

SOCIAL ISSUES IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES:

SUPPORTING OUR STAFF

SHARED LEADERSHIP
PROGRAM 2019



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We share a passion for social issues and the changing role public libraries have in creating welcoming spaces for vulnerable community members. Our project team is united in acknowledging the pressure this places on our library staff and have worked together to offer ideas to support and inform.



Introduction

Public libraries are safe spaces, where everyone is welcome to seek information, entertainment, community engagement and shelter without the need for a transaction or invitation.

‘Everyone’ includes members of our communities experiencing social issues (such as homelessness, mental health problems and addiction), who sometimes require support beyond what library staff are able to safely provide within the bounds of their roles and professional skill sets.

This report looks at how Libraries can better support and empower public library staff in engaging with social issues. It provides insight into what is being done in public libraries in Victoria and beyond to better support staff in engaging with social issues in their communities. Offering case studies of public library programs, hiring practices and policy development, it aims to provide guidance for how library managers can better integrate current practices and create meaningful positive change in their organisations to benefit library staff and the public they serve.

What's our goal?

For public library staff across Victoria to feel **safe, empowered** and **supported** in engaging with the **social issues** in their community.

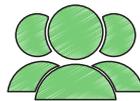
How can we achieve this?

By ensuring **community health and wellbeing** into the future with **better support** for frontline library services through:



Professional skills

- Collaboration with social services or employment of social workers
- Fit-for-purpose, regular and applied staff training
- A culture of support and debriefing



Partnerships

- Communication and collaboration with experts
- Working with our councils and community organisations
- Listening to staff and learning from our sector's successes



Programs

- Courage and means to undertake bespoke trials of social support workers
- Supporting staff by engaging communities
- A culture of empathy through inclusivity and engagement

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SURVEY OF LIBRARY WORKERS

TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL ISSUES ON PUBLIC LIBRARIES, WE UNDERTOOK A SURVEY OF VICTORIAN PUBLIC LIBRARY STAFF.

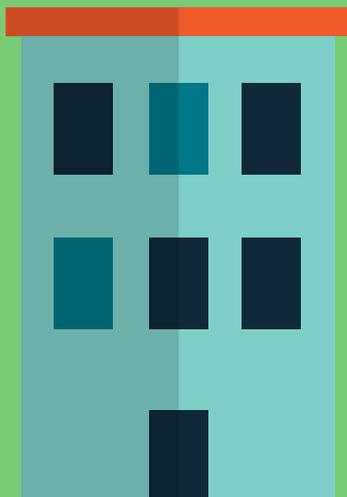


95%

46 OUT OF 48 PUBLIC AND STATE LIBRARY SERVICES RESPONDED

66%

OF RESPONDENTS WORK IN NON-MANAGEMENT ROLES



I have concerns for the safety and wellbeing of library staff when confronted with some social issues. We need to be able to work in a safe environment.
- Victorian public library employee, 2019

90% OF RESPONDENTS WORK DIRECTLY WITH CUSTOMERS, OR PERFORM A MIX OF DIRECT AND INDIRECT CUSTOMER SERVICE.

Social issues and Victorian public libraries

The aim of the survey was to gain an understanding of **what social issues library staff feel they most commonly engage with, how supported staff feel, and what could be done to make our libraries safer and more supportive working environments.**

We also wanted to gauge how confident staff feel in approaching customers with complex needs, and whether the training staff have completed has been beneficial in developing their understanding and confidence engaging with those customers.



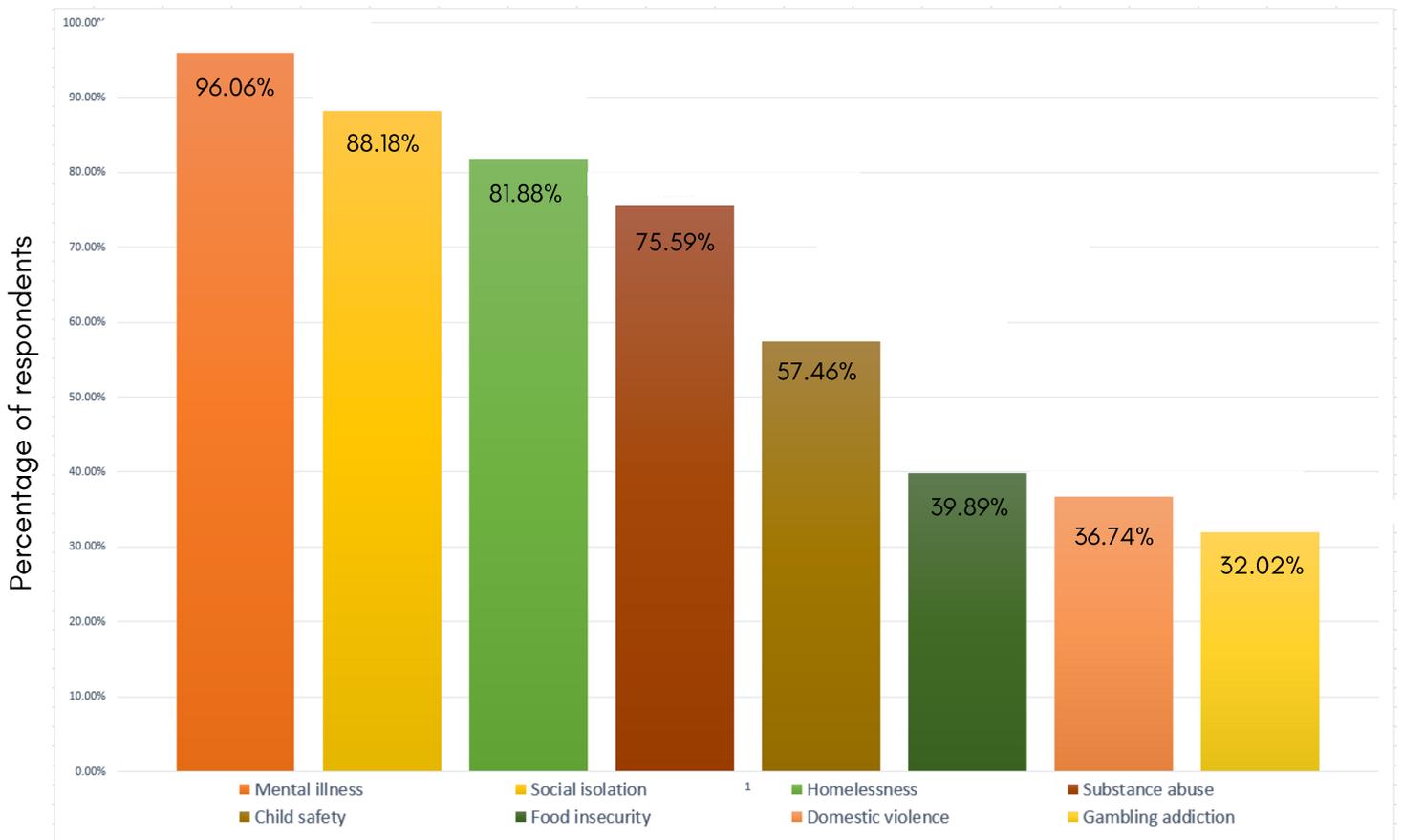
Staff from **46 out of the 48** public and State library services around Victoria completed the survey, with 381 total respondents. **66%** of respondents were staff in non-management roles, with 33.34% in some type of management role. **90%** of respondents work directly with customers, or perform a mix of direct and indirect customer service.

Complex needs:

'Complex needs' is a combination of health needs (e.g. diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation) and social needs (e.g. housing, social care and independent living). essentially the term 'complex needs' refers to people who have more than one problem. [1]

Common experiences with social issues

Social isolation and mental health problems were the social issues cited as most commonly engaged with by survey respondents. At least some respondents reported experience engaging in their workplace with each of the issues examined in the survey.



Q 4. Which types of social issues have you observed (sometimes or more regularly) in your library?

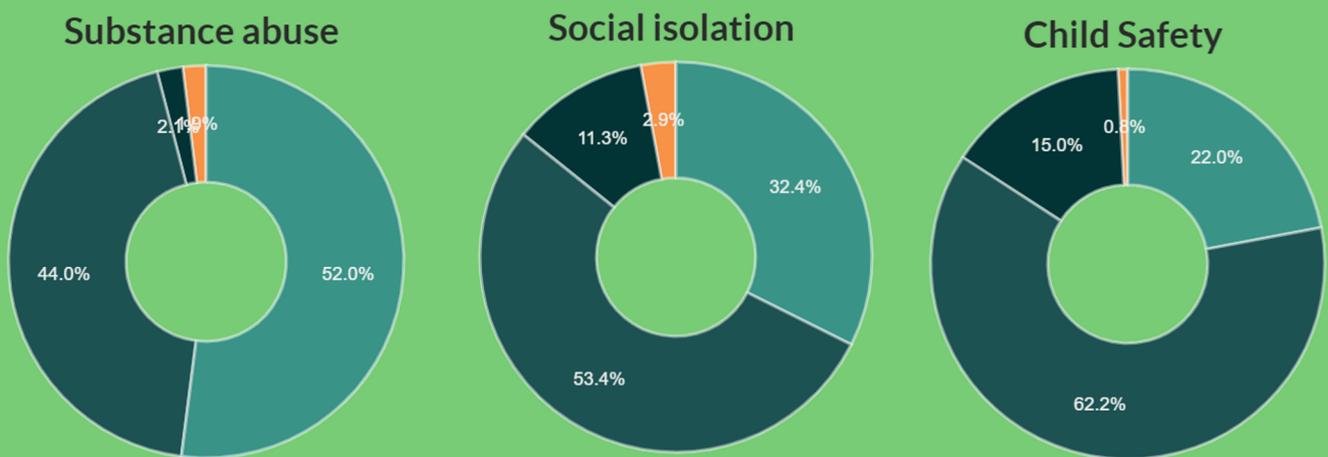
Staff confidence in engaging with social issues

Overall, a large percentage of staff reported a **lack of confidence** in dealing with many of the identified social issues.

