

Fort Saskatchewan Public Library's Card Campaign

On October 3, 2017, the Fort Saskatchewan Public Library set out to do a year-long Card Campaign.

To be most effective in promoting the library to the community, it is first important to understand the community. Fort Saskatchewan sits on a beautiful, sprawling river valley, has a unique history, and takes great pride in local businesses and services. This local pride inspired our first piece of the promotion puzzle with our slogan. "My City, My Library, My Card" reinforces the ownership the community has of the library.

Inspired by river valley animals, we developed a mascot for the library, Ferguson the Fox. Library staff and the public were involved in picking the fox and his name, once again reinforcing ownership of the library and investment in this campaign. Ferguson has become an ambassador for the library and is recognizable in the community. This fun, quick, and witty fox represents the library on many of our promotional materials and helps us to show that the library is a friendly and welcoming space. In addition to creating Ferguson, we created three exciting new library card designs. A far cry from our traditional cards, these new cards feature bright full colours, our river valley, and our slogan.



The mascot, card designs, and slogan were used with our logo and brand colours to create a plethora of other marketing material with an eye-catching and consistent appearance. Whether it's in the library or at an outreach event, it is clear who we are with our posters, pop-up signs, PowerPoint templates, and more. Word of mouth is important in any community, but especially in one that takes pride in its small-town values. Fans of the library were delighted with our new lanyards, buttons, book bags and other SWAG. They got to show off their library pride and the public saw us represented in the community by their very own neighbours and friends.



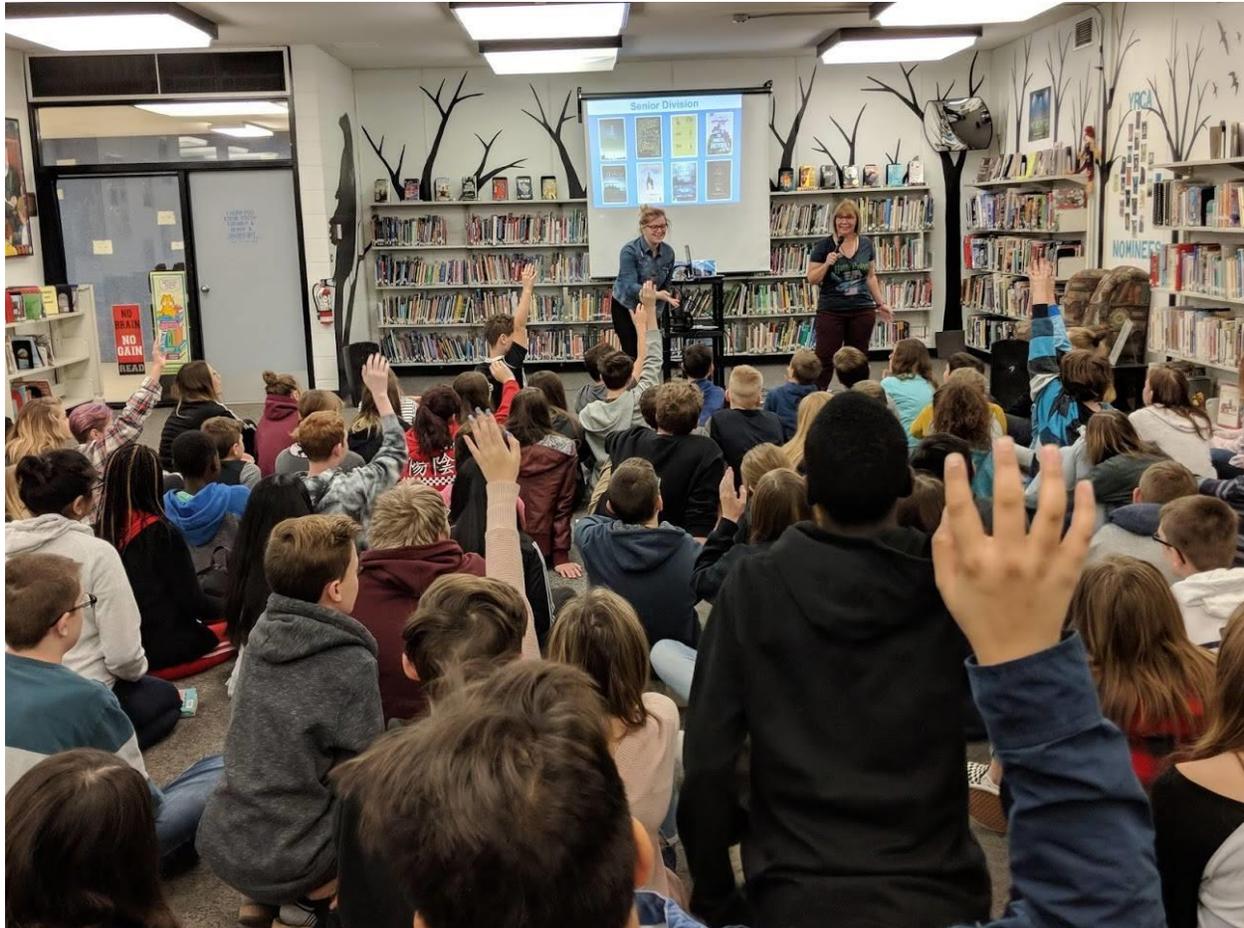
Thanks to some talented staff members, a beautiful display was created in the library to highlight the Card Campaign and to keep record of our progress throughout the campaign by adding stepping stones to the river throughout the year, showing how many cards we had created so far.

The Card Campaign was kicked off in October 2017 with a high energy launch event. Since October is Library month, it was perfect timing to invite the Mayor, local government officials, school representatives, staff, and library board members to come together and talk about the importance of libraries. Several classes from nearby schools attended to hear the speeches from the Mayor, the Library Board Chair, and the Library Director.

