



SOMERSET COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM OF NEW JERSEY

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Background:

On March 16th, 2020, the SCLSNJ Management Team held a special meeting to determine the next courses of action in the face of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. It was decided that all branches would be closed, subject to state and local government orders, as well as oversight of the Library Commission. There was an understanding that programming would transition online, and there was a need to orchestrate the production of that goal quickly. By the week of April 6th, 2020 the *Explore from Home* virtual branch opened as the platform for all online program events.

Summary:

Once the technical details on how to broadcast to constituents was determined, Adult Learning and Community Engagement (ALCE) was tasked with reviving a calendar of canceled in-person events, often made in coordination with outside presenters. The presenters for these events were contacted to see if they would be able and willing to work with SCLSNJ in a virtual setting. Those that were reached and agreed helped to form the new event schedule online. Additionally, several staff-led events were added to the calendar, including an ongoing initiative for job seekers throughout the county.

Goals Relative to Strategic Priorities and Core Services:

The ultimate goal was to adaptably maintain core library services throughout the county even while the branches remained closed to the public. Adult programming was just one aspect of accomplishing this goal, which required extensive logistical planning and interdepartmental cooperation throughout the organization. Several strategic priorities and core services were involved in Adult Programming part of this process:

- Promoting the library as an impartial platform for creating meaningful interactions and connections. During this time of social isolation and other hardships, SCLSNJ created enriching experiences for the public, allowing for social engagement while remaining safe at home.
- Exploring new ways to shape our spaces to meet community needs. The creation of a virtual branch for hosting programs for patrons to view from home was an emergent need. The organization's online presence has been significantly enhanced, which is a benefit that will serve SCLSNJ after conditions improve.
- Presenting programs that help community members CONNECT, EXPLORE, SHARE, AND DISCOVER.
- Serving as a community GATHERING SPACE. Several programs involved the virtual continuation of writers and book discussion groups, a process that has increased in recent weeks.
- Creating opportunities that build Somerset County's ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT.

One specific program initiative taken on by ALCE in partnership with SCLSNJ's Business Committee is an ongoing series for job seekers. Given the impact that the pandemic has had on employment, these programs are well suited for an urgent community and economic need.

Impact:

Based on the feedback from program-level online surveys, the public has been incredibly appreciative of the quality of programming that was cultivated throughout the closure period. During this time, SCLSNJ hosted **82 virtual events** for **2,363 or more adult attendees**. As one survey of **over 200** respondents noted, "Even after all the restrictions are lifted you should consider continuing some of these. It would be interesting if a live presentation could also be streamed simultaneously." The library system will continue to respond, improve services, and persevere.