

# The Great Equalizer

The Case For Investing In the  
Toronto Public Library

Govind C. Rao





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# The Great Equalizer

## The Case for Investing in the Toronto Public Library

When you are growing up, there are two institutional places that affect you most powerfully: the church, which belongs to God, and the public library, which belongs to you. The public library is the great equalizer.

— **Keith Richards**

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### Executive Summary

The Toronto Public Library is the busiest public library system in North America and second busiest in the world. It circulates more books than the libraries of Los Angeles and Chicago combined. Toronto's public libraries are so popular they enjoy more visits than any other entertainment draw in town — more than even the Toronto Maple Leafs. But an examination of the past 20 years of Toronto's public library budgets shows this cherished community hub is reeling from chronic underfunding.

It discovers residents' demand for public library services has never been higher:

- In 2011 alone, there were 19 million visits to the Toronto Public Library — a 15% increase since 2000.

- More people visit the Toronto Public Library every year than the annual total for 10 culture, arts, and entertainment facilities in the Toronto area including the Air Canada Centre (events, Leafs, and Raptors), the Rogers Centre (events, Blue Jays), the CN Tower, the Royal Ontario Museum, Canada's Wonderland, the Toronto Zoo, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Ontario Science Centre, the CNE, and the Toronto International Film Festival.
- The clientele is diverse: The number of Torontonians who use the library annually is relatively equal across age and income, though there are some noticeable differences. More recent immigrants (67%) are more frequent users of the library (once a month or more) than the Toronto average (46%). Slightly more women than men are registered card holders (57.5%).
- During economic downturns, Toronto's public libraries become even more valuable to residents — visits to the library increase during these periods.

The report examines a myriad of ways in which Toronto's public libraries add value to the city, acting as a great equalizer at very little cost. The Toronto Public Library costs Torontonians 17 cents a day or \$5.20 a month. For that reasonable sum — approximately the price of a breakfast meal at Tim Horton's — each resident has unlimited access to 98 branches and more books, movies, and other materials than one person could ever consume. On average, Torontonians check out one book, movie, or magazine out of their public library every month, or 12.9 a year.

But the report documents how the Toronto Public Library system has been reeling under years of real cuts to staffing, operating, capital and acquisitions budgets. The report shows that the 1990s, in particular, were a disastrous decade for the funding of Toronto's libraries. Funding fell year-on-year in real terms as both the provincial and municipal government reduced support for public libraries.

The operating budgets of Toronto's libraries were cut from \$166 million to \$129 million in 1997 (2002 dollars). The most serious cuts were administered by the provincial government of Premier Mike Harris between 1995 and 1997: provincial operating grants to Toronto public libraries during this two-year period were slashed, on average, by 36%.

The change of provincial government in 2003 did not lead to a reversal of fortunes for Toronto's libraries. The Liberal government maintained

the lower level of provincial grants and continued the freeze on provincial operating funding:

- Provincial funding as a share of Toronto's libraries' budgets dropped from 6.3% in 1992 to 3.1% in 2011.
- What was a \$10.5 million dollar provincial funding envelope in 1992 is now only \$4.6 million in operating funding (figures adjusted to 2002 dollars).
- The cumulative operating budget cuts since 1992 for the city's library budget totals \$800 million.
- Since 1992, Toronto has lost 532 library staff and is nearly 25% below what it was 20 years ago.
- Cumulative cuts to the acquisitions budget since 1992 have taken \$51.6 million in materials off the shelves, resulting in a narrower selection of materials, even as demand grows.
- In the 1990s, many of Metro Toronto's libraries were forced to cut service hours. North York Public Library cut hours in 1992 by 3.1% and still had increased circulation of 1%. The same year Scarborough, preserved hours of operation and saw an increase of 11%.

The sea change in provincial funding for Ontario libraries during the Harris years cannot be understated. After 1998, the provincial government never increased its grants to libraries as it had for the half-century after 1945. Such a long and deep string of funding cuts had an immediate and negative impact on service. In just two years, 1992–94, Toronto's libraries lost 11.5% of their librarians and support staff.

The report documents how amalgamation was an additional blow to Toronto's libraries in the 1990s. Another 10% of libraries' staffing complement was eliminated through a voluntary separation program and the new Toronto Public Library budget was reduced to well below pre-amalgamation levels, despite increased library usage by residents. Toronto's library funding hit a 40-year low in 1999.

The critical state of library underfunding was incrementally improved between 2001 and 2010, with reinvestments in materials, facilities and opening hours to recover some of the ground lost in the 1990s. Circulation, visits, and library program participation responded by growing at a 4% per year rate in the 2000s as libraries were finally able to respond to unmet demand.

By 2010, the library had come within \$7 million of its 1992 levels of funding (in 2002 dollars). It wasn't sufficient to serve the larger population and increased operating requirements, but it appeared that, at long last, the Toronto Public Library was back on the right track.

But in 2010–11, the politics of gravy trains and tax cuts plunged the Toronto Public Library back into a crisis period reminiscent of the 1990s and early-2000s. In that year, the city manager called on city agencies to cut 5% from their budgets. Opposition to service cuts by residents and the library board ensured that the final library budget for 2011 included a funding increase of 2% — still only about half of what was needed by the Toronto Public Library to maintain service at 2010 levels. The 2010–11 library budget resulted in another cut of 18 staff positions by 2012 and the closing of the Urban Affairs Library.

The 2011–12 library budget process began with the wholesale replacement of the Library Board on September 22, 2011 by majority vote of city council. Armed with the two consultants' reports that proposed major service cuts, the city manager asked the board to prepare an operating budget with a 10% cut on top of the cuts in 2011. The public responded with an unprecedented display of support for the Toronto Public Library. At the Library Board's October 17, 2011 meeting, the board initially approved a 5.7% cut to the 2012 operating budget over the previous year. It then amended the recommendation to approve a 5.9% cut — 4.1% short of the city manager's request.

This was a pyrrhic victory at best: the 2012 budget eliminated another 107 librarian and support worker positions, leading to a total of 307 staff positions cut from the Toronto Public Library system since amalgamation in 1998 at the same time as demand for library services was rapidly increasing. It was also the fourth year in a row in which there was no economic adjustment for the library acquisitions budget, despite the overwhelming popularity of the city's public library system. The budget for acquisitions was reduced by \$1.89 million, equaling a loss of 106,000 books, DVDs, CDs, and other items — 12% of all items purchased every year.

The report makes a compelling argument for increased government investment in Toronto's public libraries. The public demand for them is stronger than ever, but it's up to the city and province to keep them adequately funded.

The report also points to needed capital investments. Many of Toronto's libraries were built in the 1970s and 1980s. They require significant investments to return them to a state of good repair but no level of government appears committed to address the crisis. In 2010, the city librarian estimated the requirement for capital investment in Toronto's libraries at \$164.7



million between 2011–20. After a \$20 million dollar cut to the library capital budget in 2011, the amount now budgeted is only \$145.5 million.

It concludes that the Toronto Public Library is in critical need of an immediate and long-term reinvestment in staff, books and materials acquisition, repairs and new buildings to continue to serve the growing needs of the population. The city's challenge is not to cut, but rather to expand library services for Toronto's residents in a tough economy and in the context of a growing gap in wealth, opportunities and widening social exclusion. Toronto's library system has been a key factor in making the city a successful international example of a diverse, inclusive city. Chronic underfunding only undercuts this great achievement.

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## **Libraries: Public Goods Enjoyed By All**

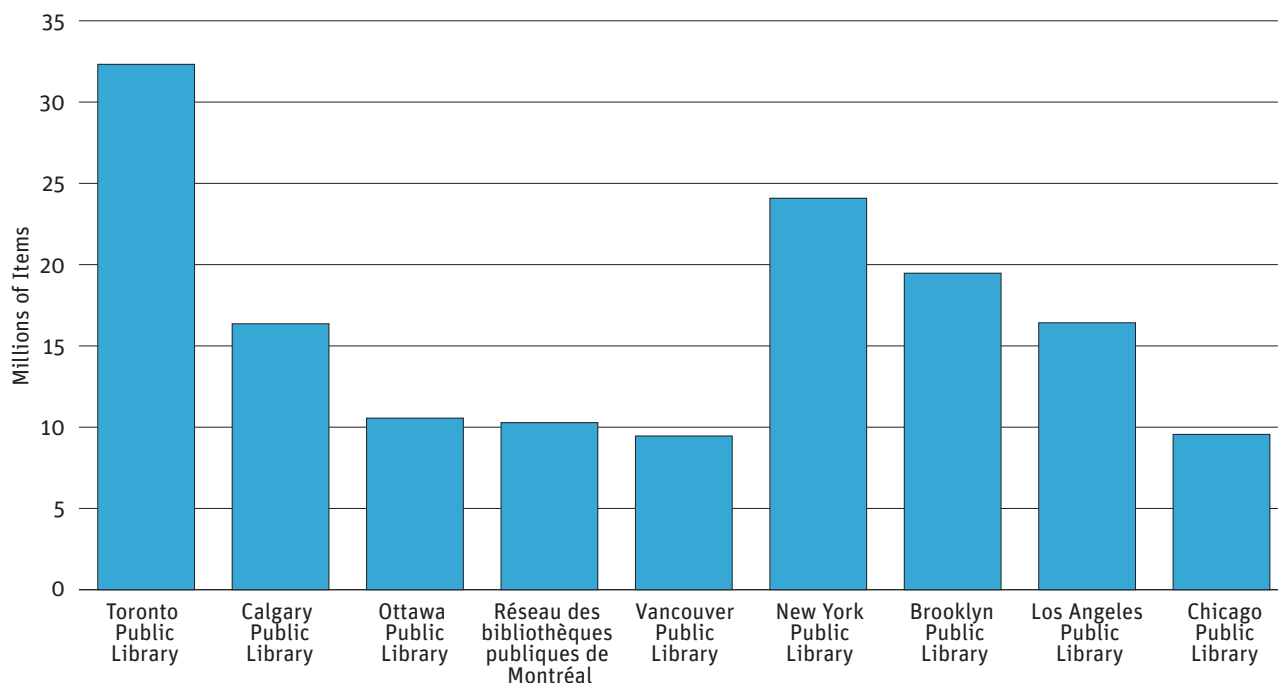
On a weekday afternoon, the freshly renovated Toronto Reference Library teems with people of all ages and walks of life. A representative cross-section of the city reads, studies and mingles side by side. Around the corner at Bay and Bloor, the Indigo bookstore carefully attempts to replicate the public library's ambiance and openness, yet is stocked floor to ceiling with *private goods*.<sup>1</sup> If you try to take a book out of Indigo without paying, you will risk arrest. The public library is an excellent example of a *public good*: something that can be enjoyed by all, and no one is excluded from its potential benefits. Anyone with a library card can take a book home for free.

And we do. The Toronto Public Library is the busiest public library system in North America and second busiest in the world. It circulates more books than the libraries of Los Angeles and Chicago combined.

Among Toronto's 98 branches are a diverse complement of specialty libraries and public facilities. Each year, Torontonians step through their doors 18 million times to borrow over 32 million books, CDs, DVDs and other items.<sup>2</sup>

In this report we look at who is using Toronto's public libraries, the benefits of public libraries as community hubs, and the funding of the Toronto Public Library and its predecessor libraries of Etobicoke, York, Scarborough, East York, Toronto, North York, and Metro Toronto over the past 20 years. The cumulative effect of this report is to shine a light on the important function that public libraries play in Toronto neighbourhoods. We reveal a library system that has experienced long-term structural underfunding that significantly affects the quality of life of all Torontonians.

