



## WOODSTOCK PUBLIC LIBRARY

<b>Subject:</b>	Diversity and Inclusion Task Force Report
<b>Action:</b>	For information
<b>Prepared by:</b>	Darlene Pretty, Manager of Public Services
<b>Meeting of:</b>	March 9, 2021

### **Introduction**

In June of 2020, the Diversity and Inclusion Task Force was formed as a result of the Library Board's endorsement of the FOPL *Statement of Solidarity with the Black Community Against Systemic Racism* (Motion 20-34). The task force is chaired by the Darlene Pretty, Manager of Public Services and includes Heather Mathers, Children and Teen Librarian, and Information Services Librarians Jim Seale, Tasha Longtin and Laura Bere.

### **Definitions**

*Diversity* means the range of human differences including but not limited to heritage, education, race income, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical, or mental capabilities.

*Inclusion* means the act of creating environments in which any individual or group can feel welcomed, valued, respected, supported and can fully participate. An inclusive and welcoming culture embraces differences and show respect in words and actions for all people.

*Systemic racism or institutional racism*, means a form of racism that is embedded in normal practice within our society or organization. It can lead to discrimination in criminal justice, employment, health care, education, among other issues. Systemic racism is less perceptible and much more subtle than overt racism. Ultimately, it can result in the failure of an organization to provide professional service to people because of their race, religion, culture, or ethnic origin.

## **Discussion**

Our mission was to identify systemic racism and inequality within the Library and to develop actionable steps to include greater equality, diversity and inclusion within our collections, programs and activities.

The Task Force were tasked with the following outcomes:

- A staff educated and committed to social justice in the service of our patrons.
- Policies and procedures free of structural racism and discrimination.
- Collections and programs that speak to all residents within our community.
- Greater connections with minorities within our community.
- Partnerships with other local organizations committed to equality and social justice.

As a result, we have identified the following Key Actions.

### **1) Develop New Programs that Aim to Amplify Ignored Voices Within Our Community**

The Library has already made great strides towards removing racial and social inequities in our programs and practices. For example:

- Fees were removed for all children's programming in 2019, making our exceptional programs available equitably to all, regardless of economic standing.
- The introduction of more drop in programs for all ages to allow our programs to be more accessible to everyone. We no longer charge any fees for our children's programs.
- The Library has participated for several years in the Toronto International Festival of Authors (TIFA) that highlights the work of both Canadian and international authors and has introduced our community to a rich and diverse number of authors.
- 2019 Oxford Reads program featuring the book, Moon of the Crusted Snow, by Waubgeshig Rice, a renowned Canadian indigenous author. The Woodstock Public Library partnered with the Oxford County Library for this community read program. Throughout the fall of 2019 the Library offered engaging indigenous programming which culminated in the Gala Author event in Woodstock attended by the author with a reading and question and answer segment.

- We are currently offering the Read Woke Reading Club for teens that highlights diverse themes in young adult literature.
- Pride Month activities such as Drag Queen story times, community Pride picnics and celebrations.
- 2019 and 2020 Health and Wellness series featuring community partners CMHA and Oxford County Community Health Centre.

Moving forward, the Task Force has identified the need to continue to provide cultural and ethnic programming that not only targets the diversity in our community but also enlightens the community as to the diversity in our city.

Possible programming could be:

- English as a Second Language (ESL) conversation circles where participants can practice their new language in a non-threatening environment.
- Visiting lending service to community groups such as senior residences, long term care facilities, Domestic Abuse Services (DASO), Operation Sharing Inn Out of the Cold, etc.
- A Cookbook Club that highlights cultural diversity in a sharing and fun environment.
- Family cultural story times.
- Kahoot trivia challenge to encourage community cultural knowledge.
- Newcomer programs for recent immigrants to Canada in our community.
- Newcomer computer basics workshops for recent immigrants to Canada in our community.
- Indigenous-led programs.
- LGBTQ programs for youth.
- Trim the Tree party for homeless youth and adults to assist staff in decorating the Christmas trees in the adult and children's departments.

