

INFO 266 – Project 1: The Community

In recent years, the purpose, atmosphere, and facilities of public libraries have changed dramatically. No longer are branches solely locations for quiet review and research. Instead, the modern library now enjoys facilitating an environment of access: access to the books, magazines, and other print material certainly, but also access to the internet, to programs, and to experiences that its patrons would otherwise be without. With this important change, however, it is essential for library branches to cater to their specific patrons, to their home community. And in order for a library to best serve its community, it then becomes important for that library to examine its community. To explore this concept further, this presentation will examine the demographics of the Crockett Library, in the Contra Costa County Library system.

The Crockett Library lives at 991 Loring Avenue, under the shadow of the Carquinez Bridge, and directly across from the C&H Sugar Factory (Contra Costa County Library, n.d.). The structure was established in 1914, and is one of the smallest libraries in the County, at only slightly over 100 square yards in floor space. The entirety of the library is structured around a central service desk, with the majority of the literary collection spread along the walls. Despite this small size, the Crockett Library still provides ample table space for small projects, offers free computer access, and hosts a number of weekly programs that draw in the surrounding community.

As a part of the larger Contra Costa County, the Crockett Library shares its goals with the overall system. Since 2019, these goals have been fourfold, and are as follows:

Goal 1: The Library champions personal and community engagement in literacy and reading to enrich lives.

Goal 2: The Library ensures easy, equitable access to library services for all Contra Costa County residents.

Goal 3: The Library delivers a consistent, high-quality, and inviting experience at all points of contact.

Goal 4: The Library successfully promotes its values, programs, and opportunities to the community. (Contra Costa County, 2023)

These aspects of the Contra Costa County Strategic Plan are focused on providing excellent and equitable service to all patrons – and even with the complications of the 2020 COVID pandemic, the Library has not faltered from its proposed path. The number of programs offered, both online and in-person, have increased by 47 percent in 2022. Over 150,000 new physical items have been added to the system’s catalog since 2018-19, and the Library’s ebook collection has more than doubled (Contra Costa County, 2023). Even in the wake of a global pandemic, these statistics demonstrate that the Contra Costa County Library continues to improve itself and its services.

With the four goals of the Contra Costa County, and therefore the Crockett Library, established, the performance of that particular branch can begin to be examined. And as stated previously, this necessitates a demographic assessment of Crockett. According to a 2020 report by DataUSA, the population of Crockett was 3205 individuals, who had a median age of 49.1 years old. DataUSA also found that Crockett was 69.9% white. Roughly 19.5% of the population self-identified as Hispanic, and the remainder declared themselves to be Black (4.9%), Asian (2.8%), or Non-Hispanic (2.8%) (DataUSA, n.d.). Since previous years, there seems to have been an influx of white, non-Hispanic individuals to Crockett. Despite this, the Contra Costa County Library found Crockett to have up to 10.2% Low English Proficiency (Contra Costa

County, 2023). In terms of economics, while a historical view of Crockett would likely label it as a company town (Hayes, 2002), due to the massive and undeniable presence of the C&H Sugar Factory, in 2020 the largest field of employment in the census-designated place was educational services (DataUSA, n.d.). Perhaps this is due to the presence of John Swett High School, and Carquinez Middle School. Of additional note: despite the presence of high and middle school, there are no official elementary schools present in Crockett – the only elementary school in the John Swett district is one census-designated place over, in neighboring Rodeo (California Department of Education, n.d.).

The information compiled above, when taken in aggregate, provides a useful tool for discussing the demographics of Crockett. However, this only provides a bird's-eye, background, view. With this in mind, this presentation can address now the individuals currently seen utilizing the Crockett Library. Over the course of the past month, the reported demographics of Crockett seem to be reflected in the actual demographics of branch-going patrons. The majority of those who visit the library are adults, most above the ages of thirty. While some of these individuals come alone, and utilize the library space for traditional activities like research or computer use, about forty percent also bring their children. Several of these regulars have identified themselves as being new to the area, and seem to be seeking out the library as a center for congregating and education – an accommodation that Crockett's recently revived Storytimes aim to offer. Additionally, since the school year has begun, occasional teens have come into the library. The branch hopes to continue this trend, and intend for positive interactions with the staff, teen-centered upcoming programming, and close proximity to a Scouting Hall and John Swett High will encourage more YA patrons. In terms of language, the majority of patrons who visit the Crockett Library speak English. However, as reflected in DataUSA's survey, roughly one in

