
TOPIC

**The Public Library as
Community Information Centre:
The Case of
the London Urban
Resource Centre**



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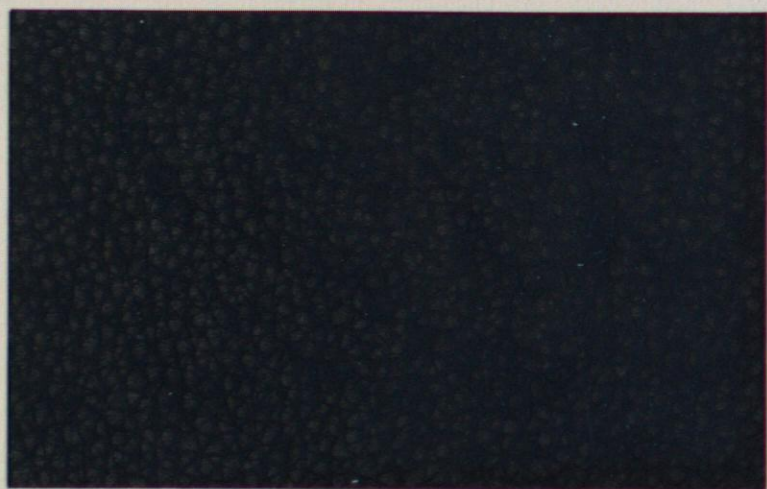
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Topic No. 4
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THIS TOPIC IN BRIEF

Access to accurate, up-to-the-minute information and to helpful advice on problems of everyday life is the question underlying this Topic. The provision of easy access to such information and advice is the objective of many agencies, which we refer to collectively as I&R — for information and referral — services. The availability and effectiveness of such services must surely rank highly on any index of the quality of urban life.

A strong case can be made that the public library has the potential to become a highly effective community I&R agency. Indeed, the case rests in part on the achievements of some libraries which have become involved in I&R. One such library is the London Public Library. In 1970 it initiated the Crouch Neighbourhood Resource Centre. Crouch has since become a highly regarded and virtually indispensable community resource. In September, 1974, the London Public Library set the London Urban Resource Centre in motion as a three-year pilot project.

In this Topic we outline the history of the London Urban Resource Centre, we assess its performance against its often unclear objectives, and we make recommendations for a reconstituted London Urban Information Centre. Our summary finding is that the London Urban Resource Centre was an innovative and potentially beneficial project, which suffered from inadequate planning, a muddled execution, poor administration, and from the lack of direction and support. Of its three-year trial period, only the first year offered enough activity, free from crippling problems, on which to base an assessment of its worth.

We conclude, however, that the potential demonstrated by those first year activities, along with the weight of testimony in support of the need for the Centre, warrants its continuation as the London Urban Information Centre. This Topic concludes with ten specific recommendations regarding such matters as staffing, managing and funding the Centre, the Centre's objectives, and its integration with Information London, the City's principal I&R agency.

THE PUBLIC LIBRARY AS COMMUNITY INFORMATION CENTRE:

THE CASE OF THE LONDON URBAN RESOURCE CENTRE

I Introduction

What temperature must my landlord maintain in my apartment?
Are there any lawyers in town who speak Spanish?
How can we get bus service in our neighbourhood?
Can I bring my parents to live with me in Canada?
Is it possible to deliver a baby at home?
Can I use part of my house as a variety store?
How do I apply for day care assistance?
Which building improvement firms are reputable?
Where can we get counselling for our teenager?

In urban North America, satisfactory answers to questions like these can often be the difference between living and merely coping with life. For the disadvantaged the difference is more likely to be between coping and not coping. In the words of one writer, "He....who has access to information has power, direction, the means with which to plan, make decisions and act. He....who has not is powerless, helpless — hopeless."¹

The information required to answer such questions is often termed "ephemeral" or "transient" by information specialists. This is because it is used only once. And, for reasons having largely to do with the pace of life, and of changes in its technologies and institutions, a list of references almost never constitutes an acceptable answer to such immediate questions. It appears that in our impersonalized mass society, more and more people genuinely need to be personally "told where to turn".

To meet this need, a network of "information and referral", or I&R, agencies has emerged. They provide a wide range of accurate, up-to-date information and skilled advice, and a variety of resources for community groups and individuals. These agencies first appeared in North America in the 1960's as more and more consumers sought answers to the complexity of problems which beset them in everyday life. The result was a proliferation of legal aid clinics, "action line" and advice columns in newspapers, "hot line" radio and television shows, telephone crisis lines and drop-in centres.

In the seventies, centres known variously as neighbourhood (or community, or public) information (or resource) centres grew up, at least partly from a need to co-ordinate the vast array of information services available. As with some of Britain's Citizens' Advice Bureaux, which may be regarded as their fore-runners, some of our information centres have been initiated by, and accommodated within, public libraries.

1. Gaylene Poryhora, "'Tell Me Where To Turn'; Or The Public Library as Neighbourhood Information Centre", Manitoba Library Association Bulletin, March 1976, p. 7.

The public library has a number of features which, some observers have argued, make it "a potentially desirable site for I&R services in relation to other agencies".² Six of these features are listed below³:

- (1) libraries have traditionally collected, organized and retrieved a wide range of information which often includes much needed community information;
- (2) libraries, exist to serve the entire community, are regarded as neutral ground, and are trusted and respected; through I&R services the library can reach unserved groups;
- (3) library staff are specialists in information handling per se;
- (4) through their branches, public libraries can become the most community-sensitive municipal agencies;
- (5) the library's extended hours of operation suit it to providing a wider range of community services than those related to reference and recreational reading materials;
- (6) the library is relatively independent from political control, which is an advantage in dealing with agencies that cover a wide range of political, cultural and ideological orientations.

