Paying Fines Forward All Year Long
Corinne Gilroy, Manager of Access Services, The Mount Library

Background & Inspiration

The annual Novanet Food For Fines campaign has for several years provided supplies and funds to local food banks in Nova Scotia, while helping Novanet library patrons keep their accounts in good standing. Food For Fines was recently expanded to be held twice a year, and the upper limit on donation fine waivers was removed.

In response to increasing student debt and food insecurity, and in an effort to improve relationships with our patrons and the Mount Students’ Union, the Mount Library is now experimenting with a year-round version of Food For Fines.

Implementation

The Mount Students’ Union operates an on-campus food bank called the Wellness Pantry. In December 2015, the Mount Library contacted the Students’ Union to discuss the feasibility of providing donations of food and personal care items year-round.

The Students’ Union welcomed the potential increase in donations, and provided the Library with a helpful list of high-demand items. The Library created an incentive program by offering $5.00 of fine waivers for each high-demand donation, and $3.00 each (the standard Food For Fines rate) for any other donated items.

The Mount Library launched its Wellness Pantry pilot campaign in January 2016. General guidelines are as follows:

- Food donation waives apply to MSVU overdue fines only.
- Waives are not available for lost books or items borrowed from other libraries.
- There is no upper limit on donations and waives; we will waive $1.00, $100.00, etc.

The Library promoted the campaign via Twitter and Facebook, our website, weekly staff/faculty e-mail bulletins, colourful desk signage, and our “welcome” slideshow, visible to patrons as they enter the Library.

Staff were provided with training on rules and record-keeping. Information, high-demand item lists, and tally sheets were placed at each circ terminal, and our collection bin was placed behind the counter.

Response

Mount students immediately embraced the Wellness Pantry campaign. Between January 4 and April 30 (the most recent day for which accurate data is available), patrons donated 275 items and Library staff waived almost $780.00 in fines.

During the annual Food For Fines campaign period (Feb. 8 – 28), the Library collected 54 items and waived almost $175.00 in fines. This is an average FFF result for the Mount Library, so our year-round campaign complements—not detracts from—Food For Fines.

The Wellness Pantry campaign has been especially helpful to graduating students, who are reminded of old Library fines in April, just prior to convocation. Many of our graduating students have 4+ years of student debt to contend with, and face a rocky economic climate for young workers. Paying off library penalties with pantry staples has the potential to reduce economic stress at an important time, while reducing food insecurity for other students.

Future Goals

The Library plans to continue with the Food For Fines campaign; purchase a new plastic bin to replace our ailing hand-decorated donation box; and promote the campaign wherever we can.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Total Number of Transactions</th>
<th>Total Fines Waived</th>
<th>Regular Items Donated</th>
<th>High-Demand Items Donated</th>
<th>Total Number of Donations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan 1 - Apr 30</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>$768.81</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 8 – 28 (FFF)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>$174.75</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>54</td>
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</tbody>
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The Mount Library’s food donation bin, bursting at the seams, waiting for another pick-up by Students’ Union reps.
Photo: Corinne Gilroy, May 9, 2016