gfj GEORGE F. JOHNSON MEMORIAL LIBRARY

Activity Report:

An Overview of Statistics, Programming, and Services

From January 2018 Through October 2021

Compiled by Erin Singleton

Introduction

The ways that we serve our patrons are continually evolving, particularly since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of this, there is a need to evaluate existing practices and be creative in developing new services that reach all of our patrons. This is an ongoing process that requires continual examination as our community works to move beyond the pandemic, and the library works to safely serve our community. We recognize that returning completely to the hours and programs of the past may not be an optimal solution, and we understand the need to develop innovative offerings through evidence-based decision making. This report depicts data that the library's staff has utilized throughout this process.

Monthly Circulation Statistics

One way that we can measure hourly library activity from both before and after the pandemic closure is by tracking circulation transactions. These statistics measure each transaction that is completed by library staff in the circulation cycle of a library item. The following graph (Figure 1) shows the monthly total of circulation transactions for the hours that the library was open from January 2018 through October 2021. The average number of circulation transactions per month was 27,945 pre-COVID and 14,787 transactions per month post-closure.
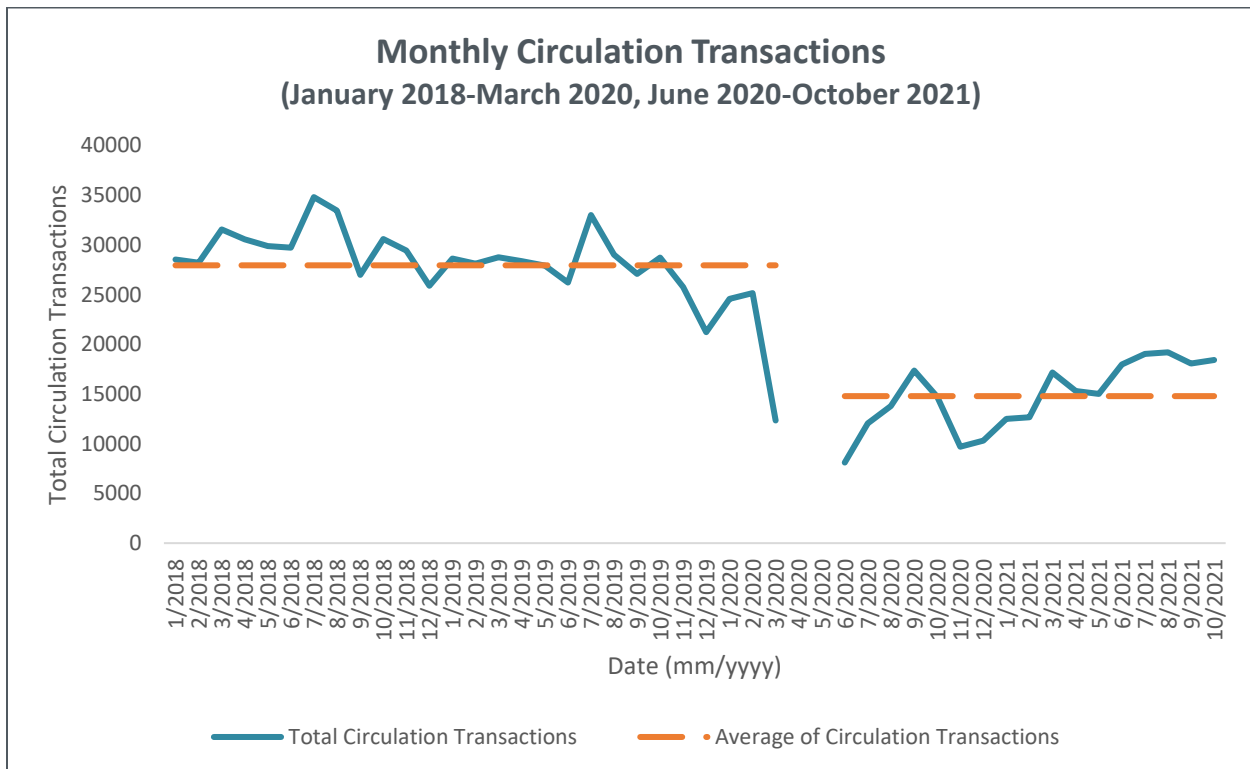

