



Customer Comments

July 2015

The following comments were received by the Library during the month of July 2015. Where the customer requested a personal reply by phone or email, it was provided. Customer comments and responses are posted on the Library website.

Received by e-mail

Comment: “My Wife and I are frequent users of the library and I would like some clarification on your library policies. In the past few weeks I few noted on two separate visits to the library that small children, who were accompanied by a parent, were allowed to basically run free in the library and converse well beyond the level of normal conversation. This occurred at length and in both instances, no one from the library took any action. This was disconcerting to me as I was brought up to believe that libraries were a place of quiet and that the quiet should be respected. This was coupled with another incident involving an older patron, who received a call on her cell phone and then took 15 minutes to have a long conversation on the phone, while the rest of the library listened. Although library personnel were on hand, no intervention occurred.

My question is does the library no longer have a policy of quiet? Or, is it just the Sequim branch not enforcing the etiquette that has prevailed over decades in every library I have ever used? Thank you for reading my email. I look forward to a response. I would add that if the library is seeking additional funding and support, it might be of benefit to enhance the library experience for all patrons, by requiring a quiet zone.”

Response: I’m sorry to hear that you were disappointed in your experience at the Sequim Branch Library. Modern library standards for quiet differ significantly from the requirement for absolute silence that many remember from the libraries of their youth. Changes in social standards and changes in library roles and missions have both contributed to this evolution. Increasingly, public libraries play an important role as a “Third Place” where community members of all ages comes together to think, meet, work, play and create. In order to fulfill this role, a certain amount of noise must be permissible.

Nonetheless, NOLS has established, and actively enforces, a Basic Rule of Conduct policy that prohibits library visitors from engaging in any conduct that interferes with the business of the library, unduly disrupts the library activities of others, or creates a risk to public health and safety. I’ve attached a copy of the policy for your information. NOLS policies are also available online at www.nols.org. Signage in all NOLS libraries informs library users about the standards of courtesy and civility that are expected, and encourages visitors who observe or experience disruptive behavior to notify library staff.

Library staff endeavor to enforce the NOL’s basic rule of conduct according to standards that are reasonable to the times that we live in, and the operational realities of the library. As you

can imagine, this is not always a simple task, particularly in the extremely busy and crowded Sequim Branch Library. Based on disruptive event log entries for the Sequim Branch, it is clear that library staff frequently intervene to address disruptions of the types you describe. Not knowing the specifics of the incidents you observed, I can't speculate on why that might not have happened on this particular occasion, but if you encounter similar disruptions in the future I would encourage you to bring your concerns to staff.

A designated quiet zone would be an ideal way to provide more balanced options for those library users who need to conduct library business, or who wish to who engage in social interaction, and those desiring quiet, but unfortunately in the limited space of the Sequim Library building, there is currently no practical way to permanently create a designated quiet zone of this type. The small half of the dividable meeting room is sometimes available for quiet reading and study, when it is not in use for library or community events. You may wish to ask staff about this option.

I hope this response clarifies NOLS' policies and practices in this area. Please let me know if you have additional questions.

Additional Comment: "Thank you for responding back to my email and the concerns I voiced. Your email certainly gave me a better insight into the library system of today, versus the one of my "youth." I can't help but wonder if we aren't doing a disservice both to your patrons and to the younger patrons of your library by not having a stronger policy on quiet in the library. I understand the policy of a "third place" but do not agree with it in total. I have been to many libraries in numerous states and have always found them to maintain a sense of dignity and quiet, where persons of all ages could enjoy the library. A "third place," is a noteworthy concept, but in a small library with an older patronage, is it serving the majority of your clients? My answer would be, no, it is not. Further, your librarians have never been anything but helpful and professional when I have been in the library, but I have yet to observe a single incident of asking a patron to control their children, or not use a cell phone in the library. If nothing else, not using cell phones in the library seems like a fairly widely accepted standard, which apparently isn't considered a viable policy for the Sequim Library. I hope you will take my comments as being constructive and reflect upon the policies in place versus the market (people) you are serving, which based upon the demographics of Sequim would seem to indicate a more traditional library atmosphere would be beneficial."

Additional Response: Thanks for sharing your further reflections. The challenges of finding the appropriate balance between creating library spaces that are open and welcoming to all, fulfilling the many and varied roles and expectations placed on library service, and maintaining appropriate levels of quiet and civility in an increasingly noisy and uncivil world, are indeed significant. NOLS is currently completing a several month process related to improved management of disruptive behavior in our libraries and on library property. This effort originated in our desire to insure a peaceful and positive library experience for the majority of library users, while continuing to create an inclusive environment and respecting every citizen's right to visit public library venues and utilize library services. Management of disruptive events is an operational issue that the NOLS Board of Trustees and staff take very seriously, and we

have dedicated considerable thought, discussion, and time to exploring the issues involved, establishing conduct standards, and identifying solutions that are firm, fair, and consistent across all branches of the library system. As part of this process we have reviewed and updated policies, improved signage and other methods of communicating about conduct expectations, and refreshed and enhanced staff training in procedures for handling disruptive events.

Library staff at all NOLS branches encounter disruptive behaviors on a nearly daily basis, and work hard to respond appropriately and consistently in situations that can be very challenging indeed. These issues are undeniably exacerbated at the Sequim Branch by a high level of use in very close quarters. Incident report records document that Sequim staff frequently intervene to affectively address disruptive issues. It is certainly possible however that staff may be unaware of some disruptive incidents, or unavailable to immediately address them. Please do help us in our sincere efforts to maintain comfortable and welcoming library spaces by letting staff know if you observe or experience a disruptive situation in the Sequim Library.

Thanks again for your thoughts.