



Hamilton
Public
Library

Annual Report 2023



Freedom to Belong and Discover

Our Values

ACCOUNTABILITY

Ensure services remain relevant and manage resources effectively and transparently. We listen to the community and communicate our rationale for decisions.

EQUITY

Informs our program design so we can create fairer access to opportunities and help build a more just society.

INNOVATION

Anticipate and respond to changing needs and technology by continually adapting our work to remain relevant. We meet new challenges by gradually shifting resources to build capacity in areas of growing need. We are a leader in integrating sustainability into our planning and actions.

INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM

Provide free access to a wide range of ideas and artistic expressions. Ensure residents have appropriate digital access and skills to flourish in the current economy and society. We nurture conversations that enhance mutual understanding and learning.

RESPECT

Support the value and dignity of all individuals. We work to support residents in overcoming the legacies of colonization, racism and other forms of discrimination.

INCLUSION

Create trusted services and spaces that welcome and value everyone. We celebrate the varied cultures and histories of Hamiltonians.

A Letter from Paul and Nick



Paul Takala
CEO and Chief Librarian



Nick van Velzen
Library Board Chair

The role of today's public library continues to evolve, as we see residents and communities face new challenges.

Hamilton Public Library offered more services and programs in 2023 and expanded service hours across the system, offering Study Halls and Extended Access in rural branches. HPL served more than 2.6 million people last year. We also increased our Membership to 178,000 card holders – that's the highest number it's been in a decade.

In May, the Library Board approved the **2023-2026 Strategic Plan**, which strengthens HPL's commitment to the community by adapting to changing needs and ensuring we are a resilient learning organization that is relevant and responsive. The Strategic Plan supports accessibility and literacy and strives to create safe spaces where people feel respected and included.

HPL leveraged many partnerships with local organizations. This strengthens our ability to enrich people's lives through barrier-free access to information, equipment, entertainment, digital services and spaces to study, work and learn. For example, in 2023, access to Wi-Fi increased by 137.9 per cent, to 1.8 million sessions.

As our City faces growing socio-economic challenges compounded by a housing and an opioid crisis, the importance of HPL's role in the community was amplified. This is why we updated our mission statement in 2023 to **Freedom to Belong and Discover**. This drives home the message that all Hamiltonians have the

right to welcoming public spaces that embrace equity and foster inclusion.

2024 promises to be another year of growth and expanded services with a more diverse program calendar, complemented by partner-led programs and community groups. We will continue to support City-led initiatives, including the exciting **Envisioning the New Discovery Centre** project as part of the West Harbour Project.

As part of our 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, HPL is committed to Truth and Reconciliation efforts. Renovations to Sherwood and Concession branches and other upgrades focus on improving accessibility, technology and environmentally sustainable solutions.

Hamilton Public Library is committed to meeting residents where they need us most. We are thankful for the support that allows us to serve all Hamiltonians. We are honoured to have served this role in 2023 and excited to forge more positive connections in this community in 2024.

