

Libraries: Essential Infrastructure for Strong Communities

AMO 2025

Dina Stevens, Executive Director
Federation of Ontario Public Libraries



Federation of Ontario Public Libraries

FOPL's strategic focus includes Advocacy, Marketing, and Research & Development.

Advocacy


As ONE VOICE, FOPL ensures issues facing public libraries are presented in a consistent manner benefiting all public libraries across Ontario. FOPL provides various levels of government with a view of public libraries as a united, relevant and integral component for economic and community development worthy of strong and continued support.

Marketing

To market and promote the services provided by public libraries in Ontario, to highlight the economic and social value public libraries contribute to the development of our communities, and to strengthen the support of funding bodies and the community at large.

Research and Development

Engage in research that provides insight into present and future environments, issues and developments facing public libraries.





Why this matters to councils



Libraries are trusted, non-partisan civic infrastructure.



They deliver measurable ROI, reduce service duplication and fill gaps.



They anchor downtowns and rural main streets, supporting local economies.



They are where residents already go—for learning, services, and connection.

Ontario snapshot (latest provincial data)

380+ public libraries & First Nation libraries participate in the provincial survey



```
graph TD; A[380+ public libraries & First Nation libraries participate in the provincial survey] --> B[81% of Ontarians hold a library card (2022)]; B --> C[13.4 visits per capita (2022) – in-person & digital engagement rebounding strongly]; C --> D[6.7 items borrowed per capita; 0.67 program attendances per capita (2022)]; D --> E[Open data source: Annual Survey of Public Libraries (MTCS/Ontario Data Catalogue)];
```

81% of Ontarians hold a library card (2022)

13.4 visits per capita (2022) – in-person & digital engagement rebounding strongly

6.7 items borrowed per capita; 0.67 program attendances per capita (2022)

Open data source: Annual Survey of Public Libraries (MTCS/Ontario Data Catalogue)

Beyond books: core city-building roles

Digital equity: free Wi-Fi,
devices, tech help; hotspot
lending and connected
computers

Early years & youth: literacy,
coding, STEAM, teen spaces
and safe after-school hubs

Small business & workforce:
makerspaces,
entrepreneurship supports

Settlement & inclusion:
language learning,
community navigation,
cultural programming

Health & social connection:
social workers on-site,
harm-reduction partners,
programs for adults and
seniors, lifelong learning



Promising practice: Hamilton Public Library

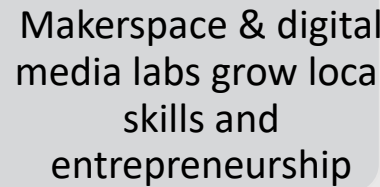
On-site social workers
connect residents to
housing, ID, benefits,
and mental-health
supports

Reduces pressure on
emergency and by-law
services; faster
referrals, earlier
interventions

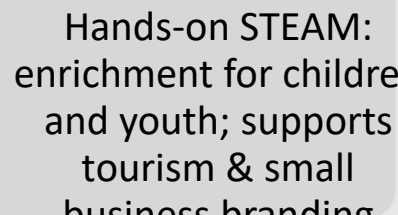
Built with municipal &
academic partners;
evaluation framework
in place



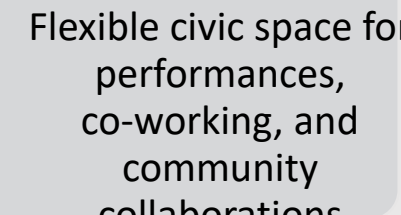
Promising practice: Innisfil ideaLAB & Library



Makerspace & digital
media labs grow local
skills and
entrepreneurship



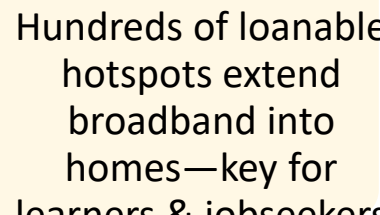
Hands-on STEAM:
enrichment for children
and youth; supports
tourism & small
business branding



