

Podcast Episode 37: Sarah & Hana: Summer Reading Update

August 8, 2023 by [Neil McKay](#)

WCLS in Whatcom County presents Library Stories!

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Christine

This podcast is produced on the ancestral homeland of the Nooksack and Lummi people. They have been its stewards since time immemorial, respecting the land, river and ocean with the understanding that everything is connected, related and alive. We acknowledge the elders and their collective and individual plights and achievements. We consider the legacies of violence, displacement, migration and settlement that bring us together today. And we pursue ongoing action to build lasting relationships and grow together so that all may prosper.

(Interlude music plays)

Neil

WCLS in Whatcom County presents Library Stories, a podcast to open your eyes to all the ways your local public libraries matter. Join us as we reveal the power of sharing at the library. I'm your host Neil McKay, Online Experience Coordinator for the Whatcom County Library System, and today...

Sarah

Hi everybody, I'm Sarah Lavender. I'm the Youth Services Librarian at the Ferndale Public Library.

Hana

And I'm Hana Boxberger. I'm a Youth Services Assistant at the Lynden Public Library.

Sarah

And we're here to kind of talk and update you all about how Summer Reading 2023 is going. I think it's been going so well. I mean, first of all, we can just say, everybody pat yourselves on the back because we reached our initial goal of planting 200 new trees in Whatcom County. We surpassed that pretty greatly. So now our goal is 500 trees, thanks to the

Whatcom County Library Foundation for donating a little bit more money for this amazing cause. So now we need to keep reading. We need to keep doing activities and hopefully we can plant 500 trees next year.

Hana

I think we'll get there.

Sarah

I think so too, but it's been really fun so far, I guess. What's been one of your favorite parts of Summer Reading, Hana?

Hana

I love seeing folks' reactions when you talk about the program and explain what it is because when you first say "Hey, have you signed up for Summer Reading or something like that?" They're usually intrigued or something.

Sarah

Right.

Hana

Most people at least know the concept of summer reading.

Sarah

Right.

Hana

But when you say what the program is and that we're reading for the trees is really the slogan of it, people love that. They absolutely love that.

Sarah

Like adults too, which I feel like in the past years I think there's been a little bit of a disconnect with adults being like "Well, I can't do Summer Reading, you know, it's for kids" or even "I don't really read" and it's like "Well this year we're planting trees." And then they get super excited. So, I've noticed that too.

Hana

And I also do love that there's another thing that I'm really enjoying is how much adults are really enjoying the program too, because Summer Reading as far as I know has always

been for all ages but, it's very kid-oriented a lot of the time. People don't realize that they can do it as well when they're grown-ups.

Sarah

Right.

Hana

And people get so excited.

Sarah

Yes, I know.

Hana

And they go "I can do it too?" And then they want to sign up and it's just been so much fun. It's like you don't even have to say much beyond we're reading for the trees for people to be on board. They go "OK. I want to do that."

Sarah

Yeah, I think everybody feels that. Also, just a reminder that these trees are being planted by the Whatcom Million Trees project. They're this really cool local organization that we've been partnering with this summer and they've been just wonderful to work with and they, you know, they do have a bit of an idea for these trees now. They've listed some different parks in Whatcom County that they're hoping to be able to plant these trees in. I know Hovander Park is one of those parks, but I also know that Deming is another area they'll be focusing on, and we're actually going to have a tree planting ceremony in October at the Deming Public Library where Whatcom Million Trees project will be there to plant a celebratory tree to kind of mark our progress with Summer Reading and then the rest of those hopefully 500 trees will be planted, you know, scattered out throughout Whatcom County throughout the next year. But they've been such great partners to work with and they have definitely expressed interest in doing this in the future as well. So, we're pretty excited about that too. And then also, I was going to say a really cool part of my job is that I get to see all the different numbers coming in each week, so each week I contact all the branch staff, the Youth Services staff at each branch and ask them how many activities did patrons do throughout the week? Of the past week, how many leaves did they earn and the numbers that come in are crazy. I mean, and it's just, it's awesome. It's in the hundreds every week for almost every branch, which is so cool. Even, I think the highest branch that gets the most leaves and activities is actually bookmobile, which I think is really cool.

Hana

Really? Ohh, that's so cool.

Sarah

A couple weeks ago they had like 551 leaves.

Hana

Oh my goodness. Yeah.

Sarah

Something like that. It was for just one week and that's so cool that that's the Bookmobile, you know, it's not even like a stationary branch, it's a small little truck that goes around, but it sees so many people. So that was really cool to see that for sure.