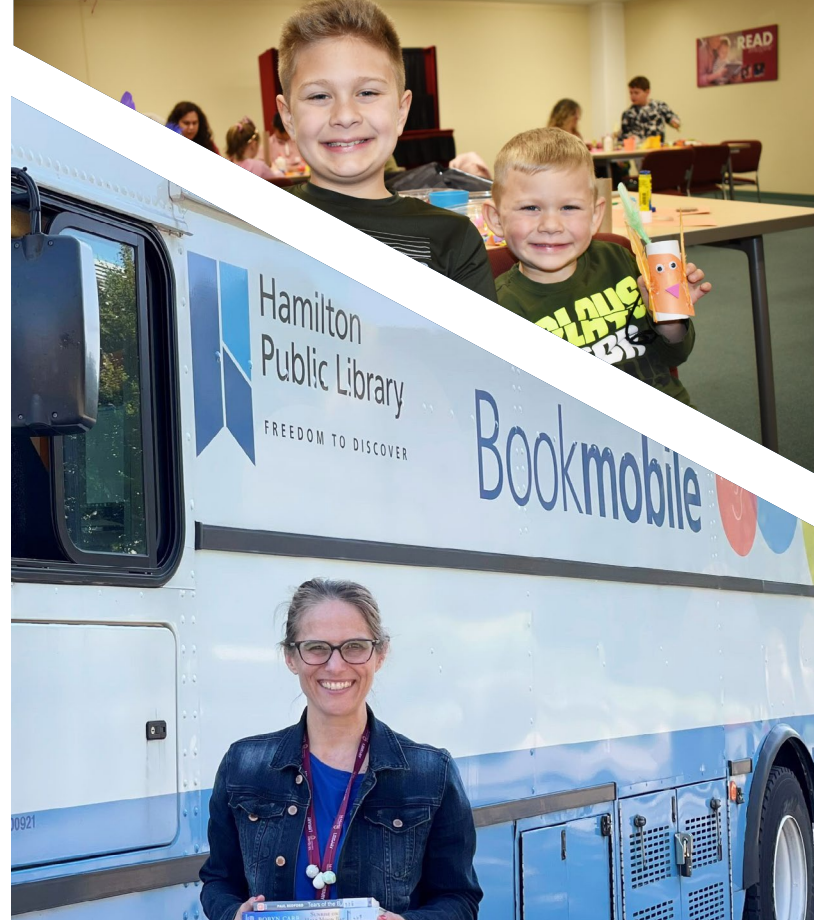
Cover Images

Top: Hamilton author of *Chrysalis*, Anuja Varghese pictured at Central Library. She won the Governor General's Award for English-language fiction in November.

Middle: A family displays their creations from Stoney Creek Craft Cart.

Bottom Right: A young Member enjoys Play Kitchen activities at Kenilworth Branch.

Left: A Member makes use of Central Library's Makerspace tools.



Big News at the Branches

There was plenty of cause for celebration among branches in 2023.

Barton saw improvements inside and out in 2023. In March, new service desks, carpeting and paint on the walls gave the branch a fresh update. In June, Green Venture and 30 volunteers helped plant a rain garden with 350 native plants on the west side of the branch.

And in October, Barton marked 60 years at its 571 Barton St., location with celebratory donuts for the northend community. Six other branches also celebrated in the same way. **Valley Park** and **Freelton** both reached their 45-year milestone, while **Red Hill** hit the big 4-0, **Stoney Creek**, 20 years, **Lynden**, 10 years and **Binbrook** celebrated five years at its RR 56 location.

Kenilworth got a mini makeover in October. Improvements were made to the 1st Floor layout with new service desks and public computer tables. And Kenilworth now has a Makerspace area on the 2nd Floor with a Mac computer and film scanner. The Makerspace at **Waterdown** expanded to include a large format printer, 3D printer, sewing machine, serger, Cricut, embroidery machine and two knitting machines. **Ancaster** and **Greensville** also got a refresh with new furniture at each site.

Mount Hope and Valley Park also had good reason to cheer in 2023. **Mount Hope** got news in April that the small Homestead Drive building was approved for a

\$5.2 million expansion. In August, **Valley Park** earned a LEED* gold certificate from the U.S. and Canadian Green Building councils for its eco-friendly construction. The branch is more efficient to operate because it uses less water, energy and natural resources saving money — and the planet — over the long term.

Dundas received a Hamilton Municipal Heritage Committee Recognition Award in February for “demonstrating an outstanding contribution to the conservation, restoration and preservation of Hamilton’s heritage by making an inaccessible property accessible to all citizens of Hamilton.”

HPL’s **Bookmobile** made its presence known in more neighbourhoods and community events throughout the year. It now visits 25 places in the City including Bernie Morelli Recreation Centre, McMaster University’s main campus and Six Nations Public Library. The Library on wheels also parked at events such as Sew Hungry Ottawa Street, Imagine in the Park and Open Streets.

*LEED® (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design), and its related logo, is licensed in Canada to the [Canada Green Building Council](#) and is used here with permission.

Supporting the Community

Childhood memories of libraries often elicit images of circle time on a carpet listening and watching Staff animate story times, or study halls where we crammed for exams in our school days. Thankfully, these scenes are still paramount for Hamilton Public Library’s young visitors.

