



Annual Report 2024

Freedom to Belong and Discover

Our Vision

A vibrant and welcoming community place where people learn, connect, share and discover.

Our Values



Accountability



Equity



Innovation



Intellectual Freedom



Respect



Inclusion

Cover Images:

Middle Left: CBC's White Coat, Black Art podcast records a book talk episode live at Central Library.

Top Right: Young Members participate in youth programming.

Bottom Right: Author Anuja Varghese reads from *Chrysalis*, the 2024 Hamilton Reads title.

A Letter from Paul and Nick



Paul Takala
CEO and Chief Librarian



Nick van Velzen
Library Board Chair

The past few years have tested the resilience of our community.

We have faced unprecedented obstacles in navigating the COVID-19 pandemic and addressing the City's ongoing homelessness crisis, opioid addiction and mental health challenges.

Then, in early 2024, a cybersecurity outage further disrupted our services, technology and programs. Throughout, Hamilton Public Library Staff demonstrated adaptability and found opportunities to serve our community better and enrich the Member experience.

We brought ideas to life, extending our reach in local neighbourhoods and around the world. Partnerships flourished with local organizations and our sister Library in Liberia through Empowerment Squared.

We increased Library and Study Hall hours, providing quiet spaces until midnight in some locations. City Council's decision to permanently offer all HPL cardholders free admission to Hamilton Civic Museums is good news. HPL expanded programs that foster intergenerational connections and nurture a sense of belonging essential for personal and community growth.

We made the most of the once-in-a-lifetime April 8 total solar eclipse in 2024 by distributing thousands of safety glasses with McMaster University Physics and Astronomy. We also inspired thousands to look at the sky year-round with astronomy-themed programs, including during March Break and Summer Reading Club.

Central Library received its first major facelift in 40 years, with exterior cleaning and a new sign contributing to downtown revitalization.

As we look ahead to 2025, HPL is focused on rebuilding momentum, fostering connections and renewing partnerships to better serve our community. We remain committed to creating Library spaces that encourage interaction, engagement and understanding. By offering inclusive programs and opportunities, we aim to unite the community, address divisiveness and break cycles of isolation. Collaboration remains at the heart of our mission, from nurturing relationships with the Indigenous community to connecting Members with vital resources such as the Red Book.

The dedication and versatility of our Staff have positioned HPL for a bright future. Community stewardship is a cornerstone of HPL's mission, contributing to a stronger, more connected Hamilton.

Membership with HPL unlocks enriching experiences, including free access to conservation areas, museums, the Art Gallery of Hamilton and local transit. It is an invitation to explore, learn and grow together.

HPL is committed to improving this community. Together with our valued partners, we strive to inspire hope, foster collaboration and achieve collective success. Thank you for your continued support in 2024. Together, we will shape a vibrant future in 2025 and beyond.



Outreach and Community

The daily influx of visitors at our 23 branches and two Bookmobiles is a welcome constant, from the lineup of Members awaiting the doors to open at the start of a day, to the sound of little feet rushing in to hear Storytime, to the late-night crowd exiting the building at the end of a Study Hall.

Images:

Top Left: HPL's Bonnie and Aleah created social media content at Central Library.

Top Right: The Carlisle Book Club meeting in February chatted about Miriam Toews' *The Women*.

While residents came to us in droves in 2024, with 2,630,502 visits counted, HPL Staff met residents where they live in the community. We set up Pop-Up Libraries at special events, visited schools and long-term care homes and parked our two Bookmobiles at 25 neighbourhood sites week after week.

Some highlights in 2024 included attending the 16th annual **Telling Tales Festival**, where Staff read stories and ran interactive family activities for a record-setting crowd at Royal Botanical Gardens. Staff also read stories to youngsters at the **Circle of Friends for Newcomers**, **Ron Joyce Children's Hospital** and **Living Hope Christian School**, where kindergarteners also registered for Library cards.

At the 2nd annual **HamOntYouth Summit** in October, 250 teens learned more about Library services as did 200 older adults at the **Seniors Kick-Off** event in June. HPL's accessible services, from computers to collections and software, were featured at the **Accessibility Fair** in September.