The conception of public library service which naturally encompasses I&R is a far cry from that of the traditional book dispensary. The general operating premises which underly I&R are that "Libraries Are People Places"⁴ which aim to satisfy "people's information needs, whatever they are"⁵ which, in turn, means reaching out into the community.⁶ The number of Canadian public libraries which operate on these progressive premises is still small — a reflection, among other things, of the fact that the public library has traditionally been one of our most tradition-bound institutions.

Two authoritative studies of provincial library systems have recently articulated modern forms of library service based on premises similar to those just discussed. The most general recommendation of The Right To Know, a 1974 review of Alberta's public libraries, is this:

2. Thomas Childers, "The Neighbourhood Information Center Project", Library Quarterly, July 1976, p. 273.
3. This list was compiled from Childers, "Information Center Project", Pyryhora "Tell Me Where To Turn", and Albert Bowron, The Ontario Public Library: Review and Reorganization, Toronto, 1975, pp. 44-5.
4. Anne Makletzoff, "Libraries Reaching Into The Community", Ontario Library Review, June 1976, pp. 83-7.
5. Tod Hawkes, "Home Runs To Home Delivery", American Libraries, June 1976.
6. Pyryhora, "Tell Me Where To Turn", p.9.

"In making their contribution to the quality of life, libraries must change from their traditional practices and develop a role as social catalyst so that information and individuals may be brought together in productive and satisfying relationships. New emphasis must be developed in thought and action towards information as the business of libraries — information in whatever format it is transmitted; towards universal access to the information resources of the province and the nation; towards commitment to social outreach."⁷

The thrust of Albert Bowron's 1975 report of his investigation into the Ontario public library system is much the same. Specifically, he endowed the libraries with six non-traditional responsibilities. The three most closely associated with the neighbourhood information centre are:

- (1) work in co-operation with the community—outreach library and information service, counselling and referral;
- (2) emphasis on the disadvantaged—motivating and assisting the unorganized, poor or displaced, as well as those cut off from information by language or cultural differences;
- (3) emphasis on service to the student—clearly arranging information, using efficient reference techniques and a trained and sympathetic staff to improve the understanding of government, society, science, and business.⁸

One Canadian public Library which began to reach out toward its client community well in advance of the reports just mentioned is the London Public Library. In 1970 it initiated the Crouch Neighbourhood Resource Centre, which is known locally as Crouch. Crouch is a branch library located in the working class Hamilton Road area of the city. The library houses several social welfare agencies in its basement, as well as providing I&R services through a "team" of community workers and concerned citizens. Crouch has become a focal point for community action; in the past it has been instrumental in obtaining a park and a pedestrian cross-walk, preserving residential zoning and in obtaining government grants for community development projects. Although Crouch has never been formally evaluated, it is probable that such an evaluation would confirm the casual consensus that, for a very modest investment, it has generated a virtually priceless sense of community in its neighbourhood.⁹

A more recent major initiative of the London Public Library is the London Urban Resource Centre which opened in September 1974 as a three-year pilot project. In July 1977, at the request of the Centre's Management Committee, the Bureau of Municipal Research began a thorough review of the concept, functioning, and

7. L.W. Downey Associates, The Right To Know, Edmonton, 1974, p. 46, emphasis in original.
8. "The Ontario Public Library", p.4.
9. See John Weiler, "Crouch: A Description of The Crouch Neighbourhood Resource Centre", July 1973, Mimeo.

future disposition of the Centre. The Bureau's lengthy report, which was formally received by the Library Board on October 19, 1977, is condensed in this *Topic* with a view to assisting others who may be contemplating the establishment or evaluation of such a centre.

II Origins of The London Urban Resource Centre

Physically, the London Urban Resource Centre is a renovated two and one-half storey older house situated directly opposite the Central Library and one block from City Hall. When it opened in September 1974, it became a new home to eight tenant organizations including Big Brothers, the Central Volunteer Bureau, the London Women's Resource Centre, the London Association for International Development, and the Urban League of London. Its main floor accommodates the Centre's receptionist, its stock of reference material (mostly reports, journals, pamphlets, newsletters, and brochures of recent vintage), the Co-ordinator's office and a kitchen. A twenty-five person meeting room and several duplicating machines complete the list of the Centre's major features.

Conceptually, the Centre was to combine elements of community information and resource centres and would promote social action and community development. Its roots can be traced to a number of actual and imagined centres, the most complete working model of which was Amsterdam's Social Action Centre. This Centre was introduced to Library Board members in May 1973 by the Library's then Community Relations Officer who had visited it.¹⁰ This was followed closely by a proposal for a "Community Social Action Centre" for London.¹¹ The main argument for the proposed Centre was that a great deal of potentially useful transient information, such as surveys of various social service needs, lay idle in offices scattered about the city; the Centre would, bring this information together with the people who could make the best use of it. It was to be a catalyst "co-ordinat(ing) and facilitat(ing) the efforts of a variety of groups, agencies and other organizations (including neighbourhood resource centres) to collect and disseminate community information of all kinds".¹²

The Board responded to the proposal for a social action centre by approving the idea in principle and by requesting additional details at its regular meetings. Meanwhile, representatives of interested groups and of the Library were meeting to work out those details. By February of the following year, the status and operational details of the Centre had reached this point:

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10. M. Barber, "Social Action Centre: Amsterdam", May 1973, report to the Library Board.
11. M. Barber, "Community Social Action Centre, London", May 15, 1973, report to the Library Board.
12. Marg Cowan and Dan Spinner, "The London Urban Resource Centre", Ontario Library Review, September 1975, p. 155.