When asked whether or not they felt confident overall in dealing with social issues in the library setting, there was a reasonably even divide. 55.12% of respondents said they felt confident overall, while **44.88%** said they did not.

Areas where staff had the least confidence were around gambling addiction, domestic violence and food insecurity, possibly due to the low incidence of exposure to these issues in public libraries.

Respondents suggested other issues regularly experienced, such as aggressive behaviour, illiteracy and other general antisocial behaviour.



I am worried that I might end up in trouble.
- Victorian public library employee, 2019

There are so many variables with each new situation - despite training I often feel unqualified
- Victorian public library employee, 2019

There were no areas in which a majority of staff reported feeling very confident, but the most significant issues with which staff felt somewhat to moderately confident were child safety, social isolation, homelessness and mental health problems. This is likely reflective both of training occurring in some areas (such as around child safety) and of the effect of regular exposure (such as with homelessness and mental illness).

In their comments around confidence, many staff expressed fearfulness of giving the wrong response to a situation, or that due to the complexity of the situation and boundaries of their roles it is difficult to know how to respond.

Some staff also stated nervousness around what possible reactions may be the result from interactions with customers with complex needs (such as aggression or violence).

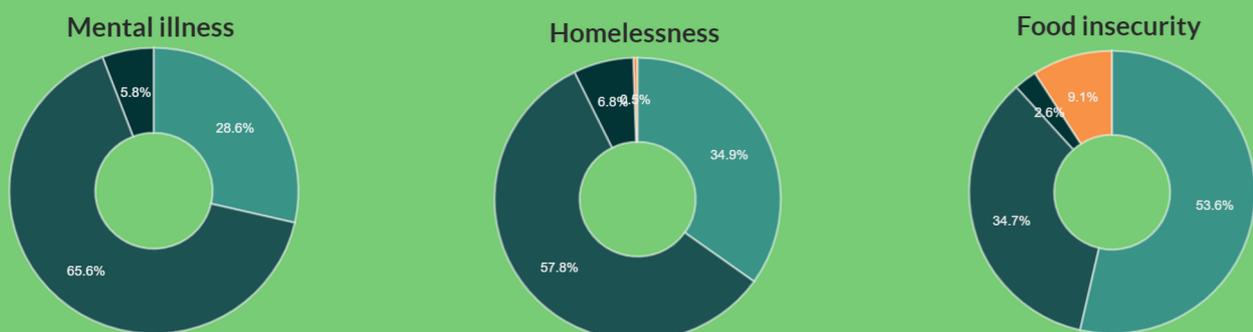


[There is a] lack of opportunities to practice positive interactions with members of the public experiencing these issues, and to critically reflect with colleagues on how those interactions went.

- Victorian public library employee, 2019

The nature of people who take illegal drugs can be highly unpredictable. I can handle most social issues, just not ones involving substance abuse and some mental health issues.

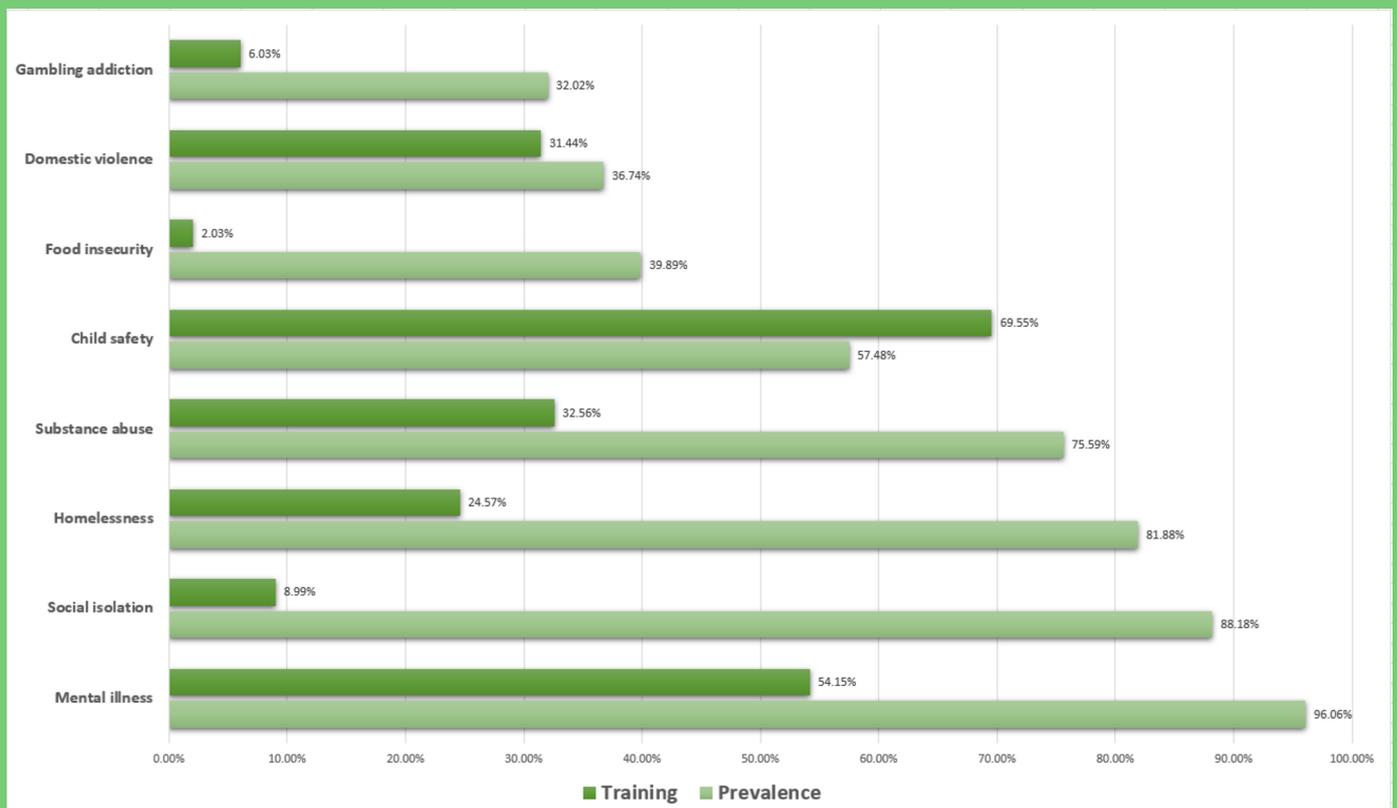
- Victorian public library employee, 2019



Issues staff experience compared with training they have received

The highest level of reported training was in the area of Child Safety, with 69% of staff stating they have had training on the topic. 86% of staff cited the training as useful. This is no doubt a direct result of the recent legislative obligations around ChildSafe workplaces, showing how government initiatives can create priorities for staff funding and training opportunities.

Homelessness and substance abuse had high reporting of visibility by respondents, but the training provided around these areas was relatively low (32.56% remembered having training for substance abuse and 24.57% reported training around homelessness). Of the staff who reported training in these areas, the majority found the training useful.



55% of respondents have completed training in engaging with mental health problems, of which 79% found the training useful. 44% stated they had not completed any training around mental health problems, though 95% of respondents engage with the issue at least sometimes in their daily work.

Many of the staff comments from this section of the survey stated the importance of staff having time to share knowledge and training, as well as having **time to debrief**. It was also commonly stated that no training will prepare you for everything, reaffirming that it is necessary for staff to feel equipped to work together as a cohesive team.

