

Report to / Rapport au:

**Ottawa Public Library Board
Conseil d'administration de la Bibliothèque publique d'Ottawa**

June 8, 2021 / 8 juin 2021

Submitted by / Soumis par:

Danielle McDonald, Chief Executive Officer / Directrice générale

Contact Person / Personne ressource:

Donna Clark, Division Manager, Branch Operations / Directrice, Opérations des succursales

(613) 580-2424 x32155, Donna.Clark@BiblioOttawaLibrary.ca

File Number: OPLB-2021-0603

SUBJECT: Accessible Collections Advocacy

OBJET: Défense des collections accessibles

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Ottawa Public Library Board:

- 1. Receive this report for information; and,**
- 2. Express support for Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) and National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS) in their request for continued, sustainable funding.**

RECOMMANDATIONS DU RAPPORT

Que le Conseil d'administration de la Bibliothèque publique d'Ottawa :

- 1. Prenne connaissance du présent rapport pour information; et**

**2. Exprime soutien au Centre d'accès équitable aux bibliothèques (CEAB) et à
Le réseau national de services équitables de bibliothèque (RNSEB) dans
leur demande de financement continu et durable.**

BACKGROUND

Close to 3 million Canadians have a print disability, which means that they have a visual impairment, an impairment related to comprehension (e.g. autism), or the inability to hold or manipulate a book (e.g. Parkinson's disease). It is estimated that only 5 to 7 percent of published works are accessible to these individuals, and as a result, they rely heavily on these works being converted into accessible formats post-publication. In Canada, two non-profit organizations provide the majority of post-publication accessible formats to public libraries: the Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA), established in 2014 after the dissolution of the former Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) Library, and the National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS), established in 2013 by the British Columbia Libraries Co-Operative.

OPL has partnered with CELA for accessible content since its inception in 2014. OPL does not currently pay any yearly membership fees to CELA. CELA's collection includes access for OPL customers to over 500,000 physical items and 100,000 digital items in English, including Digital accessible information system (DAISY)-narrated audio, e-text and braille books and magazines, 38,000 physical and digital items in French, through a partnership with the Service québécois du livre adapté (SQLA), and a deposit collection of DAISYs (Talking Books) in OPL branches.

The Federal Liberal government's 2020 Fall Economic Statement announced that funding for CELA and NNELS was being phased out over the next four years from the current level of \$4 million. In a statement made by Marielle Hossack, a spokesperson for Employment Minister Carla Qualtrough, the government indicated this change was being implemented in order to move towards production practices that are inclusive from the start, commonly known as "born-accessible" publications.¹ Funding for both services was to be eliminated entirely by the 2024-2025 fiscal year. Due to a nationwide protest campaign, led by the two organizations with support from groups such as the

¹ Raycraft, Richard. "Advocates urge Liberals to cancel 'devastating' cut to services for Canadians with print reading disabilities." CBC.ca <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/accessible-reading-funding-cut-1.5938122>

Canadian Urban Libraries Council and Dyslexia BC, funding has been restored for the 2021-2022 fiscal year, but the future of this funding is still in doubt.

The purpose of this report is to seek the Board's approval to support CELA and NNELS in their appeal for continued, sustainable funding. Support will be expressed by sending a letter to the appropriate Members of Parliament, preparing messages of support for OPL's social media channels, and continuing to work with CELA to continue a strong partnership. Staff will update the Board regarding subsequent CELA funding news as needed.

DISCUSSION

The cuts to CELA and NNELS, the two leading producers of accessible formats in Canada, will significantly impede the Canadian production and distribution of accessible books in braille and audio for those with print disabilities, and other services provided in collaboration with Canadian public libraries. For instance, CELA also provides email and phone customer support for libraries and individual customers 60 hours per week, and staff training materials including e-learning.

The Marrakesh Treaty of 2013 made the conversion and international transfer of specially adapted books for the visually impaired easier. While the treaty creates copyright exceptions that allow CELA and NNELS to perform after-market conversions of books, it does not compel content creators to add accessible features in their publications.

