The Role of Public Libraries as Partners in Serving Vulnerable Populations

Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness Conference 2019 (#CAEH19)

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Session Overview

• Public Libraries 101
• How public libraries can (and do) support vulnerable populations (and people experiencing homelessness)
• A closer look at Edmonton Public Library (EPL)
• A closer look at Toronto Public Library (TPL)
• How we can work together?
• Q&A
Libraries…they’re still around?

When you think of a public library, what comes to mind?
But...public libraries are **not** the same places we grew up with...

We’ve evolved and offer so much more than you can imagine!
open and accessible to all
welcoming
no membership required
warming and cooling centres
connection and reducing social isolation
in-branch and online

vibrant community hubs

neutral, convenient space to residents of all ages and backgrounds

for study, work, collaboration, leisure, and learning
computer and internet access
Wi-Fi access
laptop (or device) lending services
Wi-Fi Hotspots lending services
digital literacy training to support digital literacy skills
innovation spaces
• 3D Printers
• Audio/Video Recording and Editing
• Fabrication Studios
information discovery and access; expert reading recommendations

connect residents to community resources and experts

connect communities to library resources through community outreach

support technology access, use and skills development
access to resources in multiple formats (print, electronic, audio/video and more)
collections in languages that reflect local communities
for recreational, educational and information needs of all ages, abilities and interests
current and popular to research, reference, archival and special collections
Literacy, literary, cultural and recreational programs, classes & events

promote library collections and resources

access to professional or community expertise

promote life long learning through instructional and educational programs
Better meeting the needs of our customers: Social Workers in the Library

- Social Workers in public libraries to help meet community needs
- Different Levels of Practice
  - Micro
  - Mezzo
  - Macro
- May include social services on site (partnership) or social work students/interns
Social Workers in the Library: Across North America

42 Public Libraries employ full time social workers

4 with part time social workers

28 with social work student interns

56 host social services in their space
Public Libraries support in different ways…

Canadian Definition of Homelessness

II. TYPOLOGY

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- Open spaces
- Access to computers
- Assistance in finding community services
- Programs to promote inclusion and reduce social isolation
- Connecting with others
- Skills development
- Advocacy
- Awareness
- Partnerships
• Finding community services
• Employment/Housing supports
• Resume building
• Referrals to a shelter/respite centre
• Literacy
• Skills development

• Open spaces
• Social inclusion
• General programs/services
• Employment/Housing supports

• Financial Literacy
• Employment supports
• Literacy supports
• Skills development
Toronto Public Library

A little bit about us…
TPL at a glance: ranking and satisfaction

#1 Worldwide *
- circulation per capita
- electronic visits
- electronic visits per capita
  (#2 visits per capita and total circ)
* Serving a population over 1.5 million (2016)

#1 North America *
- total and per capita circulation
- total and per capita visits
- total and per capita electronic visits
  * Serving a population over 2 million (2017)

#1 Canada *
- total circulation
- total visits
- electronic visits
  (#2 electronic visits per capita)
* Serving a population over 500,000 (2016)
In 2018, Torontonians visited the library and used services in large numbers:

<table>
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<td>Visits to branches</td>
<td>17.6 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Items borrowed</td>
<td>30.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic items</td>
<td>7.0 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>24.1% increase in eCollections</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Visits to tpl.ca</td>
<td>29.4 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email and social media activity</td>
<td>18.3 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People attended</td>
<td>1.02 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs</td>
<td>46,533</td>
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<td>Wireless sessions</td>
<td>5.0 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>Computer uses</td>
<td>4.3 million</td>
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TPL at a glance: satisfaction

Well-Used
Toronto residents use their libraries in large numbers.

70% of Toronto residents used the library in 2015.

1 in 5
Toronto residents visit a library branch at least once a week.

Responsive: 95%
Library customers are overwhelmingly satisfied with the Toronto Public Library.

Helpful: 94%
Customers are pleased with the level of assistance from library staff.

Welcoming: 89%
Library customers overwhelmingly agree that libraries offer an attractive environment.

Valued: 92%
Public libraries are an important resource for Toronto’s communities.
TPL Network: Branch and Bookmobile Locations

100 branches | 2 bookmobiles
A framework to envision the possibilities that result from an investment in library infrastructure and service delivery.

