

Social work in libraries

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AN OVERVIEW OF LIBRARY SOCIAL WORK MODELS WITHIN THE CANADIAN CONTEXT



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At a Glance

A total of 9 Canadian Public Libraries hosted at least one social worker in the past two years.

Library-Community Agency Partnership Model: 1

Thunder Bay Public Library

Library Social Worker Model: 5

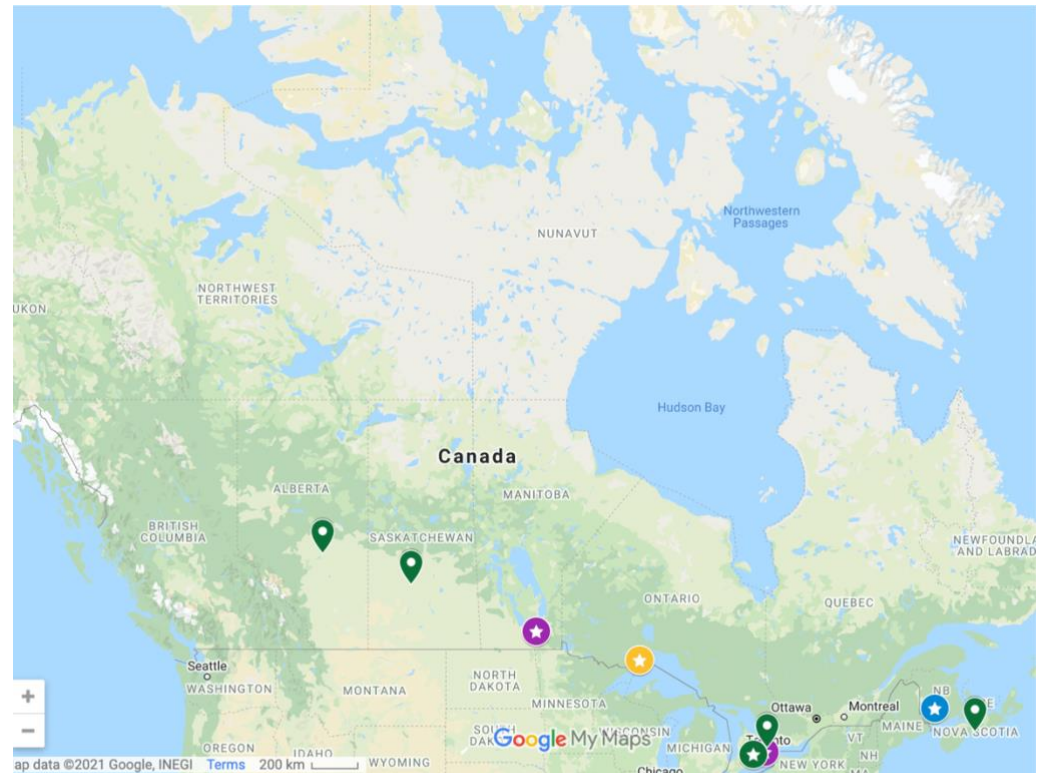
Kitchener Public Library
Edmonton Public Library
Saskatoon Public Library
Toronto Public Library
Halifax Public Library

Library-University Partnership Model: 2

Kitchener Public Library
Fredericton Public Library
Toronto Public Library *

Library-Municipal Partnership Model: 2

Mississauga Public Library
Winnipeg public library



* Anecdotal information

Thunder Bay Public Library

Library Community Agency Partnership Model

Approx. **population** 110,000

Employer: Alpha Court

(Alpha Court provides subsidized housing and case management services to individuals with a serious mental illness and/or addictions)

Title: Social Worker

Key duties:

- information/resources on mental health and addiction services
- completing forms or getting ID
- appropriate referrals
- connecting with housing or other services

Historical Background: TBPL piloted the partnership in the summer of 2016 as a 12-week program that placed a Social Worker at the Brodie Resource Library for several hours each week.

Branches: 4

Availability: part-time

Resources: <http://www.tbpl.ca/socialworker>

https://www.chroniclejournal.com/news/social-worker-added-to-librarys-services/article_7c524b40-896b-11e6-8653-73612bcefc31.html

Kitchener Public Library

Library Social Worker Model

Approx. **population** 242,000

Employer: KPL

Titles: Community Outreach Assistant and Community Connections Manager (CCM)

Key duties: community support and referral services for library customers to access community health, housing and other social service supports.