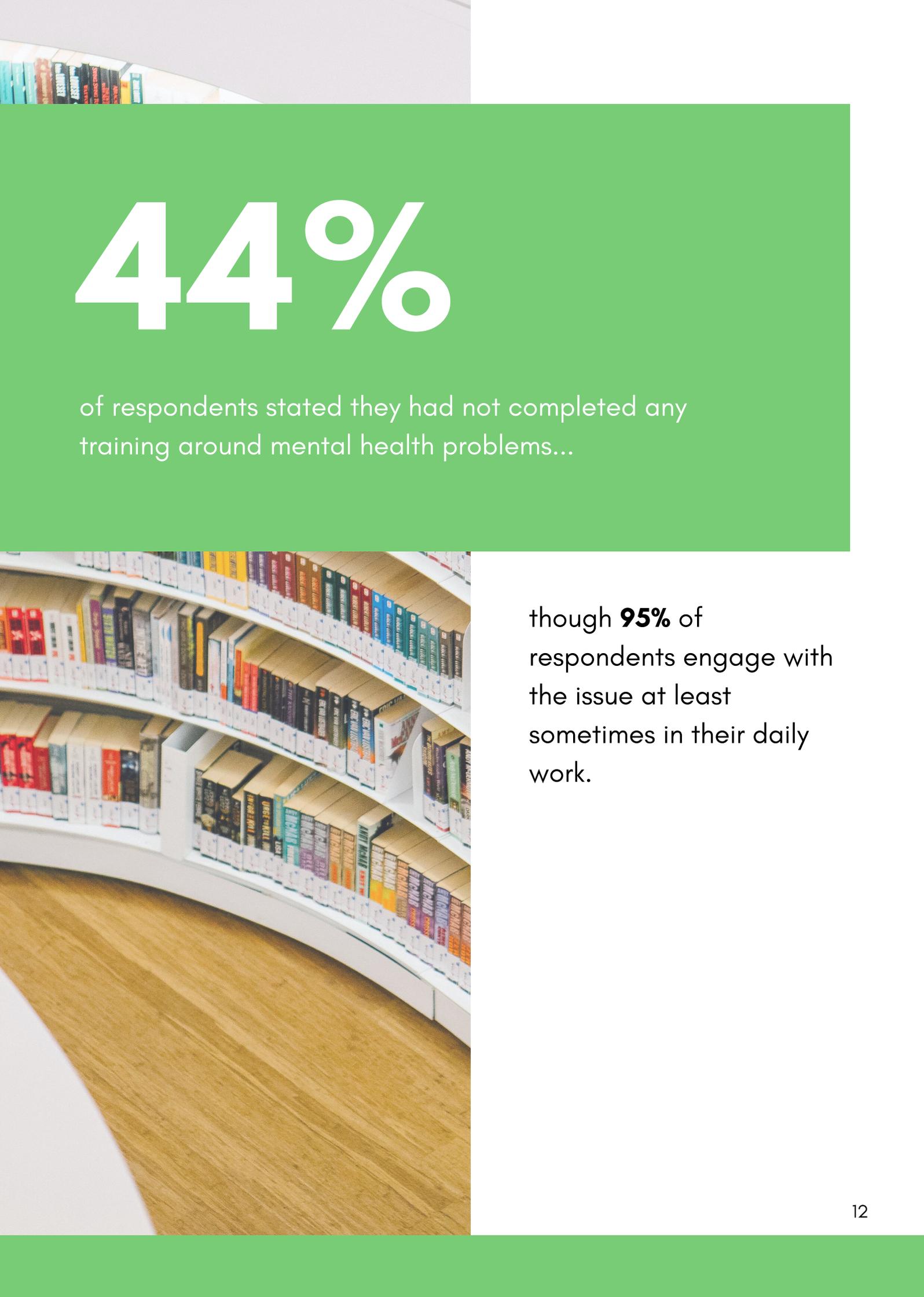
Domestic violence and child safety training relates well to the reported levels of staff experiencing these issues.

On the whole, we found that **training in dealing with high frequency social issues is lacking**, and almost half of the respondents **do not feel as confident as they would like** in engaging with customers with complex needs.



Sometimes there isn't enough time in the day to properly debrief with colleagues when incidents happen. It would be nice if there were reflection groups and other deliberate spaces/times for reflecting on issues and incidents, especially if they've had a notable impact on a staff member.

- Victorian public library employee, 2019



44%

of respondents stated they had not completed any training around mental health problems...

though **95%** of respondents engage with the issue at least sometimes in their daily work.

What surprised us

Of the respondents who stated they felt confident overall in engaging with social issues, **71.84% said that confidence stems from it being part of their role.**

vs

Only **21.76%** of staff who were not confident overall **said they don't see it as part of their role.**

- This surprised us, as many library staff have in the past expressed concern about dealing with social issues becoming an intrinsic part of their job. The latter statistic being relatively low demonstrates a possible change in the mindset of library staff as a whole, indicating that library workers are shifting from expectations of their role being transactional to being interaction and experience-based.

Libraries are now community hubs for everyone. We deal with customers who are homeless to customers who are running their own business in the library.

- Victorian public library employee, 2019

-
- It also surprised us that staff expressed the high levels of confidence in engaging with mental health problems and homelessness. Confidence in these areas scored highly in relation to other areas.

What concerned us

- There was a stark disparity between the social issues staff are experiencing, and the relevant training they have received.
- It was also very concerning that **44.8% of respondents didn't feel confident overall engaging with social issues.** Low levels of confidence around engaging with these social issues, and the stress that some of the situations may generate can only have a negative effect on staff mental health and wellbeing.
- 45% of respondents were unsure whether their library service was connected with any external services to support staff engaging with social issues. This indicates the need for greater communication with staff at all levels around existing relationships between libraries and community services, and better education for staff around what external support may be available for engaging with their community. It also indicates the opportunity for greater collaborations and partnerships with external organisations, whose expertise and resources can be of great benefit to library services.

The survey vs the society

As part of our research, we examined Local Government Area (LGA) data (obtained from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)) [2] to investigate whether there are **correlations between what staff see in their public libraries and the social issues that occur outside library walls.**

We developed an interactive map that shows the relationship between DHHS data, what library staff feel within respective library services and their confidence to engage in these issues. For ease of comparison all data columns are scaled from 0 (low) to 5 (high). An example is shown on the following page.

We looked at six single council library services from both inner and regional Victoria that had at least 10 staff members complete our survey. These were Brimbank, Greater Dandenong, Kingston, Mildura, Wyndham and Yarra.

It was not surprising that there was no apparent correlation between what was reported in the DHHS data and what is observed by library staff for gambling addiction or food insecurity; as these issues are not often visible to staff in a public library.

We were more surprised to find no link with social isolation; though this is most likely due to lack of DHHS data on this topic. For our comparison we used figures for "People who spoke with more than 5 people the previous day". Social isolation is more dependent on the quality of interactions rather than the number of interactions. It is also likely that socially isolated individuals that come into public libraries do end up speaking to more than five people because of their library visit.

We were very surprised to find no direct link between reported homelessness in the library and that reported by DHHS. When we expanded our sample group to include all single municipal libraries with more than 10 survey respondents, it did become apparent that there is a link between what is observed in the library and what is reported by DHHS; most areas that have higher prevalence of homelessness have generally also seen this in the relevant library. In instances where this is not the case, it could be due to homelessness support services in the area attracting that population during the day and making this issue less visible in the library.

Apparent links were shown between what is reported in the DHHS data and what is observed by library staff in the following areas:

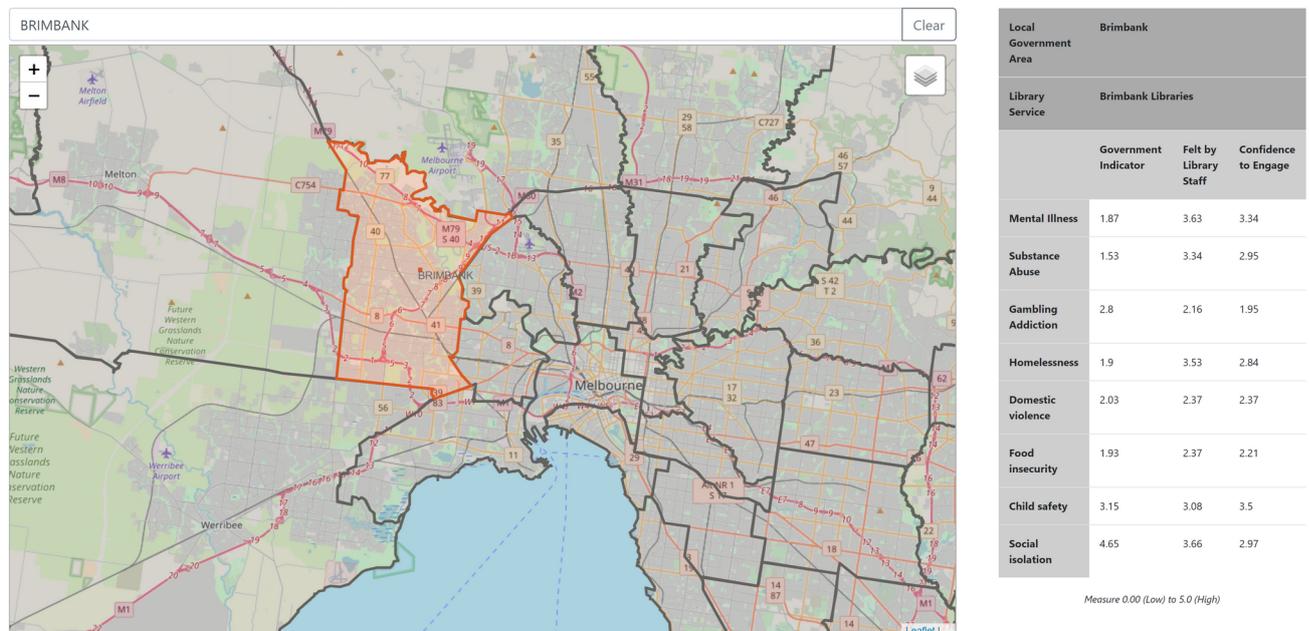
- Domestic violence
- Substance abuse
- Child safety
- Mental health problems

It is interesting to note that staff reported seeing much greater prevalence of substance abuse and mental illness in the library than what is reflected in the DHHS data. We attribute this to people experiencing these social issues finding libraries a welcoming and pressure free environment, leading them to spend greater amounts of time within the library than other users.

Our findings appear to show that enough links exist between reported DHHS figures and what is seen in libraries, to conclude that DHHS figures could be used by the public library sector to demonstrate the prevalence of social issues in our libraries. This could form part of a key argument to push for more funding to further train and increase confidence in staff, or to allow hiring of social workers to support both the community and the library staff who help them.

To see the map of your local area, go to <http://35.189.38.83/>

Social Issues in Victorian Public Libraries - SLP Project 2019



What do library staff want?

When asked for ideas in what would assist them in engaging with social issues in public libraries, survey respondents supplied **171 responses**.

The most common themes were:

- Training:** 42.69% (73 responses)
- Procedures/Policies:** 12.28% (21 responses)
- Referral Documentation** 12.28% (21 responses)
- Partnerships:** 11.69% (20 responses)
- Debriefing:** 9.35% (16 responses)
- Social Workers:** 7% (12 responses)
- Security:** 4.09% (7 responses)



In all areas where staff have received training, they stated it was useful. Overall, staff seem very willing to learn, and want to improve their skills and understanding around social issues in order to work with their community.