A new reality is also surfacing at our branches. The post-pandemic crush of economic disparity is contributing to large numbers of unhoused people, addictions and unmanageable debt where people are forced to choose between putting food on the table or paying the rent or mortgage.

As a community gathering space, Hamilton Public Library responded with seasonal **warming and cooling centres**, **expanded hours** including **Study Halls** until midnight, added **social workers** to help residents sort out practical solutions to pressing problems, offered **free tax clinics**, hosted COVID **vaccine clinics**, and as always, free Staff and partner-led programs to learn, entertain and educate.

community

Literacy and Literary Pursuits

The foundation of libraries is literacy: digital, numerical, financial and of course, reading and writing. Literacy not only enriches an individual's life, but it creates opportunities for people to develop personal, educational and marketable skills. HPL does this in practical and creative ways for local residents and beyond.



I live in Guelph, but had to go to Mohawk College with my son for an exam. I spent an hour or so in the library nearby and was completely blown away by the welcome they gave me. It's so refreshing to meet people who aren't just there as a job.

— Robin K.

The event calendar at HPL is filled daily with Storytimes for pre-readers, as well as early and established readers, book clubs, math clubs, science and technology programs and computer training.

Partnerships with agencies such as **Adult Basic Education** and donations to community organizations such as **Hess Street School** promote literacy beyond our branches. Our reach was international in May when Westdale and Dundas branches donated 135 boxes of books to Grenada, Carricou and Petite Martinique. Recognizing **Freedom to Read Week** each February further demonstrates our commitment.

HPL instills a love of reading for all ages. We launched **Early Literacy Kits**, relaunched **Reading Buddies** for reluctant readers and inspired writers of all ages to submit their work in the ever-popular annual contests, **Power of the Pen** and **Short Works Prize**. **Memory Bags** filled with historical Hamilton photos, books, puzzles and games were updated in 2023 and HPL added Kingston-Frontenac Public Library to the **OverDrive** group as of March, making access to eBooks and eAudiobooks available at six Library systems. **March Break** and **Summer Reading Club** attracted more than 20,000 people.

On the literary front, **Hamilton Reads** encouraged annual citywide book club conversations featuring local author Gary Barwin's book, *Nothing the Same, Everything Haunted*.

HPL sponsored the **Hamilton Literary Awards** in December, the **gritLIT Readers and Writers Festival** in April and the 2022-23 **Mabel Pugh Writer-In-Residence**, Amanda Leduc, as well as **Writer-In-eResidence**, Kateryna Babkina. In September, Jaclyn Desforges (pictured in middle photo) stepped into the role. HPL continued to put a **Spotlight on Local** authors, musicians and filmmakers by featuring them in author talks, **Noon Hour Concerts** and **Filmed in Hamilton** showings.



Warm and Welcoming for All

HPL aimed to put a Library card in the hands of as many people as possible in 2023. By year-end, nearly one in three Hamiltonians were active Members.

This was achieved partly through a pilot with the *Hamilton Wentworth District School Board*. We worked with 21 elementary schools (about 8,500 students) to make it easier for students to get a Library card. Handing out **free PRESTO cards** for children ages 6-12 with a Library card also increased our Membership and gave young people the bonus of travelling free on local Hamilton Street Railway (HSR) transit.

While making Library services accessible to as many residents as possible is important, ensuring the community sees itself represented in our collections, programs, exhibits and events is also vital. French conversation circles and book clubs, Tagalog (Filipino) Storytime and Black Youth Mentorship drop-ins accomplish this through programming. We celebrated **Black History Month** with the launch of **Black History Remembered**, a City-wide effort to recognize the contributions of Hamilton's Black residents. We celebrated Diwali, Lunar New Year and the LGBTQ2+ community with dedicated reading lists, branch displays and events. Multilingual books, movies and music filled the shelves at branches and **Newcomer Learning Centre** services and programs were constant sources of support for local communities.

