

City Librarian's Report for January 2024

Below is my report for the January 2024 Toronto Public Library (TPL) Board meeting. It summarizes key activities in support of the priorities outlined in our strategic plan. This report covers items that are not part of the Board agenda package.

Update on restoration of services

As we work to restore our services, our top priorities remain the phased return of our website, catalogue and borrowing services, and public computing. The phased approach launched this month and will continue into February. A report on the cyberattack will be presented to the Board at its meeting on February 26.

Opening up our public space

Sherlock Holmes Walk mural project



Mural installed behind Toronto Reference Library, along Sherlock Holmes Walk. Photo courtesy of TTC.

TPL is home to one of the largest research collections devoted to Arthur Conan Doyle's life and works, including his most popular creation, Sherlock Holmes.

On December 5, TPL, in partnership with The Friends of the Arthur Conan Doyle Collection, StreetARToronto (StART) and the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC), unveiled a [public mural on Sherlock Holmes Walk](#), the walkway along the east side of the Toronto Reference Library. The mural is a temporary installation on the TTC's construction hoarding.

The mural is the result of over two years of collaboration between the partners, in consultation with the community, and features the work of 15 StART artists. Artists were asked to draw on Conan Doyle's voice, using materials from the collection as inspiration. The mural explores the moods evoked by his writing styles and applied to characters, motifs, metaphors, shapes and colours.

Reinstating Branch Art Exhibits



In January 2023, staff and customers welcomed back Branch Art Exhibits at 11 TPL locations, a service that had been on hold since March 2020. Branch Art Exhibits offer emerging and established artists the opportunity to host solo or group shows for one month of the year. Over the course of 2023, 112 local artists/collectives displayed their works across the city, helping us activate our library spaces and reflect the diverse cultural interests of Toronto.

Last June, the TPL Board approved the revised Use of Library Space for Art Exhibits policy which eliminated the \$20 artist display fee to reduce barriers to this service.

Announcing the 2023 First and Best List



In December, TPL announced its 2023 [First and Best](#) list, highlighting ten Canadian picture books that promote literacy skills, celebrate diverse voices and inspire a love of reading.

The First and Best list is part of TPL's [Ready for Reading](#) program, which recognizes the vital role caregivers play as a child's first and best teacher. Ready for Reading promotes [fun, everyday activities](#) that help build important pre-reading literacy skills in children from birth to five years.

Visit the [First and Best webpage](#) to view this year's top ten picture books, as well as our lists from previous years.

Reinstating Coffee and Conversation programs



Coffee and Conversation program at Parliament Street branch on May 3, 2023.

In January 2023, Coffee and Conversation programs were reinstated at seven branches, connecting vulnerable customers to library and community resources.

The program provides a safe and welcoming space for individuals experiencing life challenges, and builds relationships between staff and participants. TPL staff and community guests facilitate information sharing, and organizations like [Sistering](#), [Access Alliance](#), and [LOFT](#) are available to provide support. Attendees have the opportunity to listen, ask questions and interact with service providers.

In 2023, we welcomed 499 participants at 31 Coffee and Conversation sessions. Many attendees shared that they look forward to connecting with others during these programs. Customers can visit a participating branch for information and refreshments: Sanderson, Toronto Reference Library, Fort York, Lillian H. Smith, Parliament Street, Jane/Dundas, Bloor/Gladstone.

Building pathways for workforce development

Let's Learn Tech learners get hands-on with computers



Participants working on a hands-on lab at North York Central Library.

On November 29 and 30, participants in TPL's Let's Learn Tech [IT Essentials](#) course joined a hands-on learning lab at North York Central Library, where they practiced disassembling and reassembling computer hardware to identify and learn more about their individual components. TPL's IT Services department donated old computer equipment, otherwise destined for disposal, to provide this practical learning opportunity.

Let's Learn Tech removes employment barriers and creates workforce development opportunities by introducing technology concepts necessary for the modern workplace. In addition to self-paced courses on [Cisco's Networking Academy](#) platform, learners can attend staff-facilitated online or in-person learning circles in a welcoming and mutually supportive environment.