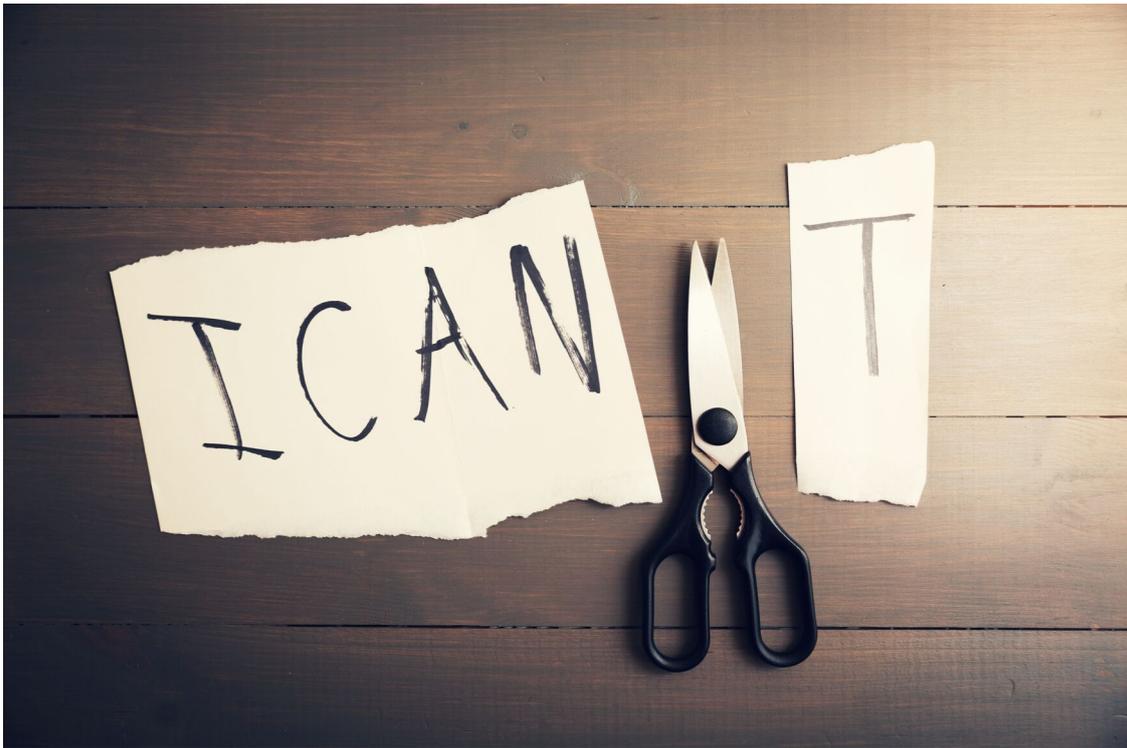
The areas in which most respondents felt they had received the majority of training were:

- Child safety
- Mental health problems
- Dealing with difficult customers

A large portion of why I work in libraries is so I can help those on the fringe ... I would love to be more informed though, so I can be of more assistance to those in our community who are at the greatest risk. We are a safe warm FREE place for them to visit.

I want to be able to help more.

- Victorian public library employee, 2019



When asked what positively impacts their feeling of confidence in engaging with social issues, **69.9%** of respondents stated that **training is useful in giving them confidence**. 79.61% cited **personal experience** in these areas as helpful.

Library staff also suggested that **opportunities to debrief and share knowledge** would be helpful for them, as well as being able to **seek support** from other departments within their local council (see 3. Partnerships).

The creation and maintenance of supportive staff environments and **support from management** regarding staff decision-making processes in difficult situations were common threads in responses to what makes staff feel supported.

[There is a]lack of opportunities to practice positive interactions with members of the public experiencing these issues, and to critically reflect with colleagues on how those interactions went.

- Victorian public library employee, 2019

*We have been provided with a lot of training and we have resources handy that help us deal with these issues. Although we could always do with **more information**.*

- Victorian public library employee, 2019

Ways of supporting staff



Training

Social workers

Practical responses

Partnerships and advocacy

1. Training

Training in how to best engage with social issues was by far the most common desire of survey respondents. Typical comments were around feelings of

- training not preparing staff for the complexity of situations faced;
- training being too irregular/seldom to maintain skills; and
- training not being supported by the opportunity for in-house debriefing around application of skills.

See Appendix 2 for a list of training in social issues for Victorian public libraries

Most of our in-house training involved 'dealing with difficult customers' rather than dealing with customers with difficulties so not quite the right approach ... Training [was] a bit superficial (no depth) but ... we have had people from other [local government] departments talk to us about homeless people and domestic violence.
- Victorian public library employee, 2019

After undergoing training, many staff still feel that they **don't have sufficient knowledge** in some of the areas. This emphasises the importance of **refreshing skills**, and facilitating **debriefing sessions** for staff to discuss how the training can support them in their work.

PLV Strategic Plan 2019 - 2022
Goal 2.0 Learning & Development
Inspire a culture of continuous learning and development to meet current and future needs

2. Social workers in libraries

Public libraries attract empathic staff, who understand the role of the library in creating an inclusive and healthy community. The kinds of behaviours public library staff must interact with as a byproduct of their work with their communities are often challenging, and can require professional skills more suited to a background in social work than in information management.

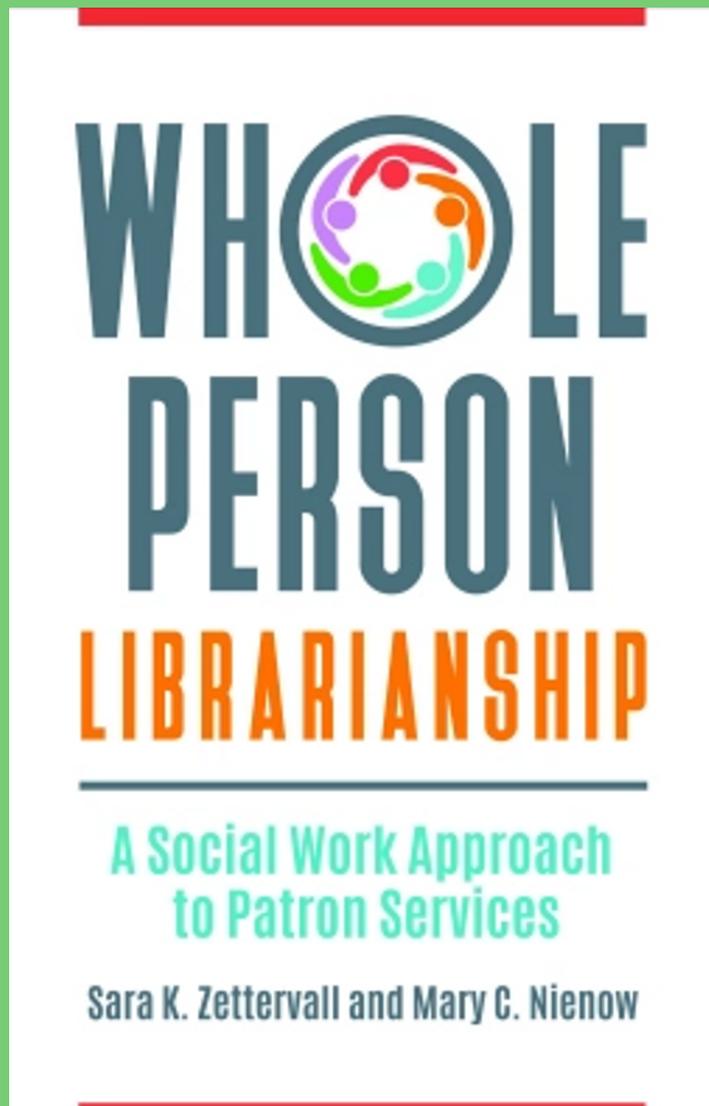
Library workers actively engage with their communities to promote equality and access to resources and information. Through our research we encountered high levels of empathy and compassion in Victorian public library employees, but we also encountered both the fear and experience of burning out in the face of working in a challenging and sometimes dangerous environment.

There are many factors to take into consideration when considering a library service's approach to social issues in its community. Libraries here and internationally are making it clear to job applicants that the library is no longer necessarily a quiet peaceful place, and that working in one requires resilience and knowledge of how to respond to challenging and complex social situations. [3] Those who already work in libraries know this all too well. From experiencing post traumatic stress disorder [4] to being ready to administer medication counteracting the effects of opioid overdose [5], library workers are already joining social services on the frontline of society's challenges.

This section explores the impact of social workers in public libraries in the US, the growing interest in following this path in Victorian libraries, and how library services can approach the investigation as to whether employing a social worker is right for them.

*I feel that we do very well with the resource that we have, **each other**. However to be able to refer a patron on to a social worker, or to have a designated staff member to bounce situations off and work out appropriate response or approach would be the ideal.*
- Victorian public library employee, 2019

Libraries are now community hubs for everyone. We deal with customers who are homeless to customers who are running their own business in the library.
- Victorian public library employee, 2019



<https://wholepersonlibrarianship.com/>

Whole Person Librarianship is a US-based movement around library-social work collaboration. [6]

It advocates combining the skills and concepts of library services and social work to create a collaborative working environment that is **equally supportive of its staff and the public it serves.**

Social workers in US libraries

US libraries are hiring social workers in increasing numbers, to offer direct access to social services within the library environment. There has been a lot of recent commentary in the media and industry publications around programs libraries are running in conjunction with social service agencies, or about libraries conducting social services within their libraries. The incorporation of social services in US public libraries takes many forms, with different models and approaches visible across the country.

