

MEMORANDUM

TO: Community and Corporate Affairs Committee

FROM: Douglas Davey, Manager of Children's and Youth Services
Clare Hanman, Manager of Content and Technologies

DATE: April 25 , 2019

MEMORANDUM NO.: MEM-LIB-2019-0001

RE: Reducing Barriers to Future Success: Expanding Fine and Fee Elimination to Include Children and Youth

PURPOSE OF THE MEMORANDUM:

To inform the Community and Corporate Affairs Committee of the Library Board's recent decision to expand the existing fine-free policy for babies and toddlers to now include children and teens.

BACKGROUND:

When children build early literacy skills, it supports their chances for success in school and in life. The Library provides programming and resources that facilitate the development of these crucial early literacy skills. However, the fear of incurring fines and fees can be a barrier to parents, especially parents of newborns, as well as those in low-income families. In September 2015, the Halton Hills Public Library took the then-uncommon step of eliminating fines for babies and toddlers. The Library's "Baby Card" program was very well-received by the community. In the three-and-a-half years since its inception, the program has seen close to 700 baby cards issued, and over 22,000 items borrowed fine-free. In recent years, many public libraries are examining the value of library fines for children and youth. Brampton chose to eliminate fines on all children's materials, while Oakville chose to eliminate fines on all children's print materials (books and magazines).

In preparing a report to the Library Board, staff reviewed the relevant literature, examined policies of other libraries, looked at financial impacts, and reflected on their own observations. Following the review, staff concluded that eliminating fines for children and teens would be beneficial to the community, and could be accomplished with very little effect on services and financials.

COMMENTS:

Fines and Circulation:

- When a patron has fines in excess of \$10.00 their account is blocked and they can no longer borrow materials. 25% of blocked patrons (over 1000 people) are children and youth. (Numbers are approximate and may fluctuate.)
- As with our current protocol for babies and toddlers, fines and fees for children and teens will be waived based on patron age and type, rather than by format of the materials being borrowed. This method also has a lower financial impact in comparison to other methods.
- Any fines and fees that are currently owed, and that are in excess of our borrowing threshold, will prevent a child or teen from being able to borrow library materials. As such, existing and accrued fines will be waived from children's and teen cards at the beginning of this program.
- While it may seem likely that, without the threat of fines, items may go lost or missing at a higher rate, this has proven not be the case. In fact, of the close to 400 current Baby Card patrons, only three have items declared lost, and only 7 have items that are between two weeks and five months overdue.
- The library has policies and procedures in place to encourage the prompt return of materials:
 - Patrons receive courtesy notices 2 days before items are due to be returned and up to 6 notices after items have become overdue.
 - Overdue items will be considered "Lost" if kept out for a prolonged period. The patron's account will be charged the cost of the item plus a processing fee, and will be blocked from borrowing.
 - An item may be renewed in order to extend its loan period. However, when a second patron puts that item on hold (i.e. requests to borrow it) the item cannot be renewed, and the patron has to return it or face the prospect of the item being declared Lost.

CONCLUSION:

The Vision of the Halton Hills Public Library is, "Your path to worlds of imagination, innovation, and opportunity." By expanding our fine-free policy to include children and teens, and thereby eliminating a barrier to service, the Library will be letting our community know that we take those values seriously. Going fine-free for children and teens will show that the Library is committed to offering barrier-free access to literacy and other library-related resources, especially for those in the greatest need. It will demonstrate that the Library supports early childhood literacy, scholarly success, and the needs of youth. Staff sincerely believe that the library will see an increase in use, cardholders, and community goodwill.

Reviewed and approved by,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Geoff Cannon", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Geoff Cannon, Chief Librarian

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brent Marshall", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Brent Marshall, Chief Administrative Officer