

# ***A Little Help from our Friends***

**Dorothy Macnaughton**

**President**

**Friends of Canadian Libraries**

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# Why have a Friends Group in Your Library?

“Few libraries are in a position to turn away help from their supporters – in fact, even if a library were so well heeled that additional fundraising wasn’t needed, libraries without a well developed group of Friends will find the going tough when they need to bring in additional precious funds in an increasingly competitive environment, when they need a new building, or when they need to grow their collections and services.”

Sally Reed, Executive Director, Friends of Libraries USA



## What Friends Groups Do

- Fundraise
- Advocate, as your library requires
- Raise the profile of the library in your community
- Make valuable connections with other organizations
- Add to the library's volunteer base

# What are the Benefits to Having a Friends Group?

- **Friends are great fundraisers**
  - Every library needs additional funds, beyond what their local government provides
    - Friends can apply for funds that libraries cannot
    - Even a small number of Friends can raise funds for your library; as the group becomes better known in the community, the funds usually increase

# What are the Benefits to Having a Friends Group?

- **Friends are great fundraisers**
  - During capital campaigns for a new library facility, Friends can help raise the required funds (particularly if they have charitable status)
  - Friends may choose to fund new furniture or other items in the library (Chesley Friends)
- Friends have time to recruit and train volunteers and to organize fundraising events; library staff don't

# What are the Benefits to Having a Friends Group?

- **Advocacy**

- If your library needs community support in a crisis (e.g. closure of a branch), having an existing Friends group will provide the numbers that can make all the difference
  - Friends have networks of family and friends in the community who they can mobilize quickly
  - Your Friends President or another representative who is comfortable speaking to Council can make a carefully crafted presentation

# What are the Benefits to Having a Friends Group?

- **Raising the Library's Profile in the Community**
  - Any fundraiser your Friends group organizes will make the community more aware of the library
  - Friends can partner with the library at various events, such as displays (e.g. during Ontario library month), or in conjunction with other organizations
  - Friends can provide refreshments at library events (cost saving and a warm, friendly atmosphere), such as a 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday celebration

# What are the Benefits to Having a Friends Group?

- **Raising the Profile of the Friends in the Community**
  - Friends can hold events like a book sale or bake sale in conjunction with other community events, such as a Fall Fair (Powassan Friends) or a summer festival, RotaryFest (Sault Ste. Marie Friends)
  - At these events, the Friends meet people who have never been to the library and have an opportunity to speak to them about the great programs and services the library has to offer

# What are the Benefits to Having a Friends Group?

- **Partnering with Other Organizations**
  - When fundraising, Friends can partner with another organization and split the proceeds from the event (Dragon Boat festival – Barrie)
  - Labour intensive events, such as a Silent Auction or even a Yard Sale can be more successful when organized in conjunction with another organizations which also has volunteers

# What are the Benefits to Having a Friends Group?

- **Additional Volunteers**

- By having a visible presence in the community, Friends are able to promote the need for additional volunteers
- At all events, at the library's circulation desk and whenever possible, Friends can talk about what they do and how fulfilling and enjoyable volunteering for the library can be
- Some individuals can assist both the Friends and the library as a volunteer

# What are the Benefits to Having a Friends Group?

- **Additional Volunteers**

- Keen library patrons can become volunteers with your Friends organization
  - Keep them involved with specific tasks that they enjoy doing and only the time they are willing to give (they won't give their volunteer time to another group)
- New volunteers may be people who have recently moved into town or be new Canadians

## What are the Risks?

- Staff may feel Friends will take on some of their responsibilities
- When advocating, Friends could have a different message from that of the library if there is not excellent communication and collaboration
- Friends may ask library staff to do too much
- Volunteers may become burned out, particularly members of the Friends Executive or Board

## What are the Risks?

- There may be communication problems at the Friends end, or the library's end
- There may be too few workers for the tasks the group has undertaken; the group may decide to limit their activities
- Some northern groups feel isolated and don't have the support, information or resources they need

# Forming a Friends Group

- It is often a Library Board Trustee or staff member who first sparks the public's interest in forming a Friends group
- Invite a speaker from a nearby Friends group or from FOCAL to help your group with information, resources and to share their experiences
- You don't need a large number of people to start with
- Those involved at the beginning stages need to be willing to put in a fair amount of time getting organized, but it pays off later on

# Forming a Friends Group

- It will be necessary to effectively promote what the group will be doing and to try to attract interested people to become involved
- The library can help promote an initial information meeting which can be quite informal.
  - Always have refreshments
  - Promote the meeting in the library, via the media and throughout the community, especially where retired people gather

# Forming a Friends Group

- The primary task for the organizers of the Friends Group will be to write a simple Constitution and By-laws (template in How to Form Your Friends of the Library Group; examples on the FOCAL web site)
- If there is a short one page summary about the new group that can be handed out, new volunteers may be recruited
- The Friends can undertake a small fundraising project to raise start-up funds if the library can't provide the funds (for refreshments, paper, etc.)

# Planning Events

- When planning events, know your community and try to plan events that you think will succeed
- If only one or two people in your group like selling tickets, don't hold raffles
- Find out what other community groups are doing and then pick something they aren't doing; learn from other Friends groups in northern Ontario, Canada and the U.S.

