

## Board Chair's 2023 AGM Report

**Report to:** The FOPL Board and Members  
**Prepared by:** Paul Ainslie, Chair  
**Prepared on:** April 17, 2023

### Recommendation

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1. **THAT the FOPL board and members receive the chair's report as information.**

### Report

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Dear FOPL Members,

It has been another exciting year for public libraries in Ontario, not without its challenges, but the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries has been there at the forefront once again to support our public libraries to meet all challenges head on!

I recently read a survey about the use of public libraries, and one respondent summed the future of libraries very succinctly: "We are adaptable and will overcome the obstacles ahead of us with pride and commitment."

And it's true; now more than ever, public libraries are providing essential services. Local and national media are paying more attention to this critical work, and libraries are doubling their traditional media and social media efforts to ensure their success stories are heard and their importance noted. This will only serve to boost the value of public libraries across Ontario, in the eyes of every community, as more and more patrons come through the doors either physically or virtually to utilize the broad array of services which are being offered.

Our public librarians have worked diligently to create, promote, and execute programming for all ages, and it shows, with public attendance at library programs each year as we come out of COVID.

Dealing with the dynamics of COVID, public librarians faced the difficulty of ensuring libraries stayed relevant, even as many had to close their doors for long periods of time. Librarians were thrown for a loop by eliminating the ability to draw people into the library with fun and educational programming. COVID disrupted their ability to run key in-person programs for people in every age demographic.



Perseverance was key, and this became an area where librarians excelled in taking action. Even though some had to face their fears of being on camera, learn how to use new technology, and create virtual programs from scratch, they rose to the occasion!

Many new virtual programs were born out of social distancing regulations, including story times, crafting how-tos, book talks, bedtime stories, drawing lessons, book clubs, online trivia, and more. Librarians also found ways to engage patrons in reading programs with virtual programming, [grab-n-go kits](#), and [online tracking tools](#).

In our rural and underprivileged communities throughout Ontario, the digital divide continues to be a challenge for delivering virtual services. To help bridge the gap, some libraries are extending their WiFi to their parking lots and lending out tablets or laptops. Others are lending mobile hotspots or placing them in trailers in parking lots for patrons to access. At FOPL we will continue to our advocacy work with partners such as the Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA), Ontario Library Service (OLS), Ontario Library Association (OLA) and the Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC) to bring about changes that will benefit libraries across the province.

In relation to this, FOPL mad a joint budget submission with the Ontario Library Association to the Ontario government with three key recommendations:

Working alongside our partners at OLA, we are continuing our advocacy for Ontario's libraries with three main priorities:

1. Maintain critical provincial funding for Ontario's public libraries at current levels and work with municipalities and the Federal government to prevent unsustainable cuts to public library funding.
2. Working alongside First Nations Public Library leaders, rapidly implement a sustainable funding model for public libraries on reserve to ensure that these important local hubs are fully-funded and viable. This includes enhancing the existing direct provincial funding support for public libraries on reserve to sustainably fund library operations and ensure a living income for frontline library staff in these communities.
3. Provide critical e-learning support and fair access to modern, digital resources for all Ontario public libraries through the creation of an Ontario Digital Public Library, thereby leveraging the province's significant purchasing power to give all Ontarians access to a common core of high-quality e-learning & online resources and more e-books.

With regards to our public libraries, it always seems to be a rare fiscal year when funding isn't an issue. With the latest budget freezes in many municipalities, in conjunction with inflation, the freezes actually feel like a budget cut. We at FOPL need to continue to advocate for our public library systems now, more than ever. With so much of public library funding coming from municipal budgets, it's of paramount importance our local politicians are constantly reminded of the high public opinion of



what our public libraries can do not only as providers of information but as gathering places in our communities. We need to bring this same attitude to the table when we have discussions with our Municipal and Provincial politicians as well.

Looking back over the past year FOPL has done amazing advocacy work in all areas, as we continue to support our public libraries in the challenges which they are faced with.

All my Best,

Paul Ainslie  
FOPL Chair