



A Remarkable Year

Our Response to the Pandemic

April 7, 2021



Vaughan
Public Libraries



An Agile and Responsible Approach to the Pandemic

In response to the declaration of a global pandemic, VPL was the first major Ontario library system to make the decision to suspend service at all locations, with doors closing to

customers on March 14, 2020. The safety of staff and customers has always been at the forefront of our decisions, which is not only why we took this action, but also why we prioritized a Recovery Strategy that allowed a gradual and safe return to operations. Returned items were quarantined before being added back to the collection and touch-free curbside pickup service was introduced in May 2020. Strict safety measures were put in place at all libraries, including reduced occupancy limits, plexiglass screens and the reconfiguration of spaces to ensure social distancing. At the sporadic times of the year when Resource Libraries were open, customers were greeted at the door and safety procedures were clearly and comprehensively communicated.

Our approach to the pandemic has been agile and we have amended our services as the conditions around us evolved. While Resource Libraries reopened after Labour Day, they were forced to close again later in December and return to curbside pickup only during York Region's winter lockdown. After a brief reopening in March 2021, a mandated lockdown resulted in another closure effective April 3, 2021. All community libraries have remained closed since March 14, 2020 but have curbside pickup in place.

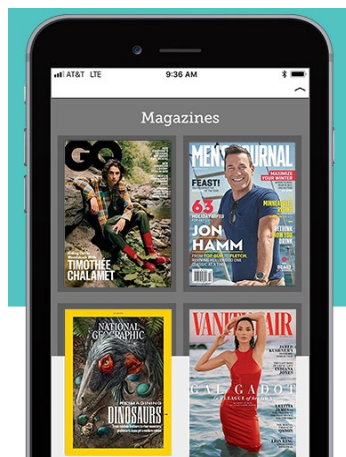




Strengthening the Digital Library

The importance of digital library services was never more critical, thus as soon as VPL's doors closed in March we took steps to enhance online offerings and make them as accessible as possible. All programming and activities transitioned to online-only and VPL increased access to our digital collection. We added 3,900 more e-books and e-audiobooks, increased borrowing limits on popular platforms like Hoopla and OverDrive, tripled the number of magazines available through RB Digital and added new databases and services like Brainfuse, which provides online tutoring for students and help for job seekers, Cantook Station enabling access to French language e-books and CreativeBug, a database filled with crafting and DIY ideas. In the first 12 months of the pandemic, more than 338,000 digital items were borrowed by customers.

To make existing resources even more accessible, we created VPL @ Home, a microsite on our website to act as your online library. This site within a site lists all available resources and programming by age group and presents the information in user-friendly tabs. Since its launch in March 2020, VPL @ Home has received 41,362 visits, with the average customer spending over three and a half minutes on the page reviewing which resources to access.



WHAT'S ON:

March Edition

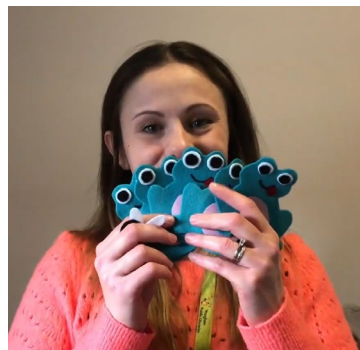
DOWNLOAD TODAY!



A Successful Move to Virtual Programs

embraced online platforms to ensure that all age groups had access to quality virtual programming throughout the pandemic. This has played a critical role in improving the mental wellbeing of the community and providing opportunities to safely socialize with others. Staff used Zoom, Instagram and YouTube to host programs and activities, and these have all been promoted via VPL @ Home and our communication channels.