"The concept of providing one centre with meeting rooms, printing and mailing equipment, telephone-desk-file facilities and a permanent address to a large number of local community information and development and social information agencies has become very popular. The potential of adding to this a professional information specialist, and researcher (librarian possibly) and the enormous files and municipal, provincial and federal information items of the Central Library plus an urban resource room at the centre with a computer terminal. This will provide a strong force in a citizen and community development. Several agencies have indicated they are anxious to ally themselves with this project — but ask when, and where it will happen."¹³

The Library's Acting Director concluded this report by recommending that the Board start the Centre in June and operate it for the remainder of 1974 with \$8000 of the previous year's budget surplus. The costs of the Centre for the remainder of the projected two-year pilot period were to be carried by the Board. These costs would be reduced by the rents paid by tenant organizations. Although some of its members would have preferred that special funding for the Centre be sought from the City, the Board resolved to go ahead with the project and requested that a "detailed costed step-by-step development and implementation plan" be prepared by the Administration.¹⁴

This implementation plan was approved at the Board's April meeting after a brief and uninvolved discussion.¹⁵ At the same time, the Administration was instructed to begin lease negotiations for the house at 322 Queens Avenue for not less than two years. This decision to go ahead with the Centre seems to have been inconsistent with another made at the same meeting. This was the decision to instruct the Administration to approach the City for funding for the Centre's first year. The Board was clearly not committed enough to the Centre to pay for it out of its own pocket.

The Board's ambivalent attitude toward the Centre, and its carelessness in proceeding with the project before outside funding was secured, underlay the Centre's muddled implementation in the summer of 1974. Perhaps foremost among the muddles was the undertaking of extensive and costly renovations at 322 Queens, before the Library and the landlord had come to terms on the lease. By the end of July the Administration had, at the Board's instruction, extracted signed commitments to rent space in the Centre from six organizations. September 1st was to have been the occupancy date. Yet at a special meeting on August 29th the Board, displeased with the latest lease proposal and regretting that outside funding had not yet been obtained, seriously considered suspending lease negotiations.¹⁶ But given what amounted to a legal commitment to the owner of 322 Queens, and a moral commitment to committed tenants (some of which had given notice to their landlords), the Board had no choice but to occupy 322 Queens. Thus, on September 6th, it approved a three-year lease.

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13. D. Rand, "Community Social Action Centre", February 12, 1974, report to the Library Board.
14. Minutes, Library Board Executive Session (hereafter, LBEM), February 12, 1974.
15. LBEM, April 16, 1974.
16. See LBEM, August 29, 1974.

III The Plan For The London Urban Resource Centre

To see what the Centre was intended to do, and how it was supposed to function, we turn now to the implementation plan mentioned above.¹⁷

The Centre had four objectives:

- to bring developmental agencies and groups and community information resources together under one roof;
- to promote communication and sharing of diverse community needs, experiences and solutions;
- to provide resources in an atmosphere conducive to self-learning, sharing and problem solving;
- to promote innovative uses of information resources amongst other educational institutions.

The means by which the Centre was to accomplish these ends included a truly formidable range of information, technical and human resources which the Centre was to provide including: a duplicating machine, an addressograph, computer terminal, flip charts, blackboards, fridge and stove, answering service and a hydraulic ramp for handicapped people, a Centre Director who would work part-time to co-ordinate its activities and supervise its administration, a volunteer receptionist and volunteer part-time librarian, and a Management Committee comprised of tenant representatives. The Management Committee was to set Centre policy and rules within the larger context of Library Board policy, and develop the use of the house for casual volunteer groups. The Co-ordinator was listed as being responsible to the Board.

The plan attached the following advantages to the proposed site at 322 Queens Avenue: a central location close to the Central Library, a street floor walk-in, close proximity to downtown, city hall, and bus routes, and a separate physical identity. The types of groups to be admitted to the Centre included those engaged city-wide in adult education, in social action and research, and in volunteer development. The total cost of operating the Centre for one year was estimated to be \$30,835, \$8,100 of which was expected to be recovered from tenant groups, leaving a net cost of \$22,725.

This plan was deficient in a number of major respects. The Board, in our view, should properly have queried these deficiencies, and redressed them prior to approving the plan. Among the basic weaknesses were four omissions:

17. D. Rand and M. Barber, "The London Urban Resource Centre", March 5, 1974, report to the Library Board.

- (1) there were no admission criteria for prospective tenants — these would have helped in decisions among competing applicants, and in barring entry to "undesirable, negative, or destructive" groups, the possible tenancy of which disturbed the Board;¹⁸
- (2) no conditions of tenancy were set out — some special obligations, such as attendance at Management Committee meetings, would have been a reasonable (and useful) exchange for subsidized rent and the use of the Centre's facilities;
- (3) there were no details concerning lines of authority and reporting procedures among the Board, the Co-ordinator, the Management Committee, and members of the Administration — these are a prerequisite of any serious organization;
- (4) there were no provisions for evaluating the experiment — without standards to meet and guidelines for monitoring and improving performance over time, a reasoned judgement as to the Centre's effectiveness would, as the Bureau has in fact found, be difficult to reach.

