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Term: Winter 2023

<div align="center">The Spadina Road Library: Hazards and Havens</div>

Introduction

10 Spadina Road is a small, single-level public library located in Toronto's Annex neighborhood near the intersection of Bloor Street West and Spadina Avenue. The library sits directly across from Spadina subway station and is surrounded by residential streets featuring single family homes, duplexes, and mid-rise apartment buildings. The library opened in 1977 in partnership with the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto located next door, for the purpose of serving neighborhood residents and housing a sacred collection of Indigenous literature and historical artifacts (TPL, 2023).

Our interest in this branch stems from the significant role the Toronto Public Library system plays as social service providers. The branch offers a variety of community programming for different demographics. This includes children's activities, one-on-one tech lessons for seniors, "English Conversation Circles" for English-language learners, and, of course, book clubs. While these offerings are traditional in Toronto Public Libraries, we are more concerned about how this branch engages with homeless, precariously housed, and vulnerable populations.

The City of Toronto is in the midst of a homeless crisis, in part due to the prolonged retrenchment of social services and rising cost of living (Walks, 2020). Scholars point to decades of multi-scalar government reshuffling and downloading of social service responsibilities, which has contributed to the neglectful deterioration of Toronto's shelter systems, public housing stock and mental health institutions (Dej & Ecker, 2018; Filion 2001; Gaetz et al., 2014). The on-going Covid-19 pandemic has intensified the problem, with over 80 homeless encampments identified across the city in 2020, as well as substantial increases in shelter system inflows and violent incidents within them (Toronto Foundation, 2021). Toronto area food banks have also reached their "breaking point," recording an 82% surge in users compared to the average monthly visitor count in 2019 (Harrison, 2023).

Despite a myriad of literature linking public-sector retrenchment with the state of urban poverty in the Toronto CMA (Census Metropolitan Area), there is little research discussing the role Toronto public libraries play on the frontlines of the homeless crisis. Our curiosity stems from (casually/in a non-research capacity) observing visible homelessness both inside and proximate to the Spadina Road branch over the course of several months. We asked ourselves, how is the library used by the homeless or precariously housed? To what extent does the library

interact with other local spaces and organizations that provide outreach and harm-reduction services? And, how successful is the library at offering harm-reduction and social assistance services compared to other neighborhood organizations?

This paper seeks to answer these questions and argues that the Spadina Road library takes on a role as a place of refuge for homeless and precariously housed individuals. We discovered that neighborhood socio-spatial dynamics necessitate their supplementary role, in which certain spaces in the Annex either subtly exclude or overtly banish vulnerable populations from their properties. We explain that the library is one of the only free and accessible spaces in the neighbourhood welcoming and catering to at-risk populations. And while the Spadina library lacks the capacity to supply robust harm-reduction services, it nonetheless solidifies its identity as an essential service capable of more than its role as *Mahsinahhekahnikahmik* or "the lodge or place of the book." The goal of this paper is twofold. For one, we hope to inspire more awareness of the valuable contributions provided by Toronto's public libraries, and the pivotal role they play in crisis management and outreach. Two, we hope to challenge policy makers into establishing coordinated partnerships between the city's library system and social service agencies and utilize libraries as part of a wraparound support framework that better addresses the needs of vulnerable and homeless populations.

Libraries as safe spaces: A literary review

Public libraries have long served as essential community hubs, providing free access to information, resources, and various services. Toronto public libraries are no exception to this, whose mission is to "provide free and equitable access to services which meet the changing needs of Torontonians" (TPL, 2023). Below lists the Toronto Public Library's (TPL) core values:

Values

1. Equity: Accessibility, respect and fairness.

2. Diversity: Valuing individual needs, experiences and differences.

3. Intellectual Freedom: Guaranteeing and facilitating the free exchange of information and ideas in a democratic society, protecting intellectual freedom and respecting individuals' rights to privacy and choice.

4. Innovation: Encouraging creativity, experimentation and the generation of ideas.
5. Inclusion: Welcoming participation in decision making and service development by residents and communities.
5. Integrity: Open, transparent and honest in all our dealings.

6. Accountability: Taking responsibility for our actions and the services we provide.
7. Service Orientation: Providing excellent, responsive services.

