

Hamilton Township Free Public Library

2020 Annual Report to

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Respectfully Submitted

Scott A. Chianese

LIBRARY DIRECTOR

Introduction: It is with pleasure that I present to you the 2020 Hamilton Township Library Annual Report. As mandated by the Library Board of Trustees, this report not only summarizes our service levels for 2020, but comments on the overall health of the library within the context of our Strategic Plan.

General Condition: The year 2020 was like no other, with the COVID-19 Pandemic touching the lives of every Hamiltonian. The library was not immune to the ravaging effects of the virus, which obligated us to continually adapt our operations to provide for the needs and wants of our community from the very beginning. We offered new and innovative services, and never wavered in our dedication to the public. While some plans for upgrades were necessarily postponed, other unforeseen changes were acted upon immediately out of necessity. All of this was accomplished while maintaining or exceeding the level of service expected of us, and at the same time keeping our patrons and employees safe. This crisis has shown that the library continues to be a vital and effective service for our residents, thanks in large part to the support of the township administration.

Financial stability continues to be a primary concern, with funding based on tax revenue remaining unpredictable, while demand for an ever-growing array of services increases. Absent expected financial support from our Friends organization due to pandemic restrictions, we found alternate sources of revenue for some programs and initiatives while necessarily curtailing others. As will be observed in the following report, the library continues to make the best use of available funding, and remains committed to the responsible expense of taxpayer monies while proudly serving the wishes and needs of the residents of Hamilton.

The reader will note that comments are not made in areas for which noteworthy progress was not made in 2020. The limiting factor is generally due to financial constraints, but this year ever-changing directives and restrictions from the Governor also played a large part as well. This in no way indicates that the stated goals and initiatives do not remain vital to the future success of the library.

In 2021, a Strategic Plan developed by the Director and Library Board of Trustees will debut. This plan incorporates our new vision and goals for the future, which will be reflected in next year's annual report.

Strategic initiative #1: Service Excellence

The Hamilton Public Library exists to meet the needs of the community.

Despite limited public access due to building closures and government restrictions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, the library continues to demonstrate its necessity to the local community through material loan, alternate and virtual services.

STATISTICS	2020
Registered Cardholders	40,892
Contactless Curbside Delivery	
Adult Materials Circulation	25,199
Children's Materials Circulation	12,928
Digital Materials Circulation	33,181
Total Circulation	71,308
Patron Requests for Material	10,082
Patron Requests for Information	5,095

In addition, children registered to participate in our online summer reading program logged more than 10,000 minutes of reading time.

Goal: Offer customer-focused service throughout the organization.

Objectives:

- *Evaluate workflow, staffing levels and budget allocation to maximize customer satisfaction with resources and services.* The library maintains the minimal number of staff necessary to continue to provide the highest level of service. All part-time employees were furloughed as pandemic restrictions limited some services, while full-time staff provided assistance from home via telephone and internet due to increased patron demand in those arenas. Employees working within the building were reduced in number each shift and organized into teams to limit exposure among the staff in the event of an outbreak and need to quarantine. All staff not onsite were on-call as needed to fill in should absences require.
- *Evaluate self-service options for optimal performance.* We have concluded the exploration of the use of a variety of self-service kiosks. Our initial findings determined that the benefit did not justify the cost. Further, our patrons have expressed that they appreciate the interaction and support of our staff.

- ***Provide understandable, attractive, visible signage.*** With township assistance, we procured signs clearly explaining the necessary precautions to be taken when entering the building (use of sanitizer, wearing of masks, hand washing, social distancing). Library staff created signage to helpfully guide our visiting public to sanitizing materials and stations, as well as towards the appropriate seating areas and computer workstations that would maintain safe distances in public spaces.

- ***Share a clear definition of service excellence with users***

- ***Evaluate customer service.*** Serving the public remains the primary objective of the library, especially during challenging times such as these. We have temporarily eased residency restrictions for patrons seeking to obtain a library card in our efforts to provide Hamiltonians with immediate access to library resources, allowing for proof of residency to be accepted once we reopen. Contactless curbside service was introduced this year, giving patrons the ability to receive and return materials without the need to physically interact with staff. Other services previously offered to walk-in guests are currently provided by appointment only, as we continue to make available computer use and printing, notary, fax and scanning services in the safest way possible under the current circumstances.