Figure 1: Monthly Circulation Transactions (January 2018-March 2020, June 2020-October 2021)

Keeping consistent with historical trends, summer months are typically the busiest with September and December being the slowest. March 2020 is understandably low because we were only open from March 1 through March 14 before the pandemic closure. Additionally, there are

two periods included on this graph when the library was operating on a curbside-only model because of the pandemic: June 8 through June 26, 2020 and October 6 through November 20, 2020. It is encouraging to note that our statistics have remained above average for the post-reopening period since March 2021 and seem to be slowly increasing. Even in a typically slower month of September 2021, we were above the post-reopening average. We are hopeful that this trend will continue.

Hourly Circulation Statistics

As we work to determine the best hours to be open, it is also helpful to analyze the library's circulation statistics by hour. The following graph (Figure 2) charts the average number of circulation transactions for each hour that the library was open on Mondays through Thursdays since January 2018.
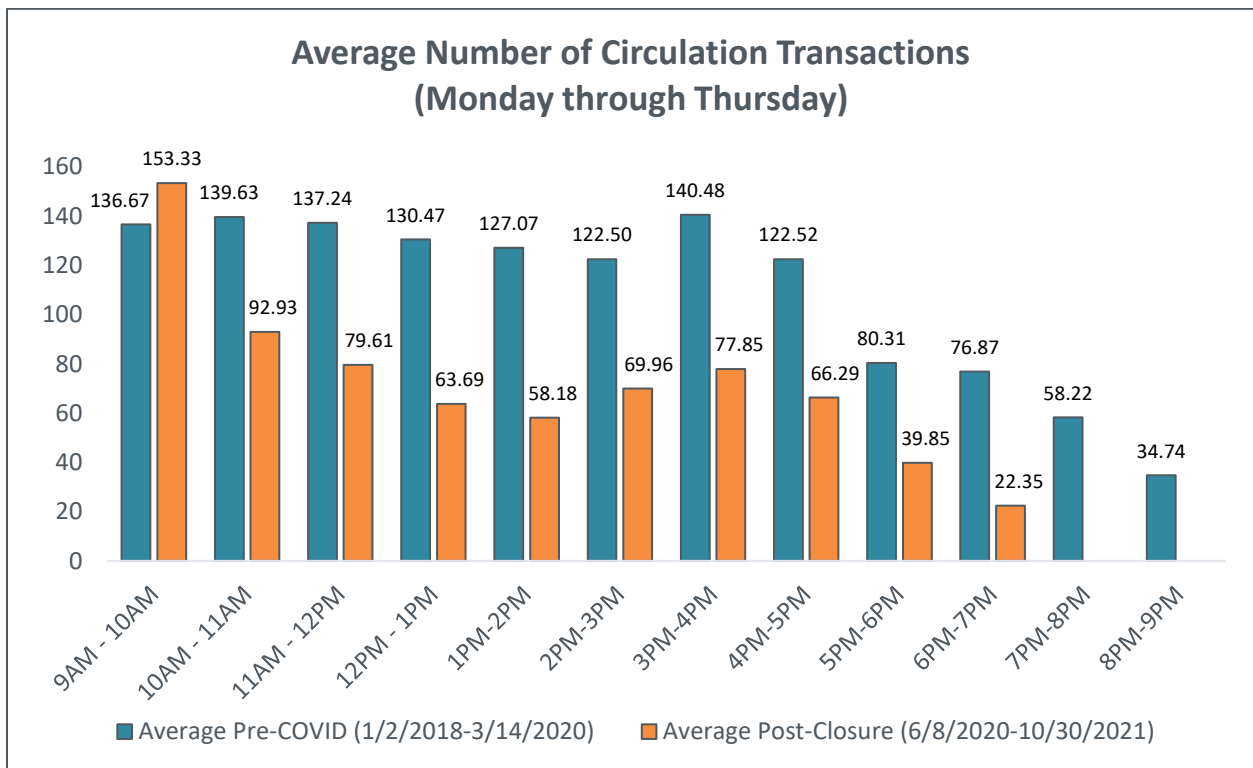

Figure 2: Average Number of Circulation Transactions (Monday through Thursday)

Circulation transactions are generally lower since the start of the pandemic. We believe that 9:00 to 10:00 AM during the post-closure period has higher totals because of our initial quarantine policy on returned materials. Any items that had completed the quarantine process were typically discharged first thing in the morning. The post-closure time period includes a variety of anomalies such as checkout limits that were in place initially upon reopening, times of curbside-only service, and varying hours. However, averaging the circulation transactions gives the best scope of this time.