**FIGURE 1** Circulation of Busiest Library Systems in North America, 2010



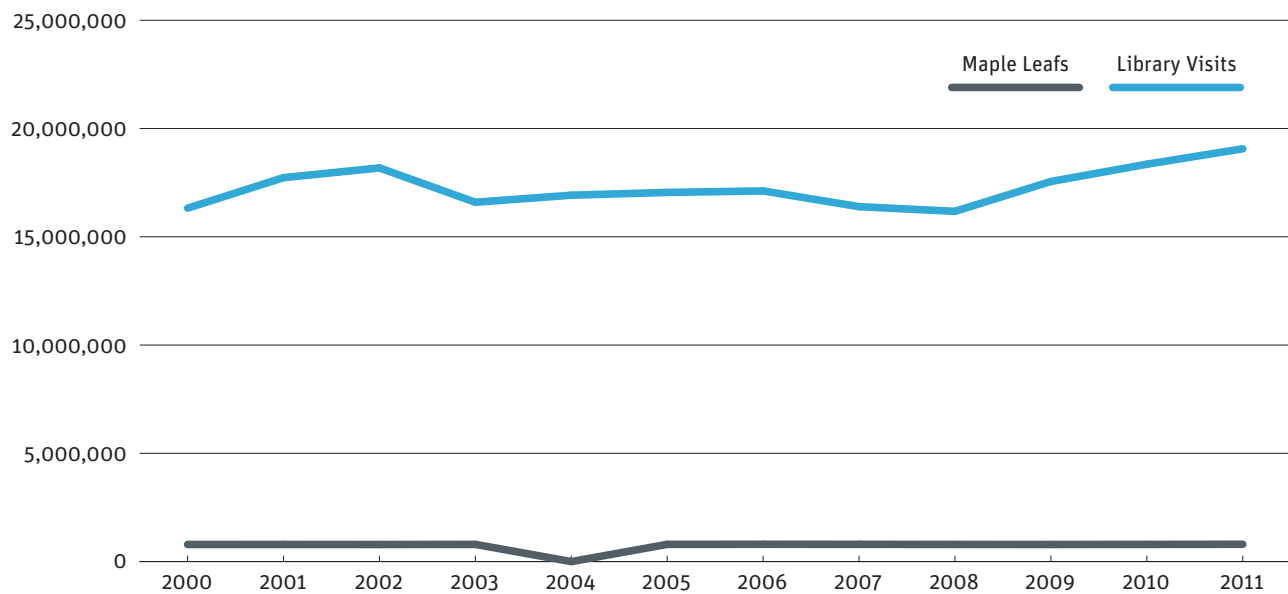
Source 2011 Annual Performance Measures and 2010 Benchmarking Information, Toronto Public Library Staff Report to Toronto Public Library Board, April 30, 2012

## Toronto Public Library: A Brief History

The Toronto Public Library system is a legacy residents inherit from visionary city builders of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries who, despite scarce resources, understood the equalizing benefits of a free public space and shelf upon shelf of books to absorb. The Toronto Public Library came into being as a democratic movement to equalize access to knowledge and create shared public gathering places. Toronto's first libraries were founded in the early-1800s, when two types of libraries developed: the subscription library for upper-class readers and mechanics' institutes, which provided workers with access to scientific and technical texts, as well as pleasure reading. These predecessor libraries were the seeds of what became the Toronto Public Library in 1884, after the passage of the Free Library referendum by a huge majority of Toronto voters the previous year.<sup>3</sup>

In the intervening 129 years, Toronto's library system has grown incrementally branch by branch and added important programs to serve the community's needs: access to resources for people with disabilities, literacy services, children's programming, and the bookmobile for residents

**FIGURE 2** Popularity Contest: Toronto Public Library vs. Maple Leafs Home Games



Source Annual Performance Reports, Toronto Public Library 2000-2011. ESPN, <http://espn.go.com/nhl/attendance>.

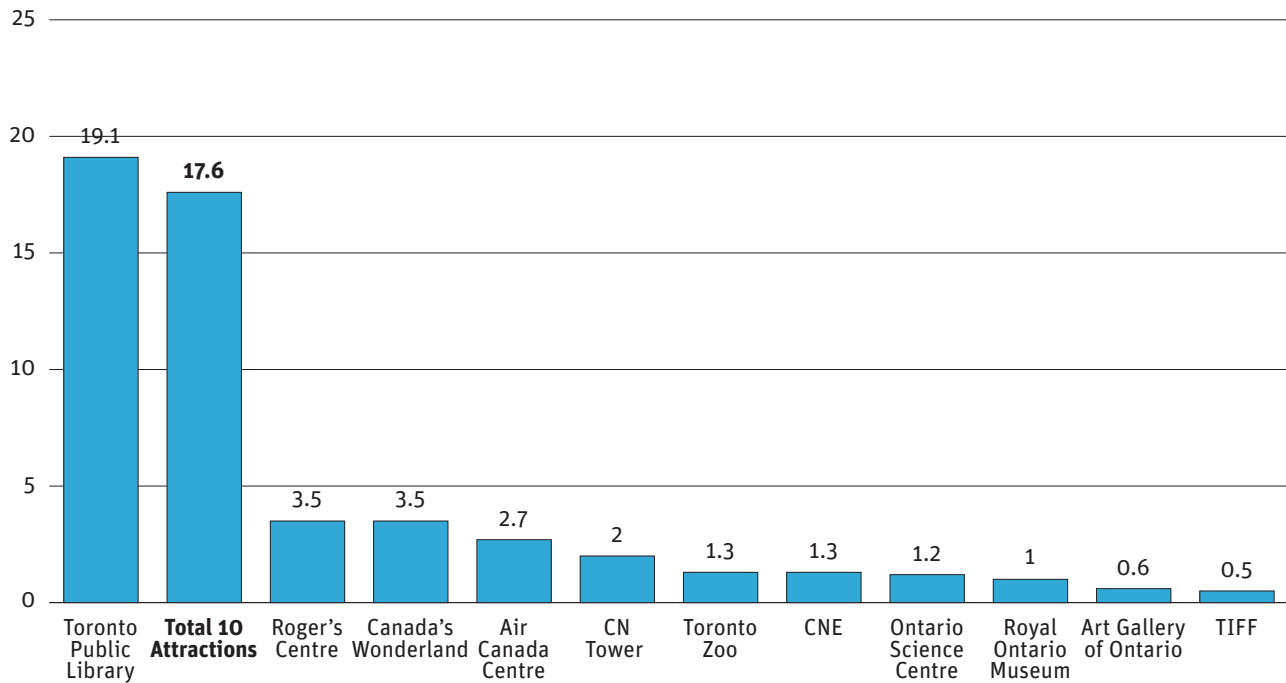
with mobility challenges. Toronto’s library system is immensely popular today – perhaps even more popular than the home team, the Maple Leafs.

### Public Libraries vs. The Entertainment District

Residents’ demand for public library services has never been higher. They enjoy more visits than any other entertainment draw in town. In fact, Toronto’s libraries are a more popular draw than Maple Leafs hockey games. A total of 799,786 people in 2011–12 had the money, connections, or luck to attend a Leafs’ game. Twenty-five times more Torontonians visited the library in that year, and none of them had to pay one cent for admission – unless they failed to return their books on time. The Leafs are considered the most popular attraction in town, measured by how hard it is to get a ticket. As *Figure 2* shows, one reason for that demand is that game day attendance has flat-lined at 800,000 for the past decade. Over the same period, visits to the Toronto Public Library have increased to 19 million in 2011 – a 15% increase.

In fact, more people visit the Toronto Public Library every year than the annual total for 10 culture, arts, and entertainment facilities in the Toronto area, including the Air Canada Centre (events, Leafs, and Raptors), the

**FIGURE 3** Toronto Public Library vs. Top 10 Toronto Attractions, 2011



Source Annual reports, corporate websites<sup>4</sup>

Rogers Centre (events, Blue Jays), the CN Tower, the Royal Ontario Museum, Canada's Wonderland, the Toronto Zoo, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Ontario Science Centre, the CNE, and the Toronto International Film Festival.

Because they are open to everyone, Toronto's libraries serve a diverse population. All residents benefit from the Toronto Public Library regardless of age, income, gender, mother tongue, ethnicity, or whether they were born here or abroad. In their day-to-day operation, public libraries are among the most inclusive, accessible and used institutions in Toronto. On average, Torontonians check out one book, movie, or magazine from their public library every month, or 12.9 a year.<sup>5</sup>

Despite misconceptions that the library has been made redundant by the internet, the exact opposite is true. During the years that the internet grew from its infancy into an extensive content network, library usage kept up its steady growth curve. The internet has, in fact, brought in a new group of users to the library, and has facilitated the increased use of traditional library services such as inter-library loans and holds.

**TABLE 4** Who's Using Toronto's Public Libraries? 2012

73% of Toronto residents use the Toronto public libraries annually. Among frequent library users (once or more per month), usage is spread evenly across all income levels.

Income	Use
< \$30,000/year	46%
\$30,000–49,000/year	52%
\$50,000–69,000/year	49%
\$70,000–99,000/year	43%
\$100,000–149,000/year	36%
\$150,000+/year	39%

#### Demographic Groups Who Are Frequent Library Users

Age 18–24 years	56%
Age 35–54 years	50%
University graduates	51%
Children (under 18 years)	61%
Part-time employees	55%
Students	60%
Recent Canadian immigrants	67%

Age Group	% of Total Population (2011)	% of Registered Cardholders*
0–12	13.2	13.2
13–19	7.8	12.0
20–34	22.8	24.7
35–49	22.8	20.5
50–64	18.9	11.4
65+	14.4	5.9

\* 12.2% of cardholders' birthdates were unknown

**Source** Toronto Public Library commissioned telephone survey in 2006. Toronto Public Library summary document, December 13, 2011.

As *Table 4* demonstrates, the number of Torontonians who use the library annually is relatively equal across age and income, though there are some notable differences. Recent immigrants (67%) are more frequent users of the library (once a month or more) than the Toronto average (46%). Also, slightly more women than men are registered card holders (57.5%).

The Toronto Public Library has been an important factor in bringing together our increasingly diverse city. Access to high quality resources and programs have allowed countless Torontonians to overcome social and economic disadvantage. At the same time, the library system continues to regu-

larly attract a significant percentage of the wealthiest people in the city. This equalizing role of public libraries is an important feature in contemporary Toronto, which has experienced severe income polarization since the 1970s. Whereas Toronto was a middle class city in 1970 — when 66% of neighbourhoods were middle income — by 2005 only 29% were middle income.<sup>6</sup> Very low-income neighbourhoods have proliferated, from 1% in 1970 to 13% in 2005. If nothing changes to reverse these trends, 20% of the city will be living on low income by 2015.<sup>7</sup>

Many Torontonians living in poverty are recent immigrants to the city. Since the early-1980s, immigrants have experienced a harder time succeeding in Canada compared with previous cohorts of immigrants to the city in the 1950s to the 1970s.<sup>8</sup> This trend accelerated in the 1990s, hastened by below-inflation wage increases and severe cuts to government transfers and services at municipal, provincial and federal levels. Growing numbers of immigrant, working class, and young Torontonians find themselves closed off from much of the richness of the city — but not its libraries. This is the challenging context in which the Toronto Public Library operates as a vital service that remains accessible and relevant to everyone.

