



Annual Report 2010: Sharing Our Stories

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Welcome

In 2010, Toronto Public Library continued to play an essential role in enriching the lives of Torontonians, with more people than ever visiting our physical and virtual branches, and borrowing more materials than ever before. This past year has once again demonstrated how well used and well loved the Toronto Public Library is to the residents of this city, and so we thought it would be fitting this year to have the library's story of 2010 be told by the hundreds of thousands of people we worked with and for throughout the year – our customers, our partners, our donors, our staff.

This year's annual report provides an opportunity for people to share their stories about the positive impact the library had on their lives, whether it helped them to find that next great read or study for exams, to get access to a computer or wireless internet, to attend a cultural program, connect to their new community, or improve their literacy skills. Their touching, heartfelt stories demonstrate the importance of having an accessible, resourceful and innovative public library system.

Thank you for your ongoing support of Toronto Public Library as we continue our commitment to the spirit of exploration, the joy of reading and the pursuit of knowledge for people of all ages and backgrounds.

– Jane Pyper, City Librarian and Matthew Church, Board Chair

Technology making a difference

To find a book and place a hold in 30 seconds feels like flying
– Customer on our new website, tpl.ca

Free and equitable access to information for everyone, regardless of age, income, education, or language, continues to be a major strategic objective of Toronto Public Library. From increased access to computer workstations, to computer training in our Le@rning Centres, to increased digital content like eBooks and electronic databases, the library played an increasingly important role in 2010 in bridging the digital divide, and helping to ensure that everyone has access to technology and the skills to use it effectively.

Story #1: Letter from library customer

In an information society, access to the internet and technology is essential to meaningful participation in daily life. In an excerpt from a letter sent in December 2010, long time library member Shireen explains how the library's virtual branch and eBooks have made a real difference to the quality of her life.

Shireen says:

One of the first things my mother did when we moved to Toronto was introduce me to Toronto Public Library. My eyes widened upon seeing all those books. And so began my decades-long habit of weekly library visits until I suffered a traumatic brain injury.

Reading became one of the casualties of that injury. Although I recognize letters and words, I have trouble perceiving content, synthesizing and processing the meaning of sentences and paragraphs, as well as holding the whole story in my head... After the umpteenth time of missing the due date and having fines pile up, I gave up on library visits. Until I received a Sony Reader last Christmas and discovered TPL's virtual branch.

The beauty of the virtual branch is I can visit any time of day or night when my energy permits; if I can't decide on a book, it's not a wasted trip; and best of all eBooks expire automatically at the end of 21 days with no fines. I have recently learned how to read library books on my iPad too...Thank you TPL!

Story #2: Having access to a computer is invaluable

In 2010, at Le@rning Centres in nine Toronto Public Library branches, the Kids@Computers team provided computer and literacy instruction to more than 800 children and their families whose incomes may limit their access to electronic information resources. After completion of two classes and their Kids@Computers Challenge! workbook, participants were awarded their own computer. Toronto Public Library is one of the key partners in this program, which is administered by Toronto Employment and Social Services.

Two of the program's participants, Sharon and her son Marlen, attended the program at Agincourt Branch in the summer of 2010. Sharon found out about the program through her social services worker and applied immediately. She tells us that her son loved going to the library for the sessions and always came home telling her about all the new things he learned. She found the internet safety tips the most helpful, reassuring her that her son was learning to surf the internet safely. Having a computer of their own has really transformed their lives.

Sharon says:

"They [Sharon's sons] are more confident in their studies, and now can independently complete their own school work. I work evenings and it was always a challenge for me to find time to take the boys to the library where they used the computer. Now they have one at home right at their fingertips. Having a computer has proved invaluable to my family. The boys' grades have shot up as well."

Sharon adds that she has learned a lot through the process as well and is delighted to have her kids show her something new on the computer. "I really wasn't computer literate before and it's been so fun to learn together. I love when the kids show me new things and tell me how to do this and that!"

Story #3: Response to ProTech opening was phenomenal

The ProTech media center operating out of Kennedy/Eglinton Branch completed its first year in August 2010 and the community response was phenomenal. The program has youth-focused programming in graphic and webpage design, digital photography, video production and music production, workplace productivity software, computer basics and employment training. Toronto Public Library partnered with outside groups including Scarborough Arts Council, Tropicana Community Services' Involve Youth program and Alternative Youth Centre for Employment (AYCE), the City of Toronto's Investing in Families, and Catholic Crosscultural Services (CCS) to run programming sessions.