IT Essentials is generously funded by donations to the TPL Foundation from Bank of America and the Metcalf Foundation.

Innovator in Residence: [Alexis Tennent](#)



Alexis Tennent presents to a class at North York Central Library on December 1, 2023.

Between October 2 to December 9, North York Central Library hosted Innovator in Residence Futures Studies expert Alexis Tennent. Alexis delivered approximately 30 free in-person and online programs, workshops and class visits, and several one-on-one consultations. Participants learned how to identify signals of change, understand trends, develop their own individual futures thinking practice, and explore drivers in today's world which may be applied to various social issues.

Entrepreneur in Residence: Joëlle Jacqueline



Joëlle Jacqueline delivers a program at North York Central Library.

From October 2 to November 24, Entrepreneur in Residence Joëlle Jacqueline offered weekly in-person small business and entrepreneurship programs, and one-on-one appointments that provided personalized feedback on business ideas and plans. A total of 377 customers attended the programs, and 51 one-on-one consultations were delivered.

As a mentor with Futurpreneur Canada and StartUp Here Toronto, Joëlle is an advocate for creating opportunities and sharing knowledge and resources. Participants spoke highly of Joëlle's skills as a facilitator, coach and mentor.

The 10th Annual Joanne Fitzgerald Illustrator in Residence: Carey Sookocheff



Illustration for the 2023 Illustrator in Residence program by Carey Sookocheff.

Throughout October, Illustrator in Residence [Carey Sookocheff](#) worked with hundreds of elementary school children online and in-person at North York Central Library. Adults and teens learned about the business of becoming an illustrator through online workshops, portfolio reviews, and visits with high school and college classes. Carey also taught an online class for children's illustrators in the Dominican Republic through a twinned project with [IBBY Canada](#). This annual residency is sponsored by IBBY Canada, Toronto Public Library, and Canadian Urban Libraries Council.

Providing the vital ingredients for a democratic society

Celebrating International Day of Persons with Disabilities

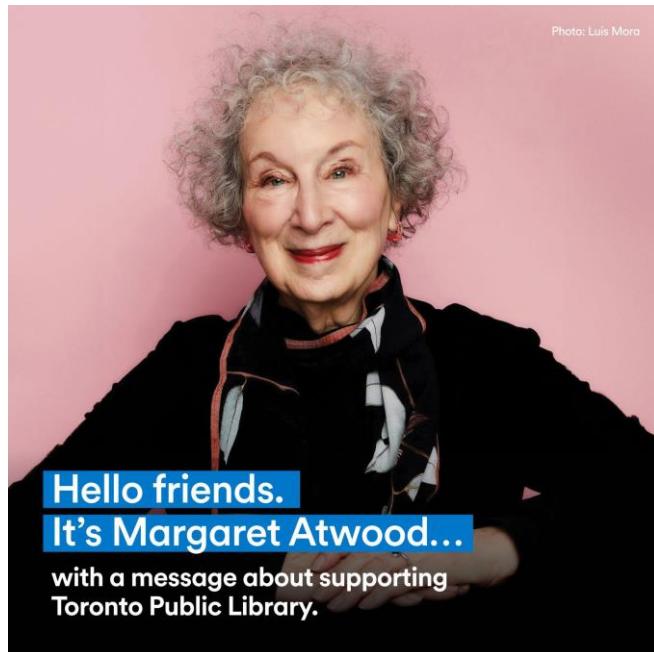
On November 30, TPL partnered with the City of Toronto to co-host “Creating an Accessible Future: Celebrating [International Day of Persons with Disabilities](#).” The event was attended by 30 participants in-person and 130 online, and supported by

live captioning and ASL interpretation.

Leaders from TPL and the City provided opening remarks and guest speakers Alicia Jarvis, Joanne Pak and Anika Abdullah shared about the future of accessibility in their areas of professional expertise. Alicia discussed digital accessibility and product development, offering insights into future intersections between the two. Joanne spoke about developing audio described graphic novels for all readers to enjoy. Anika shared about designing accessible and inclusive physical spaces where everyone can work, live and play.