Hana

Ohh that's fantastic.

Sarah

And so again, just to reiterate, if you weren't familiar with the activities and the tree and the leaf count, so basically one activity equals one leaf and 25 leaves equals one tree planted. And each branch has their own paper tree that they're working on as well. So, when they get activities from patrons, that activity essentially becomes a visual little paper leaf from recycled book pages, and they put that up on their big paper tree. And yeah, and then 25 of those equals one actual tree planted, so again, it's been really cool to watch that progress happen and see that number grow so much from week to week. And I don't know, I like that I get to be the one to add it all up, I never get to do math in this position, which I'm really thankful for, but also this is kind of a fun one to do.

Hana

It's rewarding math.

Sarah

Yes, right. Even though I do use a calculator, it's OK. It's kind of like we've got this production line that happens. Every Tuesday I e-mail the Youth Services staff, they email me their numbers by the end of that day and then I email Neil the final number by Wednesday morning and then Wednesday morning, Neil updates the website so that the little tree graphic on the top represents the new number of trees. If you look at it right now, it is like a very dense forest. It's awesome. And what we're up to like 7000-something leaves right now.

Hana

That's so cool.

Sarah

So definitely keep checking back on the website, the Summer Reading page on the website throughout the summer to see that grow, and there's also a little hidden monster in there, I should say – no, it's Sasquatch. Yeah, it's always hidden in the graphic, which is fun too, to try to find him.

Hana

I've noticed that patrons love checking in on the tree when they come into the branch.

Sarah

It's so fun.

Sarah

And like, how about putting up the leaves? How has that been? Have you been doing that or do you have another staff member do that usually?

Hana

It depends on how many there are per week. I can handle most of it. There was one week where we had 250 or something like that and I don't remember what was going on that day, but just that was going to take a really long time. Lynden is lucky to have a lot of volunteers, a lot of teen volunteers, and so usually I can if I need help with that, we can have our volunteers do it and they get to participate and see the fruits of this labor too.

Sarah

That's a great way to use teen volunteers for sure. I know, I tried that and I think a lot of the teens in Ferndale maybe have a lot of plans going on, which is great. But I've also felt that same way, where sometimes the weeks I'm like, oh, I can do this. It's only, you know, 80 or 90 and then one week we had over 400. And I was like guys, I need help.

Hana

Oh, my gosh. So amazing though, right?

Sarah

Yeah, so amazing.

Hana

It's a good problem to have so many to put up.

Sarah

And how about programs? Cause we were just talking about before this, Hanna and I were just talking about how, you know, July is our huge kid and teen program month and we just kind of wrapped that up. How is your experience with that?

Hana

With the programs? In general, in the summer? Oh, they've been so much fun and a lot of them, especially the kids programs that I was running in particular were very on brand for our trees and people loved that, right painting bird houses and making sun catchers and doing bird feeders and they were all excited about where they were going to put them at their house or on their porch or whatever. And it's just been a really good tie-in. It's been so much fun. And then be able to talk about summer reading at the beginning of the programs and encourage people to come up and sign up before they leave, if they haven't yet.

Sarah

Yes, right. And seeing them, I've had a few kids, like come into programs with their summer reading card, you know, with all the tallies. And they're like I need to record these, you know? And I'm like, OK, let's go do that, you know. Or like the front desk, they'll tally them up for you and they're just so excited. Yeah, so you're right. I feel like this year, finally, the programs really feel connected to the Summer Reading program. I think we haven't always gotten that feel in the past. And so that's been something that's been really cool.

Hana

It's been quite cohesive in that sense, and one of the activities is to attend a library program.

Sarah

Yes, right.

Hana

So, when you talk about it there and get people excited, you can say you can check off your first one, right now.

Sarah

Right. And now think about it I know for Ferndale and Lynden, we get pretty high attendance for those programs you know. In a way that could be like 85 leaves, you know if everyone there did their tally marks.

Hana

That's three trees.

Sarah

Yeah, yeah. So cool.

Hana

And almost 1/2 tree, yeah.

Sarah

Three and a baby tree. Yeah, but no, I also loved the programs, too. And we did some teen programs as well that were camps for teens, Writers camp and Shakespeare camp. And I'm really glad you got to come in and see Shakespeare camp for a little bit and it's so fun. Yeah, just getting to work with these groups of kids and teens is so rewarding.

Hana

Yeah, some of the art camps too at some of the other branches had some tree themed projects that they worked on as well, which I'm really excited to see the outcome of those.