Since its launch, the ProTech centre has had very strong drop-in and programming attendance – with a total of 7,767 participants. During 2010, 965 participants took part in ProTech’s structured programming, focused on New Media and employment-based themes. Two-thirds of participants were youth between the ages of 13-30 years. The program worked closely with the Kennedy/Eglinton Youth Advisory Group, which gives leadership opportunities to local youth.

Story #4: Bridging the generational divide through technology

In 2010, Richview Branch had 10 seniors and 11 teens involved in our Joint Internet Mentoring (JIM) Program, which helps build relationships between young adults and older adults, bridging cultural, social and generational boundaries. Supported by a federal grant, the program matches teen volunteers with seniors and for six weeks they work together to learn basic computing skills. Using the library’s computer and internet resources in sessions focusing on life skills, social networking and mutual interest research, participants build their technological skills and have an opportunity to make friends and have some fun. The pilot first took place at Richview Branch but since then, other branches have taken the program on.

The program helps address the needs of older adults, engage youth in meaningful ways, engage diverse communities through technology and encourage library participation. When these two groups came together, they had more in common than they thought, and both young and old learned communication and co-operation through a mutual sharing of knowledge.

“Being able to actually work on the computer while you are being instructed individually is a large benefit to seniors. It is also very interesting to get to know the young peoples’ background, interests.” Senior participant

“Life back then was very different. The seniors went through tough times but were able to come out of their troubles smiling. They are ambitious and want to learn, just like me.”

– Teen participant

“I have watched seniors who entered the program timid and negative, blossom and shine...It was a rewarding experience to bring two diverse groups of people together. There was a genuine sense of community that developed over six short weeks, and nobody wanted the program to end.”

– Librarian at Richview Branch

Story #5: Free internet access, and caring library staff, get one homeless woman back on her feet

Toronto Public Library staff are committed to excellence in public service and doing what it takes to meet the unique needs of our customers. Everyday our dedicated, skilled staff show empathy and compassion as they represent the library.

Parliament Street Branch page Justin Lee demonstrated a kindness and dedication not uncommon in library staff when he helped a woman who was homeless find her way back to her family through the library's computer and internet services.

St. James Town customer says:

I came across a young gentleman who was just coming out of a café with food in hand. My request for spare change was met with him offering me his coffee and croissant. I was taken aback, first with the random act of kindness, but also the fact that this young man actually cared where so many young people these days are indifferent to the troubles of the world. I was obviously in some distress as I had been crying for a while, and the young man asked if I was alright and had anywhere to stay. I told him no. He told me that he works for the library, and suggested the two closest branches [Parliament Street where he works, and St. James Town Branch] as a place to warm up and perhaps start looking for help. He told me about the various resources available to me, including free internet access. I had no idea this was available from the library.

I decided to visit the [St. James Town Branch] where I was able to access the internet (with the assistance of your fine staff there), create this email account, and manage to get a hold of some family out West. Over the next few weeks, I've managed to mend some fences and I am on my way back home to a waiting job and a place to live. This young man ... will probably never know how his actions and words of encouragement have impacted me ... He is a wonderful ambassador for the library... [Justin's] caring empowered me to find my path again.

Story #6: Extending access to the printed word

Toronto Public Library saw a huge spike in ebook interest last year – more than 70% in 2010. In this Global TV news profile of Toronto Public Library's technology innovation, the library's Director of Collections Management Vickery Bowles talks here about the growing ebook market, noting it gives customers much greater and more convenient access to the printed word.

Story #7: Library customers love our new website!

In 2010, Toronto Public Library launched its new and improved customer website after several months of beta testing with our customers. New features and functionality focus on what our customers told us they wanted most – quick and easy ways to find and reserve materials in our catalogue, flexible and user-friendly ways to search for library programs (e.g. by branch, date, author, etc.), and easier ways to find out about library services.

Clearly our customers have been happy with these improvements. Last year, over half a million holds were placed through the website every month - that averages out to 12 holds a minute, every minute of the day! And half of our website users visited the site four or more times each month. As Torontonians acquired more ebook readers, traffic to the downloads and ebook pages also grew exponentially in 2010.

Here's what some of our customers had to say about their new virtual branch:

"I love the new TPL site! It's got a nice, modern look, and it's very easy to navigate around and find what I'm after. I particularly like the front-loading of information on the search results pages -- things like noting which books are reference-only, not holdable, which used to require a click-through to find out. There are a bunch of nice touches like this. Kudos to the designers!"