Prior to the pandemic, our busiest hour was after school from 3:00 to 4:00 PM. Since reopening this has varied, particularly as school schedules have differed. However, after 5:00 PM the trend shows that circulation transactions decrease during both pre-COVID and post-closure hours. The following charts (Figure 3) illustrate the percentage of total circulation transactions that took place during each hour of the day. The statistics being used are the same as in Figure 2 but are shown as percentages to help analyze the distribution of transactions throughout an average day.
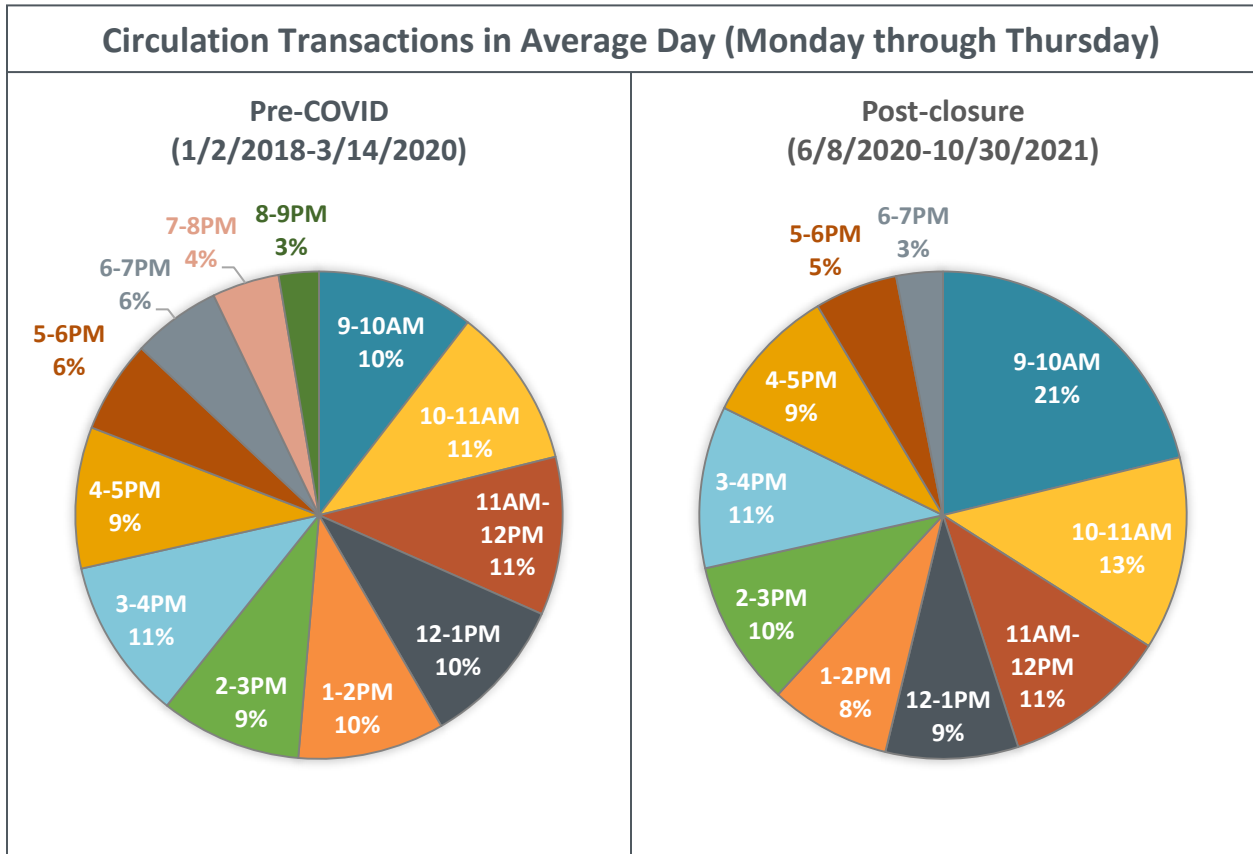

