



KEY MESSAGES OF ONTARIO PUBLIC LIBRARIES October 21, 2008

Who We Are

The Federation of Ontario Public Libraries is a not-for-profit member organization which was launched in 2005 to provide a single, strong voice for public libraries in Ontario to enhance library policies and programs through four strategic pillars: advocacy, marketing, research and consortia purchasing. Federation members include both public library trustees and chief executives. FOPL is taking the opportunity today to meet with MPP's to share with them the good news story about public libraries and how they contribute to achieving provincial objectives.

More than just books

If you haven't visited your public library lately, you'll be amazed at the array of services now offered. Ontario's public libraries are more than just books and more relevant than ever. This is most evident with their virtual information services, which provide online 24/7 access to many digitized collections, data files and librarian call centres.

Public Libraries Contribution to Meeting Government Priorities

Although the Ontario Ministry of Culture has the lead responsibility for public libraries, our programs support and benefit the agendas of many other ministries. Those programs include literacy development from pre-school to adult, newcomer integration to Canadian society, career development and employment, supporting small business with reference materials on market trends, and accessing information on community and government services. We have unique, valuable expertise to share with such ministries as Education, Children and Youth Services, Citizenship and Immigration, Community and Social Services, Health Promotion, Government and Consumer Services, and Small Business and Entrepreneurship. We welcome opportunities to partner with these and other ministries to develop and implement policies and programs that support their goals.

Public libraries contribute to meeting provincial government priorities:

- Better Health: supporting improved health outcomes by providing Ontarians free access to information about healthy living;
- Education: providing students with a quiet and safe place to study, with resources and assistance from trained information professionals;

- Strengthening the Economy: supporting economic development by creating an environment in communities that supports and attracts creative people, who in turn develop the ideas and innovations that drive economic development in a global economy in which ideas have become the key raw material;
- Promoting Reading: encouraging a culture of reading for all ages that contributes to the development of the well educated and continuously learning workforce required by business and industry; and
- Support for Communities: helping newcomers to Canada succeed through settlement support, language acquisition, accreditation and employment support and maintaining cultural connections.

Provincial Support to Public Libraries

a) The Public Libraries Act

The *Public Libraries Act* has provided for a free library service for Ontarians since its inception in 1882. FOPL believes that fee for service is a barrier to people using the library and that any attempt to change the current legislation should be avoided.

Another important element of the Act is the provision made for Library Boards. Library Boards allow for greater participation by communities in the planning and provision of library services and programs. Citizen members provide a balance between the political processes, which sometimes Councilors are constrained by, and community needs and priorities. Councilors on the other hand offer valuable insights into the City, its strategic and political directions, the decision making process, budget priorities and are able to make useful links to other city initiatives and programs.

b) Financial Support

The provincial interest in Public Libraries should be supported with appropriate levels of financial support. The provincial government's contribution to the operating budgets of public libraries has remained static for the past 12 years with no accommodation for inflation, for the huge increases in utilization we have experienced, or for our new generation of users with fundamentally different information seeking habits. Ontario's contribution is now among the lowest of all provinces on a per capita basis.

c) Patchwork of Service Levels

The reliance on municipalities to fund public library operations and their varying levels of support have resulted in a patchwork of library service levels throughout the Province, especially in the area of technological currency. Ontario's Public Libraries Act is supposed to ensure service equity and access to all, free of charge, regardless of the municipality where citizens reside. But the relatively low level of funding received from the provincial government works against this goal.

d) Promote Public Library Benefits to Municipalities

Public libraries exist in virtually every community. Each MPP can help preserve and expand the services of public libraries in their constituency by promoting the benefits to their respective municipal governments. As centres of discovery, knowledge and lifelong learning, strong public libraries are cornerstones of strong, vibrant communities.