



Report to: Stratford Public Library Board
Meeting Date: July 7, 2020
From: Julia Merritt, CEO
Subject: Anti-Racism work at SPL

This report is submitted for information.

The SPL staff are committed to inclusive Library services to all. We recognize that anti-racist action is essential to the creation of a fair and just society for all. Galvanized by the Black Lives Matter protests in June, the staff are continuing to expand their understanding of systemic racism and how work within a Library framework can help.

To this end, the following are some of the things that SPL has done in 2020:

- In partnership with the YMCA, arranging for a Newcomer Settlement Worker to be regularly located in the Library (April 2020 start date disrupted by pandemic).
- June 2020, assigning staff time to support a Huron County initiative to facilitate connection opportunities for newcomer youth (partnership initiated during the pandemic).
- Promotion of educational and artistic works related to the Black Lives Matter movement (during the pandemic closure, this is exclusive to social media). Staff also augmented the existing collection with new purchases to satisfy requests from the community for access to more resources for their own education. June is a busy month for these promotional efforts, being also National Indigenous History Month and Pride month.

Further to the above, it should be noted that the SPL has been working for the past several years to support the Indigenous community and address the recommendations from the Truth & Reconciliation report. Items of note include:

- 2016, received Provincial grant of \$3,650 to purchase culturally-appropriate fiction/non-fiction resources for children, as well as toys such as puppets. Our materials are selected on an ongoing basis by our vendors through our standing purchase order criteria which contain instructions for continued purchase of content created by and for Indigenous people.
- 2017, SPL staff connected with a local Indigenous elder who teaches to the public. We have engaged her throughout 2017, '18, and '19 to help teach our community



about Indigenous culture. Primarily aimed at children, the programs are open to all ages and are generally featured on PA Days, during Summer Reading Club, and on other special occasions to boost attendance. This elder has also graciously been teaching our staff about proper protocols to honour Indigenous elders and how to respectfully incorporate Indigenous cultural elements into our regular programming on our own.

- Additional efforts in 2017:
 - Staff researched and identified the treaties in effect in this area
 - Hosted a Community Conversation, in partnership with the University of Waterloo “Uncomfortable is Ok: How Truth & Reconciliation Affects Us All” led by the Director of the Waterloo Aboriginal Education Centre
 - Kicked off our Summer Reading Club with a performance by the White Pine Dancers
- 2019, facilitated a training day for all the Summer Reading Coordinators of the Perth County Libraries (5 libraries total), to learn from the elder noted above
- 2020, dedicated staffing time to decolonizing the SPL catalogue records related to Indigenous peoples. 1,250 subject headings have been altered to date; note that each item with a subject heading also has multiple bib records to manually change as well. So, 1 subject heading may represent a hundred items, all of which must be manually changed.

On a routine basis, our staff are on the lookout for educational opportunities and ways to participate in local conversations. We believe that "doing the work" is the most important part. SPL is not perfect, but it is putting staff time and energy behind this issue, and it will continue to do so. Given the sensitive nature of this topic and the need for us to educate ourselves, we will be expanding our focus on training in this area.

Attached to this report are the public statements issued by the Canadian Federation of Library Associations and the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries; the two primary advocacy bodies with which the SPL is associated. SPL's CEO is currently the Chair of the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries Board.