In an ideal environment, all books, eBooks and other printed communication would be born accessible. Published content would be published with accessible features "baked in" at the point of creation, including e-pub, audio and Braille options. While many groups, including CELA and NNELS, are working toward this end, very few books are available to people with disabilities without after-market conversion to accessible formats. Until born accessible content is the norm, it is highly important the CELA and NNELS services be maintained.

OPL has worked closely with CELA to provide accessible reading material for customers with print disabilities and to connect them with other CELA services since 2014. As mentioned earlier, in addition to providing access to the entire CELA Library, OPL receives a deposit collection of 6000 accessible titles in nine branches; these titles are listed in the OPL online catalogue. In 2019, CELA-provided audiobooks were

borrowed a total of 6600 times at OPL. As mentioned earlier, in addition to providing access to the entire CELA Library, OPL receives a deposit collection of 6000 accessible titles in nine branches. This material is essential for the community of readers that includes over 400 Talking Books customers who browse these titles independently. The CELA collection serves an additional 250 Homebound customers who rely on monthly residential deliveries of reading materials. Many Homebound customers do not have access to Internet in their homes, and many see neither friends nor family members in a typical month. Interested OPL customers can also sign up to receive titles by mail directly from CELA's library. While OPL does not collect the ages of its customers, anecdotal evidence indicates that CELA clients include many older adults, adults, teens, and children with print disabilities.

These customers represent an already underserved group who face barriers to accessing education, employment and other social services. Access to reading materials is crucial to their economic and academic success and social inclusion. CELA and NNELS services to libraries are specialized and indisputably of societal value in Canada. These cuts harm the most vulnerable in our society – people who are already at risk of exclusion and are now in many cases further isolated due to COVID.

The COVID-19 pandemic is having a disproportionate impact on those with disabilities in both Ottawa and across Canada. CELA and NNELS are actively engaging with the federal Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, the Hon. Carla Qualtrough, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the Hon. Chrystia Freeland, and key opposition Members of Parliament to have funding restored. OPL's continued advocacy in this matter, as the largest bilingual English-French library in North America, and a key partner of CELA since its inception, is valuable to these advocacy efforts.

The letters of support to Members of Parliament will be based on a template provided by the Canadian Urban Libraries Council, and will include information regarding the impacts of the cuts to Canadians with print disabilities, specifics regarding OPL's partnership with CELA and local customers' needs, and two requests:

1. That the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, the Hon. Carla Qualtrough, and the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the Hon. Chrystia Freeland, commit to ongoing, stable funding so those with reading disabilities across Canada are not left further behind.

2. That the above individuals work with all stakeholders, including Canadian publishers, CELA, NNELS, the Canadian Urban Libraries Council, and accessibility organizations, to develop a concrete, realistic plan to move towards “born accessible” publishing within a reasonable timeframe.

CONSULTATION

OPL Managers (including Manager, Content Services and Manager, Alternative Services/Accessibility) and the Senior Management team were consulted in the development of this report.

ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS

Approving the recommendations in this report will affirm OPL’s commitment to providing access to people with disabilities, seniors and other groups at risk of exclusion, as identified in the City’s Equity and Inclusion Lens.

BOARD PRIORITIES

Approval of this report will support OPL’s values of inclusion and literacy and help OPL achieve a goal in the 2020-2023 Strategic Directions and Priorities: strengthening stakeholder relationships and advocacy.

BUSINESS ANALYSIS IMPLICATIONS

Statistics mentioned in this report regarding accessible collections at OPL were collated from data provided by CELA to its members, as well as data available at OPL from its integrated library system (ILS).

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

OPL currently holds a deposit collection of approximately 6000 CELA-produced accessible audiobooks. In addition to the existing collection, CELA provides the Library with up to 500 new discs each year at no charge. If these items were to be purchased by OPL, and assuming an average purchase cost of \$60 per audiobook, the Library would incur an annual cost of approximately \$30,000, which would be provided in the Content Services budget.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications associated with this report.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are no risk management implications associated with this report.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS

There are no technology implications associated with this report.

DISPOSITION

Upon approval of the recommendation, staff will:

1. Work with OPLB Chair Matthew Luloff to draft and send a letter to the appropriate Members of Parliament;
2. Prepare messages of support for OPL's social media channels;
3. Work with CELA to continue a strong partnership; and,
4. Provide an update to the Board regarding subsequent CELA funding news as needed.