Figure 3: Circulation Transactions in Average Day (Monday through Thursday)

Evening hours are consistently slower with our last hour typically representing only 3% of daily circulation. The post-closure 6:00 to 7:00 PM hour is still relatively new. However, the pre-COVID data is from a comprehensive time period and the last two hours still represent a very small portion of our daily transactions. Prior to the pandemic, we were the only local library open from 8:00 to 9:00 PM. More information on the hours of the other libraries will be discussed later in this report (Figure 6). Additionally, the Endicott Police Department's front desk is open weekdays from 8:00 AM to 3:00 PM. Officers are at the station until 7:00 PM. Previously, this was a safety concern for staff members who would be leaving the building or working in the library after 7:00 PM without police officers present at the station.

Evolving Hours

On Monday, September 27, 2021 we extended our Monday through Thursday hours from 6:00 to 7:00 PM and our Saturday hours changed to 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM. We announced our new hours with ample signage at the library. We also updated our hours on our website, on our Facebook page, and on our Google Business page. Our October and November "Curious George F. Newsletters" both included our new hours; these are printed for distribution within the library and emailed to over 5,300 subscribers. Between September 18th and October 31st, there were a total of 14 posts on the library's Facebook and Instagram pages which included the new hours; these posts had over 9,000 views in total.

As shown in previous charts, from 6:00 to 7:00 PM there is an average of 22.35 circulation transactions (Figure 2) which comprises 3% of our average daily transactions (Figure 3). From our patron total statistics, we know that there is an average of 5.7 patrons coming into the building in the 6:00 to 7:00 PM hour. The graph below (Figure 4) shows the total patron visits for this time period. We are hopeful that that activity during this hour will increase, though it does not seem that remaining open past 7:00 PM is warranted at this time.
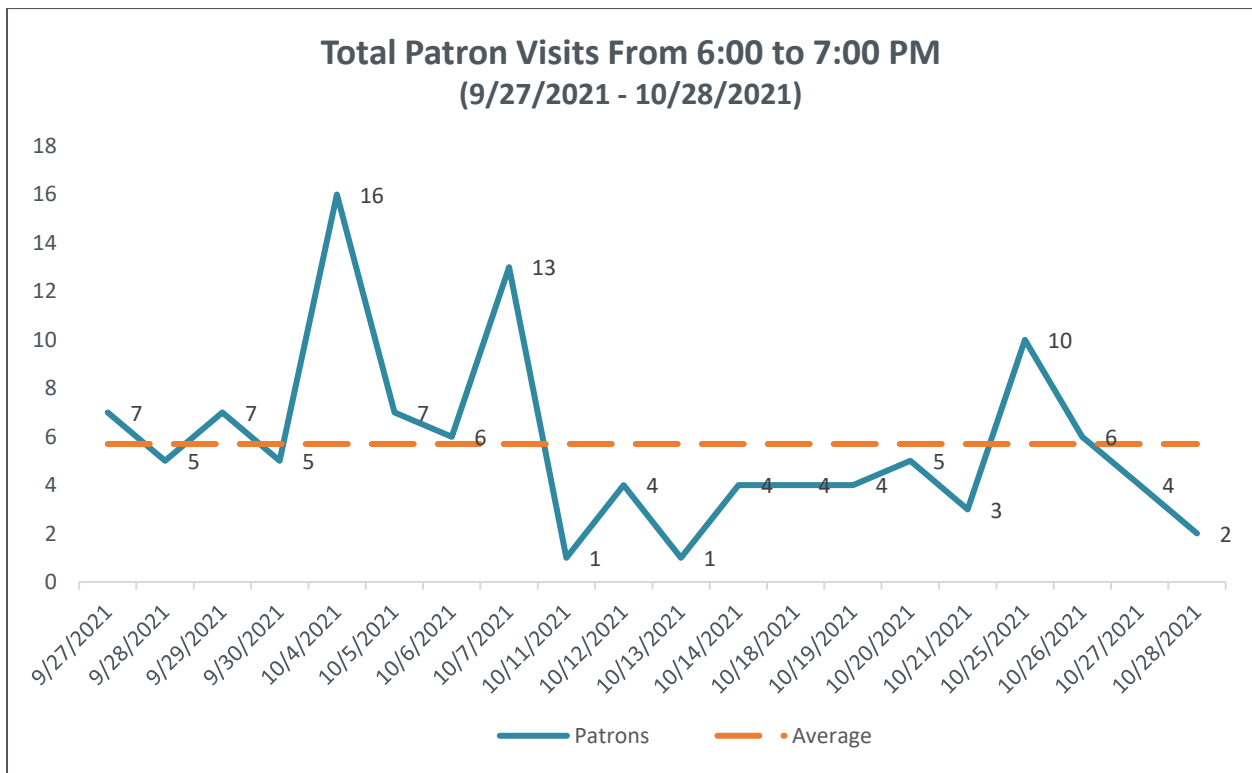

