

City Librarian's Report for June 2024

Below is my report for the June 2024 [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

Celebrating Customer Appreciation Day



Customer Appreciation Day at Long Branch library with Branch Head Stephanie DeConcily

On May 25, we hosted Customer Appreciation Day across our 100 library branches. Since our cybersecurity incident last fall, TPL has experienced an incredible wave of support and goodwill from customers. With service reinstatement nearly complete, we wanted to acknowledge and thank everyone for their patience.

Branches offered refreshments, prizes, activities, book sales, music performances and more. Thank you to our staff for helping us make the day special, and to all of our customers who have stuck by our side.

Gerrard/Ashdale branch turns 100



TPL staff with Mayor Olivia Chow, Councillor Paula Fletcher, Head of Gerrard BIA Tasneem Bandukwla and local business owner Mit Patel

On May 15, Gerrard/Ashdale branch celebrated its 100th anniversary. Celebrations commenced with a choir performance by local students from Roden/Equinox school and words from attendees, including Mayor Olivia Chow, Councillor Paula Fletcher and MP Julie Dabrusin.

A local history panel was also unveiled by TPL's Senior Services Specialist, Fiona Smith. The panel was created by Special Collections staff, Fiona Smith and Katie Muth, who worked hard delving into the long history of the Gerrard/Ashdale branch, with support from Digital Content Lead David Sprague who shared throwback photos on social media.

The celebration finished as all birthdays should, with cake! A variety of programs were also held throughout the month, including the creation of a time capsule, an art show and a local history talk with historian Joanne Doucette.

TPL celebrates Canadian Children's Book Week



Authors Wanda Taylor and Deborah Kerbel at Canadian Children's Book Week events

Every year, the Canadian Children's Book Centre hosts [Canadian Children's Book Week](#) (CCBW), a series of virtual and in-person programs that connect Canadian authors, illustrators and storytellers to children and teens across the country to inspire a love of reading. During this year's CCBW, from April 28 to May 4, TPL participated by offering two special online events featuring award-winning authors, [Wanda Taylor](#) and [Deborah Kerbel](#). Schools across Toronto were invited, and a total of 800 students and educators from 30 classes attended.

In the first event, Wanda Taylor discussed diversity, friendship and kindness with students from grades 4 to 6 while reading from her award-winning book, [The Grover School Pledge](#). In the second event, students from JK to grade 3 enjoyed Deborah Kerbel's presentation on her award-winning book, [Sun Dog](#). Participants were delighted to have the opportunity to connect with both authors and actively take part in this year's CCBW celebrations.

TPL attends the Forest of Reading Festival



TPL staff at the Forest of Reading Festival (left to right): Carolina Cadenas, Max Hare, Patty Domski, Alex Lai and Ana Malespin

On May 14 and 15, Children’s and Youth Services staff teamed up to host a TPL booth at the [Forest of Reading Festival](#). The Festival, presented by the [Ontario Library Association](#), is Canada’s largest literary event for young readers and offers numerous activities throughout the day, including author and illustrator book signings and workshops, games and crafts. The Festival also includes award ceremonies for [The Forest of Reading](#).

Over 2,000 kids and teens were excited to engage with TPL staff, who promoted TPL programs and services, including [Summer Wonder](#), [TD Summer Reading Club](#), [Digital Innovation Hubs](#), [Young Voices](#) and [The List](#). TPL’s 3D printer was a popular attraction, with both kids and teens gathering to watch it print and to ask questions about our large 3D printed figure. TPL staff made many new friends at the event and some kids were so impressed that they even asked staff for autographs! It was two fun days of celebrating Canadian authors and illustrators and sharing the joy of reading.

Spotlight on brain health at Toronto Reference Library



Boost Your Brain Health panel at Toronto Reference Library

On May 9, the Business, Science and Technology department at Toronto Reference Library and Adult Programs staff partnered with Baycrest Academy for Research and Education for “Boost Your Brain Health,” a panel discussion and information fair.

More than 100 online and in-person attendees heard from a panel of experts about innovations in dementia research, caring for loved ones living with dementia, and practical ways to address modifiable dementia risk factors such as caregiving for a person living with dementia or social isolation and loneliness.

Following the panel, there were information tables and research demonstrations related to brain health and dementia caregiving. Among the many opportunities, attendees tried out a virtual reality simulation training for dementia caregivers and learned how brain health links to nutrition, sleep, hearing health and more.