## 2) Identify and Seek Partnerships with Other Local Community Groups Concerned with Structural Inequity and Racism

Over the years, the Library has made many community partnerships that has increased our reach into the community. Library staff continue to identify and reach out to organizations in the community that will extend our reach into the community and the ability to offer diverse programming. We have been actively involved in the following community partnerships, although COVID-19 has impacted some of these partnerships in the last year. Many of these partnerships have continued virtually, and others are expected to resume when restrictions are lessened. These partnerships include:

- Alzheimer's Society of Oxford.
- Beginnings Family Services (parenting and family support services).
- Blossom Park Education Centre (adult continuing education).
- Children's Aid Society (CAS) and Open Door (James St. drop-in centre).
- City of Woodstock Parks and Recreation (summer camps, PA day camps).
- CMHA Oxford (workshops, mental health drop-in).
- Early ON Centres (outreach visits).
- Fanshawe College (workshops, teen programming).
- Ingamo Homes, second stage housing services (outreach visits).
- London District Catholic School Board (school visits, Ready for Kindergarten programs).
- Operation Sharing (Inn out of the Cold).
- Oxford County, Human Services (Pride month celebrations, Doors Open, Oxford Children's Services Network).
- Oxford County Community Health Centre (workshops).
- Oxford County Library (Oxford Reads).
- Oxford County Pride Committee (community partner, Pride month activities).
- Oxford Gardens Retirement Residence (intergenerational storytimes, adult book club).
- Oxford Local Immigration Partnership (community partner).
- Rainbow Coalition (community partner)
- Social Planning Council Oxford (community partner).
- Southwestern Public Health (Turn off the Screens programs, Safe and Active Routes to School (ASRTS) committee).

- Thames Valley District School Board (school visits, Ready for Kindergarten programs).
- United Way (community partner).
- Wellkin Child and Youth Mental Health (youth group engagement, community picnics, The Hub).
- Women's Employment Resource Centre (workshops).
- Woodstock Art Gallery (shared programming, library exhibits).

The Task Force recognizes we have made many partnerships, but we must continue to reach out into the community to identify additional organizations. Many new cultural groups are forming in the community that we need to reach out to. This is a high priority as we move forward in implementing outcomes of the report.

### **3) Engaging Minorities and Community Outreach**

The Task Force recognizes that for our programs to continue to be effective we cannot expect everyone to walk through our doors but must make a concerted effort to reach into the community to offer programs and services.

Whenever possible, the Library attends community events to promote our services and collections. We also seek opportunities to offer our programs within the community. This includes such events as:

- Pride Month celebrations in the library and Museum Square.
- International Women's Day event held annually.
- Art in the Park, City of Woodstock.
- Intergenerational family story time at Oxford Gardens Retirement Residence (currently on hold due to COVID-19).
- Monthly book club at Oxford Gardens Retirement Residence (currently on hold due to COVID-19).
- Alzheimer's Society of Oxford Brain Booster event held annually in late October.
- Wellkin Community picnic.
- CAS neighbourhood barbecue held at the Open Door.
- Beginnings Family Service's monthly Baby Brunch.
- CAS's Open Door drop in for children and families.

The Task Force has recognized that as Woodstock continues to grow in population and diversity, the Library needs to reach out to these communities to offer programming and to promote our services.

#### **4) Review Collection Development Policies, Procedures and Practices to Ensure Inclusivity and Diversity**

The Task Force has researched the trend towards more inclusive subject headings in our library catalogue. It is also possible to review our subject headings to ensure they are diverse. We feel both of these initiatives are essential in assuring that our collections and catalogue continue to reflect the diversity in our community.

Through research, the Task Force has discovered it is possible to audit for diversity in our collections and we feel this is a key objective. This will help to ensure that our collection continues to be diverse and eliminate titles that are discriminate. Staff are currently encouraged to create and maintain diverse collections through selection and our Automatic Release Programs set up with our collection vendors, Whitehots and Library Services Centre (LSC).

The Task Force has identified the need to improve our French materials for children and youth to meet the demands of the French speaking members of our community. We would like to actively begin selection in 2022 with the addition of a French language line in our budget.