Goal: Strive to be a leader in service excellence among libraries in New Jersey and nationwide.

Objectives:

- ***Incorporate continuous improvement and ongoing evaluation into all library operations and services.*** The Director attended a front desk safety seminar, sharing with staff the various causes of workplace violence among both public and employees, how to identify and avoid triggering such behavior, and incorporating recommendations for safer front desk design and layout. Protocols were investigated for various routine and emergent situations, research continues into the integration of portable panic button devices, while a keycard system has recently been installed on our employee entrance.

- ***Gather, evaluate and implement best practices from other libraries and adapt them to our operation as appropriate.*** Professional and paraprofessional staff are required to attend meetings with their colleagues both in person and via webinar to keep up-to-date on the latest developments in the field of library science and to network with contemporaries. Although off-site training was discontinued early in the year, the Director and members of the staff have been attending almost weekly webinars, teleconferences and Zoom sessions to gain insight and learn procedures from other institutions that may be incorporated into our program. Topics such as digital access, planning for reopening, new design strategies and more have been discussed.

Additionally, we embraced the practice common throughout the state of waiving patron fines and fees in the early stages of the pandemic, helping to build patron trust and respect.

• ***Create innovative services and programs and share with other libraries and our community.***

Although the library was unable to offer in person programming this year due to the pandemic, we provided a wide variety of alternative options for patrons of all ages. Virtual singalong programs by Music Made Mobile, Jim Gaven and Tim Hoh were offered multiple times throughout the year, along with a Halloween celebration sponsored by Scholastic Books featuring author R.L. Stine. We provided links to “Storytime with Author’s and Celebrities” (this was done to avoid the fees required should library staff present a public performance), “Tumblemath” and “Tumblebooks” links provided eBooks and activities for children, and our “Curbside Specials” helped keep us in touch with our youngest patrons by offering thematic crafts for the seasonal holidays. We joined with QPL Comics in presenting a virtual comics celebration for all ages featuring book panels, interactive storytelling and trivia, and added a weekly “Reader Recommendations” section to our website that provided titles available in digital or audio format for readers of all levels. In addition to our annual Summer Reading program, we added a new version for fall, both of which helped teen’s accumulate much-needed volunteer hours necessary for graduation by contributing book reviews to our website.

Strategic Initiative #2: Access to Information

The free exchange of ideas and access to information are fundamental tenets of a democratic society.

Goal: Make the Library easier to use for everyone.

Objectives:

• ***Conduct a self-study for policy, economic, language and physical barriers to reduce or eliminate barriers to access.*** We are continually evaluating our ability to offer services to the community, with universal access to the library as our goal. Our ability to conduct outreach was hampered this year, but will again become a primary objective as circumstances permit.

• ***Explore techniques to better market and promote the collection.***

• ***Reach out to special client groups such as youth, teens, seniors, persons with disabilities, English language learners, etc. to meet their needs.*** The library collaborated with Literacy New Jersey, with the assistance of Catholic Charities, to offer free United States Citizenship classes before our closure by executive order. This program consisted of hosting immigration law specialists so they could answer questions and assist attendees with the filing of naturalization forms. In addition, we continued our relationship with Literacy New Jersey, helping them to expand their gratis English classes for adults to include both individual lessons and classroom settings for groups. Reference staff worked hand in hand with these learners to

introduce them to library services, the procedure for becoming a library member, accessing the catalog, and the wide variety of material and resources available. The importance of our space as a safe, neutral ground for civic engagement and learning was well received.

- ***Identify non-users and their needs.***

Goal: Increase staff and public awareness of what we do and what we have.

Objectives:

- ***Create a public awareness plan that promotes services, materials and programs.*** The library continues to work closely with the office of the Mayor, and the employees of the Senior and Bromley Centers to expand promotion of our programs and services on social and print media, and via email. Inclusion in the township's annual printed calendar is yet another avenue through which we reach our community. We have developed close relationships with organizations such as the Garden State Storytellers League, the "For the Love of Reading" book club, and our own Friends of the Library to utilize their assistance in promoting events person-to-person and through their social media sites. The library regularly posts information on our own Facebook page and website, and larger events to the Eventbrite online event promotion site.

