



## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Newmarket Public Library Board

**From:** Todd Kyle

**Date:** June 22, 2016

**Re:** Strategies for dealing with vulnerable patrons in the library

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As a result of media coverage regarding the Library's challenges with the presence of vulnerable patrons, the Board asked staff to consult with various community partners to seek solutions to best meet community expectations.

The challenge, as previously discussed, involves homeless and other socially disadvantaged persons, who frequent the Library for extended periods and whose presence is sometimes unsettling to other library users. In particular, the recent challenge was with those with hygiene issues which affected other users' ability to enjoy the Library facility, and to which the Library responded in a small number of cases by presenting the patron with a discreet letter advising them of recommended actions. A related secondary concern involves users with excessive scent products.

Representatives of the following organizations were consulted:

Blue Door Shelters

Canadian Mental Health Association, York Region Chapter

York Region Community & Health Services

The Loft/Crosslinks Housing & Support Services

Trinity United Church

Inn From the Cold Inc.

Overall, these organizations were appreciative of the efforts the Library has taken to provide a welcoming, non-judgmental, safe and warm place for vulnerable populations, where they have access to reading resources, computers, and a community information and referral service. They are also appreciative of the Library's behavior-based approach to all patrons; that is, that everyone is welcome unless their behavior becomes a threat to others' safety or causes a disruption. They note that unlike some other libraries, NPL has chosen not to enact Code of Conduct rules that exclude from the premises anyone who is not actively engaged with a library service. Finally, they point out that although the written notices were perhaps not the best approach to vulnerable people, the content and the intent of the letters was in line with many of these agencies' own values and approaches.

Their suggestions for dealing with patrons in crisis—often exemplified by poor hygiene—centered on the resources that their agencies are able to deploy to support the Library’s efforts. These involve two basic avenues:

- Resources to encourage patrons in crisis to take advantage of self-referral to a number of services and supports, such as:
  - Housing support agencies who provide counselling on demand
  - Drop-in services that can provide support including showers and laundry facilities (it should be noted here that Trinity United Church is no longer able to support these services on demand, so the Library will no longer make that referral)
- The ability for staff to request on-site support from an agency to meet with a particular patron. In this case, the Library is often able to make available a private meeting room for this purpose.

In addition, some partner agencies made suggestions that would assist Library staff by providing training, tours of their facilities, and making themselves available to answer questions. Finally, there were some suggestions surrounding the more direct issue of scent and hygiene, involving “scent sensitivity” signage as well as provision of disposable hygiene products.

I would like the Board to provide feedback and direction on these strategies.

The following motion is recommended:

**That the Board receive the report on strategies for dealing with vulnerable patrons in the library.**