

City Librarian's Report for December 2023

Below is my report for the December 2023 [Toronto Public Library \(TPL\) Board meeting](#). It summarizes key activities in support of the priorities outlined in our [strategic plan](#). This report covers items that are not part of the Board agenda package.

Opening up our public space

1000 Reads Before Kindergarten



TPL launched the 1000 Reads Before Kindergarten online reading challenge to help parents and caregivers build a lifelong love of reading and critical early literacy skills in their children from birth to five years old. The goal is for families to read a thousand books together before kindergarten. Families have the flexibility to read at their own pace and choose books in any format and language. They can track their progress on the Beanstack Tracker App or on downloadable log sheets, earn certificates, get book recommendations and more.

The challenge provides parents with a fun and manageable strategy for introducing reading, encourages parent-child bonding and aligns with TPL's Ready for Reading suite of programs and services. Studies show that reading together helps build a lifelong love of reading and sets a foundation for school success. In just a few short weeks, we've had over 110 families join the challenge and expect this number to grow in the coming months.

Launch of first colour edition of Young Voices Magazine



Teen contributors, teen volunteers, guest editors and staff at North York Central Library.

TPL recently launched the first ever colour edition of Young Voices Magazine, TPL's publication of writing and art created and selected by Toronto teens. It was exciting to gather together this year's teen contributors, teen volunteers, guest editors and staff to launch the magazine. Our Young Voices Teen Council members selected the 88 published pieces from a total of 480 submissions with support from guest editors and staff. We congratulated the talented young writers and artists featured in the magazine and heard from them about their work and their

excitement about being published. They were joined by friends, family members and teachers at the event at North York Central Library.

Broadening Toronto's digital access and inclusion

Inaugural Digital Expo spotlights AI and emerging technology



Panelists from [The Importance of Understanding and Staying Safe with New Technologies that Use AI Models](#) (left to right): Angelin Francis, Alice Xu, Daniel Konikoff, Nisarg Shah.

On September 30, TPL welcomed nearly 100 guests to its inaugural Digital Expo at North York Central Library. Local agencies and industry leaders in the fields of artificial intelligence (AI), smart cities, data privacy, big data, and open data who discussed the importance of knowing and staying safe in today's ever-changing digital world.

The event began with a keynote about trustworthy AI by [Associate Professor Peter Lewis](#) from Ontario Tech University, and concluded with a team from York University presenting their research on clickbait and [Terms of Use](#) when using the internet. The Expo also featured exhibitors from local communities including Canada Learning Code, Provocation Ideas Festival, the City of Toronto Connected

Community Team, and Literacy AI. The Expo kicked off Digital Inclusion Week, a week that promotes digital literacy and inclusion through technology training programs.

What does it mean to be a digital citizen?



Pictured left to right: TPL Board member Councillor Paul Ainslie, Fiona O'Connor, Ramona Pringle, Kathryn Hill, Lisa Fender, Jolin Joseph and Jarret Leaman.

On October 25, TPL celebrated Digital Citizen Day with [MediaSmarts](#) by hosting a thought-provoking panel discussion, featuring academic, not-for-profit, media and tech sector experts, about the challenges and opportunities faced by digital citizens today. TPL Board Member Councillor Paul Ainslie opened the event, held at Toronto Reference Library, with a few words on the importance of what it means to be a digital citizen. During the moderated discussion, various themes were explored including strategies to foster a more inclusive online community, combating online hate, how to stop the spread of false information, and ethical considerations online users should pay attention to when using emerging technologies, such as [fact checking](#). The lively discussion was enjoyed by nearly 40 attendees.

Building pathways for workforce development

Successful inaugural Autism Employment Expo supports community need



The Autism Employment Expo kicked off with a keynote from Andreas Souvaliotis, entrepreneur and author of the memoir, 'Misfit: Autistic. Gay. Immigrant. Changemaker.'

