

President's Report 2017

Good evening! Once again I have the honour of presenting to you my view, as President, of PAL's progress over the last year. And we have made progress. We made conscious efforts to reach out to new clients, new volunteers, and new donors and these efforts have borne fruit.

Here are a few highlights:

Last summer we got a Canada Ontario Job Creation Grant to pay for Mark to receive training in social media, and he has worked hard to raise PAL's profile on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

We also made strides in becoming better known outside the digital world. In September we had a booth and presentation at Word on the Street. Thanks to Mark, Marguerite, Marguerite's friend Alice, Susan Castillo, Jennifer (and Dalton the dog) who helped out with this. In February, Anita, Mala and I attended the Experiential Expo organized by the Toronto Visionaries of the Canadian Council of the Blind. I was able to do radio interview with Kelly McDonald of AMI at that event, telling his listeners about PAL and its service. In April, I had a table at the Tech Expo that took place as part of the national meeting of the Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians here in Toronto. In June, Susan Castillo, Karen Wong and I attended a volunteer recruitment event put on by Volunteer Toronto. Every single one of these initiatives has led to more exposure for PAL, more potential clients, and more potential volunteers.

We made progress in fund-raising as well. This past June, for the first time, we took part in the Toronto Challenge. This is an event comprising 1K and 5K walks and a 5K run, which is staged every year by the City of Toronto Long-Term Care Department to raise funds for organizations that help seniors in the city. We had nine participants, seven walkers and two runners, and raised over \$10,000. Many thanks to everyone who participated in the event, or donated to support us. In June we also took part in the Great Canadian Giving Challenge; some donors used that platform to support participants in the Toronto Challenge and some just used it to donate to PAL directly. We feel that we learned a lot and look forward to publicizing these overlapping events more effectively next year.

You may be wondering why seniors? We spent so much of our time in the past reading for students and so we perhaps tend not to think of PAL as a seniors-oriented organization. In fact, many of our volunteers and clients are seniors, and as members of the boomer population experience age-related vision loss, this dimension of our service will grow. Accordingly, we applied for and received an Ontario Seniors Community Grant to prepare marketing materials to reach out to potential clients, and to develop a database of clients and volunteers. In the next six months I will be visiting BALANCE for Blind Adults, the CNIB New Beginnings program, and the Neighbourhood Group to speak to staff about PAL and the

service we offer. Thanks to our client, Bruno Iaboni, who is here tonight, I have also made contact with all the Lions Clubs in District A711 and hope to speak to some of their members.

So we have made progress. Are we “there” yet? Not really. But the signals - income, clients, volunteers, hours read - are all positive, and all we can do is keep working to make every year better than the one before.

None of this would have happened without the help and support of our staff, Derek and Mark, whose resilience, dedication and patience make the work we do possible. Many thanks also to the Board members who all contributed in many ways to a successful year. We will miss Martha Hirst and Karen Wong, who have chosen, for reasons of geography, to leave the board. You can always rejoin us if your orbit brings you back this way. And many thanks, also, to our loyal clients, who continue to send us great books, and our wonderful volunteers, who read them.

I myself have chosen to step down from the role of President. I have done this for a very long time, and I will be joining the ranks of seniors in a few weeks. Over the past year, as I was filling out various grant applications and got to the question “Does the organization have a succession plan?” I realized that we did not, but we should. That will be a task for the new President and Board to work on.

I do expect to stay associated with PAL for the foreseeable future and to concentrate my efforts on fund-raising and publicity. With that in mind, here are a few of the events we are planning for the coming year. We hope you can join us for some or all of them!

- We will have a table again at Word on the Street, at Harbourfront next Sunday, September 24. Our booth number is LL15, on Literacy Lane, in the Brigantine Room. If you are in the neighbourhood, please stop by and say hello.
- We will once again have our Holiday Party in December because last year’s was so much fun, despite the snowstorm. Great food, good company, inspirational music, it was fantastic. We’ll let you know the date closer to the time.
- We are hoping to take part in next year’s Visionaries’ Expo, in February 2018 (exact date to be announced)
- And we will be taking part in the Toronto Challenge 2018, on Sunday, June 10. Mark it in your calendar and plan to participate!

Thanks again.