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## **Metropolitan Toronto Area Library Funding: The Early 1990s to the Present**

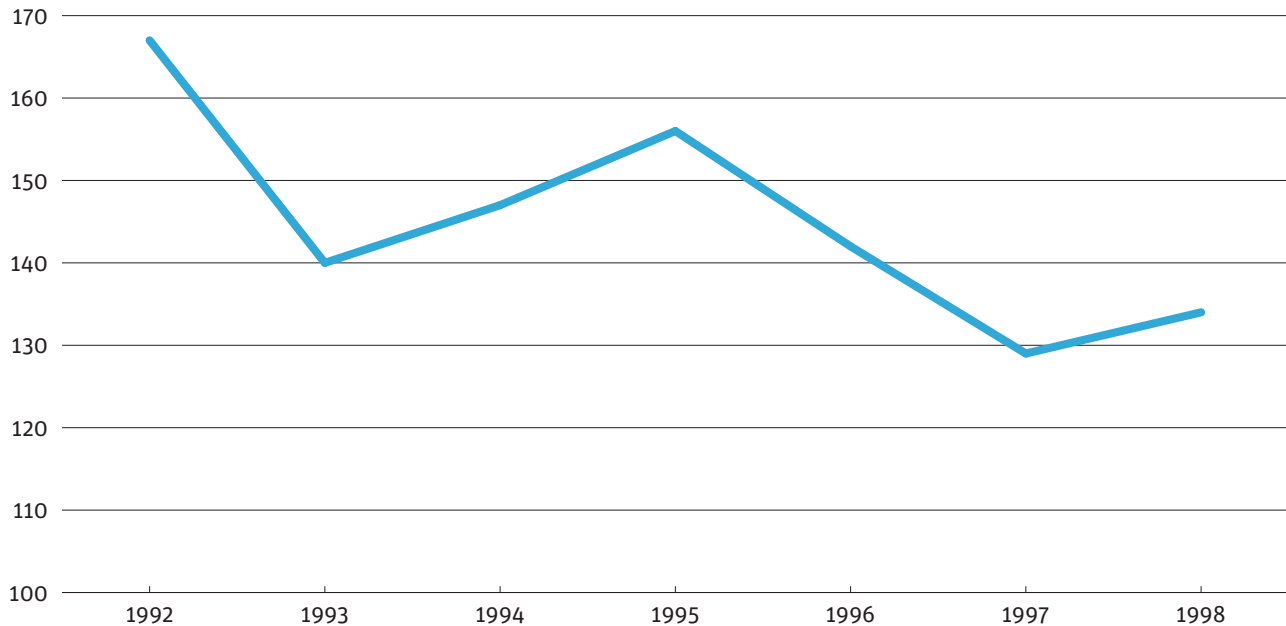
Given the heavy use of the library and its increasingly important social role for the community, have Toronto's libraries been sufficiently funded? A careful analysis reveals that the answer is no.

This section tracks the level of municipal and provincial funding for Toronto public libraries between 1992 and 2012. During this 20-year period of rising — and increasingly complex — demand, the Toronto Public Library system has experienced real cuts to staffing, operating, capital, and acquisitions budgets.

First, we look at pre-amalgamation funding for the predecessor systems of the Toronto Public Library. We combined Ontario provincial government statistics for the six municipal library systems and one at the Metropolitan Toronto level to create a data set that reveals the funding trends that were inherited by the Toronto Public Library at amalgamation in 1998.

The 1990s were a disastrous decade for the funding of Toronto's libraries. As *Figure 5* shows, funding fell year-on-year in real terms as both the provincial and municipal government reduced support for public libraries.

**FIGURE 5** TPL Predecessor Libraries Total Operating Expenses, 1992–97, Constant 2002 Dollars, Millions

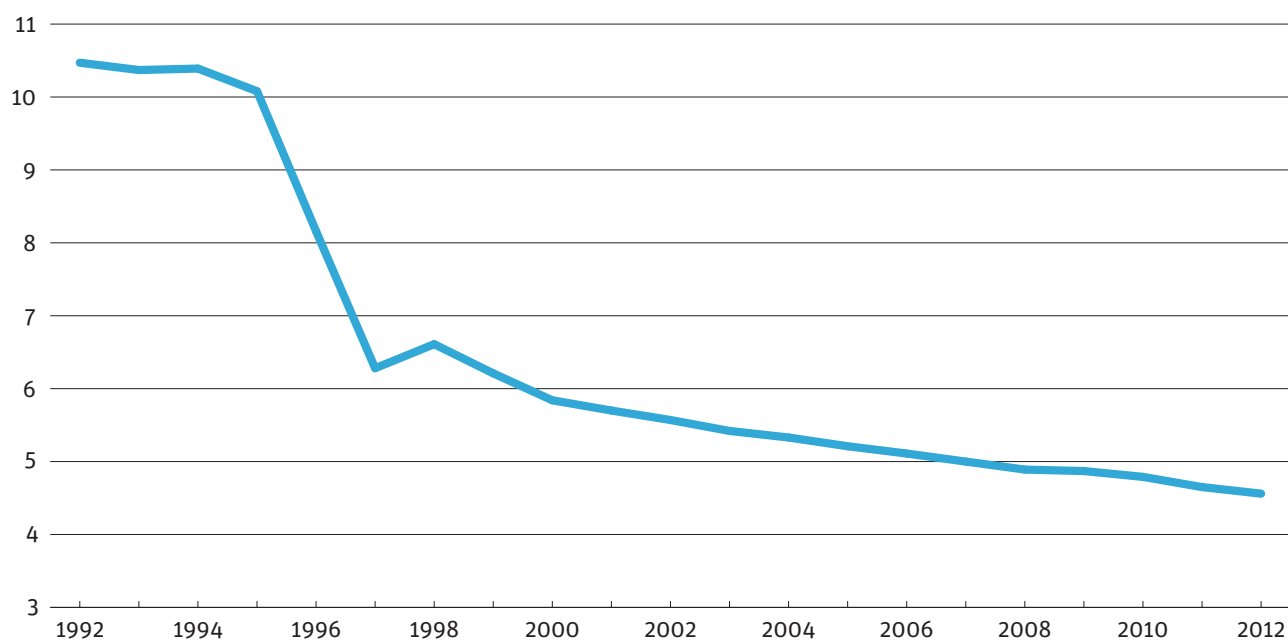


Source Ontario public libraries statistics, 1992–97. Published by the Ontario Ministry of Culture.<sup>9</sup>

The operating budgets of Toronto’s libraries were cut from \$166 million in 1992 to \$129 million in 1997 (2002 dollars). Progressive Conservative Premier Mike Harris’ provincial government administered the most serious cuts to Toronto public libraries between 1995 and 1997, with provincial operating grants slashed, on average, by 36% in a two-year period. The change of provincial government in 2003 did not lead to a reversal of fortunes for Toronto’s libraries. The Liberal government maintained the lower level of provincial grants and continued the freeze on provincial operating funding. What was a \$10.5 million dollar funding envelope in 1992 is now only \$4.6 million in operating funding (figures adjusted to 2002 dollars). As *Figure 6* illustrates, provincial funding precipitously declined, from 6.3% of Toronto’s libraries’ budgets in 1992 to a figure equivalent to only 3.1% of the budget today. The province has cut its support by more than half since 1992, although we should note that the province’s historic share of funding for libraries was approximately 15%.<sup>10</sup>

The sea-change in provincial funding for Ontario libraries during the Harris years cannot be understated. After 1998, the provincial government

**FIGURE 6** Provincial Operating Funding Cuts, 1992–2012, Constant 2002 Dollars, Millions



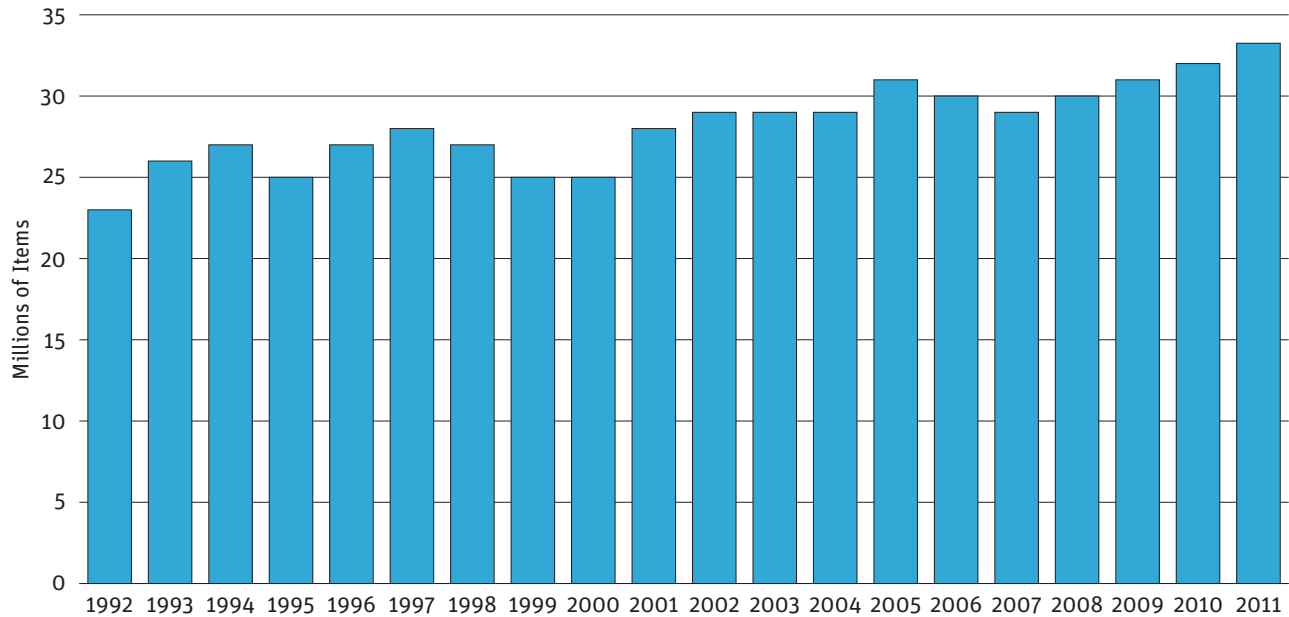
**Source** Ontario Public Libraries Statistics, 1992–2010. Published by the Ontario Ministry of Culture, and Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. Data for 2011 from 2011 Toronto budget. 2012 data from library budget presented at Toronto Public Library Board, January 2012.

never increased its grants to libraries as it had for the half-century after 1945. The Ontario government also completely withdrew from providing any central direction for municipal libraries through a provincial library agency within the bureaucracy. The result is that 250 major municipal library systems coordinate operations and share information based on ad-hoc and sporadic contact.<sup>11</sup>

Such a long and deep string of funding cuts had an immediate and negative impact on service. The North York Library cut hours by 3.1% in 1992 and by 3.7% in 1993. It closed the Yorkdale Library branch that same year. The provincial share of the York Public Library budget was 12% in 1995 and only 6.5% in 1997, an overall loss of 44% of the provincial grant and 5% of its total budget. In response, York closed libraries on Friday evenings and slashed the budget for materials such as books. Etobicoke also cut Friday evening service and moved opening hours from 9 am to 10 am. Bookmobile service — where buses filled with abridged Toronto Public Library collections made regular visits to neighbourhoods to promote library usage — was eliminated in Scarborough and Etobicoke. The Scarborough library also ended its children’s toy borrowing program in 1995. The next year, librarians tried



**FIGURE 7** Circulation: Toronto Public Libraries, 1992–2011



**Source** Ontario Public Libraries Statistics, 1992-2010. Published by the Ontario Ministry of Culture, and Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. Data for 2011 from 2011 Performance measures, presented at Toronto Public Library Board, May 2012. Period from 1992–1998 reflects circulation of predecessor libraries, period from 1998–2011 reflects amalgamated Toronto Public Library.

