



## STAFF REPORT INFORMATION ONLY

### Safety and Security – Update

**Date:** January 29, 2024

**To:** Toronto Public Library Board

**From:** City Librarian

#### SUMMARY

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The purpose of this report is to provide the Toronto Public Library Board with an update on progress in implementing actions identified in the Alternate Approaches to Safety and Security report, presented to the Board at its May 24, 2022 meeting, as well as other related initiatives. A previous Safety and Security – Update report was provided to the Board at its October 25, 2022 meeting. The content of this report builds on the previous update and highlights activities from October 2022 to December 2023.

The Safety and Security Discussion Table identified eight opportunity areas with a strategic focus on alternate approaches to safety and security. The opportunity areas offer an approach for advancing a welcoming and supportive environment while addressing safety and security issues, to provide support to all library users and staff, including those from vulnerable communities and equity-deserving groups.

The Safety and Security Opportunity Areas include:

- 1) Focus on welcoming all
- 2) Strengthen training
- 3) Strengthen communications between TPL staff & management
- 4) Increase investment in service development
- 5) Expand and strengthen connections to community resources
- 6) Accelerate improvements to physical spaces
- 7) Strengthen documentation, evaluation & ongoing learning

The following report includes an update on progress in each of these areas in 2023, and planned activities in 2024. Substantial progress was made in 2023 due to the increased funding provided in the 2023 budget for a number of safety and security measures. This includes the addition of eight new safety and security positions, enhanced security guard services and trauma-informed staff training. In addition, important advances were made in enhancing the provision of social services at library branches.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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Additional funding was approved in TPL's 2023 budget submission to fund the action plan initiatives, including:

- \$0.259 million (2024 annualized cost of \$1.035 million), for 8 positions to help support TPL's trauma-informed service approach
- \$2.5 million for enhanced security guard service to support branch safety and compliance with Rules of Conduct
- \$0.500 million to introduce Social Service Team initiative. This initiative is funded by grants from the TPL Foundation for two years and then by the City of Toronto starting in 2025.

TPL's proposed 2024 budget includes additional funding for four additional Library Safety Specialists as well as increased funding for guard and security services and systems.

The Director, Finance & Treasurer has reviewed this financial impact statement and agrees with it.

## ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PLAN

By providing a safe space for all customers and staff, while maintaining a welcoming and inclusive space for all, TPL can achieve its strategic priority of opening up spaces so that all Torontonians, including those from equity deserving populations, are able to access, use and benefit from TPL's services, programs and technology. Many of the opportunities identified by the 2022 Discussion Table align with the strategic priority of investing in staff and fostering an innovative service culture.

## EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

TPL's Safety and Security Action Plan identifies and reinforces TPL's obligation to provide a safe space for all customers and staff, and at the same time ensure that spaces and services provided are welcoming and inclusive for all, especially for equity deserving communities such as newcomers, persons with low-income, persons with disabilities, vulnerable seniors and youth, people living with mental health or addiction issues, people experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity, and Indigenous, Black and racialized groups and others.

## DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on June 22, 2021, the Board considered [Security Guard Service – Increase to the Value of the Contract and Purchase Order](#) and staff were directed to produce a report for the Board with more information on the role of security guard services and the impact they have on Library services.

In response to this Board direction, the Board received for information, a report on Use of Security Guards at Toronto Public Library at its meeting on October 25, 2021. At that meeting, the Library Board adopted a motion directing the City Librarian to convene a discussion table to explore alternate safety and security strategies. The discussion table included representatives from TPL Management, the Library Board, TPLWU CUPE Local 4948, the City of Toronto and community organizations with expertise in providing services to socially excluded groups.

At its meeting on April 25, 2022, as a part of the [Provincial Election: Advocacy Opportunity](#) the Board identified an advocacy opportunity in support of improving safety and security issues faced by library staff in their interactions with customers. In addition to two opportunities identified by FOPL and OLA, the Board approved advocacy efforts related to requesting increased investments in mental health and addiction crisis intervention services available to the community to address the urgent needs of urban public libraries in addressing safety and security issues.