Thank you to our collaborators at Baycrest. This event was funded by a Cafe Scientifique grant from the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR). The panel presentation was livestreamed and is [available for replay](#).

Leading to Reading with certified therapy dogs



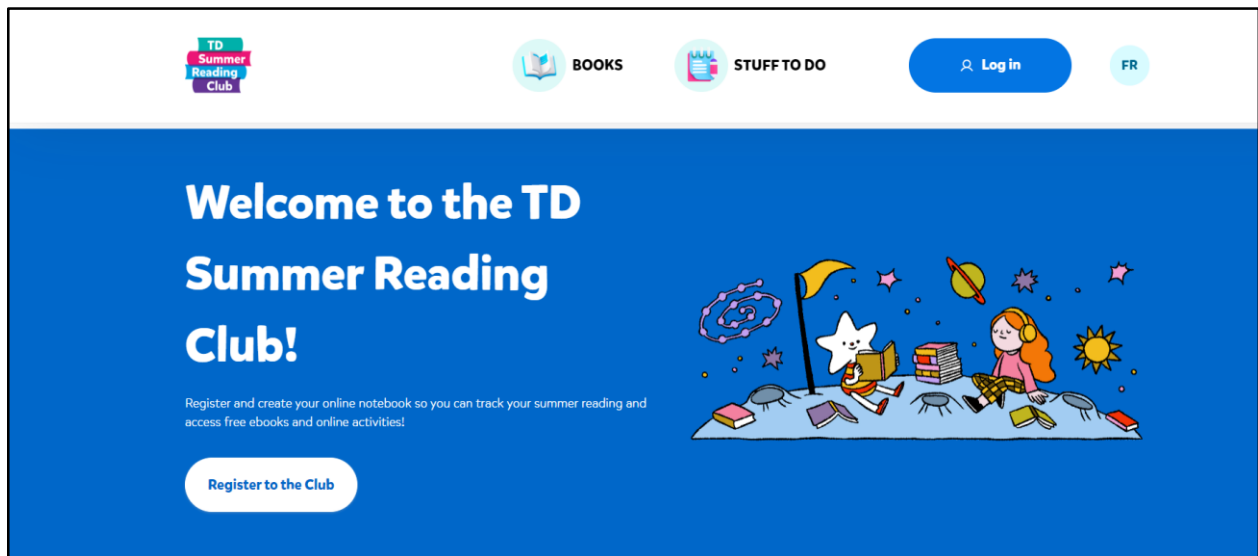
Leading to Reading with a Leonberger named Bison

Last month, TPL, in collaboration with One Health Partners, introduced a pilot program where children had the unique opportunity to read to certified therapy dogs during Leading to Reading sessions. Research has shown that reading aloud to a dog has positive effects on reading abilities in young children and enhances comprehension more effectively than reading to an adult. Interacting with animals can also reduce anxiety, and the nature of therapy dogs can help children feel more relaxed and confident while reading.

Since April, approximately 23 Leading to Reading pairs have participated in the program at Agincourt branch, and the response has been incredibly positive. Several volunteers expressed that reading with dogs positively reinforces children's reading capabilities and confidence in reading aloud to others.

This initiative ran until June 12 and aligns with TPL's commitment to promoting children's overall well-being and fostering literacy skills.

TD Summer Reading Club's new website



The new TD Summer Reading Club website

TPL, in partnership with Library and Archives Canada and with generous funding from TD Bank Group, launched a new [TD Summer Reading Club \(TDSRC\) website](#) on June 10.

The new site modernizes processes for TDSRC registration and material orders while providing real-time online participation and survey data for libraries to evaluate and improve their local reading club throughout the summer. Kids can now comment on each other's posts, increasing interactivity and engagement. To make reading tracking easier for families, parents and caregivers have the option of creating their own accounts linked to their kids'.

The 2024 national TDSRC program will kick off with a bilingual launch event on June 20, hosted by Westmount Public Library in Quebec. The event will be attended by Mayor Christina Smith, Councillor and Library Commissioner Elisabeth Roux, as well as retired Member of Parliament and former astronaut Marc Garneau.

Staff profiles and reporting features will launch in August. Visit www.tdsrc.ca to check out the new site and enjoy a Canadian Space Agency video featuring [astronaut Joshua Kutryk!](#)

Broadening Toronto's digital access and inclusion

Seniors' Digital Literacy Community Librarian pilot a resounding success



Seniors' Digital Literacy Community Librarian team in February 2024. Pictured from left to right: (back row) Erik Pinter, Kimberly Thomson, Elvia Lanuza, (front row) Elizabeth Sallese, Rabia Pirani and Cathy Duong.