On October 26, over 200 guests attended TPL's first Autism Employment Expo at North York Central Library's [Concourse Event Space](#). Autistic job seekers had the opportunity to hear inspiring talks, participate in skills-building workshops, meet employers and service providers, and connect with TPL resources. The event was featured on [Toronto.com](#) and [CBC Metro Morning](#), helping attract visitors from as far as Parry Sound, Ontario and Buffalo, New York.

Feedback was very positive. One guest noted in a survey that "there was an undeniable mood of hope, progress, understanding and inclusivity... (TPL) can show the way for (other) organizations to follow." Another guest said "the event was extremely well organized... Fidget toys and colour-coded communication labels were a thoughtful touch that made us feel seen and understood."

The Autism Employment Expo was the successful submission from the 2022 City Librarian's Innovation Challenge, submitted by librarians Tim Feller and Melanie LaFleche. The team conducted research and consulted with autistic adults and service providers, helping to shape the sensory-aware event which included sensory kit materials and a quiet room for guests.

Providing the vital ingredients for a democratic society

Tower of Banned Books art display



Tower of Banned Books art installation displayed in the atrium of Toronto Reference Library

On October 25, Toronto Reference Library unveiled the Tower of Banned Books art installation created by Canadian artist Kelly McCray. The tower is prominently displayed on the main floor of the library and will remain until the end of the year. It comprises 400 used books, many of which have been challenged, censored or banned over the years.

The Tower of Banned Books is part of TPL's intellectual freedom series exploring what's at stake when intellectual freedom is threatened. The installation draws awareness to the issue of threats to intellectual freedom and encourages conversation about the consequences of literary censorship. TPL recognizes the repercussions of literary censorship and is committed to promoting and defending intellectual freedom.

Our Dance of Revolution film screening



TPL staff join Mykel Hall and Hollywood Jade on stage to commemorate the completion of the program. From left to right: Lesley Freedman, Rachelle Gooden, Hollywood Jade, Mykel Hall (DJ Blackcat), Courtney Cardozo, and Alice Moore.

Toronto Public Library's 2SLGBTQ+ Services Committee collaborated with Equity and Inclusion Services to host a special public screening of the multiple award-winning film [Our Dance of Revolution](#) on November 2. The film follows the powerful history of Toronto's Black Queer Community and the undeniable contributions the group continues to make to the fabric of our city. The screening

took place at Palmerston branch and featured renowned Black Queer guests, Mykel Hall (DJ Blackcat) and interviewer Hollywood Jade. Program attendees participated in a Q&A segment after the film which generated profound conversation about honouring those who have paved the road before us. This event highlights our commitment to increase programming which reflects and celebrates 2SLGBTQ+ communities through an intersectional lens.

Library Settlement Partnerships (LSP) celebrates its 16th anniversary



The Toronto Si-Zhu Chinese Music Ensemble performing "Dance of the Golden Snake" at Toronto Reference Library as part of LSP Week celebrations. (Marcia Dubskey/Toronto Observer)