# Planning Events

- If you are holding something like a yard sale, choose a very visible location (even outside the library, if there is adequate shelter)
- Plan events initially that require only a few volunteers and little time and effort
- Use your local media to promote events - free PSAs work well
- Use newsletters which other organizations publish to promote your events
- Learn from events that don't succeed

# Types of Events or Activities

- **Fundraising**

- **Book Sales**

- Specialized sales – children’s sale; antique book sale; Gently Used sale (just prior to Christmas)
- Online book sales

- **Raffles – quilts, donated items from local businesses, “Rainbow Country Dining Raffle” (Parry Sound Friends)**

- **Bake Sales**

- Specialty bake sales – Pie Sale (Mattawa Friends)

# Types of Events or Activities

- **Fundraising**

- Sporting Events - ATV rides (Mattawa Friends)
- Bingos (Thunder Bay Friends)
- Selling Nevada tickets (Thunder Bay Friends)
- Silent Auctions
- Christmas craft and bake sale (Englehart Friends)
- Tag Day (Fort Frances Friends)
- Trivia Nights (Sundridge-Strong Friends)
- Garden Tours

# How Do Friends Spend Their Funds

- Most Friends Groups have their own bank account; they deposit the funds they raise into that account
- Friends that have charitable status need to report their fundraising activities to the government annually
- Often the Library Director will make a “wish list” which he/she will provide to the Friends
- Sometimes Friends members will suggest a specific idea and the Library Director can indicate whether it is feasible

# How Do Friends Spend Their Funds

- Some Friends have an arrangement with the library that all funds raised go into the library budget
- It gives the Friends a great deal of satisfaction to know how the funds they work so hard to raise are benefiting the library and the community

# How Do Friends Spend Their Funds

- Friends funds are used to fund:
  - Books
  - DVDs
  - Magazine subscriptions
  - Furniture
  - Signs
  - Landscaping
  - Sponsor specific programs or services
  - Draw prizes for library programs
  - Computers or computer work stations

# Types of Events or Activities

- **Literacy or Cultural Events**
  - Sponsor and organize author readings
    - Local authors
  - Sponsor children's events
    - Poetry contest (Friends of the Ottawa Public Library Association)
  - Sponsor library's literacy programs
    - Books for Babies
    - Author in Residence

# Types of Events or Activities

- Literary Landmarks (Friends of the Vancouver Public Library)
- Sponsor and organize display of art in the library (Chesley Friends)
- Hold art fundraising event
  - Raffle of donated painting by a local artist
  - Organize a film festival

# Maintaining a Successful Friends Group

- **Friends Group:**

- Develop good communication among Friends volunteers and members and with the Library staff
- Be welcoming to everyone and value people's ideas
- Keep track of volunteers – names, phone numbers, types of tasks they enjoy helping with
- Develop a good system for organizing events
- Try to spread the workload as much as possible

# Maintaining a Successful Friends Group

- **Friends Group:**

- The most successful groups are ones where everyone feels their contribution is important to the group's success
- Hold regular Board meetings where the group can discuss Friends initiatives and make decisions as a group on how funds will be spent
- Hold effective meetings where Friends members can discuss events they want to undertake and where they can brainstorm ideas and agree by consensus

# Maintaining a Successful Friends Group

- **Friends Group:**

- Use your library's newsletter and/or web site to thank your volunteers, to notify the public about upcoming events and to highlight the success of Friends events
- Create a Friends membership brochure and volunteer form
  - It can be very basic
  - Samples from Thunder Bay and Sault Ste. Marie Friends

# Maintaining a Successful Friends Group

- **Friends Group:**

- Develop and maintain a good relationship with the media
- Use students required to have 40 hours of volunteer service to help out with various tasks
- New volunteers will want to be involved with a group where people love books, love the library, and enjoy what they do to support the library

# Maintaining a Successful Friends Group

- **Library Staff and Trustees:**
  - The ongoing sincere appreciation of library staff and Library Board Trustees goes a long way to making volunteers feel they are valued
  - A simple thank you or a visit to a Friends event visibly demonstrates your support
  - Some staff may bake for your bake sales
  - Some Trustees may help out with a Friends event, if they are asked

# Volunteer Recruitment and Retention

- **Volunteer Recruitment and Retention -**  
Reva Cooper's presentation, OLA Super Conference, 2007
  - Bear in mind the nature of volunteering in the 21st century
  - Utilize volunteers in positions they can manage (according to the time they can commit)
  - Look for opportunities to recruit new Canadians or people new to the community

# Volunteer Recruitment and Retention

## ● **Where to find volunteers**

- In the library - tables set up during special events or specifically for a membership drive
- Approach book club members
- At Friends events and library events – have your membership and volunteer forms handy
- Engage the assistance of the Welcome Wagon – have them distribute membership brochures or forms

# Volunteer Recruitment and Retention

- **Where to find volunteers**

- Approach genealogy society members
- Advertise in the High Schools
  - Send a poster to attract students who require their 40 hours of volunteer service
- Utilize Volunteer Centres
  - Often unemployed individuals looking for a reference to put on their resume will put their name in with a volunteer centre
  - Place ads in community newspapers

# Revitalizing A Friends Group

- Be patient; it takes time to revitalize a group that has members who have burned out or which has lost quite a few active members (often due to aging)
- Decide what your current volunteers can do; you need to be careful not to lose people who are willing to help in limited ways
- Develop a plan to increase the visibility of your group in the community
- Spread the word in the community that your group needs volunteers (start with a specific event)

# Revitalizing A Friends Group

- Find out if you can partner with another organization for an event; some of their volunteers may become Friends volunteers
- Plan events well ahead of time and make them as manageable as possible
- Advertise your event on the library's web site and ask for volunteers
- Utilize every opportunity to promote your group

## Conclusion

- If your library is thinking about starting a Friends Group, if you have an existing Friends Group that you would like to support in meaningful ways, or if your Friends Group is facing challenges, I hope you have found useful information, support and encouragement today.
- If you have questions or need resources, please contact Friends of Canadian Libraries at [focal@accessola.com](mailto:focal@accessola.com)

# FOCAL National Friends Survey

- On the FOCAL web site:  
<http://www.accessola.com/focal/>
- Go to “Counting Opinions” and please fill out the survey for your library or your Friends group