(Source: TPL, 2023)

The Toronto Public Library (TPL) system is aware of its use by multiple vulnerable groups and has policies designed to support them in their library use. Though their traditional "full-service" library membership requires registering a permanent address, TPL also has "access" membership which does not require an address and is listed as being for "customers who are experiencing homelessness or who are precariously housed and unable to provide permanent address identification" (TPL, 2023). This membership has a lower physical borrowing limit but otherwise provides full access to digital and in-person library services (TPL, 2023). The library also references the needs of vulnerable populations in its "Inclusive Washrooms" policy, which states that washrooms must be built or renovated to "facilitate equity, inclusivity, and accessibility", including "mounting locked containers for disposal of sharp objects" (TPL, 2023). Research has shown that substance use is higher among homeless Torontonians than the general population, and is a large risk factor for prolonging homelessness (Grinman et al., 2010). All this said, you do not need a library membership to enter the buildings, read materials in the library, use the 15-minute express computers, or use the washrooms. There is no barrier of entry for those experiencing homelessness.

There has been some limited research done on homelessness in the Toronto Public Library system. It has been demonstrated that people experiencing homelessness in Toronto commonly use the TPL system (Walsh, 2018). However, this use can be stigmatized. In the 2018 paper "Public library and private space: Homeless queer youth navigating information access and identity in Toronto", author Benjamin Walsh studied library usage among homeless LGBTQ youth in Toronto. This group is described as using the TPL system to "seek information and shelter" (Walsh, 2018). However, many of the youth interviewed preferred spending time in private spaces such as Apple stores and academic libraries, which they felt allowed them to "pass" more easily as not homeless. As Walsh observed, "there is a perception that public

libraries are where the homeless go", and for many, public libraries carry stigma and "signify failure" to pass as a housed person (Walsh, 2018).

Unfortunately, not much scholarship has been done on libraries and homelessness in the Canadian context—let alone on Toronto specifically. A literature review of studies on homelessness in libraries found that between 2002 and 2022 there were only 14 studies that included "the input of people experiencing homelessness", only one of which was in Canada (Forrest, 2022).

However, non-Toronto based research suggests that public libraries have increasingly become safe spaces for homeless populations. A case study on the San Diego Public Library's (SDPL) Central Library shared that "dozens of patrons with housing instability eagerly line up waiting for the library to open each morning," while library staff estimated that nearly 80% of its users are precariously housed (Urada et al., 2020, p.2). Non-electronic resources aside (i.e., books, maps, brochures), a crucial aspect drawing homeless populations to libraries is free access to computers and the internet. In today's digital age, access to technology is often essential for securing housing and employment, as well as for obtaining information about available social services. Likewise, libraries offer an array of educational materials, empowering homeless patrons to make informed decisions and gain new skills that can transition them into more stable living arrangements (Muggleton, 2013; Muggleton & Ruthven, 2012).

Public libraries often host a variety of programs specializing in front-line outreach and crisis management, sometimes through "library-social work partnerships with nonprofits," in which experienced outreach workers work one-on-one with library patrons requiring access to essential services and resources (Zettervall & Nienow, 2017, p.73). While we did not find evidence of such partnerships in Spadina Road, the librarian stated that she actively engages in crisis management with homelessness and vulnerable patrons, despite not possessing an educational background in social work or crisis management. Nevertheless, locating crisis management and outreach inside the library, even when performed at an 'informal' level, demonstrates the ways in which libraries frame themselves as safe spaces.

Hersberger (2002) suggests that homeless and precariously housed populations often lack secure and stable places to rest during the day. They argue that public libraries provide a safe, climate-controlled environment that offers respite from extreme weather conditions, as well as a quiet and comfortable space to relax, read and decompress. Furthermore, many libraries also have policies in place to ensure that all patrons, regardless of their housing status, are treated with respect and dignity. A study by Geisler (2017) asked library staff to describe their approach in addressing the challenges posed by homeless patrons, particularly complaints about inadequate personal hygiene and odors, sleeping, and improper attire. Staff across 8

libraries expressed similar intentions to follow their library's overarching mission: providing equitable service to all patrons regardless of their socio-economic situation, doing so without shame and discrimination. This is important because homeless individuals often experience a profound sense of isolation, in part due to the deeply entrenched stigmatization and "criminalization" of homelessness (Belcher & DeForge, 2012). By offering a space where homeless or vulnerable patrons can interact with others, engage in conversation, and form relationships with library staff members, libraries help counteract the social exclusion accompanying urban poverty, and, as we see in the case of the Spadina Road library, promote inclusion and offer emotional support (Gehner, 2010).

Methodology

Methodology and reflections on ethnography

This paper draws on analysis from several ethnographic research methods including participant observation 'field notes,' as well as alternative cartographical exercises such as mapping, audio-visual 'soundscape' recordings and photography. A large portion of our findings study research is based on three semistructured interviews with three informants: a TTC (Toronto Transit Commission) employee who works the overnight shift at Spadina Station, an administrator at Walmer Road Baptist Church, and a librarian at the Spadina Road Library.

