



MEMORANDUM

To: Newmarket Public Library Board

From: Todd Kyle

Date: September 16, 2015

Re: **Fines amnesty**

A suggestion came from staff that the Library might want to consider having a Fines Amnesty period in order to collect outstanding materials and re-connect with lapsed library users.

In the past the Library has on occasion implemented an amnesty event called Food for Fines in conjunction with the Newmarket Food Pantry. During a scheduled week announced only slightly in advance, library users may return overdue material directly to staff who will then waive all associated charges in exchange for a Food Pantry donation. The benefit is that it encourages patrons with long overdue material to bring it back, and allows them to become borrowers once again.

There are reasons to use this approach. In order to encourage return of long overdue material, library staff make attempts throughout the collections process to phone or e-mail the patron to inform them of the charges, their options to pay, and that returning the material will result in a lower debt, as the replacement cost will be deducted. Despite this, many do not return the material, and in some cases seem to believe that returning the material will trigger a large debt, rather than reduce it. An amnesty helps allay those fears and encourage return.

There are drawbacks to this type of approach. Some fine revenue is foregone. Most items returned are not the long overdue items the Library is seeking. Patrons who regularly pay fines may be upset that others are exempt. Some patrons report that they keep material longer, hoping for a future amnesty. Indeed, staff cannot inform patrons of such a future amnesty in dealing with their overdues, as this encourages them to keep the items longer. The result is that this approach does not encourage the behavior for which it is intended.

I am therefore not recommending this strategy. Instead, staff will continue to encourage prompt return, negotiating with individual patrons on the best payment approach with an eye to flexibility, taking into consideration each unique situation, and with the goal to encourage continued use of the library.

The following motion is recommended:

THAT the Library Board receive the report on Fines Amnesty.