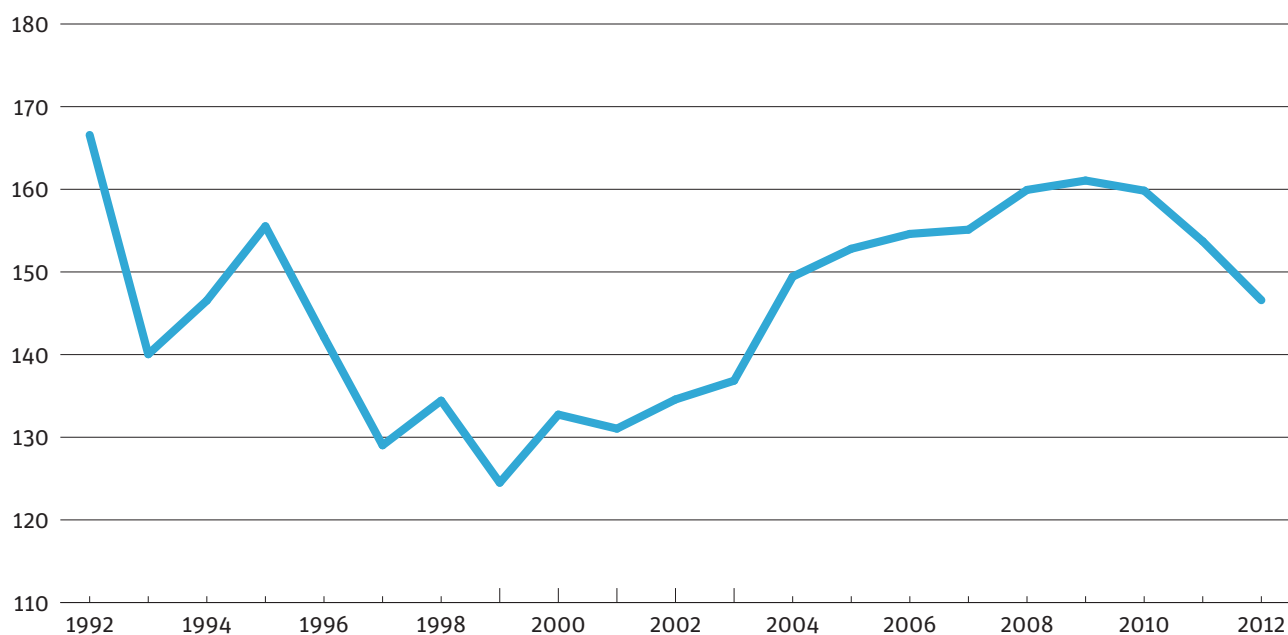
to make due by repairing 12% more items because there were 10% fewer dollars in the materials budget to purchase replacements. Budget cuts also forced libraries to reduce staff. In just two years, 1992–94, Toronto’s libraries lost 11.5% of their librarians and support staff.

Amalgamation was an additional blow to Toronto’s libraries in the 1990s. Another 10% of libraries’ staffing complement was eliminated through a voluntary separation program and the new Toronto Public Library budget was reduced to well below pre-amalgamation levels. The political initiative to bring seven library systems under one umbrella was done in the name of efficiency and cost-savings, but the result was simply a further reduction of the city’s public library budget.<sup>12</sup>

And yet, because of the deep recession of the early-1990s and the slow recovery, especially for socially and economically vulnerable populations, circulation and visits to the library increased significantly during this time period.

Metro Toronto’s remaining library staff did ‘more with less’ but it was not sustainable over the long-term. Cuts have reduced the number of librar-

**FIGURE 8** Toronto Libraries Total Operating Expenditures, 1992–2012, Constant 2002 Dollars, Millions



**Source** Ontario Public Libraries Statistics, 1992–2010. Published by the Ontario Ministry of Culture, and Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. Data for 2011 from 2011 Toronto Budget. 2012 data from Library Budget presented at Toronto Public Library Board, January 2012.

ians and degraded the variety and quality of the Toronto public library’s collections.

### City and Library Budgets: 1998–2011

Seven municipalities were amalgamated into the new City of Toronto in 1998 by virtue of provincial legislation. Amalgamation had a major impact on Toronto’s residents in the 1990s. It was preceded by deep municipal budget cuts pre-amalgamation as a result of provincial downloading and more cuts to provincial transfers post-amalgamation. The original Metro Toronto Reference Library, built in 1977, already had a long history of underfunding, as detailed in the “Program Review of the Metro Toronto Library Board” by J.P. Kruger in 1982.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, it was already working at a reduced level of funding when the cutbacks of the early 1990s and amalgamation exacerbated this problem. The combined impact on Toronto’s libraries was disastrous, and Toronto’s library funding hit a 40-year low in 1999.

The critical state of library underfunding was incrementally improved in the years 2001–10, with reinvestments in materials, facilities and opening hours to recover some of the ground lost in the 1990s. Circulation, visits, and library program participation responded by growing at a 4% per year rate in the 2000s as libraries were finally able to respond to unmet demand. By 2010, the library had come within \$7 million of its 1992 levels of funding (in 2002 dollars). It wasn't sufficient to serve the larger population and increased operating requirements, but it appeared that, at long last, the Toronto Public Library was back on the right track.

But in 2010–11, the politics of gravy trains and tax cuts plunged the Toronto Public Library back into a crisis period reminiscent of the 1990s and early-2000s. In October 2010, council voted to cancel the \$60 personal vehicle tax. This cancellation, combined with a decision to freeze property taxes, resulted in the city foregoing \$132 million in revenue.<sup>14</sup> The 2011 city budget drew on a pre-existing surplus from the previous administration to balance the books. At the same time as the administration of Toronto Mayor Rob Ford proposed using surpluses to fund tax cuts instead of improved public services, the city manager called on city agencies to cut 5% from their budgets. This requirement was imposed on agencies regardless of program needs or growth in demand. Opposition to service cuts by residents and the library board ensured that the final library budget for 2011 included a funding increase of 2% — still only about half of what was needed by the Toronto Public Library to maintain service at 2010 levels.

A total of 182 staff positions were lost between 1998–2011.<sup>15</sup> The 2011 library budget would result in another cut of 18 staff positions by 2012<sup>16</sup> and the closing of the Urban Affairs Library.<sup>17</sup> What came next was much worse.

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## The Long Shadow of Management Consultants

City managers contracted KPMG consultants in May 2011 to study city-wide operations which could be “rationalized” — in other words, the city was looking to offload costs through privatization, contracting out and further cuts to programs.<sup>18</sup> Like a repeat of the 1990s, the city manager also contracted DPRA Consulting to write a report to study “service efficiency” in the Toronto Public Library.

KPMG tabled the *City of Toronto: Core Service Review* in July 2011.<sup>19</sup> Their recommendations for city services were predictable: contracting out, reduc-

tion through consolidation, and privatization. When it came to the Toronto Public Library, the report had four key recommendations:

- Consider opportunities to reduce services (hours and days of operation);
- Consider rationalizing the footprint of libraries to reduce service levels, closing some branches;
- Consider reducing or eliminating some programs and outreach activities;
- Consider consolidating Toronto Archives with Library Services.<sup>20</sup>

The most contradictory aspect of KPMG's report was that it identified the service provided by the Toronto Public Library for Study and Community Access as "above standard" and therefore concluded it should be reduced to the lower standard of American municipal libraries by closing some library branches. Remarkably, KPMG looked abroad to American public library systems decimated by years of deep funding cuts for a model for Toronto libraries just as officials from those regions were themselves looking to Toronto as a model of a "healthy and outstanding" library system to emulate.<sup>21</sup> The KPMG report was a recipe for how to dismantle a library system that took communities 130 years to build.

In November 2011, DPRA<sup>22</sup> submitted its report to the city manager and the Library Board.<sup>23</sup> DPRA Consulting focused exclusively on the Toronto Public Library. Its report provided very specific recommendations for budget and service cuts:

- Invest in self-service checkout to eliminate positions;
- Reduce open hours per year by 13% or 35,165 hours;
- Shift remaining hours to periods of highest demand (afternoons, evenings, weekends) and reduce 'off-peak' hours (mornings, slowest day of the week);
- Charge for adult programs (literacy, author evenings);
- Institute new user fees for holds not picked up and inter-branch delivery.

DPRA Consulting also recommended closing 14 library branches: Swansea, Todmorden Room, Davenport, Queen/Saulter, Taylor Memorial, St.Clair/

Silverthorn, Victoria Village, Evelyn Gregory, Long Branch, Perth/Dupont, Mount Pleasant, Humber Bay, Pleasantview, and Jones. Despite such a radical recommendation for multiple closures, DPRA maintained it wouldn't "lead to reductions in library service or access given that the affected populations are located in areas which are serviced by other branches within walking distance."<sup>24</sup> Incredibly, DPRA also maintained that a cut of 35,000 service hours from remaining branches wouldn't result in service reductions. Public opposition to the closure of library branches led Toronto city council to specifically set this aside as an option for the Toronto Public Library Board to consider in 2011.<sup>25</sup>

Both DPRA and KPMG are global consulting firms which use much lower American benchmarks when establishing their standards, without any consideration of the particular importance of libraries to the fabric of Toronto, or the unique needs of the city's population. Neither report took into account the diverse, immigrant character of the city or the equalizing nature of public libraries anywhere among their considerations. When their contracted mission is solely to recommend spending cuts, consultants quickly learn to ignore the real value of public services.

What "alternative service delivery" means in the context of the Toronto Public Library is a profit-making opportunity for private companies, financed by the poorest members of our society. As Toronto's *Now Magazine* comments ruefully:

The Toronto Public Library has now contracted out collection of fines to a private collections agency. Fines over \$10 are being pursued. The logical outcome will be a drop in circulation as low-income borrowers will be dissuaded by a new aggressive approach to fines.<sup>26</sup>

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## The 2011–12 Library Budget Battle

The 2011–12 library budget process began with the wholesale replacement of the Library Board on September 22, 2011 by majority vote of city council. The new citizen appointees represented a shift from the previous board and were more focused on finding savings to limit or shrink the Toronto Public Library's budget.<sup>27</sup> Armed with the two consultants' reports that proposed major service cuts, the city manager asked the board to prepare an operating budget with a 10% cut on top of the cuts in 2011. The public responded with an unprecedented display of support for the Toronto Public Library. At the Library Board's October 17, 2011 meeting, the board initially

approved a 5.7% cut to the 2012 operating budget over the previous year. It then amended the recommendation to approve a 5.9% cut – 4.1% short of the city manager’s request.

This was a pyrrhic victory at best: the 2012 budget eliminated another 107 librarian and support worker positions, leading to a total of 307 staff positions cut from the Toronto Public Library system since amalgamation in 1998 at the same time as demand for Library services was increasing rapidly. Between 1992 and 2012, Toronto’s libraries lost 532 staff and are expected to deliver quality service with 24% fewer staff.

It also marked the fourth year in a row in which there was no economic adjustment for the library acquisitions budget, despite the overwhelming popularity of the city’s public library system. The budget for acquisitions was reduced by \$1.89 million, equalling a loss of 106,000 books, DVDs, CDs, and other items – 12% of all items purchased every year.

Rather than taking the popularity of Toronto’s public libraries and continually increasing demand as a cue to improve and expand services for an enthusiastic population, the city is undoing the brief gains of the 2000s and diminishing a cherished community hub still reeling from chronic underfunding.