(I) Participant Observation

To get a good sense of library operations, guest patterns and atmosphere, we visited the space at different times of day, sometimes together and sometimes on our own. We tried to spend at least 30 minutes observing the environment each time, walking through the aisles, sitting near the computers, reading near the front desk and other patrons. We also spent time outside the space, paying close and noting what we saw, heard, smelled, and experienced in general, trying hard not to appear like we were observing and recording guest behavior. Luckily, we were never stopped and questioned about what we were doing, however we were involved in a violent incident (explained below) on one of our explorations that raised questions about our safety in the library and how they deal with extraordinary interpersonal situations.

(II) Alternative cartographies: Mapping, photography, soundscapes

Following an initial site exploration and field note evaluation, we returned to the library with a camera and audio recorder. Our goal was to sonically and visually frame the complex socio-spatial relationships we documented in our field notes. Despite being an underappreciated ethnographic exercise in mainstream academia, alternative

cartographies, especially photography and soundscapes, can capture an emotive side of social phenomena that may be difficult to convey in writing (Harper, 2002). Visual artist Dona Schwartz describes the power of visual ethnography:

> In making the case for making pictures I am suggesting that pictures can offer us ideas and irreducible experience that cannot be restated or translated into linguistic terms, Articulations produced through photographs can offer us insights based on spatial and composition arrangements, they can convey moods and emotions. They generate novel ideas and inferences…. In the sciences, the idea of "productive ambiguity" with multiple readings giving rise to innovations that would have been unimagined had not a plurality of readings been possible. (Prosser, 2011, p.481)

We took nearly 100 photographs of the library from multiple vantage points. In the interior, we captured the front desk and entry way, the stacks, computer area and the communal worktables. We also photographed the exterior, capturing the walkway, sitting areas, neighboring buildings, trees and wildlife, anything we thought to encompass the library's property. For our soundscape, we used our smartphones to record the same areas we photographed. However, we did not record and shoot at the same time, and thus several photographs and sound clips are not related to each other.

Due to the large amount of raw data, we selected only the photos and audio we determined appropriate analysis (ie not blurry or too muffled). Our photos reflect the different types of library usage, such as patrons reading, writing, speaking with librarians, as well as visibly homeless patrons resting, using the computers and storing their belongings.

For the soundscape, we created a narrative encapsulating a library experience from the 'point-of-view' of someone walking in. We used a digital audio workstation, Logic Pro X, enabling us to selectively sample and arrange specific audio files catering to our desired narrative. Thus, while the soundscape splices together experiences across various times and locations within the library, sampling techniques allowed us to include valuable data in a 3-minute clip.

Generalizability:

It is important to note that our photographs and soundscape offer limited context and do not fully capture the complexities of the sociological phenomena we wish to illustrate. Like our fieldnotes, we cannot be certain that what we capture comprehensively explains the situation, especially when we are portraying vulnerable

populations. Our data, while poignant and thought provoking, must be analyzed with caution as it does convey what our subjects were thinking about at that time, nor does it describe the way they describe their socio-economic circumstance. As such, our data points to sensationalizing urban poverty, that we are focusing too much on the context of that particular moment, instead of capturing the resiliency and agency of vulnerable or marginalized library patrons. Perhaps these photos and sounds are more useful at complementing our research, rather than an independent source of data.

(III) Interviews

We decided to interview each subject in a semi-structured fashion to give them an opportunity to express themselves. To do this efficiently, we created fixed questions with open responses and sequenced them to guide the narrative towards how they engage with vulnerable populations and their relationship to the Spadina branch library. While we were aware of the limitations of this approach, see (Weiss, 1995), this method proved to be most feasible given our time constraints. Prior to each interview, we rehearsed our scripts and divided the questions amongst ourselves so that one of us could take notes while the other gave their undivided attention to the interviewee. We also chose this route because we did not receive consent to record our interview, which would have eliminated the need for on-the-spot note taking. Given the limited time we had with our subjects, this method proved effective at generating rapport with our subjects, because at least one of us had the opportunity to 'connect' with them while the other was taking notes. The benefit of this was that we were able to make script revisions on the fly and skip some of our 'warm up' questions designed to help subjects feel relaxed and comfortable with us (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Wilkerson, 2007).

Prior to the interviews, we strategically coded the data to locate and establish patterns, recurring themes and relationships. Annotations were conceptualized and applied mostly through deductive/positivist logics. As we already established an a priori theory of our case study through our field work observations, photography and neighborhood exploration, namely that the library is a safe space for vulnerable populations, it was difficult for us to not have preconceived theories as we examined the data. Likewise, our protocols are grounded in this theory, as many of our questions are designed to confirm whether the library serves as a 'haven' for the vulnerable. In other words, our data tests our existing theory and questions about the library, and we analyzed the data to confirm this (Mehta, 2023).