At its meeting on May 24, 2022, the Board considered the report [Alternate Approaches to Safety and Security at Toronto Public Library](#), which contains the findings of the Discussion Table, and endorsed eleven specific short-term actions.

At its meeting on October 25, 2022, the Board received for information, a [Safety and Security Update](#) on progress in implementing eleven short-term actions identified in [Alternate Approaches to Safety and Security at Toronto Public Library](#), as well as other related initiatives.

## **ISSUE BACKGROUND**

TPL is committed to providing welcoming and supportive spaces for the public and staff across its 100-branch network. Providing access to public space and ensuring everyone feels welcome and has equal opportunity to use and benefit from its spaces and services is embedded in TPL's mission and strategic priorities. TPL has an obligation to provide a safe and inclusive space for all customers and staff.

Toronto is a densely populated, complex urban environment. As with other urban libraries throughout Canada, TPL's role in identifying and advocating against barriers to service has been increasing because other social services and programs are either unavailable or already overextended. Many local and community organizations offering these services shut down during the global pandemic and have not returned.

The number of safety and security incidents, relative to the number of library users, is continuing to increase, as are the severity of these incidents. The different ways that people use the space in libraries can create hotspots for

tension, unsafe practices, and behaviours that negatively impact others. Unpredictability, extreme behaviours, and violence are the most difficult to manage and highest risk to customer and staff safety. A wide range of TPL customers become involved in incidents, including (but not limited to) people with unmet health and social needs.

The impacts of incidents on staff and other customers can be extremely difficult. Customer incidents involving uncivil behaviour, verbal or physical harassment, threatening behaviour, violence, substance use, drug poisoning, theft and property damage are not uncommon at some branches. In the face of these challenges, many staff go above and beyond when trying to manage incidents in a way that respects the individuals involved, de-escalates tensions, and keeps people safe. However, these interactions can be very taxing on staff.

There are policies, programs, and procedures in place at TPL to keep the library safe and at the same time protect and support staff prior to, during, and after incidents. Discussion Table members agreed that TPL has an important opportunity to consider alternative approaches to safety and security as part of their continued efforts to learn and strengthen supports provided to both customers and staff.