"I love what you are doing with the new website - it's fresh, more user-friendly and just generally feels more like it 'speaks to me' i.e has me the user in mind rather than what the library staff would like to push to the user. Thanks for the improvements."

"I travel all over the world and have always praised, as one of the great features of living in Toronto, that it has the most-used library system in North America. Because of the computer network, I have 99 libraries only a block away from my home. Now I can add that it has one of the best websites of any library I know."

"I have used the TPL site occasionally, but now I will use it more regularly. You have done, and continue to do a magnificent job on this very thorough and user-friendly web site. This is Thanksgiving weekend, and I am very thankful for the efficient, thorough and gracious resources provided by the Toronto Public Library, including the web site."

Nurturing the joy of reading

This book is very awesome!

*– Hunter’s Glen Junior Public School student
during Keep Toronto Reading day at their school*

One of the library’s core mandates is to celebrate and nurture the joy of reading in all Torontonians, regardless of age, background, language or ability because we believe passionately that a literate and reading culture supports a creative, healthy, successful and dynamic society. In 2010, our programs, people, collections and spaces provided free and ubiquitous access to the services and materials that make the joy of reading available to everyone.

Story #1: Finding a path to literacy through his public library

Dr. Anthony Hutchinson is a leading national expert in developing and evaluating youth gang prevention programs. Dr. H is also a huge advocate for libraries; as a troubled youth involved with gangs and functionally illiterate, he found a mentor and a path to literacy in his local public library in Toronto.

Story #2: Book Bash makes reading fun

In 2010, Toronto Public Library hosted Book Bash!, the first annual Canadian Children's Literature Festival, made possible by the Muller Scholastic Endowment Fund. Over 1,000 people attended Book Bash! at North York Central Library on Saturday August 28. The exciting day was filled with appearances from renowned Canadian children’s authors including Eric Walters, Barbara Reid and Kenneth Oppel. Families also celebrated Canadian literature and the joy of reading with storytelling, puppet shows, face painting, crafts, music, and more fun throughout the day. Scholastic generously donated new books, making it possible for every child who came to take home a free book.

Story #3: Students help Keep Toronto Reading

In April 2010, Toronto Public Library presented its fifth annual city-wide Keep Toronto Reading festival. Attendance was its highest ever, with 5,300 guests attending 82 events in over 40 branches across the city.

More than four hundred of those were students and teachers at Hunter’s Glen Junior Public school in Scarborough who, on April 9, participated in “Keep Toronto Reading Day” in celebration of Keep Toronto Reading.

They took part in fun-filled reading activities, from filming their own video book talks for YouTube, to enjoying storytelling by Rukhsana Khan. At mid-day, the

entire school “dropped everything to read” and for half an hour everyone got lost in a favourite book.

At the end of the day, the school gathered for an assembly where a library staff member from nearby McGregor Park Branch helped launch the school’s very own Keep Toronto Reading journal, to record all the students’ recommended reads, which were later published on the library’s website.

The day was organized by teacher Debbie Firestone, who, at the end of the day, recounted excitedly: “The day was magical. Every single student and teacher left the school transformed: smiling, talking to each other, vowing to read all weekend... I would love to make this an annual event.”

Story #4: Interactive early literacy centres are extremely popular

Diana Olford, children’s librarian at Cedarbrae Branch says:

“There are families who come in every week for at least an hour, often on the same day each week. A lot of the story time families have continued to come in on the same morning even though story time is finished, just because it has become a regular part of their routine. The room is packed on Saturdays, generally from open to close. Kids love listening to and reading along with the Tumblebooks on the computers, particularly the Caillou story. One mom told me her child had listened to that story at least 25 times by her calculations.”

Debbie Attack, Department Head, Children and Youth Advocate, says:

“The KidsStop helps to make the library a destination for young families, a place where parents and children can find a comfortable spot to read or play with the many interactive elements. It’s a place where families can build important early reading skills while having fun together.”

Mother visiting the Thorncliffe KidsStop, says:

“[My daughter] will be going to school this year. I know it for a fact that when you start early, getting them involved in reading and all the literacy activities, they do much better at school.”

Story #5: Volunteers help children learn to read

Leading to Reading is our popular reading practice and homework help program for children, grades 1-6, who are having difficulty with reading or homework. Volunteer-student pairs meet at a scheduled weekly one-hour session to engage in reading, learning and related activities.

