

# **Ontario Pre-Budget Consultations**

**January 22, 2019 – Timmins, ON**

## **Northern Ontario Public Libraries**

Presenters:

Carole-Ann Churcher, CEO of the Timmins Public Library

Cyndi Stockman, CEO of the James Twp. Public Library in Elk Lake

Cheryl Lafreniere, CEO of the Teck Centennial Library in Kirkland Lake

Christina Noel-Blazecka, CEO of the Cochrane Public Library

I'm proud to work alongside passionate librarians and library staff, who make an impact in the lives of Ontarians every day.

### **Ontario Public Libraries strengthen local communities by engaging their citizens.**

We are Ontario's farthest-reaching, most cost-effective public resource. We are local centres of information, making access to knowledge readily available.

We help millions of regular people in virtually every community across Ontario – large and small – reach their potential.

We are Ontario's original community hubs, with a proven history of responding to and reflecting local priorities.

### **Public Libraries are essential to people and families across Ontario.**

The demographic we serve spans from infants to seniors – we are an institution providing free, equal access to ALL Ontarians, regardless of their age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language, education, income or social status.

In addition to books, movies and digital resources such as eBooks, eMagazines, databases and downloadable audio books, public libraries provide internet, wifi, technology training programs, access to health and wellness information, safe spaces for teens, high-quality children's programs focusing on literacy and multiple opportunities for knowledge sharing and lifelong learning at any age.

We offer stimulating educational, cultural and entertaining programs.

We form partnerships with local organizations in order to provide a wider range of resources to our patrons.

Teachers rely on our resources now more than ever to supplement and enhance their lessons due to lack of school libraries and school librarians.

We are also a lifeline for seniors, keeping them involved and active in their communities as they move through life.

In many northern, rural communities the library is the only place where reliable broadband is available and often the only frontline access point for digital Ontario government services and transactions.

### **We would like to share a few stories which demonstrate local impact.**

#### Timmins, ON

*Similar to southern Ontario urban centres, Timmins is currently struggling with the issue of homelessness. Libraries are able to support the homeless by providing a welcoming space, access to free books, newspapers and information as well as referrals to local support services.*

*Free access to Wi-Fi and computers are essential for a homeless person, to access online services and to keep in contact with their family members in other parts of the province. We witness firsthand, the value our services to those marginalized populations when they are able to find that apartment listing or access funds to help them get a flight back home. The Library may be the place where they get the resources and encouragement they need to get back on their feet again.*

#### Elk Lake, ON

*Elk Lake is located at least 40 km from the Hwy 11 corridor, but we are the central hub in our vicinity, with 4 highways coming into our community.*

*James Twp. Public Library has partnered up with Employment Options to offer space for meetings and appointments to help people look for jobs, make resumes or explore different educational training opportunities for new careers. By offering this service, people do not have to travel so far to get the help required to better their futures.*

### **Ontario public libraries deliver a significant economic impact in communities large and small.**

Public libraries like ours deliver huge returns on investment.

Impact studies done across the province indicate that every dollar invested in public libraries consistently generates over \$5 in direct economic benefits for the local community.

## Kirkland Lake, ON

*Debbie is one of many seniors who rely on the Teck Centennial Library in Kirkland Lake for more than just books. When she received an iPad as a Christmas gift, she didn't know what to do with it, or even how to turn it on. Like many seniors, Debbie was fearful to learn this new technology.*

*Library staff encouraged Debbie to sign up for a free 10-week iPad workshop. Now Debbie is able to communicate daily with her daughter and grandchildren, who live in Kitchener, using Facetime.*

### **Public libraries need help.**

While we've become resourceful at maximizing the value of every dollar, we've reached a critical crossroads.

Ontario public libraries are primarily a local responsibility. Municipalities, on average, are responsible for 96% of funding for their public libraries, leaving a heavy burden on the local taxpayer.

## Cochrane, ON

*Tyler is a 24-year-old young entrepreneur who spent several days a week at the Cochrane Public Library preparing his business plan to open a therapy clinic. He relied on the library's free WiFi, full administrative services, and comfortable work space to do research and bring his dream to achievement. Today, Tyler continues to come to the library to utilize the wide range of services as before, but for different reasons as well - enjoying the coffee bar on his breaks while relaxing in the library's atmosphere.*

### **Ontario should support public libraries.**

The province's support is essential for the sustainability of public libraries, especially for hundreds of libraries in small towns, rural and northern communities.

While we appreciate previous short-term grant opportunities offered by the province, these do not ensure sustainability as our sector transforms itself into the digital 21st Century.

Provincial support was cut by 50% back in the 1990's. And unlike other transfer payment recipients, the provincial base funding for public libraries has been frozen at that level **for over 20 years**. Many libraries are struggling to keep up with the role of public libraries in this digital age. And demand continues to rise.

While we recognize and appreciate the province's fiscal challenges, there is an immediate need to bring stability to many of our public libraries across Ontario, especially in the north.

Through a small investment in the province's annual base funding – \$17 million shared across hundreds of libraries, Ontario would ensure the long-term sustainability of our public libraries, especially in smaller towns and rural communities.

That's less than a 2.3% increase over the 22 years the provincial base funding has been frozen.

This 17 million dollar - enhanced, predictable funding would allow our public libraries to make immediate and long-term plans that best respond to the needs of our residents and communities.

Together, we can ensure that all Ontarians would have access to a true 21<sup>st</sup> century public library and the critical resources and services it provides.

Thank you.