

REPORT OF SHELAGH PATERSON

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2021 was another very unusual year for the association (and most organizations!).

To set the context for future readers of this report, it is important to note that for much of the first half of 2021, Ontario was in some form of shut-down due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and vaccination was not widely available in Canada until late spring. Impacts included retail

and restaurants closed, public libraries with limited on-site access, and most academic institutions and school boards primarily delivering remote learning and library services. As more people received their vaccination, summer through to fall was a time of more freedom and mobility. Libraries could ease restrictions and K-12 students went back to the in-person classroom. More school library professionals went back into the school library, but the re-allocation of school library staff remained a concern in many areas of the province. At the end of 2021, the Omicron subvariant of COVID (less severe but highly contagious) caused the province to go back into shut-down.

OLA made its' own history in 2021:

- Delivered the first-ever virtual OLA Super Conference and exceeded registration numbers compared to an in-person conference. The majority joined via their institution's site license which provided professional development for months following the conference.
- To provide some stability to OLA, the OLA Board and Divisional Councils extended their terms and elections (with some exceptions) were suspended. This was an extraordinary commitment.
- The Ontario Health Library and Information Association completed its' first year as OLA's newest division.

Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, there were a number of highlights:

- At the 2021 OLA Super Conference, Lisa MacLeod, Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries and Laurie Scott, Minister of Infrastructure announced that the Ontario government would invest more than \$4.8 million to upgrade broadband in up to 50 public libraries in unserved and underserved communities. Kudos to Ontario Library Service who are implementing the project.
- We witnessed a wave of fine-free policies across public libraries in Ontario and the rest of Canada ensuring barrier-free access to public library services.
- Members got more comfortable and adept at using web-based meeting and virtual program platforms. 'Zoom fatigue' persisted, but folks expressed

appreciation for connecting with more people at events and meetings without the barrier of geography.

- A second year of the virtual Forest of Reading Award ceremonies in partnership with CBC Books – thus ensuring kids across the country could attend.

Under the leadership of Andrea Cecchetto, OLA President, the board took a deep dive on two initiatives that will serve OLA well over the next 3 – 4 years:

- With extensive member input, approval of a new 3-year strategic plan.
- As part of this, a goal is to pursue a new governance framework for the association in conjunction with member input.

I would also like to thank Bennet Steinburg for his exceptional work as Deputy Editor for *Open Shelf*, OLA's online publication, during the Editor-in-Chief vacancy.

After almost 9 years at this location, we said goodbye to 2 Toronto Street in downtown Toronto. While staff primarily had been working from home, and while this was a prudent fiscal move for OLA, we will miss this space. I have such appreciation for the OLA Staff team who helped get OLA through some precarious financial times. In addition to clearing out, organizing, and archiving the entire OLA office in November, until mid-October they were all working a reduced workweek as a further means to contain expenses.

As we head into a new year, the 2022 Conference theme captures what we want to do more of; 'Gather / Se rassembler' – and hopefully, we can see more of each other in person!