- ***Ensure that all staff is fully conversant with Hamilton Library policies and procedures.*** All staff, both permanent and temporary, receive a copy of the library policies and are required to confirm that they have been read and understood.

- ***Share the library core values with staff and community.*** The library's core values are expressed in our Strategic Plan. Revisions begun in 2019 by members of our Board of Trustees and staff were delayed due to the pandemic, but will be in place for 2021. The goals established by the new plan were developed with the future success of the library and exemplary service for our patrons and community in mind, and will be used as the basis of our annual report going forward. Once complete, the plan will be available on our website for public inspection.

- ***Improve and increase outreach efforts.*** Outreach was limited this year due to restrictions brought about by the pandemic, but we were able to interact remotely and in outdoor settings. Several mask drives were conducted on library property, some in cooperation with the township itself (where facemasks were distributed to resident senior citizens), and others in conjunction with the Chabad of Robbinsville. We are also a collection point for Mask Up Hamilton Township School District, allowing this organization to collect facemasks for students returning to school. The library continues to promote our services through on-site collections that run year round, including a drop box for the Rescue Mission of Trenton, our "Warm Feet, Warm Hearts" clothing drive, Cellphones for Soldiers and our food drive for local pantries and needy individuals. Additionally, the Director has contacted local print publications in an effort to better disseminate any and all changes regarding library service.

Strategic Initiative #3: Learning Organization

We believe that we provide the best possible library services when we are engaged in professional development.

Goal: Be a responsive, evolving organization.

Objectives:

- ***Establish institutional standards and expectations for communication, respect and conflict resolution throughout the organization.*** Any issues amongst the staff are resolved quickly and fairly by department supervisors working in conjunction with the Director, rarely necessitating Department of Personnel or union involvement. This year, the Director and staff worked closely with the Library Board of Trustees to update our Strategic Plan, and intend to do the same with our Library Policies in 2021. All library employees are provided with the Hamilton Township Employee Code of Conduct, attend annual Ethics and Non-Harassment training, and have read and signed off on the township's ethics rules.

- ***Recognize and reward exceptional individual and group performance, innovation, collaboration, creative problem solving and continuous learning.*** Employees are commended for their accomplishments by their supervisors and the Director as warranted, while more notable achievements are brought to the attention of the Library Board of Trustees for recognition. Staff that demonstrate initiative and leadership qualities are given more responsibility, and promoted to supervisory positions when possible.

- ***Facilitate the career growth of high performing staff and provide all staff with the tools and educational opportunities required to develop new skills.*** We replaced staff computers that were well past their life expectancy (exceeding 10 years of use), leading to regular work stoppages or delays due to lack of memory space and the inability to upgrade from unsupported software. The library worked closely with our internet technology support group to procure gently used machines from the healthcare industry at a cost of less than half that of new replacements. This long overdue and essential investment will provide staff the ability work faster and more efficiently.

- ***Create the optimal workforce for the Library's future; identify appropriate workload staffing levels necessary for running operations; strive to attract and retain a staff that reflects the diversity of our community.*** The retirement of our Supervising Children's Librarian after twenty-five years of service was a dearly felt loss, but a professional more than qualified for the role has filled her position. Chosen from over twenty applicants, this sixteen-year veteran in the field brings crucial technical expertise, almost a decade of supervisory experience, and a willingness to go above and beyond what is required (as demonstrated by her volunteering of

time and energy towards departmental efforts even before her start date). This Hamilton resident is an invaluable addition to our staff.

- ***Share knowledge throughout the organization and encourage staff to avail themselves of both onsite and offsite professional development opportunities.*** Although offsite development was impossible due to pandemic restrictions, every member of the staff, the Director, and members of the Board of Trustees attended and participated in virtual training sessions covering a wide range of topics. New ideas or procedures that were an improvement over current doctrine were considered for incorporation into day-to-day operations.

- ***Actively practice open, honest communication.***

Goal: Share a clear, inspiring vision and purpose.

Objectives:

- ***Ensure all staff understand and actively support organizational goals.*** Nearly every member of the staff provided input towards our continuously developing policies and procedures as they evolved and adapted to the rapidly changing circumstances brought about by the pandemic.