At this launch it was announced that every month of the campaign, new cardholders would be entered to win a gift card from a local business. We approached businesses in Fort Saskatchewan and several of the gift cards throughout the year were donated for the campaign. We thanked these businesses on our social media pages, making sure we got the word out about their generosity.

October was a busy time, as it was the launch of the Campaign, Library month, and a time when we regularly visit schools to do book talks about the Young Reader's Choice

Awards (YRCA). This year instead of just visiting the schools for this sole purpose, we combined the YRCA talks with a library card membership drive. We created forms for students to take home to get signed by a guardian and returned to their teacher. We then collected these forms, made up the cards, and returned them to the students. In the first two months of this campaign, this created almost 700 cards--a huge boost to our initial counting and a great motivator for us to keep up the great work.



In January of 2018, we created a brand new website and used this opportunity to integrate our Card Campaign messaging throughout the site. We offer online card applications and embed this option throughout the pages so that patrons are motivated and prompted to get a library card from many points of discovery. This feature has been very popular with new patrons and we see an average of 16 cards every month created.

A substantial part of the Card Campaign was our pop-up library tables stationed throughout the city. At a grocery store just a few blocks away from the library, we set up a table in the foyer and approached shoppers, asking them if they would like to sign up for a free library card. It was remarkable that just a few blocks away from the library we found a brand new audience, many of whom had no idea where the library was. It was a resounding success and patrons were thrilled that we were out and about making it easy for them to get a library card.

At Christmastime we set up a table at Walmart where we wrapped gifts by donation and while people waited for their presents, we talked to them about getting a library card. We repeated these successful visits at the local movie theatre, hockey arena, and at the schools at meet the teacher nights. We attended a Chamber of Commerce luncheon and presented on the resources we have for business people at the library, a presentation we have repeated at several local businesses' staff meetings. We customize our outreach based on the location, offering relevant and eye-catching resources depending on the audience we expect to see.



These outreach visits enabled us to reach a new audience that we wouldn't otherwise have the opportunity to meet. These connections have been important not only in the creation of new library cards but also to form new relationships with community groups. After having a pop-up library table at the local cinema, we developed a relationship with the manager and now we advertise the library on the screen before film showings. These outreach events have also created a snowball effect: the more we are out in the community, the more we are asked to come visit. We struggled to get into the schools to speak about our summer programs or our library cards but now we are being invited to events and to speak at assemblies.

While outreach will continue to be a priority for us at the library after the campaign is over, the campaign gave us a focus for attending events in the community. It strengthened our existing partnerships and gave us the motivation and opportunity to form new ones. And by having the campaign as a year-long initiative, we were able to be creative with our outreach locations and to try new ventures.

In order to help maintain the excitement of this endeavor, we had two special events spaced throughout the year. In February, we were thrilled to have Hal Johnson and Joanne McLeod visit the library. Hal and Joanne are known for their TV segments, *BodyBreak*, all about keeping fit and having fun. Their presence made a big splash in the community and local media. It even inspired our own staff to have some fun with fitness and we created our own library fitness video, which was extremely popular on Facebook and in the library community (<https://youtu.be/bOQILo18FFM>). It was the perfect thing to get people thinking about the library again since the launch.



Then in July of 2018, we had Justin Sorensen, a professional football player from the Edmonton Eskimos Football Club come to the library. Justin's visit to the library brought in a demographic of the community that may not often come to the library. And we were ready to sign them up for a brand new library card. Justin was a skilled speaker, took his time signing autographs and taking photos with the hundreds of patrons that attended, and spoke about the importance of reading.



In the final two months of the campaign we created two mail-out initiatives to reach existing and potential cardholders. First, patrons whose cards had recently expired were sent an email encouraging them to renew their cards. If they did not have an email listed, a physical letter was sent. We also had the exciting opportunity to work with the City to include a letter about the library in the utility bills of all Fort Saskatchewan residents. Just days after these letters were sent out, people were coming into the library holding their letters, excited to sign up for their free card.

Our finale event was an amazing celebration of the community. Local press, government officials, and patrons came together to witness the reveal of our final number of cards created in the year—over 6,000! The celebration included local entertainment and the premiere of a fun video created by our staff.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1auSjzyYQec>)



Our mission for this campaign was to raise awareness of the many uses of the library and the ways to use your library card. And our vision is for our community to be resourceful, literate, and informed. One that is proud of, and values their city, their library, and their card.

Our valid borrower count has increased by an astounding 40%. Our social media following has increased this year by almost 20%, our circulation has increased, our gate



count has increased, and our program and outreach participation has increased by 57%! This summer, our Summer Reading Club sign up went from 388 to over 600 registrations.

While these numbers have been exciting, justifying, and are an effective measure to tell a story about what we've accomplished, hearing from staff and patrons has also shown us what a success this past year has been. Staff commented, "It has been exciting, and brought us together as a team working towards a common goal".

In a recent community survey, we asked what people thought about the campaign:

"I think [the campaign] is great. It encourages people to check out the library and see the great programs"

"Loved that we saw the library in schools offering free cards at school events. Everyone should have access to the library--literacy should come at zero cost."

"Everyone in the community could benefit in some way from belonging to the library"

Card campaigns are not new to libraries but they are usually week-long or month-long efforts. By having this initiative as a year-long event and tying it in with re-branding efforts, we had the opportunity to be creative, innovative, and very impactful.

Also, including the staff at every step of the process meant that staff were not being directed to do things but rather were a part of the process and therefore invested in its success. And, of course, this investment benefitted the Card Campaign greatly as their ideas and talents are what made this initiative possible.