Since 2022, TPL's Community Librarians have delivered Seniors' Digital Literacy services at Toronto Seniors Housing Corporation (TSHC) buildings to improve technology access and digital literacy among seniors. The pilot, generously funded by an Anonymous Lead Donor, Richard and Joan Boxer, The Catherine and Maxwell Meighen Foundation, and other donors, has served 6,691 seniors from June 2022 to April 2024.

Within that period, Community Librarians delivered 500 programs with 4,020 participants, 98 outreach events reaching 2,113 people, and 540 Book-a-Librarian sessions. They also issued 253 library cards, distributed 500 laptops and loaned 211 Wi-Fi hotspots. An initiative in collaboration with TSHC and Baycrest Health Sciences distributed 116 laptops at one TSHC location—reaching nearly every

resident in the building.

Participants have shown strong appreciation for this initiative and enjoy connecting with other seniors as part of a group. Many stated that they plan to stay in touch with the friends they made in the classes, a significant outcome towards reducing social isolation and loneliness among older adults.

With the resounding success and outstanding impact of the project, the service became permanently operational in May 2024. TPL celebrates the City of Toronto's decision to permanently fund this initiative and continue providing library services and digital literacy training at seniors' point of need for years to come.

Building pathways for workforce development

Hospitality and Tourism Job Fair



Hospitality and Tourism Job Fair at Cedarbrae branch

On April 26, Cedarbrae branch hosted a Hospitality and Tourism Job Fair in partnership with Springboard, a local organization connecting residents with community resources and support.

The event welcomed 340 job seekers and generated extremely positive feedback. Attendees learned about various roles in the Hospitality and Tourism industry and connected with employers offering positions ranging from entry-level to management roles. TPL staff issued 82 library cards, connected with attendees and shared relevant information about library programs, services and resources.

Providing the vital ingredients for a democratic society

TPL partners with the Ukrainian Bookshelf project



Me with Oleh Nikolenko, the Consul General of Ukraine in Toronto, and Petro Schturyyn of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, at North York Central Library

This month, we joined the Ukrainian Bookshelf project, an initiative created by the First Lady of Ukraine Olena Zelenska. Through the project, TPL received a donation of approximately 200 new adult and children's contemporary Ukrainian books which have been placed at North York Central Library.

I attended the official launch of the collection on June 10 with Oleh Nikkolenko, the Consul General of Ukraine in Toronto, and Petro Schturyyn of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress. At the event, the Consul General shared a story about a recent devastating strike on a major publisher in Ukraine, and reflected that "the Ukrainian Bookshelf project is sheltering and safeguarding Ukrainian books and

culture just as Canada is sheltering and safeguarding Ukrainians fleeing the war.”

The Ukrainian Bookshelf aims to foster cultural ties between countries and promote Ukrainian literature, arts, customs and history. The collection represents a cultural bridge between the Ukrainian community in Toronto and their homeland, while also sharing Ukrainian heritage with Torontonians.

Libraries, public space and democratic values



Me with Tommi Laitio at Toronto Reference Library

On May 27, I spoke with award-winning urbanist Tommi Laitio about the important role libraries play in the stewardship of public space. The event was watched live by an inspired audience in the Jack Rabinovitch Reading Room at Toronto Reference Library, as well as online by over 300 library staff across Canada, and is part of our series exploring [what's at stake](#) when intellectual freedom is threatened.

Drawing on practical examples from around the world, the conversation explored how library staff and leaders can build and maintain spaces that promote openness, play and imagination, while being proactive about the safety of all visitors and the well-being of front-line staff. The discussion considered the virtues of *convivencia*, a cooperative state between harmony and open conflict, which emphasizes practice, effort, negotiation and accommodation. It also examined the

value of libraries as spaces of inclusive place-making where people can learn to convene and coexist with others.

[Watch a replay of the discussion.](#)

TPL at Pride Toronto's Community Connect



2SLGBTQ+ Services Committee and Pride Alliance members at Pride Toronto's Community Connect at Amos Waites Park in Etobicoke.