But the most problematical aspect of the plan for the Centre concerned what we may call its "sharing" objectives, and the relation between these and the provision of office space to community groups. The housing of such organizations was clearly the Centre's most innovative aspect. Its rationale seems to have had two parts. The first was the convenience of access rationale common to social welfare. This is simply that clients of several agencies which are under the same roof are better served than if the agencies are physically separated from one another. But this argument loses its force when one compares welfare services and the information services which the Resource Centre was to provide. The major difference is that transient information may be accumulated and disseminated by post and telephone much more readily than welfare services. That is, physical proximity between service sources and clients is not nearly as critical in the former as in the latter.

We may now consider the housing of groups from the perspective of the groups themselves. The implementation plan implied that the transient information lying idle in offices scattered about the city would be shared among its several collectors quite readily if their offices were in the same building. Physical proximity would also, according to the plan, predispose tenant groups to cooperate in solving community problems. To be effective in achieving these sharing objectives the Centre would have to provide a collective objective, a collective sense of identity, and a collective business practice for its diverse tenant groups. Unfortunately, this was not appreciated by the Centre's planners.

In sum, the plan failed to address many legitimate concerns about the Centre's operations, its management, its accountability, and the probable dynamics of its diverse groups when brought together. For its part, the Board was remiss in not requiring the Centre's planners to address these concerns before it allowed the project to go ahead.

18. LBEM, April 16, 1974.

IV The Three-Year Experiment Reviewed and Assessed

Our aim in this section is to make a reasoned recommendation regarding the Centre's post-experiment disposition. Our basic choice is between recommending its termination and recommending its continuation.

Our search for evidence on which to base this decision has covered a broad spectrum of written material, including Library Board and Management Committee minutes and reports, the Director's monthly reports, reports by the School of Library and Information Science at Western University, academic papers, and the Centre's internal files. We have spoken with many past and present participants in the Centre, including members of the Board, the Administration, the Centre's staff, and its tenant groups. We have also sought the views of knowledgeable and interested people from the community both in personal conversation and by questionnaire.

Our first step in assessing the Centre's performance was to try to construct a balanced account of the Centre's life. Inadequacies of the documentary evidence made this a futile task. For example, the minutes of the Management Committee are generally uneven, often unclear, and do not exist for some meetings (no minutes were kept during 1975). The Board's minutes tend to be excessively brief and, as the Board left the Centre to its own devices for the first year and a half, bear no informative mention of the Centre for long periods. The account of the Centre given by the Director's monthly reports is short on background information and overstates the Centre's good works; as essentially public relations pieces directed at the Board, these reports were a natural vehicle for the Centre to use to justify its existence. Finally in this regard, it should be noted that the Centre's objectives, open to interpretation on many basic points from the outset, changed greatly under the influence of its many participants and often adverse circumstances. The general implication of these shortcomings in documentation for our assessment of the Centre, is that it will have to be rather impressionistic. We shall have to judge the worth of general patterns of activity over periods of months, rather than of shorter series of specific projects and daily services.

For assessment purposes the Centre's three years of activity may be divided into two periods, September 1974 to January 1976, and February 1976 to August 1977.

The first period coincides with Mr. Dan Spinner's tenure as Co-ordinator. There seems to be a consensus among the people we contacted about the Centre, that under Mr. Spinner the Centre was more active and productive than at any other time. It is probable that the Centre's novelty bred an enthusiasm which helps to account for this. However, Mr. Spinner's energy, imaginativeness, and clear conception of the Centre's role — i.e., "a catalyst attempting to find out what information groups have, what information is needed, and how the two can be co-ordinated"¹⁹ — should be given their due.

In its first year the Centre was involved, often as initiator, in a wide range of projects. All of them seemed to fill an authentic need and to accord with

19. Cowan and Spinner, "The London Urban Resource Centre", p. 157.

the founding spirit of the Centre; a few were truly creative. The Club File Project, for instance, was mounted to avoid confusion and duplication by centralizing and updating data files on all of London's clubs and community groups. The purpose of another noteworthy project, the Community Computer Lab, was to give community groups ready access to information about other groups and services in London and elsewhere, through the computing facilities of Western University. The Community Indexing Project was set up to organize and catalogue the holdings of five community groups. The Community Data Bank project was mounted to computerize reports, surveys, and socio-demographic information held by the five participating social agencies, so the information could be shared among them. As a final example of the Centre's potential for contributing to the community, we will note that Western's School of Library and Information Science held a summer course at the Centre in 1975.

Also important, if less remarkable, were the Centre's information and referral, and meeting room services. According to the Centre's own statistical reports, in 1975 it responded to an average of 173 I&R queries per month and its meeting room was booked almost once a day on average.²⁰ Mention should also be made of the informal, and necessarily unrecordable informal exchanges of information between and among Centre staff, tenants, and its visitors. In the view of some observers these are the Centre's greatest asset.²¹

Having commended the Centre for its involvement in these activities, we must now add, regretfully, that many of its initiatives could not be sustained to completion, often for want of enough paid staff. For example, of the projects cited above as exemplary, the Community Data Bank is the only one which has any potential of consequence. Since the Resource Centre representative withdrew for want of time in the spring of 1976, it has evolved into the Agency Information Sharing Project and is on the verge of becoming operational. We must note here as well that the participation of the Centre's tenant groups in its activities was never more than marginal, even in the beginning. This is to say that the Centre's sharing objectives were not being realized.