Figure 4: Total Patron Visits From 6:00 to 7:00 PM (9/27/2021 – 10/28/2021)

Our Saturday hours have varied from 2018 through the present. Prior to the pandemic, we were open from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM. Post-closure, we were open from 1:00 to 5:00 PM. Currently, we are open on Saturdays from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM. Figure 5 represents the circulation transactions from these times.
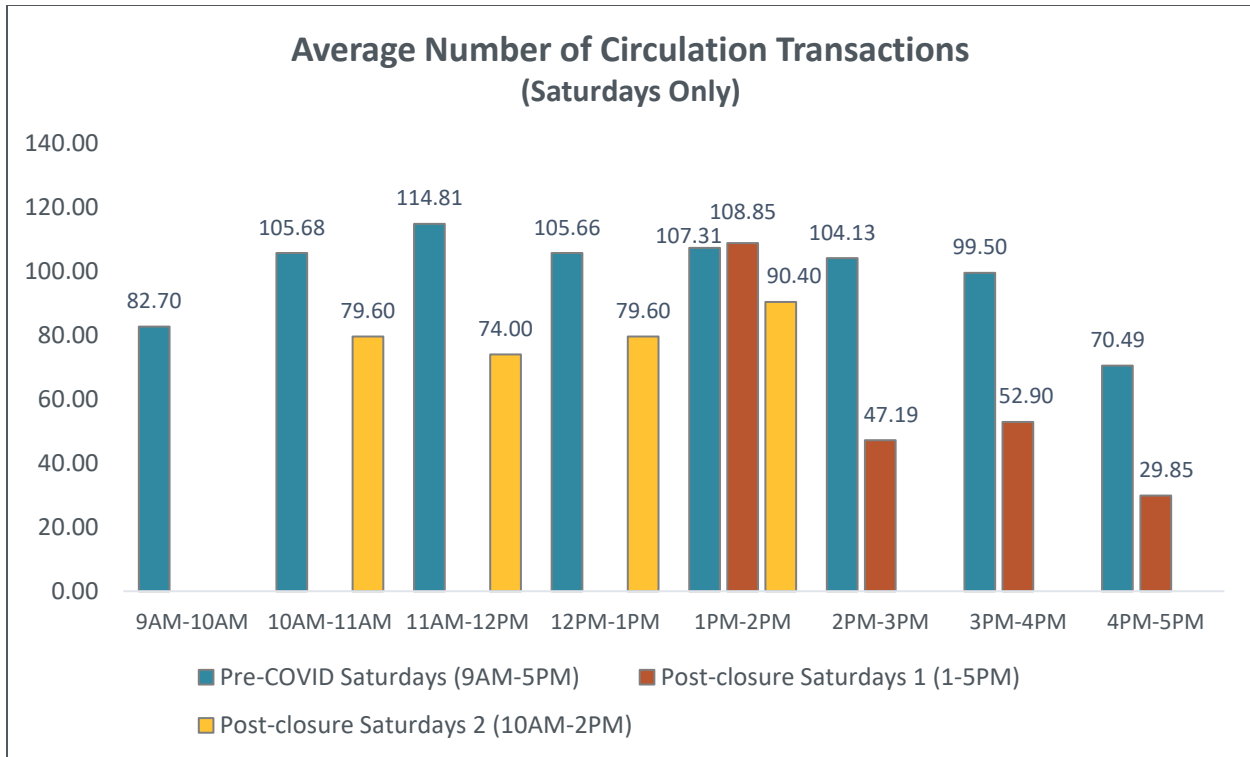
Figure 5: Average Number of Circulation Transactions Per Open Hour (Saturdays Only)

