

HALTON HILLS PUBLIC LIBRARY REACTS TO PROVINCIAL CUTS

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Many library patrons won't feel the effects of the funding cuts made to the Southern Ontario Library Services (SOLS) budget, but for patrons looking for foreign language materials, large-print books or enough copies to run a book club, the cuts might be a challenge.

On April 11, the provincial government effectively halved the SOLS budget, resulting in the cancellation of the Interlibrary Loan Service, a courier service designed to help libraries across Ontario share materials.

"From our patrons' perspective, if we don't have materials available, we would use SOLS to source those materials," Beverley King, manager of community and adult services for the

Halton Hills Public Library (HHPL), said. "Whatever library has them available to lend would lend them, and they would be delivered."

A common use of the service to provide numerous copies of a book for book clubs and reading groups, but it may also be used to help patrons track down older, out-of-print material.

The service is also commonly used to source large-print or audio versions of materials for older residents.

Similarly, materials in different languages are commonly shared through the loan service.

"It wouldn't be useful to get a small shelf of books for those people (interested in material in specific languages)," Douglas Davey, children and youth services manager at the HHPL, said.

In 2017, Halton Hills residents borrowed about 2,000

items from other libraries through SOLS, while the HHPL lent out about 2,400 items to other libraries. Overall, the library lent more than half a million items in 2017.

"The impact on Halton Hills is not huge," Geoff Cannon, chief librarian at HHPL, said. "What this change in service is really going to affect is the small, rural and, especially, First Nations libraries."

While the courier service is effectively suspended, Ontario libraries can still do interlibrary lending. One avenue is a subsidized service through Canada Post allowing libraries to mail materials at a discounted rate. For medium-sized libraries like the HHPL, this isn't a major concern, but small libraries with small budgets may feel the squeeze.

Halton Hills residents



Dennis Roberts/photo

The Halton Hills Public Library Georgetown branch.

benefit from "reciprocal borrowing" from neighbouring communities.

"Patrons of our library can borrow from anyone in Halton Region, Brampton or Wellington County," Davey said.

While the courier service has been a focal point of the

cuts, SOLS provides much more value to libraries.

Through the service, libraries and, in turn, patrons have access to various collections lent out across the province, including training and professional development materials.

The service also negoti-

ates collective purchasing agreements.

"The more libraries who purchase, the lower the price," Cannon said. "An ebook is still incredibly expensive to libraries compared to what citizens can buy. Our role is to break down those barriers to knowledge."

The HHPL receives about 98 per cent of its funding from the town of Halton Hills, with about two per cent delivered through the Public Libraries of Ontario Grant (PLOG).

"The government has not touched the PLOG," Cannon said. "It hasn't gone down, but the previous government had promised an increase."

The PLOG funding was frozen in the 1990s and has not increased since. Of the libraries roughly \$3.5 million budget, the PLOG accounts for about \$60,000.

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