On the event side, HPL partnered with the City of Hamilton's Indigenous Relations Team to host a **Red Dress Exhibit** in recognition of **National Day for Awareness of Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG)** in May. HPL celebrated **Newcomer Day** on May 26 and **National Indigenous Peoples Day** on June 21 with a gathering of food, music, dancing and presentations. In November, a Human Library event invited six HPL volunteers to chat with newcomers about their immigration and life experiences.

In July, HPL's Local History and Archives exhibited the **Holocaust Recollections** on Central Library's 3rd Floor. The display was the work of HPL Librarian Kaye Prince-Hollenberg who discovered the booklet **Holocaust Recollections: The Stories of Ten Hamiltonians** in the archives. Through Kaye's research, the display told the story of four survivors featured in the booklet.



“

Love that HPL has extended Sunday and study hours. I have a type of job where I use library resources and printing services on a regular basis. I am so grateful to have such a good library system.

— Heather H.

equity

collaboration

HPL operates on the philosophy best articulated by author and disability rights advocate Helen Keller, who said, “Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”

Partnerships are key to HPL’s mission. In 2023 a partnership with **Green Venture** led to a huge turnout for Seedy Saturday in February and a new rain garden at Barton Branch. **Birds Canada** supplied HPL with 10 Bird Watching Kits in June. Members borrow backpacks which are filled with a laminated bird guide, two informative bird books and binoculars. **Stratford Festival** once again offered four in-depth talks about plays featured in their 2023 season at Valley Park in March and April. And when **Elections Ontario** came calling, HPL responded by serving as a polling station for the Hamilton Centre by-election in March.

A digitization project with **Internet Archive Canada** and **Local History and Archives** began in April. This was a major milestone after months of planning. The project’s initial focus digitizes regional government documents, public domain texts, local newspaper scrapbooks and archival material within the Michael Johnstone Fonds.

HPL worked with the **City of Hamilton** to explore possibilities for a new **Discovery Centre** at the foot of Pier 8 in West Harbour. Funding for a Program Design and Development Study was approved in November 2023. Preliminary plans for the Discovery Centre would feature a gathering place defined, led and staffed by local Indigenous peoples, a modern Library with a full range of services, cultural exhibits and a café. Community consultations are expected to begin in mid-2024.

As always, HPL has relied on the sage guidance of its **Library Board Members** over the years. On May 17, the Hamilton Public Library Board approved the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan. The updated Mission — Freedom to Belong and Discover — stresses the importance of inclusivity in all we do and provide. HPL’s Values rely on six pillars: Accountability, Inclusion, Equity, Innovation, Intellectual Freedom and Respect.



“

It’s a public library and being downtown, it means that it does more than just provide books and a quiet place for the community. It means it provides temporary shelter from the elements and a place to charge a phone or access the internet for some people who don’t have that elsewhere.

— Sophie V.

Making an Impact

More than:

5.4M

Items circulated

2.6M

In-person visits

3.2M

Hours of Wi-Fi use

153K

Program attendees

2.2M

Total pages printed

427K

Computer sessions

56K

AskHPL questions

44K

New members

1,900

PRESTO passes issued

Increases from 2022

Wi-Fi sessions
+137.9%

In-person
visits +52.7%

Computer
sessions +35.3%

Materials
circulated +6%

2023

Timeline

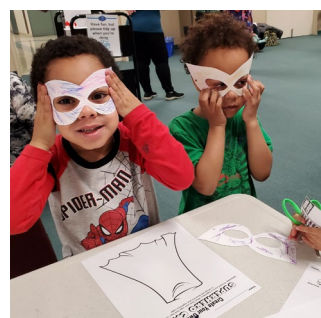
January

Family Literacy Day on Jan 27 attracted 620 Storytime fans to HPL branches.



March

March Break events were in person again. More than 4,758 people participated in sing-a-longs, family dance parties, bubble science shows, alpaca visits, book clubs and writing programs.



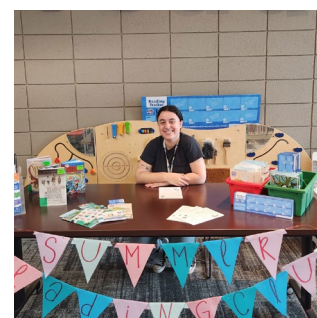
May

The Library Board approved an **updated Strategic Plan** that creates a vision for HPL to 2026. It includes long-term, collaborative solutions to pressing issues around homelessness, mental health, the opioid crisis, climate change and reconciliation with our Indigenous neighbours.



