

DIRECTOR'S CLOSED LIBRARY ACTIVITY REPORT #1  
April 7, 2020

For the weeks before the library closed, SALS was hosting a weekly virtual meeting of all Directors to discuss how the Corona virus was affecting libraries. At the March 18<sup>th</sup> meeting we heard from many libraries who had instituted procedures to help stem the spread of infection. They almost all agreed that sanitizing procedures they had implemented were not sufficient and did not think that they would be able to implement correct social distancing. Many indicated that they would probably be closing within a week because of this. I felt the same way about the efficacy of the procedures we had instituted here (basically wiping down all surfaces, computers, furniture, books after each use, hand sanitizer for computer users, continuous hand washing etc.). I had ordered cleaning products and gloves but there was a run on these products and they would not arrive for two weeks. All local stores were out of product and by our last open day we only had one small bottle of hand sanitizer left for computer users. This was when I proposed to our Board President the idea of closing the library to the public. The idea being that staff would continue their work in the Library while we were closed.

The closing of the Library came on us quickly and the closing of the whole building even faster. The closing of the schools and the Governor's closing of all non-essential businesses and workers prompted the Supervisor to inform us that we would not be allowed to work in the building after the closure time. The Town Clerk informed the staff as they were leaving work on our last open day that no one would be allowed back in after 8PM. When I received this news it was 4pm and I was in the Albany area and had to rush up to the Library to get, before the deadline, materials and records that would enable me to work from home.

After the schools closed, most SALS libraries followed suit. SALS closed with staff working from home. They cancelled their delivery service and requested that we keep any books belonging to other libraries until they re-opened and advised that all books checked out were to be kept by patrons. They extended due dates on all checked out items until the end of April with fine forgiveness for that time.

We locked the drop box and requested that no book donations be left anywhere around the building (someone left three bags any way). We put a hold on our newspaper and water deliveries. I sent a closing notice to Bob to put on the website, one to Sharon to put on Facebook and one to Wendy for the Patron email list. These are our three ways to communicate with the public.

Unfortunately, Sharon was dealing with an issue that left her with no water in her home and she had to stay elsewhere. Elsewhere did not have sufficient connectivity and she could not get online to check her email or make any posts. So our page did not have posts for a while after closing.

Getting things set up to work from home, I kept running into snags. The passwords I needed for some sites were in a book in the Library and I had to get creative in jogging my memory. I had no scanner, fax or copier in my home and could not send Financial Officer receipts he needed to see to authorize payment vouchers.

We are lucky that our staff members had personal equipment and internet available to them to use during this time in order to accomplish assigned duties, because our library does not have sufficient equipment to lend to staff to take home like some of the larger libraries do. Please keep in mind that

staff is using their personal phone and internet accounts as well as equipment to do library work during this time.

Our first closure notice had details that had changed so I sent out an update which was shared on the Chamber of Commerce's site as well as the Town's.

While Sharon was out of commission, I began research on helpful sites that would be informational, educational and entertaining and posted public notices from the bank, food pantry, the Town, Warren Co. and the Chamber. I check these sites daily for my own information as well as the public's and pass along anything interesting. I also compiled a WHILE THE LIBRARY IS CLOSED notice advertising our Facebook page and website as a place to find public notices, a homework help database, virtual tours, free e-books and audiobooks, and other topics of interest. One thing this down time has shown is that we need to figure out how to get the public used to checking our website and social media pages.

Sharon finally got her internet back. We had a phone discussion about how to proceed with social media. We did not want to just keep repeating the same type of posts. She wanted to find some sort of educational series to change things up. She did her research and found a great series on Digital Literacy, tools to verify the news you read. It's a great program and so relevant to our times. I assigned both Wendy and Sharon to watch it as part of their staff educational requirements for this year. We also talked about continuing with our plans for Summer Reading Programs and decided to spend some of this time putting together the posters, booklets and reading lists. She was also assigned to a virtual meeting for implementing the ReadSquared program hosted by SALS.

During these first 10 days after closing, Wendy did her best to keep communication lines open through the Patron Mailing List. She sent out each notice promptly when she received the request. These included all closing notices and updates. She worked with Bob Walp to get the Friends' Newsletter sent out, as well as notices of Wine Tasting postponement, public notices and updates from the County and Town as well as updates on the status of due dates and fines on checked out items. She also diplomatically fielded requests from Patrons to unlock the box so they could return their books. And forwarded to me her reply to one of our patrons who was writing to say she missed us. In addition to her work with the Patron Mailing List, Wendy got permission to go into the Library. She now goes in once each week to water plants and generally check on the Library.

By April, I was finally able to have phone conferences with both Wendy and Sharon and Wendy was assigned to continue with her work for Summer Reading. Making advertising blurbs as well as posters, etc. She was also assigned to participate in a virtual Youth Services Meeting organized by SALS. We all participated in this meeting. After the meeting I had a call from Wendy about making a Virtual or recorded story time. An excellent idea, something we have wanted to do but did not have the time to do it. I researched and found a couple of on-line videos for them to watch on making videos for the internet. Wendy and Sharon are now collaborating on this. I look forward to the outcome, it will open up a number of possibilities if we have to resort to only on-line programming in the future.

During this time, it took a while to get in a rhythm with regular communication, I think we have a good system going now. I thought that this was a good time to educate ourselves. I have taken to providing the staff with webinars that are relevant to their work interests. I have also filled my calendar with professional development webinars such as Managing Projects and People From Home to name just one. I am also going into the Library at least once a week, picking up mail as well as sending the Friends

theirs as they are currently in the middle of a membership drive. I am now allowed to go into the Library to complete essential tasks as long as correct social distancing is practiced. The Town sent its Building Manager in to thoroughly clean and sanitize the second floor of the building. In the Library, they cleaned all the walls, windows, counter tops and floors. Kudos to Bill and Lynn for that. They even got the bugs out of the windows and lights.

Going forward I am preparing and participating in weekly webinar assignments and projects for the staff. I am also working on collection development. I am not ordering anything until we open, but am preparing carts so we are prepared when we finally do. I am catching up on data input, finalizing 2019 accounts for Annual Report approval. I will continue to participate in the weekly SALS director's meetings as they continue to provide useful info on how other libraries are handling the myriad and diverse situations we are encountering and what to expect and how to plan for the near future. I will continue to forward any info I encounter that will be of use to the Board, and am always available for consultation on any projects or reports.

You can expect a weekly update to this report every Wednesday going forward. I did not include time details in this report other than in a general way. Wendy and Sharon are keeping good time records and they will be included in subsequent reports.

Alma Alvarez, Director  
Town of Chester Public Library