Nor did the city’s consultants take seriously the continually neglected problem of infrastructure repair and expansion. A recent report on the state of public library infrastructure in Ontario concludes that it “is in crisis and needs immediate attention.”<sup>28</sup> There are four problems to address: not enough space to meet demand, the need to repair and, in some cases, replace aging facilities, upgrading facilities so they’re more accessible, and the need to convert temporary facilities into permanent ones.<sup>29</sup> In fact, even the KPMG report identified a \$50.2 million state-of-good-repair backlog.<sup>30</sup>

Many of Toronto’s libraries were built in the 1970s and 1980s. They require significant investments to return them to a state of good repair but no level of government appears committed to address the crisis. In 2010, the city librarian estimated the requirement for capital investment in Toronto’s libraries at \$164.7 million between 2011–20. After a \$20 million dollar cut to the library capital budget in 2011, the amount now budgeted is only \$145.5 million. The Federation of Ontario Libraries report on the capital needs of Ontario’s libraries allows us to determine Toronto’s needs range from \$162 million–\$189 million, very much within the range of the city librarian’s original estimate.<sup>31</sup>

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## The Next Chapter For Libraries

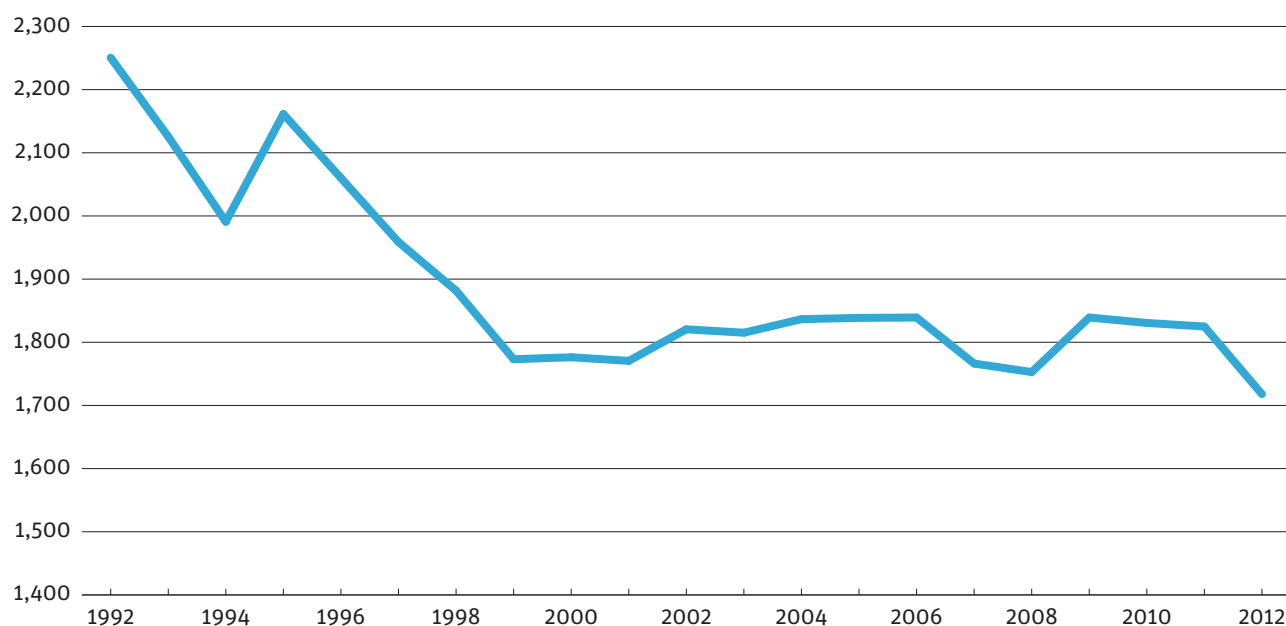
Toronto's library system in 2011 provided access to books, programming, computers and the internet to a record number of residents of the city. Yet, the Toronto Public Library is in desperate need of an immediate and long-term reinvestment in staff, books and materials acquisition, repairs and new buildings to continue to serve the growing needs of the population. The city's challenge is not to cut, but rather to expand library services for Toronto's residents in a tough economy and in the context of a growing gap in wealth, opportunities and widening social exclusion. Toronto's library system has been a key factor in making the city a successful international example of a diverse, inclusive city. Chronic underfunding only undercuts this great achievement.

And yet, paradoxically, Toronto's libraries have never been more popular. The Toronto Public Library costs Torontonians 17 cents a day or \$5.20 a month. For that reasonable sum — approximately the price of a breakfast meal at Tim Horton's — each resident has unlimited access to 98 branches and more books, movies, and other materials than one person could ever consume.<sup>32</sup> And, through their contribution, residents fund adult literacy and youth and early childhood reading programs for over three quarters of a million of their neighbours. Bookmobiles transport material to locations across the city, connecting residents with mobility restrictions to the public resources which will enrich their lives. Although we already get excellent value for our 17 cents a day, increasing that amount by a mere two cents a day would raise \$13 million. If the provincial grant were restored to its 1992 level, the Toronto Public Library would gain \$7.5 million in additional funding. With these two injections of funds the Toronto Public Library would finally have its operating budget returned to 1992 levels. In January 2012, the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries made this same recommendation to the government. The Federation specifically called for a doubling of the provincial funding envelope from \$18.7 million to \$43.9 million, to be phased in over 5 years.<sup>33</sup>

What could we do with the increased funding? For starters, we could invest in the three most important aspects of a public library: staff, materials, and opening hours. Every service sector organization needs to be adequately staffed if it is to provide high quality service to its users. Since 1992, the Toronto Public Library system has cut over 500 library staff.

Without librarians and staff to manage the collection, facilitate the literacy programmes, and guide library users, the Toronto Public Library be-

**FIGURE 9** Toronto Libraries Staffing Levels, 1992–2012



**Source** Ontario Public Libraries Statistics, 1992–2010. Published by the Ontario Ministry of Culture, and Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. Data for 2001 from Toronto Public Library Annual Report. Data for 2011 from 2011 Library Budget. Data for 2012 from Toronto City Budget.

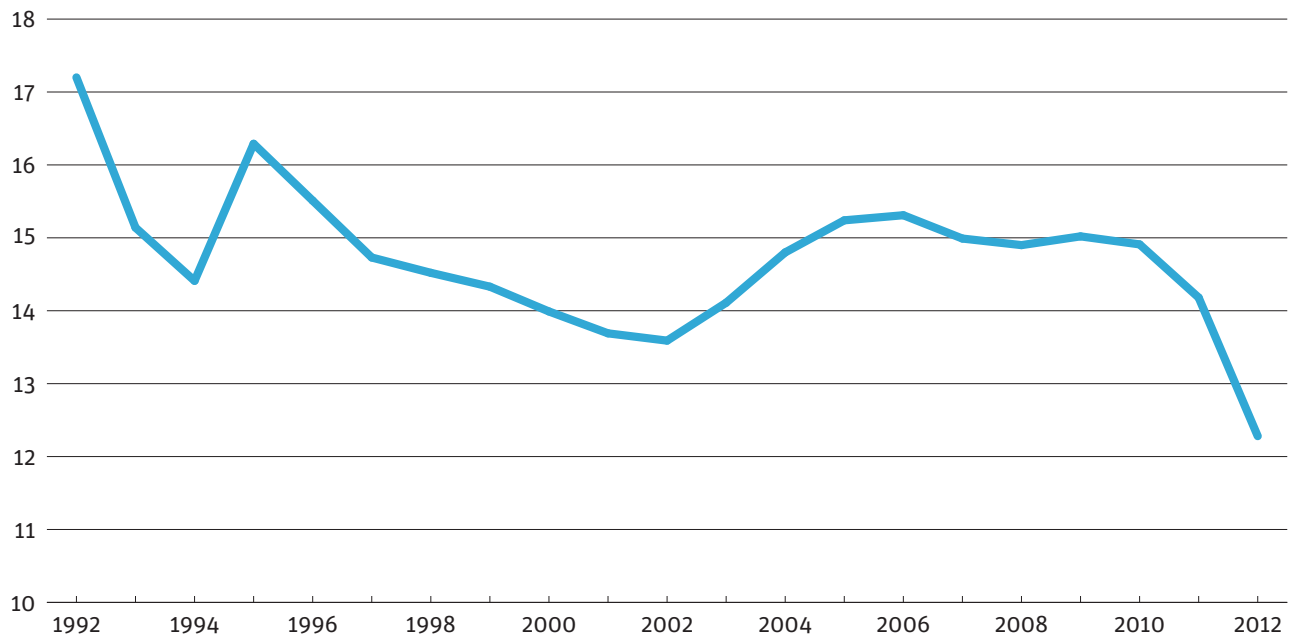
comes an empty shell. Almost all libraries in the Toronto system have experienced declining staffing levels since amalgamation. These library workers are the key to a high quality public library system: the friendly familiar face who knows the teenagers by name, the literacy programmer who reads to toddlers, the bookmobile and truck drivers who drop off books to seniors around the city and ensure that hold requests are filled.

Cumulative cuts to the acquisitions budget since 1992 have taken \$51.6 million in materials off the shelves, resulting in a narrower selection of materials, even as demand grows for non-traditional and alternative selections. The relevance and attraction of any public library is based on the diversity of material that is available for circulation. We limit the potential of our library system when we do not invest in circulation materials that attract residents from all linguistic and cultural communities and meet the special needs of persons with disabilities (e.g. large-print, Braille, and audio books).

There is a compelling argument for increasing the city's investment in public libraries. The cumulative operating budget cuts since 1992 for the library budget totals \$800 million. During economic downturns, libraries have always witnessed a growing demand for their services. In the midst of



**FIGURE 10** Library Acquisition Budget, 1992–2012, Constant 2002 Dollars, Millions



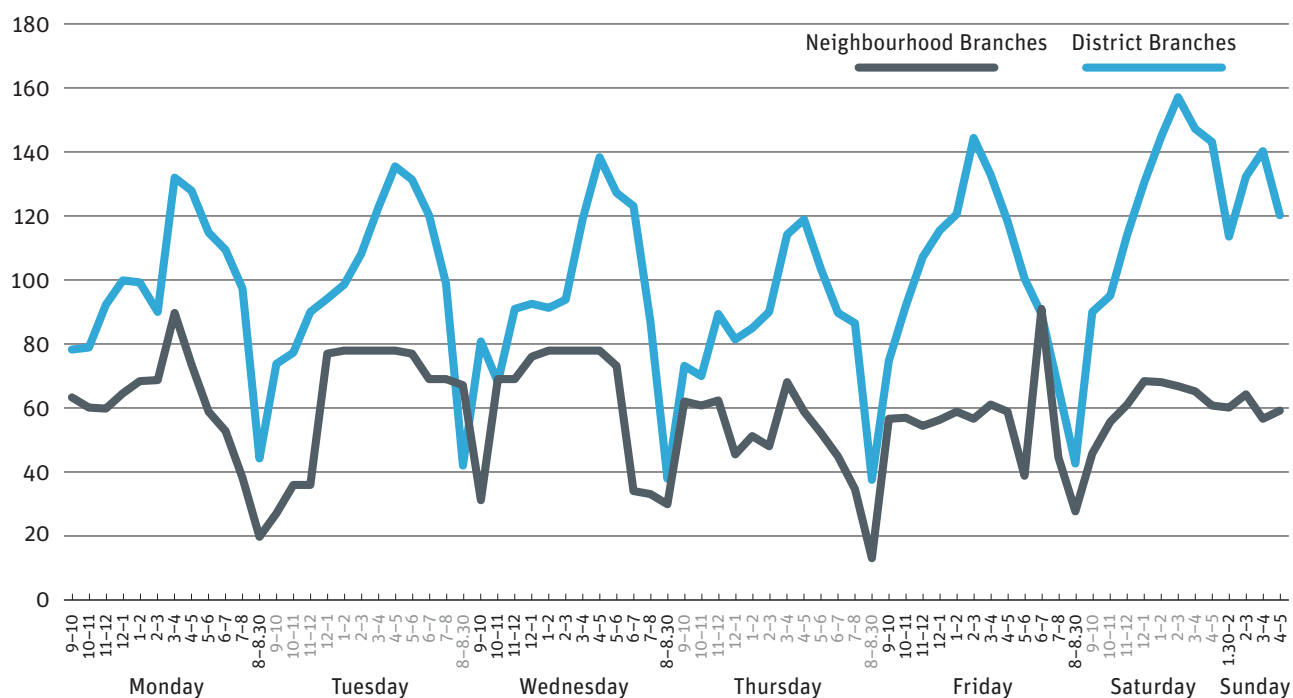
**Source** Ontario Public Libraries Statistics, 1992–2010. Published by the Ontario Ministry of Culture, and Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. Data for 2011–2012 from 2011 and 2012 Toronto Public Library Budgets.

the 1992 recession, the city’s library system experienced the greatest jump in circulation since 1932, and the same spike was seen in 2008. Libraries are more than just recession-proof, they are one of the few remaining lifelines available for thousands of vulnerable Torontonians during a recession. The public demand for them is as strong as ever, but it’s up to the city and province to keep them adequately funded. In the 1990s, many of Metro Toronto’s libraries were forced to cut service hours. North York Public Library cut hours in 1992 by 3.1% and still had increased circulation of 1%. The same year Scarborough, preserved hours of operation and saw an increase of 11%.