Many library services have hired one or more licensed professionals, who deal with case work from within the library. This practice, first seen in 2009 at San Francisco Public Library [7], is often supported by the hiring of people with lived experience of homelessness or other social issues (Health and Safety Associates), who act as support workers for library visitors. Denver Public Library (in addition to a full-time social worker) employs Peer Navigators - individuals who have direct experience navigating the complexities of US social services, who meet with vulnerable library patrons who are unsure how to engage the assistance of the social service system and support agencies [8].

Other libraries, such as the District Libraries in Michigan, bolster their inhouse social support programs with social work interns. Niles District Library was the first in the area to do so, after being awarded a grant to hire a full-time social worker, and to offer stipends to social work interns at bachelors and masters level education. [9]

Hundreds of US libraries now collaborate with professional associations and educational institutions to host social work student interns at their libraries. Whole Person Librarianship's Sara Zattervall and Mary Nienow advocate the practice, benefitting both library staff and the social work industry and creating the foundation for future employment, collaboration and partnerships. More information (including a guide for library services on how to organise the placement of social work interns at their libraries and an interactive map plotting participating libraries across the US) can be found at <https://swlibraryinterns.com>. [10]

As part of our research, we reached out to US public libraries that offer social services as part of their core service. Outlined below are two different approaches - one library service that has hired a social worker themselves and one that sees its role as filling the gap between traditional library services and where social support services step in.

Long Branch Free Public Library

New Jersey

We spoke with David Perez, the social worker employed by Long Branch Public Library

Long Branch Public Library's (LBPL) social work program was inspired by the effects of the 2012 superstorm Sandy. The Library manager, Tonya Garcia, observed great swathes of the community using the library as a place of refuge, obtaining information and basic help. The staff, Ms Garcia found, were "not equipped with the social work lens needed to effectively serve the patrons".

Mr Perez was brought on board as a social work intern, to support staff and help them engage more effectively with customers with complex needs. "The staff understand the correlation and "fusion" of the two professions", he says, "and the community is very happy we offer these professional services free of charge." While some social work undertaken by Mr Perez is incidental to the patron's library visit, many patrons now visit specifically to seek assistance with social issues and other agencies/municipal government refer people to the library's social work service.



Through the program, the Library partners with anyone from barbershops to schools to local or state government to deliver projects as diverse as school visits, community literacy and haircuts, and prison re-entry programs, partnering "...with anyone and everyone in our community, to help improve the quality of life".

See Appendix 3 for the full interview with David Perez.

Learn more at the Long Branch Free Public Library website:
<https://www.longbranchlib.org/social-work-and-divesity>

Dallas Public Library

Texas

We spoke with Heather Lowe, Adult Services Administrator and coordinator of HELP Desk.

Dallas Public Library (DPL), prompted by the obvious increase in numbers of patrons experiencing homelessness during the financial crisis, consciously examined the library's approach to engaging with people experiencing homelessness, in an effort to make the library a more comfortable environment for both staff and the public.

Initial simple measures such as staff greeting homeless patrons as they entered in the morning, and running 'Coffee & Chat' sessions to facilitate 'normal' interactions between people of different lived experiences. A successful funding application then saw **one full- and one part-time social worker employed by the library.**

These initial measures were so successful that the library wanted to expand its social service offering to onsite case management, but soon realised the demand would be too great for the library to make a meaningful difference in that area, so thought instead about how the library could add value to the status quo.

Building relationships is a key focus of DPL's engagement with patrons with complex needs. "Getting to know the folks who visit the library regularly has improved the experience for everyone, staff and library visitors alike," says Lowe. "Because staff have made efforts to learn about our homeless neighbors, it's easier for them to notice if something is wrong and to act proactively."

This relationship building works in conjunction with DPL's core of social service provision - the **H.E.L.P. (Homelessness Engagement and Leadership Program) Desk**. Run by two full-time H.E.L.P. staff and a group of trained Central Library staff, this referral and support desk focuses on the needs of homeless patrons and sees over 1500 patrons in any given year. "Today, the Homeless Engagement and Leadership Program has three goals: provide warm referrals, offer opportunities for mental stimulation, and organize public education around homelessness and poverty. Treating our homeless neighbors like any other neighbor often means the library is the one place where people feel recognized."

"...after working with many of our service provider partners, we shifted to doing what libraries do best: information navigation, mental and social stimulation, and a willingness to help."

The hiring of social workers at DPL was intended to help staff navigate interactions with library visitors with complex needs, as much it was intended to support those visitors. Lowe reports the employment of social workers and counsellors as having had a **very positive impact on staff stress** levels and their impression of being supported. "This has alleviated a lot of stress among our staff. Even though [the social worker] cannot be everywhere all at once, knowing she is there as guidance and backup allows staff to feel like they have needed resources."

Staff have been educated to increase their ability to **empathise with visitors experiencing homelessness**, including tours of local social service facilities and receiving training on the issue of homelessness, resources to help, mental health, de-escalation techniques, and having tough conversations. "It's all been an ongoing learning experience," says Lowe. "Since the beginning of the program, incident rates have gone down significantly, and staff have better relationships with the folks in our buildings."

Library staff have the opportunity to benefit from modeling and coaching by the Library's social worker, attending and contributing to conversations with patrons when they call the social worker for help. "This type of learning," Lowe notes, "makes it much more likely that staff will implement sensitivity and de-escalation techniques." DPL also runs education and awareness campaigns for housed library patrons, in an effort to increase community empathy around homelessness and other social issues. The Library's focus on empathy over case management has had a powerful impact on the local homeless community, Lowe says.

"We hear over and over again from patrons that they feel 'human' in the library or that 'they're able to remember who they are.' It's that small slice of normalcy and recognition that I believe does the most good."

See Appendix 3 for the full interview with Heather Lowe.

Learn more at the Dallas Public Library website
<http://dallaslibrary2.org/homeless/>

Social workers and Victorian public libraries

Social issues are increasingly and highly prevalent in Victorian public libraries, with surveyed library staff reporting **significant engagement** with issues such as homelessness, mental health problems, substance abuse, social isolation and child safety. The 2017 Shared Leadership project Keeping a Lookout [11] recommended in its Call To Action that a pilot program incorporating social workers in libraries be initiated in Victoria, with a view to better supporting vulnerable members of library communities.

PLV Strategic Plan 2019 - 2022
Goal 2.2: Community of Practice
Encourage networks that foster shared experiences, knowledge, ideas, programs and practices

**KEEPING A LOOKOUT
CALL TO ACTION!**

**PUBLIC LIBRARIES
VICTORIA NETWORK
(PLVN)**

- That an OUTREACH special interest group (SIG) be formed.
- That PLVN advocates for partnerships with relevant agencies to provide a training model and support.
- That a statewide project be offered incorporating the parallel work of library staff and social workers.
- That a pilot program incorporating social workers in libraries be initiated in Victoria.

.....

One such pilot has recently been undertaken, at City of Melbourne Library Service (MLS) from February to May 2019. The motivation for the trial was not only to provide better avenues of access to support services for library customers, but also to support library staff in having safe and effective interactions with customers with complex needs. The outcome of the trial was the decision to hire a full time social worker to work across the service's six branches.

We met with Anne-Maree Pfabe, Manager of MLS, to learn more.

City of Melbourne Library Service

Outreach worker pilot program

Background to pilot program:

The trial was part of a **multi-pronged strategy** developed in response to a number of concerns related to customers behaviour, which posed significant security risk and caused feelings of not being safe in library staff.

Based on the positive impact of social workers employed in US public libraries, MLS undertook a trial of an **assertive outreach worker** with specialist experience in engaging with people experiencing homelessness.

The trial occurred alongside the development of:

- more robust policy around staff engagement with difficult behaviours,
- the creation of both a 'toolbox' for staff to aid in formulating responses in difficult situations,
- and of an incident log accessible by all staff. This log, in the form of an excel spreadsheet, was created to better inform all library workers of incidents or instances of challenging customers behaviour, in an effort to better prepare staff for potential experiences and to track repeat offenders.



Funding of pilot program:

MLS consulted with the City of Melbourne's Social Investment Branch before undertaking the project, and found them very responsive to getting involved, both financially and in offering expertise and contacts. Joint funding was therefore arranged, from both MLS and the Social Investment Branch. Ongoing funding for the position will come entirely from the MLS budget, supported by a successful application for Local Priorities Funding.

Structure of pilot program:

The Outreach Worker was employed on a temporary full-time basis to work across the six MLS branches, employed via a local homelessness support agency, Launch Housing.

The trial employment was also multi-pronged, aiming to:

- educate, empower and support staff in engaging with customers experiencing homelessness and/or with complex needs;
- to directly engage with those customers and provide a link with support services outside the library branch where possible;
- and to develop and deliver training programs around homelessness.

The Outreach Worker **supported staff** by:

- Running training sessions (large scale and 'lunchbox' training);
- Being on call to advise staff in situations of challenging customers behaviour or mental health/homelessness concerns;
- Attending team meetings where possible, to provide support for 'debriefing';
- Delivering **31 staff meetings and training sessions**.

The Outreach Worker **supported customers** by:

- Visiting the libraries and delivering individual consultations to customers with complex needs as required;
- Providing advice and training to staff on dealing with challenging behaviours and providing resources to customers with complex needs;
- Observing, reviewing and recommending changes to library spaces to increase inclusivity;
- Delivering **41 individual consultations**, approximately one third of which were with customers experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Other reasons were behavioural, mental health problems, and alcohol and other drugs.

