

Statistics. The very word can mean “boring” for some folks and “fascinating” for others. No matter how you feel about statistics, they do provide information that is helpful, reliable, and based in fact. Every year, each public library in the state of Wisconsin is required to provide an annual report to the Dept. of Public Instruction, which governs them. These reports are mainly comprised of numbers, and when you look at the numbers, our New Glarus Public Library gives us reason to be proud as a community.

One of the most shared (and misleading when taken out of context) statistics in New Glarus is that we pay the 36<sup>th</sup> highest per capita cost for our library out of 384 library systems in the state. This is correct; and with that let’s look at the numbers including looking at some similar sized villages in the area

- Average cost statewide - \$43.02 per capita
- New Glarus - \$72.49
- Belleville - \$90.53
- Cuba City - \$56.41

Let’s compare populations and percent users:

- New Glarus (population 2,152; resident borrowers 1,115; percent library users 52%)
- Belleville (population 2,381; resident borrowers 1,687; percent library users 71%)
- Cuba City (population 2,091; resident borrowers 982; percent library users 47%).

Now let’s look at the database to try to ferret out the causes of these differences. First, the cost per circulation. That is, the total library budget divided by the number of items checked out. This is not a precise guide to a library’s efficiency but does give a rough comparison.

- Average cost per circulation in Wisconsin - \$3.38
- New Glarus - \$3.24
- Belleville - \$3.24
- Cuba City - \$4.34

Total Circulation. By quickly comparing how many items are checked out of a library, it is easy to see how well our library is used, despite its limitations.

- Average total circulation in statewide libraries – 53,048
- New Glarus – 78,608
- Belleville – 84,408
- Cuba City – 38,381

Interlibrary loans. These are the numbers of items that come in from outside libraries.

- Average Interlibrary Loans – Loaned to library patrons in Wisconsin – 10,187
- Cuba City – 4,128
- New Glarus – 32,766
- Belleville – 44,488

What conclusions should we take from these comparisons? The first and most obvious is that per capita cost is an unreliable measure of the efficiency of a well-run library. About the only conclusion that per capita cost correlates to is how heavily a library is used. New Glarus should be proud of the fact that our per capita usage is quite high, our cost per circulation is below the state average and that we use our interlibrary loan system very extensively.

It is clear that our library handles its transactions as efficiently as comparable neighbors, and more efficiently than the state average. However, our librarians do MUCH more than check out books – they lead programs, help patrons with a wide variety of questions and concerns, help with job searches, and assist with school projects, to name a few.