Emily, who is one of our most faithful volunteers, has been with us since 1995. She tells us she responded to an article in the North York Mirror about the program as it asked for volunteers and “the rest is history.”

Emily says:

“I always liked kids - I started with tutoring one child a week for the first few years and I took up 2 kids after that.”

“I strongly believe that children are our future; the best way to ensure our future is to help educate the younger generation and this is my small way of contributing my effort to that...helping children learn has given me tremendous satisfaction that my small contribution is bearing fruit. I do intend to keep volunteering in this program in the foreseeable future.”

“I find the program particularly relevant considering where I tutor, which is in the Jane-Finch area. Many of the students that I've tutored have been first- or second-generation immigrants, and even if they've learned how to speak English, they still have trouble catching up in the written area. I can identify with that, since English was my second language, and I remember how difficult it was matching up the sounds with the spelling...And the learning goes both ways - we tutors learn how to teach different students, with different personalities, and students get to learn. It's a great opportunity for both, and I've learned a lot about kids and cultures just from my tutoring at TPL.”

Story #6: Bringing community together through the written word

The Seniors Reading Circle, part of the Forever Young Seniors Program, is a partnership between the library and UNISON Health and Community Services. Every last Thursday of the month, representatives from the Barbara Frum Branch bring multiple copies of an advanced picture book to the Lawrence Heights location of UNISON. The circle is all about socializing literature and bringing the community together in a friendly and thought-provoking environment. Participants include those with low literacy and also those who are learning English as a second language.

“The books that are selected teach an inner good. I also like how there is time for commenting...how there are copies for each of us so we can read aloud and

listen to others. I also particularly enjoy that it is intergenerational as we get to work with young people from the library, I find this all very enjoyable.”

– Avril

“I like how the stories allow us to share our experiences with others. The words and illustrations in the picture book give me something to speak about. I like how people express their concern for things.”

– Francine

“We tend to be self-absorbed in our own world. This program allows us to put ourselves out there and express our emotions and perspective on things.”

– Regina

“I look forward to the reading circle each month. I like books with meaning, one which will lead to varying opinions. I like how books have a real-world element to them. It makes it easy to relate to plus we get to know a lot about each other this way.”

– Doreen

Getting Toronto's youth engaged

Libraries are a safe place for young people – the spaces are inviting...and provide access for everyone

– *Okeima Lawrence, library board member*

In 2010, our youth engagement efforts paid off—the library welcomed youth in record numbers and saw more young people than ever join and engage in their library. Toronto Public Library continued to pursue its strategic goals of supporting educational achievement for youth as a foundation for future success; engaging youth in ways that are meaningful to them, with emphasis on leadership skills and social integration; and promoting greater participation among youth in library programs and services.

A particular emphasis was put on community partnerships in 2010 to help expand existing programs, and develop new and innovative initiatives to draw youth into the public library and help them thrive.

Story #1: Young Voices get heard at the library

In October 2010, the Young Voices Writers' Conference took place at North York Central Library. About 160 youth participated in the annual event—the first year that the conference was primarily promoted through social media and RAMP, our dedicated online resource centre for youth. An impressive list of professionals, each specializing in different subjects, hosted the hands-on workshops for youth. They included Richard Scarsbrook, keynote speaker and fiction specialist; Allan Stratton, last year's Toronto Public Library Writer-in-Residence; Willow Dawson, graphic novels; Rosemary Mosco, short stories; Lesley Livingston, fantasy; and John Crossingham, singer/songwriter. In addition to the regular print version of the Instant Anthology, an online version was created for the first time allowing participants to see their work updated live online as they submitted it.

Story #2: Youth advisors develop leadership skills

For the past 20 years, Youth Advisory Groups (YAG) have provided the library with an opportunity for interaction with and input from young people regarding the development of youth-focused services, programs, collections, publications and physical spaces. Volunteering for the library helps to develop leadership skills and gives young people a chance to make new friends, learn and interact with new people. To help spread news of the library's upcoming teen summer reading program Word Out!, Sanderson's YAG created a video with scenes from the branch as well as from the city's downtown landmarks.

Story #3: Turning to the library as a safe place

Okeima Lawrence is the youngest-ever Toronto Public Library board member and has been heavily involved with the library since he was a young teen. In this video, he speaks about his fond memories of libraries as his “safe place.” Libraries helped him develop his leadership skills and grow into a strong individual dedicated to helping young people pursue opportunities and fight for change.