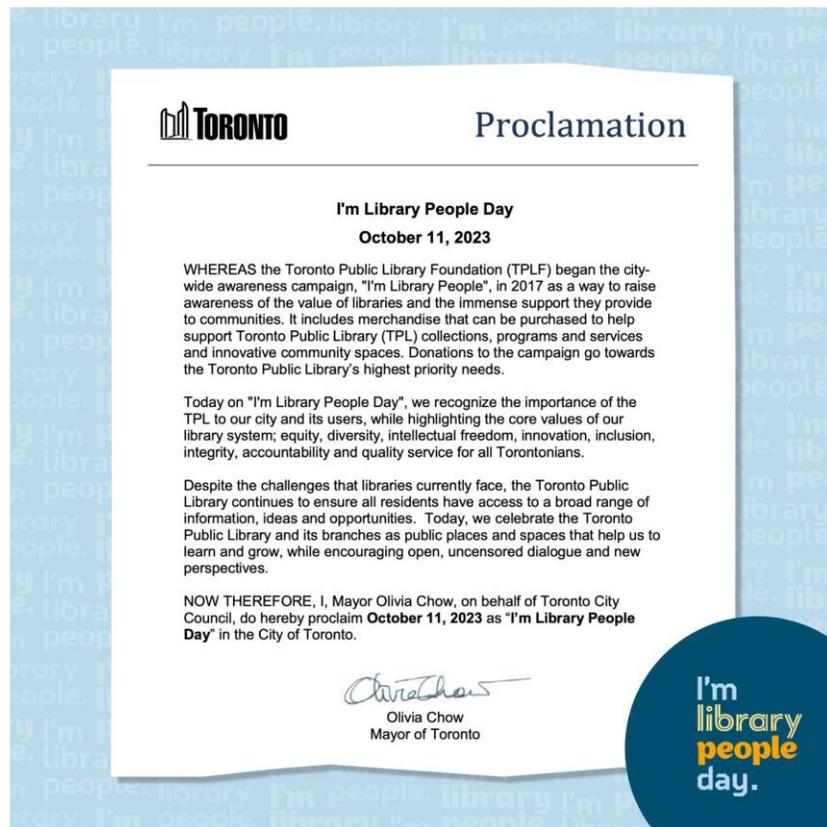
Library Settlement Partnerships (LSP) celebrates its 16th anniversary this October; in-person events returned for the first time since 2019. TPL has been helping newcomers with their settlement needs through LSP by working with seven local settlement agencies since 2007. A recent article in the [Toronto Observer](#) featured the performance by the Toronto Si-Zhu Chinese Music Ensemble, just one of 14 events that happened across Toronto from October 10 to 21. The article also highlighted the impact and importance of LSP services for newcomers and this

year's LSP Week theme "Build Connections" - empowering everyone to rebuild personal and social connections following the pandemic.

At this time, all 15 LSP branches offer one-on-one referral support and group sessions. This service is funded by [Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada \(IRCC\)](#).

Watch the [Toronto Si-Zhu Chinese Music Ensemble](#) performing "Dance of the Golden Snake" at Toronto Reference Library as part of LSP Week celebrations. (Credit: Marcia Dubskey/Toronto Observer).

I'm Library People Day in Toronto



Mayor Chow's proclamation for I'm Library People Day in the City of Toronto

Mayor Olivia Chow proclaimed October 11 as I'm Library People Day in the City of Toronto. Library lovers took to social media throughout the day to share their appreciation for TPL, highlighting the exceptional programs, service, spaces and collections available to all Torontonians. In celebration of the day, the [Foundation](#) launched a limited edition I'm Library People mug with partial proceeds being donated to the Library (available to purchase at Balzac's Café locations and [Spacing Store](#) at 401 Richmond St. W).

Investing in staff and an innovative service culture

Youth Services Professional Development Day



Staff attending the Youth Services Professional Development Day

On November 1, staff from across TPL gathered for an afternoon of learning and networking at this year's Youth Services Professional Development Day. The event

drew 72 staff at various levels in both youth-dedicated and more generalist roles. Keynote speaker Lillian Allen, Toronto's Poet Laureate, recounted stories of growth in the young people she has mentored as a creative writing professor and the pride she takes in her vocation working with youth. Representatives from youth-serving agency Strides Toronto provided an overview of their services, and TPL staff member Hailey Mullock shared strategies for program planning.

Lisa Heggum, manager of Youth Services at TPL, highlighted the year's achievements and next year's areas of focus including creating more opportunities for learning and collaboration in TPL's youth staff community. In table discussions, staff shared their experiences and ideas about programming and identified priorities for the new year. With the inclusion of ice breakers as well as meditation and stretch breaks throughout, the afternoon was designed to strike a balance between thoughtful presentations and discussions and fun, grounded and joyful play, movement and rest.