Reflections on Methodology

1.1 Violent Incident Anecdote (Jackson)

I walked into the library about 40 minutes before closing. There was a security guard at the door and the librarians were quick to greet me and see if I needed assistance. While the atmosphere felt a bit tense, there were a few children with adults in the room, so I did not think much about it.

I was walking around, checking out the books, and noticed a person sitting in one of the chairs. I walked past them and noticed them get up carrying a large textbook. They were walking quickly behind me with the book raised over their head with the intention of whacking me over my head. Luckily, because I was observing my surroundings, I was able to quickly move out of their reach without making a scene. I simply walked casually towards the exit, paid goodbye to the security guard and librarians (with a smile) and left. As I was leaving, I noticed the guard and librarians were on high alert and likely saw the event transpire.

While this was a traumatic experience for myself, I am more concerned about the children and guardian who almost certainly saw this event transpire and had been in the room with this person for quite some time. Yes, there was a security guard at the door and three librarians visible in the space, but how do they prevent events like these from escalating or impacting other library guests? I decided not to intervene or confront the person, though perhaps being physically fit allowed me to escape harm, but what about someone not in my position? What protocols do they have in place for a situation like this, so the library remains a safe space for the public? And why/how often are these events occurring? What social forces contributed to my individual experience? To what extent did my social location or positionality impact this incident?

There were pros and cons to this encounter. On the one hand, I became concerned with introducing researcher bias to the project, especially because we were concerned with vulnerable populations who are deeply stigmatized. I did not want my trauma or frustrations towards this chance encounter to cloud my judgment or transfer onto Isobel. Initially, it was difficult to negotiate feelings of empathy and anger. Yes, I strongly believe we have an obligation to do everything we can to minimize urban poverty, alleviate chronic mental health conditions and treat our neighbors equitably, but I also believe that a just and equitable urban landscape is a capstone to public safety.

On the other hand, the experience reminded me of the importance of reflection and reflexivity in qualitative research. Being reflexive made me more aware of my assumptions and positionality influencing our research processes and interpretation of data. Rather than bury this experience, I decided to embrace it as an opportunity to use "personal revelation not as an end in itself, but as a springboard for interpretations and more general insight' (Finlay, 2002, p. 215). Described by Finlay as "Reflexivity as introspection," I used this traumatic experience to guide our research, seeking a better

understanding of how library employees manage the different types of people in space, especially those who present a safety and security risk. Rather than "wallowing in subjectivity," (p.215) or as Woolgar (1988) puts it "benign introspection," (p.22) I used my traumatic experience as de facto data, linking my experience to the broader social context with which the library operates. Clearly, there are people experiencing homelessness and mental health illnesses present in the library and shaping the way it operates. While my experience was worrisome, I saw it more as substantiation and a justification for our case study.

1.2 Limitations

   Our research was limited by our positionality, research focus, time constraints, and the inherent limits of our methods.

   Our positionality as University of Toronto students both limited and enhanced the data we were able to collect. U of T is a local university located near all three of our interview sites: Spadina Subway Station, Walmer Road Baptist Church, and the Spadina Road library. We believe familiarity with the university—both its good academic reputation and its physical spaces—enhanced our ability to obtain and conduct interviews. We made sure to represent ourselves as students learning the fundamentals of qualitative research, and that our central goal is familiarizing ourselves with ethnographic research tools not the actual data we collect. While this seems counterintuitive, we wanted to avoid being perceived as media professionals seeking a specific narrative. Instead, our goal was to be as inconspicuous as possible, believing that this would help interviewees feel more at ease sharing their personal experiences.

   When Jackson approached TTC workers about an interview, many questioned our motives due to the recent news stories about violence on the TTC. Nobody from the TTC wanted negative media attention. However, he was able to secure an interview with "Gloria" by specifying that we are U of T students. Fortunately, this approach led our informant, Gloria, to trust us and welcome us behind the operator booth to conduct the interview. Our status as U of T students similarly helped in obtaining an interview with the Director of Administration for the Walmer Road Baptist Church. When Isobel called the church's phone number, she discovered that another U of T student had also recently called to set up an interview. This student was unrelated to our study or class, but the incident meant our interviewee was already familiar with the student process of obtaining interviews for classes.

   However, our positionality also limited our research. As students of URB 342, we did not have permission to interview vulnerable populations, which includes people experiencing homelessness. This means our research unfortunately cannot include the perspectives of the group which it concerns most. In the future, we would like an

opportunity to interview vulnerable library patrons to get a better understanding of how they use the library and their thoughts on its role in their lives.