Supporting cultural expression

I never felt so profoundly how important libraries are to our cultural life

– Toronto Poet Rosemary Sullivan

Through our resources, programs, partnerships and spaces, Toronto Public Library contributes to the vibrancy and liveability of the city and its neighbourhoods by supporting city-wide and local cultural expression.

Our collections provide access to an extensive range of cultural experiences, and we continue to build special collections that reflect Toronto's rich cultural heritage. In 2010, our branches continued as accessible venues for cultural, literary and arts events, and as hubs for local artists, authors and performers. And the library once again partnered with City and community organizations to deliver entertaining and educational cultural experiences for all ages, including participation in city cultural festivals such as Luminato, Toronto Book Awards, and the Toronto Star Short Story Contest.

Story #1: Appel Salon brings literary & cultural events to everyone

In October 2010, John Ralston Saul and Joseph Boyden visited the Appel Salon to discuss Louis Riel and Louis-Hippolyte Lafontaine, the "Extraordinary Canadians" they wrote about as part of their contribution to the Penguin Canada series. During their talk, Saul also spoke about the value of the Toronto Reference Library, both to his research for the book, and to the people of Toronto.

Story #2: Supporting artistic expression

Toronto Public Library provides free space for art exhibits which reflect the diverse cultural interests of the city and its neighbourhoods. Artists are invited to submit their work for possible exhibition at one of 13 library branch locations.

In 2010, library customer Helen Leask told us that her daughter Martha's life was transformed by the opportunity to exhibit at the library. Martha is intellectually disabled, has severe epilepsy and has a seizure-response dog guide, Wylie and creates wonderful, insightful, happy pastels. Exhibiting at the Toronto Public Library gave Martha the confidence to start selling her art through her own website – www.swingingmonkeydesigns.com

Helen says:

“Over 40 people turned up on Sept 2 to celebrate with Martha, bringing armfuls of flowers, gifts and kind words. She overcame her shyness and her communication difficulties to actually make a speech. It was a wonderful, wonderful event and we are so grateful to the Toronto Public Library for making it possible with this smart, affirmative program.”

This *Globe and Mail* article written by Martha’s mother gives some insight into Martha and her twin brother. In it, Helen also mentions Martha’s exhibition at Toronto Public Library. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/facts-and-arguments/my-twins-have-different-destinies/article1700276/>

Story #3: Transforming the public realm with poetry

At the Toronto Reference Library last year, Toronto's Poet Laureate Dionne Brand launched *Poetry is Public is Poetry*, an ambitious city-wide initiative that aspires to transform Toronto’s public realm into an illuminating forum for the written word. To ensure the program is accessible to everyone, *Poetry is Public is Poetry* is working closely with the library, embedding two to four installations per year in walkways and surrounding library spaces. The first permanent *Poetry is Public is Poetry* installation featuring verse from Toronto poet Rosemary Sullivan is displayed at the main entrance of the newly renovated Cedarbrae Branch.

Rosemary says:

That was one of the most compelling events of my writing career! ... I can't tell you how impressed I was with the excitement of the crowd at the reopening of their library. People lined up, anxious to enter. That doesn't happen without a great deal of work and dedication.

Thank you for your exciting initiative on Poetry is Public is Poetry. Dionne spoke so beautifully about the meaning of a library. And I watched the nodding heads and excited faces responding to her words. It meant so much to them. I am deeply honoured that the committee chose my poem for the Cedarbrae library. It is exactly the right library for those words. A young woman came up to me afterward and said she had read my poem Exile years before and had been so moved by it that she had translated it into Arabic.

That Dionne flew back for this event was beyond the call but it was so wonderful to have her there. The whole event touched me very deeply. My words in bronze leading into a library; it's a remarkable thought. And it is all a testament to the

dedication of the Cedarbrae staff to their public. I never felt so profoundly how important libraries are to our cultural life.

Bravo to all of you. All the best.

Story #4: Partnering to bring art to the community

The Iain Baxter & EcoArtVan is a collaborative outreach project that involved the library and the efforts of No. 9, an organization committed to using art to stimulate social and environmental change, Art Gallery of Ontario, and Toronto District School Board. Originally called the Mobile Art Truck Project, it consists of a mobile art exhibit and art instruction program that toured at-risk communities across Toronto. Last year the EcoArtVan visited 24 inner city model schools and eight Toronto Public Library branches. In total, 200 children participated in the art-making workshops and an additional 125 people visited the EcoArtVan and talked about the installation with the No. 9 artist educators.