Sarah

Yeah, we tried to do some tree themed haikus at the teen writers camp. It was good. I think some teens are intimidated by poetry for sure. So, there was a little bit of hesitation, but then I think when they realized "Ohh, a haiku is like pretty easy and fun and I can write it about anything I want." And so, we did tree and nature ones. And so that was really fun too.

Hana

And then you and Theresa got to do some story times in nature.

Sarah

So, we went to Hovander Park for two of the Wednesday Storytimes and it was so fun. We had huge groups. I think the last one we had 86 people and yeah, we all get to sit out in the grass under apple trees. Theresa picked an apple off the tree and started eating it at the end of her storytime. She was like "This is great a little tart but..." That was super fun. And again, that program is so cool because it's right next to the Children's Story Garden at

Hovander, which if you haven't been there it's in Ferndale. It's an amazing park. But the Story Garden is so cute. They actually have children's picture books placed next to each of the little garden displays, right?

Hana

Just very sweet.

Sarah

Yeah, like in their theme. There's, you know, depending on what vegetable or fruit is in the story, it'll match up. So, it's super cool if you haven't checked it out yet, I definitely recommend stopping by, but yeah, so that was so fun, and now we're kind of moving into August, which all of our major kid, teen and early programs are wrapping up for the summer. But that definitely doesn't mean Summer Reading is wrapping up. We still are going to go all the way to the end of August. August 31st. And so keep doing your activities, keep hugging trees, right? Keep reading. There's another program happening. It's really cool. It's a bilingual program, which we're super excited about. And it's actually called Stories and Popsicles.

Hana

So yeah, the program is inspired by the book about Paletero man by Lucky Diaz, which is a fantastic, vibrant, just beautiful, beautiful book. Beautiful story, so I imagine that's going to be a lot of fun and it'll be really good for a hot day in the summer because there will be popsicles.

Sarah

For sure.

Hana

I do know that.

Sarah

Yes and I think this would be a good one too if you're looking for something in August to do. I know a lot of our patrons at all of our branches had so many activities to do with us in July that they might be feeling a little bored during August or want something more. This is your chance to go do that at these different libraries and yeah, we're super excited about that. And then before we know it, we'll be back in school in the school year. But, yes, so Summer Reading, I think overall has been a huge success. I just keep hearing stories and just people

are just so excited, and I haven't heard that the last few years. So, it's really awesome to hear.

Hana

It's really that community focus that patrons are just –.

Sarah

They're wanting that.

Hana

Really wanting to get into and –.

Sarah

Right.

Hana

Been really rewarding to see. Yeah, just that drive to do something together and to provide something for our county.

Sarah

Yeah, that is so beneficial. And I think it's exposing people to Whatcom Million Trees project too. I know on their website there's different dates where they do kind of volunteer days where people can go and gather and take out a bunch of English Ivy, or what have you, and so it's cool because I think that opens a door for them as well to get more volunteers and maybe even families will want to go check out their website. And that's an activity on the card, by the way, looking at the Whatcom Million Trees website. So, if you haven't done that, check it out and mark your card.

Neil

All right. So, this is Neil back here. I've been listening to this wonderful conversation about Summer Reading and I had to interrupt because as we're talking about how looking at the Million Trees Project website is one of the activities you can mark down to get a leaf. Another activity of course, because it's Summer Reading is reading a book, so I'm here to ask the both of you if you have any recommendations, book recommendations for our audience?

Hana

Well, I have two and as you can imagine, being in Youth Services, I mean we don't only read kids and teen books, but we do read a lot of them. So, I have a teen and a middle grade, which is probably around like 8 to 12 years old I would say for this one. So, my teen book that I just read was called *Enter the Body* by Joy McCullough. And actually Joy McCullough is a Seattle author. She's written a couple of really fantastic books, and this one is from the perspective of, well, many of the women from Shakespeare's plays, but with a focus on the stories of Juliet, Ophelia and Cordelia. So that's Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet and King Lear. I think Sarah, who runs the Shakespeare camp, knows more about Shakespeare than I do, but I thoroughly enjoyed still this story, and it's these women are telling each other their stories essentially, and it's kind of got a backstage feel, like they're all hanging out backstage with each other. And halfway through the narrative, it sort of flips and they start telling their stories the way that they more wish they had been told. And so, they're kind of taking charge of their narratives cause a lot of them don't have much of one in their place. So that one was fantastic. Yeah, I think you would like it a lot. I'm sure you'll pick up on plenty that I was not able to, but I think you can appreciate it either way.