The 1:00 to 2:00 PM hour from immediately after the closure is likely inflated because of discharging quarantined materials. While the data from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM only represents statistics from five Saturdays, we are encouraged that we have seen increased traffic while being open during these new hours. Overall, Saturday transaction averages are higher than those in the evenings. Both Figure 2 and Figure 5 show that this is consistent during the pre-COVID and post-closure time periods. Though the circulation transaction statistics are only one piece of the data, they indicate that extending Saturday hours would be better than extending evening hours.

Additional Opportunities for Programs and Services

While presenting many challenges, the pandemic has also allowed us to evaluate the best ways to serve our patrons and to create new programs and services to offer. Library staff has used their collective years of training, experience and education to find new and creative ways to offer programs and services. The following are a selection of the new and reimagined offerings that we have instituted since the March 2020 closure. Please note that this list is in no way a comprehensive list of things that we offer at the library; it is merely a selection of things that we have created or revamped during this post-reopening period that we continue to offer today.

- *Curbside Pickup* – Our curbside pickup service began as a necessity when we were unable to allow patrons inside the library. However, this is a service that patrons continue to utilize. It is most popular with older patrons, those with young children, or during inclement weather. With this curbside service, we also implemented our online

chat feature. This allows patron to connect with us via text or through a web browser to ask questions, request materials, and pick up their curbside orders.

- *Adult Book Club* – Our adult book club resumed meeting via Zoom after the library's closure. Earlier this year, some members expressed an interest in returning to in-person meetings, while others felt safer remaining on Zoom. We purchased equipment to allow us to do this, and the group now meets with some members at the library and others joining virtually. This hybrid model has been well received. Many of the book club's members are older and have expressed that they like to have the option to Zoom in inclement weather or when otherwise not able to leave the house. While this does require some extra time for setup and preparation, it has allowed nearly all of the pre-pandemic book club members to return to the group. With patrons preferring to have the option to choose between virtual and in-person participation, this program may not return to its pre-pandemic model. We will continue to evaluate this and offer the program accordingly.

- *Book Clubs for Children and Teens* – We have also been able to resume book clubs for some of our younger patrons with modifications. This past summer, we held a session of our Teen Book Discussion Group. We have also been able to hold our Jr. Readers Book Club (children in first through third grades with their parents) and Readers Book Club (children in fourth through sixth grades) during the school years. Last year, some of the sessions had to be held via Zoom due to various COVID restrictions. However, we are hopeful that we can remain in person for the entirety of this school year. These programs are able to take place because we accept a limited number of registrants, eliminate the snack segment, socially distance participants, and keep masks on. We have also implemented individualized supply containers for each participant that the librarian prepares ahead of time; this eliminates crowding during crafts, activities, and book exchange. These programs have been successful with a full slate of registrants each year.

- *Virtual Story Times* – Following the school pandemic trend of virtual classrooms, we have created a Virtual Story Time program by creating a Google Slide model of our Scott Room's story time area and Bitmojis of each of our children's librarians. Each story time includes a video of the librarian reading a book, and another of them doing a flannel board activity. The story times also include links to books in the library's catalog and to other early literacy activities. The children's librarians at GFJ have created 26 virtual story times, which are available at gfjlibrary.org/stories. These are much more labor intensive than an in-person story time, but they have been very well received by our patrons with nearly 600 total views on the videos created in-house. Our typical story time participants are from birth through age five and are not able to be vaccinated at this time. Additionally, those under two years old are too young to wear masks. This virtual program allows us to safely share story times with our youngest patrons. We are also happy that this program has been well received as it will allow us to keep offering story

times during the upcoming Scott Room renovation in 2022. We are currently working to prepare these 2022 programs while we still have access to the Scott Room.

