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From: "Allan Far"
To: nmarshall@tpl.toronto.on.ca
Date: 12/31/03 2:14 PM
Subject: Permission to Address Board Jan 19/94 re: Computer Access

December 30, 2003

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Att.: Gillian Mason, Board Chair

Dear Madam Chair:

I am a constant user of the Toronto Public Library services, for which I am most appreciative. It is an excellent service for which you can and should take pride. But, there's always room for improvement and that's what this is all about.

I am also in the process of becoming an advocate and spokesperson for members of our community who suffer from various mental disorders. This disorder is quite rampant and as our society becomes faster, more demanding, less humane and less supportive in many ways, more and more people join our ranks every day – lawyers, doctors, teachers, university students, artists, writers, producers and accountants - that's me - I too am in recovery after a severe battle with suicide and 33 days at HRRH Keele Site earlier this year. I've been up and down like a yo-yo with this for 20-odd years now.

I am nudging certain segments of City Public Services that I don't think give sufficient attention to the needs of my group. For example, at the moment, I don't think Ms. Josephine Bryant nor Mr. Ron Dyck seem to understand that keeping Library Branch Storage Drives away from their clients is a big deal to us and I'm trying to persuade them otherwise in the strongest manner possible.

Large segments of the community, namely the working poor, many seniors on the lower end of the socio-economic scale, those vulnerable due to various mental health disorders, children of new immigrant refugees and young people using modern tools to look for work, including some students may not be able to afford computers or the cost of connectivity required from their homes. They rely on the full facilities of the public library system that, at present, TPL is only partially providing.

Presumably due to demand, Dyck, through Bryant and your Board limits on-line access to computer hardware to one hour per 24 hours per branch per person. When you stop and really think about it, that's not a lot of time. The solution is to work off-line - or even off-site for those who have a computer and no ISP - but that requires drive access at the Library.

If clients bring in their own storage medium, they can download internet information and store it on the memory disc, if they have access to a drive. How can Ms. Bryant through her colleague Mr. Dyck take pride in doing only half a job? If I gave them full fax in their homes but no access to a printer they'd think I just landed from Mars. Let's face it, the good citizens from Rosedale, Forest Hill and the Bayview-Lawrence Communities wouldn't put up with this silliness for two seconds and we all know it.

There are several other issues about the library Information Technology System that I've brought to your officials' attention most recently, but, in all fairness, with the holidays and all they have not had time to get back to me about them. However, I don't expect a lot of enthusiastic support around change because they don't like outsiders nudging them about how to do their jobs. Especially one recovering from mental illness! Which is only natural. But, it doesn't make it right.

I would like to take the opportunity to address these matters publicly with The Board at your next monthly meeting. I will require about 10 minutes, possibly less if you are squeezed for time, to put this on the agenda so that it does not get swept under the carpet like I suspect it already has been, based on the polite, though very delayed brush-off I've already received from Ms. Bryant recently.

The TPL has announced that your next meeting is at 18:00 on Monday January 19 2004 in the Board Room at the Toronto Reference Library on Bloor and Yonge. I will be there at 17:30 for any hand-shaking and get-acquainted moments and I will assume that unless I receive notice to the contrary, I will be given this opportunity.

Madam, I have just picked-up a copy of What's On (January-March, 2004) and by January 19, I will have read it cover-to-cover. Thank-you for this and the granting of my request.

Yours sincerely,

Allan F. Farrington