Halifax Public Libraries – Universal Access Plan 2014-2016

Executive Summary

Throughout our library system, staff are providing service every day to a significant number of customers with a wide variety of abilities and challenges. In addition, statistics indicate that the number of community members who self- identify as having some form of disability is projected to increase in coming years. Our libraries provide a good level of basic service to these customers, with accessible facilities, and services such as Home Delivery, Assistive Technology and special formats such as Large Print and digital media. It is time, however, to move beyond "accommodation" to "inclusion" – to create a library experience and organization that is universally accessible and barrier-free for everyone. Adaptations to meet special needs are still essential, but creating environments that bring people together, not separating them, is just as important. This plan presents the steps we will take in that direction over the next two years.

Working from community input as well as consultations with staff in all of our branches, the work outlined in this plan will focus on the following four priority areas:

- Staff competency and organizational capacity
- Developing a more inclusive workplace
- Responsive programs, collections, services and facilities
- Community engagement and relationship building

Actions have been developed to support the following four Objectives:

- Expand staff competencies and organizational capacity to ensure a positive library experience for all customers, regardless of ability
- Develop a more inclusive workplace by identifying and reducing barriers to employment and volunteer positions within the library.
- Work with branches, regional teams, departments and community to create universally accessible programs, collections, services and facilities, as well as those designed to meet specific needs.
- Through community engagement, develop sustained relationships that will enable us to co-create relevant and responsive library services for people with disabilities.

Key Actions:

- Development and implementation of staff training plan
- Development of work placement model for persons with intellectual disabilities
- Development of more accessible hiring practices
- Continued community consultations
- Development of models for more inclusive children's and adult programming
- Research best practices in assistive technology and make recommendations

Also included are:

- Results from branch and community consultations
- Relevant statistics on disability
- Definitions
- Areas of alignment with other organizations