When libraries closed in March 2020, all in-person programs, events and camps were suspended. However, our commitment to delivering these services did not waver, as staff



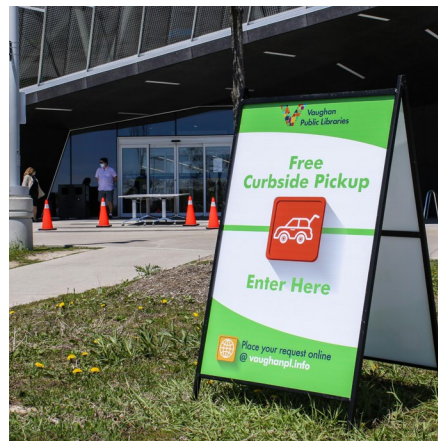
While numbers have been strong across all programs, several have stood out. VPL's sold-out Family Magic Night had 264 attendees, and our Halloween Party saw more than 160 customers join. A special lecture series – 'Reflecting on Racism and Discrimination' welcomed 112 customers to its first session and subsequent lectures have also been well received. VPL also hosted online versions of its popular summer staples. The Summer Reading Club had 264 children registered, while the Teen Challenge had 74 participants and 34 entries were received for VPL's first ever Virtual Science Fair. Live-streamed and prerecorded storytimes on Instagram, STEAM videos for children and Toastmasters for Teens were also very popular with Vaughan citizens with an average of 5,000 people attending virtual library programs monthly.



Keeping Collections Accessible

May 14, 2020 we were the first library in Ontario to launch curbside pickup. The measures put in place ensured that items were handled safely and could be picked up from the branch of your choice. The response to curbside pickup was and continues to be phenomenal. Cumulatively, customers borrowed more than 640,000 items over the twelve months of modified operations through curbside pickup and from our sporadically opened Resource Libraries. We also introduced a digital library card so we could virtually welcome new customers without requiring them to visit a branch.

We understand that one of the best things about a library is being able to browse the stacks and discover something new, which is why we created 'Surprise Me!' bundles. Each bag contains a curated selection of items based on an age group or interest and helps replicate the experience of unearthing a great find in one of our libraries. Customers have enthusiastically embraced these bundles and 3,358 have been picked up since launching in December.



Ask Us!

By Phone



By Social Media



By Email

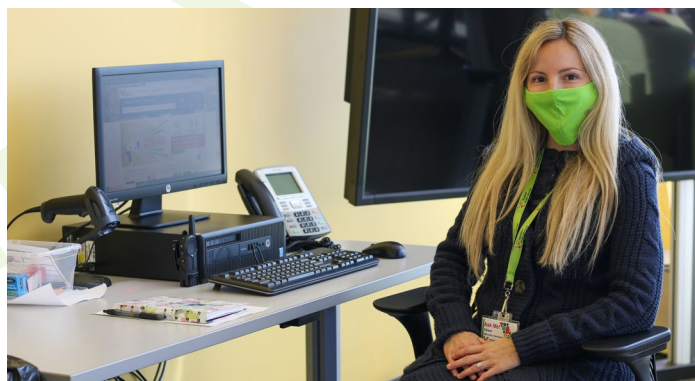


Digital Innovation

As well as enhancing our digital resources, we recognized the need to modify all our services and operations to maximize the use of digital technology. This allowed us to be flexible, more responsive, and more effective while restrictions were in place. We introduced the Ask Us!

Virtual Information Desk to assist with customer needs and implemented customer access to VPL staff through Live Chat and social media, as well as through more traditional methods like telephone. Staff transitioned to laptops rather than desktop computers, which allowed many to work productively from home and enabled the creation of online programming from staff homes early in the pandemic. We recognized that access to free internet is important and that we needed to provide this, which is why we extended wifi access into the parking lots at our three Resource Libraries.

We also increased the frequency and scope of our digital communications to keep you informed. This included doubling the frequency of our eNewsletter, which is distributed to over 15,000 customers. Our What's On magazine, which provides an overview of VPL programs, has moved to a fully digital format with quick links to registration pages – this has allowed us to continue distribution even while all of our physical branches have been closed. Additionally, a monthly digital magazine of Recommended Reads was also introduced to inform customers of new and noteworthy items in VPL collections.