every five groups of patrons come in with questions in Spanish. In order to address this need, signage throughout the building is posted in both English and Spanish, and the new Library Assistant is bilingual-certified by the County. Finally, to address online and remote patrons, the Crockett Library is able to apply a unique tool. As one of the smaller branches, the comparatively slower foot traffic allows Crockett to be on point for answering the County's ASK service, an online form that patrons and non-patrons alike can submit requests, queries, or general comments on the library. Obviously, this inbox collects information from everywhere in the County, but staying abreast of the issues plaguing online users enables Crockett staff to have ready solutions for common virtual problems.

Overall, this presentation would conclude that the Crockett Library is providing a valuable and valued service to its community. There are certainly individuals who are not members of the Crockett Library, or those who simply aren't aware of the branch's resources – and this gap between patrons and non-patrons should be addressed. Luckily, the staff at Crockett are seeking to expand their reach via a needs assessment approach. Past feedback on programming has been taken into account when designing new ones, and events such as meditation sessions, art camps, and a Halloween-themed party are currently on the docket. Upcoming programs in September and October seek to reintroduce the branch to the public, by partnering with local businesses, and hosting a variety of events designed to attract individuals from all walks of life. Additionally, the library is soliciting advice, especially from new patrons, on items to add to the collection. This presentation would stake the claim that the majority of individuals who are not currently using the library in Crockett simply are unaware of the resources they could gain. Fortunately, libraries excel at distributing information, and through working with the monthly local newspaper of the Crockett Signal, expanding the branch's online

and physical presence, and expanding the physical collection based on patron requests, the Crockett Library, the branch will soon be able to welcome a brand-new slew of patrons.

As a final note, this presentation would like to address some of the similarities and differences between the Crockett Library and other public, as well special and school, libraries. Across public libraries, communities can vary widely. As such, partitioning communities is a common strategy to ensure that all patrons receive the attention they deserve. After exploring the methods used in many other libraries across the country, two sets of divisions seemed to best suited to benefit a library's understanding of their community. The first of these sets regarded how patrons interact with the branch: they can do so in-person, when they attend library programming, or just come in to check items out; they can interact virtually, whether this be through browsing the online catalog, or submitting questions to the library's chat service; or the public can interact with the library through outreach, where the library comes to them! Each of these methods of accessing the library are equally valid, and while branch employees may hope to transition all users to in-person patrons eventually, keeping track of how patrons are engaged better allows the library to cater its experiences. The second set was a division along age lines: child, teen, and adult. Different age groups will always be looking for different resources. It's important not to withhold information based on age, but identifying the dominant age groups that attend a branch will allow the library to make better decisions when updating or weeding their collection.

In terms of non-public libraries, a wealth of information can still be gleaned – and applied to the local level. After an exploration of the three main types of libraries: special, school, and public, several trends were discovered. The first addressed collection size. The larger the patron base, the broader the collection. This makes a lot of sense, as a specialized library will be

catering to a smaller, and much more focused, patron base. Conversely, a public library will need to cater to individuals of all ages and interests. This trend also persisted when discussing methods of acquiring feedback. Public and school libraries are required to use surveys and other tools of mass information gathering, whereas special collections can target specific patrons for how to build their collection. But even with all of the differences between school, public, and special libraries, this presentation discovered that the global COVID-19 pandemic had imposed at least one common trend upon them all. Since COVID, all libraries, no matter the patron base, have dramatically increased their online resources and services. As these trends and others continue to affect all libraries, it is more essential than ever to pay attention to them. Being cognizant of our sister branches' tools, efforts, and trends, while keeping in mind our local patrons, will allow us to provide accessible and indispensable library service to all for years to come.

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