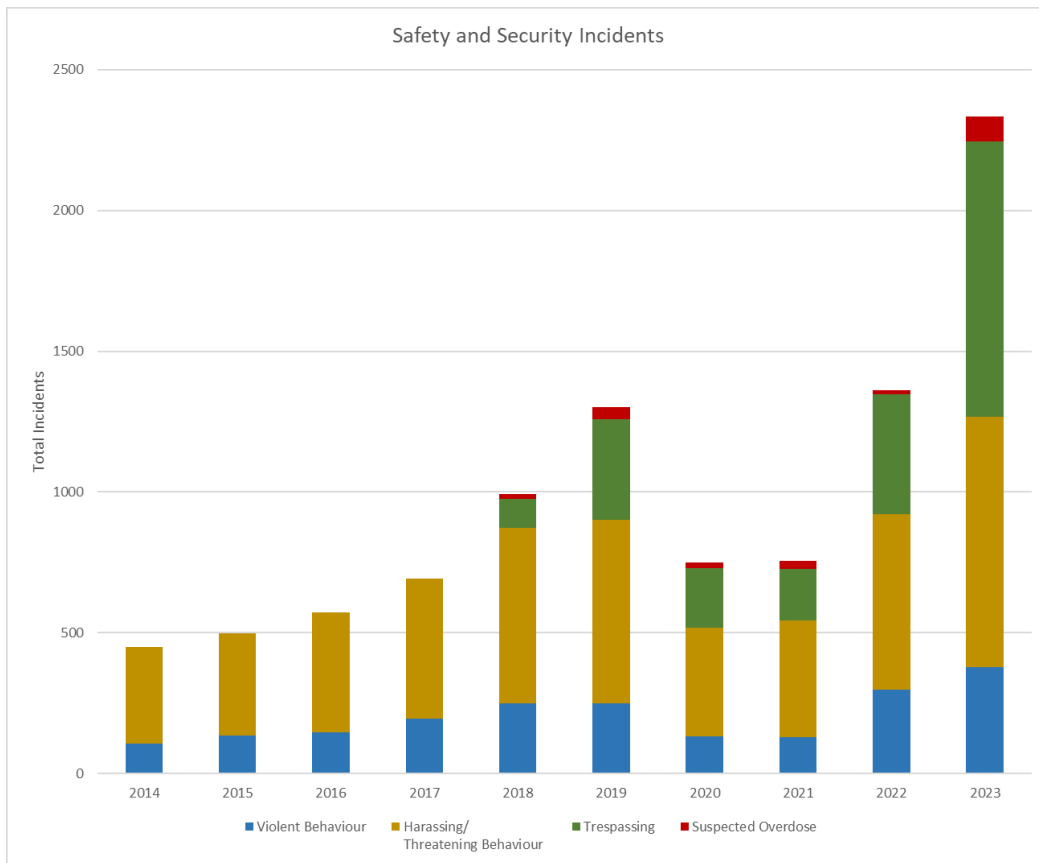
The number of safety and security-related incidents at library branches continued to increase in 2023, rising by 71% compared to 2022. Safety and security incidents include situations involving violent, harassing or threatening behaviour, trespassing by previously excluded customers, and suspected overdoses. In total, there were 2,334 such incidents reported in 2023, with significant increases in the number of incidents involving trespassing by previously excluded customers (up 129%), and suspected overdoses (up 529%).

Most incidents occur in twenty or so specific branches, particularly those in the downtown core. The majority of library branches experience relatively few incidents. We anticipate bringing a report to the Board in March 2024 with further details on incidents and Rules of Conduct.

## Number of Safety and Security Incidents by Year (2014-2023)

Year	Safety & Security Incidents	Annual Change
2014	450	
2015	498	11%
2016	572	15%
2017	693	21%
2018	992	43%
2019	1302	31%
2020	749	-42%
2021	756	1%
2022	1362	80%
2023	2334	71%

## Safety and Security Incidents by Year and Type of Incident (2014-2023)



## COMMENTS

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The report from the 2022 Discussion Table, *Alternate Approaches to Safety and Security at Toronto Public Library*, identified eight opportunity areas for the City Librarian's consideration:

- 1) Focus on welcoming all
- 2) Strengthen training
- 3) Strengthen communications between TPL staff & management
- 4) Increase investment in service development
- 5) Expand and strengthen connections to community resources
- 6) Accelerate improvements to physical spaces
- 7) Strengthen documentation, evaluation & ongoing learning
- 8) Use security guard services intentionally as part of a broader suite of resources and tools that support the prevention and resolution of incidents

Within each of these opportunity areas, the Discussion Table identified specific actions for the City Librarian's consideration. One of the overarching considerations suggested by the Discussion Table was to view the opportunities through a trauma-informed lens. This is a wraparound service approach for dealing with individuals in crisis, which covers a spectrum of supports and services the library would provide and turn to in dealing with the safety and security of staff and customers.

In response to the Discussion Table report, the City Librarian proposed, and the Board endorsed, a series of 11 short-term action steps to address the opportunity areas identified in the report. A progress update was provided to the Board on October 25, 2022, outlining progress to-date and outlining plans to increase funding for safety and security initiatives as part of the 2023 budget. That budget included funding for eight new positions devoted to supporting safety and security initiatives. Additional funding was also included for trauma-informed staff training, enhanced security guard services, physical security enhancements, such as camera upgrades and new installations, and to initiate social service teams to provide low-barrier access to mental health services in library branches.