Whatever the Centre accomplished in its first year seems to have been accomplished largely unassisted by the Library Board or Administration. While the Board seemed to follow a policy of "benign neglect", the Administration tended to deny the Centre both critical administrative support and sound direction. These factors, together with the lack of staff, led Mr. Spinner to make two requests of the Board in September 1975. First, he asked the Board to set up an advisory board for the Centre. His purposes were to improve communications between the Centre and the Board, to clarify the Centre's direction, and to evaluate the Centre's performance. His second request was that a full-time librarian be hired for the Centre.

The Board did not consider these requests until it was too late. In January 1976, in the wake of Mr. Spinner's resignation, it appointed two of its members to the Management Committee, and made Mrs. Barber interim Co-ordinator.²²

20. Since, as we have seen, bookkeeping has not been one of the Centre's strong-points, these early figures should be regarded as rough estimates. The figures for the period following August 1976, when a full-time receptionist began work, are generally more reliable; a few will be cited later.

21. See, e.g., Jan Kolaczek's paper in S.D. Neill (ed.), "The London Urban Resource Centre: Social Information, Organization and Communication", Unpublished course papers, School of Library and Information Science, University of Western Ontario, 1975.

22. LBEM, January 13, 1976.

In two papers written in the month of his departure,²³ Mr. Spinner described a Centre brought to a standstill by insufficient staff, conflicting conceptions of its purpose, property problems,²⁴ and by the lack of adequate support and direction from above. The tenant groups, he implied, had left the formation of Centre policy in his hands, subject to the constraints of the Administration. It seems clear from these papers that the novelty had worn off, that the leader had come to feel frustrated and powerless, and that the Centre's service to the community had fallen off badly. Many of the weaknesses of the implementation plan, it seems, had surfaced to undermine the Centre's early progress.

The period from February 1976 to August 1977 has been a period of relatively self-centred activity for the London Urban Resource Centre. Most of 1976 was taken up first with attempts to define the Centre's role, and later with an unsatisfactory evaluation of its performance.

The role-defining exercise began in earnest under the second Co-ordinator who began work officially on April 1st. Under him, the Centre's "most important single achievement", in the words of the Director's Report for September 1976, "was a statement of goals" which the Management Committee endorsed in July. This statement need not be discussed here, as it had little discernible effect on the Centre's activity. The resignation of the Co-ordinator, for personal reasons, at about the time it was adopted was a major factor.

Mr. David Thompson assumed his duties as the Centre's third Co-ordinator in August. A full-time receptionist, a position which had been recommended by a staffing review as a less expensive alternative to a full-time Co-ordinator,²⁵ also came on stream in August. The Centre staff and its tenant groups were preoccupied from September to December of 1976 with its evaluation. For the Co-ordinator the evaluation involved compiling statistics on the usage of the Centre's I&R, reference, printing, and meeting room services.²⁶ For the tenant groups it involved writing testimonial letters, at the request of the Board, stating "why being part of the Centre is valuable to themselves, the Board, and to the community". Collectively the letters indicated that the tenant groups had no strong collective sense of the Centre's objectives, and that the Centre's main attractions for them were its low rent and conveniences. From January to May of 1977 the inhabitants of the Centre were chiefly preoccupied with the Board's reactions to their evaluation.

Impressed by neither the statistics nor the letters, the outgoing Board resolved not to renew the Centre's lease at 322 Queens when it expired on August 31, 1977.²⁷ The incoming Board, six of whose nine members were new appointees, reopened the question of the Centre's future under pressure from the Management Committee. It struck an Ad Hoc Committee to (a) determine the applicability of the Centre concept to Library objectives and (b) consider other locations.²⁸

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23. D. Spinner, Letter to Management Committee members, January 6, 1976. D. Spinner, "Items In Progress and Items To Be Done", Internal Report, January 30, 1976.
24. Examples included roof leaks, security, and parking problems.
25. M. Barber and T. Normile, Internal Report to S. Beacock, February 5, 1976. Paradoxically, this recommendation was made after the authors had made an airtight case that the Co-ordinator's responsibilities could not be carried out by a part-time Co-ordinator.
26. D. Thompson, "Report on Four Facilities", December 15, 1976.
27. LBEM, February 16, 1977.
28. LBM (i.e., Minutes of the public portion of the Board meeting), March 16, 1977.

The Ad Hoc Committee concluded early that the Centre had become an administrative tangle and set about drawing up a statement of goals and a rationale for Library involvement in the Centre. These were reported to the Board on May 11, 1977, along with a number of recommendations. One was that an independent review of the Centre be done as quickly as possible; another was that the lease be extended to April 30, 1978, to accommodate the review.²⁹ When funds were obtained for the review the Board acted to extend the lease as recommended.

To be fair, the Centre was engaged in the period just discussed with activities other than self-definition, evaluation, and lobbying the Board. But these activities, the projects especially, are collectively much less interesting and significant than those of the early period. To illustrate, the Co-ordinator prepared a number of indexes, computer programmes, bibliographies, and resource lists. The Centre was temporary home to several outside groups working on grants. The demand for its I&R service and meeting room continued at about the same level as in the early period. Perhaps the most positive evidence of productivity is to be found in the dramatic increase in the number of low-cost copies printed for outside community groups on the Centre's gestetner machine acquired in November 1976. From 50 in its first month output climbed to an average of 6,700 per month in 1977. But, taken together, these activities do not impress the observer nearly as much as those of the Centre's first year.

