

Alison Williams | Movers & Shakers 2021—Community Builders

June 2, 2021



Partnership Queen

When Alison Williams began as Copper Queen Library’s (CQL) program coordinator five years ago, budget cuts only allowed for a part-time position. In her interview, she made it clear that she wanted to increase staff hours, the budget, and community participation, which was in steep decline. Thanks to her work, the role is now full-time, two new positions have been added, and community engagement is on the rebound. She’s also written and been awarded more than \$155,000 in grants for new programs and collections.

Williams created the San José/CQL Annex, an offsite collection and library space in the San José neighborhood, two miles from the U.S.-Mexico border, home to the town’s largest number of children and the highest poverty rate. Initially focused on preschool-age patrons, it now offers children’s, teen, and adult collections; public computers; meeting spaces; and a tool lending library.

Partnerships with the Bisbee Unified School District and local mine owner Freeport McMoRan, among many others, reflect “a mutual vision of serving the community together, instead of competitively,” Williams says—“an important commitment in a small and rural” place like Bisbee, which has just over 5,000 residents.

Williams is proud that CQL was one of the first libraries in Arizona to launch a Wi-Fi hotspot checkout program a few years ago. “We now have 45 hotspots and have often had waitlists of 30–40 people, as the need for internet accessibility is so high,” she says, “whether it is access to online schooling or to be able to work remotely. Hotspots are a viable stopgap of service that puts communities on the road toward broadband for all.”

Williams authored the library’s COVID-19 response plan and revamped its summer reading program—which she’d already reinvented to an eight-week series of field trips in 2016—based around sending physical books to youth, which became a model for the Arizona State Library’s grant-funded program for small and rural libraries. Williams also created health and wellness kits for every student in town, including those who are homeschooled, and the “Love Letters to the Universe” passive program that combines a focus on literacy and gratitude.

CURRENT POSITION

Library Program Coordinator, Copper Queen Library, Bisbee, AZ

DEGREE

BA, Hunter College, New York, 1995

AWARDS

EBSCO Excellence in Rural Library Service Award, 2019; *LJ* Best Small Library in America, 2019

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