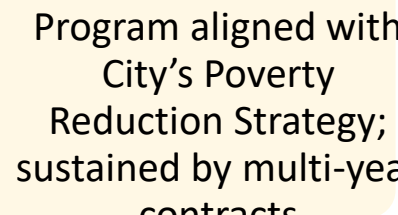
Flexible civic space for
performances,
co-working, and
community
collaborations



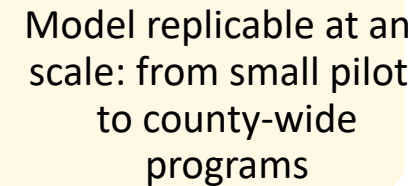
Promising practice: Toronto Public Library – Wi-Fi Hotspots



Hundreds of loanable hotspots extend broadband into homes—key for learners & jobseekers



Program aligned with City's Poverty Reduction Strategy; sustained by multi-year contracts



Model replicable at any scale: from small pilots to county-wide programs



Promising practice: Vaughan Public Libraries – Newcomer Settlement



Library Settlement Partnership (LSP):
settlement workers
co-located in library
branches

One-stop access to
language, employment
and community
services in many
languages

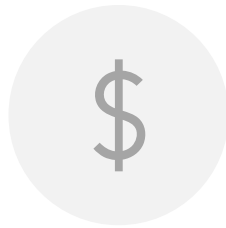
Strengthens inclusion,
reduces duplication,
and speeds up
integration



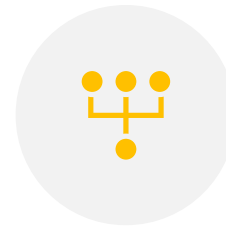
The municipal value proposition



HIGH TRUST + HIGH
FOOTFALL = EFFICIENT
CHANNEL FOR CITY
PRIORITIES



PROVEN ROI (E.G., STUDIES
SHOW \$5+ VALUE
RETURNED PER \$1 IN
LARGE SYSTEMS)



LEVERAGES EXISTING
STAFF, SPACE AND DATA—
NO NEED TO BUILD NEW
DEPARTMENTS



LIBRARIES DE-RISK
INNOVATION THROUGH
PILOTS YOU CAN SCALE IF
THEY WORK

What councils can do in the next 6 months

- Co-fund or expand hotspot lending and device access with your library
- Co-locate municipal counters/pop-ups (permits, taxes, transit cards) in branches
- Use shared dashboards: align library metrics with Community Safety & Well-Being plans
- Back provincial modernization (ODPL) and leverage joint grants/federal programs

Call to action for AMO delegates

Ask	Ask your library CEO for ideas and suggestions for collaboration
Earmark	Earmark modest innovation funds for library-led pilots with clear KPIs
Adopt	Adopt a joint municipal-library Digital Equity Plan for 2026 budgets
Champion	Champion Ontario Digital Public Library (ODPL) to stretch local dollars further



Thank you

- Dina Stevens, Executive Director, Federation of Ontario Public Libraries
- dinastevens@fopl.ca | fopl.ca

Let's build smarter, fairer communities—together.



**SAULT
STE. MARIE**



How it came to be

Monday, July 31, 2023, Council Resolution

Whereas Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is a book gifting program that mails free, high-quality books to children from birth to age five, no matter their family's income, and was recently expanded to include Canadian cities; and

Whereas the government of Canada website states that removing barriers to literacy would greatly improve all children's chances at success, encourage children to take more initiative, have higher self-esteem, stretch their imagination, and show that books are an important way to get information; and

Whereas supporting this initiative aligns with the corporate strategic goal to promote quality of life advantages within our youngest demographic, and

Whereas investing in our youth is a key to continued growth within our community that will have positive impacts on our citizens for generations.