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Building a Lasting Legacy

The work of building a world-class library system did not pause during the pandemic, and VPL made many steps to lay the foundations for an even brighter future. We do not believe that there should be barriers of any kind to our customers, which is why we're proud that Civic Centre Resource Library and Pleasant Ridge Library were recognized by the Rick Hansen Foundation for their accessibility. It's also why we eliminated late fees and wiped clean the accounts of more than 3,000 customers who did not have access to our collection at the beginning of the pandemic due to outstanding amounts.

Construction continued at VPL's newest locations – the library at Cortellucci Vaughan Hospital and the VMC Library and VMC Express. The library at Cortellucci Vaughan Hospital slated to open in 2021, will specialize in health literacy and will be an invaluable community hub, while also serving patients, staff and caregivers at the hospital. The VMC Library caters to Vaughan's fast-growing downtown core and will feature culinary literacy programming as well as the innovative self-serve VMC Express, which will provide rapid access for people on the go. Planning work also progressed on an exciting renovation of Maple Library, scheduled for 2021 and the new Carrville Community Centre and Library.

Our vision of what libraries can be is deeply rooted in the community and throughout 2020 we held virtual consultations with the public as we developed a new Strategic Plan, which will guide our direction and priorities in the next five years. This plan was also shaped by all levels of staff and the VPL Board and was released in March 2021. You can view it on the same page as our innovative digital Annual Report to discover where we are planning to go, as well as more great achievements from the past year.





Keeping Staff Engaged and Informed

VPL has an outstanding collection, but our staff are our greatest asset. VPL staff embraced change, showed remarkable resilience and dedication, and consistently demonstrated

innovation. The remarkable successes of our colleagues can easily be lost in the constant change, resulting in workplace stress. To combat this, VPL engaged the service of experts in positivity to deliver interactive staff training sessions. This provided space for staff to gather and reflect upon their successes, while also identifying obstacles and preparing themselves for the future. The importance of bringing everyone together and keeping everyone informed was a constant thread since mid-March with weekly updates from the CEO (55 to date) and regular all staff Town Halls.

The annual Staff Appreciation event was reimagined as an online celebration attended by VPL Board Trustees to recognize the remarkable achievements of the VPL staff, their long term service anniversaries and presentation of the Annual Award of Excellence. This was a remarkably challenging year for staff, but their response and commitment was extraordinary, and this event provided an opportunity to reflect on that.

VPL staff members were active participants and contributors to the City of Vaughan Emergency Operations Committees and Task Forces, developing research and providing support and insights as required. Additionally, several VPL staff were redeployed to assist staffing the mass vaccination sites.

While VPL furloughed many staff in response to our closures, 73% of the 162 staff members that were laid off have been recalled as demand for services increased. Frequent communication continues with colleagues still not back in the workplace as we look forward to their return.





Connecting with the Community

A personal customer care program was created to provide virtual updates to over 6,000 customers to promote knowledge of online resources, and a further 1,524 telephone calls were made to regular customers and

vulnerable members of the community to provide people with reassurance and advice on resources available, as well as mental and social support.

As the months progressed, we continued outreach efforts to our partners and community groups, as well as supported schools through virtual library orientations. We also focused on reducing seniors' isolation and with the assistance of a Provincial grant, distributed portable wifi devices to seniors' residences in the City to ensure our older customers could connect with loved ones and access VPL resources. VPL also loaned out its 3D printers to enable the manufacturing of face shields for frontline workers.





The Future

The last twelve months taught us a lot, and we are extremely proud of our response to the pandemic and the achievements we experienced. As the pandemic optimistically draws to a close, we will remain focused on delivering safe and comprehensive services to the citizens of Vaughan, ensuring complete access to our collections, providing exceptional customer service and innovative programs and continuing to build a world-class library system. This future will be guided by VPL's new five year Strategic Plan, which can be accessed by clicking [here](#).

On behalf of everyone at Vaughan Public Libraries, we thank you for your patience, co-operation and support over the past year and we look forward to welcoming you back into your public libraries as soon as safely possible.

For a special message from our staff, click [here](#).



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