

Toronto Public Library Programming for Women

Date:	October 26, 2015
To:	Toronto Public Library Board
From:	City Librarian

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to respond to the Toronto Public Library Board's request at its February 17, 2015 meeting to explore the feasibility of celebrating Women's History Month at the Library, and to provide a summary of current library programming targeted to women.

Toronto Public Library (TPL) offers a broad range of literary, educational and cultural programs throughout the year that celebrate the diversity of Toronto's many cultures, audiences and areas of interests. Women in Toronto are active and enthusiastic users of Toronto Public Library services, and attend a broad range of these programs at the Library. Recognizing this, TPL has developed both ongoing year-round programming targeted and of general interest to women, as well as a package of programming to mark International Women's Day in March.

Over the past several years, there has been an increasing number of formal celebrations and official declarations related to different cultures, audiences and areas of interest, often focused around "months" or "weeks" – for example: Senior's Month, National Literacy Day, Black History Month, Aboriginal Celebrations, Small Business Month, etc. While the Library celebrates several of these months during the formally designated timeframes with related packaged programming, it is not possible to celebrate them all. These larger-scale month-long celebrations require significant dedicated resources, and are most often developed and delivered through local and/or city-wide partnerships that offer the necessary content, expertise and resources to successfully deliver such comprehensive programming and promotion.

Rather than focusing on Women's History Month in October, TPL has, and will continue to allocate resources to highlight and celebrate the history, accomplishments and interests of women through packaged programming focused around International Women's Day – through branch programming and displays, the Thought Exchange Series, and through some premier programming in the Appel Salon.

Additional work will be done to expand the scope and raise the profile of women's programming by pursuing additional programming partnerships and increasing the Library's promotion and marketing efforts.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact to the 2015 operating budget resulting from this report.

The Director, Finance and Treasurer has reviewed this financial impact statement and is in agreement with it.

DECISION HISTORY

At its February 17, 2015 meeting, the Board heard a presentation from a member of the public, John Wilson, regarding the feasibility of Toronto Public Library hosting Women's History Month programming, similar to the programming the Library does around Black History and Asian Heritage Month celebrations.

In response, the Board directed staff:

“to explore the feasibility of celebrating Women's History Month and provide a summary of current programming related to women, and report back at the end of the Third Quarter 2015.”

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The Library develops and presents a broad range of programming throughout the year that celebrates the numerous and diverse cultures, audiences and interests in Toronto. The ways in which these programs are developed, delivered, packaged and promoted vary considerably, based on: the reach and relevancy of the programming related to TPL services, as well as to the community that the programming serves; the scope and scale of the programming; and the availability of library resources and expertise in developing, delivering and promoting the programming.

Over the past several years, there has been an increasing number of formal celebrations and official declarations related to different cultures, audiences and areas of interest, often focused around “months” or “weeks” – for example: Senior's Month, National Literacy Day, Black History Month, Aboriginal Celebrations, Small Business Month, etc. At different times, the Library has been approached to promote and support these and many other celebrations and commemorations – for example, Jewish Heritage, Italian Heritage, Holocaust Awareness, Islamic History, etc.

While the Library celebrates many of these months during the formally designated timeframes with related packaged programming, it is not possible to celebrate them all. These larger-scale month-long celebrations require significant dedicated resources, and are most often developed and delivered through local and/or city-wide partnerships that offer the necessary content, expertise and resources to successfully deliver such comprehensive

programming and promotion. So while the Library has not had the resources – and in many cases, the expertise – to support all of these celebrations and commemorations on an equal scale, it has strived to offer targeted, relevant programming wherever possible, and has looked for opportunities to partner to increase the quality and quantity of relevant programming and promotion for these areas of interest.

The Library also offers programming that celebrates the diversity of these cultures and interests throughout the city but that is not necessarily focused around a particular month or at a particular time of year. Because “women” is such a broad audience that the Library serves, in all neighbourhoods across the city, and spanning so many areas of interest and need, this has been TPL’s approach – to offer a very broad range of relevant library programs and services year round in branches across the city. This, in combination with the packaging and promotion of targeted programming around International Women’s Day, raises the profile of women and their interests and issues, and complements the many other library services available to this audience.

COMMENTS

Women in Toronto are active and enthusiastic users of Toronto Public Library services, and attend a broad range of programming at the Library. Many of these programs are developed specifically for women, while others are more generally targeted but tend to attract predominantly female audiences.

International Women’s Day

Over the past couple of years, TPL has developed a package of programming to mark International Women’s Day in March. In 2015, for two weeks around International Women’s Day, the Library delivered almost a dozen programs in ten branches across the city – programming that spanned topics as diverse as health, finance, family, missing and murdered indigenous women, and empowerment. These programs were promoted in-branch through the Library’s programming magazine, *What’s On*, and online on the Library’s website and through its social media channels. To complement this programming, branch staff were encouraged to organize book displays, show films and undertake programs about the lives of women. Attachment 1 summarizes the Library’s 2015 International Women’s Day programming and attendance.

Year-round Programming for Women

Throughout the year, the Library offers programming that expressly targets women’s issues and/or women’s audiences, covering such wide-ranging topics as history, literature, fashion, parenting, financial planning, small business and art. Attachment 2 shows a snapshot of the Library’s Fall 2015 programming targeted to women, and is indicative of the types of programs delivered throughout the year.

Many library programs are more generally targeted to women, are led by high profile or influential women, and/or simply tend to attract large female audiences; in particular:

- History: Programs related to the place of women in history, their trials and accomplishments are very popular with a broad range of audiences and cultures at TPL. For example, the Library's Thought Exchange program about Portuguese garment workers in Toronto attracted generations of garment workers who were eager to share their stories and experiences.
- Book clubs and literary programs: Some are specifically targeted to women (Older Women's Network (OWN) Feminist Book Group, Ladies First Book Club) and some present topics and books of particular interest to women.
- Residency Programs: TPL's many residency programs are led by influential and successful women – for example, the first two Entrepreneurs in Residence were women; several of TPL's Innovators in Residence have been women, as have the Writers and Illustrators in Residence. In addition to providing one-on-one consultation in their areas of expertise, the Residents run many workshops, programs and seminars as part of their residencies.
- Business and Personal Finance: TPL runs many of these programs that are specifically targeted to women and their issues – e.g. investment advice for older women, getting ahead in business, women and money, etc.
- Health and wellness programs: Many of the Library's health and wellness programs are implicitly aimed at women (bone health, breast cancer, etc.), and others are more generally of interest.
- Women's programming as part of Cultural/Heritage Celebrations: The Library's Black History Month, Aboriginal Celebrations, Pride programs, etc. very often include programming targeted to women.
- Parenting programs: Many of these are of particular interest to largely female audiences.

Plans for 2016

Staff continue to explore opportunities for additional year-round programming related and targeted to women and women's issues, to offer the programming more broadly across the city, and to raise the profile and awareness of this programming to an expanded audience.

In addition, TPL has allocated resources to once again highlight and celebrate International Women's Day, through branch programming and displays, the Thought Exchange Series, and through some premier programming in the Appel Salon. Additional work will be done to expand the scope and raise the profile of this programming by pursuing additional programming partnerships and increasing promotion and marketing efforts.

CONTACT

Linda Hazzan; Director, Communications, Programming & Customer Engagement;
Tel: 416-393-7214; E-mail: lhazzan@torontopubliclibrary.ca
Anne Bailey, Director, Branch Libraries; Tel: 416-393-7039;
E-mail: abailey@torontopubliclibrary.ca

SIGNATURE

Vickery Bowles
City Librarian