REPORT TO THE LIBRARY BOARD
MEETING DATE: MAY 26, 2009

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<td>Subject:</td>
<td>Serving Socially Vulnerable Populations</td>
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<td>Prepared By:</td>
<td>Delilah Deane Cummings, Heather McDonald, Margaret Wilkinson, Nancy Collister</td>
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<td>Presented By:</td>
<td>Delilah Deane Cummings</td>
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**Recommendation**

It is recommended that this report be received.

**Issue / Opportunity**

This project emerged as a direction of the Library’s Strategic Plan...Imagine! 2005-2008. Socially vulnerable populations were identified as client groups requiring enhancements in service to meet the Library’s vision of being a Community Hub that strengthens individuals, families and neighbourhoods by connecting them to people and to relevant information, services and resources. In disadvantaged communities across London, isolation and inertia can comprise daunting barriers to the flow of information, personal relationships may be weak and creative neighbourhood networks may function poorly. Socially vulnerable groups are unlikely to enjoy the vital flow of information through which citizens communicate their experiences and work together to convey their needs and enhance their quality of life. The scale and complexity of social vulnerability risks and issues in London now requires London Public Library to take a brand new look at the extent to which our services embrace and benefit all parts of our society.

**Background & Review**

LPL developed a project proposal in November 2007, with a goal of designing new and enhanced policies, services and processes for London Public Library and developing a comprehensive strategy and service model for serving and meeting the needs of the socially vulnerable populations within London. Socially Vulnerable individuals or groups are defined as those people or groups who are socially isolated or excluded, often at-risk in our city and province.
This project was submitted to the Ministry of Culture, Library Strategic Development Fund, and was approved for funding in 2008. A cross-functional Project Team of London Public Library staff was formed, under the direction of two Project Sponsors, Nancy Collister and Margaret Wilkinson and with the following membership: Project Manager: Delilah Deane Cummings; Kathryn Baldock, Rebecca Faber, Tammy Gilbert, Beth Kinchlea, David McCord, Diane McClelland, Heather McDonald and Helen Thompson. Project milestones were established:

Milestone 1: Develop project plan
Milestone 2: Conduct research and best practices review
Milestone 3: Conduct stakeholder research – focus groups, surveys, interviews
Milestone 4: Analyze research results; identify issues, gaps and opportunities for improvement
Milestone 5: Identify strategies to address the issues and opportunities. Test with stakeholders
Milestone 6: Create the solutions, test and implement
Milestone 7: Monitor, review and evaluate
Milestone 8: Share results with wider community e.g., provincially at Ontario Library Association Conference

A Request for Proposal was developed for Consulting Services, and Nicole Kovacs of Kovacs Group Inc. was contracted to work with the Project Team to complete Milestones 3 and 4. The London Public Library’s commitment to an unbiased research process required that a third party facilitate, gather and present the information and feedback from individuals and community partners to ensure the neutrality of the results. The Executive Summary of the consultant’s report is appended.

Stakeholder research included focus groups with Library staff, community service providers and individuals, facilitated by Nicole Kovacs. An analysis of the focus groups demonstrated that key themes were common throughout each of the focus groups. Common themes included:

- Appreciation of the London Public Library’s effort to provide enhanced services to vulnerable populations;
- Lack of awareness of Library services;
- Organizational culture of the London Public Library
- Interest in community collaboration;
- Perception of the London Public Library by vulnerable populations; and
- Recognition of barriers and suggestions for potential solutions.

Next Steps

Currently the Project Team members are engaged in analyzing the information received from participants. Identified barriers and potential solutions have been reviewed against current policies, procedures and processes and an impact/effort grid is being developed to determine which solutions are “quick wins” and which require longer term implementation. In addition the Team is developing an implementation plan for each of the selected solutions, including objectives, tasks, deliverables, timelines and person(s) responsible.
Next steps include the development of a summary of the implementation plan to share with the community. We will encourage community feedback on the summary implementation plan, determine evaluative measures and methods and then begin to implement solutions. A key activity will be to further develop strategies to effectively engage socially vulnerable populations on a go-forward basis in order to learn and understand their needs and aspirations.
Serving Socially Vulnerable Populations Project Report

A report prepared for the London Public Library

Nicole Kovacs, M.B.A.
Kovacs Group Inc.

