Hamilton Public Library

**Date:** February 21, 2024
**To:** Chair and Members of the Library Board
**From:** Paul Takala, CEO/Chief Librarian
Tony Del Monaco, Director Finance and Facilities
**Subject:** **Safety and Security Update and Proposed Next Steps – PT/TD**

## INTRODUCTION

At the Central Library we are familiar with a general pattern of increased security incidents when the weather gets cold outside. Back in the early 2010s we started to notice an increase in challenging incidents that we had not experienced before. This led us to fully review all our strategies and processes around security and safety. Changes implemented following that review included more security cameras, the creation of an in-house Security Supervisor, and staff training in verbal de-escalation and intervention. We also created the social worker program at Central and implemented living wage pay for our contract security guards. A more complete list of our multipronged approach to security is summarized in this Update on Safety and Security[i] from February 2018 or more recently in the May 2023 Report on Incidents[ii]. See Appendix I at the end of this report for a summary of the different training and supports we have for staff.

## UPDATED CONTEXT OF 2023 AND 2024

During much of the COVID-19, pandemic public health restrictions, including contact tracing and physical distancing, limited in-person visits and reduced the number of security incidents we saw. In 2023, as we saw a significant rebound in in-person visits, we also saw an increase in security incidents.

In 2023, HPL participated in a Canadian Urban Library Council (CULC) Working Group on Safety and Security[iii]. This group was created because libraries nationwide were experiencing new types of security challenges. The opioid crisis, homelessness and mental health challenges are being experienced in ways and on a scale not experienced before by libraries. This year, HPL will use the toolkit to complete another full review of all our existing processes to ensure a safe environment. We anticipate that review will lead to changes in how we do things; however, we need to be aware that our long-term experience with these challenges led us to adopt many strategies that others are only now considering. We will be keeping the Board engaged in that process.

## MOVING BEYOND AN EMERGENCY

This is not a new emergency; we have already been managing an emergency at Central Library, and to a lesser extent at other locations, for years. The heart of the matter is that the level of disruption we are experiencing is undermining our ability to provide the

kind of library environment that is welcoming and safe. This is negatively impacting our ability to fulfil our mandate. While there is still a lot of positive activity at Central, we are seeing some declining patterns of use and some are telling us that the negative activity at Central Library and in the area makes them avoid the space. It is important to distinguish between people's perceptions of safety and actual safety. While our rate of incidents is low compared to visits, to witness someone in mental distress engage in a loud and continuous verbal outburst or to see a person unconscious from using opioids may not be a direct risk to someone's safety, but it impacts their perceptions.

We have been communicating with the Library Board and City Leadership that a combination of the current level of need, the lack of accessible alternatives and our approach has unintentionally resulted in the Central Library becoming a de facto safer injection site and homeless day shelter during cold weather. Central Library is still much more than that, and the City needs us to continue to be a great public library; however, having people overdose regularly, use drugs, and hang out with all their belongings is driving away a lot of families and other Members from Central.

Our ability to serve families with young children and some other library users will continue to be hindered without meaningful change to what happens both inside our space and in the immediate vicinity outside. Until those changes are affected, we will proactively manage the situation in a way that is consistent with our values and make what progress we can. We need to be aware of the scale of the challenges in Central Library's neighbourhood. These will not be easily resolved, and it will take sustained collective action to improve.

Many discussions are currently ongoing about how to address the serious challenges many in our community are facing. At HPL, as we have done in the past, when we faced serious challenges, we engaged broadly and focused on developing meaningful solutions consistent with our values and mandate. The following are several actions that are being taken:

- **Central Safety Taskforce** – In Q1 2024 we will be engaging key stakeholders to explore steps to reduce serious incidents in our spaces. The task force will look at appropriate services that can support individuals in our space and measures to reduce disruptive behaviours. We are looking to engage the City Healthy and Safe Communities, Public Health, Hamilton Police Service (HPS) and other stakeholders engaged in working with vulnerable individuals.

- **CULC Safety and Security Toolkit Review -** We will be reviewing the toolkit recommendations and best practices to see if there are any additional viable options we can implement. The toolkit identifies some distinct points to consider along our members' visitor experience, referred to as a "Journey Map". Those points are Members' Experience, Social Development, Incident Preparation,

Incident Prevention, Incident Response, and Post-Incident Recovery.

