

LIBRARIES

ROBBINS AND FOX LIBRARIES

Mission

The Robbins Library (main) and the Fox Branch Library form Arlington's public library system. The Robbins and Fox libraries are vital community centers for all, providing opportunities for lifelong learning, personal fulfillment, and enjoyment that make Arlington a great place to live, work, study, and visit. The library is committed to services that anticipate and respond to the needs and interests of all users.

Library Services During COVID-19

On March 13, 2020, both library facilities closed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. To keep all ages connected, informed, and entertained, librarians conducted reference services by email and phone, added new e-content and streaming services, and learned how to produce story times, sing-alongs, book discussion groups, and speaker programs on Zoom and other online platforms. The first virtual library program was held on March 27.

The library held a "Big Return" event on Saturday, June 20 where patrons could return the items they'd had since March. Book drops at Robbins were reopened to accept returns.



Assistant Director Anna Litten on Contactless Pickup launch day

In late June contactless pickup service began, restoring access to the library's physical collections. Popular titles from Fox Library were temporarily relocated to Robbins, along with Fox Library staff. In August the "Grab Bag" service launched, providing busy adults and families with a custom bag of library materials suited to their general preferences. The service was instantly popular, drastically reducing wait times for library materials.

In October the lobby at Robbins reopened for drop-in checkout service, eliminating the hassle of the appointment system and welcoming patrons back inside for the first time since March.



Returned materials flood the Community Room.

Accomplishments in 2020

January - March 12

- Thanks to support from the Friends of the Robbins Library the \$1.00 rental fee for feature DVDs was removed, thus eliminating a financial barrier to access. Library DVD collections continue to circulate despite the availability of streaming options.
- In January 2020, launched "open holds" system at Robbins and Fox as an added

Library Statistics	FY2017 Actual	FY2018 Actual	FY2019 Actual	FY2020 Actual
Weeks open - Robbins (main) facility	52	52	52	37
Weeks open - Fox Branch facility	52	52	52	11
Materials Circulated	731,597	741,374	749,636	669,692
<i>Physical materials</i>	666,966	663,644	643,004	520,080
<i>Digital materials (e-books/audio/video)</i>	64,631	77,730	106,632	149,612
Children's program attendance	27,454	24,769	24,356	15,825*
Adult and Teen program attendance	3,952	4,465	3,784	3,421*

* Includes virtual program attendance

convenience for patrons. Patron-requested materials that are ready for pickup are tagged and placed spine-down on open public shelves. Instead of waiting in line for staff to retrieve reserved material from a storage area behind the desk, with open holds patrons find their reserved materials and the self-checkout machine.

- Working with the Health and Human Services Department, established library hours for the Case Manager for homeless services.
- Applied library trust funds to replace the worn-out, heavily used Teen Area diner booths.
- Working with Arlington Center for the Arts, added works by local artists to the circulating art prints collection.
- In collaboration with the Arlington Cultural District and the Arlington Commission for Arts and Culture, won the maximum \$6,000 grant for Cultural Districts from the Mass Cultural Council to create a new walking tour through the District.



Drop-in checkout service in the lobby.

March 13 – December

- Provided library services during the COVID-19 pandemic: expanded collections of downloadable e-books, audiobooks, and streaming media services; supported children, families, and older adults with virtual program options; established contactless pick-up with a custom-designed scheduling app from the Minuteman Library Network; introduced “Grab Bags” to circulate materials in bulk and reduce wait times; circulated take-home laptops and hotspots to address the digital divide; worked with

the Facilities Department to mitigate risk for Robbins Library staff and the public: increased regular cleaning, and added air filtration and purification.

- During lockdown, produced a town-wide mailer to promote Summer Reading across age categories, resulting in 1,136 participants. In a normal year, participation averages 1,600.
- Partnered with Arlington EATS to provide age-appropriate giveaway books to families receiving meals in July and August.
- Coordinated with ACMi to make library-produced videos of virtual programs available to wider audiences, e.g. author readings, and a history of Arlington’s Libraries presentation by Richard Duffy sponsored by the Friends of the Robbins Library.
- Launched Arlington’s COVID-19 Archive, a digital archive meant to be a permanent record of Arlington’s experience of the pandemic. The archive is hosted on the Local History page of the library’s website, and will remain open for submissions indefinitely.