Our photography—and to some extent field notes—were limited by our narrative focus and preconceived notions. For example, we did not photograph any of the "Baby Time" programs because we deemed this irrelevant to our research. We also used previous experience and likely stereotypes to assume if a patron was experiencing homelessness. Thus, we may have misidentified homelessness and missed less visible housing precarity.

We were also limited by time constraints. Even if we had permission, we did not have time to research urban poverty in an ethical and responsible way. We did not want to sensationalize or "exoticize" urban poverty, in which we inadvertently victimize vulnerable populations by focusing too much on the extreme aspects of poverty while ignoring their agency and resiliency (Small, 2015). More research on ethical representations of poverty is needed before we embark on interview processes.

Results & Analysis

1.1 "Hazards and Havens": Neighborhood socio-spatial dynamics shaping the Spadina Road Library

The Spadina Road Library sits just north of the intersection of Spadina Avenue and Bloor Street West in the Annex neighborhood. From a purely quantitative perspective, the Annex appears to be a wealthy neighborhood. According to their 2016 neighborhood census profile, 28% of families belong in the top income decile compared to the city's average of 13%. Median annual income for full-time workers in the Annex is significantly greater than the Toronto average, with residents earning $66,359 compared to $55,246. Moreover, the census indicates that residents are more employed and more educated than the rest of the city. The Annex has a 66% employment rate relative to the city's 59%, while 70% of the neighborhood has completed tertiary education compared to just 44% in Toronto (City of Toronto, 2016).

For someone who has never visited the Annex, they might assume that residents occupy "high-skilled" jobs that compensate well. Below average rates of unemployment and low levels of unsuitable housing (City of Toronto, 2016) might mean that residents do not experience food insecurity or housing precarity. Perhaps there is minimal poverty in the neighborhood, and the built environment is well maintained with manicured gardens and attractive green space.

We explored a couple blocks' radius around the library to help us understand and contextualize this data. We observed objects and spaces confirming its high-income demographic, such as expensive cars, large, single-family homes, private schools, multiple forms of public transit. We saw the different restaurants, parks,

religious centers and TTC buildings shown on maps, including Tim Hortons, the Walmer Road Baptist Church, Paul Martel Park, and three Spadina station entrances.

As we walked through the area, we quickly realized the limitations of our initial research. While census profiles and geographical maps document who or what comprise the neighborhood, they often fail to capture the complex socio-spatial relationships that develop within them. We noticed that the neighborhood is not exclusively populated by census "residents," and that seemingly mono-functional objects and spaces carry multiple meanings depending on who engages them. More broadly, we recognized that a person's social location influences how they navigate the built form, especially for people who are homeless, visibly poor or precariously housed. In the Annex, private and public spaces develop into "havens" or "hazards," sometimes functioning as a place for temporary refuge or a space of hostile exclusion. Paradoxically, these spaces can be both havens and hazards; welcoming some while simultaneously constraining others.

We developed these typologies to demonstrate how the built environment communicates attitudes towards homelessness or vulnerability. Attitudes can be subtle and overt, and be expressed by individuals and institutions. Havens are spaces that are free of charge to enter, are temperature controlled, provide free wifi, public restrooms, free food, and places to temporarily rest or sleep. Hazards are more exclusive spaces, ones that require entry fees or are restricted to public access. They might be locked, fenced in, or guarded by police and security. They have "no loitering" and "no trespassing" signs, surveillance cameras, and a built form that prohibits or discourages resting or sleeping in place.

1.2 Mapping Havens and Hazards: What the built environment communicates about homelessness.

We identified two spaces in the area that serve as havens for precariously housed or homeless individuals. For example, the Walmer Road Baptist Church has a community fridge and food bank garden, providing free food for individuals experiencing food insecurity. In a neighborhood that is predominately high-income, the church recognizes that low-income and vulnerable people pass through, and that they should have access to nourishment regardless of whether they live in the neighborhood. Similarly, the Spadina Road Library branch has services that can provide haven to those experiencing homelessness. This includes free entry, free wifi, public bathrooms, and access to computers.

However, many spaces in the neighborhood mix havens with hazards, with some being very hostile. This is true of both outdoors and indoors, public and private owned. In terms of the outdoor landscape, most benches on city sidewalks have armrests in their middle. On the surface, arm rests are innocuous and helpful; they

appear to make sitting more ergonomic. However, they are impossible to lie down on. This is not unintentional but a product of "defensive design" also known as hostile architecture (Pelley, 2019). These benches are intended to discourage people, usually homeless, from sleeping on them. Thus, benches can be either a haven or a hazard, depending on their built form.