In particular, the CCM:

- Provides an advanced level of customer service with a focus on developing and assessing programs and services for underserved or marginalized communities.
- Working with Black, Indigenous, and other racialized groups, the manager oversees library initiatives that support inclusive, diverse, and anti-racist practices.
- Support to the development of intercultural competencies (overseeing newcomer / ESL service initiatives).
- This role also serves individuals living with complex needs such as mental illness, addiction, and/or experiencing homelessness by developing social support programs and services.

Historical Background: University Partnership Model. KPL piloted the first MSW practicum at its Central Branch in 2016-2017.

Branches: 5

Availability: full-time

Resources: (Schweizer, 2018), Job descriptions retrieved on

https://www.kpl.org/sites/default/files/webpostingmanagercommunityconnectionsmy2021_0.pdf

Toronto Public Library

Library Social Worker Model

Approx population 6.2 m

Employer: TPL

Titles: Social Worker

2 Social Workers (Rahma Hashi and Kristin Hoffman)

Key duties:

- to help take a strategic approach in understanding vulnerable populations,
- to identify local and system-wide barriers in accessing library programs and services
- to develop a response to these barriers

Historical Background: the first case was a temporary, one-year position funded by the Toronto Public Library Foundation, focused in the Malvern area of Toronto. It was a more traditional social worker role because it was created to focus on frontline work, like counselling, at a youth gathering space in the library called The Spot. The fall of 2018 marked the first time the Toronto Public Library hired a social worker as a permanent staff member, overseen by Aly Velji, manager of adult literacy services at the Toronto Public Library based out of the North York Central branch.

OF NOTE: The Toronto Public Library had six specialized community librarians that complemented Hashi's social worker role. They looked at how they can get people involved in the library who may have no prior knowledge of the space — starting with signing people up for library cards out in the field or connecting them with programs that may fit their needs. Two librarians were embedded with Toronto Employment and Social Services; one works in the shelter system, one with the refugee system, one in digital innovation services in the Albion Road area, and another with correctional centers.

Branches: 100

Availability of the service: full-time

Resources: <http://rabble.ca/news/2019/08/how-canadas-largest-library-system-removing-barriers-and-advancing-inclusion>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZQPla0B0Irom>

Saskatoon Public Library

Library Social Worker Model

Approx population 336,614

Employer: SPL. Funded by the Government of Canada in partnership with the United Way of Saskatoon and Area.

Titles: Outreach Worker

2 Social Workers, reporting to the Senior Manager Welcoming Initiatives.

Key duties:

- meeting with patrons/clients (referrals; help to navigate policies and procedures of community organizations; providing brief counselling)
- employee training and development
- work with community organizations
- incident response
- outreach



Historical Background: SPL started hiring full-time RSW in Oct 2018.

OF NOTE: Job posted on Aug 2021. Position's details: full-time, six months with possibility of extension. Remuneration circa \$60,000.

The position is currently located in various locations of the SPL. RSW with a minimum of 2 years of experience working with at-risk people and people facing homelessness, poverty and/or marginalization.

Frances Morrison Central Library offers the Outreach Support Walk-Up Window. The window on the east side of the library, on 4th Avenue, allows the patrons access to support workers without entering the Library.

The window was funded with a grant from the Emergency Community Support Fund, an initiative established by the Federal Government in response to the pandemic.

Branches: 9

Availability of the service: full-time

Resources: <https://saskatoon.ctvnews.ca/saskatoon-library-first-in-canada-to-offer-outreach-support-at-walk-up-window-1.5292763>

Halifax Public Library

Library Social Worker Model

Approx population 448,000

Employer: Halifax Public Libraries. Funded by HRM (Halifax Regional Municipality)

Titles: Social worker - library community navigator

2 Social Workers

Key duties:

- to help library staff interact with the more vulnerable customers effectively and compassionately
- to help organize regional teen services training days (so that staff can build better personal and professional boundaries; how to use social media properly when interacting with teens or how to practice self-care.)
- to provide needs assessment
- to train staff on overdose recognition and naloxone response, non-violent crisis intervention, boundary setting, self-care, trauma-inform care (intersection of trauma, substance use, mental health and behaviour).
- to provide a direct supervisor for the library's four security officers (library employees) to ensure that the library is safe and accessible to everyone.
- to develop and run Library's Coffee Corner meetings

Historical Background: In January 2019, the Library launched the pilot of a Community Navigator position based at Central Library for possible expansion to other library locations. Working directly with at-risk individuals from youth to adult, including those experiencing mental illness, substance abuse, housing and food security issues, the Navigator served as a resource to Central Library staff providing, training, coaching and guidance since then.

OF NOTE: The Library is leading a paradigm shift in how HRM public spaces and facilities can be harnessed to support community safety and wellbeing. For instance, the libraries regularly host Restorative Justice circles. They also provide neutral meeting spaces for supervised custodial visits. They have trained staff on empathy-driven approaches to reducing problematic behaviours among vulnerable populations such as the homeless, people with mental issues and substance abuse. All libraries now contain naloxone, and staff are trained to administer it in response to a suspected overdose. They also consider how design elements can support safer and more inclusive public spaces.

14 branches

Availability of the service: full-time

Resources: <https://signalhfx.ca/for-halifaxes-only-library-social-worker-a-circle-of-care-extends-to-all/>
www.halifaxpubliclibraries.ca

Edmonton Public Library

Library Social Worker Model

Approx. **population** 972,000

Employer: EPL; Based on Community-led service model.

Titles: Outreach workers

3 Social Workers.

Key duties:

- Individual needs assessment
- Drop-in assistance
- Resources, referrals, and advocacy (around food or housing insecurities, escaping violence, addressing health and financial issues, and reconnecting with friends and family).
- Response to needs of vulnerable persons
- ID clinic

Historical Background: In 2011, EPL was the first Library in Canada to hire an outreach worker. Two more were subsequently added to support at-risk library users through EPL's community outreach services. The program began as a 3-year \$605,000 pilot project initially funded by the Province of Alberta's safe Communities Innovation Fund. The pilot was done in partnership between the EPL and Boyle Street Community Services.

OF NOTE: According to EPL's 2013 Annual Report, EPL's SROI report completed in Nov 2013, the Outreach Program created a value of over \$3.56 million in savings and/or reallocation of funds to Edmond's downtown between Jan 2012 and Aug 2013. In addition, it provided the statistics that EPL outreach staff had more than 6,000 interactions with at-risk Edmontonians. They provided a range of services such as addiction support, medical care location, housing referrals, employment counselling, and suicide prevention.

Branches: 21

Availability of the service: full-time

The service is on a drop-in basis on Mondays and Fridays before noon.

Resources: <https://www.epl.ca/milner-library/outreach/>

Kitchener Public Library *in 2018*

Library University Partnership Model

Student practicum: Master level

Title: Community Placement Worker

On-site supervisor: Librarian at Central Branch

Off-site supervisor: Social worker with an MSW

University: Wilfrid Laurier University

Availability: Each placement lasts for two semesters, from September to April.

When & Where: 8-months term Sept to April, three days per week (546 hours). Field placement is located at the Central Library.

Resources: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/kitchener-waterloo/library-social-worker-kitchener-public-library-1.3932414>

Kitchener Public Library *since 2018*

Library University Partnership Model

Student practicum: Bachelor level

Title: Student Assistant

Collaborate with: Kitchener Public Library and Extend-A-Family Waterloo Region staff to determine the work direction.

University: Waterloo University

BSW student's learning opportunities:

- Community outreach
- Community development
- Disabilities

Intervention Approaches:

- Advocacy and outreach
- Community development
- Social planning
- Research

Description of placement experience:

In partnership with Extend-A-Family Waterloo Region, the BSW Student Assistant will have the opportunity to work at Kitchener Public Library's Grand River Stanley Park Community Library and apply social work theory in a practical setting.

The experience will focus and prioritize the development of relationships with residents, associations, businesses, other public institutions in the area defined as Stanley Park in Kitchener with the assistance of a vital asset map of the community.