- *Take and Make Crafts* – The Youth Services and Teen Departments have been creating take and make crafts for our patrons. Teens have had seasonal options for activities to pick up at various times. In the Children's Room, there is at least one new craft being offered each month. These have been popular, and we have distributed anywhere from 30 to 75 craft kits to families each month. We also offer the option to pick up these crafts curbside if families prefer this to coming into the library.

- *Digital Escape Rooms* – Our Teen Department began creating original, digital escape rooms during the closure. These have continued and we now have a total of 11 digital escape rooms available at gfjlibrary.org/teenpage. These were created with teens in mind, but they are available to anyone.

- *READsquared* – The READsquared platform allows us to offer online reading programs for all ages and is being offered to us at no charge through the New York State Library. We have conducted programs for children, teens, and adults through READsquared. It allows us to create programs where participants can track their reading, complete missions, review books, view reading lists, enter to win prizes, and complete various other activities that we create. Most recently, we used this for our 2021 summer reading programs for children, teens, and adults. For each of these programs, librarians created two versions so that participants could choose whether they wanted to participate online or with the traditional paper program. Preferences were split and people were happy to have the ability to choose between the options. We are currently offering the "Carve Out Time for Reading" program for teens using READsquared.

- *YouTube Channel* – Our YouTube channel was created during the library's pandemic closure period and remains available to users. It houses our Virtual Story Time videos which were mentioned above. The Youth Services staff have also created five drawing videos, eight craft videos, and 18 story videos which are available for anyone to enjoy.

- *Tech Center Updates* – The Tech Center's staff has created innovative ways to serve patrons during this time. First, we are offering live, virtual classes via Zoom. These classes are very well attended and are able to accommodate more attendees than the Tech Center could hold even prior to the pandemic. Second, are on-demand virtual classes. These self-paced classes cover a variety of subjects and allow participants to learn on their own time. A third pandemic addition is Virtual Tech Help. This service allows patrons to email their tech questions and promptly receive an answer from a member of our Tech Center staff. The Tech Center pages of the library's website were redesigned for these three, new offerings. The final, more recent Tech Center offering is appointment-based one-on-one tech help. This allows patrons to bring their specific questions and devices to the library for learning and assistance. This service has been well received with weekly appointment times often filled.

- *Self-Checkout* – Our latest library addition is a self-checkout station. This allows patrons greater privacy and the opportunity to checkout without coming into contact with others. While we anticipate that the majority of our patrons would rather interact with staff, we are happy to be able to offer this service to those who may prefer it. We are the first library in the Four County Library System to offer self-checkout.

"Big Broomes" Libraries

While we recognize that each of our libraries are slightly different, it can be interesting to look at what other local libraries are doing at this time. Figure 6 shows the hours of the "Big Broomes" libraries from early 2020 and the present time according to their websites.

Library	Pre-COVID		Current	
	Hours	**Total**	**Hours**	**Total**
George F. Johnson Memorial Library	Mon.-Thurs. 9 AM-9 PM Fri. & Sat. 9 AM-5 PM	64	Mon.-Thurs. 9 AM-7 PM Fri. 9 AM-5 PM Sat. 10 AM-2 PM	52
Broome County Public Library (Binghamton)	Mon.-Thurs. 9 AM-8 PM Fri. & Sat. 9 AM-5 PM	60	Mon.-Thurs. 9 AM-8 PM Fri. & Sat. 9 AM-5 PM	60
Vestal Public Library	Mon.-Thurs. 9 AM-8 PM Fri. 9 AM-5 PM Sat. 10 AM-2 PM	56	Mon.-Thurs. 9 AM-8 PM Fri. 9 AM-5 PM Sat. 10 AM-4 PM	58
Your Home Public Library (Johnson City)	Mon.-Thurs. 9 AM-8 PM Fri. & Sat. 9 AM-5 PM	60	Mon.-Thurs. 9 AM-7 PM Fri. 9 AM-5 PM Sat. 10 AM-2 PM	52

Figure 6: "Big Broomes" Hours

The number of hours the library is open is not the only measure of how we serve our patrons. Figure 7 shows some ways that the libraries are serving patrons in addition to open hours. The data shaded in yellow is from the 2020 Annual Report and therefore reflects the data at the end of the 2020 calendar year. The data shaded in blue has been gathered from the libraries' websites and social media pages.