HPL Staff also attended cultural and community events such as the annual **gritLIT Festival of Readers and Writers**, **Sikh Heritage Month** celebrations and the **Hamilton Regional Indian Centre's** first Pow Wow at Pier 4 Park. In November, the Bookmobile wended its way through Mountain streets at the **Hamilton Santa Claus Parade**. It also attracted thousands of visitors to the City's **Open Streets** events on King Street in May and June.

HPL continually engages with the community to increase access to our myriad free services and programs and raise awareness of important issues.

We forged a new relationship with **Queer Coffee Hamilton**. The group toured **Local History and Archives**, which houses the **2SLGBTQ+ Community Archives** and was encouraged to help preserve and share this important collection. Local History also contributed archival materials for the **Hamilton Street Railway's** 150th anniversary exhibit at the Visitor's Experience Centre May-December.

On a practical note, HPL's partnership with the **Social Planning and Research Council** and **McMaster University** made it easier for low-income individuals and newcomers to file taxes and increase their financial literacy. HPL hosted 20 tax clinics at nine branches where 985 returns were filed—a 102% increase over 2023—generating \$2M in tax benefits for clients.

The **Bob Kemp Hospice** also reached out to display its Grief Exhibit in our branches. It sparked vital conversations about this important issue.

Thanks to our long-standing connection to McMaster University, HPL helped distribute more than 80,000 certified solar eclipse glasses throughout the city so residents could safely watch the April 8 event. We initiated a recycling effort with the **Royal Astronomical Society Hamilton Centre** afterward and sent a large chunk of those glasses to South Africa to be used by the South African Astronomical Observatory in Cape Town and to a rural teacher in northern Tanzania.

The most evident examples of HPL's close ties to local agencies are the new **Community Partner Desk** at Central Library, numerous information tables set up at branches throughout HPL and the long-established **Red Book of Community Resources**. Within a few months of its launch in October, the Community Partner Desk hosted weekly and biweekly time slots for 10 helping organizations focused on health, social and educational support. Across the system branches frequently hosted information tables such as **Goodwill**, **Wesley** and **Good Shepherd** to name a few. Red Book's expansive data bank is constantly updated to ensure residents have the latest information.

The **Newcomer Learning Centre's** Staff pay the same diligent attention to the community's Newcomer population. Staff-led programs include English classes, academic credential information, volunteering opportunities and government supports. NLC tutors regularly meet one-on-one with Members to help improve conversational English each week. They also participate in Human Library events, which allow meaningful dialogue about life in Canada.

Library Services and Branch Updates

Hamilton Public Library continued to enhance its services and expand its reach within the community.

At Central Library, a **newly installed HPL sign** featuring backlighting and the familiar bookmark motif revitalized its exterior. The previous sign was preserved for potential refurbishment and future indoor display.

HPL also made strides in addressing service gaps, particularly in Ward 14, where Councillor Mike Spadafora supported a feasibility study for a potential new branch. Recognized as a key priority in the Library's **Facilities Master Plan**, this study provided critical insights for future infrastructure planning and set the foundation for major Library developments.

The **Big Screen at Central** Library provided an engaging venue for community programming throughout the year. It featured Copa America soccer, the Art of Creation series and live broadcasts of the Summer Olympics and Paralympic Games. Interactive games on the screen during the Summer Reading Club engaged more than 250 Members and fostered creativity and excitement. In the Fall, the Big Screen continued to bring the community together with live-streamed cultural events, including the CHCH Remembrance Day ceremony and the Hamilton Santa Claus Parade. In December, it featured broadcasts of the Men's and Women's World hockey.

Other initiatives reflected the Library's commitment to inclusivity and lifelong learning. Central Library's **Newcomer Services Fair** in September, part of Welcoming Week, attracted more than 200 Newcomers and community partners, providing critical resources and connections.

The **Computer Literacy for Seniors** program, conducted in partnership with **Mishka Social Services**, proved to be invaluable. Over six weeks, participants learned basic computer skills, email use, social media navigation, Zoom functionality and scam prevention. Beyond technical education the program fostered a sense of community, creating a welcoming environment that encouraged social connections among participants.

Social workers remained a regular presence at Central Library and Barton Branch throughout 2024. The pair met with people seeking health, social services and resources, offered supportive listening and brief counselling and trained Library Staff on how best to deal with crises when they arise. The social workers also support access to services like housing, harm reduction, employment counselling and food security, and they provided crisis intervention and the de-escalation of disruptive behaviours on-site.