Nature of Practicum Assignments: Community development projects and activities

Key duties:

- Survey and map vital community assets.
- Prepare written report identifying community skills, assets, issues and needs.
- Collaborate with Kitchener Public Library and Extend-A-Family staff to determine the direction of the work.
- Document existing and suggest new resources to facilitate dialogue and partnerships amongst community members.
- Identify potential future events, gatherings and/or partnerships that build relationships to bring people together in their community.
- Identify challenges or barriers amongst community members/partners and collaboratively brainstorm solutions.
- Prepare other reports and recommendations as required.

When & Where: The BSW field placement is situated at the Grand River Stanley Park Community Library, and hours are flexible

Resources: <https://uwaterloo.ca/school-of-social-work/eaf>

Fredericton Public Library

Library University Partnership Model

Approx population 58,000

Employer: -

Titles: Bachelor Social Work Students

4 Bachelors Social Work Students.

Students made a compelling case for staffing a social worker at the Fredericton Public Library.

Historical Background:

OF NOTE: Four BSW students from St. Thomas University (finished in May 2020)

When & Where: social action placement with the Fredericton Public Library in the spring of 2020

Resources: <https://nbmediacoop.org/2020/07/15/social-work-in-the-stacks-video/>

Mississauga Public Library

Library Municipal Partnership Model

Approx. population 721, 000

Employer: City of Mississauga (City funds 50% and Region of Peel funds 50% of the SW's salary)

Titles: Assistant Library Outreach Worker

2 Social Workers. The Assistant Library Outreach Worker (ALOW) reports to the Central Library & Community Development Manager

Key duties:

- Develop a system of care approach for those who are experiencing episodic or chronic homelessness - by developing collaboration and coordination of services with partner community agencies
- Conduct Comprehensive Needs Assessments
- Provide case management services and support to individuals; to ensure appropriate referrals are made on behalf of the individual to partnering organizations.
- Provide advocacy where required and assist individuals to self-advocate
- Maintain electronic records, reports and statistics necessary for program functioning
- Develop materials and communication tactics at each of the eighteen library locations that will provide information and support for those at risk of homelessness
- Support library staff in creating an inclusive and welcoming space for individuals who are experiencing homelessness; understanding the unique needs and how to support individuals and families requesting information regarding housing and housing security, and how to make a referral to the Library Outreach Worker
- Staff the Open Window Hub program
- Work with library staff to provide programs that will support individuals who are experiencing homelessness, such as art therapy and storytelling, to provide a therapeutic outlet for those experiencing trauma related to being homeless; computer literacy to build skills; nutrition and self-care and access to food security

Historical Background: Innovative Solutions to Homelessness Pilot; Funded by a federal Employment and Social Development Canada grant of \$122,523. The project timeline was May 2017 - July 2018

Branches: 18

Availability of the service: Full-time

Resources: <https://www.mississauga.com/news-story/7412748-central-library-to-launch-homelessness-outreach-pilot/>
<https://web.mississauga.ca/library/using-the-library/open-window-hub/>

Mississauga Public Library

Library Municipal Partnership Model

Additional Info

Open Window Hub

- In partnership with the Salvation Army, a shower program was launched at Celebration Square in early May for community members needing access to hygiene facilities. Bus tickets, socks, underwear and hygiene kits are also provided through the Hub
- In mid-May, a meal-box program was launched to provide a hot lunch to those in need. Donations were received from four community agencies, and five local business establishments provided discounts to support this initiative
- In conjunction with the Region of Peel, a medical van, housing worker, Peel intake worker and Peel's Harm Reduction Team provided support to the community on Celebration Square

Background: In 2017, the Mississauga Library, in **partnership** with

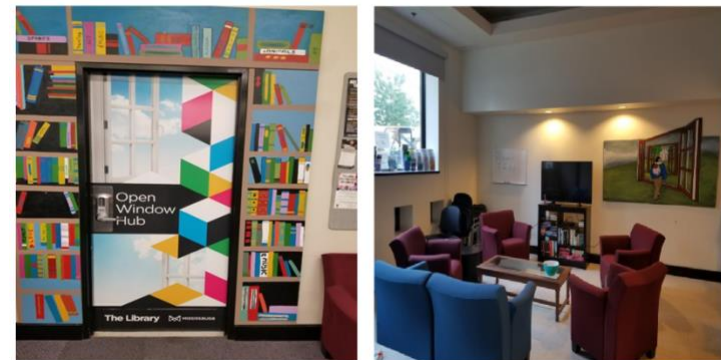
- the City of Mississauga's Recreation Division Community Development and Security Services teams,
- the Canadian Mental Health Association Peel Outreach team,
- the Region of Peel (Housing & Homelessness), and
- the University of Toronto,