- ***Incorporate assessment, continuous improvement and planning for the future into everyday operations.*** Department supervisors evaluate employee performance and share knowledge to achieve the more efficient completion of tasks. Suggestions and constructive criticism from employees is accepted for the betterment of library functionality.

Strategic Initiative #4: Lifelong Learning and Enjoyment

Hamilton has a proud heritage of diversity and inclusion, and is strongly committed to education and learning.

Goal: Promote literacy and the love of reading and learning for all ages.

Objectives:

- ***Expand and evaluate outreach services for literacy.*** The pandemic limited our ability to conduct outreach as usual, so other avenues of dissemination were necessitated. Local newspaper “The Hamilton Post” was instrumental in sharing the wide variety of materials, services and programming we offer in an article entitled, “Give the Library the Care It Deserves”, and included an appeal for community involvement and contributions (both monetary and otherwise) as well. The library participated in the Bromley Day of Action, answering a personal appeal from the Mayor. Representatives went door to door with flyers, brochures, library materials and other items, sharing our message and informing residents of what we have to offer.

• ***Develop opportunities for staff and public to cultivate and share their love of reading.*** Our “For the Love of Reading” book club offered their meetings to all interested attendees via Zoom when in-person meetings became impossible, resulting in an actual increase in membership. The library offered free access to a virtual young adult book festival, connecting local teens with authors and readers from around the country.

• ***Develop programs in support of and in coordination with the collection.*** Before closing to the public, the library served as host to several photomontage collections pertaining to New Jersey history. Once contactless curbside service was incorporated into our daily routine, special events were organized. Goody bags consisting of crafts, school supplies, and other fun and educational materials for children to explore, as well as suggested readings on the various themes (seasonal celebrations, the anniversary of the Apollo 7 space mission) were delivered curbside to the nearly 500 families that participated in these programs.

Goal: Build, manage and evaluate our collection in order to meet the educational, recreational and cultural needs of the community.

Objectives:

• ***Evaluate community and patron desires and make sure our collection reflects them.*** The library staff continued to interact with our patrons virtually and via phone service, achieving a better understanding of their needs and wants. Although they met remotely, our literary groups provided recommendations for our collection on a regular basis. These and other efforts help us to determine the materials we provide to an ever-changing population.

• ***Define the role of the collection and the appropriate balance for types of materials, including formats, age levels and subjects.*** The professional staff continued to regularly update our collection, replacing and ordering physical materials. In addition, we dramatically increased our virtual presence during the pandemic to continue providing service at an optimal level. A preponderance of information and assistance for those affected by the COVID-19 virus in any form (physically, emotionally, financially) was provided through sites such as the New Jersey State Bar Association, the Center for Disease Control, and State and Federal Departments of Health. Fact checking sites provided trustworthy, reliable information (Snopes, FactCheck, PolitiFact) and helped dispel misinformation as well (COVID-19 Rumor Control and Disinformation site monitored by the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security). Working in conjunction with the School Superintendent’s representative to our Board of Trustees, we were able to offer students access to our juvenile and young adult eBook collections using school provided authentication information. This removed barriers that some patrons face in obtaining a library card, such as language or transportation challenges. We continue to add links to historic and cultural sites (The Louvre, Yosemite National Park, the San Diego Zoo, Metropolitan Opera) as well as sports and entertainment (National Football League Network). All of these resources have been provided at no additional cost to taxpayers.

- ***Provide easy user-focused access to the collection.*** The Library continues to utilize KOHA open source automation for the operation of our catalog. It has proven to be the most advanced and cost effective resource available, and offers the freedom to choose the features we find most beneficial to our patrons.

Goal: Use technology to provide innovative library services and to reach out to remote users.

Objectives:

- ***Explore the establishment of a virtual branch to focus our current online services into a unified approach.***

- ***Evaluate our integrated library system to ensure optimum customer service and financial stewardship.*** The library made more essential improvements to our network this year, including upgrading the bandwidth of our incoming circuits from 10 to 1,000 megabits per second, dramatically increasing internet speed to all public and staff machines. This move not only improved the performance of our computers, but also resulted in an annual savings by taking advantage of a new contract negotiated between Verizon and the New Jersey State Library. An upgraded firewall was added to replace the obsolete unit that could not manage the increased bandwidth. We worked in collaboration with our integrated library service provider to install a secure sockets layer to our online catalog, shielding the connection between our server and a patron's web browser, thus protecting confidential information from third party access. This certificate will automatically renew every three months at no charge for as long as our server is active. We continue to practice due diligence with regard to contracted technical support, requesting proposals on a regular basis to ensure we receive the best return on our investment. The library annually receives dividends through our participation in the E-Rate Discounted Telecommunications Services program.