On May 24, our 2SLGBTQ+ Services Committee and Pride Alliance participated in Pride Toronto's Community Connect at Amos Waites Park in Etobicoke. Community Connect events are hosted in areas outside of the downtown core to create more 2SLGBTQ+ visibility and awareness across the city.

We had the opportunity to showcase TPL's diverse and expansive [Pride Collection](#), and display an array of great 2SLGBTQ+ titles from our local Mimico Centennial branch. We also highlighted our year-round 2SLGBTQ+ programming that happens at all branches, including Drag Performer and Rainbow Storytimes, book clubs and film screenings.

This outreach aligns with TPL's [commitment to equity](#) and illustrates our support of 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion through our staff, spaces, collections and programs. We look forward to future collaborations with Pride Toronto and other 2SLGBTQ+ facing organizations.

TPL at Toronto Newcomer Day



Toronto Newcomer Day visitors lining up to register for library membership at TPL's booth.

On May 23, TPL participated in the 10th annual [Toronto Newcomer Day](#) at Nathan Phillips Square. The event welcomes newcomers to Toronto, connects them to a wide range of services and recognizes their contributions to the city. More than 240 newcomers engaged with library staff and learned about TPL programs and services at the information fair. Staff also issued more than 70 new library cards at the event.

Special pre-Newcomer Day events took place on May 8 at Cedarbrae and Parliament Street branches. Over 120 participants were excited to learn about Cuban and Brazilian drumming from Joaquin Nunez and the steelpan from Suzette Vidale. Many also tried their hands at playing these musical instruments while others danced to the beats.

CN Tower joins tpl:map



Last month, we welcomed the [addition of the CN Tower](#) to our tpl:map program. Nearly 80,000 customers logged onto the [tpl:map site](#) on May 16, many in pursuit of a CN Tower pass, demonstrating an overwhelming interest in the attraction. Through the online portal, a valid adult Toronto Public Library cardholder may reserve a general admission pass for themselves and up to three others (maximum two adults). Passes are subject to availability.

Other recent partner additions to tpl:map include the Hot Docs Festival, The Royal Conservatory of Music, Tafelmusik and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. The availability of passes for these attractions depends on the operating season of each partner.

Since 2007, tpl:map (formerly known as the Museum + Arts Pass) has grown in popularity with over one million passes borrowed, expanding free access to Toronto's arts, cultural experiences and attractions. Full borrowing rules and a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section are available at [tpl:map](#).

TPL's "Kits for Kyiv" reach children in Kyiv



Children in Kyiv unboxing TPL's activity kits

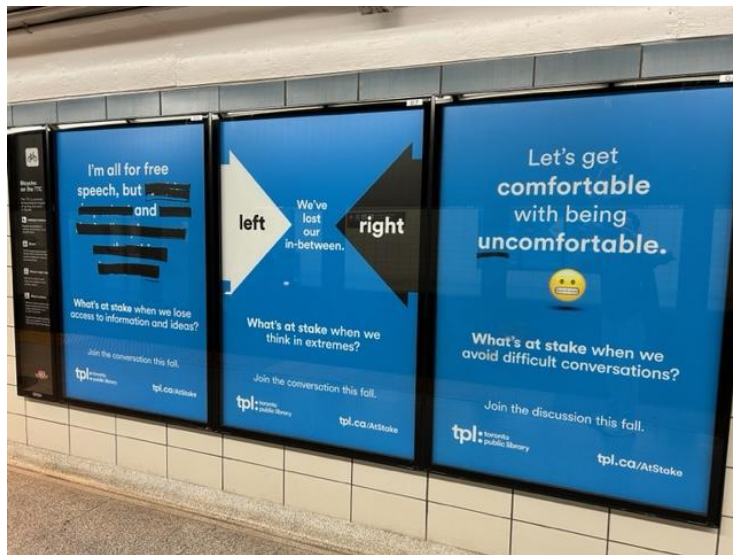
Last fall, TPL partnered with T.G. Shevchenko Central Library for Children of Kyiv to engage students in grades 3, 4 and 5 in designing activity kits for other children their age to encourage innovation, foster empathy and create shared connections.

Following a successful event at North York Central Library, where 106 kits were created, all kits made their way to Kyiv and were distributed in library programs and nearby schools last month. [Children were thrilled to receive the kits, and eager to respond to the challenge.](#)

The activity kits encouraged recipients to tackle one of three design thinking STEAM challenges: imagine and build a prototype of a totally new instrument, a purpose-driven robot, or a futuristic creature. The kits also included craft materials and handwritten notes of inspiration.

