



# The Second 100 Days

October 8, 2020

To guide Vaughan Public Libraries (VPL) through the next phase of our pandemic response, a comprehensive VPL Recovery Strategy has been produced. This document includes service planning and integration, safety protocols, operational procedures and Frequently Asked Questions. The most recent chapter added to the Recovery Strategy is the Public Occupancy Plan which defines VPL's reopening strategy. This chapter outlines changes made to the physical environment and workplace procedures in detail. VPL's Recovery Strategy has been shared with the entire VPL staff team and has provided them with confidence in VPL's commitment to the safety of both staff and customers and planned preparedness.



## Curbside Pickup and Customer Borrowing

VPL launched curbside pickup on May 14 at our three Resource Libraries – Bathurst Clark, Civic Centre and Pierre Berton, and at our seven remaining Community Libraries beginning July 2, allowing customers to access the physical collection at the library of their choice. Between that date and September 8, 73,261 items were borrowed by 6,869 unique customers across 14,583 interactions. Visits to the curbside pickup webpage have exceeded 51,000 and continue to increase.

Although curbside pickup was discontinued at Resource Libraries on September 8, during September the average number of items picked up at curbside in community libraries remained very high with over 2,905 items picked up per week. The curbside model has been adapted to allow customers to access existing holds or place new ones that can now be collected appointment-free. This represents a significant shift from the initial model, where staff received requests and curated a package of items for customers, who then had to pick them up at a set time.

As of October 2, 87,443 items were still out on loan. All items borrowed pre-closure had a return date of September 8 and customer reminder began on September 6 so the volume of returns increased dramatically in September. All items returned to VPL are isolated for a minimum of 72 hours before being re-shelved. To reduce barriers to access, VPL Board has made the socially responsible decision to eliminate late fees and excuse all existing fines on customer accounts. VPL will continue to follow best practices to encourage customers to return library items, including frequent communication with customers through telephone, email and text and continuing to hold customers accountable for returning library items in a timely manner.



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For the majority of the curbside pickup service, customers have been restricted to the items available at the branch where their request was placed, but VPL is gradually resuming the transfer of items between branches. In all, there are almost 18,812 items requested by customers that need to be pulled from the shelves in other locations and be shipped to customers' home libraries for pick up. Other than these, 6,188 items have been pulled from the shelves and are on the way to customer's home libraries for pickup.

In September 128,660 physical items were borrowed by customers while a further 28,410 digital eBook, eAudio and eVideo items were circulated. These digital circulation numbers have remained relatively steady throughout the pandemic, indicating that the public continues to embrace a mixed delivery model that allows them to borrow items in the format they choose and where they choose.

## Digital Resources

The VPL website has surpassed 677,000 page views since the closure of branches in March which reflects the strength of the public's response to the digital resources and programs offered online, as well as services such as curbside pickup and the Ask Us! virtual information desk. It is not surprising that the curbside pickup page leads the way with 51,854 views since its launch. The heavy use of digital downloads is reflected in the 46,584 views of the page that collates them all in one spot. The third most visited page is the VPL at Home web portal, which houses links to digital resources as well as online programs for all ages. Pages that did not exist when branches closed in March now combine for more than 92,000 page views – a testament to the work staff have done to respond to the changed conditions. Membership has also seen significant interest throughout the duration of the closure due to the promotion of temporary digital library cards. Visits to this page are up 20%

The website is just one way that VPL connects with the community, while all of VPL's communication channels have played a critical role in informing customers of service changes throughout the pandemic. Twice weekly eNewsletters are sent to 15,083 recipients and 12,125 follow VPL on social media across three different platforms: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. A focus on growing these numbers remains a key part of VPL's strategy and will enable rapid customer communication throughout the remainder of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

With facilities closed, VPL also successfully implemented the extension of public wifi to the parking lots of its three resource libraries to provide free internet access to customers, currently averaging 466 customer uses per week.





## Programming Innovation

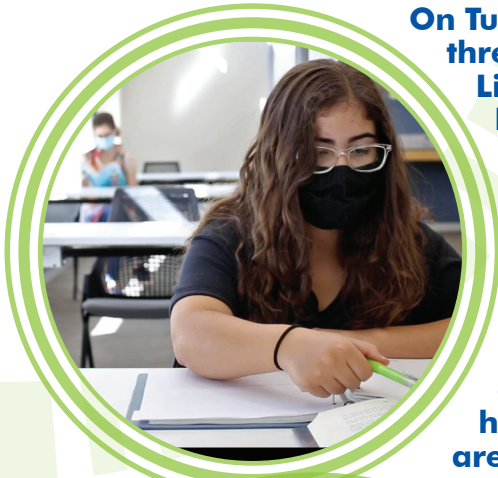
While all in-person programming remains cancelled for the foreseeable future, VPL continues to offer a wide range of digital options for all ages as staff continue to demonstrate their amazing creativity and adaptability. In addition to ongoing programs such as virtual storytimes and a speaker series, VPL also offered four major summer initiatives. VPL's inaugural song writing contest asked entrants to base their song around the lockdown experience, and judges were impressed by the quality of Vaughan's local talent. This ran at the same time as VPL's first Virtual Science Fair, which was an astounding chance to connect with the budding scientific minds of our City. VPL received 34 entries in three age categories, with all projects focusing on the theme 'Happy and Healthy @ Home'.

VPL's Summer Reading Club moved online with 161 parents registering and adding 264 children to the program. Themed reading lists each week and weekly reading reports encouraged families to make reading a habit and read each day. Reading is not only a fun way to get away when we are stuck at home, but children who read throughout the summer experience less summer learning loss. Finally, the Teen Summer Challenge saw 74 teens complete challenges on a weekly basis for the chance to win prizes.

