

To: Toronto Public Library Board – September 18, 2006

From: City Librarian

Subject: ***Ready for Reading – A Children’s Early Literacy Initiative***

Purpose:

To introduce the Toronto Public Library Board to the *Ready for Reading* initiative.

Funding Implications and Impact Statement:

There is no immediate financial impact as a result of this initiative. The program can be accommodated within the existing operating budget.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Toronto Public Library Board receive the *Ready for Reading – A Children’s Early Literacy Initiatives* report for information.

Background:

There is compelling scientific research which links a child’s success in school directly with the acquisition of early literacy skills. Research shows that children get ready to read years before they start school. Early literacy is everything children know about reading and writing before they can actually read and write. The relationship between the skills with which children enter school and their later academic performance is striking. For instance, research has shown that there is nearly a 90% probability that a child will remain a poor reader at the end of the fourth grade if the child is a poor reader at the end of the first grade. Further, knowledge of alphabet letters at entry into kindergarten is a strong predictor of reading ability in 10th grade.

The American Library Association (ALA) developed the *Every Child Ready to Read* (ECRR) program in response to this situation. The program provides all the information libraries need to introduce parents and caregivers to the importance of early literacy and to teach them how to develop these skills in their children. The emphasis is on providing an atmosphere that is fun, verbal and stimulating, full of opportunities to talk and be listened to, to read and be read to, and to sing and be sung to. It is not a program designed to teach reading, but rather to lay the groundwork for the development of early literacy skills. The program strongly positions the Library as the leader and expert in early literacy services.

The program supports the TPL Strategic Plan Key Priorities by providing library service that meets the needs of low-income neighbourhoods, contributes to the successful adaptation of newcomers to Toronto and promotes books and culture.

Comments:

Toronto Public Library has offered quality story times for young children for decades. By incorporating ALA's program and its philosophy into all of our current preschool initiatives, a new emphasis will be placed on explaining and demonstrating to parents the value of reading readiness in the preschool years and how they can develop early literacy skills in their children. The Toronto Public Library will call our adaptation of this initiative *Ready for Reading* enabling TPL to include this program with our other "Reading" initiatives, *Leading to Reading* and *Keep Toronto Reading*.

Ready for Reading will permeate every aspect of what we do for preschoolers, and all current programs for young children will be adapted and branded to reflect that they are part of this initiative. Materials will be produced to support parents with early literacy techniques. New programs will also be introduced as part of this effort. Discovery Centres, interactive centres where parents and caregivers can learn and play independently with children from age 0 to 5, will be introduced in some children's areas as part of branch renovation projects. Information sessions for parents and caregivers will be introduced. As well, increased emphasis will be placed on providing services to children with special needs.

The program will extend to newcomer parents and caregivers with various levels of English language skills. A one-page handout of the key pre-reading literacy skills and reading tips will be developed and translated into various languages and distributed in locations where newcomer parents gather.

The *Ready for Reading* initiative will provide the Library with many partnering opportunities, supporting as it does the current emphasis on the early years in education. It will position TPL as the leader and expert in early literacy services. It will enable us to reach priority neighbourhoods and newcomers with a program that shows parents and caregivers how the Library can help improve the success of their children in school. It may also present future funding opportunities.

Conclusion:

The *Ready for Reading* initiative will enable TPL to provide a more focused approach to all of our existing early and pre-literacy programs and will position TPL as the leader in the field of early literacy in Toronto and beyond. Reading is fundamental for success in life, and this program will guide generations of children into success with reading.

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List of Attachments:

Not applicable.