## The Best Thing a Library Can Be Is Open

Having built the libraries and stocked the shelves, extra hours are only a matter of funding staff complement. If we put an extra cent per resident per day towards increased hours, we could extend Saturday and Sunday service by five hours. The greatest number of visitors to the Toronto Public Library arrive on Saturday, and the bustle grows steadily all day until the busiest

**FIGURE 11** Average Visits By Hour of Day, November 14–20, 2011



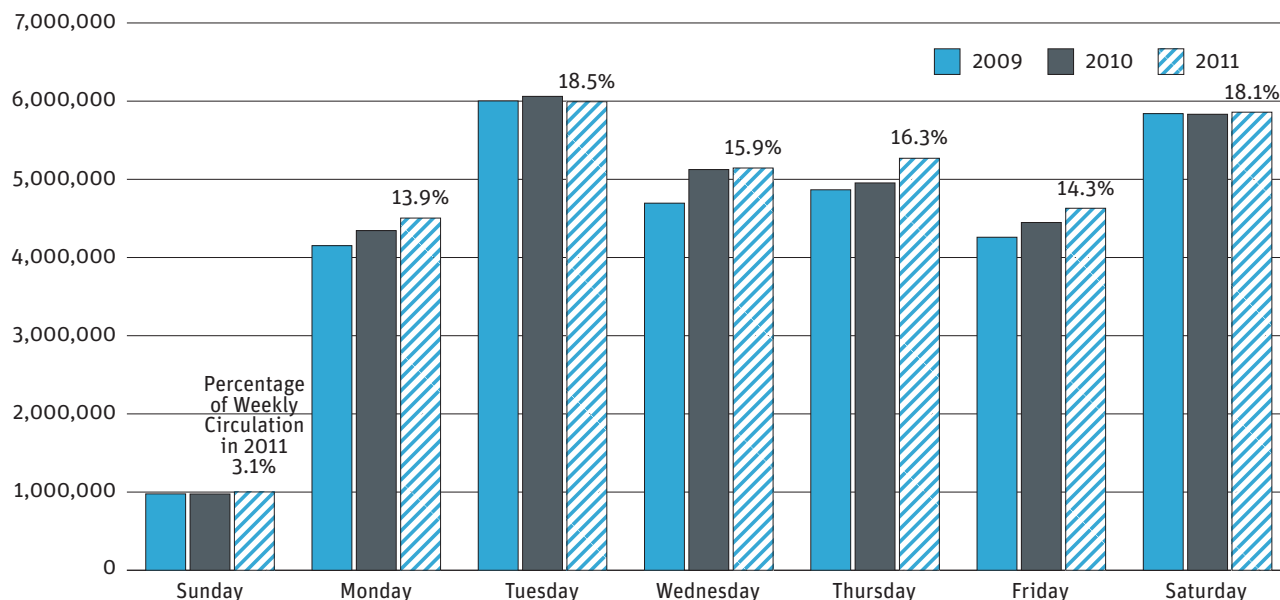
Source: Toronto Public Library, 2011 Annual Performance Measures and 2010 Benchmarking Information, Presented to Library Board, April 30, 2012.

time all week — just before closing time at 5 pm. On Sunday, libraries are open only from 1:30–5:00 pm, yet their visits rival the busiest weekdays. All the evidence of library use supports the conclusion that increasing service on Saturday by two hours and on Sunday by three hours would bring a significant increase in visits and circulation by meeting the expectations of Torontonians. The TPL could begin by offering longer weekend hours in one library in each geographic quadrant and extend weekend hours in district branches.

## Return on Investment

My library makes me richer than reality would have it. I have access to a wealth of resources, publications I adore but can't afford.... My library is a destination, a detour between errands, or an idle weekend afternoon; no coffee purchase necessary. My library is inspiring. Growing up, I didn't have

**FIGURE 12** Circulation By Day of the Week



Source Toronto Public Library, Performance Measures Report, 2011. Presented to the Toronto Public Library Board April 30, 2012.

access to a city library. When I came to Toronto, the immensity of choice was astounding. —**Jessica Craig**

The ongoing library cuts represent short-term savings to the city’s annual budgets. But how do we calculate the cumulative costs of those cuts on the community? This requires a level of analysis and long-term perspective of which few consultants or politicians appear capable.

This section examines the return on investment delivered by public library services in five areas: entertainment, cognitive skills development (i.e. literacy), social inclusion, labour market support, and positive health outcomes.

Libraries play a unique role in the city budget by multiplying the value of their direct funding in important ways.

When library budgets grow, what we see as library users are more materials and staff and an increase in the quality of service. What remains hidden to us, however, is the foundational role the library system plays in confronting many of the most serious challenges facing the City of Toronto. When library budgets shrink or fail to keep up with population growth, there is a

deeper, long-term impact of this underfunding on the lives of Torontonians that is inevitably ignored by those looking only for short-term savings.

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## Entertainment and Enjoyment

At the most basic level, Toronto's libraries are a valuable source of entertainment and enjoyment for people of all age groups and would be more than worthwhile if that was their sole function. By pooling their resources at an average daily cost of 17 cents per person per day, all Torontonians have access to a seemingly limitless supply of books, videos, music, magazines and newspapers. If libraries were examined as a purely recreational destination, their value for money would far exceed any possible private sector equivalent. Like public parks and pools, libraries provide low-cost entertainment to all visitors and increase both quality of life and the liveability of our communities.

Even as we use them, the benefits of a public library can sometimes fall under our radar. For example, Zadie Smith's latest novel, *NW*, is listed for \$32 in hard copy and can be found for \$20 online. The Toronto Public Library system currently has 104 copies of the book for which they paid approximately \$1,963. The current average price paid by TPL for print material (including both hard cover and trade paperback, but not mass market paperback) is \$18.10.<sup>34</sup> A month after its release, there were 276 holds on the book in the library system. Instead of each of those library users buying their own hard cover copy for \$20, reading it once, and then putting it on their private bookshelves, our public library has bulk purchased the book so that thousands of Torontonians can borrow it, read it, and then pass it on to others in the community. Is there any better example of the smart, efficient use of scarce resources and the library's role as a strong multiplier of value with an impressive return on investment? Through bulk purchasing and public ownership, Torontonians have access to many more books than they could ever afford to buy themselves, costing the community mere pennies per reading. The public library system is an excellent model for cities and residents struggling with shrinking budgets in difficult economic times.

However, the importance of libraries in other areas is less well understood. Unlike other municipal services, the return on investment of funding to libraries cascades across several sectors that support the health and welfare of Torontonians, whether they are themselves regular library visitors or not. Just as it is a multiplier of the dollars we spend on recreation, the Toron-

to Public Library also plays a critical long-term role strengthening the city's ability to remain a culturally diverse community, to support literacy, health and well-being, and social inclusion. To fully understand the impact of a city's library system, we need to understand its role in each of these areas.

After I came to Canada, I found that I was an abnormal child. I noticed that my classmates could read a material at least twice faster than me and they could actually comprehend something from it, but I just couldn't understand the meanings behind the words. I told my friend that I decided to change. "You should read more, why don't you go the library?" she replied. So I was there, in the library. At first, I picked some storybooks with pictures from the children section because that's what my reading level was. After I read them, I said to myself: "oh, books can be interesting! —Yi Tian Guo

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## Cognitive Skills Development

As a major source of no-fee recreational reading material in the community, libraries play a central role in the development of literacy skills among its users.<sup>35</sup> In fact, on top of the importance of literacy for personal development and quality of life, literacy rates are closely tied to a region's economic potential.<sup>36</sup> Greater Toronto is projected to have nearly 3.2 million adults with low literacy skills by 2031, a 64% increase from 2001.<sup>37</sup> Failing to invest in literacy today will have direct long-term economic consequences for the city in the years ahead.

Interestingly, the cognitive development that comes from recreational reading for even purely entertainment purposes is important for both the academic success of children and the economic success of adults.<sup>38</sup> For young children, reading habits and frequency are tied to several measures of success throughout their lives.<sup>39</sup> Especially important to young readers are the social elements of reading, like group reading and the active discussion of stories.<sup>40</sup>

Libraries, of course, are strong contributors to this element of early childhood education and literacy development in Toronto's youth. They provide access to a wide selection of reading materials, encourage reading and discussions in group settings, and promote the idea of reading as a lifelong social experience. As they enter into the culture of reading that is sustained by their community library, young children receive advice, guidance and encouragement from librarians and book recommendations from fellow readers.

Developing this culture of recreational reading among Toronto's young children is important for several reasons. Most importantly, in adults, regular reading outside of work is a predictor of greater literacy skills.<sup>41</sup> And this daily act of reading newspapers and novels is important for the maintenance of literacy skills.<sup>42</sup> Good literacy skills, in turn, strongly impact the ability of adults to successfully function and thrive in their personal and professional lives.

As the authors of the 2009 report *Addressing Canada's Literacy Challenge* point out, these personal impacts have serious structural economic consequences for governments:

Differences in average adult literacy level have been shown to exert a profound influence on key indicators of economic success, explaining as much as 55% of long term differences in the long term growth rate of GDP per capita and productivity growth at the national and international level....The same research also suggests that the distribution of adult literacy skill has also influenced the long-term economic success of Canada and its economic peers. Specifically, the higher the proportion of adults with very low literacy skill, the lower overall rates of long term GDP growth. Research has also established a strong relationship between literacy and a range of outcomes at the individual level. Differences in literacy skill are associated with large differences in employability, wage rates, income and reliance on social transfers, such as social assistance. Adults with higher literacy skills work more, experience less unemployment, earn more, spend less time unemployed and rely less on government transfers.<sup>43</sup>

On a deeper, more corrosive level, low literacy rates damage Toronto's efficacy as a city of genuine opportunity where residents have equal access to the tools required for full social mobility. A child born into a family that cannot afford to purchase books and other reading material on a regular basis may never develop adequate literacy skills and will have a substantially diminished ability to succeed in school and build a financially successful career.<sup>44,45</sup> The income gap between Toronto's low and high-income households is already cavernous and growing.<sup>46</sup> A decline in literacy rates would only accelerate this gap.

Public housing was a hard place to grow up. I am not hard. And so it was tough. As a child I dreamt and fantasized about ways of escape. I won't lie; death sometimes seemed preferable to the life I had. Yet I somehow found enough resolve to turn to books and reading instead of drugs, alcohol, crime.

There were no libraries within walking distance. But every week the Toronto Public Library bookmobile would show up at the top of the street. It was a highlight of my week. It was, for me, a life saving miracle. Books were my way out. I would read anything. The librarians were so lovely. Bringing in books they thought I'd like. Letting me take out as many books as I could carry. I always — always — read them all.... I can truthfully say that the Toronto Public Library and books helped save my life. I don't even want to think about where I would be without them. If the Toronto Public Library and books saved me, I'm sure they have and will continue to save others. Knowing that gives me great comfort. Libraries matter. —**Sandra Brunner**

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## Social Inclusion

Social mobility is also a challenge in Toronto's recent immigrant community.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, studies have shown that the difference in earnings between immigrants and native-born Canadians can largely be explained by differences in literacy.<sup>48</sup> A decline in literacy rates would further worsen the status of the city's low-income immigrant populations and diminish the ability of their children to lead their families out of poverty.

