

F15: WebJunction BC

Zola Maddison, Partner Services Consultant, WebJunction.org

Alane Wilson, Executive Director, BCLA

Zola Maddison provided an overview of WebJunction.org as an online community dedicated to fostering collaboration and mutual support among libraries as well as building the knowledge and skills of library staff, trustees and others with an interest in libraries. WebJunction began in 2002 as part of the Libraries Project of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation – putting hardware and software in libraries, and especially libraries in low income areas in order to help bridge the digital divide. In support of this effort, OCLC was given a grant to build an online learning community for library staff – including comprehensive technological training.

Today WJ is a highly interactive online community – providing courses on all kinds of topics, live and archived webinars, library news and developments, space for discussion and ways to contribute content. My WebJunction is the social networking side of WJ – offering access to colleagues and friends in the library world and providing a means of linking in and keeping up to date with events, developments, special interest groups and general goings on. Zola advised session attendees to sign up for WJ; read the terms of service; affiliate with WJBC; and begin taking advantage of the free courses and other opportunities on offer. Membership is available free of charge to all public library staff and volunteers in BC, and to all members of the BC Library Association, the BC Library Trustees' Association, and the BC Teacher Librarians' Association.

Alane Wilson continued the discussion with a focus on WebJunction BC. She explained the initiative arising as a joint effort of the three partner associations (BCLA, BCLTA, and BCTLA) and the Public Library Services Branch over a very short timeline and with minimal staff capacity. By pooling together, the associations have been able to provide access to a resource that promises to meet the training and other needs of library staff, volunteers and trustees throughout the province – starting with 300 free courses being available on a first-come-first-serve basis to all those who meet WJBC membership criteria.

Alane stressed the importance of making time for your own professional development and advised that most WJ courses are about an hour long, and can be stopped and started as many times as necessary during the year you have access to them after signing up. About 60% of WJ courses are skills-based (e.g., Excel, MS Office, PowerPoint, Linux, web design, etc.) and about 40% are library-specific (e.g., friends and trustees, children's services, reference and information services, etc.). In light of there being only 300 free courses available to WJBC members, it is important to adhere to the rules of etiquette noted beside the course catalogue (e.g., sign up for one course at a time and finish that course before you start another one). After the 300 free WJBC courses are used up, courses will still be available to WJBC members at a charge of \$25 USD/course. Alane also mentioned that one of the goals of WJBC is to somehow make Education Institution content available and to eventually begin to contribute Canadian course content to the larger WJ community.

In addition to online courses, Wimba Classroom technology is also available to WJBC members – allowing online meetings in a classroom-type environment, with online chat and teleconference capability. This service is available to all WJBC members – as long as the meeting in question is open to the entire community (e.g., you can hold an information session for staff at a particular library, as long

as you open the invitation to staff at other libraries as well). As well, WJBC offers an event calendar, communities of practice, special interest groups, blogging capabilities, etc.

Check out WJBC today – become a WebJunction member at www.webjunction.org and then affiliate with WebJunction BC.