

To: Toronto Public Library Board – May 15, 2006

From: City Librarian

Subject: **Youth Incentive Program – Teen Forgiveness Fines and Fees Waiver Pilot Project**

Purpose:

To report back to the Toronto Public Library Board on the completion of the Youth Incentive Program – Teen Forgiveness Fines and Fees Waiver Pilot Project.

Funding Implications and Impact Statement:

The total fines and fees waived under the teen forgiveness program was \$29,348. The lost revenues are offset, to some extent, by the return of overdue materials. In addition, long overdue teen fines and fees may not have been recoverable.

Any future implementation of the incentive program could be accommodated within the Library's operating budget.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Toronto Public Library Board:

- (1) receive the *Youth Incentive Program – Teen Forgiveness Fines and Fees Waiver Pilot Project* report for information; and
- (2) approve repetition of the incentive program at strategic intervals, using a \$20 coupon.

Background:

The Library's Key Priorities as set out in its Strategic Plan include reaching youth, serving newcomers, and low-income neighbourhoods. In keeping with these priorities, the Board, at its April 4, 2005 meeting, passed a motion requesting that staff consult with teens regarding incentive options to encourage teen use of the Library, including the possible provision of an overdue fines waiver for teens.

Beginning September 7, 2005, the Library introduced a reduced fine for teens, ages 13 - 17, to further the objective of reducing barriers that discourage teens from reading and using the Library. Although the reduced fine structure enables teens to more readily pay their fines and continue to use the Library, it does not help teens, particularly those in “at risk” communities, whose borrowing privileges are already suspended because of high outstanding fines and fees.

As a result, the Board passed a further motion at the September 26, 2005 meeting approving the implementation of a three-month teen forgiveness fines and fees waiver pilot project beginning in October 2005.

Comments:

The pilot was implemented in all branches in October, and ended January 31 to extend over the Christmas break. Coupons were distributed in the branches, delivered by branch staff to schools, and were available for downloading on *ramp*. The coupon was for one use only per teen. A brief survey was conducted as part of the evaluation process.

Key Findings:

- 3,279 coupons were redeemed or an average of 205 per week
- total fines and fees waived was \$29,348 or an average of \$8.95 per coupon
- 85 percent of coupons were redeemed for \$20 or less, indicating that “up to \$20” was an appropriate value for the coupon
- 1,377 coupons or 42 percent were redeemed at branches in designated “at risk” areas, indicating the project did reach high-need teens
- 1,285 or 55 percent of coupons used resulted in card renewals; this represents just over 6 percent of the teens who were not using their cards prior to the project. Of those renewals, 513 were redeemed at branches serving priority communities, permitting a considerable number of teens to borrow library materials again
- 80 percent of teens got the coupons at branch libraries, 13 percent at schools, three percent on *ramp*, indicating that branches are still the best point of contact with teens, even if they don’t use their cards, and that school cooperation continues to be key to TPL’s success in reaching out to teens
- coupons were redeemed at a similar rate throughout the campaign period, indicating that the 16-week duration was effective
- 83 percent of survey respondents answered that they had been in a library within the last month, while 17 percent (547 teens) had not been in a library in the last year or longer, indicating that a significant number of teens returned to the library because of the coupon
- 70 percent of survey respondents indicated that they used the library to get books, music and movies, 15 percent used the library to surf the net, 6.4 percent identified research and doing homework as an important reason for them to use the library, 13 percent of teens indicated they use the library as a place to go to in their community for either social or school related purposes

Conclusion:

It is recommended that the Board approve the repetition of the Teen Forgiveness Fines and Fees Waiver Project, at strategic intervals. The pilot was a success since over 3,000 teens responded, 1,285 cards were renewed and 547 teens, who had been gone for a year or longer, came back to the Library indicating that we did reach many lapsed teen users.

Staff, in consultation with youth, will continue to seek out other opportunities to bring teens back to the Library. With the introduction of the lower teen fine rate and the Teen Forgiveness Fines and Fees Waiver Project, the process of bringing teens back to the library is well underway.

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List of Attachments:

Attachment 1: Map indicating Distribution of Coupons Collected at TPL Branches