January 21, 2009

Mr. Grant Hopcroft
Director of Intergovernmental and Community Liaison, CAO's Office
The Corporation of the City of London
300 Dufferin Avenue
London, Ontario
N6A 4L9

Dear Grant:

Re: Employment Ontario Transformation 2009

We at the London Public Library acknowledge the uncertain economic times in which all Ontarians find themselves today. We agree that a renewed and revitalized Employment Ontario (EO) network will be essential to the success of Ontario’s workforce. In this letter, we present our request that public libraries be able to continue to play a role in providing employment services to the public working in partnership with the Province of Ontario, local government and other community partners.

London Public Library (LPL), as a provider of Employment Resource Centres (ERC) at our Central Library and five branch locations, is currently one of the key partners in providing in accessible, high quality Employment Ontario information and referral services to our community. LPL has offered ERC services since 1997 when we were approached by the federal government to develop and offer this service. Through labour market agreements, federal funding was transferred to the Province of Ontario in 2007. It is now under the auspices of the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU). As a current service provider, we have been part of the MTCU stakeholder engagement sessions providing information about key elements of the plan and have completed the "capacity survey" designed to assess the scope of services provided by each of the current agencies.

Over the course of the transformation process we have become increasingly concerned that there will be no place for public libraries in the new EO network and corresponding Employment Services (ES) model. A memo to EO partners from Kevin French, Assistant Deputy Minister Employment and Training Division, Ministry of Colleges and Universities, dated December 5, 2008 states: “Organizations that provide Higher Skills Training and Foundation Skills within the EO network will have a prominent role in the transformation ahead”. We have been given to believe that public libraries, which deliver employment and information referral services and do not currently provide the full range of employment services (such as client planning and assessment), will not be among the organizations selected in the new ES model.

It is critically important that government be aware that the public libraries have made and can continue to make a huge contribution in the area of employment services to the community. Moreover, in today’s context, the role of public libraries as an organization that enriches lives and empowers people has become more relevant than ever. With over 115 years of service experience, LPL can say with certainty that utilization of public libraries increases significantly in uncertain economic times. We saw this during the recession of the early 1990s.

People come to their public library, as a recognized and trusted institution, to seek vital information for job opportunities, career planning and small business management. For example, during a time of
layoffs and eroding retirement savings, many people returning to the workforce will come to the library to seek help in preparing resumes and cover letters and to research and contact potential employers.

Public libraries currently have a key place in supporting the government’s role in closing the digital divide. Libraries support technological literacy, access to information and communication. All levels of government have recognized this and have invested in making public libraries points of public access. People come to their public library to use computers, access the Internet and to use e-mail.

Literacy services have traditionally been part of public library core services. The memo from Kevin French also states that: “In 2009, the ministry will begin the design and development of new service delivery guidelines and models for these services, including Literacy and Basic Skills and adult learning programs. We have no information about the place in this model for libraries to perform roles, such as literacy services. Yet, we know through long experience that many people come to the library to build their literacy, numeracy skills to improve their employment prospects.

Libraries also support new immigrants. Traditionally this has been done through collections and programming. Recently a number of public libraries have entered into partnership with Citizenship and Immigration Canada. These libraries, including LPL, are part of a “Library Settlement Partnership” between Citizenship and Immigration Canada, community partners and the library to have Settlement Workers providing newcomer services in library locations. The value-added combination of settlement services and employment services is part of the strategic direction for the partnership.

It is our recommendation that MTCU enter into discussion with the public libraries in Ontario who currently offer employment services to consider how libraries might to play an ongoing role in providing employment services to the public working in partnership with the Province of Ontario and local community partners through the transformed Employment Ontario network and corresponding Employment Services Model. We believe that this will build on the strengths of the new model to ensure relevant, accessible and high quality services.

Thank you for taking this matter forward on behalf of public libraries and the communities we serve.

Sincerely,

David Winninger
Chair
London Public Library Board

cc: Jeff Fielding, Chief Administrative Officer, City of London
    Ross Fair, General Manager, Community Services, City of London