



## STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

### Social Service Team – Extension of Contract

**Date:** March 25, 2024  
**To:** Toronto Public Library Board  
**From:** City Librarian

#### SUMMARY

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The purpose of this report is to seek Toronto Public Library Board approval to extend the Toronto Public Library (TPL) Social Service Team pilot contract with Gerstein Crisis Centre through December 31, 2024. This extension will increase the total value of the contract beyond \$500,000, requiring Board approval.

This service was designed to offer low-barrier access to in-branch mental health and crisis support services and wellness and recovery programming, including referrals to other social service and health agencies and supports. The contract began April 1, 2023 as a one-year pilot to March 31, 2024 with a commitment of \$499,090, excluding Harmonized Sales Tax (HST).

With the documented success of the pilot, Gerstein Crisis Centre confirmed as Toronto Community Crisis Service (Toronto's 4th emergency service) anchor partner for the areas of Toronto that TPL's service operates in, and with donor funding confirmed, TPL wishes to extend the service contract through 2024.

The total value of the service contract with this extension commitment, covering the period April 1, 2023 to December 31, 2024, will be \$871,408, excluding HST. This contract is fully funded from donations to the Toronto Public Library Foundation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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### **The City Librarian recommends that the Toronto Public Library Board:**

1. approves a commitment with Gerstein Crisis Centre to continue to deliver TPL's Social Service Team initiative from April 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024, including:
  - a. a contract extension with cost not exceeding \$372,318 for a total April 1, 2023 to December 31, 2024 contract value of \$871,408, excluding HST.

## FINANCIAL IMPACT

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The total value of the commitment with Gerstein Crisis Centre is \$871,408 which is comprised of the contract extension value of \$372,318 from April 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024 and the original contract value of \$499,090 from April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024.

The cost of the Social Service Team initiative is included in TPL's approved operating budget. Gerstein Crisis Centre was awarded a one-year contract in a non-competitive procurement process for the period April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024 to provide TPL's Social Service Team pilot. The TPL Foundation committed to funding service through the end of 2024. Starting in 2025, funding for the service will be provided by the City of Toronto, as approved as part of the 2023 Operating Budget.

The Director, Finance & Treasurer has reviewed this financial impact statement and agrees with it.

## **ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PLAN**

This service supports many strategic plan priorities and goals including:

- Opening up of public space with embedded crisis workers supporting accessible, inclusive spaces and services that respond to the needs of TPL's most vulnerable customers;
- The service model focus on equity supporting everyone to feel welcome in TPL spaces including individuals experiencing vulnerabilities and crisis; and
- Support of the partnership enabler with TPL and Gerstein Crisis Centre working together to embed subject matter experts in library spaces, supporting both customers and library staff. This innovative partnership provides subject matter expertise with integrated social service connections alongside customer service work and trauma informed role modelling for staff.

## **EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

The Social Service Team initiative was developed as an equity-focused service approach to vulnerability. It is a community-based, non-medical, trauma-informed, harm reduction approach to crisis that respects individuals' abilities to define their own identities, experiences, and goals. The initiative provides a direct and free service to TPL's customers that are experiencing the often-intersecting vulnerabilities of mental health challenges, addictions, low income, and homelessness or precarious housing. The voices of people with lived experience guide and promote this innovative model for crisis support, wellness and recovery, and knowledge sharing. Due to structural barriers, many vulnerable customers have difficulty navigating and accessing basic resources and supports in the community. Although individuals experiencing homelessness may be the most visible population using library spaces, there are other vulnerable individuals using the library expected to benefit from accessing these social service supports at their point of need.

## **ISSUE BACKGROUND**

First identified as a service need following a 2019 Community Needs Assessment led by TPL's Social Worker and the Services to Vulnerable Persons

Committee, the Social Service Team Pilot model was defined and approved as a 2020-2024 TPL fundraising priority.

## COMMENTS

The Social Service Team pilot provides an on-site service offering low-barrier mental health and crisis supports to individuals accessing the library and builds the capacity of the library system. While anyone can access the service, the program is for Torontonians who are the most vulnerable and are unable to access the mental and physical health resources as well as support services required to improve their lives. This initiative serves as an access point for library users and connects them to resources outside the library setting such as mental health, primary care, housing, and recovery supports.

The Social Service Team pilot is available at four TPL branches, primarily focusing on services at Toronto Reference Library and Lillian H. Smith, with additional resources and programming available at Sanderson and Fort York.

Gerstein Crisis Centre is an anchor partner in the Toronto Community Crisis Service (TCCS) for the areas of Toronto that TPL's service operates in and was awarded under City of Toronto Ariba Document Number 3044861985. This connection is critical for the success of TPL's service to ensure integration with the TCCS partner network for housing, mental health and addictions referrals.

With the approval of this contract extension, the Social Service Team pilot, delivered in partnership with Gerstein Crisis Centre, will continue through to December 31, 2024.

## CONTACT

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## SIGNATURE

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City Librarian