

**COMMUNICATION & COUNSEL**

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**Subject:** Services to the Aboriginal Community in Ottawa

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**Background**

Ottawa-Gatineau's urban Aboriginal population numbers 20,590 according to the 2006 census. This is the seventh largest urban Aboriginal population in Canada. Ottawa-Gatineau's Inuit population has grown to 730, from 415 in 2001, making it the largest Inuit community anywhere outside of the North. According to the January 18, 2008 issue of the *Ottawa Citizen*, organizations in the local Inuit community believe that the Inuit population in Ottawa is significantly larger than the census indicates and totals 1,600-2,000 people.

Ottawa is the 13<sup>th</sup> city in Canada to be part of the federal government's Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) and is receiving \$1.75 million over five years to ensure Aboriginal peoples can integrate successfully and take full advantage of the economic and community opportunities that exist in Ottawa. The other twelve urban centres designated as participants in the UAS include: Vancouver, Prince George, Edmonton, Calgary, Lethbridge, Saskatoon, Regina, Prince Albert, Winnipeg, Thompson, Thunder Bay and Toronto. Additional information is available at: <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ai/of/ias/bkg-eng.asp>

The Aboriginal community in Ottawa faces many challenges including housing, unemployment, low education, literacy, and poverty. The community is spread out over the city though there is a large Inuit community in the Vanier area. For the past several years OPL has increased our outreach to this community to encourage library use and encourage the love of reading. The City of Ottawa's City Operations Department (formerly Community and Protective Services) has also joined with Aboriginal service agencies to create the Aboriginal Working Group to ensure that the City and its agencies (including Ottawa Police and OPL) are working together with the Aboriginal service providers to best serve the needs of the community.

OPL has participated on this Aboriginal Working Group to determine priorities and has participated in its activities such as the: Know Your Services Aboriginal Survey; Information Fair; and the Listening Circle Consultation Forum.

## Recent Activity

In recent years OPL has focused on approaching Aboriginal service providers to consult with them on how we could assist them to help their clients. This activity supports and responds to Strategic Directions A. Provide responsive service and B. Develop partnerships for accessible and efficient service.

Activities and partnerships were developed such as:

- Vanier and St-Laurent branches presented Aboriginal children's authors Jan Bourdeau Waboose, Larry Loyie, and Michael Kusugak to students from schools with higher than average enrolment of Aboriginal students like Assumption Catholic School and R. E Wilson School.
- Jan Bourdeau Waboose gave a presentation to the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health's Peri-natal and Art Therapy groups at Vanier branch while Larry Loyie presented his books to the Senior's group of the Wabano Centre. Michael Kusugak, Larry Loyie and Leo Yerxa visited Rosemount branch to talk about their work with students from the Alternative Aboriginal High School program. M Kusugak also gave a storytelling event at the Odawa Centre's Elder's Lodge.
- Aboriginal storyteller Daniel Richer presented a storytelling session to families at Sunnyside branch from the Minwaashin Lodge Sacred Child program.
- St-Laurent branch has had regular outreach story time sessions at the Ottawa Inuit Child Centre and organized several open houses at their branch and at Vanier branch. At one open house maktaq (whale skin), bannock and caribou stew were served after a storytelling session by two Inuit elders.
- The Curator of Contemporary Inuit Art from the Canadian Museum of Civilization, presented a program on Inuit culture to students of Assumption School at the Vanier branch.
- Library staff had information kiosks at events such as the Metis community's Louis Riel Day, two Family conferences held at the Odawa Native Friendship Centre, a Senior's Information Fair at the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health as well as at the launch of the Aboriginal Information Forum (Children's Aid Society)
- Library staff organized two Every Child Ready to Read sessions for the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health and one session for the Ottawa Inuit Child Centre.
- OPL offered evacuees from the Kashechewan community the opportunity of borrowing library materials.
- Selected branches celebrated First Nations Public Library week with book displays.

The Friends of the Ottawa Public Library have been major supporters by providing funds for many of the outreach efforts.

Collection Development has increased the collection of books by and about the Aboriginal community such as the Eaglecrest early reader series.

Some employees working in branches serving a larger Aboriginal population participated in an Education Institute audio workshop "Providing Library Services for Aboriginal People" plus conference sessions on the topic.

## Future direction

The Library will continue to focus on building relationships and program partnerships with service providers to the Aboriginal community. This would build on past successes and have the greatest potential for connecting the library with issues of literacy and learning to members of the Aboriginal community.

An Aboriginal Working Team of OPL staff will be created in 2009. The team will initially work to improve the knowledge of OPL information and programming staff on literature by Aboriginal people and about working with this community. The team will plan activities to celebrate the 2010 First Nations Public Library Week.

A Children's and Youth In-Service on Aboriginal literature and working with the Aboriginal community will be held. A resource list of Aboriginal titles by age level will be created as well as a list of adult books by Aboriginal authors. A list of Aboriginal programmers available for library programs will be developed.

The Library will continue to integrate OPL services into the City's Aboriginal Services Initiative. The City of Ottawa's Aboriginal Working Group is meeting in February to discuss priorities and plans for 2009.

## Additional Related Developments

At the recent Ontario Library Association Superconference (January 28 to January 31, 2009) the following motion was passed at the AGMs of the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries (FOPL) and the Ontario Public Library Association (OPLA).

### Topic: Targeted Funding for Newcomer and First Nation Public Library Services in Public Libraries

Whereas the public library is often one of the first institutions to which newcomers to Canada and specific community, turn to for information, resources and support and

Whereas public libraries increasingly provide services to urban Aboriginal residents:

Therefore, be it resolved that the OPLA/FOPL make it a program priority to urge the Governments of Ontario and Canada to respond to these newcomer, settlement, **First Nations** and urban Aboriginal service priorities in a responsive, inclusive and timely fashion.

The original motion was proposed by the Ottawa Public Library and the final version was amended (as indicated in bold) to broaden the scope to include First Nations libraries.

Ontario is one of the few provinces which has a designated funding program for First Nations libraries. There are 52 First Nations libraries on reserves in Ontario. With the assistance of the Ontario Library Service, the Ontario First Nations Librarians have created a Strategic Plan called *Our Way Forward*. It is available at <http://ourwayforward.ca/> Ontario First Nations Public Library week is celebrated this year February 9-14, 2009.