The thought-provoking event provided an opportunity to celebrate the accomplishments made by and for persons with disabilities to remove barriers and advance inclusion in all aspects of society.

Margaret Atwood encourages Torontonians to support TPL



In December, Toronto Public Library Foundation sent out a powerful letter penned by iconic Canadian author Margaret Atwood. Her note touches on critical topics

that TPL has been amplifying throughout 2023, such as intellectual freedom challenges, the Book Sanctuary Collection, and the importance of public libraries in a democratic society.

In the letter, Margaret discusses her own journey visiting Deer Park branch and encourages patrons to consider donating to their local library. The letter resonated with many in the TPL community and generated hundreds of donations (and counting!) that will be directed to TPL's highest priority needs. Atwood says, "Every writer begins as a reader, and I was no exception. I know first-hand how access to TPL's collections can unlock endless possibilities for learning."

Read Margaret's message [here](#).

Investing in staff and an innovative service culture

Partnering with T.G. Shevchenko Central Library and the City of Toronto for Children of Kyiv



Mayor Olivia Chow with students at Kits for Kyiv held at North York Central Library on December 4, 2023.

This past fall, TPL partnered with T.G. Shevchenko Central Library for Children of Kyiv, with support from Mayor Olivia Chow's office, to design a program that could facilitate connections between children in Toronto and children in Kyiv. The collaboration resulted in Kits for Kyiv: a reinvention of the traditional pen pal exchange.

On December 4, 106 students from McKee Public School in grades 3, 4 and 5 joined us at North York Central Library, ready to tackle design thinking challenges while taking on the role of a "STEAM pal."

During the event, participants were asked to imagine and build a prototype of a new instrument, robot or creature using assorted materials. They were then

tasked with assembling a kit of materials to send to a child in Kyiv, who would undertake the same challenge. Kits included miscellaneous craft materials provided by the library, a photo of the kit creator's prototype and a handwritten note for the recipient.

The event welcomed special guest keynotes from Mayor Olivia Chow, and Deputy Mayor Volodymyr Bondarenko who called in virtually from Kyiv.

Positive Spaces training for staff



In 2023, TPL Pride Alliance, an employee resource group that helps foster and support an inclusive environment for 2SLGBTQ+ staff, collaborated with The 519 to continue offering TPL's mandatory Positive Spaces staff training. This training supports the work of TPL's 2SLGBTQ+ Service Plan and TPL's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. It also fosters welcoming and inclusive spaces for all gender and sexually diverse communities and our staff.

At each session, participants learned about the prohibited grounds of the Ontario Human Rights Code with a focus on Sex, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Gender Expression, as well as the importance of pronouns and gender expansive

language. Staff also discussed common scenarios they may encounter at work.

In 2023, 14 Sessions reached over 350 staff, including more than 130 managers and supervisory staff in sessions targeted towards these groups. Since this mandatory training was introduced in 2021, nearly 40 sessions have been delivered to over 900 staff members. In 2024, Positive Spaces training will expand to offer 25 sessions throughout the year, with the goal of reaching up to 800 staff.

Councillor Paul Ainslie receives the OPLA James Bain Medallion



TPL Board Member Councillor Paul Ainslie was awarded the 2023 [OPLA James Bain Medallion](#) for demonstrating outstanding leadership in governing a public library in Ontario.

Councillor Ainslie has been on the Library Board since December 2006. Over the past 18 years, he has been a champion of TPL's services at City Council and has provided invaluable guidance to the Board and TPL's leadership team. In addition, Councillor Ainslie has provided leadership for public libraries in Ontario as a Board member and current Chair of the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries (FOPL). We are thrilled to congratulate Councillor Ainslie on receiving this well-deserved award.

The award was presented by 2023 OPLA President Ryan Moniz at the Ontario Library Association Awards Gala on January 25. Congratulations Councillor Ainslie, from everyone at TPL.