

City Librarian's Report for March 2024

Below is my report for the March 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.

Update on restoration of services

We have [almost fully recovered](#) from the cybersecurity incident that disrupted all library systems and technology in October. Since the end of February, we have restored Your Account, the catalogue and searching capabilities on [tpl.ca](#). Staff have been busy behind the scenes and we have finished processing all stored items. Our recovery efforts have been featured in the [Canadian Press](#), [CBC](#), [Globe and Mail](#) and [Toronto Star](#).

Opening up our public space

Celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Osborne Collection of Early Children's Books



The Osborne 75 exhibit at the Toronto Reference Library's TD Gallery.

To celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Osborne Collection of Early Children's Books, the TD Gallery featured [Osborne 75](#), an exhibit of original art, manuscripts, books, toys and more. The exhibit ran from November 11, 2023 to February 18,

2024, presenting free weekly public tours showcasing the world-class research collection and introducing Osborne to many new fans.

With conversations ranging from book production, to early children's textbooks, to modern retellings of fairy-tales, the exhibit highlighted the breadth of what Osborne has to offer and encouraged visitors to check out the publicly accessible collection in-person at TPL's Lillian H. Smith branch.

Celebrating Black History Month



A collage of Dr. Rita Cox created by Maria A. Shchuka branch staff, using images of book covers to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Rita Cox Black and Caribbean Heritage Collection.

Throughout February, TPL celebrated Black History Month with an exceptional series of events and activities for all ages, honouring Black voices, heritage and culture.

Featured Black History events included [Reframing History: Newfoundland and Labrador & the Black Atlantic](#), a panel discussion about revisiting and reframing history through the lived experiences of all the communities that make up Atlantic Canada. Former Olympian, educator and political activist Valerie Jerome talked about her family memoir, [Races](#). Iconic MC and hip-hop influencer Michie Mee also joined Del Cowie and DJ Grouch in an interview.

Explore the 2024 Black History Month reading lists on OverDrive with recommended books for [adults](#), [teens](#) and [children](#). We continue to showcase Black History all year round. Visit our [Black History page](#) to see more.

TPL's Black History and Culture program series is generously supported through the TD Ready Commitment.

Launching an early literacy pilot program with The Reading Partnership



In February, TPL launched Reading Program on Demand, a 10-week pilot program in collaboration with [The Reading Partnership](#), helping caregivers build literacy skills among children ages four to six.

The program is a play-based on-demand digital series designed by professional educators to serve low-income families and representing Black, Indigenous and racialized communities. The series makes learning more accessible by allowing families to engage with program content at their own pace. The program also provides opportunities for caregivers to connect with and gain support from one another during weekly online coaching sessions hosted by TPL staff from Albion, Cedarbrae and Downsview branches.

Through this program, caregivers gain the tools, relationships and confidence to be active participants in their children's education. With 30 families participating in the pilot and another 25 waitlisted to participate in future series, response has been exceptional.

Providing the vital ingredients for a democratic society

Freedom to Read Week



From February 18 to 24, TPL recognized Freedom to Read Week, an annual celebration that encourages Canadians to think about and value their right to read, write and publish freely. The week was an important opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to [intellectual freedom](#) and to reflect on the essential role public libraries play in supporting democracy and informed minds.

Branches across the city presented programs that included Freedom to Read Week-inspired book club discussions, creative writing exercises, trivia challenges, printmaking and more. We also launched a new season of our program series that explores [what's at stake](#) when intellectual freedom is threatened, continuing these critical conversations with events, civil forums and installations.

Bookmobile attends College Park BIA Family Day event



Customers visit TPL's bookmobile at College Park.

On February 16, TPL's bookmobile, "Big Blue," attended the College Park BIA Family Day event. Staff provided information on the bookmobile and TPL services, and registered customers for library cards. Customers also took part in library trivia to win a limited edition TPL tote bag.

The event was a great success with over 600 customers visiting the vehicle to browse its collection and borrow material. Attendees expressed their appreciation for TPL services, resources and collections. Thank you to the bookmobile team who worked the event, including Nina Pena, Colin Rogers, Arnold Rubio, Nazila Jafari and Howard Cheng.

Mobile Library Services is generously supported in part by The Catherine and Maxwell Meighen Foundation.

Exploring Toronto's budget process

Earlier this year, we collaborated with [Social Planning Toronto](#) to host "TPL Talks: 2024 City Budget with Social Planning Toronto," as a part of TPL's Civic Life program series. The Civic Life series offers opportunities for library customers to learn about municipal processes, engage in conversations and share what's important to them.

With an online session on January 17 and an in-person session on January 19 at Lillian H. Smith branch, participants broadened their knowledge of Toronto's budget process and discussed what should be prioritized in the City's spending. Participants also received an information kit with a curated list of books, reports and articles created by TPL staff.

The two sessions were co-facilitated by Israt Ahmed, a Senior Community Planner at Social Planning Toronto who has overseen the analysis of several City of Toronto budget reports. Israt used her background in coordinating civic engagement initiatives and building resident leadership to deliver the dynamic and well-attended workshops.

Teen Council volunteers visit City Hall



Teens making use of library spaces.

On February 7, several of TPL's Teen Council volunteers went to City Hall to participate in a focus group in support of this year's [Toronto For All](#) campaign. Toronto For All is Toronto's public education initiative to help create a city that says "no" to all forms of discrimination and racism, including systemic racism. Past campaigns focused on Anti-East Asian Racism and Islamophobia, and this year's campaign will promote allyship.

At the focus group, volunteers discussed what makes a strong ally, what might stop people from acting as allies and shared personal experiences of being allies

themselves. The teens were insightful and articulate, and stressed that educating ourselves about a cause is the first step to becoming an effective ally.

This was an excellent opportunity for the City to hear from young people and for the volunteers to have an impact on an important issue that affects all Torontonians.

Investing in staff and an innovative service culture

Supporting staff with 2SLGBTQ+ programs and services



The pillars at the Yorkville Branch during Pride Month.

TPL's Branch Experience project offers opportunities for branch staff to learn how to best serve our customers from subject matter experts. In February, Gerrard/Ashdale branch hosted TPL's Senior Services Specialist for 2SLGBTQ+ Community Connections & Partnerships. The visit aimed to provide insight on how to best support and engage 2SLGBTQ+ customers within the community.

The discussion covered strategies for community-informed and intersectional programming, as well as the creation of welcoming book displays that elevate diverse voices. Staff are eager to provide more 2SLGBTQ+ engagement and programming, and are interested in learning best practices to deliver them.

Branch Experience began in 2019 at Brentwood branch and continues to expand. By the end of March, Branch Experience will take place at 56 branches.