

City Librarian's Report for May 2024

Below is my report for the May 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

Period equity at TPL



Period product dispenser in a library washroom

Earlier this year, we began offering free period products in all TPL public washrooms. Period product dispensers have been installed in each of our washrooms to address period inequity and create more welcoming and inclusive spaces in our city.

According to a 2023 report from [Plan International Canada](#), one in four Canadians who menstruate struggle to afford menstrual products. Providing free menstrual products not only meets a basic essential need but also confronts the stigma and financial barriers associated with menstruation.

This initiative follows our successful six-month period equity pilot with [The Period Purse](#) in 2022 at Malvern and Sanderson branches. You can now find all TPL branches offering free period products on the [Period Pin](#) map.

Symphony Storytime for Neurodiverse Children



Symphony Storytime for Neurodiverse Children at S. Walter Stewart branch

Last month, Children’s Services and S. Walter Stewart branch collaborated with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra (TSO) to design and host Symphony Storytime for Neurodiverse Children, in celebration of Autism Awareness Month.

The inclusive program blended literacy and music education in a sensory-friendly environment, making it especially welcoming to neurodiverse children and their families. Participants enjoyed stories accompanied by live music from a TSO cellist who, along with library staff, engaged the group to sing and dance along.

The resoundingly positive feedback from attendees reflected their gratitude and desire to see more library programs specifically designed for neurodiverse children. Families expressed their appreciation for the thoughtful inclusivity of the event, highlighting the importance of providing spaces where neurodiverse children can not only participate but also connect with others and fully engage in enriching activities.

Biblio Bash raises over \$1 million for newcomer services at TPL



Biblio Bash gala in the atrium of Toronto Reference Library

The Toronto Public Library Foundation surpassed all fundraising records, reaching \$1,071,550 in support of TPL. Presented by Fitzrovia, Biblio Bash welcomed library lovers, business leaders, philanthropists and city builders to the transformed Toronto Reference Library for an unforgettable experience. Attended by 38 notable authors and 425 guests, their sold-out black tie gala raised funds to launch new welcome resources in 40 languages and expand critical outreach for newcomer programs and services.

Each of the dinner tables welcomed a guest author, including Sophie Grégoire Trudeau, Emma Donoghue, Ali Velshi, Morgan Campbell and Stephen Poloz. Hosted by CBC personality Ali Hassan, remarks from notable guests including Mayor Olivia Chow and Vickery Bowles helped rally the room and encourage support for this important fundraising priority.

Visit Bibliobash.ca to learn more and view photos and highlights from the event.

Introducing new children's Welcome Packages



New TPL children's Welcome Package

In April, Children's Services launched a new children's Welcome Package across TPL. The package is designed to make getting a library card a fun and memorable experience for children and their parents/caregivers.

The Welcome Package is a keepsake that includes fun activities for children (i.e. stickers for children to personalize their new library card and a creative drawing activity) and families to do at the library, and a separate postcard outlining the benefits of library membership.

These packages are available to children ages birth to 12, whether they are getting their first library card, have lost their previous card or already have one. They ignite a sense of adventure and joy, getting children excited to explore the endless possibilities their library has to offer. With these packages, we hope to foster meaningful and lasting connections with children and their families.

The List 2024



Our newest edition of [The List](#) is now available online and in-branch, and copies have been distributed to the Toronto District School Board and Toronto Catholic District School Board. The List features 100 diverse title recommendations chosen by our YA experts, along with [video reviews](#) by teen volunteers. It is a helpful and popular resource among teens, educators and readers of Young Adult literature.

The List's 10 categories this year include some old favourites like Comics & Manga and Turning Points. Also, returning this year, we have the Indigenous Voices category, featuring books by Indigenous authors. New this year is the "on the bright side" category, featuring books that end on an optimistic note and highlight the importance of connection. There's something for everyone on The List!