This report provides a further update on progress in 2023 and actions planned in 2024, categorized by the eight opportunity areas identified by the Discussion Table,

## **1) Focus on welcoming all**

TPL plays a unique role in providing a welcoming space for all. Efforts are focused on ensuring that safety and security initiatives are designed and implemented in a way that fosters a welcoming environment for all who wish to use Library services. Signage is in place across TPL's 100 branches to reinforce that TPL is a welcoming space for all, and at the same time reinforce the need to follow library rules of conduct.

- As part of our commitment to fostering a welcoming environment for all, in 2023 TPL created a new management position of Manager, Welcoming Spaces, reporting to the Director of Human Resources. This position provides overall leadership and direction to TPL's welcoming spaces program and associated initiatives. The role also chairs TPL's Safety and Security Leadership Table, which is a new initiative bringing together senior TPL leaders from across the organization who are responsible for safety and security and related matters such as service development for vulnerable populations. The Manager oversees TPL's new team of Library Safety Specialists, ensuring that they are deployed and supported to address branch safety and security needs, as well as providing collaborative leadership for TPL's evolution to a trauma-informed culture.
- Another essential component to fostering a welcoming environment for all is to incorporate a trauma-informed approach, that recognizes the impact of past and current trauma for individuals and takes steps to avoid re-traumatization. In 2023, we developed a proposal for a comprehensive trauma-informed staff training program, focused on working with individuals in crisis or experiencing distress. The procurement process is underway for this new program, which we anticipate introducing in 2024.

## **2) Strengthen training**

TPL remains committed to building a staff training framework to further develop staff capability and confidence in areas relating to safety and security. Focus areas in 2023 included:

- Dealing With Difficult Behaviours de-escalation training to assist staff in managing disruptive and potentially dangerous situations. 17 sessions were offered in 2023, with over 200 staff attending. This training will continue to be provided on an ongoing basis.

- Development and implementation of a comprehensive Workplace Violence Prevention & Response Program in partnership with TPL's Joint Health and Safety Committees. The Program includes a revised Emergency Guide as well as enhanced lockdown procedures training. Over 200 staff were trained in 2023, with an e-learning module to be implemented in 2024 for all staff.
- Intensive incident management training conducted with in-charge staff, using forty case studies based on real-life TPL incidents. The case study toolkit includes guiding questions to help branch staff discuss strategies in responding to incidents.
- Twelve training sessions conducted on obligations, rights and responsibilities under the Ontario Human Rights Code and Occupational Health and Safety Act for directors and managers.
- TPL worked with Toronto Police Service to provide TPL managers with training on best practices in engaging TPS to respond to incidents.

2024 planned initiatives include:

- Mental Health First Aid Program: TPL is partnering with the Mental Health Association of Canada to launch Mental Health First Aid training for TPL staff. Twenty TPL staff are being trained in Q1 as in-house trainers, to deliver the program to TPL staff through monthly training sessions on an ongoing basis.
- Development of an overall safety and security staff training curriculum, using role-based learning paths that outline required capabilities and training required by each role.
- Implementation of two new e-learning modules on Workplace Violence Prevention and Response and Human Rights and Workplace Harassment.

### **3) Strengthen communications between TPL staff & management**

- In the 2022 staff engagement survey, TPL staff identified concerns regarding communication between senior management and staff, particularly during the pandemic.
- In response, TPL established in 2023 a regular schedule of branch town hall meetings, where members of TPL's management team met with branch staff in a small group setting. Ten such branch town halls were held in 2023 at branches with high rates of safety and security incidents. These meetings

were successful in engaging staff and management in open dialogue and joint problem-solving. A schedule of 2024 sessions is being developed.

- TPL also established a Safety and Security Update section on the TPL intranet, share:tpl, to provide staff with regular updates on safety and security initiatives in progress or planned.
- All-Staff Town Halls – all-staff town halls were conducted quarterly throughout 2023, covering a range of updates and providing an open forum for staff to ask questions of TPL’s senior leaders, including topics relating to safety and security.
- Labour-Management Committee – management and union representatives have agreed to meet annually to discuss safety and security initiatives, with the first such review having occurred in September 2023.
- Central Joint Health & Safety Committee – collaborated on various initiatives supporting workplace health and safety, including the Workplace Violence Prevention and Response program.