In evaluating the Centre one is faced, then, with what appears to be one year, the first, for which there is much evidence of potential, and two years of defensive, indecisive soul-searching, during which the community services provided by the Centre tended to be quite unremarkable. On the basis of this potential demonstrated by the early Centre, together with what we feel is a genuine and pressing need for the services it might have provided in other circumstances, the Bureau feels that the Centre should be continued, although on very different terms.

The Resource Centre was needed, it was originally argued, to give the public better access to ephemeral information. The need for assorted community organizations and service agencies to pool their information and experiences with a view to more effectively addressing community problems, was also widely perceived. In its May 11th report to the Board, the Ad Hoc Committee again articulated these needs and lent its support to a resource centre which would respond to them. The Bureau also supports such a Centre. We would like as well to draw attention to another argument, namely, the importance of easy citizen access to a broad range of municipal information. Without such access, citizen participation in local decision-making can never be effective.

"Problems of availability, intelligibility and cost are involved in information acquisition. If one set of parties to the deliberations has the means for surmounting these problems, while another set of interested participants does not, a substantial subversion of the accepted mechanisms of community development exists. If community information resources are improved, however, the subversion can be eliminated or at least, ameliorated."³⁰

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29. "Report of The Ad Hoc Committee to Study The London Urban Resource Centre", May 11, 1977.
30. J.S. Kidd, "Determining Information Needs of Civic Organizations and Volunteer Groups", Ch. 3 in M. Kochen and J.C. Donohue (Eds.), Information For The Community, Chicago, 1976.

V Summary and Recommendations

In this review of the London Urban Resource Centre, we have followed the Centre's evolution from its several proposals in the London community through its implementation by the London Public Library Board, to the conclusion of its three-year trial period. We have seen how an innovative and potentially beneficial project, suffered from inadequate planning, a muddled execution, poor administration, and lack of direction and support. Of its three-year trial, only the first year offered enough activity, free from crippling problems, on which to base an assessment of the Centre's worth.

We concluded that the potential demonstrated by the Centre's first year activities, coupled with the irrefutable need for it, warrants its continuation, albeit in much-modified form. That it should continue as a project of the Public Library follows logically from our comments in the Introduction, and need not be argued further here. To minimize the influence of ghosts from the past, and to better reflect the primary focus of the re-constituted Centre we are about to propose, we call it the London Urban Information Centre.

Ten specific recommendations concerning the proposed Centre, and the reasons for them, are given below. All have their roots in a problem raised in preceding sections. The subjects of the recommendations, in order of presentation, are: the provision of office space, group composition, management and control, staffing, role overlap, resources, objectives, costs and funding.

- (1) The Bureau recommends that the provision of office space to community organizations be considered a low priority objective in the proposed London Urban Information Centre.

Evidence from questionnaire, interviews, Centre's files, and participation in the Centre as a tenant, lead us to the conclusion that the chief value of accommodation in the house to community groups seems to be its low cost and convenience. The extent of sharing between tenant groups, while mentioned by them as an advantage of tenancy, has not been great. There has been no regularized formal (e.g. meeting) or informal (e.g. coffee break, luncheon) programme for exchanging community information between and among tenants; no collective output or direction has been discernible; and Management Committee meetings have tended to be too loosely planned, executed and reported to warrant continuing respect. The departures from the Centre in July and September of the Central Volunteer Bureau and Big Brothers, partly out of dissatisfaction with the Centre's ethos, seems to tell strongly against the value of sharing.

- (2) The Bureau recommends that, should tenant groups be accommodated in the proposed Centre, a set of admission criteria be established at the outset and enforced. These criteria should give priority to active, city-wide, non-partisan, low-budget organizations co-operatively engaged in community development, and for which the Urban League may be taken as a model. The terms of admission should clearly specify the responsibilities of the groups to the Centre and to the Library Board.

The lack of a well-thought-out admission criteria contributed significantly to the Resource Centre's difficulty, throughout its three-year run, in finding a collective identity and course of action. Admission during the first year of the Centre was based essentially on expediency. If a group was interested, could pay the rent, and a space was available, it was admitted. A lesson regarding admission criteria may be drawn from one reason given by both the Central Volunteer Bureau and Big Brothers for their departures. This was the lack of business-like decorum in the Centre. Many of the Centre's tenant groups are staffed by volunteers. Their irregular, short, and unpredictable hours of work clearly hindered effective co-operation, sharing, and the projection of a professional image for the Centre. In the informal setting of a renovated house, the interests of professional, service-oriented organizations offering one-to-one service, and those of volunteer, social action groups, and their respective work habits, were bound to conflict.

- (3) The Bureau recommends that an Advisory Board be established to keep the Library Board informed of and involved in the direction and operation of the proposed London Urban Information Centre.

This Board should include two members of the Library Board, the Director of the Library, the Co-ordinator of the Information Centre, the Community Relations Consultant of the Library, two interested and informed members of the community and such other members as the Library Board determines. The Advisory Board should be responsible and should report directly to the Library Board. Once the Centre is firmly established, the Library Board may see fit to adopt a more conventional reporting structure and procedure.

A major point in connection with the implementation plan's treatment of the Resource Centre's organization was that it was entirely inadequate from the standpoints of accountability and responsibility. Virtually no remedial action has been taken on these matters since it opened and this, despite many signs that it was direly needed. This recommendation, then, seems an obvious one.

- (4) The Bureau recommends that the proposed Centre not be undertaken without a set of by-laws.

The terms of such a set of by-laws are beyond the scope of this review. However, the Bureau offers the following suggestion on the assumption that the London Urban Information Centre will continue to be an integral part of the London Public Library.