Providing the vital ingredients for a democratic society

Public consultations for TPL's new Strategic Plan

Throughout March, we ran an online survey and idea exchange to gather ideas and input from the public to help shape TPL's Strategic Plan for 2025-2029. More than 3,000 people shared their thoughts on how we can focus and evolve our services to meet community needs over the next five years. Using

ThoughtExchange as our engagement tool, participants confidentially shared and rated thoughts, which were then analyzed and organized into ten themes. With over 82,000 ratings, we prioritized themes based on number of thoughts and average rating.

There were many positive comments suggesting that TPL should not only continue providing many of our existing services but also expand them further. Many also expressed gratitude for the wonderful service our staff provide every day.

Learn more about the insights from the public consultation [in our report to the Strategic Plan Steering Committee](#) and explore [participant thoughts](#) on ThoughtExchange.

Results from this consultation, along with insights from our Staff Consultation Forums and Environmental Scan findings, led us to identify [eight focus areas](#) for our next consultation phase beginning in June.

Chinese Canadian Archive celebrates Asian Heritage Month



Items from the Chinese Canadian Archive

The [Chinese Canadian Archive](#) (CCA) is a community archive, maintained by TPL, to preserve and share the experiences of Chinese Canadians in the Greater Toronto Area through collected documents, photographs and other records. On May 6th, the CCA hosted two well-attended events to celebrate Asian Heritage Month.

In the afternoon, community members were welcomed at an Open House event in the Marilyn & Charles Baillie Special Collections Centre at the Toronto Reference Library. Collection materials were available to explore, and attendees had lively conversations about their families' experiences as Chinese Canadians living in

Toronto. In the evening, over 200 participants gathered in Beeton Hall in the Toronto Reference Library for a public talk titled "Toronto in the Times of Exclusion", in partnership with the Chinese Canadian Museum. Catherine Clement (creator and curator of "The Paper Trail to the 1923 Chinese Exclusion Act" exhibition) and Jean Yee (daughter of a Chinese head tax payer who ran a hand laundry business in Toronto) shared insights about how the Chinese Immigration Act affected Chinese Canadians' lives.

TPL Celebrates Jewish Heritage with a new series



TPL launched our new [Jewish Heritage](#) programming series, presented in partnership with the Miles Nadal JCC. Torontonians are encouraged to discover Jewish arts, culture and history with events, programs and featured collections throughout Jewish Heritage Month this May, including a [reading list](#) for all ages. And we'll present year-round programs, collections and activities that highlight and celebrate the contributions of Jewish writers, artists and other members of the Jewish community. [The Jewish Mosaic Collection](#) highlights English-language materials about Judaism and Jewish culture.

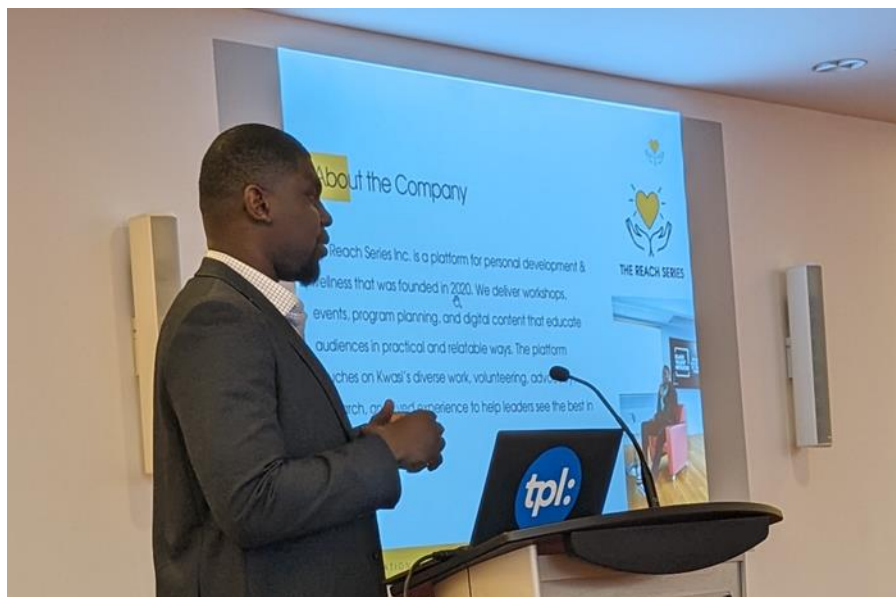
This series represents the first of two new heritage series, along with Islamic Heritage (coming this fall). These series, alongside our established Black History, Asian Heritage, and Indigenous Celebrations series, aim to showcase the rich tapestry of cultures that make up our city. By providing a platform for learning and celebration, we hope to foster a greater understanding and appreciation of the Jewish community's invaluable contributions to our shared history and identity.