#### **4) Increase investment in service development**

- TPL’s Social Service Team initiative, which was conceived prior to the pandemic in 2019, began in July 2023 as a service pilot. It was seeded by TPL Foundation funding but later approved as a permanent service in the 2023 operating budget following a commitment of two years of TPL Foundation support.
- The Social Service Team initiative is currently provided in partnership with the Gerstein Crisis Centre and their Community Crisis Workers. This service provides on-site, low-barrier mental health and crisis support and programs for individuals accessing the library at four branches. This initiative provides one-on-one counselling from experienced crisis workers and group programming that includes individuals with lived experience providing insight and mentorship to participants. Two programs currently hosted in library facilities include: FRESH – Finding Recovery Through Exercise Skills and Hope and WRAP – Wellness Recovery Action Plan information sessions
- In the last half of 2023 there were over 6,300 engagements with over 1,400 individuals. The service partnership with Gerstein has now been extended to December 2024, and the City committed to continued funding for the Social Service Team initiative in the 2023 operating budget process.
- Initial findings indicate expansion of this service to additional branches is warranted. Formal service evaluation will be completed in 2024 with reporting to include expansion plan recommendations and options.

## **5) Expand and strengthen connections to community resources**

- Community Librarians – in 2023, TPL had 8 Community Librarians (funded and contract) working in community agencies, shelters and in Toronto Community Housing/Toronto Seniors Community Housing locations. These Community Librarian placements supported the [Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy](#), the [Toronto's Senior Strategy 2.0](#), the Reconciliation Action Plan, and the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Action Plan.
- TPL's Coffee and Conversation program expanded to 7 branches in 2023, offering 31 sessions to 499 participants. This program connects vulnerable library customers to the wide range of resources that exist at the library and in the community. The program provides a safe and welcoming space to customers experiencing life challenges and enhances relationship-building between staff, community partners and customers.
- Community connections - TPL representatives have participated in networking opportunities with the City of Toronto, Toronto Police Service, SafeTO, the Toronto Community Crisis Response Program and others
- Cross-divisional collaboration – a working group has been formed to support development of a Branch-Centered Community Outreach Framework that includes guidelines, best practices and resources for how to engage community organizations, contacts and agencies

## **6) Accelerate improvements to physical spaces**

- In 2023, TPL added a new position of Manager, Public Safety, to provide oversight of all security programs and systems, including security guard services, building access systems, CCTV video surveillance, intrusion alarm systems and fire alarm systems.
- In 2023 TPL also completed a comprehensive review of physical site security measures, including CCTV cameras, site access and related systems and processes. Upgrades to systems and procedures are underway and will continue through 2024.
- Physical Security Design initiatives included:
  - Review of current security hardware and documentation is in progress
  - Installation/upgrades of security cameras at 18 high incident branches commenced in December 2023 and will continue in 2024
  - Recommendations for physical security design standards to be brought forward in 2024
- Risk Assessments: in 2022 and 2023, TPL conducted workplace violence risk assessment at 22 higher incident branches. These assessments and

resulting recommendations are being addressed in consultation with Joint Health and Safety Committee representatives.

- Washroom Sensors pilot
  - In Fall 2022, Brave.coop, a cooperative based out of Vancouver, BC that builds tools to detect and respond to overdose, was engaged to install washroom sensors in five single-use (accessible) washrooms at Toronto Reference Library (TRL). The sensor sends an alert to security if a washroom has been occupied for a period of time or if no movement has been detected. A wellness check is then performed and the outcome recorded. Sensors do not prevent overdoses but have been determined to be a useful tool to support more effective wellness checks. Based on the success of this pilot, the five sensors currently employed at TRL have become part of the ongoing safety and security response at the branch and TPL is looking to implement sensors in other high incident branches.

