



Ready for Reading – Update

Date:	January 21, 2008
To:	Toronto Public Library Board
From:	City Librarian

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to update the Toronto Public Library Board on the progress of the *Ready for Reading* initiative.

In 2006, the Toronto Public Library (TPL) developed a strategy to deliver and promote all of the Library's programs and services for children from birth to 5 years with the brand, *Ready for Reading*. Based on the American Library Association's (ALA) *Every Child Ready to Read*, TPL's program focuses on early literacy and the methods to help parents and caregivers assist children in developing the skills needed to become a reader. Through 2006 and 2007, the program was developed, refined, marketed and delivered.

This report will highlight the successes of the *Ready for Reading* program and present new program developments. *Ready for Reading* will continue to position the Library as the leader and expert in the field of early literacy.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The cost of the program is being accommodated within the existing operating budget and could be enhanced with additional funding through the efforts of the Toronto Public Library Foundation.

The Director, Finance & Treasurer has reviewed this Financial Impact statement and is in agreement with it.

DECISION HISTORY

Toronto Public Library has been delivering quality storytimes for children for decades. TPL developed *Ready for Reading* in 2006, basing the initiative on the *Every Child Ready to Read* program from ALA. The first information report, "Ready for Reading – A Children's Early Literacy Initiative" was presented to the TPL Board on September 18, 2006. A verbal report on *Ready for Reading* with an unveiling of the *Ready for Reading* support materials was presented at the February 26, 2007 meeting.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Research shows that children get ready for reading years before they start school and that parents and caregivers have an important role in laying the groundwork for the development of early literacy skills in their children. *Literacy Matters: A Call For Action*, a 2007 report from the TD Bank Financial Group makes the point that “Canadians should be worried about the state of literacy.” Frank McKenna in the introduction reports that “Almost 40% of Canadian youth do not have adequate literacy levels.” He goes on to state, “Our literacy challenge must be viewed as a national priority.”

Toronto Public Library is one of the leaders in early literacy in Canada and *Ready for Reading* continues to strengthen TPL’s voice in the early literacy field, while guiding generations of children into reading success.

COMMENTS

The goals and objectives that have provided the framework for the *Ready for Reading* program are:

- to enhance the quality of TPL’s programming and services to children birth to 5 by incorporating *Ready for Reading* principles;
- to expand TPL programs and services by developing new *Ready for Reading* – focused programs and services;
- to expand the reach of programs and services by taking *Ready for Reading* principles into the community;
- to improve the literacy of Toronto children, especially those in newcomer and low-income families.

The core of the program is to help parents and caregivers develop six basic skills in children birth through age 5. The skills are:

- Print Motivation;
- Phonological Awareness;
- Vocabulary;
- Narrative Skills;
- Print Awareness;
- Letter Knowledge.

Accomplishments to date include:

Staff Training:

Two-hundred and forty-one (241) staff have been trained in the philosophy and delivery of the *Ready for Reading* programs.

Children's Programs:

All preschool programs have been branded with *Ready for Reading* and adults have been brought into the programs. Adults, both parents and caregivers, are invited into the programs to help them understand the program philosophy and encourage them to continue to work with their young children at home.

In every district a *Baby Time*, *Toddler Time* and *Preschool Time* can be found to support program demand in that geographical area. While statistics have not been compiled for the complete year of 2007, staff report growing attendance, enthusiastic participation and appreciative response.

Parent, Caregiver and Educator Programs:

A pilot Early Literacy Workshop program has been developed and delivered in the Regent Park Community. These workshops focus on the strategies that parents and caregivers can use to assist children in developing reading skills. The workshops will continue to be developed and delivered in 2008.

Collections:

Children's picture and board books which best support the six skills in the *Ready for Reading* program have been identified. Specially designed stickers have been placed on these books to help parents find them in branch displays. Additional *Ready for Reading* books have been purchased to support the increased demand for children's picture books.

Branches have tidied their preschool collections and mounted displays using the materials provided by Marketing. This makes the Library more inviting to parents and children and resource materials easier to access. Customer response has been favourable.

Outreach:

Staff have made presentations about *Ready for Reading* at the following Conferences, Universities and Community events:

- Partnerships in Action Conference, January 26, 2007;
- MacAulay Child Development Centre, May 25, 2007;
- Word on the Street, September 30, 2007;
- Storytimes at the Ontario Science Centre (monthly);
- U of T – Faculty of Information Studies, October 17, 2007;
- Ryerson – Early Childhood Education Class, October 29, 2007;
- Best Start Conference, *Working Together: Toronto's vision for children*. November 8, 2007.

At each of these presentations the response has been overwhelmingly enthusiastic. In all cases attendees have wanted more information and additional handouts.

Marketing & Communications:

- High quality materials have been developed and distributed to promote the program. All materials promote the six skills needed to get children ready for reading and are aimed at parents and caregivers.

- In addition to the materials distributed through regular branch contacts, the Kindergarten Outreach materials were redesigned using the *Ready for Reading* branding.
- A new *Ready for Reading* library card has been developed for preschool children.
- The TD Summer Reading Club included support materials to help parents use the program with preschool children.
- *First and Best*: A new initiative in 2007 was the introduction of the *First and Best* Booklist. Ten new Canadian books representing the best new books of the year that help build early literacy were highlighted on a booklist which was marketed not only in Toronto, but also across the country (Attachment 1). The books were advertised in *The Globe and Mail* and highlighted on local and national radio and on local television. The *Toronto Star* did a cover story on the *Ready for Reading* initiative and highlighted the ten books. The success of the initiative was immediate as all ten titles now have a large number of holds placed on them. This is unusual as few picture books have long holds lists.

Future Developments

***KidsStops*:**

As branch libraries are being renovated, *KidsStops* are being included in appropriate projects. The *KidsStop* will be an area within the children's department with interactive activities for children and adults which support the six prereading skills. The first *KidsStop* will be opened in the S. Walter Stewart Branch in 2008.

***Sunday Storytimes*:**

Recognizing that many families have limited time during the work-week to come to the Library, TPL will pilot a Sunday storytime project in selected branches in priority neighbourhoods beginning in the Spring of 2008. Like all storytimes held in TPL, these programs will highlight the *Ready for Reading* principles.

***Workplace Outreach*:**

Presentations for various workplaces are under development. The first workplace *Ready for Reading* workshop will be held at the Peak Frean factory in early 2008. The purpose of these workshops is to make parents aware of the rich resources at the Library and encourage them to bring their children – or grandchildren to the Library and get a Library card. Knowing that many newcomer and low income parents do not use the resources of the Library, TPL will bring information to them at the workplace.

Future Challenges

As the success of the *Ready for Reading* initiative continues to grow, demand for both collections and services will grow. Branches are seeing increased demand for preschool materials and programs, and there is demand from outside groups both for speakers about the program and for materials to distribute.

A Resource Guide with in-depth information for parents and caregivers has been developed and will be produced when funding is available.

The Toronto Public Library Foundation is working to secure additional funds to support the *Ready for Reading* initiatives.

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: First and Best Bookmark