

Dear Community,

I need to keep you up to date on my thinking as our Youth Services team plans programs for children and teens this fall.

As we approach the school year, you may be thinking:

"COVID is over. Why can't library services get back to normal?"

"Our taxes are paying for library programs. You're wasting our money if you don't have storytime."

"I need a reason to get out of the house and talk with other adults every week. Your programs used to be my lifeline."

"Social isolation is worse for kids than getting COVID. Kids are missing out on key developmental interactions."

"Parents can choose for their own families if they want to take kids out in public."

I know that many families were hoping to return to in-building programs for babies, kids, and teens this fall.

Unfortunately, due to changing community conditions and our responsibility to follow guidelines from the health department, ImagineIF Libraries is not able to provide a safe environment to staff presenting indoor programs to youth. Therefore, **we are planning a hybrid outdoor and take-home kit program offering similar to this year's Summer Experience**

Here's my thinking: if several of our staff members needed to simultaneously quarantine, we would risk having to close one or more library branches. Closing library branches would severely limit our ability to provide safe and fair access to library services to all community members.

We have a duty to remain open to deliver taxpayer services: providing safe access to books and information.

It is the library's responsibility to also provide critical information and literacy opportunities to as many youth in the Flathead as possible. To meet these needs, we will do the following:

- Offer **take home hands-on learning kits for kids and teens birth-18** in all of ImagineIF Libraries for the months of September, October, and November 2021.
- While the weather permits, we will hold **three total outdoor family early literacy classes per week in Bigfork, Columbia Falls, and Kalispell** (locations TBD).
- Families can also visit our YouTube archive of over **200 virtual literacy and science programs** at tinyurl.com/ImagineIFYT
- We will closely monitor public health guidance and reevaluate our services for December.

We know that our community is eager to return to in-person indoor programs.

We miss hosting large groups of young people and their families, too. We hope that it will soon be safe enough to return to indoor library programs.

What am I missing? Please contact me with your thoughts and ideas.

Warmly,
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