London Public Library's Internet Filtering Test Project: Themes (Viewpoints & Perceptions) *in contrast to* Realities on Filtering and Related Topics

Theme: London Public Library's internet filtering is censorship.

REALITY: Censorship occurs when expressive materials, like books, magazines, films and videos, music or works of art, are removed or kept from public access because they are considered objectionable.

London Public Library is limiting access to sexually explicit website content by placing filters on the majority of machines in the library, in an effort to mitigate the risk of unintentional exposure by customers to these kinds of images, which are inappropriate in a public setting. Approximately, 20% of the workstations are not filtered.   Therefore, unrestricted access is still available on dedicated workstations to all websites and information.

Similarly, London Public Library may only have one copy of a book in our collection and this same copy must be accessed by all cardholders, sometimes resulting in a waiting list.

Theme: Privacy Screens solve the problem of unintentional exposure to images that are inappropriate for a public library setting (specifically images that are sexually explicit or extremely violent.)

REALITY: The Library's experience using privacy screens in a public setting proves that this is not the case. The Library has been installing privacy screens on public Internet workstations since 2001.   While privacy screens limit visibility of screen content because they blacken or blur the screen image when viewed from the side, they do not conceal screen content when viewed from directly behind the workstation.   Therefore, they provide limited effectiveness in public areas where traffic flow occurs regularly behind the computers.

Currently about 70 % of public workstations providing Internet access in the Library environment are equipped with privacy screens. Home work centres and children's area workstations are excluded for two reasons:
- To enable parents and children or a number of students to collaborate at a workstation. This has been a frequent request over the years.
- To provide an added level of security through the monitoring of activity in the area.

Additional information: Some people with low vision or visual impairment find it difficult to use a workstation with a privacy screen.

Theme: Placement of internet workstations in a public library setting can eliminate or significantly reduce unintentional exposure to images that are inappropriate for a public library setting (specifically images that are sexually explicit or extremely violent.)

REALITY: Over time, the placement of computers to reduce the impact of unintentional exposure to images on the computer screen has become a less effective solution for a number of reasons:

- First and foremost, the sheer number of computers in the Library has increased exponentially. For example, in 2001 in the former Central Library there were about 23 public workstations providing Internet access. Today there are 110 public workstations in the Central Library providing Internet access. Throughout all locations there are 230 public workstations providing Internet access. (In addition there are 75 catalogue-only workstations, 45 workstations in the ERC's, 32 E-mail only workstations and 33 Children's CD-ROM workstations.)
- In branch locations, it is difficult to isolate computers due to the openness of the spaces. All areas in Library locations are open to all customers, of all ages, and services are adjacent to each other without barriers.
- Service initiatives such as Employment Resource Centres, Teen Annex, Homework Centres require configurations for specific purposes which can't always be isolated within the location.
- Isolating computers is not a feasible solution. Past experience has shown that they can become the focus of inappropriate behavior. Furthermore, staff cannot properly view or supervise isolated locations and isolated computers are more vulnerable to theft or vandalism.

The placement of public workstations into single, collective locations ("Computer Commons" or "Computer Labs") is a common practice in North American libraries and widely regarded as a best practice in terms of public service.

As part of the Library's ongoing due diligence, supervisors undertook a review, in August, of the current placement of workstations in locations. With the exception of two locations (one recommended minor shifting, the second, Masonville, is undergoing renovations) all locations reported that computers were placed to optimize the effectiveness of the following placement factors:
- Amount of walk-by traffic directly passing behind the screens (as privacy screens are not effective when viewing the screens from directly behind).
- Proximity to or in view of staff for service support.
- General management and behaviour monitoring.
- Computers located in both the adult and children's/youth areas.

Theme: It is the responsibility of library public service staff to monitor computer terminals and ensure that computer users are not accessing sites that include images that are of a sexually explicit or extremely violent nature. If they identify instances of non-compliance, they should address these situations immediately and ensure the computer user exits the site and if not, the employee should take further punitive action.

REALITY: It is not the responsibility of staff to actively monitor websites or pages being viewed by the public on workstations within the branch, nor do we have the resources to apply to this process. Staff does not have the knowledge, experience or authority to make a determination that an image or text

contravenes the Criminal Code. While one person may be offended by a sexually explicit image displayed on a computer, another person might consider it inoffensive or acceptable. Staff cannot be expected to make these assessments and determine what is considered pornographic.

The staff guidelines related to the Computer Use and Internet Access Policy & Use Guidelines, March 2006, state that any staff member, concerned about content being viewed by a patron, has the right to:
- Remind the patron that he/she is in a public and workspace where there are people of all ages.
- Although privacy screens are in place and ensure a measure of privacy, they are not capable of completely blocking the view from anyone passing by.
- Staff cannot force a patron to close a site. Staff cannot ask a patron to leave because of the content being viewed. The Library does not act as censor.
- Staff should especially remind patrons that children might be able to view their screens:
  - You may not be aware that privacy screens will not necessarily block what you're viewing from people directly behind you. Children are welcome in this area and this content is inappropriate for them, or
  - Please remember that you are in a public space where people of all ages are trying to enjoy the Library. The privacy screen does not block images on the screen from people directly behind you.
- Staff are not required to look at information or images on a patron's screen if they are concerned about the content

Theme: Other people cannot see what a computer user is viewing on the screen and have no right to comment or assess it.

