Manitoba Library Association

Statement regarding Community Connections at the Millennium Library

December 10, 2024

In response to the City of Winnipeg's latest Winnipeg Public Libraries Attendance and Incident Quarterly Report stating that "funding for the Community Connections (CC) space is secured only until December 31, 2024" and that "there are currently no other funding sources for this library service,"[1] the Manitoba Library Association (MLA) issues the following statement:

Community Connections was envisioned and created by a working group composed of local citizens, community-based organizations, and professional library staff. Taking into account their own lived experience and community expertise, they sought to create a culturally safe, low-barrier service space to access information and resources – essential in light of growing social issues such as poverty, homelessness, and untreated addictions and mental health conditions. Vulnerable residents of downtown require support in accessing resources at the library and in the community. . The working group was formed to help inform and develop solutions steeped in values of librarianship, including equity and access to information and knowledge, and is trauma-informed and guided by principles of harm reduction and positive community development.

Community Connections is a library service with trained library staff including librarians, library service assistants, and community crisis workers. providing information for all community members. The service supports the safety of Winnipeg Public Library overall with the dedicated community safety hosts, the library staff, and community crisis workers providing tailored services for their most at-risk patrons. In fact, the WPL report states directly that: "The Public Service believes that the resources and staff available in the Community Connections space [...] is crucial in maintaining safer library spaces."[2] and that "providing library customer services (access to information) is often the gateway for people to access housing, employment supports, food security, and other basic needs."[3]

Closing Community Connections goes directly against the security audit conducted by GardaWorld in the June, 2023 *Improving Safety at the Millennium Library and Other Winnipeg*

[1] Winnipeg Public Libraries Attendance and Incident Quarterly Report (July, August and September 2024) https://clkapps.winnipeg.ca/DMIS/ViewDoc.asp?DocId=25700&SectionId=751594&InitUrl=
[2]Ibid
[3] Ibid

Public Libraries report[4]. Closing CC would also go against prior commitments made by the City such as those outlined in the OurWinnipeg 2045 developmental plan and the Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Strategy.[5]

Community Connections is a library service that reflects the needs of Winnipeg with specially trained library staff providing information for community members. CC staff have the tools, the education and the training to properly provide social service and library information to patrons, support patrons or de-escalate situations. These dedicated staff connect with those who might be at risk of exclusion, creating meaningful access to materials and services for all.

Community Connections logs more information questions than any other Millennium Library service desk handling 45% of customer inquiries at Millennium Library.[6] If funding is terminated at the end of this year, current patrons will still need the services and information they have come to rely on at Community Connections. Taking away Community Connection's 4.2 FTE positions will mean vulnerable customers will seek assistance at the other service desks where there is limited capacity to provide specialized services that often require interactions that are extended in time and expertise.

Without the dedicated and specifically-trained library staff to provide them with the answers they seek, not only will a greater workload be placed upon the already overburdened library system, but it will create unnecessary hurdles and friction points for customers as they struggle to navigate the information available while looking for resources.

As libraries change and evolve, one fact remains constant: Libraries are there to serve and reflect the communities in which they exist. In addition to serving and reflecting the community around Millennium Library, Community Connections also reflects the Manitoba Library Association's values of collaboration and partnerships, access to information, inclusivity and acceptance, communication, community, and open-mindedness.

The Manitoba Library Association calls upon the City of Winnipeg to also provide ongoing,operational funding for the Community Connections library space at the Millennium Library past December 31, 2024. We believe that other Manitoba libraries, as well as other libraries in Canada, can benefit from the lessons learned and the outcomes of this creative and effective solution - and most importantly, all citizens of Winnipeg.

[signed by Board of MLA]

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[4] Appendix B - GardaWorld Report https://clkapps.winnipeg.ca/DMIS/ViewDoc.asp?DocId=23874&SectionId=&InitUrl=

[5] 2021-2031 Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Strategy https://engage.winnipeg.ca/poverty-reduction-strategy

[6] Winnipeg Public Libraries Attendance and Incident Quarterly Report (July, August and September 2024) https://clkapps.winnipeg.ca/DMIS/ViewDoc.asp?DocId=25700&SectionId=751594&InitUrl=