- ***Use the interactive potential of the catalog and website to get feedback from our users.***

Strategic Initiative #5: Cultural Center

Hamilton is a dynamic hub of cultural activities and civic engagement.

Goal: Offer programming which serves the needs and interests of the Hamilton community.

Objectives:

- ***Improve library-wide coordination, planning, marketing and evaluation of programming.***

Although we were unable to present events for the majority of the year, we continue to seek out programs that are informational, entertaining, and highly recommended. Tentative scheduling for 2021 is already in place, and financial support from our Friends organization has been guaranteed so as not to incur taxpayer expense.

• ***Work in collaboration with other organizations (libraries, schools, and businesses) and cultural institutions to develop, co-sponsor and publicize programs.*** Despite a limited ability to present programming in 2020, the library was able to work with outside institutions before and during the pandemic to provide information, assistance, and cultural enrichment to our patrons. Staff worked in collaboration with representatives from Literacy New Jersey and Catholic Charities to present weekly English and citizenship classes while we remained open to the public in the early part of the year. Librarians kept track of the operating status of local agencies catering to the homeless, needy and unemployed to share with our community, and offered assistance in navigating New Jersey Unemployment Insurance Benefits, Federal Economic Stimulus information, and the Libraries to Business website that provided resources for the small business community struggling in the wake of the economic turmoil caused by the pandemic. We lent support to the New Jersey State Library's "Fresh Start @ Your Library" initiative, a statewide reentry program focused on reconnecting recently released citizens with their communities and workforce, and hosted the annual Hamilton School District Art Show by presenting students works virtually via our website.

Goal: Optimize the use of meeting rooms.

Objectives:

- ***Create a centralized listing where all events and programs held in the Library can be posted.***
- ***Communicate to the community the availability of and limitations on the use of meeting rooms.*** Meeting room use this year was minimal due to pandemic restrictions, but information on usage is always available via a link on our website. We remain in close contact with interested parties in preparation for renewed use in 2021. The Director and Board of Trustees introduced changes in policy regarding the refunding of fees, clarifying the consequences that will occur in regards to late payment, belated room cancellation and inclement weather or other unforeseen circumstances at the library.
- ***Evaluate and purchase room reservation software and train relevant staff in its optimum use.***

Strategic Initiative #6: Stewardship

The Township of Hamilton, its residents and businesses provide us with the funds to operate the Library and expect us to maintain the highest levels of efficiency and integrity.

Goal: Develop a comprehensive plan to maintain and upgrade library infrastructure (building, grounds, and technology) to ensure safety, efficiency and the delivery of excellent library service. Balance opportunities for improvement against costs.

Objectives:

- ***Determine and plan for upkeep-, upgrade- and replacement-costs for all systems on a continuing basis.*** There were many unforeseen modifications required to our building and operations in response to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Curtains were added between office desks to better protect staff, in addition to the township made Plexiglas installed at our public facing counters throughout the building (these were provided at no expense to taxpayers as funding was provided through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act). Our HVAC personnel conducted tests to insure appropriate amounts of outside air per occupant were being brought into the building, and our maintenance department was issued a cleaning “gun” that is able to eliminate 99.9% of all germs through its use of static cling technology and miniscule micron dispersion. We also improved security measures by installing a keyless entry lock system to our employee and front entrances, and adding a new camera to provide coverage of the previously unmonitored front entrance, walkway and parking lot. In addition, we updated our analog video surveillance to a network video recorder. This upgraded system will provide clearer picture quality, increased storage capabilities, the potential for future expansion if desired, and will require less maintenance due to the use of fewer components, leading to long term savings. The library also addressed the previously undetected potential for risk of legionella growth within the cooling system. State and township personnel were involved in every step of the process to ensure proper testing and remediation took place before the unit was put back into operation, and a comprehensive water management program has been developed and implemented to prevent the potential for reoccurrence in the future.