Feedback from all these programs has been universally positive, with participants telling staff how enjoyable it was to add these activities to their summer plans and whether similar events would run in the future.



# Vaughan Public Libraries Reopens Branches



On Tuesday September 8, Vaughan Public Libraries reopened its three largest branches to the public. Bathurst Clark Resource Library, Civic Centre Resource Library and Pierre Berton Resource Library resumed regular hours of operation, but with significant safety measures and modifications in place. On the first day of reopening, the three resource libraries circulated 5,484 items to 1,754 customers! Our citizens were clearly very excited to return to VPL.

To enable physical distancing, an occupancy limit of 50 customers was employed at all three locations, and customers are requested to limit visits to no more than one hour to allow others to access library resources. Customers are required to wear a mask within the library, and anyone who is sick or has recently experienced any potential symptoms is being asked to stay at home. Upon entry customers are requested to sanitize their hands.



All VPL staff have been provided with three VPL-customized face masks along with detailed instructions for use and training. Plexiglass shields have been installed at service counters and physical distancing markers have been installed on the floor. Seating has been reduced to ensure distancing, and one-way traffic flow has been introduced in public and staff areas. Several services remain unavailable, and some of those that are available have been modified. Computers receive heavy usage thus individual customer time on these is limited to one hour per day. Keyboards and mice are enclosed within one-time use plastic coverings that are replaced after each use. Computer stations and seating areas are also disinfected frequently.

Extensive procedures have been created and reviewed with staff to ensure that they are familiar with all of the protocols in place and how to confidently assist customers as they navigate the changed environment. Helping the public is one of the main reasons why many VPL staff entered the field and the entire organization is excited to see the return of friendly faces and welcome customers back. The remaining seven VPL branches remain closed until further notice but will continue to offer curbside pickup. This service will be discontinued at the reopened libraries, though staff will be available at the entrance to assist customers who are unable or uncomfortable entering.



**OUR RESOURCE LIBRARIES  
ARE NOW OPEN!**



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## Research

Vaughan Public Libraries continues to be an active participant on City of Vaughan teams and task forces. In addition to senior management participation, VPL librarians are participating on the City's Data Analytics Task Force researching and analyzing information regarding such topics as government involvement and actions such as restrictions and regulations for various levels of government which have impacted Canada and internationally, and grassroots community initiatives both at home and abroad being implemented and heralded. Two other VPL librarians are working with the City's Economic Development team researching business trends and long-term impacts of COVID-19 on all types of businesses among other topics.



## Staffing

As VPL extended the scope of its services throughout the Summer, a number of staff have returned from layoff, and as of the reopening of resource libraries on September 8th, 74 staff had returned to their duties within branches. Upon return staff have received a 'welcome back' package, which has acted as a primer on the changes they will notice within the work environment, as well as the new safety procedures that have been put in place. Regular team meetings and training as required have helped to reinforce this. Returning staff have been warmly received by their colleagues and staffing levels will continue to increase as VPL moves through the phases of its recovery plan.

The COVID-19 pandemic has required staff to drastically amend their routines and work processes as VPL's delivery model has evolved. The remarkable successes that all of our colleagues have achieved can easily be lost in the constant change, resulting in workplace stress. To combat this, VPL engaged the service of experts in positivity over three online, 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 has been a constant thread since mid-March. Bi-weekly Town Halls have created an open forum for discussion, while informing staff of changes and providing them with the opportunity to participate in Q&A sessions with the Executive Management Team. This has been augmented with weekly email updates from the CEO – 29 of which have been sent as of September 30.



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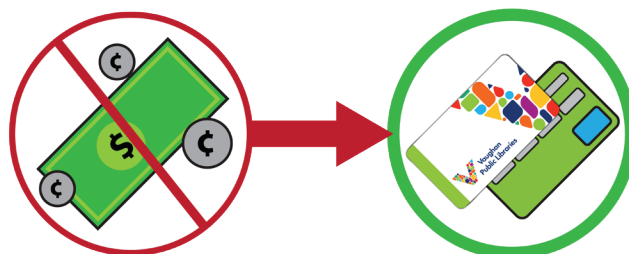


## Fiscal Impact

As highlighted in the previous RRR Report, the closure of locations and staffing reductions resulted in significant savings in salary and benefit costs of \$1.5M to date and an anticipated total of \$2.45M by year end. VPL also qualified for Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) funding offered by the federal government, leading to a total of \$2.3M received to date with an additional \$1.1M anticipated to be received by year end for a total federal funding subsidy of \$3.4M.



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## The Digital Pivot Continues

As VPL looks to the future, we are conscious of the need to innovate in order to create an even more robust library system. At the same time, the digital shift and automation required by our COVID-19 response has identified areas where long-lasting improvements can be made. For example, the response to digital programming has shown us that we need to supplement in-branch programming with an online component. The necessity of having staff work from home has prompted our move from desktops to laptops and will provide greater flexibility in the future. The pandemic safety concerns surrounding cash transactions has led us to go cash-free, while still providing customers with the options of debit, credit or using autoloaders to complete cash transactions by themselves. Our pandemic response has also accelerated the transition to digitizing processes, including records management, document approvals and pay stubs. Digital staff meetings have proven to be very popular and will remain in place for the foreseeable future.

VPL will continue to use technology as a driver for change, providing our customers with better ways to connect with our services, use our spaces and engage with our staff.

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