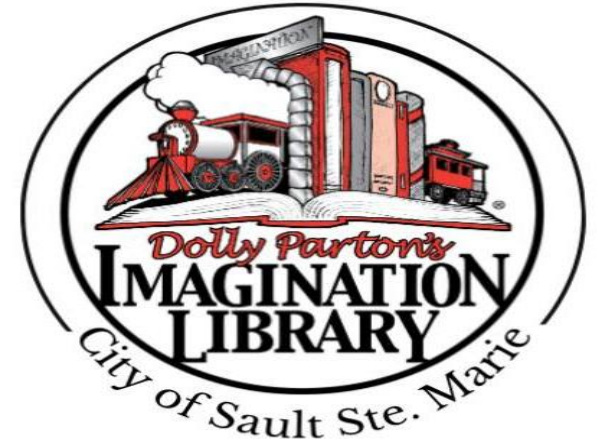
Now Therefore Be It Resolved that staff review and report back to Council concerning the process of enrolling the City of Sault Ste Marie in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library;

Further it be resolved that staff seek a possible partnership with not for profit organization(s) to help finance this initiative.

You're invited to attend the launch of
Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

Thursday, July 11 at 11 a.m.

James L. McIntyre Centennial Library
50 East Street, Sault Ste. Marie, ON.

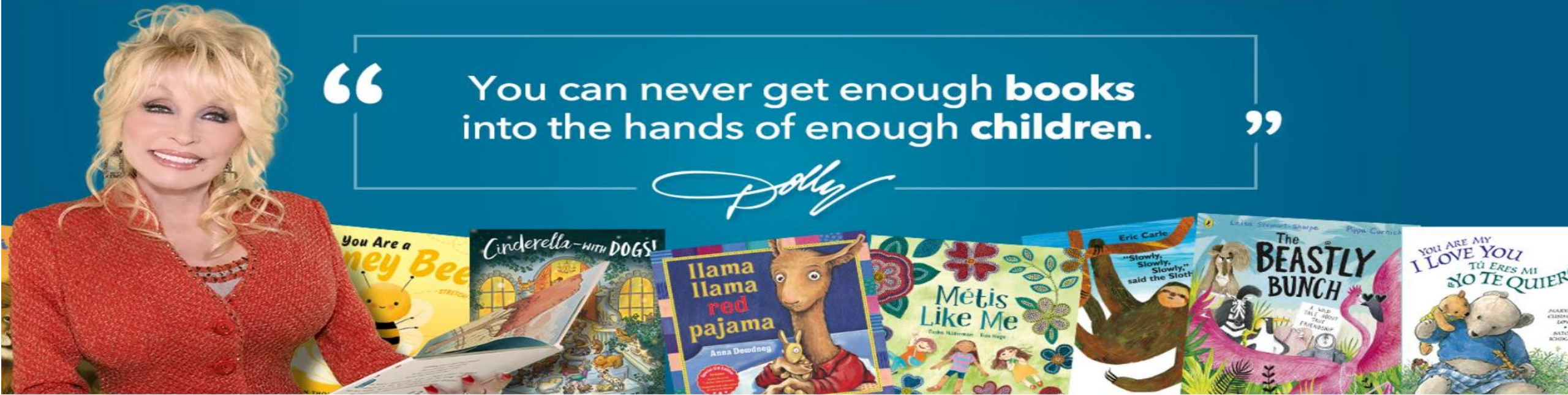


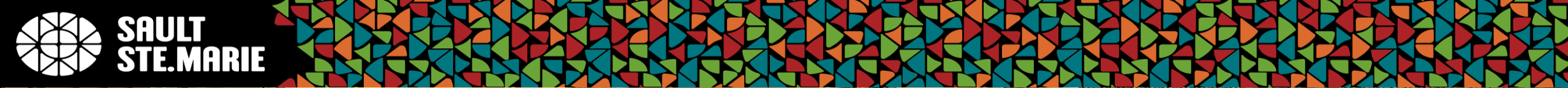
“

You can never get enough **books**
into the hands of enough **children.**

”