The Co-ordinator of the Resource Centre now reports to the Director and the Board through the Co-ordinator of Central Library Services. The Bureau suggests that the Community Relations Consultant is a more appropriate link between the Co-ordinator of the proposed Information Centre and the Director of the Library. Our rationale follows.

The Community Relations Consultant is responsible for publicizing the Library system's services and programmes, and for monitoring and identifying the community's needs for these programmes and services. Included in these programmes are adult education programmes (lectures, films, workshops) which the Community Relations Department administers. The Library's printing service is also a responsibility of this department. Although Community Relations does not collect and disseminate the sort of information which comes within the Resource Centre's domain, the compatibility between their two services seems evident.

Specifically, the Urban Information Centre could be a valuable instrument for assisting the Consultant in anticipating Library-related information needs. A close working relationship between the Centre and Community Relations could enhance the delivery of low-cost printing services to deserving community groups. The adult education mandate of Community Relations seems very compatible with the informational thrust of an urban resource centre. Moreover, that mandate might be usefully widened to include the promotion, in the secondary and post-secondary school system, of the study of urban problems and the use of the urban resources of the proposed Centre. Finally, the Community Relations Department's publicity capability, could be directed to clarifying and raising the Centre's public image.

- (5) The Bureau recommends that the minimum staff requirements for the London Urban Information Centre be one full-time secretary and one full-time Co-ordinator; so strong is this requirement that the Centre should not be contemplated if it cannot be met.

The Bureau recommends further that the Co-ordinator be qualified, by training or experience (or both), as a librarian and a community or social worker, and that he/she have some familiarity with London's networks of social services and community information.

These recommendations stem from the experience of the Centre since August, 1976, when a full-time receptionist began work. By virtue of the simple fact that the receptionist position was full-time and the Co-ordinator's part-time, the receptionist assumed the role of the Co-ordinator in his absence. The Co-ordinator was relegated to the position of reporting to the receptionist to catch up on the happenings around the Centre. Among other possible consequences, the situation increased the potential of misunderstandings.

- (6) The Bureau recommends that the feasibility of incorporating Information London in the proposed Centre be seriously studied.

The question of compatibility and overlap with Information London, the agency whose primary mandate is information and referral for individuals, arose early in the Resource Centre's history. In the Centre's documents one finds numerous allusions to the advisability of amalgamating the two services. Information London's directories, its survey of alderman-citizen relations and its landlord-tenant handbook seem, on the face of it, to be the sort of initiatives in which the Resource Centre should be directly involved. Additionally, Information London is in an unparalleled position to identify community information needs.

It is the Bureau's opinion that the public library is both an appropriate and a suitable setting for an informational and referral service. For support, the Information Brampton service is a good example. It is operated and housed within the City Centre branch of the Brampton Public Library. A thorough review of this service has recently been completed by Pat Seymour.³¹ In a lengthy discussion, she affirms the appropriateness and suitability of I&R as a service of the Brampton Public Library. The Information Centre, Information London, and the London Public Library would, we feel, all benefit greatly from union.

- (7) The Bureau recommends that a determined effort be made to provide a low-cost and preferably free meeting room in the proposed Centre; and that this Centre continue to provide the same level of printing services, at cost, to low-budget community organizations.

We feel that the past demand for these facilities warrants their continued provision by the Centre. The printing service appears to be the less dispensable. Its use has been increasing, perhaps in response to the closing of a local corporation's printing department which had given many free services to some community groups.

- (8) The Bureau recommends that the mandate of the London Urban Information Centre include the establishment of a municipal documents collection.

The need for such a collection is indisputable. It has been recognized and documented recently by Mr. Albert Stray, now the Assistant Librarian at Crouch.³² More recently a Library Committee on Municipal Government Publications has concluded in favour of such a collection.³³

- (9) The Bureau recommends that the following objectives be tentatively accepted for the London Urban Information Centre, the order of presentation reflecting their priorities, the first-mentioned being the highest priority and so on:

1. To act as an information, referral and contact Centre for:
 - (a) individuals and organizations engaged in (i) city-wide and neighbourhood research; and (ii) community development programmes designed to improve the quality of life in the community through self-help, outside technical and financial assistance, and through the integration of specialist services;

31. "Review of Information Brampton", Staff Report, May 24, 1977.

32. "Need and Location of Municipal Reference Library: London, Ontario", in Neill (ed.) "The London Urban Resource Centre", 1975.

33. See the Committee's report to the Director of February, 1976.

- (b) individuals requiring information for coping with problems of daily life.
2. To provide a special library of urban reference materials.
 3. To provide printing services "at cost", and free meeting space, to individuals and groups engaged in community development programmes on low budgets.
 4. To identify information needs in the London community, and to serve such needs, first, by referring them to existing institutions within whose mandate they seem to fall and, if this is not possible, by serving them itself within the constraints of its resources and priorities.
 5. To provide office space for community organizations.

Although it wasn't listed as an objective in the implementation plan, no other objective seems to have been pursued as persistently, at least during the past two years, as that of deciding what the Centre's objectives ought to be. The efforts of the Ad Hoc Committee To Study The London Urban Resource Centre, which culminated in its "Statement of Purpose and Objectives" of May 11, 1977, seem to have been the most fruitful. The objectives we have just presented depart from the Committee's "Statement" and incorporate our previous observations and conclusions.