January 31st, 2009
ABOUT THE LONDON PUBLIC LIBRARY

The London Public Library’s vision is to be the community hub that strengthens individuals, families and neighbourhoods by connecting them to people and to relevant information, collections, programs and resources. We are passionate about making a difference in our community, one person at a time, by enriching lives and empowering people through relevant, accessible, high quality Library services.

ABOUT THE PROJECT TEAM

The Serving Socially Vulnerable Populations Project Team is comprised of managers and staff at the London Public Library. The Project Team provided guidance to ensure the effective completion of the project. The Project Team includes Nancy Collister, Margaret Wilkinson, Delilah Deane Cummings, Kathryn Baldock, Rebecca Faber, Tammy Gilbert, Beth Kinchlea, David McCord, Diane McClelland, Heather McDonald and Helen Thompson.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nicole Kovacs is President of Kovacs Group Inc., a consulting firm that specializes in developing innovative strategies and solutions that deliver high-level results for nonprofit organizations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The support of the Government of Ontario, through the Ministry of Culture, is acknowledged by the London Public Library. This project will provide long-lasting value to the Library, the community and socially vulnerable populations in London.

We would also like to thank Daniel Londono of DLM Graffiks for the design services, Laura Acquaviva of Laura Acquaviva Photography for the photography, Mauricio Osorio for the Spanish translation of the Executive Summary and ACFO de London–Sarnia for the French translation of the Executive Summary.
Finally, we would like to thank all of the individuals and organizations for graciously providing information, participating in interviews and attending focus groups. Without their assistance this project would not have been possible. Specifically we would like to thank:

- Addiction Services of Thames Valley
- AIDS Committee of London
- Brescia University College
- Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women and Children
- Centre for Social Inclusion
- Children's Aid Society
- Christian Horizons
- CMHA London-Middlesex
- Crouch Neighbourhood Resource Centre
- City of London
- Cross Cultural Learners Centre
- G.A. Wheable Centre for Adult Education
- Huron University College
- Hutton House
- Information London
- John Howard Society
- London Community Foundation
- London Coalition for Social Justice
- London District and Distress Centre
- London Diversity and Race Relations Advisory Committee
- London Harm Reduction Coalition
- London Intercommunity Health Centre
- LUSO Community Services
- Meals on Wheels of London
- Mission Services of London
- Northwest London Neighbourhood Resource Centre
- Pathways Skill Development & Placement Centre
- Pillar Nonprofit Network
- Salvation Army
- Schizophrenia Society
- Single Women in Motherhood (S.W.I.M.)
- Southern Network of Specialized Care
- Statistics Canada
- The Centre of Hope
- The Crest Centre
- The Unity Project
- United Way of London & Middlesex
- University of Western Ontario
- WIL Employment Connections
- WOTCH

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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The London Public Library's Strategic Plan...Imagine! 2005 – 2008, identified socially vulnerable populations as a client group that required service enhancement.

To determine how to better serve vulnerable populations, the Library embarked on a project entitled “Serving Socially Vulnerable Populations”. Key aspects of the study included identifying vulnerable populations in London, determining why some vulnerable individuals do not make any, or full, use of the Library and identifying barriers and solutions to Library use. Socially vulnerable individuals or groups are defined as those peoples or groups who are socially isolated or excluded from society. This project will result in the development of a comprehensive strategy and service model to assist the Library to serve and meet the needs of socially vulnerable populations within London.