Outcome of pilot program:

The **trial was a success**, and MLS has since moved to hire a qualified social worker. A qualified social worker was deemed more suitable to MLS' needs than an outreach worker, to provide the required depth of knowledge and experience across all areas of complex needs. The library's social worker needs working knowledge of psychology in addition to emotional intelligence skills.

The employment of a qualified social worker also creates the opportunity to engage Master of Social Work interns, who require professional supervision and support.

A survey of staff (created by Melbourne City Council's Research and Development department) completed before and after the pilot showed improvement in:

- staff feelings of being supported by management
- confidence in engaging with a wide variety of behaviours and social issues
- understanding of the complexities faced by people experiencing social issues
- staff perception of the adequateness of social issues training received.

What MLS learnt:

Pfabe emphasised the importance of properly considering and recognising the issue specific to your own library service, before leaping straight into hiring a social worker. She recommends:

- **Try an outreach worker or partnering with an agency first**, to determine whether there is a need for qualified social work professionals to be on staff.
- **Don't reinvent the wheel**, or do it all yourself. Liaise with Council departments to benefit and learn from their expertise, and create collaboration opportunities for the future.
- Should a social worker be deemed appropriate, strongly consider organising the **employment via an agency**. It is hugely important that the social worker has adequate professional support, and allows potential for future workplace mentoring of student placements or expansion of services through collaboration with that agency. This allows the library service to continue focusing on delivery of library services.
- **Be clear in your motivation** for incorporating social services into your library service model. The motivation for the MLS pilot was wanting staff to feel safe and empowered, leading to positive outcomes for community and customer service.
- Maintain an awareness that libraries provide spaces and services for the **entire spectrum of the community**. Management needs to provide resources for staff to deal with that, both in terms of staff helping the community and **staying safe themselves**.



*I do feel library staff need to be prepared to provide support/information, because we are 'on the ground' and libraries are often a safe space for people who feel vulnerable, however **there is a definite limit to what we can offer as library staff** - at the end of the day we are not social workers, and we deal with a lot of confronting situations, and while we often feel empathetic to the situations our patrons are experiencing, there's only so much we can do, and should do ... I think it's great that libraries are examining these issues, and trying to address the lack of staff training. But at the end of the day **these are social issues that need a considered and professional response** - like having trained social workers on-site/on-call.*

- Victorian public library employee, 2019

Do our staff want social workers?

Only 10% of respondents had experienced a social worker being employed by their library service. Of that 10%, **81.09%** of respondents believed utilising or employing a social worker had a **positive impact** on their library service.

When all respondents were asked if using or employing a social worker would be of benefit to staff in their library service, the response was an overwhelming **84% yes**. Interestingly, many of the staff commented that they felt a social worker could provide a supportive role to staff by sharing their knowledge and expertise and promoting best practice, rather than just being a point of redirection for customers with complex needs.

Having staff who have specialised training and knowledge in this area will benefit both staff and the public. Staff will feel supported and can seek advise from the social worker to further enhance their skills in dealing with situations involving social issues which can often be quite confronting.

- Victorian public library employee, 2019

To increase staff confidence in dealing with these social issues, because as librarians we are experiencing these issues more and more and are often ill-equipped to deal with them.

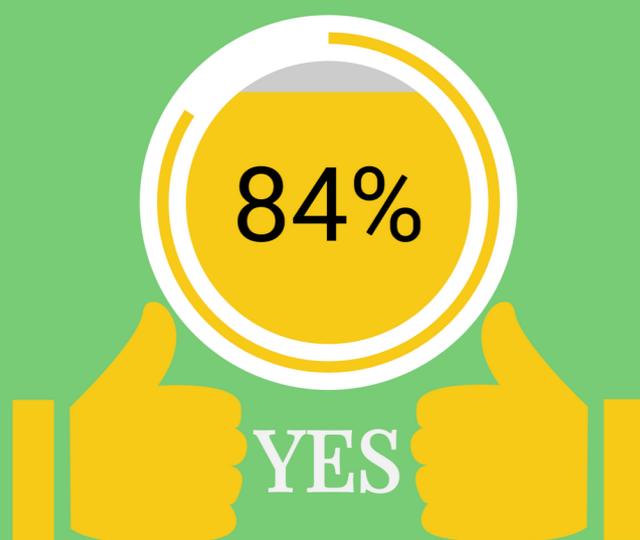
- Victorian public library employee, 2019

It would help staff to deal with workplace stresses and difficult situations.

- Victorian public library employee, 2019

Libraries could really do with a dedicated support person on hand to help deal with customers experiencing social issues. Librarians are not social workers. I feel it is the Librarian's role to sign post / refer clients to other services but we lack knowledge of what these services are.

- Victorian public library employee, 2019



Having an expert not only to call on for advice, but to ask to step in and use their expertise is invaluable, and takes the pressure of library trained staff who are not trained in social work.

- Victorian public library employee, 2019

Firstly, the skill set of these workers important. Secondly , [they] can provide great peer support and sharing of knowledge. Customers [also] feel supported.

- Victorian public library employee, 2019

3. Practical responses

What is already being done?

Programming and initiatives to create an inclusive and welcoming library space supports staff as well as community by creating the opportunity for 'normal' interactions between staff and customers from all backgrounds and lived experience.

We looked around Victoria to discover **what is already being done in public libraries** to support vulnerable community members, and showcase some **examples** below. At each of these libraries we spoke to a staff member who explained how their library service is creating opportunities for empathy and connection. We also outline security measures to help staff feel safer in their workplace.

Maribyrnong Library Service: responding to local community needs

The **'Need a Coat'** initiative was piloted in Maribyrnong in 2017. The idea was inspired from Colchester Library in London, where a coat rack was set up for people to leave jackets for those in need. It has been extremely well received by the community and is now an annual event. Items are donated from council staff as well as members of the local community. It is run across 3 libraries (Braybrook, Footscray and West Footscray).

Maribyrnong Library Service have **replaced their traditional Christmas Wishing Tree** with an invitation to their community to donate feminine hygiene products or a Christmas gift to McAuley House. McAuley House is a local 24/7 safe house that provide crisis accommodation for women and children. Through this they have developed a good relationship and are now able to provide outreach programming at their centre.

The library service also participates in **Food For Fines** annually, and have so far donated 1,600 food items to the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC) over the past 2 years. Their **weekly knitting groups** have also donated their items to the ASRC, and have hosted pop-up market stalls to fundraise for the ASRC. So far they have been able to raise thousands of dollars for the ASRC.

As of the 1st July 2019, **Footscray Library opened an hour earlier** in response to community needs, specifically for those who need an inviting space to escape the cold or the heat.

Library customers and the wider community have been very responsive to the initiatives undertaken by Maribyrnong Library Service. The Library has found that customers appreciate opportunities to help those in need.

Moreland City Libraries: Libraries After Dark

Libraries After Dark is **an after-hours program** run across a number of libraries across Victoria. Social and recreational events are hosted in local libraries during the evening to provide **safe, warm and alternative spaces** for the local community.

The program provided a **'primary prevention' approach to preventing harm from gambling**, seeking to reach the whole community. The secondary prevention targets were adults at moderate to low risk of of gambling harm.

This project was piloted by Moreland City Libraries through funding received by the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation through their 2017-2019 Prevention Partnership program.

The aims of Libraries After Dark were to:

- Increase awareness of the local library as an alternative social/recreational option;
- Increase participation of at-risk groups in library activities, especially at night;
- Increase staff awareness around gambling harm, risks and stigmas of those affected; and
- To provide engagement opportunities with at-risk groups.

A total of of **33,404 people attended the pilot program** across the four libraries, with the programs outset being only 2,079.

"By empowering library staff with knowledge of the risks and harms of gambling products, empathy for victims of the industry grows. This empathy is an important component in fostering a sensitive and welcoming spirit in staff. Libraries can also play an important role in connecting people seeking help/ experiencing harm with gambling help services."

-Libraries After Dark Evaluation Report 2017-2019

Yarra Libraries: Feelgood Fridays

Feelgood Fridays was a project undertaken by Yarra Libraries which was inspired by the **increasing number of homeless people** in the inner city of Melbourne.

It was a 12 week program which aimed to **connect people with community support services**, remove barriers and encourage vulnerable community members to use Yarra Libraries.

Each week a room at the Florence Peel Centre was set up with tables and lounges. The space also included **basic breakfast** (toast, coffee and tea etc.) as well as **wifi, free books and phone chargers**.

Community service providers were invited to come in and attendees could choose to engage with them. Some of the services attendees were able to receive included an on call nurse who provided flu injections, vet services for pets, Ask Izzy and Centrelink.

A total of 6 sessions ran, with 65 people attending. It resulted in 12 Library signups and 42 connections were made with service providers.

I also have concerns for the safety and wellbeing of library staff when confronted with some social issues. We need to be able to work in a safe environment.

- Victorian public library employee, 2019

Security in the library

A significant number of survey respondents (**44.88%**) don't feel confident to engage in social issues in the library for various reasons. Personal safety in the workplace is one of the key concerns for many staff.

To enable staff to be more confident and feel safe and supported in their workplace when dealing with these social issues, some Victorian public libraries have implemented some of the following measures:

- Security officers patrolling regularly or be permanently present during library opening hours;
- Security officers escorting staff members to car parking spaces or public transport locations after night shifts;
- Security officers presence for specific events/programs based on risk analysis;
- Location based or portable (lanyards) duress alarm triggers for staff, which activates police call out or security checking call;
- Provide mobile phones, portable headsets or radio units;
- Visible CCTV cameras.

