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How Does Our Local Library Benefit My Family?

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Presenters: Jane Haskell & George Morse, UMaine Extension

Libraries benefit everyone in their community, not only library users but also those that never use it.

Nationally, 67% of adults report their local library is important to their family and 90% say they are vital for their community.¹ Libraries are shifting from primarily being a source of books and media to providing transformational opportunities for patrons through children's programs, librarian assistance, research resources, and etc.² Moreover public library use grew from 2008 to 2013.³

Surveys show strong support for libraries, but they overstate backing in the voting booth.⁴ It is important that people understand the benefits to their family.

Direct Benefits to Your Family

What are the direct benefits of using the library to my family?

- The long-term value of a library comes from the life changing experiences it provides to users, such as pre-school children learning to love reading and new parents learning to nurture their children.⁵ While not capturing the full benefits, a sensible estimate of direct benefits is the out-of-pocket costs saved by using the library.

Direct Benefits in Dollars to Your Family

What would you need to pay out-of-pocket for the books and services you used last year?

- Using the "Library Use Value Calculator" the Rob Smith family with two children estimated they saved \$1,584 in out-of-pocket last year.⁶

Do the direct benefits of using the library outweigh the taxes my family paid for running the library?

- The Smith family paid the median level of property taxes (\$1,936).⁷ The library's share was 1.5% or \$29 per year.⁸ The Smiths received over \$54 dollars in benefits for every dollar in taxes for the library! (\$1,584/\$29.04)

Indirect Benefits to Your Family, And for Library Non-Users

- In addition to the direct benefits, your family also benefits indirectly when others use the library.
- These indirect benefits even go to people who never use the library. Nationally, 52% of Americans did not use a public library during 2013 and 28% of families had no library patrons.⁹ However, the non-users reap indirect benefits when others use their local library. Let's explore an example.

What are the indirect effects (also known as public value) of early literacy programs for pre-school children?

- We start with this example because free literacy programs to young children is the highest priority for all library programs, favored by 82% of Americans aged 16 and over.¹⁰
- **These directly help pre-school children learn to love reading and learning, preparing them to do better in school.** Hence, they have more opportunities, earn more, and pay more tax.

- **Indirectly, the rest of the community benefits as these pre-school programs expand.** For example, even a retired couple (with no local grandchildren) benefit because fewer special reading teachers are needed, lowering the cost of education and the local property tax rates.
- These are major long-run indirect benefits as these children earn higher incomes, pay more taxes. This reduces the need for public assistance. Their higher tax reduces the burden on others. Even more important, these children contribute more to society, finding solutions to climate change, new diseases, poverty and creating dynamic businesses, schools, and hospitals.

Public Value Statements

Public value statements communicate these direct and indirect benefits quickly during backyard chats, office breaks or public meetings. Here is an example:¹¹

Our library is a good investment. For example, children in our library's preschool programs have greater success in school, reducing school costs and taxes for everyone."

References

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- 6- <http://www.maine.gov/msl/services/calculator.htm>.
- 7-Maine Property Taxes 2014. <http://www.tax-rates.org/maine/property-tax>
- 8- De Rosa, C. et al. (2008), p. 4-14
- 9- Zickuhr, K., et al. (2013).
- 10- Rainie, L. (1/24/2014).
- 11- This public value statement is one of 19 developed at UMaine Cooperative Extension workshops with 15 Maine libraries by small teams and edited slightly.

For more information or an expanded list of public value statements or information on public value workshops or webinars, contact:

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