Goal: Reduce the environmental impact of the Library below current levels and be recognized as a community leader in this area.

Objectives:

- ***Create an Environmental Task Force to explore energy efficiencies and ways to reduce the environmental impact of the Library.***

Goal: Create ways to reach patrons who cannot or do not visit the library.

Objectives:

- ***Assess the population and needs of non-drivers and homebound residents.***

• ***Create partnerships with government entities and nonprofit organizations to supply access to Library collections and services.*** Our close relationship with the New Jersey State Library, combined with our long-term partnership with materials provider Baker & Taylor, led to our ability to offer our patrons a new eBook and audiobook platform, Axis 360. This resource, geared toward children and young adults, will provide more options at no extra cost to the township. The library collaborated with the United States Census Bureau to provide information to the community, answer patron questions and concerns, and facilitate “knowledge sharing sessions” between Hamiltonians and census bureau staff. We worked with the nonprofit small business assistance organization SCORE (Service Core of Retired Executives) to provide links and promote free virtual events, as we were unable to offer meeting space for in-person workshops this year. These offerings brought valuable learning opportunities to our municipality and expanded the benefit SCORE could provide to local businesses.

• ***Examine (and adjust as necessary) library hours to better meet the needs of our residents.*** The library has a statutory requirement to operate a minimum of 60 hours per week. Staff and budgetary limitations, combined with union negotiated schedules, prohibit any increase or change in library hours.

• ***Research the feasibility of purchasing a bookmobile and/ or technology to reach the homebound.*** The library has dramatically increased our online offerings during our closure in response to the pandemic through multiple databases, digital and audio resources (eLibraryNJ, Axis 360), programming and events, as described in detail in other sections of the report.

Goal: Make the best use of available space.

Objectives:

• ***Conduct regular usability studies and align spaces according to patron use.***

• ***Evaluate the usage of lobby space and develop a plan for optimal use.*** A greater focus was directed at the use of all library space in anticipation of opening under restricted usage due to the pandemic. Furniture was rearranged or removed, and some public computers were placed out of service to accommodate for social distance between visitors. Any furniture or items not in use were removed in an attempt to limit the need to disinfect surfaces, and all study and meeting rooms were closed to the public.

Goal: Align our budget with institutional goals and ensure our priorities and our budget process is open and transparent to all.

Objectives:

• ***Develop a budget process that is transparent and actively encourages staff input.*** Staff have always been encouraged to voice suggestions to their department supervisors concerning the use

of library funds, who in turn meet with the Director to share this input when budget deliberations are being held.

• ***Raise our cost consciousness and encourage staff participation in cost containment efforts.***

Fiscal responsibility is of paramount importance, given the limited resources available to the library. Any practical suggestions that may result in savings are instituted. This year, we were able to utilize a cash donation to help offset losses experienced due to the cancellation of our Friends book sales.

• ***Demonstrate operating efficiencies to the community.*** The largest expenditures this year were to cover materials, supplies, and physical upgrades to the building itself in response to the pandemic. We sought out the most fiscally responsible means of installing Plexiglas at our public counters, realizing a savings of nearly \$8,000 by utilizing township labor over higher priced, inferior products from the public sector. Sanitizer stations, a thermographic camera, digital resources and laptops for staff to work more efficiently from home were all purchased in tandem with other township departments to appreciate greater savings. At years end, with the assistance of our township administration, we were able to receive reimbursement for all of these items with monies from the Coronavirus Relief Fund.

Goal: Broaden our resources.

Objectives:

• ***Develop a centrally coordinated volunteer program that includes training and recognition of volunteers.***

• ***Explore ways to increase resources through community and library partnerships.*** The library continued to work closely with the STEMnauts volunteer tutoring program, connecting students and tutors for (what was necessarily) virtual assistance this year. We were able to once again host the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program, although only for a limited time due to our closure in March. These professionals offer help to low income residents, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and limited English speaking taxpayers. Our reference librarians assisted these volunteers by providing forms, instruction booklets, and other downloadable materials. We established connections with several local businesses in hopes of developing a relationship that will encourage the contribution of funds for resources that are more expensive and larger projects.

• ***Expand fundraising efforts.***

• ***Explore the formation of a foundation and investigate entrepreneurial services that will increase financial resources.***

*** ***End*** ***