Dolly









Funding

Rotary Club of Sault Ste. Marie \$10,000

Kiwanis Club of Sault Ste. Marie \$10,000

Avery Construction \$500

Zonta Club of Sault Ste. Marie \$1,000

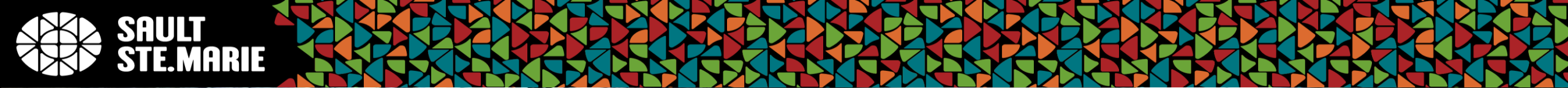
City of Sault Ste. Marie



Councillor Caputo and CAO Vair presenting to the Rotary Club of Sault Ste. Marie

Councillor Caputo and Communications Manager presenting to the Zonta Club of Sault Ste. Marie





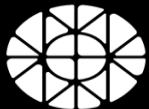
Rotary
Club of Sault Ste. Marie

DATE July 5, 2024

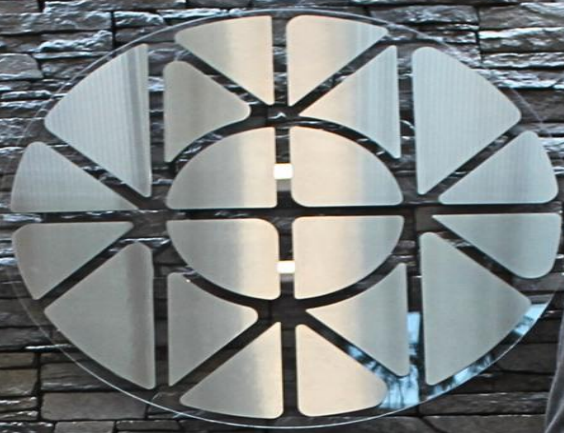
PAY TO THE ORDER OF: City of Sault Ste. Marie \$ 6000.00
six-thousand xx / 100 DOLLARS


Imagination Library
MEMO

J. Solh - St. P.
SIGNATURE



SAULT
STE.MARIE



 **Kiwanis**
CLUB OF SAULT STE MARIE

Date May 7th

Pay To
The Order Of City SSM - DOLLY PARTON LIBRARY \$5000.00

Five Thousand XX Dollars

Authorized Signature Jim St Jules Kiwanis Club of Sault Ste Marie



SAULT
STE.MARIE



AVERY CONSTRUCTION • TRANSPORTATION MATERIAL HANDLING • HARVESTING		July 2024 DATE
PAY TO THE ORDER OF:	<i>Dolly Parton's Imagination Library</i>	\$500
	<i>Five Hundred</i>	/100 DOLLARS
MEMO:	SIGNATURE	



ZONTA
CLUB OF
SAULT STE. MARIE AREA

July 2024
DATE

PAY TO THE
ORDER OF:

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

\$1,000

One Thousand

/100 DOLLARS

MEMO:

SIGNATURE

More permanent solution

Goal: 500 in the program

- Based on census data and the calculator provided on the Dolly Parton Imagination Library website, Sault Ste. Marie has approximately 3,040 children in the 0-5 age group.
- The cost per book averages \$3.85, and with twelve books per year, the cost per child is \$46 each year.
- **Year 1:** 20% of children is \$11,393
- **Year 5:** under a full subscription scenario \$230,528
- **2025 Budget:** Yearly Council to allocate \$10,000 to support the Library

Moving forward

- 476 children are in the program. 46 have graduated, and 9 are on the waitlist (but there could be more).
- It costs approximately \$1,835 a month to keep the program running with 476 children.
- Worked with DSSAB to ensure books were getting into the hands of children in social services programming.
- In the 24 hours between posting that parents could apply online, Communications staff had to turn off the online option as applications for 143 children were received, reaching (beyond) capacity.

Contact Information:

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is a turnkey, scalable, low-cost, low-risk, highly effective program that promotes equitable access to early childhood educational resources.

For more information:

705-989-5549

angela.caputo@cityssm.on.ca