July

Summer Reading Buddies were back in branches after a three-year hiatus due to the pandemic. In total, 1,683 children were helped by teen volunteers who logged more than 2,000 hours through the Summer.



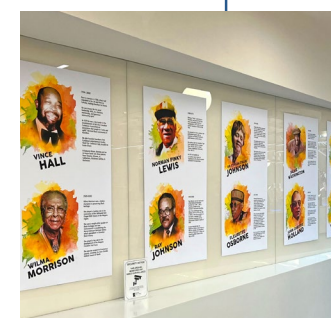
September

Birdwatching kits were added to the catalogue for Members to borrow. The kits supplied by Birds Canada include a laminated bird guide, binoculars, a backpack and two birdwatching books from HPL's collections.



November

With an eye to creating a cultural centre, Indigenous gathering space, library and café at the city-owned **Discovery Centre** on the west harbour, HPL got the go-ahead from council to lead a Program Design and Development Study.



February

Black History Month celebrations included performances by Garnetta & DaGroovyMaster and Mohawk College musicians who paid tribute to Hamilton's own Jackie Washington. Also, bookmarks honouring 16 local achievers proved to be very popular among residents who were keen to collect them all.



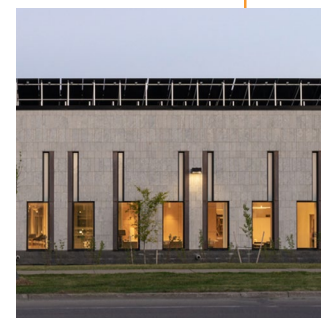
April

Young transit riders got good news in Spring when HPL expanded its **free PRESTO card program** for children ages 6-12 for the long term. A nice perk for existing and new library card holders.



June

HPL curated reading lists, offered musical performances, screened a documentary and created special Storytimes featuring Indigenous authors and illustrators in celebration of **Indigenous history, heritage and diversity**.



August

Valley Park Branch earned a **gold medal** from the U.S. and Canadian Green Building councils for its eco-friendly construction. The branch uses less water, energy and natural resources saving money — and the planet — over the long term.



October

Kenilworth Branch, which was built in 1932 and is one of HPL's oldest branches, got a **mini makeover**. On the 1st Floor, new service desks and public computer tables were installed. A Makerspace with a Mac computer and film scanner were added to the 2nd Floor.



December

The **Hamilton Literary Awards** returned to their roots at Central Library Dec 14 to celebrate its 30th year. Central Library first hosted the event in 1993. Local authors Sheila Murray, Joyce Grant (pictured), Fareh Malik and Darrell Epp won awards for fiction, non-fiction, poetry and children's books.

Hamilton Public Library Board (2023-2026)

The Hamilton Public Library Board has nine citizens and two City Councillors. The Board establishes Library services for our community based on public input and market research.

Hamilton Public Library Board Members:

- Nicolas van Velzen, *Chair*
- Gagan Batra, *Vice-Chair*
- Brie Berry
- Kojo Dampney
- Dayna Firth
- Alison Griggs
- Jennifer Horwath
- Councillor Ted McMeekin
- Councillor Nrinder Nann
- Lynne Serviss
- Carly Whitmore

Thank you to the **2022-23 Hamilton Public Library Board** for its service and dedication:

- Lori-Anne Spence-Smith, *Chair*
 - John Kirkpatrick, *Vice-Chair*
 - Gagan Batra
 - Elly Bowen
 - Robert Coruzzi
 - C. A. Klassen
 - Stu Laurie
 - Councillor Ted McMeekin
(from February 2023)
 - Councillor Nrinder Nann
(from November 2022)
 - Councillor Judi Partridge
(to October 2022)
 - Councillor Maria Pearson
(to October 2022)
 - Lynne Serviss
 - Nicolas van Velzen
-