And then I also just read — these are both new releases. They've come out pretty recently. I just read one called *No Matter the Distance* by Cindy Baldwin, and actually Cindy Baldwin lives in Portland, OR. So, we have a couple NW authors on this list and so this one is about Penny. And Penny has cystic fibrosis, which actually Cindy Baldwin also manages, and a dolphin ends up in the Creek that's outside of her house. It's a Creek that's not terribly far from the sea, but far enough that it'd be really unusual for a dolphin to end up there. And it's just about Penny is forming this relationship with this dolphin and kind of like a kinship with her and it's about her life as well, just dealing with having CF and not letting that define her, but she also feels very lonely because people with CF are so contagious to each other. They can spread germs to each other really easily. And so it's really hard in person to have relationships with other kids that deal with the same kind of lifestyle that she has. And that's really lonely for her. And so she's kind of learning how to build that community as well. And it's just a very introspective, beautiful, it's in verse as well.

Sarah

Oh yeah.

Hana

It's her writing it in verse and actually *Enter the Body* is also in verse —

Sarah

Ohh my gosh. Ok.

Hana

Because it's I think I would need Sarah to double check this fact, but I think all of their narratives are in the same like meter that their plays are written in, if that makes sense.

Sarah

Yeah. OK, that's cool. OK.

Hana

At least I know at least one of them is, so that's just pretty cool too. I love a book in verse too.

Sarah

And I love listening to audiobooks in verse too.

Hana

Oh, absolutely, yeah.

Sarah

But these both sound so good.

Hana

They are, and they're both very character driven, if that's your reading doorway, which is definitely my main one.

Sarah

I'm a character reader for sure. No, thank you. That sounds...yeah, both of those are gonna go on my list for sure. And it's good 'cause I have definitely been reading different things than I normally read. So, you know, most of the time, it's all kid stuff with a little trickling of adult, but I've been reading a lot about grief and death just because a couple of months ago my cat passed away and so I've been discovering though some really good books.

One is called *No Death, No Fear* by Thich Nhat Hanh. And he's a Buddhist and has just this amazing view on death and how you know our society and culture is so afraid of death whereas I think in the Buddhist teachings it's more about the continuation, you know, and that we're never, there really isn't death. And in a way we just become all the things around us, you know. And so that's been giving me a lot of peace and I think I definitely recommend it for anyone who you know has lost someone or I mean we're all scared of losing someone. So, I think it's one of those books that it just opened my eyes to a little bit of a different way

to see it and also another one in the similar vein is called *It's OK That you're not OK* by Megan Devine and that one I'm listening to right now. And it's great. It's really all about the fact that our culture doesn't know how to talk about death and grief.

Grief is one of those things we get uncomfortable with and we want if someone's experiencing deep grief we want that feeling to move on as fast as possible and you know you're going to feel better soon and all of that, instead of really accepting it as part of, that's what everybody will feel. We all feel that in life and it's part of love is grief and so I'm really enjoying that as well. I always love reading and talking about things that maybe are difficult to talk about or have a stigma on them. And so, if you're interested in learning about that or you're maybe you're grieving yourself over the loss of someone or something. Both of these books have really been helping me, so I definitely recommend them, and we have both those in our system as well.

Hana

That's great. Some light summer reading.

Sarah

Yeah, I know. Right. I'm like, oh, man. I need to, maybe I need to move it into something, get to the middle grade.

Hana

Well, they sound very powerful so, and I'm glad they're helping.

Sarah

And I'm reading lots of picture books on the side to help too. Those are always –.

Hana

Balance is important.

Sarah

Yes, for sure. We have so many great picture books.

Neil

Well that's great. That's some a broad range of recommendations there. Anyway, Well, thank you. Thank you, Hana. Thank you, Sarah. I'm always glad to hear how exciting it is in the Youth Services department, and that's all I got for you.

Sarah

Thank you so much, Neil.

Hana

Thanks, Neil.

(Interlude music playing)

Neil

Alright, that's our show. I want to thank Sarah Lavender and Hana Boxberger for taking over the microphones. There's still a lot of time to participate in Summer Reading. Visit our website at WCLS.com/summerreading to see how many trees we have earned and visit your library branch to let them know how many leaves you've earned. As always, I'd like to thank my boss, Mary Vermilion. If trees could speak, they wouldn't, only hum some low green note. Until next time, this is Neil Mckay for the Whatcom County Library System. I'll see you at the library.