No. 9 Executive Director Andrew Davies calls it one of their most successful projects to date.

Andrew says:

“We chose to work with the library as a partner on this innovative art and environment educational outreach program because the library is a major cultural hub and place of learning within the many diverse communities that make up Toronto.”

Staff at Richview said the program was a success:

“The children enjoyed themselves and the instructors were excellent! The children loved making their own artwork and one mother said she found the program so good she was going to try and book the EcoArtVan for her daughter’s school. The van also attracted a lot of attention in Richview’s parking lot.”

Story #5: Satisfying intellectual curiosity

The “Thought Exchange” program series launched in 2010, challenging older adults and life-long learners to “satisfy their curiosity with an eclectic collection of lectures and discussions across the city.” Thought Exchange programs were offered in a number of branches and sparked intellectual exploration on a wide array of subjects, from Toronto’s vibrant history to classical music, opera, literature, the art of Vermeer and Rembrandt, and more.

Over 380 people came to the six-part **History Matters** series which took listeners through Toronto's history of booze, madness, hippies, public transit, the Don Valley and the battles of Portuguese women cleaners; Francis Broun's lectures on the **Golden Age of Dutch Art**, held at Palmerston Branch, drew over 100 people to each talk. Here's what we heard about the Thought Exchange:

"The fact that these series are free makes it possible for people who couldn't normally attend their lectures, to hear them."

– History Matters attendee

"Audiences are excited, laughing, talking to each other and definitely wanting more sessions! Many participants have said that they love the library location for lectures like this...because libraries are identifiable places in the community and they are accessible."

– RoseMarie Spearpoint, Branch Head, Palmerston Branch

"A wonderful musical journey" "...lively, passionate, incredibly well informed-never dull" "...my appetite has been whetted and I want more"

– Music Through The Centuries audience members

Always innovating

I, for one, love what you do at the library and find the e-news very informative

– *Library Customer*

As the busiest public library system in the world, Toronto Public Library is constantly innovating, finding new ways to connect with Torontonians; taking great ideas and making them work for neighbourhoods and the city; creating new kinds of reading and learning experiences for our customers.

Toronto's public library has become more than a place to access books – we've made strategic investments to create a modern, efficient and sustainable library system that supports learning, information access, collaboration, and self-discovery.

Furthering our commitment to excellence in customer service, we broadened our engagement in social media to promote our collections, programs and services; to participate in conversations and have meaningful dialogue with customers; to gather feedback; and to build better relationships with key audiences and potential new audiences.

Story #1: Human Library creates new ways to learn

In November 2010, the library hosted its inaugural Human Library program at five branches across the city, making it one of the largest human library events in the world. The Human Library supported a number of the library's key strategic objectives, including providing new and creative ways to learn and access information. The pilot event was a huge success, with over 200 people taking the unique opportunity to "check out" one of our 60 human books for a one-on-one conversation. The program garnered huge interest from local, national and international media as well, with dozens of media calls and stories from literally all around the world.

"I didn't really know what to expect but was very curious and I am so happy I took out a human book. I learned a lot from him."

– Borrower who visited Malvern Branch

"I found the experience of speaking with a book who had survived crushing poverty and breast cancer, life changing. I feel like I have a completely new perspective about people facing obstacles out of their control."

– Borrower who visited Bloor/Gladstone Branch

"This was the most exciting & meaningful thing I've done all year."

– Human Book

"The library has given me so much in my life and this was an opportunity to give back in some small way."

– Human Book

Story #2: Engaging our customers in new, interactive and "social" ways

Toronto Public Library was very active and popular on our social media channels in 2010 – our Twitter feed and Facebook fan page grew to over 6,000 followers/fans – an increase of 30% over the previous year.

The library uses online and social media channels in a number of ways to improve service to our customers, to raise awareness of the library, and to deliver and engage customers in library programs, services and activities.

For Keep Toronto Reading 2010, the library used social media channels to not only promote the annual reading festival; it was also an opportunity to engage our customers and let them “share the books they love” in all kinds of different ways - we asked Twitter users to tweet their favourite reads with the #keepontorontoreading hashtag, share YouTube book reviews, and tell us about all the programs they went to all month long. The interactive campaign was a huge success in terms of customer engagement and participation, with over 800 Twitter mentions, 12,000 YouTube views, and 11,500 website visits.