Public Libraries across Victoria removing overdue fines

Library rules and policies can be inherently (and often accidentally) unwelcoming to customers experiencing homelessness or with complex needs. Policies relating to baggage size, no sleeping in the library, clothing/footwear requirements or requiring a permanent address to get a library membership – can lead to customers feeling unwelcome and at risk of being ejected [12]

Library fines are another common policy that can create barriers for customers from a variety of demographics and backgrounds. Conversations with customers about overdue library fines can be difficult for library staff and their customers. They can be confronting situations depending on the circumstances, and also create a barrier in access of library collections and services for the community. For vulnerable members of the community, library fines can mean never coming back, for fear that their fines have accumulated to an unmanageable amount. The thought of paying off large fines can seem nearly impossible. A member from Yarra Plenty Regional Libraries “...told the library they had stopped taking their children to the library because they were regularly accruing more than \$50 in fines.” [13] 16 libraries across Victoria have removed fines to date. It is a global trend aimed at increasing access and removing barriers to vulnerable members of the community.

CEO of Yarra Plenty Ms. Jane Cowell says that “...fines overwhelmingly affected people from a lower socio-economic background. Those with more money simply paid the fines and kept their books longer. But for those who couldn't afford the risk, the fines served as a deterrent from borrowing at all.” [14] By removing fines libraries are being responsive, ensuring that universal access is possible for every member of the community and enabling social inclusion.

When staff are engaging with customers who face social issues such as mental health problems, homelessness or addiction, having a conversation around fines can create a hostile situation. By eliminating the need for these conversations to happen, library staff and the community see a huge benefit.



4. Partnerships and advocacy

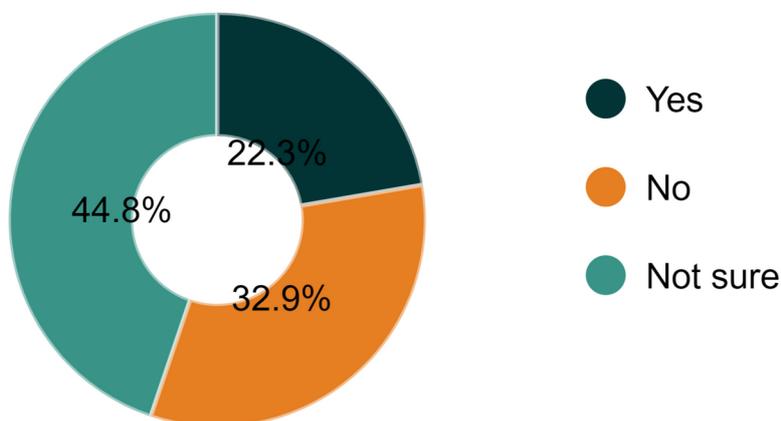
United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 17

*A successful sustainable development agenda requires partnerships between governments, the private sector and civil society. These inclusive **partnerships** built upon principles and values, a shared vision, and shared goals that place **people** and the **planet** at the centre, are needed at the global, regional, national and local level. [15]*

Public libraries have often looked beyond their four walls to develop relationships and partnerships with groups, agencies and organisations within their community. The benefits include:

- Supporting staff to gain knowledge and expertise from the community around them;
- Providing training for staff around community issues;
- Providing programs in the library;
- Accessing external funding to support additional programs or staffing;
- Co-locating public libraries in community hubs, offering the community access to services in one location.

Survey responses reflect that some libraries currently engage with community organisations or agencies, but the **majority of respondents were unclear** which agencies (if any) were currently accessed by or partnered with their library service.



Q 10. Is your library service connected with any external services/organisations to support your staff in engaging with social issues?

Those who were aware of connections reported links with a variety of council services and community providers, including but not limited to local council departments, local Neighbourhood Houses, community information and support services, homelessness support services, Beyond Blue, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Save the Children, Infoexchange, DHHS, Gamblers Help and Mission Australia.

External funding through partnership

A good example of libraries **accessing external funding to run programs** is libraries in partnership with Communities for Children (CFC). CFC is federally funded by the Department of Social Services. CFC Facilitating Partners (CFC FPs) support children and families in 52 disadvantaged communities across Australia. The CFC FP in each of these communities (or sites) engages smaller local organisations to deliver a range of activities in their communities whose programs are funded by CFC. [16]

Casey Cardinia Libraries partners very effectively with CFC Facilitating Partners - with Anglicare in Cardinia and Windermere in Cranbourne - to fund the **Library Has Legs** programs, which support early literacy programs for ATSI and CALD communities as well as supporting vulnerable families.

Libraries need to continue to look for these opportunities to support staff by gaining understanding of the community they work in, but to also develop strong relationships within that community to assist and support staff in engaging with social issues.

Community information and support services

Working with community information and support services (CISS) located throughout Victoria offers opportunities for public libraries to use the expertise of these organisations to:

- Access local knowledge and community information;
- Refer vulnerable Library users who may be experiencing personal and financial difficulties to CISS for information, referral and support services such as emergency relief.
- Receive the benefit of support services and counseling offered by CISS to members of the community (including library staff). [17]



Connecting with Councils

The closest partnership and source of guidance and support to library staff comes from their own member Councils.

Utilizing services with Council such as

- Youth Services
- Children and Family
- Disability and inclusion
- Aged Care
- Health and Support Services
- Community

can lead to the establishment of stronger projects in shorter time periods, as seen in MLS's outreach worker pilot collaboration with Council's Social Investment Branch. As council libraries or corporations, utilising the expertise of those closest to us is a great place to start in working to better support library staff.

I think we need more (and ongoing) training around social issues. We need to be more connected to the services in our local community.

- Victorian public library employee, 2019

PLV Strategic Plan 2019 - 2022

Goal 3.3 Partnerships

Foster new and strengthen existing partnerships to deliver positive outcomes for our sector

Advocating for staff rights

Though library staff know working with the community brings the likelihood of exposure to challenging behaviours, library services can do more to create the expectation of a **respectful and courteous environment within the library.**

For example, Brimbank Libraries ran a campaign in 2017 called **It's Never Okay** after a Brimbank Library staff member put forward a proposal to run an organisational wide campaign to counter the **aggressive behaviour** being directed towards library staff.

The decision was made to commence the organisational-wide campaign due to the increased number of reported incidents with regard to aggression against Council staff. This had been particularly prevalent in public facing areas such as libraries, leisure centres and customer service.

In order to address these issues, the OHS team conducted risk assessment, targeted training and safety sessions, but at the time staff still had a degree of concern and personal apprehension regarding the continuing level of antisocial behaviours experienced.

In June 2017, WorkSafe Victoria published guidance material titled Prevention and management of violence and aggression in health services (Edition 2) [18]. This was undertaken in partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services in response to escalating incidents of aggression and violence with healthcare and paramedic workers. The campaign slogan used was: Aggression and violence against health workers – It's NEVER OK. This slogan was adapted for Brimbank's campaign to: **Aggression and violence against Council staff: It's NOT OK – It's NEVER OK.**

The message was displayed on posters and splash screens in libraries, leisure centres and customer service centres. Staff were provided with badges with the slogan to wear on their lanyards. Brimbank library staff have reported feeling more supported as a result of the campaign, finding it useful to refer to in the event of negative interactions. The visibility of the campaign has also sparked conversations around behaviour between staff and the public, showing effectiveness as an awareness-raising tool for public education.

PLV Strategic Plan 2019 - 2022

Goal 1.0 Represent

Proactively advocate on behalf of the sector and represent our members on matters that impact public libraries

Closing Statement

Using a variety of measures, whether it be staff training, partnerships or social support, public libraries across Victoria have the ability to become even more vibrant, welcoming spaces.

The responses to our survey clearly show staff have the capacity, and want to be better at engaging with social issues. It is our job to provide them with the tools to make this possible. This is an opportunity for libraries to create meaningful positive change, and be part of a humane solution to key issues facing society today.

Recommendations

Changes within library service policies

- Clearer communication (e.g. position descriptions and debriefing) on what the role of the library is in engaging with these issues. Address the gap between staff expectations of the scope of their roles and what they will be expected to engage with everyday.
- Be flexible in hiring practices where possible. Consider required skills as well as mandatory qualifications.
- Build relationships - Council contacts (Social Departments, MCH Family Services); local organisations (e.g. Launch Homelessness, St Vincent de Paul Society); neighbouring library services. Don't reinvent the wheel - seek help and advice from those who already work in the area.
- Consider employing in-house social support services. There are different models, from a roving social worker (MLS) to an office onsite delivering case management (requires soundproof location for meetings and secure storage for customer files).

Professional skills

- To ensure community health and wellbeing into the future, library staff need to be better trained and supported in providing frontline library services to people with complex needs.
- Options to help people with complex needs who are coming to the library anyway, or consciously transform the library into a destination for those seeking social services.

Industry changes

- Advocating for awareness in tertiary education of issues faced by library staff - incorporation of relevant skills and awareness training into university education.
- Advocacy campaign around staff safety - (e.g. Brimbank It's NEVER OK).
- Empathy-driven librarianship - increased feelings of safety and control can help staff feel confident and demonstrate more empathy.

"Training staff is not the only thing we need to do. It is about **changing staff perceptions** of the role we play in society. We have moved from the transactional library to a learning/teaching library – our next phase is to absorb the **social library** into our mission."