**Tier 1:** Neighbourhood Branches (81) and Bookmobiles (2)

**Tier 2:** District Branches (17)

**Tier 3:** Research and Reference (2)

**Tier 4:** Online and Digital
Strategic Approach: Serving Vulnerable Populations

- Information sharing
- Service Coordination
- Strategic partnership development
- Service and program development
- Staff training and support
TPL Social Worker: System-wide perspective

- Macro-level approach
- Bringing in social work concepts into the system
- Focus on:
  - Reducing barriers to accessing programs and services
  - Review of policies, processes and procedures
  - Program development
  - Partnership development
  - Staff Development

Rahma Hashi, MSW, RSW
In response to the rise in homeless people using its branches, the Toronto Public Library has hired Rahma Hashi, its *first full-time social worker* to deal with *homelessness*, a move that could be *copied* by big-city libraries across Canada. The social worker will help *raise awareness* among branch librarians on how to deal respectfully with *vulnerable people* who may suffer from mental health issues and addiction, as well as homelessness. Also, starting this fall, a librarian will serve *two city-run homeless shelters*. 
How our libraries can help the homeless

By Bob Hepburn Star Columnist
Wed., Sept. 19, 2018 | 3 min. read
Public libraries offer books, shelter and much more

Toronto Public Library's first full-time social worker highlights the much-needed resources they provide to the community

BY TARA MACINNIS
2018

46,533 programs

1,017,209 people attending

- Children’s programming (Babytime, Storytime, Family Time)
- Book Clubs, Book Talks, Author Visits
- Career and Job Search (Employment Clinics, Road to Employment, Volunteering for Newcomers)
- Health and Wellness (Diabetes Risk Assessment, Healthy Eating, Exercising)
- Small Business
- Personal Finance

...and so much more!
Programs and Services: Employment & Job Search

- Job Interview Skills
- Resume Makeover
- Employment Clinics
- Exploring careers
- Small Business
- “You Can't Fire Me! I Quit!: What You Need to Know About Employment Termination”
Housing Assistance Program

1:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m. on recurring dates listed below
180 mins

Location
Malvern

Need assistance with finding affordable housing or avoiding eviction? An expert from The Housing Help Centre will meet with homeowners and tenants one on one and provide information on housing topics including Rent Bank, utilities assistance programs, and help finding housing.

Drop in. No registration required. Call 416-396-8970 for more information.
Tech Training: Classes and Workshops

• Classes offered on a variety of topics:
  • Basic Computer Skills  (Computer Basics, Move that Mouse)
  • Internet and Research  (Web Basics, Basic Research Help)
  • Microsoft Office products  (Word, Excel, etc)
  • Email and Social Networking  (Gmail, Twitter basics, Facebook)
  • Digital Design  (3D Printing, Adobe Photoshop, etc)
  • Downloads and eBooks  (One on One Tech Training, etc)

• User Guides

• Book a Librarian (1-on-1 support)
Technology: Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending program

- Low income families
- Unlimited internet for 6 months
- Available in Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs; 29 branches)
- Work with local community partners
- Circulate over 1000 units/year
- Reducing barriers to accessing internet services and reducing the digital divide
Community Connections: Community Librarians

• “Embedding” librarians within social service agencies
  • Toronto Employment & Social Services, Prisons, Shelters and Community Health agencies
  • Reducing barriers to accessing services
  • Meeting the customer at their point of need
Community Connections: Community Librarian (Shelters)

- Programs and services include:
  - On-site card registration and renewal
  - Information (reference) services
  - User Education
  - Programming (customized to the organization)
Community Events:
Homeless Connect Toronto Event
Partnerships: Homeless Connect Toronto

Screening of documentary “Us and Them”
Partnerships: World Homeless Day (Oct 10)
Partnerships: MyToronto Program

111 CAMERAS
93 PARTICIPANTS
2,600 PRINTS
40 EXHIBIT PHOTOS
13 CALENDAR PHOTOS
1 CITY

Hosted By:

mytorontocalendar.com

(215) 303-5500

Ve’ahavta
A Jewish Humanitarian Response to Poverty

MYTORONTO
Partnerships: MyToronto Program Workshops (2019)
Partnerships:

Literacy in Shelters Conference

Supporting shelter staff in developing skills to provide early literacy support to clients

Frontier College and Toronto Public Library present:

Literacy in Shelters Conference 2019
Tuesday, November 5th - 9:00 am to 3:00 pm
North York Central Library, 5120 Yonge Street, Toronto

Directions to North York Central Library are on the back page.

This free conference is for staff and volunteers of shelters and community agencies who work to support learning and change in the presence and aftermath of violence, neglect and other traumatic experiences. This conference will be most useful to shelters and agencies that support children, teens and their families. All welcome!

