

More library users can now borrow a pass and museum-hop

All 99 branches in Toronto to offer program that gives free access to key cultural institutions

Feb 20, 2009 04:30 AM

DONOVAN VINCENT

CITY HALL BUREAU

A pilot project in which 32 Toronto libraries lend families free passes to cultural institutions like the Art Gallery of Ontario is being expanded to all 99 branches.

As of March 7, a limited number of Sun Life Financial museum and arts passes will be available to anyone with a Toronto library card.

The pass provides full admission to a family of up to two adults and five children to institutions such as the AGO, Bata Shoe Museum, Black Creek Pioneer Village, Casa Loma and the Museum of Inuit Art.

The program began in July 2007, offering passes to library-card holders in branches serving "priority communities," areas challenged by poverty and crime.

The expanded program was launched yesterday at the AGO, at an event that included the mayor, city and library officials, and representatives of Sun Life and the cultural venues.

The idea was inspired by a Chicago public library program offered with the support of the Kraft Foundation, called the Great Kids museum passport.

The Toronto passes are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

Matthew Church, chair of the Toronto Public Library board, said that last year passes were lent out more than 21,000 times, benefiting as many as 60,000 residents. In March, the program will expand to a potential 200,000 passes per year, offering access to more than 500,000 people.

Councillor Paul Ainslie, a library board member, said the pass program has operated in the Kingston-Galloway community, a priority neighbourhood in his ward, since 2007.

"I really like the program. It provides underprivileged children and low-income families exposure to cultural institutions they wouldn't otherwise see," Ainslie said.

Expanding it across the city, especially during troubled times, means even more people get the chance to visit these attractions, he added.

For more information, call 416-393-7131 or visit torontopubliclibrary.ca and click on "library news."