developed a plan to work together to address the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness or at risk for a variety of reasons. The Library received a **grant** from Employment and Social Development Canada. This funding provided compensation for a **Homelessness Prevention Outreach Worker (HPOW) for 18 months**, and the Open Window Hub, a drop-in space, opened at the Central Library.

The Open Window Hub has been operating since September 2017. To date the Homelessness Prevention Outreach Worker has aided almost 400 individuals, averaging 14 new referrals a month, along with supporting City staff in Security Services, Animal Services, Parks & Forestry, and more. The program quickly made an impact and filled a gap in social services in Mississauga.

In 2019 a full-time permanent **Library Outreach Worker** was approved, and the Open Window Hub became a core library service. An agreement was developed with the **Region of Peel to fund 50% of this position.**

Open Window Hub



The nature and scope of the work performed by the Library Outreach Worker was deemed to align with services that are the responsibility of the Region of Peel. As such, an agreement was struck in principle for the Region to pay half of the salary of the Library Outreach Worker. The Region agreed to this funding in the understanding that the following **work** would be **provided**:

- Case management services to residents of the Region of Peel aged 16 years or older who are experiencing episodic or chronic homelessness or who are at risk for homelessness.
- Assistance to individuals in developing a housing plan, and in obtaining housing services, employment services, social services, health services, and such other similar services.
- Comprehensive needs assessment development for individuals.
- Providing advocacy where required and assisting individuals with self-advocacy.
- Providing drop-in programs for supporting individuals who are experiencing homelessness.

“The Library Outreach Worker will continue to work with the Region of Peel to ensure that appropriate services are being offered, and that referrals are made in an efficient and effective manner. Financial Impact the Region of Peel will reimburse the City for 50% of the Library Outreach Worker’s salary for 2019 (\$43,121) and 2020 (\$44,574), inclusive of all applicable taxes, subject to an increase of up to 7% based upon the actual costs. These funds will be deposited into cost element 590131 “Recovery From Region” and cost center 27204 “Open Window Hub”. The funds will be used to offset the cost of the service for the City of Mississauga.

The Library Director and Legal Services have worked with the Region of Peel to draft a workable agreement to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of both partners in this agreement. Through its work with the Open Window Hub, the City and the Region of Peel have been able to reach out to at risk populations, to build relationships with individuals to provide important community and social services linkages which have made a significant difference in the lives of its clientele. It is **recommended** that Council grant authority to the City to sign the agreement to continue this important service and obtain the 50% funding for the Social Worker’s salary granted through the cost sharing agreement. This will allow the Open Window Hub to continue to effectively serve this at-risk population and provide a window to regional and community services through this important outreach service (City of Mississauga, 17 April 2020).

The Open Window Hub has helped over 475 at-risk residents, with an average of 16 contacts per day and 14 new clients being referred to the hub each month.

Resources: <https://pub-mississauga.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=1905>

Winnipeg Public Library

Library Municipal Partnership Model

Approx population
Employer: City of Winnipeg

Titles: Community Crisis Worker
2 Social Workers

Key duties:

- to connect clients to emergency shelter and housing
- social assistance
- employment
- counselling
- mental health
- therapy programs and services
- health care information

Historical Background: The first Community Crisis Worker was hired in 2012. In 2018 was hired the second one.

OF NOTE: In March 2020 the City of Winnipeg decided to cut grants to community groups by 10%, cutting back on 14 Winnipeg Transit routes and closing the Millennium Library on Sundays as part of a budget that maintains most city services.

Branches: 20
Availability of the service: full-time

Resources: <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/demand-for-services-prompts-library-to-add-crisis-worker-502322401.html>
<https://winnipeg.ctvnews.ca/second-social-worker-to-widen-reach-at-millennium-library-1.4130829>