Library	Collection Size	Registered Borrowers	Online Tools	November Programs				
				In-Person	Virtual	Hybrid	Passive	Total
Endicott	105,910	22,288	8	11	7	1	19	38
Binghamton	209,445	33,079	1	19	3	0	2	24
Vestal	114,086	10,852	0	17	0	1	0	18
JC	36,335	7,302	2	0	1	0	2	3

Figure 7: "Big Broomes" Library Activity

Please note the following considerations for Figure 7:

- Online Tools refers to databases and services offered outside of the Four County Reference Center. For GFJ Library, this includes resources such as Mango Languages, Linked In Learning, digitized local history resources, and more.

- Hybrid programs refer to those which have a simultaneous in-person and virtual component. Passive programs refer to those which patrons can complete on their own time whether in-person or online.

- Friends of the Library Book Sales and any meetings being held at the library are not being counted in this data for any library.

Obviously, everything that a library does has a cost, particularly in terms of staff time. Each library needs to decide the best way to allocate their available resources to serve their population. Our staff has found that we have some patrons happily returning to the building and others who enjoy the online offerings that we have worked to create. Of course we also have patrons who participate in both. We are working to serve all of these populations as best we can and to utilize our time in the most effective way between these various tasks.

Summary

The needs of our patrons are continually evolving. We have realized that serving our patrons to the fullest extent possible is not only achieved by having the library doors open. At this time, we believe that our open hours are sufficient, and they allow staff time to work on the many additional programs and services that we are providing to the community. We are continually assessing the best ways to serve our patrons. This report does not take into account collection development, circulation, marketing, or countless other tasks which we regularly complete. However, we hope that this leads to further understanding of the decisions that have been made in the recent months, and the course we hope to follow as we move forward.

Resources

- Activity Report Statistics
  The attached Excel file contains the charts and data found in this report. It is also available in the Documents folder for the November 2021 Board Meeting at
  https://www.gfjlibrary.org/about/file-cabinet/

- Daily Circulation Per Hour –
  https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1G5Isy5DNqAN9PHfWks0469f_A5Q-91WU
  The original circulation transactions statistics were obtained from BlueCloud Analytics, a program provided by SirsiDynix with support from the Four County Library System.

- Big Data 2020 – https://intranet.4cls.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Big-Data-2020.xlsx
  The data on collection size and registered borrowers was gathered from the Four County Library System's 2020 Annual Report Big Data file.

- Information on GFJ and other libraries were gathered from the following pages.
  - George F. Johnson Memorial Library
    Website – http://www.gfjlibrary.org/
    Facebook – https://www.facebook.com/gfjlibrary
    Instagram – https://www.instagram.com/gfjlibrary/
    YouTube – https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCRcc34XHlJfZ6nurIWOJzw

  - Broome County Public Library
    Website – http://bclibrary.info/
    Facebook – https://www.facebook.com/bcpubliclibrary
    Twitter – https://twitter.com/bcpubliclibrary
    Instagram – https://www.instagram.com/bcpubliclibrary/

  - Vestal Public Library
    Website – https://www.vestalpubliclibrary.org/
    Facebook – https://www.facebook.com/vestalpubliclibrary
    Instagram – https://www.instagram.com/vestal_public_library/
    YouTube – https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCp-SMhf_ehRz4gJKB_N6Mng

  - Your Home Public Library
    Website – https://www.yhpl.org/
    Facebook – https://www.facebook.com/YourHomePublicLibrary/
    Twitter – https://twitter.com/YHPL_JC
    YouTube – https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCdTATtTZZ1gZK9lwmpEIqzg

- Internet Archive – https://archive.org/web/
  Information on library hours prior to the pandemic was gathered from the Internet Archive.