- **Updated Report on Safety & Security** - As mentioned previously, a report on Safety & Security in the Library was brought to the Board in 2023. We will bring an updated report to the Board at an upcoming meeting with updated data on incidents and updated actions taken.

As we work to reduce unwanted behavior, we need to be mindful that most vulnerable individuals visiting our spaces are respectful to staff and other members.

## APPENDIX I: SUMMARY OF EMPLOYEE SUPPORTS IN PLACE AT HPL

HPL provides a wide range of resources for employees to safely and effectively respond to various potential situations that may occur in our spaces as a public-facing organization. While we cannot eliminate all potentially hazardous scenarios, our strategies and supports are multifaceted to help control hazards, reduce impacts, and keep our employees and Members safe. Below is a summary of our current actions.

### Training

- HPL public service employees must complete Crisis Prevention Institute's (CPI) *Verbal Intervention*™ (VI) training a minimum of every five years, with opportunities for additional refresher training provided on a case-by-case basis between trainings. CPI's *Verbal Intervention*™(VI) training program (formerly called *Prepare*™ training) teaches the skills required to verbally de-escalate disruptive behaviours and prevent further escalation. Through VI training, participants learn how to *Recognize & Respond to Defensive Behaviours, Understand What's Behind the Behaviour,* and *Address the Needs of the Individual.*

- HPL began rolling out the *Emotions Matter* program to public service employees in November 2023. This emotional labour training program designed specifically for library workers was developed by McMaster University's Advanced Research on Mental Health and Society department, supported by McMaster's Community Research Platform and the Hamilton branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association.

- HPL plans to continue rolling out Ryan Dowd's De-escalation Training in a phased approach for all public service staff in 2024. We've also used a directed approach in response to specific needs. For example, Central Information Services Managers have begun assigning courses to their staff. In response to incidents and Manager requests, we've also assigned specific courses to staff at Saltfleet, Sherwood and Turner Park in 2023. While this is not an exhaustive list, courses cover a range of topics such as de-escalation training, body language, supporting coworkers during a

conflict, handling problematic behaviours, responding to prejudicial and inappropriate customer comments, and more.

- On June 13, 2023, we launched Opioid Poisoning Response Training (OPRT). While HPL is not required by the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* to have employees trained in naloxone delivery, we understand the value of being able to quickly respond to an opioid poisoning event to administer potentially life-saving measures. All designated First-Aid-trained employees are required to complete the Opioid Poisoning Response training through St John Ambulance. However, we also make this training available to any interested employee.

- In October and November 2023, HPL Managers and Staff led two optional learning sessions called *The Trick to Tricky Member Interactions*. Each session focused on tricky or complicated situations and requests from library members. Staff had the chance to hear about real-life situations and were given the opportunity to discuss strategies for approaching each situation.

- During Staff Day 2023, a representative from Homewood Health led a session called *Building Resilience: Understanding Challenges, Learning Strategies, and Accepting Change,* which was attended by 40 employees. Additionally, a third-party counsellor led a training session called *Critical Incident Debriefing* that was developed in response to themes noted in employee concerns.

- All employees are currently trained in recognizing possible signs of substance use and/or a substance use disorder and how to appropriately respond as a part of their new hire onboarding.

## Resources

- In 2022, HPL partnered with Public Health, adding two Social Workers on-site at Central Library. The Social Workers make informal connections with Library Members in HPL facilities to increase awareness of available services. They also conduct assessments that include but are not limited to current physical and mental health needs and social services needs, including housing, income supports, educational, employment, social and cultural concerns, and legal issues. In coordination with employees, they will build response plans for individuals involved in incidents at the Library that may lead to restricted access, but not respond to immediate incidents that may place the worker at risk. While they are stationed at Central Library, they can visit any branch if needed. They are also available to assist virtually for employee training and resources. So far, they have developed two workshops for HPL employees:

    - Social Worker Q&A Session: In September 2023, Staff from across the system had the opportunity to learn more about HPL's Social Worker program

and engage directly with both Social Workers. This optional learning session focused on responding to staff-submitted questions and discussing specific, real-world scenarios staff have encountered during their time at HPL.

- *In It Together:* This is a workshop for staff related to trauma-informed customer service. It is currently in development and tentatively scheduled for Q1 2024.