Services for Children

Children and caregivers participated in over 130 virtual programs in 2020, including story times, sing-a-longs for infants and toddlers, craft times, toddler programs, workshops, various performances, and middle-grade book groups. The children’s librarians assisted children, parents, and teachers with physical and virtual library collections, and homework assignments.

Community outreach efforts included contact with all seven elementary schools, attendance at school library aides’ meetings, diverse books workshops for educators, letters to teachers, assignment support for teachers and students, extended loan periods for educators, and the preparation of curriculum kits.

Russell Fund

The Library is fortunate to have the Anne A. Russell Children's Educational and Cultural Enrichment Fund, which sponsors many special programs and services for children that could not be afforded otherwise. Program highlights in 2020 included book giveaways in the Winfield Robbins Memorial Garden, Kindergarten Kits for children turning five who are ready for their first library card, and interactive online story times and sing-alongs.

Services for Teens

The Head of Teen Services engaged teens during the pandemic by coordinating online programs, take-and-make crafts, creating a Robbins Library twitch presence for interactive online gaming, and by promoting library services on social media. In the fall of 2020 Ottoson Middle School students participated in a "For Freedoms" civic engagement project.



"For Freedoms" installation amplifies teen voices during election season.

Services for Adults

The seventeenth annual Arlington Reads Together program, co-sponsored by the Arlington Libraries Foundation and the Diversity Task Group of Envision Arlington, took place in March. Esmeralda Santiago, author of 2020 selection *When I Was Puerto Rican*, appeared at Town Hall on Sunday, March 8 before a crowd of hundreds—just five days before the shut-down. The library's many book discussion groups and programs for adults moved to Zoom in 2020 and continued to see steady participation. The Library continued outreach efforts through involvement with the Arlington Commission for Arts and Culture, the Arlington Cultural District, the Arlington Poet Laureate, Sustainable Arlington, the Rainbow Commission, the Chamber of Commerce, and other groups in town.

Circulation, Technical Services, and Technology

The Circulation Department staff are the first front-line workers most visitors see when walking through the front doors, checking out and returning thousands of items at the main circulation desk. In 2020 library circula-

tion departments all over the country, including Robbins', had to reinvent the way library materials flowed in and out of the building. Circulation staff are also responsible for processing the daily delivery of bins, managing Minuteman interlibrary loans, maintaining good order on the shelves, and shifting collections.

The Technical Services Department processed new items and collections. In 2020 new items included circulating Chromebooks and hotspots, and new audio-enhanced picture books in the Children's Room. Tech Services staff also updated records in the catalog, coded vendor bills, and maintained selector accounts.

All of the library's public-facing and staff-facing equipment, systems, and peripherals are managed by the Technology Department. Staff ensure that Robbins and Fox equipment meets the Minuteman Library Network's management system requirements and supports all library cataloging, purchasing, collection management, and circulation functions.

Edith M. Fox Library

Only two and a half months after the year began, Fox Library staff moved over to Robbins on a temporary basis to support reference and circulation services. The Fox Library closure presented an opportunity for improvements to the physical space: a new coat of paint, and a new carpet generously funded by the Friends of Fox. A new office for the full-time Fox Children's Librarian was created from a storage room adjacent to the children's area. The Fox Library also received a building security system upgrade, a people counter for statistics use, and a wireless service upgrade.

Little Fox Shop

The Little Fox Shop is a children's resale shop within the Fox Library. It is operated by the non-profit The Little Fox Shop, Inc., whose primary mission is to support the Fox Library with proceeds from sales. Grants are given annually to support a variety of services. Library administration and Trustees acknowledge The Little Fox Shop, Inc. board members: Amy Weitzman (President), Cara Fraley, Betzi Hanc, Stephanie Murphy, and Janet Peluso. The Library also gratefully acknowledges the volunteer staff of the Shop: Christian Bayer, Brett Cook, Roslyn Fitzgerald, Annie Grear, Sharon Green, Kelly Hamilton, Sandy Hutchinson, Julie Kinchla, Faith Makowka, Judy McCarthy, Denise Movsessian, Jane Peluso, Kate Reid, Jane Sedgwick, and Bailee Star.

Board of Trustees

The seven-member Board of Trustees supported the Director with library policies and administered library trust funds so that essential library services could be delivered including materials for all ages, the summer reading programs, activities for children, volunteer and staff appreciation, and staff attendance at library

conferences and workshops both in-person and remote.