Investing in staff and an innovative service culture

Discussing Cybersecurity Across North America

We are receiving much interest from colleagues across North America about cybersecurity. Steve Till-Rogers, TPL's Director of Digital Strategy and Chief Information Officer, and I were featured speakers at the Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC) Spring meeting, and at two conferences for IT professionals and other stakeholders to discuss cybersecurity: the Canarie SecuR&E Forum and the IT@UofT 2024 Conference.

Recognizing National Day of Mourning



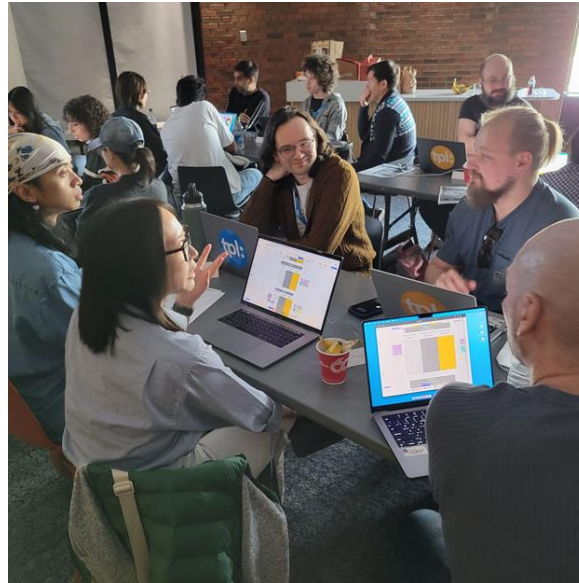
Kwasi Adu-Basowah leading a presentation at Toronto Reference Library

To mark the National Day of Mourning on April 28, TPL and the Toronto Public Library Workers Union (Local 4948) jointly sponsored a presentation at Toronto Reference Library on April 24. "Being Trauma Informed - Creating a Safe Library and Public Space" was led by Kwasi Adu-Basowah, a certified Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse with over 13 years of experience in the mental health field.

The session was attended by more than 50 staff and a few members of the public.

Attendees learned about the importance of trauma-informed approaches in creating safe and welcoming spaces for all.

First hybrid Digital Innovation Hub and Pop-Up Learning Lab Town Hall



On April 30, TPL staff gathered online and in-person at the recently renovated York Woods branch. Organizers experimented with the use of an intelligent 360° conference camera, mic and speaker for the [Digital Innovation Hub \(DIH\) and Pop-Up Learning Lab \(PULL\)](#) Town Hall. At these bi-annual gatherings, staff have the opportunity to participate in team-building activities, professional development and information sharing.

The successful event was organized by TPL's Innovation team in partnership with the [Media Creation Lab](#) at York University Libraries, who presented a demonstration, "Lighting for Small Spaces." This was followed by a staff-led workshop on using RawTherapee for photo editing and a networking opportunity for TPL and York University Libraries staff. Staff then participated in group discussions to inform service planning aimed at broadening Toronto's digital access and inclusion.

In 2023, DIH and PULL staff offered nearly 1,500 [programs](#), reaching over 12,500 learners. Out of over 100 learners who completed a post-program survey, 97% said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the program.