- In 2023, we arranged and paid for a third-party counsellor to provide onsite counselling services at Central Library once per week over four weeks in February/March 2023 due to an increase in challenging incidents. Employees were able to use work time to meet with the counsellor. Additionally, we offered two dates in the Fall of 2023 that were management-specific counselling sessions to support our Management Team.

- We also partner with the City of Hamilton's Critical Incident Peer Support Team (CIPS) when needed for situations where employees have experienced a distressing, sudden and/or extraordinary event that is overwhelming and outside the range of everyday experience. Following an incident on November 27, 2023, where Central Library proactively moved into lockdown, two members of the CIPS team attended Central Library the following day to debrief with employees who needed additional support to process the incident. The CIPS team also made their contact information available for all employees in the organization who were not able to or preferred not to attend in person to provide support and debrief as needed.

- All employees can access several free and confidential resources through our Employee Family Assistance Plan (EFAP) – Homewood Health. Our EFAP's confidential counselling services (ex., stress, relationships, grief, anxiety, depression, and more) are available 24/7 along with Life Smart Coaching (ex., health, workplace issues, relationships, family, and much more). Our EFAP also offers an online platform called Pathfinder, which learns about the user's unique needs and recommends the clinically indicated care, service, or resource at the right time. They also offer an internet-based Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (iCBT) program, a form of psychotherapy that focuses on the links between thoughts, feelings and behaviours. This program helps recognize how those thoughts, feelings and behaviours mutually impact each other and gives tools to help change thought patterns and improve mood.

- All employees also have access to another digital platform called LifeSpeak – Mental Health & Resilience, which is free, confidential, and available 24/7. LifeSpeak offers a wealth of information through online resources, including videos, tip sheets, articles, podcasts, webchats, 'Ask the Expert' sessions, online workshops, etc., on a variety of wellness-related topics (e.g. compassion fatigue, resilience, managing stress and anxiety, mental health for managers, etc.).

- HPL continues to consult with City of Hamilton's Healthy and Safe Communities to ensure we are aware of available supports and coordinate our actions.

- HPL participated in a special Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC) Taskforce looking at safety and security challenges facing public libraries.

## Existing or New Processes

- In 2023, in collaboration with the onsite Social Workers, HPL developed guidelines for employees on what actions to take if a Member discloses that they have had or are having suicidal thoughts. This guide helps direct employees to available resources to help in these challenging situations based on the severity of the incident (ex., 9-1-1, COAST, 9-8-8 Suicide Crisis Helpline, Distress Halton, onsite social workers).

- In 2023, a check-in/check-out process was developed for our Bookmobile and Courier drivers who work alone and may have to pick up or drop off a company vehicle in an unmonitored parking area to ensure that they are accounted for as a safety precaution.

- In August 2023, HPL implemented a specific Safety Plan During Public Programs document. This tailored safety plan aims to have preventive safety measures in place if there is an anticipated protest, threat to physical safety, and/or high-profile performer(s). The safety plan is divided into three sections: General Requirements, Safety Plan for Performer(s), and Safety Plan for Employees.

- On an annual basis, all HPL branches conduct Emergency Drills that consist of at least one fire drill and one active threat/lockdown drill. A debrief meeting is held with staff following the drill to discuss what went well and any improvements needed. Staff not present during the drill receive a one-on-one debrief with their manager or designate to review the drill results and any applicable action steps that have been or will be implemented as a result of the drill.

- The Health & Safety Coordinators review all incidents at HPL and follow up as needed. Follow-up may include but is not limited to providing additional resources such as EFAP support, creating individualized safety plans for an employee who expresses they feel unsafe as a result of an incident/Member interaction that occurred in the workplace, recommending when a Member should be added to the History of Violence (HOV) list in accordance with the definition of workplace violence as described in the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* to the Senior Leadership Team, and notifying all employees when a Member has been added to the HOV list along with appropriate action to take if the individual is seen within our facilities.

[i] https://hpl.novusagenda.com/AgendaPublic/CoverSheet.aspx?ItemID=305&MeetingID=45

[ii] https://granicus-azmop-peak.s3.ca-central-1.amazonaws.com/uploads/attachment/pdf/8203/SafetySecurityReport_May_2023.pdf

[iii] https://www.librarysafety.ca/