



Report to: Stratford Public Library Board
Meeting Date: May 6, 2020
From: Julia Merritt, CEO
Subject: Borrow the Internet project update

Background

“Borrow the Internet” works by loaning mobile hotspots, loaded with a cellular data package, to library members. A mobile hotspot is a small router with a cellular data plan, subscribed to by the library, and it enables a borrower to connect to the Internet anywhere they go. The hotspot emits a wireless internet signal that allows borrowers to connect their personal devices, such as a laptop, tablet or smartphone, for the duration of the loan. Borrowers aged 18 and older are able to borrow these devices for 7-day periods. Connectivity is available anywhere in Ontario where the hotspot can reach the cellular connection whether at home, work, or even at a park or community festival.

Many public libraries offer this service to their communities. Libraries such as Kitchener, Huron County, London, Region of Waterloo and Wellington County are some of the local libraries offering this service. All are seeing strong success with the program; most have ongoing waiting lists of at least 3 requests for every 1 mobile hotspot they own.

Pilot Project

In 2019 SPL obtained funding from the Stratford-Perth Community Foundation to purchase 10 hotspots and fund internet connection costs for the initial months. Festival Hydro then partnered with the Library to navigate the internet contract, and to provide remote control of the devices (turning them off if overdue, etc).

Results of the project are as follows:

Statistics

- Since launching late September 2019, there were 165 week-long checkouts.
- Each hotspot circulated on average 17 times between September and March
- Currently there are 40 holds on the hotspots waiting to be filled (end of April)



Feedback:

BiblioCommons

pholkchick Dec 04, 2019

This is an AMAZING resource for my family! As a homeschooling mother of 6, living in the country with limited wifi, this allows us so much more freedom in our learning. This has been a Godsend!!

Borrow the Internet Survey (7 responses)

7/7 responded they would borrow the hotpots again

7/7 felt it was easy to use

7/7 felt length of the loan was ok or sufficient

7/7 were completely satisfied with the quality of connectivity

7/7 felt there was personal benefit from the program

3/7 only had reliable access to the internet outside the program

When asked other than your home, where did you use the hotspot:

- Everywhere I went away from home wifi instead of extra data charges on my phone. Had to add \$7 extra data today cause no hotspot
- At a meeting in Stratford
- Tried it out in the car and at the Rotary Centre. This loan was to check the device for possible use in cottage country next summer.

4/7 used the hotspot over 2 hours a day

When asked about what they used the hotspot for:

- 5/7 said general research
- 4/7 said entertainment
- 4/7 said access to government information
- 4/7 said online shopping
- 3/7 said connecting with family and friends
- 3/7 said online courses

Other Comments:

- Great programme allowing people without internet access to use the internet at home. Up until now I have just used the wifi at the library.
- Fabulous programme! It keeps me connected without spending my unvast fortune
- Absolutely love this new program, and find it very helpful for my daughter who does all her schooling online. I hope the program continues and expands!
- I think this is a great program as it will help those who are unable to get (rural) or can't afford internet. The programs offered by SPL are amazing



Next Steps

Clearly, the Borrow the Internet pilot has been a success, and could support additional units in order to minimize wait times (the current goal would be an additional 10 hotspots).

As of April 30th, the grant funds will be exhausted. SPL has been seeking alternate external funding sources but has not yet been successful. The operational budget may be able to sustain internet connectivity costs for the remainder of 2020 but given the financial pressures of the pandemic/state of emergency this remains to be seen. Monthly costs for unlimited internet connectivity for the 10 hotspots is \$500.00.

This report is brought to the Board for information.