Many of those who struggle with low literacy skills tend to exist outside the labour market or school system. This population includes retired seniors, the long-term unemployed, those who are looking for work, and homemakers. In some cases, their low literacy skills have prevented them from full involvement in society. In other cases, their lives outside the labour market or school system don't require them to read daily, making it difficult to improve their literacy level. That's why public libraries were built and funded in the first place — they fill an important void that can't be filled by the private sector.

The Toronto Public Library also plays a vital role in ensuring free access to computers and the Internet to help bridge the digital divide. Whereas 94% of people from households in the top quarter (\$85,000+) of the Canadian population by household income had access to the internet at home, only 56% from the bottom quarter (\$30,000 or less) of the population had the same access.<sup>49</sup> For Toronto residents with household incomes under \$60,000, 17.1% rely on the Toronto Public Library for their internet access, a much higher rate than the Canadian average (11.1%).<sup>50</sup>

As with the other elements of the return on investment from libraries, social and economic exclusion is not solely about human dignity, oppor-

tunity and well-being. It also has significant long-term economic impacts on the city. The Toronto Board of Trade has noted that there is a strong business case for promoting social cohesion and economic inclusion of Toronto's immigrant populations to increase the city's productivity growth and economic performance.<sup>51</sup>

Moving beyond the impact of literacy, Citizenship and Immigration Canada recognized the central role of the public library in initial integration of recent immigrants in 2008 by launching the Library Settlement Partnerships program under the umbrella of the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program. The program established a series of partnerships between public libraries and immigrant settlement organizations to support the delivery of immigrant settlement services in Ontario libraries.<sup>52</sup>

Toronto is a city of immigrants, my family among them. My parents, sister, and I moved to Toronto in 1994, when I was four and a half years old.... The library opened my imagination, sparked my love of learning, and allowed my family to settle into our new home. It helped Toronto deliver on its promise of a better life for us.... Our incredible public library system is an equalizer, an educator, and an opportunity creator. It allows families like mine with no resources and no connections to find their place in the city. It enriches the education of our children and youth. It allows anyone from anywhere to feel as if they have something to count on when they arrive in Toronto, a place to go for resources to better themselves, and a community through which they are able to find the means to contribute to this mosaic of a city. That is why my library is important to me. I am proud to live in a city with a public library which fosters understanding, acceptance, and equality. All Torontonians are richer for having these services: the new ones, the growing ones, and all who call this city home. —**Jelena Ciric**

The role of libraries in supporting social inclusion extends well beyond Toronto's recent immigrant populations. Libraries provide safe and climate-controlled indoor public space where marginalized or isolated people can comfortably visit regardless of their literacy skills or level of disposable income. If physical engagement with the community at large is the first step toward full social and economic inclusion, the library's support for multilingual and accessible material for persons with disabilities has played an important role in creating a common space where all Torontonians can feel welcome. It's an area in which the city should be investing more, not less.



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## Economic and Labour Market Support

Economic inclusion is a serious issue in Toronto. According to the Ontario Labour Market Bulletin, in August 2012, Toronto's unemployment rate climbed to 10.7%, up 0.7% from August 2011.<sup>53</sup> Library services provide direct support for those trying to make the transition into the labour market. Through free internet access, information on job searches, new careers, and skill development, public libraries are an important bridge back into the labour market, especially during an economic downturn. It bears repeating that shrinking library hours, services and staffing levels has an impact not only on individuals looking for work, but on regional economic growth and productivity.

The Toronto Public Library spent approximately \$16 million dollars on books, DVDs, and other materials in 2011. The Toronto Public Library makes a point of purchasing Canadian material from Canadian suppliers and retail bookstores, and most distributors are located in the Greater Toronto Area thus stimulating the local economy. The capital expenditure budget for the library for 2012 is approximately \$29 million, of which the vast majority will be spent on local workers and materials to upgrade and renovate facilities.<sup>54</sup> These capital investments will result in 355 person years of work in 2012.<sup>55</sup> Finally, library workers overwhelmingly live in Toronto and the GTA, putting the \$140 million spent on salaries back into the local economy.

With my health deteriorating, and my doctors suggesting I try YOGA and TAI CHI. The Toronto Public Library provided me with free instructional resources to practice these disciplines. —**Milica Hovanec**

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## Health and Welfare

Libraries also contribute directly to the health of Torontonians by providing a no-fee source of materials on health promotion, healthy living and disease management. These materials are among the most popular items checked out at Toronto's libraries. Access to reliable information about healthy living has been identified as a requirement for the health of Canadians and the transformation of their health care system.<sup>56</sup>

The Ontario Medical Association reports that as of April 2012, more than 927,000 patients in Ontario had no family doctor.<sup>57</sup> And even those with family doctors often have little chance to have extensive discussions with medical professionals about anything but disease identification and management. Libraries provide access to health information by making avail-

able an array of books selected by professional librarians and providing internet access to those who have none.

But the role of libraries in supporting the health of Torontonians reaches deeper than simply access to health information. The literacy skills promoted and sustained by the library system are also a critical component of health promotion, especially in seniors.<sup>58</sup> Health literacy – the ability to read and understand health care information is simply a specific type of basic literacy.

In 2008, the *Health Literacy in Canada* report found that “daily reading is the strongest predictor of higher levels of health literacy.”<sup>59</sup> On average, as health literacy rises, individuals enjoy better health. And of course, as the health of the population improves, the burden on the health-care system is reduced.” Also, the most vulnerable populations in terms of health literacy are seniors, immigrants and the unemployed.

Reviewing the role of municipal governments in health literacy, the report concluded: “Investments in libraries can increase access to materials and thereby improve overall literacy and health-literacy skills among all sectors of society.”

Viewed through the most obvious lens available, recreational reading, libraries provide an enormous return on investment to Torontonians and would be worthwhile if that was their only purpose. However, looking more deeply into the role of the library in our local communities reveals the cascading impact of every dollar invested into the system on most of the measures of a successful city.

The first time that I entered a library, I was thirteen years old and in my first year of high school in Jamaica. The school library was my haven, especially at lunch time, as I had no lunch or any money to purchase lunch at the cafeteria. I would go into the library to hide away so that my new friends would not see that I had nothing. It was there that I opened my very first book and I will never forget it; it was a “Nancy Drew Mystery: The secret of the old clock” by Carolyn Keene. The first time I read that book; I fell in love and have read all the books in the series. Afterwards, my lunch times were still spent in the library of my school, but this time for different reasons; it was because I wanted to be where I had access to the materials that allowed for me to let my imagination free while educating myself. —**Stacy-Ann Samuels**

Every day, library workers provide Torontonians with the tools and support necessary to become healthier, more independent, better educated, wealthier, more professionally successful, less socially isolated, and more literate. They help people climb out of poverty, adjust to a new country and

cope with an economy in transition. For most Torontonians, libraries constitute their primary experience with not only their city government, but with any level of government.

The systematic underfunding of our library system in the name of short-term savings is not only a clear false economy, it permanently impoverishes the lives of Torontonians. The underfunding of the system is direct neglect of those residents who most need the support of the city to help them develop the tools to succeed and meaningfully contribute to the community: Children, seniors, recent immigrants and the unemployed.

It is not just “my library” that matters to me, but all 101 libraries belonging to the citizens of Toronto. I have always been proud of my library system. Books are not cheap, but thanks to the Toronto Public Library, knowledge is free. In these hard economic times, the Toronto Public Library welcome those who cannot afford costly tuition fees, computers, i-Pads, and e-readers, providing them with convenient means and opportunities to better themselves and become productive, educated members of our society...Truthfully, there is no such thing as “my library” that exists in this great system. Anyone who has ever used a Toronto Public Library knows that the moment we place a “hold”, we do not use only the library closest to our home, but all the libraries scattered throughout the city. —**Milica Hovanec**

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## Re-Imagining the Library for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

In Cambridge, Massachusetts, newborns receive a tote bag of books in the mail from the public library to get them (and their parents) off on the right foot. Toronto is not keeping up with other library systems, and where it was ahead of the curve, it needs new investments, new innovations to meet the expanding needs of residents. You could check out a poster to hang in your room for two months at the Toronto Public Library in the 1970s. The Scarborough Public Library circulated children’s toys until the 1990s, but ended this service in 1996 due to provincial budget cuts.<sup>60</sup>

How much would we enrich the life of Toronto’s residents if we continued to evolve the role of the library in our city? How could we make libraries a depository of community content created by residents of the area? The life of city residents would be enriched by more branches to service areas in the outer ring, where distances between library locations are larger and Toronto’s low income residents are concentrated.

Many of the local demands on the library simply require us to ensure that the core mission of the library is well-served. For instance, the acquisitions budget falls short of the challenges presented by the increased cost of materials and larger population. And in 2010, branch librarians lost their ability to order specific materials geared to the needs of their particular community when management implemented a centralized ordering procedure as a cost-savings measure. The 2011 DPRA report recommends the expansion of self-service checkout and automation throughout the system. Why wouldn't we, instead, reinvest in staff complement which has been cut by 24% since 1992? Adult reading and early childhood reading programs are in constant demand in a city as diverse as Toronto. It is a fiction to believe that the library can move to a self-serve model and remain relevant to all Torontonians.

The Toronto Public Library system is a public service in which we can all take pride. Public libraries across the city welcome diversity, foster inclusion, and build a strong sense of community. They serve Torontonians of all political stripes, all backgrounds, all ages and in all neighbourhoods. Chronic underfunding and cuts to the library budget are not just an attack on librarians and books and city buildings. They are a denial of public services to seniors, children, immigrants, the unemployed. Toronto's city council decisions appear to deliver savings, but cost Torontonians many times that amount in lost benefits and leave behind a permanently diminished city.

Our libraries were built by Torontonians with few resources but an understanding of the need for the equalization of knowledge and public space. Toronto's library system was established during even more difficult times than we are experiencing today. Residents chose to prioritize resources to provide free and open access to knowledge. We can do the same.

It is a unique characteristic of libraries that there is no downside to Torontonians reading more books or children accessing more reading programs. On the contrary, reinvesting in the Toronto Public Library is a prerequisite to ensuring that we live in an inclusive and economically successful city where all Torontonians have the best chance to flourish.

# References

IN RESEARCHING THIS report, we drew upon published library statistics from the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport for Ontario Public Libraries from 1992–95, and 1997–2010. We also consulted the annual reports for the following library systems:

- Toronto Public Library, Annual Reports 1998–2011
- North York Public Library, Annual Reports, 1992–97
- York Public Library, Annual Reports, 1992–97
- East York Public Library, Annual Reports, 1992–97
- Scarborough Public Library, Annual Reports, 1992–97
- Etobicoke Public Library, Annual Reports, 1992–97
- Toronto Public Library (pre-amalgamation), Annual Reports, 1992–97

Quotes from Toronto Public Library users in the report were drawn from winners of the “My Library Matters to Me” contest.” Accessible at <http://ourpubliclibrary.to>

# Notes

**1** How many of the customers at the average bookstore got hooked on reading as a child at their local library? Although the public library and Indigo are contrary institutions with regard to *public* and *private goods*, they do share one strong connection: well-funded public libraries subsidize the creation of a healthy future market of bookstore customers.

**2** The split between audio-visual to printed materials is approximately 1/3<sup>rd</sup> to 2/3<sup>rd</sup>.

**3** See the short historical write-up on the Toronto Public Library website: <http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/about-the-library/library-history/>

**4** Rogers Centre: <http://www.rogerscentre.com/about/history.jsp>. Canada's Wonderland: <http://www.teaconnect.org/pdf/2011Report.pdf>. In the 10 years from February 1999 to February 2009, the Air Canada Centre had 26.8 Million visitors. We take 2.68 million visitors as representative of their annual attendance for 2011. [www.theaircanadacentre.com/about/index.asp](http://www.theaircanadacentre.com/about/index.asp). CN Tower: [http://www.cntower.ca/App\\_UserFiles/Press\\_Releases/History\\_2012.pdf](http://www.cntower.ca/App_UserFiles/Press_Releases/History_2012.pdf). Toronto Zoo: <http://www.torontozoo.com/pdfs/org/2011/Operating/Budget.pdf>. CNE: <http://www.theex.com/about-the-cne/our-past-present/>. Ontario Science Centre: <http://www.ontariosciencecentre.ca/Media/Details/316/>. Royal Ontario Museum: <http://www.rom.on.ca/about/pdf/reports/2010.pdf>. Art Gallery of Ontario: <http://www.ago.net/2010-2011-year-in-review>. TIFF: <http://tiff.net/pdfs/Festival/Backgrounder/2011.pdf> (Figure is a sum of film attendance and festival attendance at Yonge and Dundas Square.).