Story #3: Improving customer communications through virtual outreach

Toronto Public Library launched its e-newsletter last year as part of the library's online strategy to reduce printed materials and improve the way we communicate with our customers. By year's end, close to 2,500 customers had signed up for our service and the number of subscribers continues to grow. Customer feedback has been great:

"I, for one, love what you do at the library and find the e-news very informative. I forward the e-newsletter on to so many friends and contacts and clients. The free events are such a nice surprise for so many. So many folks are having a hard time making ends meet, and your events and updates offer a way to have a night out which they might otherwise not enjoy. Keep up the good work!"

Story #4: Delivering 21st century library services

Our branches are welcoming for everyone, with comfortable reading lounges, interactive early literacy centres (KidsStops), vibrant Teen Zones, older adult spaces, and even outdoor reading spaces. We renovate our branches to support the delivery of 21st century library service in a welcoming, accessible environment, with improved customer service and increased access to technology for research, learning, work and recreation.

When one of our most popular branches, Cedarbrae, reopened one of the branch regulars sent us this lovely poem.

*Opening day is over
(as chaotic as they say?)
Now operating smoothly
I'll visit every day
To say I'm overwhelmed
is no exaggeration-
After a two year hiatus
this is worthy compensation
Now I can saunter over
no need to drive
Your friendly, smiling greetings
when I arrive
New books and magazines
oh, such pleasure
Reading and ruminating
at leisure...
Chuckling to myself
maybe taking time
To dream up another
nonsensical rhyme...
Oh, a final comment
before I stop -
Cedarbrae, quite simply
is over the top!*

Congratulations!

– Tom Stephen

Story #5: Black Creek project brings history to life

Last year, York Woods Branch brought the past to life through the Black Creek Living History project. Seniors were invited to share their stories, past and present, about living in the Black Creek community. Teens learned how to conduct interviews and use digital camcorders to record and edit the seniors' stories.

In this video, one of the participants shares his happiest memories of living in the community. Seven other interviews are available for viewing on the project's website. (www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/black-creek-history).

Story #6: Still innovative at 100

In 2010, the Toronto Public Library celebrated its third branch centenary at the Riverdale Branch. This beautiful library, designed in a Georgian Revival style by Robert McCallum, demonstrates every day how it continues to provide modern, relevant 21st century library service, even at the ripe old age of 100.

Library customer Maggie Fung and her children at the Riverdale 100 celebration:

"I think reading is important for starters, and the library has just such a welcoming environment and it is a great place for the kids to grow up. There is just so much more to a library than books. There are programs, seminars and other activities for anyone who comes here. It is extremely important for the library to be here because it brings the community together. You just don't see kids here, you see people of all ages here."

Loving the library

Story #1: Our City does libraries right!

The *National Post*'s Peter Kuitenbrouwer wrote a short succinct piece about what our city does right. Hint: it's our libraries!

Peter wrote:

At 10 a.m. today, for reasons too long to explain, I ended up in Gerrard India Bazaar, near Gerrard Street and Coxwell Avenue, cold and somewhat disoriented. Nothing was open and I needed to make a few calls and get organized. Lo and behold, there stood the Ashdale Branch of the Toronto Public Library, just opening its doors to greet the new day.

The library had everything I wanted: a bathroom, a Toronto telephone book, a map of Toronto, all the morning's newspapers, warmth and friendly staff. Frequently in this space we critique the things the City of Toronto does wrong, so I just want to take a second to praise something this city does right: maintain 99 branches of the library, the biggest borrowing library system on the continent. It's a beautiful thing.

Story #2: Home Library Service

Toronto Public Library's Home Library Service is available for Toronto residents who are homebound for three months or longer due to age, illness or disability. A variety of library materials, including books, paperbacks, large print books and talking books, are selected and delivered to you free of charge. This past year, we brought joy to many, especially to this one grateful customer with limited mobility who sends us this lovely note:

I know that I am often sleepy and sometimes not very sociable when the library delivery person arrives at my door once a month. I have let myself become even more a night person. I always was, but I got up and went to work in the morning like everyone else. Now, I really am a night owl. It's after 3 am as I type this up.

So, this is just to explain my grogginess when you arrive. I am so grateful that you bring me the books. You bring me ideas. You bring me sanity and a way to lose myself in someone else's thoughts.

The books are really important to me. The books are not the same as taking pills for my maladies and watching my cholesterol intake. The books feed the part of me that is still free, and still, somehow, young.

