



## In Profile: Meg Ross

*How do you get younger students excited about reading? For Kamloops librarian Meg Ross the answer is their own public library card. Over the past two years, local Grade 3 students have used their new cards to check out over 8,000 items.*



### What's your role?

I'm the Coordinator of Children's and Youth Services for the Thompson-Nicola Regional Library, which means that I look after the programming for children and youth in the 14 branches across our library system. In addition to planning and developing programs, I oversee system-wide initiatives like the summer reading club and the Grade 3 VIP Library Card Campaign.

### Tell us about the Grade 3 campaign.

We started this program in 2017 as part of a strategic initiative to support students in our area by offering all Grade 3 students the opportunity to register for a public library card. We targeted this age because Grade 3s are often at the transition point between learning to read and reading to learn. Reading is a fun and exciting new skill they've just gained, and we want to fuel that excitement by connecting them to all the resources of their local public library.

### How does the program work?

At the start of the year, I get in touch with educators in districts 58 (Nicola-Similkameen), 73 (Kamloops-Thompson) and 74 (Gold Trail), and the independent schools in our area. I'll send the teacher-librarian or Grade 3 teachers at each school a library card registration form to send home with students. The forms are returned to me, and we then create a new library card for each student (including those who may already have a library card), along with a letter welcoming them to the Grade 3 VIP program.

For schools that are located near a branch, students can come in for a group tour and to pick up their cards. For many of the schools, the cards are returned to them for the classroom teachers to distribute. I'll also visit some of the



classes to talk about the materials available at the library – not just books and graphic novels, but magazines, CDs, DVDs and video games. It's really exciting for them to learn about all the resources they can take home for free.

## How have the students responded?

They love it! They are so thrilled to be part of this program and to have their own library card. In 2017, 627 students participated in the campaign, with 66 per cent of them receiving a public library card for the first time. We count all students who return a form as participating in the campaign, so that those who already have a library card can count as participants (the class with the highest participation rate wins a gift card from Indigo). In 2018, 504 students participated and 83% registered for their first library cards. We issue students a unique card so that we can track their library usage. And we're seeing that they're using their cards – students in the program have borrowed over 8,000 items since we launched the campaign.

## How have the schools responded?

This program has built stronger connections between the library and schools. I'm now a familiar face and name for teacher-librarians and teachers across the three districts and in the independent schools. This program is also opening opportunities to build other partnerships and programs to benefit students. In 2018, I started a program for Grade 8s at Westsyde Secondary in Kamloops that enables students to come for a tour and sign up for a young adult card, and through my connections with the local teacher-librarians we're now looking to expand it to other Kamloops high schools. I love talking to these students about how hard the library works to protect their privacy and autonomy. Once they've turned 12 it's up to them if they want to include their parents on their card. While this allows their parents to pick up a hold on their behalf or pay fines on their card, for some students you can really see how important it is to them to have the privacy that comes with their young adult card. It's powerful knowing that they can choose to keep the library materials they are accessing private, and that we'll protect that choice. As with the program for the younger years, we want students to be informed of all the resources they can access for free through their public library. For the Grade 8s, we also go a little more in depth on the online resources they can access through our website.



## Any advice for others interested in launching a library/school partnership like this?

Be flexible! Each district is unique and has its own resources and needs. In one of my districts, my main contacts are the teacher-librarians; in the others, I work directly with the Grade 3 teachers, as they have the strongest connections to students.

We know from the research that students who have access to books and other materials are more successful, not just in school but in life. That's at the heart of this work. We want to make sure our students are as well supported as they can be.



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