

## Nancy Marshall - Sick Kids Reading Room

C.

**From:** "Valerie McDonald"  
**To:** <nmarshall@torontopubliclibrary.ca>, <mchurch  
**Date:** January 27, 2010 1:20 pm  
**Subject:** Sick Kids Reading Room  
**CC:** <childrens.council@sickkids.ca>, "Jonathan Blumberg""

The Secretary  
 Toronto Public Library Board  
 789 Yonge Street  
 Toronto, Ontario M4W 2G8

Dear Board Members,

I was dismayed to learn that the Toronto Public Library Board has made a decision to withdraw services from the Reading Room at Sick Kids. Two of my children were treated for cancer at the hospital and we were frequent users of the Reading Room during their collective 2 years as in-patients. During that time, my daughters were able to keep up with school projects using the reference collection, enjoyed presentations by visiting authors and found refuge from treatments, tests and noise.

I'm concerned that without the expertise of librarians to support the program, and without the partnership of the Toronto Public Library, the collection and services provided to families and children will be compromised. Because of the joint sponsorship, for example, librarians order books, audio-books and other resources for children of all ages, including infants and pre-schoolers, while TDSB has a mandate to serve only school age children. In addition, the TPL connection allows librarians to access resources such as multi-lingual books and DVDs through inter-library loans. Their expertise greatly benefits families from diverse communities who find the hospital experience particularly frightening and overwhelming.

Several years ago, the TDSB made significant cuts to the teaching staff provided to students at the hospital because of a peculiarity in the Education Funding formula. The formula dictates that the board can only receive funding for children registered as TDSB students. However, as you know, Sick Kids serves children from all across Ontario and Canada, most of whom are in and out of hospital and therefore retain their enrollment in their home schools. A minor compromise was reached between the board and the Ministry of Education so that the cuts were not as dramatic as those first proposed, but they did reduce the access children had to hospital teachers. Because of that experience, I worry that Sick Kids programs will always be more vulnerable to cuts in TDSB programs whenever the board faces difficult financial choices, just because the hospital is an anomaly for all of its funders. Without the support from the TPL, it will be even more difficult for the school board to continue to provide adequate service at Sick Kids.

The children who use the services of the Reading Room are among the sickest and most vulnerable in Canada. A strong partnership between teachers and librarians to provide a normal and enriching childhood experience adds tremendously to their healing in a way that is difficult to quantify. I urge you to reconsider your decision.

Sincerely,

Valerie McDonald

cc. Jonathan Blumberg, Family Centered Care Council, Sick Kids  
 Children's Council, Sick Kids