REALITY: Despite measures such as privacy screens, people may see content or images on computer screens used by others as they walk through or use library space. Further, not everyone who uses library computers is tech-savvy. Many do not know that if they do not clear the computer history that the next person to type in a URL might be directed to content they did not want or choose to see. In either of these cases, the content or images may be audience inappropriate and/or unacceptable to them. The rights of one individual should not infringe on the rights of another; that is, the right of a person to access and view content and images should not infringe on the right of another to make their own decision as to what they want to access and see.

Part of supporting an adult's freedom of expression and exploration is recognizing that we live in communities, and that we need to respect others' right not to be subjected to our tastes just as we would not want to be subjected to theirs. We each have a responsibility to observe certain cultural norms and the majority of people, as evidenced by Appendix D – Community Feedback would rather our libraries not be places for people to view pornography nor for others to be subjected to it.

Theme: Filters are not effective at blocking access to pornography and illegal content on the internet, such as child pornography.

REALITY: A common complaint about filters is that they are not 100% effective in blocking out inappropriate material. However, their success rate is greater than 95%. Generally, filters are not

perfect and parents / guardians should do their best to monitor their children's internet use, even on filtered terminals. Furthermore, it is important that London Public Library's policies and key messaging related to computer access, communicate the expectations and realities related to internet use.

Theme: Filters block important and legitimate information.

REALITY: The claim that filters block important and legitimate information is difficult to prove. Our current vendor maintains that only a very small percentage of all websites are erroneously blocked. Filtering vendors differ in methodology and philosophy and it is, with due diligence, that the Library selects a vendor that provides a product most suited to its needs. Our current vendor provides an opportunity for any customer to submit a blocked website for review, anonymously.   The Library receives reports on these transactions and can monitor performance in this area. As time goes on, London Public Library and other customers will demand better and better filters from our vendors.

Theme: Filtering violates freedom of expression and access to information.

REALITY: People often try to compare filtering to our materials selection process in stating that filtering excludes information and violates freedom of expression as opposed to the impact of a library selection policy which is designed to be inclusive and nonjudgmental.   In terms of building our collections in different media, it is not possible to have everything the way it might be with the Internet. The Library tries to present quality resources reflecting a balance of opinion in as many areas as possible, given limitations of space and budget. This selection attempts to meet the various needs of different clientele even though some materials in the library may offend some people.

As with the materials collection, the Library understands that the Internet represents many different view points on topics and recognizes and supports access to these, even when the topic is controversial or offensive to some, such as pornography. However, the difference between Internet materials and other items in the collection is that they are "broadcasted" into public space in a library in the way that other materials are not. Most other materials are available and accessible only by an individual user by choice. Therefore, in order to maintain a balance of access to as broad a range of information as possible on the Internet for the individual and to reduce the impact of the "broadcast" aspect, affecting broader public space and other users, the Library provides a balance of filtered and unfiltered workstations. The balance maintains freedom of expression and access to all information on the Internet in our locations.

London Public Library currently has filters on around 86% of our public access computers that are not designated for a particular function. 14% of these computers are unfiltered. The mix is intended to meet the needs and expectations of all. At this point in time, we have had no complaints of lack of access to unfiltered workstations.

Theme: Parents must protect their children from viewing sexually explicit or extremely violent websites or material in the library. It is not the responsibility of the Library to do this.

REALITY: The primary responsibility for rearing and protecting children rests with parents. If parents want to keep certain ideas or forms of expression away from their children, they must assume the responsibility for shielding those children.

However, this does not fully apply in the library environment where children are able to roam freely through all parts of the space.

- When roaming freely, they may have unintentional exposure to inappropriate sites, unbeknownst to their parent. In other words, the child did not select or choose to view the images, but have been forced to view it.
- Many children (11 and up) are unattended in the library. They come to the library after school to do their homework or attend programs. Their parents are working and these children depend on the library after school.
- Children come from many different backgrounds. Many children in our community do not share the same advantages and some have limited or negligible levels of parental support and guidance. Accordingly, the community must also participate in ensuring that our public spaces that children attend are safe and inviting and free from obvious risks.

Theme: This is a censorship issue not a community Issue

REALITY: The road to establishing our community's safety and protecting our children from Internet dangers is complex and sometimes daunting. The journey begins with a commitment from everyone - the parents, community leaders and institutions, law enforcement, service providers, and technology vendors. At the end of the day, safety, and specifically Internet safety is not a private issue, censorship issue or technology issue...but a community issue.

Theme: The Criminal Code of Canada specifies precise standards for what constitutes unlawful obscenity and child pornography. These standards have been upheld by Canadian courts because they are narrowly tailored to regulate specific risks of harm. The general and ill-defined blocking of pornography is incompatible with these standards.

REALITY: The Criminal Code of Canada defines a range of illegal activities in this country including libel and obscenity (sexually violent material), child pornography and hate propaganda. In most cases, these laws extend to materials and activities in print, magazine, broadcast, film and the Internet. As of June 2002, child pornography and the luring of children are the only two offences that specifically refer to the Internet.

It is not up to the Library or its staff to determine if Internet sites are legal or illegal under the law. However, in our community it is important that the Library try to accomodate the rights of one person against rights of another person in our facilities. By internet filtering, the Library is trying to ensure that the right of our citizens of all ages to enjoy their visit to the public library is not infringed upon by exposure to sexually explicit images that are not appropriate in a public place. At the same time, we recognize that there is a need for unfiltered access to information that is available through unfiltered workstations in all locations. We believe we have struck a balance that makes sense for our community.