## **7) Strengthen documentation, evaluation & ongoing learning**

- Incident reporting
  - TPL's Incident Response Management System (IRMS), launched in September 2022, is now fully operational and in active use by TPL managers and staff to track and record all types of incidents across TPL branches
- Rules of Conduct
  - Rules of Conduct training has been updated for staff, managers, and in-charge staff
  - Furthering a trauma-informed approach to exclusion appeal meetings, with Library Safety Specialists providing support to managers and customers in this context
- Advocacy and awareness – TPL is an active partner in the Canadian Urban Libraries Council / Conseil des Bibliothèques Urbaines du Canada (CULC/CBUC) - Safety and Security Working Group. TPL representatives: Moe Hosseini-Ara, Director, Branch Operations and Customer Experience, and Elizabeth Malak, Area Manager.
  - Promoting learning, support and collaboration around safety and security in public libraries

- In collaboration, developing toolkit of best practices regarding safety and security with training and resources to be shared with CULC and other public libraries
- Supporting advocacy and communication to raise awareness of the complex issues that public libraries are facing
- Sharing our learning – TPL's Alternate Approaches to Safety & Security model was recognized by the library community. Pam Ryan, Director, Service Development and Innovation, represented the initiative as invited speaker at both the Library Journal [Public Library Safety Summit](#) in Columbus, OH in April 2023, and in the subsequent online training certification program for public libraries, the Library Journal [Library Leaders' Safety Summit](#) in September 2023. Senior TPL leaders also participated in numerous media interviews in 2023 regarding safety and security in public libraries. TPL's Manager of Workplace Health, Safety and Wellness also received the 2023 Occupational Health and Safety Professional of the Year Award for his work on TPL's workplace violence prevention and response program.

## **8) Use security guard services intentionally as part of a broader suite of resources and tools that support the prevention and resolution of incidents**

### Library Safety Specialists

- A key recommendation from the Discussion Table was to add a broader range of resources to complement the use of security guards. Based on this recommendation, in 2022 TPL conducted a benchmarking review of best practices and innovations being introduced by other public libraries in North America to address safety and security concerns.
- As a result of that review, TPL has added a new staff role of Library Safety Specialists (LSS) and hired six new staff into these positions in 2023 as a pilot program. Using a trauma-informed approach, LSS's work with other TPL staff and with guards to engage customers, explain and enforce the rules of conduct, develop effective working relationships with library customers, monitor library spaces for appropriate customer behaviour, and de-escalate situations as required. LSS roles work under the leadership and direction of the Manager, Welcoming Spaces within the Human Resources Division.
- To-date, LSS positions have proven invaluable in supporting staff in providing a safe and welcoming environment, and as a result we have

requested funding for additional positions as part of the Open Hours Plan incorporated into the 2024 operating budget.

- TPL has conducted a comprehensive review of its use of security guards. In 2023, TPL migrated to the use of higher-level guards at all branches where guards are deployed. This provides greater flexibility as well ensuring that guards have the range of skills that are required. TPL has also increased the use of mobile guards to respond to incidents when they occur.

#### Security Guard Services

- TPL is also currently engaged in a Request for Proposal (RFP) process to select the security guard service provider when the current contract expires in May 2024. As part of that process, TPL is making a series of changes to requirements, including enhanced trauma-informed training for guards, mobile response services, enhanced accountability measures, among others. A recommendation on TPL's new security guard contract is anticipated for the Board's approval in the next few months.

## CONCLUSION

Creating and maintaining safe and welcoming spaces is an ongoing effort, requiring collaboration, creativity and resourcefulness from all areas within the organization. Working in partnership with TPL staff, union, and other stakeholders, the Safety and Security Leadership Table will share information and ensure co-ordinated approaches in the development, management, and continuous improvement of safety and security initiatives across TPL in 2024 and beyond.

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## **SIGNATURE**

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