Arlington Libraries Foundation

The Arlington Libraries Foundation was established in 2013 to continue the long tradition of supporting the libraries by raising private funds. The Foundation seeks to create ways to build a legacy for the Library and create ongoing sources of support. These include running an annual fundraising campaign, creating endowed funds and named funds at the request of donors, and by providing a structure for bequests. The Foundation was able to fulfill the library's fiscal year 2021 grant request, funding materials and various initiatives. Library administration and Trustees are grateful to the Arlington Libraries Foundation Board members for their work: Karin Barrett (chair), Lynne Gardham, Marian Hanley, Patrick Hanlon, Maryellen Loud, J.B. Maxwell, Michele Meagher, Jeff Miller, and Usha Pasi.

Friends of the Library

The Friends of the Robbins Library, with a membership of over 350, is a vital support group that raises funds primarily through memberships and book sales. In 2020 the Friends found creative ways to work around COVID-19, holding book donation events and pop-up book sales in the library's parking lot. Library administration and Trustees acknowledge the Friends of the Robbins Library Board members for their support: Ruth Hersh (chair), Jourdan Hafen (vice chair), Karen Kittridge (treasurer), Katherine Krister (assistant treasurer), Gwendolyn Wong (secretary), Alison Goulder, Andrew Fischer, A. David Lewis, David Warrington, Rebecca Kittredge, Susi Barbarossa, Timothy Wilson, Sally Naish, and Amy McElroy (coordinator).

The Friends of Fox Library board supported the Fox Library with a grant for a new carpet, and also sponsored library activities in connection with the Arlington Commission for Arts and Culture. The Friends of Fox Library also opened an online clothing resale shop with proceeds planned to benefit the Fox Library. Library administration and Trustees acknowledge the Friends of Fox Library Board, led by Scott Weaver (chair).

Library Volunteers

Library volunteers assist various departments in shelving, shelf reading, supporting the library's homebound delivery program, and more. Library administration and trustees gratefully acknowledge the work of the library's volunteer staff. Two of the library's book discussion groups are led by trained volunteers: Therese Henderson continued to coordinate the Robbins Library Book Discussion Group, and Brad McKenna continued to serve as Guys Book Group facilitator. Lanie Cantor and Lynne Davis were homebound delivery volunteers throughout COVID-19. Other volunteers assisting at the Robbins Library in a variety of capacities were: Becky Anthony, Raquel Balmelli Newell, Joanne Burstell, Nan-

cy Brooks, Carol Browne, Stephanie Chiha, Graciela Correa, Catherine Farrell, Louise Friel, Heidi Gilliam, Sharon Green, Liz, Gross, Aileen Grunder, Kim Haase, Sarah Huntington, Marion Kilson, Mary Kokaras, Nick Lee, Ann LeRoy, Max Litvinov, Kaz Lockwood, Sharyn Lowesnstein, Tomi Magome, David McGowan, Donald Mugnai, Ann Marie Peterson, Vielle Roby, Dolores Schueler, Edda Shaffer, Tannaz Shirzed, Rose Udics, Larry Wendell, and Susan Whitney. The Library acknowledges the efforts of all the students who volunteer hours at Robbins and Fox to fulfill their community-service requirements for high school: Madeline Amidon, Harleen Bassan, Gabe Higgins, Kyle Lewis, Dinor Nalbani, Davis Rennella, Samuel Reyes, Lenny Santos, Donatello Sassaroli, and Aakril, Shrestha. The Library is grateful to Fox Library volunteers Justine Barnes, Joe Cook, and Debbie Hayes.

Future Goals

- Fully restore library services and hours in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, as public health conditions permit.
- Explore ways to enhance support for library services to teens – an expanding cohort in Arlington.
- Launch the redesigned library website and “virtual branch,” robbinslibrary.org.
- Implement a new Strategic Plan for Arlington's Libraries.
- Work with the library Equity, Diversity and Inclusion task group and relevant Town departments, boards, and commissions to improve library spaces and services and make them welcoming to all.
- Proceed with the strategy to deaccession the Winfield Robbins Art Prints collection.
- Continue working with the Housing Corporation of Arlington's Human Services Network, a collaboration of relevant Town departments and non-profit social services organizations working to identify and stabilize vulnerable community members by connecting families and individuals to resources that promote healthy living.
- Promote the Reimagining Our Libraries capital improvement projects at the Robbins Library and Fox Branch Library by working with Town leadership, appropriate departments, and library support groups.