So when you come to my door, and I seem a little fraught, please remember how much I appreciate it that you come, and bring me the books that are now a really big and important part of my life.

Story #3: Most Important Building in the City

Mystery author Gail Bowen, a former writer-in-residence for Toronto Public Library writes a very nice letter to libraries in one of her blog posts.

Last year when I was Writer in Residence at the Toronto Reference Library I took the subway to work. I am of an age where men offer me their seats on public transit, and I welcome the courtesy. One hot day when we were hurtling along, a young man who appeared to be of mid-eastern descent offered me his seat. He asked if I'd had a good day, and I said yes. He asked where I worked and I told him. His face lit up at the mention of the Toronto Reference Library. He told me that when he came to this country, Toronto Reference Library was the most important building in the city for him. He explained that he knew that everything he needed to make a new life was in that building, and he went there every day.

That young man was just one of many. Every morning, the lobby of the library was packed with people waiting to get inside. Most, like most of us, were immigrants and like the young man on the subway and like generations of people who came to this country in search of a good life, the people in that lobby knew that the key to the good life was the library.

I was born in 1942, and when I started going to Earlscourt Public Library in Toronto, it was filled with what were unkindly referred to as DP's – Displaced Persons. As ugly as that term is, it offers a useful perspective for understanding what the library meant to people who came to Canada during those first post-war years. Libraries offered the displaced a place of belonging – a place where they could learn to shape their lives to become the citizens they wanted to be.

Like many people of my generation, I was the first in my family to attend university. When I started at the University of Toronto, my classes were filled with the students who had sat beside me at the shining oak tables in Earlscourt Public Library. Like me, they went on to live lives that would have been beyond the imagining of their grandparents, and they were able to do this because the libraries of this country have always offered people the tools to build new lives.

Here in Calgary at my home library, Memorial Park, and at Central Library, I've seen students studying quietly after school. Memorial Park and Central are both downtown libraries and many downtown students don't live in homes that offer them a place where they can study, read, think and dream. Ernest Hemingway

wrote a fine story about the human need to have a place where, whoever they are and whatever their circumstances, they are treated with dignity, as valuable members of the human race. The story is called “A Clean Well-Lighted Place”. For generations, libraries have offered us all a clean well-lighted place to become the people we want to become. I hope we never lose sight of the value of that gift.

Share your stories

We'd love to read, listen to or view your own story. Please feel free to share your memories about the impact Toronto's public library has had on your life by emailing us at: shareyourstories@torontopubliclibrary.ca

Statistics

In 2010, Toronto Public Library had another banner year, with customers visiting our physical and virtual branches, borrowing materials, using our in-branch internet and wireless services, and attending programs – all in record numbers once again. With more than 18 million visits to our branches and more than 32 million items borrowed, 2010 was again our busiest year ever.

And internationally, the Toronto Public Library continues to maintain its position as the busiest urban public library system in the world*.

**Toronto Public Library has higher circulation per capital (11.9) than any other international or North American library system serving a population base over 2 million.*

Graph #1: Library Use

LIBRARY USE	2010	2009
Circulation	32,324,416	31,271,072
In-library use	7,808,931	7,959,072
Information requests	7,484,286	7,730,028
Visits	18,352,210	17,554,470
Individuals using public workstations	5,993,062	6,130,523

Graph #2: Program Attendance

PROGRAM ATTENDANCE	2010	2009
Preschool	243,021	202,084
Children	205,678	226,869
Teen	70,488	73,969
Adult	87,625	70,337
Older Adult	16,728	11,617

Graph #3: Virtual Visits

WEB SERVICES	2010	2009
Virtual visits*	27,003,433	23,393,920
Database queries/searches	19,688,259	17,673,973
Virtual information requests	69,063	33,413

Financials

Toronto Public Library Board Statement of Revenues and Expenditures Year Ended December 31.

	2010 \$	2009 \$
REVENUES		
City of Toronto	170,229,047	165,352,986
Provincial and Federal Grants	6,706,294	6,170,370
Fines and user charges	4,128,602	4,005,441
Other sources	2,534,469	2,466,957
Total Revenues	183,598,412	177,995,754

	2010 \$	2009 \$
EXPENDITURES		
Staff costs	137,384,772	131,567,018
Purchase of services	22,327,522	22,323,316
Library materials	17,514,854	17,412,159
Materials, supplies and equipment	5,519,439	6,111,475
Financing and other	851,825	672,786
Total Expenditures	183,598,412	177,995,754