Page 7 Images:

Top: One of a few Human Library events hosted in 2024 by the Newcomer Learning Centre at Central Library.

Bottom: Nolan, 4, plays with the puzzle table at Kenilworth Branch.

Youth and Education

The benefits of reading, especially among young people, are immense.

Quite simply, reading builds better brains. It increases knowledge, vocabulary and bonds, sparks imagination and creativity and reduces stress.

HPL helps nurture all of the above in many ways. We pump up the programming on PA Days, after school hours, during March Break and Summer. We attend special events such as Telling Tales and Winterfest. Schools and community organizations often invite us into their spaces and we do the same by inviting classes and many other groups to visit us in our branches.

We launched the year with a bookmark contest, inviting budding and practicing young artists to illustrate their future Library. We had a record number of entries, making choosing nine winners difficult. It was the same challenge to narrow down the winners of our annual **Power of the Pen** writing contest for young storytellers, which attracted 260 entries.

During March Break, 5,654 people attended a whopping 232 events, filling our 23 branches and two Bookmobiles throughout the week-long school holiday.

Summer Reading Club 2024 was also a success, with 6,774 children and youth joining the Club—a 65% increase over 2023. Spanning 12 weeks, the Club encouraged kids to read for the love of it while offering engaging reasons to hang out at the Library. Local musicians, magicians, scientists, zoo wranglers and authors attracted hundreds of visitors.





YOUTH AND EDUCATION

A dedicated crew of 186 Summer Reading Buddy volunteers met with 1,633 young students through July and August to help boost their literacy skills.

These Reading Buddies volunteered 2,099 hours for the program. In September, at the 16th annual celebration of children's literature, the Telling Tales Festival, HPL Staff did what they do best. More than 1,850 little visitors flocked to HPL's Storytime sessions and interactive creative activities at Royal Botanical Gardens.

FrightFest and Pumpkin Palooza kept the fun going well into the Fall. Youth Services offered 63 Halloween-themed programs in October, attracting 849 participants to activities such as Storytime, crafts, science, scary writing, dancing and more. FrightFest featured horror films, stories, workshops, tarot and eerie crafts.

Whether it's a special occasion or just an ordinary Saturday, HPL endeavours daily to infuse young people with enthusiasm, curiosity, questions and a love of learning.

Images:

Top: Zayna, 4, mom Disha and son Zorawar, 1 enjoy March Break activities at Kenilworth Branch.

Bottom: Ariel, 5, tries out the horn she made to welcome in 2025 at Westdale Branch's Noon Years Eve program.

Page 9: The picturesque Valley Park Branch.

Partnerships and Collaboration

This past year, HPL deepened its commitment to community engagement through meaningful partnerships and collaborative initiatives.



In response to feedback from **Karis Disability Services**, Red Hill Branch launched a monthly evening storytime program designed for adults with disabilities, ensuring inclusive programming that meets our community's diverse needs.

HPL also played a vital role in the **Discovery Centre Study**, co-hosting a stakeholder roundtable with the City's Indigenous Relations Team at Central Library on March 26. This session provided an opportunity for community Members to share their aspirations and contribute input on the project's vision, governance, and feedback processes.

In alignment with our commitment to social equity, HPL supported the **United Way's Period Promise** campaign by designating Dundas, Turner Park and Central as donation depots for menstrual products from April 15 to May 15, to help address period poverty in our region.

New partnerships further expanded our reach and impact. HPL collaborated with the Hamilton Regional Indian Centre to launch **Public Computer Training for Indigenous learners** in Fall 2024.

Additional collaborations with **Adult Basic Education Association, YWCA and Editors Canada** allowed us to create tailored programs to support Newcomers, underserved communities and local writers.

Technology and historical storytelling came together with the launch of the augmented reality project **Burlington Heights Military Museum** on November 2. A collaboration with Dundurn Castle, the City's **Civic Museums** and the **Indigenous Relations Team**, this immersive experience brought the War of 1812 era to life, drawing 300 attendees and garnering media attention from CHCH and The Spectator.

