

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Community and Corporate Affairs Committee

**FROM:** Douglas Davey, Manager of Children's and Youth Services

**DATE:** Apr 25, 2019

**MEMORANDUM NO.:** MEM-LIB-2019-0002

**RE:** LGBTQ+ Library Services

### PURPOSE OF THE MEMORANDUM:

To inform the Community and Corporate Affairs Committee of the various initiatives — past, present, and future — that the Library has launched in order to meet the needs of the LGBTQ+ community.

Note: This memo employs the acronym LGBTQ+, which stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender/Transsexual, Queer/Questioning, and more. This acronym arose in response to the need for a concise term that addresses the complex interweaving of gender, identity, and sexuality.

### BACKGROUND:

The Library's commitment to support our diverse community is reflected in our plans and procedures:

- Strategic Outcome A
  - Connected community that is culturally-enriched by population growth and increased diversity.
- Diversity and Inclusion Policy
  - The Halton Hills Public Library recognizes and affirms the dignity of those they serve, regardless of heritage, education, beliefs, race, income, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical, or mental abilities. The Halton Hills Public Library makes diversity and inclusion priorities in planning and decision making for staffing, collections, and services.

The Library endeavours to offer collections, services, and programs for those in our community who are diverse and/or traditionally-underserved, such as Indigenous people, seniors, youth, French and ESL speakers, low-income earners, and new immigrants. One such demographic group is the LGBTQ+ community. This memo outlines our current offerings, as well as our plans for the future.

## **COMMENTS:**

### Community Partnerships

The Positive Space Network, or PSN, is a branch of the Reach Out Centre for Kids, or ROCK. PSN offers programming and resources for LGBTQ+ people in the Halton community. These services include partnership programs offered at the Library.

### Collections

In recognition of the diverse needs of our community, the Library collects many items that are 'by, for, and about' LGBTQ+ people. These materials are available in almost every format and designed for every age. Recently, the Library launched the teen "Rainbow Collection," a virtual LGBTQ+ "shelf" in the Overdrive / Libby eBook platforms. A "shelf" is a staff-curated reading list, where similarly-themed materials are brought together to aid in discovery.

### Programming

Approximately 10 years ago, the Library began our first LGBTQ+ focused program, which was a partnership program that offered drop-in support for LGBTQ+ youth. That program was eventually discontinued, but recently the Library and Town of have been partnering with PSN to offer space and support for a new drop-in program.

The Library and the PSN, along with the other Halton libraries, have formed a committee known as the Youth Collective Impact. This committee has worked to launch a new program called Rainbow Connections, an intergenerational LGBTQ+ program series designed to bring people of all ages together and share their knowledge and experiences. A recent Board Game Afternoon program had nine people in attendance, ranging in age from children to seniors.

This summer, the Library is taking part in a dynamic new trend in libraries: a Drag Queen Storytime. The Library intends to book Fay and Fluffy, two well-known drag performers who specialize in programming for children and families. The pair have conducted numerous programs across Ontario, including at the Royal Ontario Museum, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Burlington and Oakville Public Libraries, and the Positive Space network. Fay and Fluffy's program is high-quality, cost-effective, and entertaining for all-ages. This kind of programming demonstrates the Library's commitment to LGBTQ+ people of all ages, builds understanding, and may even have an impact on bullying.

For Pride Month 2019, we have purchased pride flags both large and small to be used in several displays throughout the library.

In 2017-2018, and in partnership with the PSN and the CFUW (Canadian Federation of University Women), the library offered a well-received presentation on the topic of gender identity.

## SERVICES

Some members of the LGBTQ+ community struggle with using the services of a public agency such as a library. Notably, transgendered people often encounter obstacles when acquiring a library membership, as new patrons are asked to present a piece of government ID during the registration process. Many trans people do not resemble their ID as both their name and appearance may have changed, especially if they are transitioning between genders. Here at the Halton Hills Public Library, unlike other library systems, we allow people to register under a preferred name and do not ask for their gender. In addition, as with all Town public facilities, gender-neutral washrooms are available to the public.

LGBTQ+ people in Canada experience a level of violence and harassment disproportionate to what is experienced by their heterosexual counterparts. As such, it is no surprise that our LGBTQ+ patrons may experience anxiety when borrowing LGBTQ+ themed material. However, our self-serve holds and self-check machines allow patrons to check out their own materials and mitigate any potential distress. Virtual materials are growing immensely in popularity, and are even more private.

As part of the Library's official work plan, and in order to ensure that employees and the Board understand the specific needs of LGBTQ+ people, we are looking into offering "Positive Space Training," a program that is offered by the PSN. Not only will this develop our staff's customer service skills, it will also send a message to the LGBTQ+ community that we want to offer them the best library services possible.

## **CONCLUSION:**

*"Drag Queen Story Hour [DQSH] is a fun and important program that celebrates diversity in the way that children may dress and act. It encourages children to look beyond gender stereotypes and embrace unfettered exploration of self. Programs like DQSH encourage acceptance of difference and help to prevent bullying, while providing an enjoyable literary experience."*

-Judy Zuckerman, Director of Youth and Family Services, Brooklyn Public Library

There are many LGBTQ+ people in our community, but they lack some of the social and cultural amenities available in a larger city. We at the Library are uniquely-positioned to improve the lives of this under-served group. We have the materials, staffing, partnerships, and expertise to truly improve the lives of LGBTQ+ people in our community. We are already doing great things with our collections, now it is time to bring all of our services to that level.

Reviewed and approved by.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Geoff Cannon", written over a light blue rectangular background.

Geoff Cannon, Chief Librarian

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brent Marshall", written over a light blue rectangular background.

Brent Marshall, Chief Administrative Officer