This initiative was offered with support from Mayor Olivia Chow's office and with participation from students and educators at McKee Public School in Toronto.

TPL in the top 10 for the IFLA PressReader International Marketing Award



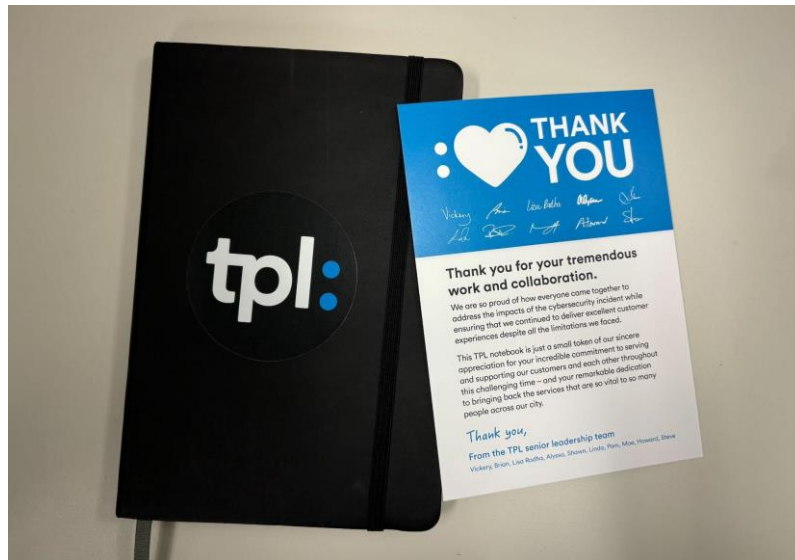
TPL's What's at Stake campaign posters in a TTC station

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) recently announced TPL's What's at Stake marketing campaign as one of the top 10 winning submissions for the 2024 IFLA PressReader International Marketing Award, and the only North American library system in the top 10. This award recognizes creative, results-oriented library marketing projects or campaigns from 2023, encouraging marketing in libraries and allowing libraries to share marketing expertise globally.

In September 2023, we launched our What's at Stake campaign to raise awareness and understanding of the current attacks on intellectual freedom and encourage people to engage with the issue. The initiative included a multi-channel marketing campaign and robust [programming series](#), all of which asked audiences to consider: "What's at Stake when intellectual freedom is threatened?"

Investing in staff and an innovative service culture

Celebrating our staff



A notebook and note of appreciation distributed to all TPL staff – a small token of appreciation from TPL's senior leadership team.

To thank TPL staff for their tremendous work and collaboration while we dealt with the impacts of the cybersecurity incident, the senior leadership team distributed a note of appreciation, along with a branded TPL notebook, to all staff across the organization. A video was also created, highlighting some of the incredible work and accomplishments of our staff. Thank you to our dedicated staff for their commitment to serving and supporting our customers during this challenging time.

TPL's Innovation Symposium spotlights the future of libraries

On May 31, nearly 300 attendees from around the world participated in TPL's annual virtual Innovation Symposium.

The event kicked off with a library leaders panel that I moderated, featuring senior leaders from Boston and Seattle public libraries, the British Library and the National Library Board of Singapore. We spoke about the opportunities and challenges facing libraries around the world and how libraries are preparing for the future.

Three lightning talks offered glimpses into innovative initiatives across the globe. Featured projects included artificial intelligence at New York Public Library, an ongoing civic engagement project in Belgium, and a Canadian initiative to help librarians share their most innovative ideas with each other.

The Symposium concluded with a keynote by Dr. Sandra Hirsh from San Jose State University on her new book, [Library 2035: Imagining the Next Generation of Libraries](#).

[View a recording of the Symposium.](#)

Introducing TED Tuesdays



One of many TED courses available to staff

As spring is a time for new growth and change, TPL's Learning & Development team introduced a "TED Tuesdays" initiative, curating an eight-week series that featured brief courses and supporting resources for staff.

TED began in 1984 as a conference where Technology, Entertainment and Design converged, and today it spans worldwide communities and initiatives exploring everything from science and business to education, arts and global issues. In addition to the hundreds of TED Talks curated from annual conferences, TED produces short video series and animated TED-Ed lessons, many of which can be found in TPL's staff learning management system.

Over the eight-week period, 238 staff completed 526 courses about general topics related to health and well-being, as well as strategies for improving work life.