On an international scale, HPL continued its support for the **Liberian Learning Centre** in Paynesville, Liberia. Our Senior Leadership Support Manager, Meg DeForest, played an integral role in staff training and the grand opening of this vital learning hub, which focuses on community-driven programs such as parenting support, teacher curriculum development and digital literacy. This initiative, spearheaded by Hamilton resident Leo Johnson and **Empowerment Squared**, was years in the making and represents a milestone in the development of public library services in Liberia and West Africa.



The poignant Missing: Red Dress Exhibit (photo page 10) drew attention to the national crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and LGBTQ2S+.

Library Programming

A quick look through HPL's monthly events calendar reflects myriad public interests, from practical to cultural to whimsical.

Author events, writing sessions, computer literacy classes, science, craft, health and wellness, parenting, genealogy, 3D printing and many other endeavours filled each issue of the **What's Happening Guide**.

Some of the highlights in 2024 included **Seedy Saturday**. On February 3, HPL and **Green Venture** enticed more than 900 green thumbs to Central Library with a seed exchange, storytime, gardening workshops, earth-friendly vendors and idea sharing.

February also heralded **Black History Month**. We highlighted key items in our collections to read,

watch and listen to. We hosted the annual **Jackie Washington Day** concert featuring **Harrison Kennedy** and the **Stuart Memorial Community Choir**. More than 230 guests celebrated Canada's first Black disc jockey and blues legend. Hamilton's talented young entrepreneurs also set up a **BLK Owned Youth Market** at Central Library in February.

Music dominated April during **Jazz Appreciation Month**. Thanks to the funding from **Hamilton Musician's Guild**, HPL hosted 17 jazz concerts for more than 738 people at branches across the City.

HPL welcomed more than **25 authors and playwrights** to our branches in 2024, including **Hamilton Reads** pick Anuja Varghese, whose award-winning debut of short stories attracted many readers. *Chrysalis* was the second most borrowed book at HPL last year. One of the main attractions was in May when CBC recorded its popular podcast **White Coat, Black Art with Dr. Brian Goldman** at Central Library. The sold-out event featured Dr. Jane Philpott (*Health for All*) and *The Wisdom of Nurses* authors Amie Archibald-Varley and Sara Fung.

Aspiring writers of all genres filled up playwright and **Mabel Pugh Taylor Writer-in-Residence Anna Chatterton's** weekly appointment schedule in no time when she came on board in September. Perhaps some of those students entered the ever-popular 10th annual **Short Works Prize**, a long-standing partnership with **Hamilton Arts & Letters Magazine**. **Hamilton Zinposium** celebrated the art of self-publishing and do-it-yourself media in November. More than 500 fans of all ages – including a 92-year-old – attended workshops and vendor displays. A series of **Stratford Festival** workshops attracted 126 participants who praised the hands-on theatrical learning experience.

Local History and Archives created many exhibits throughout the year to spotlight our collections, local artists and collectives. Notable and conversation-worthy exhibits included *Whimsical Words*, which featured rare, old and unusual children's books in **LHA's Rare Book Collection**. **Art of Creative** explored the early origins of science through art.

The collaboration with the **Art Gallery of Hamilton** and **Sloboda Lab at McMaster** focused on investing in and supporting pregnant people and those planning to become pregnant. The poignant **Missing: Red Dress**

Exhibit drew attention to the national crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and LGBTQ2S+. The **Kooshkopayiw Metis Artist Collective's Awakening** exhibit promoted the works of established and emerging Metis artists. LHA Staff also headed to **History in Action Day** at Battlefield Park, where 1,300 students learned about the City's significant past. When **Internet Archive founder Brewster Kahle** visited in June, he highlighted the vital work of LHA's digital preservation and providing universal access to knowledge.

Other popular events included **Repair Cafes** and mending and fabric swap programs, which taught folks new skills that help divert items from landfills. A **Dementia Education** series with the **Alzheimer Society of Hamilton and Halton** gave vital information on prevention, warning signs and addressing caregiver fatigue. The Defy Dementia event hosted by **Baycrest, McMaster University** and **Hamilton Health Sciences** in March brought 126 people to Central Library to learn from the experts. The **Hamilton Amateur Astronomers** may have inspired a new hobby for the 187 people who attended a telescope clinic in November at Valley Park Branch.

Whether you visit our **23 branches** and **two Bookmobiles** for entertainment, education, intrigue or relaxation, HPL aims to inspire and enhance new and existing pastimes, skills and connections.