In Spadina Station, hostile benches are one of several hazards faced by the precariously housed. There is a "No Loitering" sign, which warns of prosecution, as well as many security cameras—watchful employee eyes were on the immobile, while commuters were not given a second glance. However, the station also functions as a haven: there is free wifi, and for a small fee people can access a temperature controlled environment which connects to stations with other amenities—such as public bathrooms. Moreover, we noticed that the station was serving two contradictory functions: a place for mobility and a place of settlement. Nestled between flocks of commuters, entrances featured make-shift encampments and people huddled by the doors to stay warm.
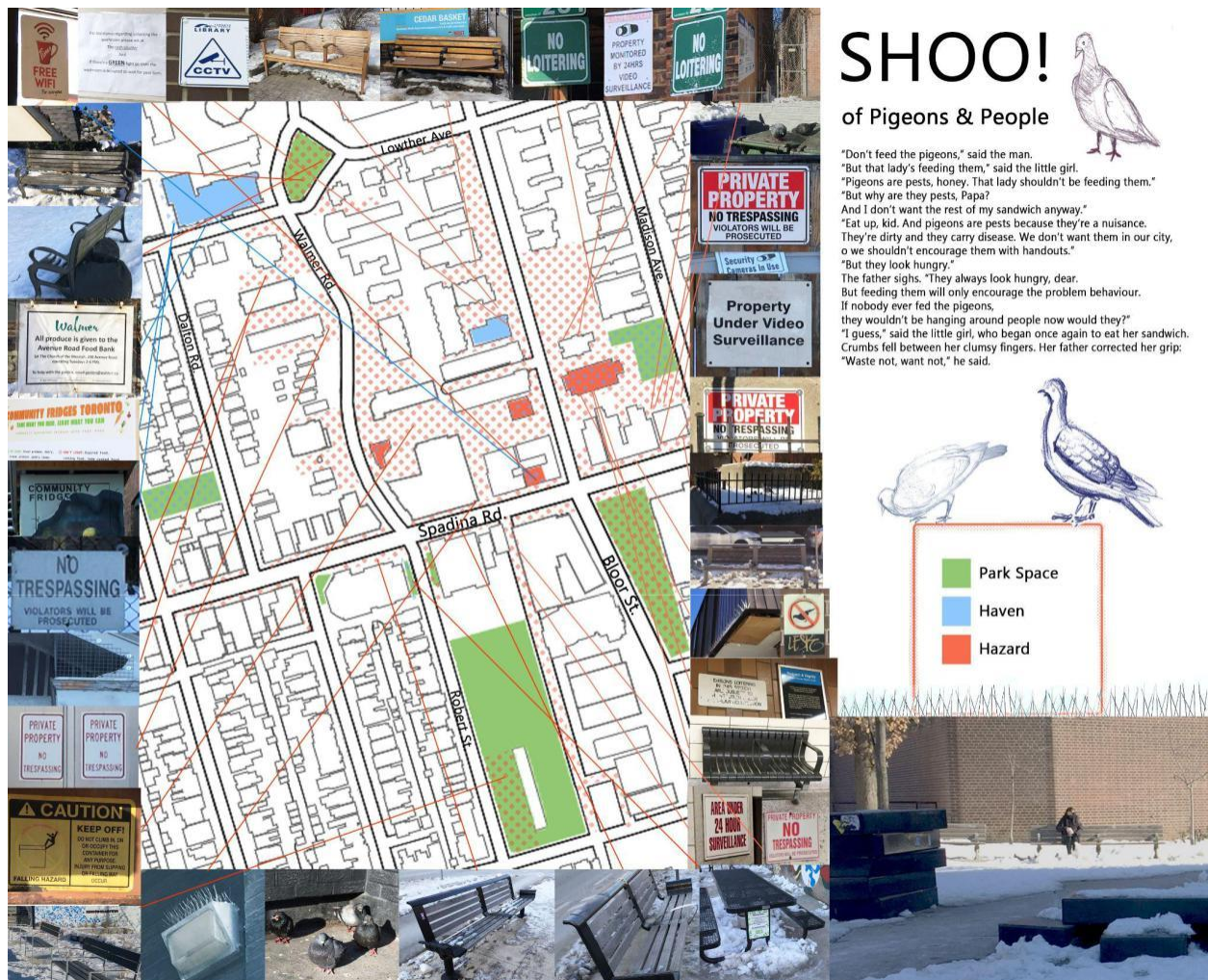
Figure 1: Mapping Havens and Hazards

To better understand the relationship between havens and hazards we mapped a roughly two-block radius surrounding the library (figure 1). The map codes spaces as havens—blue—and hazards —red. Through this we can see how the neighbourhood is largely composed of hazards, with a couple havens and a few mixed haven–hazard spaces. This network shapes the movement of vulnerable people, who are forced to navigate a maze of hazards, bouncing between spaces that act as havens—however temporarily. In this way, the neighborhood's treatment of vulnerable people mirrors how it controls wildlife and pests. Above the many restrictive sidewalk benches are roofs covered in spikes—plastic and metal—all to discourage pigeons from hanging around. Garbage bins are locked to keep out scavengers and animals, while private balconies are covered in mesh preventing birds and squatters from settling on their patios. Hazards to people act in a similar way, making homeless life that bit more uncomfortable and informing both housed and unhoused passerby that homelessness is unwelcome in this neighbourhood.

