

WVLS Post Conference Report

To start with, I'd like to thank Wisconsin Valley Library Service for providing me with the scholarship that allowed me to attend the Association of Rural and Small Libraries conference in Vermont. It was a valuable experience on many levels and so much of what I learned is helping me to make the Owen Public Library stronger and better.

I have so many stories I'd like to share but I'll try to stick to the form and keep this a reasonable length!

1. *Please highlight three sessions from the conference. What were the session topics? Who presented them? What made these presentations most effective and meaningful to you?*
 - a. Book Club Reboot: Creative Twists on the Reading Groups We Know and Love presented by Sarah Ostman and Stephanie Alba gave me some great ideas for my book club but also solved a problem I've had for a while. After the presentation I stopped to talk to the presenters about a problem book club member. This person thinks they always have the answers, likes to hog the speaking floor and is rude when expressing their opinion of books they don't like when other book club members say they enjoyed those same books. Sarah and Stephanie said that the club should make rules about who speaks and when. In one case, we changed a question we ask every month, "What else did you read this month?" to "What was the best thing you read this month?"
 - b. Libraries and the LGBT+ Experience, presented by Tina Dalton and Jennifer Strickles was fascinating and inspiring. Tina and Jennifer shared their experiences both with programming for the LGBT+ community and in dealing with unaccepting co-workers. In recent months I have talked with more library patrons who identify as part of the LGBT+ community and I am excited to understand their viewpoint more and to facilitate a better library experience.
 - c. Feeding America: Gardens, Seed Exchanges, Summer Meals, and More!, presented by Noah Lenstra was enlightening. There wasn't a lot of structure to the presentation but many audience members were fans of the presenter and familiar with his promotion of healthy choices in the library. Noah began the presentation but it soon turned into a discussion of ways and means. It was so exciting to hear about the many good programs that work in libraries.

2. *Please Highlight a conference experience, other than attending a conference session.*

I sort of embraced a different attitude with this conference than I have with those I've attended in the past. I allowed myself to relax a little rather than rushing from session to session. This gave me a chance to chat with presenters, vendors and other attendees. I went to fewer sessions but I got more out of the ones I went to. It was a good trade. One particularly good experience was with the representatives for Findaway products. I had noticed a problem with our juvenile audiobooks.

Many of the children who want them have no way to listen to them. CD players are going the way of tape players as more of our audio content comes through streaming. My granddaughter loves audio books and I took the time to find her a CD player and a good set of headphones. I've tried adding the Overdrive app to her Kindle but it is locked down tight and I don't know the password. I've told her mom to add the app, but it hasn't happened yet. Then shortly after school started my granddaughter told me recently that no one in her class knew what an audio book was. I started thinking about it and how both CDs and streaming were not widely available to elementary age students. That's why I decided to talk to the Findaway people. They showed

me both their playaway examples and a new product called a Wonderbook, which combines an ink and paper book with an audio component. I think this may be a great solution to the problem of providing audiobooks to younger patrons.

3. As a result of attending this conference, what three things do you plan on implementing at your library in the next 6 months?

From Book Group Reboot, I got the confidence to take more leadership in our book club. The book club was started by a patron so up until the conference I let her run the club. And she is great at it in general, but there were a few areas that needed a firmer hand, such as in dealing with that problem member and planning ahead so we can get the books we need on time. A couple of weeks after the conference we had our “organizational” meeting in the fall when we are supposed to choose books for the rest of the year. I came armed with a variety of topics and books to suggest. We not only made out the schedule for the rest of the year, but all the way through May of 2020. I hope this will allow for better meetings with more meaningful discussion. Also, I am having a representative of Reading Group Choices, whom I met at the conference, send me copies of their bookmark that lists “Guidelines for Lively Book Discussions.” I hope these small changes will have a big impact on the quality and vitality of our book discussions.

I considered some pretty big ideas from the session on LGBT+ Experiences, including creating an LGBTQ+ and Allies support group but in the end I’m going to start with one small change and hope that it will make an impact. With board approval (already obtained, informally) I am going to change our small, single stall restrooms so they are no longer designated by gender. They will simply be labeled “restroom” rather than “men” and “ladies.”

One day at the conference, I got delayed and was late for the session I wanted to go to. I debated whether to just skip this session and then noticed a presentation in progress on the open Petit Dejeuner Terrace and I was drawn in. Representatives from the National Network of Libraries of Medicine were giving a demonstration on Finding Reliable Health Information with Medline Plus. I’d heard of this resource before but thought it was a paid subscription database. I was excited to learn that it was free and to see how much more it had to offer than Web MD. I plan to use Facebook and perhaps create a flier to encourage patrons to try out Medline Plus.

This did not come from a workshop, but after talking with the Findaway representatives and sampling their products, I plan to make room in my 2020 budget to start a small collection of Wonderbooks.

4. What kind of support is needed for you to implement these three things?
- I need support from my book club and so far, they have backed me up on this!
 - I have the support of my library board for this. I just need the support of the city workers to help me make the physical change.
 - Promoting a “new to me” resource is something I can do on my own.
 - Here, I need the support of my board and the city when they pass the final version of my budget.
5. How might your conference experience have been improved to be more beneficial/impactful to you?
- Conferences are exciting and exhausting and overwhelming. It is impossible to pack in everything they have to offer in just a few days. I can’t imagine any way that WVLS could have

improved the experience. It occurs to me though, that there are certain skills to making the most out of a conference and I'm starting to learn them. Perhaps, if you have new conference goers, you could give them some tips. I'd be happy to write up a blog post if you think that would be helpful.