluating our priorities and redefining what access looked like at ICPL. Some decisions were relatively easy; we knew immediately that our focus had to be on staff and community safety. We knew we needed to establish a way to continue phone and chat service quickly, since this would keep us in communication with the community. We knew we needed a new plan, both for right now and for the future.

Quickly, we worked together to create and implement remote technology solutions and work-from-home practices that allowed uninterrupted phone and chat public services. We made the difficult decision to furlough half of our staff. We transitioned from a building-based, in-person service model to a virtual service model. This included producing and promoting virtual programming for all ages and a focus on digital media formats. We crafted, communicated, and implemented a phased re-opening plan; we're currently in Phase Two of Six, which means we offer curbside pickup of materials and we mail materials to patrons. Collections Services staff pivoted to quickly select and purchase digital resources to supplement our existing collections, and patrons responded immediately. Funding support from the Friends Foundation allowed us flexibility in purchasing the formats and titles our users requested. We all learned how to use Zoom.

Our users have responded positively to our new services. Use of digital resources is up, and the number of patrons we serve each week via curbside and mail show consistent high use. As of August 20, we have sent 3,751 mailers of materials and had 6,858 patron pick-ups via curbside. In total, more than 30,500 items have been checked out since we began offering curbside pickup.

The murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer in late May brought systemic and institutionalized racism into focus on a national level. Black Lives Matter activism increased in many communities, including Iowa City. Witnessing the testimony of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) in our community—often directly in front of the library building on the Ped Mall—served as a call to action for the Library. We took immediate steps to support learning about racism and ways to be an antiracist, including offering an “always available” curated resources list - for all ages and all card holders. We began working on explicit equity language and equity goals into our future plans.

Throughout these challenges, the leadership team continued to discuss and work on the strategic plan. We realized that, despite putting in considerable effort to its creation, our original version would no longer work for us. Stepping back and assessing the framework, community group responses, and staff work related to futurecasting and goal setting, we saw a way to maintain the core of our first plan but shift into a “bridge plan” model. We transitioned our thinking from a five-year plan to a three-year plan, and kept the focus on community input and rebuilding from the COVID closure. As we work through the new plan, we will continue to seek opportunities to remove service barriers and provide access to all.

The year was a good reminder of how fortunate we are to have an exceptional staff, a supportive and engaged Board of Trustees, an active and dedicated Friends Foundation, an amazing group of volunteers, and a community that champions their library. The hardest part of the building closure has been getting used to doing our work without regular contact with the people we are here to serve. The absence of colleagues, volunteers, and patrons will never feel normal.

It has been a year of peaks and valleys, and staff have been asked to do new things and work together in new ways. I am tremendously proud of the resiliency, creativity, passion, and humor ICPL staff demonstrate every day. This is a group that can take on anything.

While it wasn't what I expected, I am proud of the work that was done this year. I am excited about our strategic plan and eager to continue to rebuild ICPL with the community.

With gratitude,

Elsworth Carman