1.3 Interviews: Weak Ties and Strong Similarities

We had always planned on interviewing a library worker, but our mapping led us to seek interviews for the Spadina Road TTC Station and Walmer Road Baptist Church. Both these spaces are some of the few neighbourhood locations with haven elements. Through fieldnotes and photography, we observed that both spaces also had signs of use by people experiencing homelessness. These signs included a free food fridge at Walmer Road and the storage of belongings in Spadina Station. We want to learn how other organizations in the neighbourhood interact with people experiencing homelessness, and how that is similar to or different from the Spadina Road Library. We were also interested in the outsider organizations' perceptions of the Spadina Road Library, and whether these organizations or their workers had a relationship with the library.

Informant 1: "Gloria" (real name redacted), a TTC employee:

This interview was conducted March 8, 2023. The purpose of interviewing a TTC employee was to provide context on how the library is perceived by neighboring businesses/outsiders. The TTC and TPL are public institutions under municipal jurisdiction yet appear to act differently when engaging with the city's vulnerable/homeless populations. Our goal was to determine whether TTC employees share similar sentiments to the librarian(s) towards vulnerable and homeless populations, and the extent to which they engage with them.

Gloria's interview provided data on how the Spadina TTC Station officially interacts with homelessness. Through her we learned that the TTC and its workers are also on the frontlines of the homelessness crisis. She told us that while the TTC provides training on emergency situations, she would prefer if they got more training. According to Gloria, the TTC stopped going after fare evasion before the pandemic. She stated that workers were most commonly assaulted when enforcing fare collection, which led management to stop the practice of having TTC workers do the enforcing. Gloria also brought up tensions between TTC union workers and the private security firm "Star Security", which has been hired for safety by the TTC. According to her, these security guards don't do much for the issue of violence on the TTC, as they don't have the power of the police. Instead, they will punt people who disturb the peace from one station or bus to another.

The interview also provided data on how workers perceive/experience homelessness in the station. As a fare inspector, Gloria takes initiative when interacting with vulnerable populations. She told us that she has developed a rapport with many people who regularly use the TTC for shelter, and will provide clothes or food when she can. She doesn't believe in judging people who are experiencing hardship, and will often go the "extra mile" to help them.

Lastly, the interview provided data on a TTC worker's perceptions of the library. We learned that Gloria had limited knowledge of library programs and hours, mistakenly thinking it was closed at times it wasn't. She states that people rarely ask her about the library, though she'll occasionally recommend it as a place to go for a public bathroom. However, this lack of knowledge doesn't appear universal for all libraries—she previously worked at Bloor-Yonge station and was apparently often asked about the Reference Library—of which she had a fair knowledge.

Informant 2: Debie (Walmer Road Baptist Church Administrator)

Our second interview was conducted March 13, 2023. The purpose of this interview was to further our understanding of how the library is perceived by neighboring businesses/outsiders. During our exploration of the neighborhood, we noticed that this church has an outdoor community fridge and food garden, indicating they are deliberately engaging with vulnerable populations. We want to learn more about how organizations in the neighborhood interact with people experiencing homelessness in comparison to our observations in the library. Do church employees share similar sentiments to the librarian(s)? How do they engage with vulnerable populations? What is their relationship with other organizations serving the same community?

We learned that the church's involvement with vulnerable populations used to be greater but was reduced by financial issues caused by the building's deterioration.

They previously rented space to charities and hosted the Walmer Road Food Bank, however, they now only unlock the church for services. To compensate for this change, the church has tried to help the community by aiding the charities in finding new rental space. They helped the Walmer Road Food bank move to another church, where it became the Annex Food Bank. They also utilized more of their outdoor space, installing a free food fridge in partnership with Community Fridges Toronto.

