

Date: February 5, 2020
From: Paul Takala, CEO/Chief Librarian
Subject: **Keeping HPL Safe & Welcoming – Annual Report on Incidents**

BACKGROUND

The importance of the public library today as a vital public space that brings people of all backgrounds together is more important than ever. HPL provides 1,095 hours of service a week at our 22 physical locations and 2 bookmobiles. Our strategic priority “Community Beacon” speaks to the importance of our spaces: *“The library system will act as a unifying force by welcoming everyone.”* Although the rate of incidents at HPL is relatively low, we know that witnessing someone acting out, such as, swearing loudly can be unsettling.

As an institution that works hard to welcome everyone without barriers, occasionally problems that exist in the communities we serve are experienced inside our spaces. To put it in context, in 2019 the Library had just under **3.6 million in-person visitors**. In 2019 there were a total of 1,100 incidents reported which averages **3.1 incidents per 10,000 visits**. (See Table 1.)

Incident Categories

We have an incident report tracking system that categorizes incidents into 3 categories:

1. **Behaviour** – Someone violated our code of conduct, this usually involves behaviour that negatively impacts on the rights of others to use the space. Common examples of this are: excessive noise, inappropriate language, drinking alcohol or being excessively intoxicated.
2. **Facility** – Incidents that involve some problem with our facility. This could involve an elevator out of order, door malfunction, power outage, or an unexpected mess that needs to be cleaned-up.
3. **Medical** – This usually involves either an ambulance being called or the administration of first aid.

ELEMENTS OF OUR SECURITY STRATEGY

Our goal at HPL for many years is not just to provide a safe environment, but to create a welcoming environment where people feel respected and secure. To achieve this goal HPL has undertaken a multifaceted strategy to reduce the risk of serious incidents happening in our spaces and to ensure we have good systems in place to monitor and respond proactively when something happens. Important elements of this strategy are:

1. **Staff Training** – All staff that interact with the public are required to complete [Prepare Training](#) developed by the Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI). This is a non-violent crisis intervention training that helps staff learn how to respectfully diffuse situations. One of the principles of this training is the professional respect we give to customers has the biggest impact on creating a safe environment for the staff and public. Customer Service Training reinforces the training.
2. **Customer Service Commitment** – In 2015 the Board approved a significantly updated [Code of Conduct](#). The new policy replaced a long list of prohibited activities in the Library, with a staff customer service commitment and 4 simple rules for people using the Library to follow:
 - Be courteous and respectful
 - Follow Library policies and procedures
 - Treat Library materials, resources and spaces with care and respect
 - Be responsible for those in your care
3. **Incident Reporting System** – On the staff Intranet is a system for tracking incidents at HPL. The system makes information available promptly, so situations can be tracked, and corrective action taken when needed. Incidents are reviewed by the departmental manager, Security Supervisor and the Health & Safety Coordinator.
4. **Weekly Incident Review Meeting** – Every Monday the Director of Finance and Facilities meets with the Security Supervisor and the CEO/Chief Librarian's Assistant to review incidents from the previous week. Recommendations from that meeting are reviewed at the weekly Senior Leadership Team (SLT) meeting the next day.
5. **Security Supervisor** - To place more emphasis on addressing security concerns, the Library created a full-time permanent in-house Security Supervisor.
6. **Security Contract** – HPL made a number of changes to how we secure security services. We stipulate in the contract better pay for the guards in our RFP and require more training. There is on-site orientation for new guards.
7. **Security Camera Policy** – In 2013 the Library Board made a number of changes to the Security Camera policy and approved funds to expand security camera coverage. The expansion of the coverage is less of a deterrent than a tool to help us effectively investigate incidents. The policy and processes that have been set-up ensure staff and customer privacy is protected.
8. **Community Resource Worker** – The Library added this position to liaise with customers in crisis, train and assist staff resolving challenging situations and helping people connect to services available in our community. The CRW is based at Central but available to branches for consultation and support.

9. **Experience Annex & Other Partnerships** – The City of Hamilton’s Experience Annex Social Navigator is located at the Central Library. This program engages youth that have not made a successful transition to higher education or meaningful employment. Clients are connected with services and advancement opportunities. City School by Mohawk provides free college level courses at the Central Library. HPL engages in over 150 partnerships that support learning, access to music and culture and social engagement.
10. **Re-entry Procedures** – At HPL when someone has completed a long-term ban, they are required to meet with either the Chief Librarian and the Security Supervisor. The purpose of the meeting is to review what behaviours led to the ban and encourage accountability.
11. **Physical Design** – When designing and renovating spaces, we pay considerable attention to ensuring sight lines are good and we will be able to manage our spaces effectively. Where problems have emerged, we have made furniture and other changes to the physical environment to reduce unwanted activity.

CONCLUSION

The role of the public library at bringing people together is more important than ever. Misunderstanding, bias and prejudice are best overcome when people have a chance to get to know the “other”. HPL attracts people of all ages, economic, educational and cultural backgrounds. It is imperative that as we strive to create public spaces that welcomes everyone, we ensure safety and security in ways that remain true to our values as a public library.

Other libraries often contact HPL for information about our approaches to safety and security because they know HPL takes a comprehensive and proactive approach to these issues. Moving forward we should continue to do so.

TABLE 1 - 2019 Hamilton Public Library Report on Incidents

	Behaviour					Facility					Medical					Annual Total	In-Person Visits	Incident Rate Per 10,000 Visits
Location	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Cat. Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Cat. Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Cat. Total			
	Jan-Mar	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sept	Oct-Dec		Jan-Mar	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sept	Oct-Dec		Jan-Mar	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sept	Oct-Dec				
Ancaster						1				1	1	1			2	3	149,642	0.2
Barton	19	22	9	19	69	4	7	5	10	26	3	3		2	8	103	92,143	11.2
Binbrook			1		1											1	53,706	0.2
Bookmobiles														2	2	2	26,634	0.8
Carlisle		1			1											1	15,328	0.7
Central	126	94	99	83	402	26	86	73	35	220	26	15	10	17	68	690	1,349,826	5.1
Concession	8	2	1	2	13			1		1	2		1		3	17	95,813	1.8
Dundas	1	7	7	1	16	1				1				1	1	18	215,705	0.8
Freelton																	16,170	0.0
Greenville																	9,369	0.0
Kenilworth	6	3	1	5	15	1				1						16	85,136	1.9
Locke	1	1	1		3		1	1		2						5	49,883	1.0
Lynden			1		1								1		1	2	27,039	0.7
Mount Hope		1			1	1				1				1	1	3	5,413	5.5
Red Hill	18	17	8	10	53		4	1	1	6	5	3	1	1	10	69	172,515	4.0
Saltfleet				8	8				2	2	1	2			3	13	117,445	1.1
Sherwood	3	3	3	5	14			2		2	2	4			6	22	121,856	1.8
Stoney Creek																	51,485	0.0
Terryberry	5	4	11	5	25		1	4	1	6	3	3	1		7	38	241,712	1.6
Turner Park	10	17	14	12	53	3	1	4	2	10	2	6	1	3	12	75	367,826	2.0
Valley Park			1		1							1		1	2	3	53,636	0.6
Waterdown		1	1	2	4		1	1	2	4			2		2	10	123,856	0.8
Westdale	2		5		7			2		2						9	149,915	0.6
Total	199	173	163	152	687	37	101	94	53	285	45	38	17	28	128	1100	3,592,052	3.1