**5** Toronto Public Library, 2011 Annual Performance Measures and 2010 Benchmarking Information, Presented to the Library Board, April 30, 2012. Accessible at: <http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/content/about-the-library/pdfs/board/meetings/2012/apr30/13.pdf>

**6** J. David Hulchanski, "The Three Cities within Toronto: Income Polarization Among Toronto's Neighbourhoods, 1970–2005." *Cities Centre Research Bulletin* 41, Toronto: Cities Centre Press, 2010, p.8.

**7** Ibid.

**8** Garnett Picot and Feng Hou, “The rise in low-income rates among immigrants in Canada,” Analytical Studies Branch research paper series, Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 11F0019MIE – No. 198, June 2003.

**9** The statistics for 1996 were not published by the Ministry of Culture; it was the only year since 1882 that no set of comprehensive stats were ever published. (Personal correspondence with Lorne Bruce, September 19, 2012.) In 1996 the Ontario Government under Premier Michael Harris had planned to pull out of provincial funding of libraries and data collection altogether, and the Ministry recorded no data. Therefore, we have created 1996 statistics by averaging 1995 and 1997 figures.

**10** Personal correspondence with Lorne Bruce provided this historical perspective on provincial funding.

**11** This paragraph draws on personal correspondence with Lorne Bruce.

**12** Perhaps the only silver lining of amalgamation was the new ease in requesting material from other branches across the city. There was a 42.5% increase in holds in 2000 over 1999, and 2 million items were delivered to local branches in 2000. (Source: TPL Annual Performance Measures, 2000, April 30, 2001.)

**13** I am grateful to Lorne Bruce for drawing my attention to the history of underfunding of the Metro Toronto Reference Library.

**14** Shelia Block, “Countdown to Zero: Balancing Toronto’s Budget,” Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and The Wellesley Institute, Ottawa: November 2011. Accessible at: <http://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/countdown-zero>

**15** “2011 Operating Budget Submission and Service Review Reduction.” Presented to the Toronto Public Library Board, November 22, 2010 by the City Librarian. Accessible at: <http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/content/about-the-library/pdfs/board/meetings/2010/nov22/09.pdf>

**16** From November 22, 2010 Library Board meeting, “2011 Operating Budget - Service Review 5% Reduction” to Josie La Vita, Director of Financial Planning Division, Finance, from Jane Pyper, City Librarian.

**17** The Urban Affairs Library was located in Metro Hall and maintained a collection of records related to the operation of the City and its pre-amalgamation jurisdictions, as well as operating as a branch library for local residents. As a resource to city staff and the public looking for information related to Toronto City Politics, it was invaluable. In 2011 the branch was closed and its material went into storage at the Toronto Reference Library.

**18** As the “Final Report to the City Manager,” July 7, 2011, p. 4 puts it: “The project purpose is to review and analyze all City of Toronto services, activities and service levels provided by divisions and agencies and to apply a core service filter to assist Council’s decision-making. The filter identifies services that are not core, or that are provided at higher than standard service levels.”

**19** KPMG. “City of Toronto: Core Service Review. Standing Committee Summary, 2011.” 2011 Accessible at: <http://www.toronto.ca/torontoservicereview/index.htm>

**20** *Ibid.*, p. 80.

**21** Scott Sherman, “Upheaval at the New York Public Library,” *The Nation*, November 30, 2011. Accessible at: <http://www.thenation.com/article/164881/upheaval-new-york-public-library>

**22** From their website: “DPRA attracts the brightest minds in defense and homeland security, environmental forensics, chemistry, physics, and public policy.” (Accessible at: <http://www.dpra.com/index.cfm/m/114>) Between the two consultancies they had most letters of the alphabet covered.

- 23** DPRA. “Service Efficiency Study: Toronto Public Library.” November 2011. Accessible at: [http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/content/about-the-library/pdfs/board/meetings/2011/dec12/14\\_3.pdf](http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/content/about-the-library/pdfs/board/meetings/2011/dec12/14_3.pdf)
- 24** Ibid., p.vi.
- 25** Memo from Joe Pennachetti, City Manager to Jane Pyper, City Librarian, date November 21, 2011.
- 26** Robert Priest, “Are Libraries Throwing the Book at Us?” *Now Magazine*, September 6–13, 2012. Accessible at: <http://www.nowtoronto.com/news/story.cfm?content=188461>
- 27** Critics of the composition of the new Library Board saw the appointees as not having the best interests of the TPL and the residents of Toronto at heart. A recent report by the Office of the City Ombudsman raises other problems with the appointment process. In a September 2012 report, City Ombudsman Fiona Crean takes the Mayor’s Office to task for an appointment process to city boards that “undermined the principles of openness, competition and equity, and challenged the goal of a merit-based, representative and accountable appointment process.” Fiona Crean, “An Investigation into the Administration of the Public Appointments Policy.” September 2012, p. 5.
- 28** Federation of Ontario Public Libraries, *The State of Public Library Infrastructure*, December 2011. p. i. Accessible at: [http://fopl.ca/media/2012/02/11-1200-FOPL-Report\\_FINAL.pdf](http://fopl.ca/media/2012/02/11-1200-FOPL-Report_FINAL.pdf)
- 29** Ibid.
- 30** KPMG, “Core Services Review,” 2011. p. 153
- 31** There are 1093 public libraries in Ontario, Federation of Ontario Public Libraries, “The State of Public Library Infrastructure,” December 2011, p. 14. If Toronto’s 98 branches are 9% of the total, then the capital needs are 9% or \$162 million-\$189 million over the next 10 years.
- 32** In the context of ongoing climate change, the fact that libraries are a highly-efficient collective consumption alternative to wasteful individual consumption should not be overlooked.
- 33** Federation of Ontario Public Libraries, “Increasing the Provincial Operating Grant to Ontario Public Libraries,” presented to Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. January 23, 2012.
- 34** I am grateful to the staff of the Toronto Public Library for providing me with the current average price of printed material. For Zadie Smith’s book, the average price was slightly more, \$18.88.
- 35** UNESCO defines literacy as “the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve his or her goals, develop his or her knowledge and potential and participate fully in community and wider society.” Mark Richmond et al, *The Global Literacy Challenge*. 2008. p.18.
- 36** Movement for Canadian Literacy, “Standing up for Literacy: Brief to Federal Finance Committee”. Accessible at: <http://www.literacy.ca/content/uploads/2012/02/Standing-up-for-Literacy.pdf>
- 37** Canadian Council on Learning, *The Future of Literacy in Canada’s Largest Cities*, p. 2. Accessible at: <http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Reports/ReadingFuture.html>
- 38** Rachana Bhatt, “The impact of public library use on reading, television, and academic outcomes,” *Journal of Urban Economics* 68 (2010). P. 148.
- 39** John Ermisch, “Origins of Social Immobility and Inequality: Parenting and Early Child Development.” *National Institute Economic Review* No. 205 (July 2008), p. 69.
- 40** Janette Pelletier, “Supporting Early Learning and Literacy,” *What Works? Research Monograph #37*, October 2011. P.2. Accessible at: [http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/WW\\_Early\\_Language.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/WW_Early_Language.pdf)
- 41** Literacy Ontario, *Adult Literacy in Ontario: The International Adult Literacy Survey Results*, p. 36. Accessible at: <http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/training/literacy/international/internat.pdf>



- 42** Conference Board of Canada, *Literacy, Life and Employment: An Analysis of Canadian International Adult Literacy Survey Microdata* (January 2006), p. 13
- 43** Data Angel Policy Research, *Addressing Canada's Literacy Challenge: A Cost/Benefit Analysis*, p. 13. Accessible at: <http://www.dataangel.ca/en/cost-benefit-jan26.pdf>
- 44** David A. Green and W. Craig Riddell. *International Adult Literacy Survey. Literacy and the Labour Market: The Generation of Literacy and Its Impact on Earnings for Native Born Canadians*. Statistics Canada, Culture, Tourism and Centre for Education Statistics Division, November 2007, p. 41. Accessible at: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-552-m/89-552-m2007018-eng.pdf>
- 45** Ana Ferrer et al, *International Adult Literacy Survey: The Effect of Literacy on Immigrant Earnings*. Statistics Canada Publication, September 2004, p. 28. Accessible at: <http://faculty.arts.ubc.ca/dgreen/documents/effectofliteracy.pdf>
- 46** See, J. David Hulchanski; and. TD Economics, *Toronto's Economic Recovery Leaving Many Behind*. October 22, 2010. P. 3
- 47** See, <http://www.ncw.gc.ca/l3bd.2t.1ilshtml@-eng.jsp?lid=391&fid=12>
- 48** Ana Ferrer et al, *International Adult Literacy Survey*, p. 28.
- 49** See, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/100510/dq100510a-eng.htm>
- 50** Toronto Public Library, "2011 Annual Performance Measures and 2010 Benchmarking Information, Presented to the Library Board," April 30, 2012. Accessible at: <http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/content/about-the-library/pdfs/board/meetings/2012/apr30/13.pdf>
- 51** Toronto Board of Trade. *Lifting all Boats: Promoting Social Cohesion and Economic Inclusion in the Toronto Region*. June 2010. p. 16.
- 52** Susan Macdonald, "Conceptualizing Public Library Service to Newcomers in Canada". Paper presented at the Canadian Association for Information Science Annual Conference, May 31-June 2, 2012. Abstract accessible at: [http://www.cais-acsi.ca/proceedings/2012/caisacsi2012\\_60\\_macdonald.pdf](http://www.cais-acsi.ca/proceedings/2012/caisacsi2012_60_macdonald.pdf)
- 53** See City of Toronto, "Economic Indicators," August 2012, accessible at [http://www.toronto.ca/business\\_publications/pdf/2012-august.pdf](http://www.toronto.ca/business_publications/pdf/2012-august.pdf)
- 54** TPL Capital Budget Monitoring Report, April 30, 2012. Accessible at: <http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/content/about-the-library/pdfs/board/meetings/2012/may28/17.pdf>
- 55** We use the methodology laid out in Rod Sawyer, "The Economic and Job Creation Benefits of Ontario Public Libraries," *The Bottom Line: Managing Library Finances*, Vol. 9, Number 4, 1996, in Table 2 to estimate the number of jobs created by capital expenditures. (Total project cost × 75% / average annual construction wage, \$59,000).
- 56** Health Council of Canada, *Stepping It Up: Moving the Focus From Health Care in Canada To A Healthier Canada*. December 2010. pp. 29–30. Accessible at: <http://www.healthcouncilcanada.ca/tree/2.40-HCCpromoDec2010.pdf>
- 57** See, <https://www.oma.org/Mediaroom/PressReleases/Pages/over90000patients.aspx>
- 58** Paul Roberts and Gail Fawcett, *International Adult Literacy Survey At Risk: A Socio-economic Analysis of Health and Literacy Among Seniors*, November 1998, p. 33. Accessible at: <http://www.nald.ca/library/research/nls/ials/atrisk/atrisk2.htm>
- 59** See, <http://www.ccl-cca.ca/ccl/Reports/HealthLiteracy.html>
- 60** See, <http://torontopubliclibrary.typepad.com/lillian-h-smith/2012/07/the-way-things-were-toronto-public-library-poster-pool.html>



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