The church worker had a lot to share about her perceptions/experiences with people experiencing homelessness. They see a lot of people camping on the property, particularly the back parking lot. She will try to help connect them with social services, but often encounters roadblocks in connecting them with available shelter/housing space. Debie will usually let them stay for a bit before taking action to move them off the property—she cites the difficulty of balancing neighbour and landlord concerns with those of the people camping. There is a sign in the back parking lot warning people not to store their belongings on the property—that sign is in response to a time when a couple camped there for over a month. According to Debie, the city also does not send social workers to help incidents on private property, so she is sometimes forced to call the police, which she worries will escalate situations. Despite these barriers in providing assistance, Debie will go the extra mile in providing help—which we witnessed when she opened the doors for a congregant she knew had previously experienced homelessness.

Debie had stronger ties to the library than Gloria, but they were still fairly loose. She had limited knowledge of the programs or hours of the Spadina Road Library. However, she did once use its community boards to advertise a church event, and like Gloria, she will recommend it for the washroom and indoor space. Debie also has a positive opinion on the TPL system more broadly due to personal experience with her local library.

Informant 3: *redacted name* (Spadina Road librarian):

Our third and final interview was conducted March 14, 2023.The purpose of this interview was to understand the head librarian's duties, experiences, and overall perspective of working in the Spadina Road Library, as well as TPL operations more broadly. We wanted insight into how this library approaches providing services for vulnerable individuals, particularly those experiencing homelessness/housing precarity.

The library is aware of its use by people experiencing homelessness, and workers are trained with this in mind. The librarian stated that they are trained in de-escalation tactics, and are required to complete modules on various topics related to vulnerable populations. They also now have a security guard after a

violent incident occurred over the pandemic. According to the librarian, there will also be new initiatives—including in-library social workers—that will be coming in the next few years.

The librarian also shared her perspective/experiences with homelessness in the setting. A lot of her work regarding this population is providing information and connecting people with other services. She also cites the difficulty of balancing needs of all library patrons, which also include many children and students. However, she has developed a rapport with many over the years, knowing people by name and often having lengthy conversations with them. Over the 18 years she has worked there, she has noticed an increase in the number of patrons who are experiencing homelessness.

The librarian had strong views on the role of the library regarding homelessness. While she thinks the library is moving in a good direction with initiatives, she's also skeptical of whether promised changes will actually materialize, particularly for this small library. At the same time, she believes libraries are not equipped or suited for the role of a shelter, and that the city and province should be investing more in other social services. She's frustrated seeing the homelessness crisis grow, which she believes stems from a decades-long disinvestment in social services, particularly social housing, welfare, mental health and addiction services.

Conclusions

The library is a haven for many vulnerable people, but it has increasingly been put in a position on the frontlines of a homelessness crisis that it is inadequately equipped to address. The social safety net in Toronto has seen major cuts over the last few decades (Dej & Ecker, 2018; Filion, 2010). On the federal level, As many old psychiatric hospitals were closed, the beds and services they provided were never fully replaced (Wiktowicz, 2005). Social supports have not grown with the population and in many cases they have shrunk—both proportionally and by raw numbers. It may be perceived as a less controversial investment by many politicians in a political climate where welfare funding has become a divisive issue (Filion, 2010). Though the library is aware of its role as a haven, it cannot adequately provide people with housing or healthcare, only refer them to resources which may not actually be available (reference relevant research on shelter/healthcare backup). In this way, the library can only act as a band aid solution for the many issues facing people in Toronto.

There remains a large gap in research done on libraries and homelessness in both a Canadian and Torontonian context. This is particularly true for research that involves data collection from people belonging to this vulnerable group. Looking to

future research, we have several questions which would seek to address these gaps:

1. How do vulnerable populations experience the library, and what do they personally perceive as "haven" or "hazard"?
2. How are the community ties of the Spadina Rd. Library similar to, or different than, those of other libraries?
3. How does the library system across the GTA interact with vulnerable populations, and how has this changed over time?

Public libraries remain valuable and can become more impactful if they receive additional funding and resources from the municipality. The homeless crisis stems from a variety of intersecting social issues, including the retrenchment of social services, inadequate mental health and rehabilitation services, education, racism, and socio-economic inequality (Gaetz et al., 2014). Addressing homelessness requires more holistic and systems based approaches, and libraries can be part of a wraparound support system designed at alleviating the challenges associated with urban poverty. This could include more official integration with city and provincial social services, such as TCHC (Toronto Community Housing Corporation) or Ontario Health. Though this may not be the case for every TPL branch, our research shows that local knowledge of the Spadina Road Library is limited (Appendix A, Appendix B). Vulnerable patrons may benefit if the library develops stronger relationships with other local organizations—both public and private—that see significant use by those experiencing homelessness. This paper shows the degree to which the Spadina Road library takes part in helping vulnerable populations, and while they are limited in what they can achieve, they nevertheless take initiative and go the extra mile.

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