Public Services staff have recognized the success of highlighting our diverse collections with topical and seasonal book displays and will continue this practice both in-library and virtually.

We would also like to investigate adding additional collections in the languages that reflect our community. Our collection vendors offer such services including the selection and cataloguing of multilingual materials.

The Library can make a better effort to advertise the multilingual books that are available through interlibrary loan both on our website and during outreach. We also recommend that staff better advertise the multilingual books available on Hoopla and TumbleBooks.

## 5) Identify and Recommend Steps to Remove Racial and Social Inequity Barriers in Library Policies

The Task Force recommends that policies be audited for cultural and social inequity when they are reviewed or created.

The Task Force has identified inequity in some of our circulation policies that need to be addressed:

- Overdue Fines – many libraries in our region no longer charge fines as they see this as creating barriers for those who are economically under privileged and causes a socio-economic barrier. Studies have shown that charging fines is not effective in having overdue materials returned.

Here is a link to an article about Kitchener Public Library going fine free: <https://kitchener.ctvnews.ca/kitchener-public-library-does-away-with-overdue-fees-for-good-1.5273182>

Here is a link to an article about Oxford County Library going fine free: <http://www.heartfm.ca/news/local-news/no-more-library-fines-in-oxford-county/>

- Personal information requirements for obtaining a library card – we currently require an address for people to obtain a library card. Many libraries have created policies that will allow people experiencing homelessness and those living in shelters to acquire a library card with certain conditions. Other libraries have made partnerships with shelters for book deposits of library materials. The Task Force recommends more research and the development of lending policies for these initiatives.

## 6) Identify and Develop Training Opportunities for all Library Staff on Issues of Structural Racism, Inequity and Diversity

All library staff have attended Ryan Dowd's Librarian's Guide to Homelessness training which has provided staff awareness on the plight of people experiencing homelessness, and how to better serve them in the library. We currently subscribe to Ryan's monthly webinars and staff are strongly encouraged to watch them. This is an excellent source of staff

training for issues related to libraries and providing better, more inclusive, service.

Task Force members attended the Bridges Out of Poverty workshop in November 2020 which gave great insight into the challenges faced by those living in poverty, how to better serve them, and how our policies can adversely affect them.

The Task Force has identified many staff training resources to pursue as follows:

- **Call It Out: Racism, Racial Discrimination and Human Rights by The Human Rights Commission \*FREE**  
<http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/learning/elearning/call-it-out>
- **Lambton College’s “Exploring Diversity and Equity” Mini-Courses \*FREE**
  - Acknowledging Unconscious Bias
  - Mental Health
  - Intercultural Awareness
  - Ageism
  - LGBTQ Identities
  - feminism
  - disability justice
- **Canadian Human Rights Commission Webinars \*FREE**
  - Building Bridges Between Cultures
  - Gender Identity & Gender Expression: Building Awareness
  - What is Systemic Discrimination?
- **Harmony @ Work – Diversity and Inclusion Training**  
<http://harmonyatwork.ca/>
  - Inclusive Customer Service: Overcoming Unconscious Bias and Building Intercultural Competence
  - Building a Positive Space: Tools for LGBTQ+ Inclusion
  - Culturally Intelligent and Inclusive Communication for Professionals



- **The Canadian Diversity Initiative** <https://candiversity.com/>
  - Respect and Inclusion in the Workplace
  - LGBTQ+ Diversity and Inclusion Training for the Workplace
  - Canadian Indigenous Culture Training
  - Unconscious Bias

## **Recommendations**

The Diversity and Inclusion Task Force recommends the following:

- 1) That a Diversity and Inclusion Policy be created and approved by the Library Board.
- 2) That the addition of a Community Outreach Librarian position be considered for the 2022 Operations budget to initiate many of the recommendations outlined in this report.
- 3) That the Board consider the elimination of overdue fines.
- 4) That the Board recommend to City Council that they consider diversity and inclusion when appointing members to the Library Board.
- 5) That Library Management consider the creation of a staff committee to move forward with many of the initiatives that have been identified. Representation from Public Services, Technical Services and Circulation would be ideal.