



July 4, 2023

Clara Freire
General Manager, Community and Social Services
By email: clara.friere@ottawa.ca

Re: Ottawa Public Library and Community and Social Services

Dear Clara,

It was a pleasure to recently meet with you regarding Ottawa Public Library (OPL) and your work in Community and Social Services (CSS). OPL is pleased to work with CSS colleagues at the Priority Neighborhood Sponsors Table, and we recently also connected with Kent Hugh to collaborate with the Community Engagement Team in Lowertown.

As mentioned when we met, OPL is exploring additional community partnerships to best serve clients and our community. We are particularly noticing increasing challenges for clients in accessing health (including mental health), housing, and social services.

The OPL Board received a report about Safety and Security in June 2022 that noted trends including increasing incidents, and the impact of gaps in services to support housing, mental health, and substance abuse on all public spaces, including libraries. A recent article in *The Walrus* that I shared with you by email (May 30, 2023) reinforced this, noting that library employees across the country are serving clients with more complex needs than ever before.

At the meeting, the Board directed staff to "explore developing partnerships to offer a variety of social services in library facilities, funded through partner agencies." Specifically, the potential for OPL to partner with "social services agencies (both City-affiliated and not) to offer a variety of different services in library facilities, funded through partner agencies. This could include social workers, harm-reduction experts, therapists, and / or counsellors." These types of partnerships have been successful in other library systems and can assist in providing client support in a welcoming space, while also improving the environment for all visitors and employees. Anecdotally, other libraries have reported that clients are happy to access social services in the library space as it destigmatizes the process of seeking support, particularly for those who feel welcome in the library. Along similar lines, OPL already has a fruitful partnership with Ottawa Public Health to support clients' health needs, including vaccine clinics and an ongoing Community Wellness Hub.

Given the City of Ottawa's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan, including its commitment to work with community partners to improve the safety, health, and well-being of Ottawa residents, including through integrated and simpler systems, we request that OPL and CSS staff continue to come together to discuss opportunities to partner, including but not limited to the potential to have CSS staff use OPL meeting room



Ottawa Public Library
Bibliothèque publique d'Ottawa

space to meet with clients on a regular basis. We would welcome opportunities to collaborate on serving clients in a positive and accessible space, according to our mandates and expertise. We also welcome opportunities for CSS and OPL staff to learn from one another, and we're interested in understanding more about your partnership with the Ottawa Police Service in the Byward Market area.

Thank you for the lovely introductory conversation, and for your consideration of potential future partnerships. I look forward to connecting in the future and working together at the Priority Neighborhood Sponsors Table.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sonia Bebbington".

SONIA BEBBINGTON
Chief Librarian/Chief Executive Officer

CC: OPL Board Chair, Councillor Matt Luloff
OPL Board
City of Ottawa Community Services Committee Chair, Councillor Laura Dudas