(10) We offer here, to comply with the terms of reference for the review, some suggestions regarding the Centre's costs and its funding. Over its life, the Centre and the Library proper have made many applications for outside funding. Although none were successful, most of the prospective granting agents endorsed the concept of the Centre and wished it well. We have two modest suggestions for outside funding. The first is that Family and Children's Services be asked to participate in the Information Centre in roughly the same way as they have participated in Crouch, that is by paying all or part of the wages of its Co-ordinator (see p. 3 above). The second suggestion is that those needy community groups who remain uncovered by the United Way umbrella, make a united appeal to several local corporations. It is possible that the latter would prefer to make one annual contribution to such a consortium, housed perhaps in an office complex, rather than the piecemeal contributions some corporations have been making to individual groups.

The operating expenses of the Centre to the Library for 1975 and 1976 were \$25,049 and \$26,176 respectively. These amounts represent about eight-tenths of one per cent of the Library's total expenditures for those years. It seems clear that the Library Board did not get the return from its investment in the Centre that it would have, had it taken its responsibility for the Centre more seriously. The Bureau is quite aware of the current squeeze on all public expenditures. We believe, however, that for roughly the same outlay relative to its total budget,

with certain changes the Library Board can mount the Centre we have proposed. In anticipation of the Art Gallery's departure from the Central Library to new premises, the Board might make room for the Centre in that building. For the reasons noted by the Library's Committee on Municipal Government Publications, we suggest the Children's Library as the most preferable site.³⁴

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34. The Children's Library, although part of the Central Library building, is physically separated from other reference services. It has a separate off-street access, and is adjacent to several meeting rooms.

CORPORATE

A. E. Ames & Co. Ltd.
Bank of Montreal
Bank of Nova Scotia
Bell Canada
Board of Trade, Metro Toronto
Bovis Corporation Ltd.
Bramalea Consolidated Development
Brascan Limited
Cadillac Fairview Limited
Canada Malting Co. Ltd.
Canada Packers Foundation
Canada Permanent Trust Co.
Canadian Freehold Properties Ltd.
Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce
Canadian National Railways
Canadian Pacific Limited
Commonwealth Holiday Inns of Canada Limited
Confederation Life
The Consumers' Gas Co.
Crown Life Insurance Co.
Dofasco Ltd.
Dominion of Canada General Insurance
Dominion Securities Corp. Ltd.
Donlee Manufacturing Ind. Ltd.
T. Eaton Co.
Gilbey Canada Ltd.
Group R
GSW Limited
Guaranty Trust Co. of Canada
Gulf Realty Co. Ltd.
I.B.M. Canada
The Imperial Life Assurance Co. of Canada
Imperial Oil Ltd.
INCO Ltd.
Independent Order of Foresters
Jackman Foundation
Kodak Canada Ltd.

PROFESSIONAL

Armstrong & Molesworth
Arthur Andersen & Company
Bird & Hale Ltd.
Blaney, Pasternak, Smela and Watson
John Bousfield Associates
Mary Collins Consultants Ltd.
Currie, Coopers & Lybrand Ltd.
Development Engineering (London) Ltd.
A. J. Diamond Associates
Dilworth, Secord, Meagher & Assoc.
Goodman and Carr
Govan, Kaminker, Architects and Planners
Eric Hardy Consulting Ltd.
I.B.I. Group

GOVERNMENTAL

Burlington
Reg. Mun. of Durham
Borough of East York
Borough of Etobicoke
Township of Gloucester
Reg. Mun. of Hamilton-Wentworth
Kingston
London
Metropolitan Toronto
Ministry of State for Urban Affairs
Ministry of T.E.I.G.A.
Mississauga
Reg. Mun. of Niagara

LABOUR

Ontario Federation of Labour
Sudbury and District Labour Council
Labour Council of Metropolitan Toronto

Koffler Stores Ltd.
John Labatt Ltd.
A. E. LePage Ltd.
Lever Brothers Ltd.
Maclean-Hunter Publishing Co. Ltd.
Manufacturers Life Insurance Co.
Maple Leaf Mills Limited
Marathon Realty Company Ltd.
L. J. McGuinness and Co. Ltd.
Russell J. Morrison
Noranda
Northern and Central Gas Corp.
Ostrandens Jewellers
Parking Authority of Toronto
Proctor and Gamble of Canada Ltd.
Redpath Industries
The Royal Bank of Canada
Royal Insurance Company
Royal Trust Co.
Samuel Son & Co. Ltd.
Shell Canada Ltd.
Sheraton Centre
Robert Simpson Co.
Simpsons Sears Ltd.
Steel Co. of Canada
Sunoco Inc.
The Toronto-Dominion Bank
Toronto Star Ltd.
TransCanada Pipe Lines Ltd.
Turner and Porter Funeral Directors Ltd.
Union Carbide Canada Ltd.
Victoria & Grey Trust
Weber Reproductions Ltd.
George Weston Ltd.
Wood Gundy Limited
F. W. Woolworth Limited
Y & R Properties Limited

Jarrett, Goold & Elliott
Mackie & Slavik
Marshall Macklin and Monaghan
Mathers & Haldenby Architects
Murray V. Jones and Associates
Norman Pearson, Planning Consultant
Osler, Hoskin and Harcourt
Peat, Marwick and Partners
Price Waterhouse & Co.
Proctor and Redfern Group
P. S. Ross & Partners
Thorne, Riddell & Co.
Toronto Real Estate Board
Weir and Foulds
Woods, Gordon & Co.

Edmonton City Parks and Recreation
Borough of North York
Oakville
Ottawa
Reg. Mun. of Ottawa/Carleton
Reg. Mun. of Peel
Richmond Hill
St. Catharines
Sudbury
Toronto
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