AGENDA

9:00 am - 9:30 am  
Registration and a light breakfast*

9:30 am - 9:45 am  
Welcome and introductions

9:45 am - 12:30 pm  
Morning workshop
Supporting learning and change
Facilitated by Dr. Jenny Horsman

12:30 pm - 1:15 pm  
Networking lunch*

1:15 pm - 3:00 pm  
Afternoon workshops – Your choice of:
1. Ready for Reading and Learning (Preschool and kindergarten children)
2. Resources and activities to support reading, writing and math (Grades 1 to 12)
3. Tools for Emotional Intelligence (Grades 9 to 12)
Partnerships:  Toronto Shelter Support and Housing Administration (SSHA)

- Community Librarian program
- Community events related to new shelter/respite centre openings
- Information tables in branches
Language and Literacy: Adult Literacy Program

- FREE one-on-one support to improve basic reading/writing and math skills (2 hours/week)
- Personalized training plan and materials
- Financial supports available (TTC tokens or childcare)
Language and Literacy: Adult Literacy Program Outreach/Collections

- Adult Literacy materials available in 55 branches to support the community
- 21 Deposit collections with community partners

- Compilation of learner writing from learners across literacy programs in Toronto
- Providing a voice to learners and an opportunity to be published

Innovative Programming: Coffee and Conversation

- Monthly informal drop-in sessions (led by TPL Social Worker)
- (Light) refreshments
- Community partners and social Services present at each session
- Open to all (advertised with local shelters and respite centres)
Innovative Programming: Coffee and Conversation

“I showed up early because I’m looking forward to the conversation.”

“I didn’t know the library had this.”

“Now I know my options, I had no idea you were here to help.”

“Thank you for listening.”
Language and Literacy: ESL Program & Conversation Circles

• Co-sponsored program with community partners to offer ESL classes & Conversation Circles

• Learning materials and online resources to support learning
Newcomers: Library Settlement Partnership (LSP) program

- Partnership with Newcomer and Settlement Agencies
- Settlement workers placed in library branches to help:
  - Job-related search and support
  - Language learning
  - Government-related services (getting a driver’s licence)
- Available in 15 library locations (with more in the summer)
- Available to all newcomers, regardless of status
Incarcerated & Recently Released Populations: Storybook Parents

- **Recording** incarcerated (and recently released) clients reading **storybooks** for their **children**

- **Goals:**
  - Maintain or develop bonds
  - Serve as a reading role model for their children
  - Breaking the cycle of low literacy
  - Introduce them to library services available to them (and their families)
Incarcerated & Recently Released Populations: Storybook Parents Program Feedback

Statistics: 2018 & 2019 (YTD)

- 145 participants
- 236 children reached
- 263 recordings made

"Cause I wanna be a better father and show my baby I love her."

"The CD has had a positive impact on my daughter. She comes home from school & listens to it immediately each day. She’s so happy to hear her dad’s voice & tries to read along."
Incarcerated & Recently Released Populations:

Programming

Onsite Programs (Toronto South & East Detention Centres):

• Book Clubs (discussion groups)
• Financial Literacy program
• Creative Writing program

Recently Released Programming or Services:

• Information Sessions
• Computer (and tech) training
• Finding a job or housing
TPL Care Kits

- Exploring the opportunity to provide “care kits” through structured access points
  - Adult Literacy Program
  - Youth Hubs
  - Programs led by the Social Worker
  - Branches
- Kits will include “basic need” items
RECAP: Strategic Approach: Serving Vulnerable Populations

- Information sharing
- Service Coordination
- Strategic partnership development
- Service and program development
- Staff training and support
Supporting Staff: Information Sharing

- Intranet site to support staff
- Information, resources
- Referral information
- Articles and support documents
- Staff guide on resources and referrals
Supporting Staff: Training and Staff Development

• Staff Training:
  • Librarian’s Guide to Homelessness
  • Trauma Informed Service
  • Self Care
  • Mental Health First Aid

• Increasing knowledge of Social Work concepts
  • Defining vulnerability
  • Intersectionality
  • Strengths -based approach
  • “Whole person”
Events: Film Screening of “The Public”

Sometimes we get to do some cool stuff!
WOW! I’ve got a lot of great information... now what?

• Learn more about the public library system in your area

• Look at opportunities to:
  • Develop partnerships
  • Support for your clients
  • Support for your organization
  • Inform them about what you are doing
  • Advocate and raise awareness
REMEMBER:

Public Libraries support in different ways…

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and...

Keep the conversation going!
Thank you!
Questions?

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