The project milestones included:

- Milestone 1: Develop project plan
- Milestone 2: Conduct research and best practices review
- Milestone 3: Conduct stakeholder research – focus groups, surveys, interviews
- Milestone 4: Analyze research results and identify issues, gaps and opportunities for improvement
- Milestone 5: Identify strategies to address the issues and opportunities. Test with stakeholders.
- Milestone 6: Create the solutions, test and implement
- Milestone 7: Monitor, review and evaluate
- Milestone 8: Share results with wider community e.g., provincially at Ontario Library Association Conference

Nicole Kovacs of Kovacs Group Inc., was contracted to work with the Project Team to complete Milestones 3 and 4. The London Public Library's commitment to an unbiased research process required that a third party facilitate, gather and present the information and feedback from individuals and community partners to ensure the neutrality of the results. This report summarizes the work completed in Phase 3 and Phase 4.

IDENTIFICATION OF VULNERABLE POPULATIONS IN LONDON

In order to better serve vulnerable populations, the London Public Library required further information about vulnerable populations in London. To identify vulnerable populations in London, Library staff members were surveyed, informal interviews were conducted and a literature review was completed.
An electronic survey was distributed to all Library staff. In total, 84 staff from 15 branches responded. The purpose of the survey was to determine which vulnerable populations accessed the Library, which did not access the Library and the extent to which vulnerable populations used the services of the Library. The survey results demonstrated that the majority of branches have vulnerable populations accessing their services.

Service Providers, the City of London and the University of Western Ontario were contacted as part of the information gathering process. Some of the individuals contacted answered a few informal questions. It was clear from their responses that many individuals in London have multiple barriers that make them vulnerable. These individuals are most at-risk and also the most difficult to serve. It was expressed that the most meaningful method to determine which services vulnerable populations require was to engage vulnerable populations themselves and ask them what they need.

A literature review was conducted to gather information about vulnerable populations. In total 83 articles, reports and websites were reviewed. The research resulted in the identification of 16 vulnerable groups. These groups include: individuals with mental health issues, individuals with addiction issues and individuals/families who are homeless or home insecure.

COMMUNITY MAPPING

The London Public Library has 13 service areas. Research was conducted to identify organizations that serve vulnerable populations and determine which vulnerable populations live in each service area.

FOCUS GROUPS, INTERVIEWS AND E-MAIL CONSULTATIONS

Focus groups, interviews and e-mail consultations were held to gather information regarding: barriers that exist for vulnerable populations to be able to access the library, solutions to those barriers, how the Library can better serve vulnerable populations, how the Library is viewed by vulnerable populations, where vulnerable groups are located within London and how the Library can better partner with community organizations to provide service to vulnerable populations.

In total, 56 individuals participated in 7 focus groups, 1 interview and 3 e-mail consultations. Participants provided the Library with valuable information that will inform the development of a comprehensive strategy and service model for serving and meeting the needs of socially vulnerable populations within London. Analysis of the research resulted in the identification of 15 barriers that preclude vulnerable populations from partially or fully using the Library's services. These barriers include: inability to pay fines, duplication of services, permanent address requirement, I.D. requirement, attitudes and behaviours of Library staff, language, literacy, physical barriers, lack of awareness of library services, fear and intimidation, mobility and transportation, parking, childcare and library services. Participants brainstormed solutions to each of the barriers. The solutions and barriers are currently being analyzed by the LPL Project Team.
PLAN TO INVOLVE VULNERABLE POPULATIONS ON AN ON-GOING BASIS

The London Public Library has a sincere interest in engaging socially vulnerable groups, on a go-forward basis, in order to learn and understand their needs and aspirations. While five methods were researched, the Library will determine which method to use based on the Library's capacity, time and resources. The methods included: suggestion boxes, surveys, focus groups, interviews and Participatory Action Research.

NEXT STEPS

The London Public Library will use the information from the community scan, focus groups, interviews and e-mail consultations to develop strategies, services, policies, procedures and processes to better serve vulnerable populations. LPL staff are currently analyzing the information gathered throughout this process. The Project Team will work closely with Service Providers and individuals to review recommended solutions and develop implementation and evaluation strategies.

"We see a lot of socially vulnerable people at the Library. I always think there must be something more that could be offered. I get really excited that we might be able to do something to provide additional services to these individuals."

Library Staff Member