Page 10 Images:

Top Left: Author Joyce Grant at the Locke Branch. She taught a popular children's fiction workshop at several branches in 2024.

Top Right: Missing: Red Dress Exhibit.

HPL by the Numbers

185,395
Active Members

The highest membership count in **12 years**, showcasing our growing impact.

1,378
Hours of Service Weekly

Delivered across **23 locations** and **two Bookmobiles**, ensuring accessibility for the entire community.

112
Hours of Evening Study Halls Weekly

Evening visits rose **79%**, with **5,026 visitors** in 2024 from **2,801** in 2023.

Study Hall Use Soars

In 2024, **19,954 people** used Study Hall, an **83%** increase over 2023, when **10,910 people** visited branches after hours.

Demand for AskHPL Increases

You had questions, we provided answers. There were **27.5%** more calls, emails and chats with HPL Staff in 2024.

Programs and Attendance Grows

We increased programs by **34%** last year and **44%** more people attended them.

Social Media Audiences Expand

2024 saw a **12%** increase in followers on our social media channels.

Timeline

2024

January

The most read, watched and listened to items borrowed in 2023 were released. Prince Harry's *Spare* dominated the Top 10 lists, as did children's authors Dav Pilkey and Jeff Kinney.



March

March Break featured 232 events across 23 branches, engaging 5,654 attendees. Highlights included a visit by Triple C Farm to a Bookmobile site where 160 Members petted a plethora of furry friends.



May

CBC's White Coat, Black Art podcast with host Dr. Brian Goldman, recorded a book talk episode live at Central Library. More than half of the attendees were first-time visitors to HPL.



July

Summer Reading Buddies matched 186 volunteers with 1,633 children, fostering a love of reading and supporting literacy skills through 2,099 volunteer hours.



September

HPL welcomed playwright Anna Chatterton as the 2024-25 Writer in Residence. Aspiring writers seeking mentorship support filled up Anna's calendar quickly.



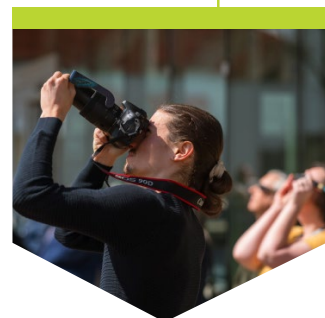
November

The Kooshkopayiw: Awakening exhibit featured Métis artists from November 2, 2024, to January 31, 2025.



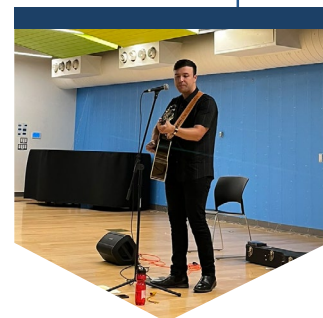
February

We celebrated Black History Month with storytelling, concerts and a youth market. A concert honouring local blues legend Jackie Washington drew 230 attendees and ended with a standing ovation.



April

On April 8, Hamilton witnessed the first total solar eclipse since 1925. HPL prepared the community by distributing 80,000 eclipse-viewing safety glasses provided by McMaster University.



June

National Indigenous History Month featured author talks, a children's puppet theatre and a performance by James N. Wilson (in photo) on June 21, National Indigenous Peoples Day.



August

The Summer Reading Club registered 6,774 children and youth, a 65% increase over 2023. Activities included many performers, presentations, movies, crafts and science programs.



October

The Community Partner Desk at Central Library launched, connecting the community with 10 local help agencies focused on health, social and educational supports.



December

HPL celebrated 50 years of Noon Hour Concerts with a special holiday performance by the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra's Brass Quintet.

Members of the 2024 Board of Directors:

The Hamilton Public Library Board has nine citizens and two City Councillors. The Board establishes Library services for our community based on public input and market research.

Hamilton Public Library Board Members:

- Nicolas van Velzen, *Chair*
- Gagan Batra, *Vice-chair*
- Brie Berry
- Kojo Dampsey
- Dayna Firth
- Alison Griggs
- Jennifer Horwath
- Lynne Serviss
- Carly Whitmore
- Councillor Ted McMeekin
- Councillor Nrinder Nann (to October)
- Councillor Cameron Kroetsch (from November)