– Victorian public library employee, 2019



Thank you to:

Our sponsor, Felicity Macchion

State Library Victoria

Public Libraries Victoria

Our Library managers

John Martin and Sue Upton

**Library staff around Victoria who responded to
our survey**

**Our case study contacts - Anne-Maree Pfabe,
Heather Lowe & David Perez**

The Keeping a Lookout team

Appendix 1

Useful texts and resources

Texts:

- Albrecht, S. 2015, *Library Security: Better communication, safer facilities*, ALA Editions, Chicago, United States.
- Dowd, R. J. 2018, *Librarian's guide to homelessness: an empathy-driven approach to engaging with people experiencing homelessness*, ALA Editions, Chicago, United States.
<http://www.homelesslibrary.com/>
- *Libraries are for everyone: providing quality services for people who are homeless*, Australian Library & Information Services
https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/12286%20Library%20for%20Homeless_V4FINAL.pdf
- Making ends meet: Low Income Resource and Information Guide, 2019, Casey North Community Information & Support Service, Victoria.
<https://www.caseynorthciss.com.au/resource>
- Zettervall, S. K. & Nienow M. C. 2019, *Whole Person Librarianship: A Social Work Approach to Patron Services*, Libraries Unlimited, Westport, United States.

Resources:

- Ask Izzy - "Ask Izzy" can help you to find the services you need, now and nearby.
<https://askizzy.org.au/>
- IFLA, 2017, *IFLA guidelines for Library Services to people experiencing homelessness*
<https://www.ifla.org/publications/node/12642>
- Public Library Association, 2019, *Social Work Interest Group*
<https://connect.ala.org/pla/communities/community-home?communitykey=5c2df085-e960-4608-87e7-fc132b3a43d9&tab=groupdetails>

More items can be found in the **References** section

Appendix 2

List of training in social issues

Examples of training designed to better equip library staff in engaging with social issues, including : child safety, substance abuse, homelessness, mental health, domestic violence, aggressive behaviour and others.

Child Safety

Organisation: Child Wise

Training: Child Wise Child Safety Training

Description: This training equips staff with the knowledge and skills to identify risks to children and strengthen internal child protection and child safeguarding practices.

Areas covered include: 'Introduction to Child Safe Practice' for frontline staff who engage with children and young people, 'Leading a Child Safe Organisation' for executives and management, 'Personal Safety' for teachers and educators in the early learning and primary education sector, 'Wise Parent' for parents and carers amongst other programs.

Link to website: <https://www.childwise.org.au/page/72/child-safety-training>

Substance Abuse

Organisation: Turning Point

Training: Turning Point's training focuses strongly on identifying behaviours associated with AOD and providing tools and techniques to help manage and assist those impacted, their training provided an 'overarching' approach around 'difficult and challenging behaviours'

Description: Areas covered include: Introduction to dealing with AOD issues (for secondary schools, tertiary institutions, workplaces and allied health professionals), Assessment, treatment and referral for AOD problems, Young people and AOD issues, Pharmacotherapy, Dual diagnosis and mental health assessment and treatment for AOD clinicians, Understanding and treating methamphetamine users and other topics by negotiation.

Link to website: <https://www.turningpoint.org.au/education/professional-development>

Organisation: Caraniche at work

Training: Face-to-face ice training for frontline workers

Description: The half-day training course builds frontline workers' knowledge and skills to respond safely and effectively to people who are affected by ice.

Link to website: <http://work.caraniche.com.au/training/face-face-ice-training-frontline-workers/>

Organisation: Caraniche at work

Training: [Managing Aggressive and challenging behaviours](#)

Description: This full-day workshop commences with a review of anger, aggression and some other challenging behaviours. Worker, client and systemic factors are discussed before using the predisposing, precipitating and perpetuating factors model to explore the drivers and risk factors behind aggressive behaviour in particular. Seven core principles for de-escalation (DR LASSO) are presented and practiced, followed by assertive closure for when all other attempts fail. The day concludes with strategies such as Psychological First Aid to enable staff to support colleagues who have just experienced a challenging incident.

Link to website: https://caraniche.com.au/vicroads-program?task=view_event&event_id=69

Homelessness

Organisation: Social Solutions

Training: [Bridges out of poverty training](#)

Description: The “Bridges out of Poverty” workshop will provide participants with the knowledge, understanding and tools to tackle sensitive issues in a respectful and constructive ways. It offers solutions that are practical and strategic, addressing everyday interactions through to policy implications in every sector, from justice, health and housing, education and employment, through to transport and training. This workshop introduces strategies for changing program designs, policies, and procedures to improve outcomes. Participants will use case studies to identify principles of change and apply the material to their own practice.

Link to website: <http://socialsolutions.com.au/event/bridges-poverty-day-one-two/>

Organisation: Launch Housing

Training: [Lived Experience Advisory group](#)

Description: Guest speakers with lived experience of homelessness can be arranged to come out and do talks with staff, or with the general public. Great for raising awareness and understanding.

Link to website: <https://www.launchhousing.org.au/lived-experience-advisory-group/>

Organisation: Council to Homeless Persons (CHP)

Training: [Understanding Homelessness Workshop](#)

Description: The Understanding Homelessness Workshop, explores the structural causes and pathways leading to people experiencing homelessness. The aim of the session is to provide a greater understanding of homelessness in Victoria, by exploring some of the causes and solutions. The session explores: How homelessness is defined in Australia, the causes and consequences, pathways to homelessness, impact of homelessness on people, solutions, and a brief overview of the homelessness system in Victoria.

Link to website: <https://chp.org.au/training-for-the-homelessness-sector/>

Organisation: Homeless Training Institute

Training: [Librarians guide to homelessness](#)

Description: Training aimed at library staff to confidently and compassionately solve problem behavior from troubled individuals. Developed by Ryan O'Dowd. Ryan is the Executive Director of a large homeless shelter outside of Chicago, Illinois. He regularly travels the country training libraries, police departments, schools and other organizations on how to work compassionately with challenging homeless individuals. There are sections of the website which you can access without registering for the training which provide some insight for staff. Although this is American based, a lot of the information is still relevant.

Link to website: <http://www.homelesslibrary.com/>

Mental health

Organisation: Mindful Employer

Training: [Prepared Leaders](#)

Description: This highly practical, interactive workshop builds the confidence and skills of managers and leaders to recognise and respond to workplace mental health concerns early, in the same way as they would any other safety issue. By teaching your leaders the appropriate skills, you'll increase your organisation's preventative capabilities, and help to promote a positive mental health culture in the workplace.

Link to website: <https://www.mindfulemployer.com.au/what-we-do/3-hour-workshops>

Organisation: Mindful Employer

Training: [Mental Health on the frontline](#)

Description: This dynamic workshop ensures that customer service staff or staff working in a public-facing role have the knowledge, skills and resilience to respond to mental health issues effectively. It is designed to increase awareness and understanding of a broad range of mental illnesses, ensuring staff have the skills to maintain quality service, whilst still looking after themselves. Participants will learn how to access appropriate support services and take home the practical skills to ensure they can respond in a crisis.

Link to website: <https://www.mindfulemployer.com.au/what-we-do/3-hour-workshops>

Organisation: Real Response

Training: [Mental Health First Aid Course](#)

Description: The 12-hour Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) course teaches adults (18 years and over) how to provide initial support to adults who are developing a mental illness or experiencing a mental health crisis.

Link to website: <https://www.realresponse.com.au/mental-health-first-aid/>

Organisation: Beck Henshall Collaborations

Training: [Managing Mental Health](#)

Description: 1 in 5 of us each year and 50% of the population over a lifetime will experience significant mental health issues. We offer insight, support and tangible advice for management, HR and employees to manage and support mental health/illness so that everyone can stay focused on the work.

Link to website: <http://www.bhcollaborations.com.au/training-and-workshops>

Organisation: Heads Up

Training: [Better Mental Health in the workplace](#)

Description: National Workplace program is no longer running, but there are plenty of online resources available including online training. This site also lists a variety of other training providers who provide mental health training.

Link to website: <https://www.headsup.org.au/training-and-resources/educational-and-training>

Organisation: MOAT Training

Training: [Foundation Mental Health](#)

Description: A two-day session developed by MOAT: Mental Health Services to equip staff and volunteers with assessment skills and strategies to support people experiencing mental illness.

Link to website: <http://www.moat.com.au/moat-courses/foundation-mental-health/>

Organisation: MOAT Training

Training: [Youth and Adult Mental Health First Aid](#)

Description: A 12-hour course delivered over 2 days, Mental Health First Aid is recognised internationally as the foundation mental health literacy package. Adult Mental Health First Aid supports adults learning skills to help other adults experiencing mental illness.

Link to website: <http://www.moat.com.au/moat-courses/youth-mental-health-first-aid/>

Organisation: Relationships Australia

Training: [The Casual Counsellor](#)

Description: At some stage over their careers, many people will find themselves needing to support or help a colleague or a friend who is in difficult circumstances. Counselling skills can often assist in the management of the colleague or friend's emotional response to an issue or event. Other situations where a person may need to be the "casual counsellor" include helping a staff member who is a direct report, helping a student or parent in an education setting or assisting a client in a non-clinical situation.

Link to website: <https://www.relationshipsvictoria.com.au/training/training/course/101/11>

Domestic Violence

Organisation: Womens Health Victoria

Training: [Active Bystander Training](#)

Description: This three-hour active bystander training supports participants to speak up when confronted with everyday sexism and sexual harassment as well as a range of behaviours and attitudes that justify, excuse, blame, trivialise or minimise violence against women. This training takes participants through the causes, prevalence and impact of domestic violence, sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women.

Link to website: <https://whv.org.au/training/active-bystander-training>

Organisation: Heartlinks

Training: [Social Awareness Training](#)

Description: This program offers organisations the opportunity to inform their members about community inclusion and gender equality with a view to reducing family violence. It is designed for community groups, sporting clubs and other organisations and businesses with public facing members, staff and volunteers.

Link to website: <https://heartlinks.com.au/here4u/>

Organisation: Make the Link

Training: [MATE Bystander Training](#)

Description: Using a wide range of strategies to create change, this program is relevant to everyone - from teachers to students, from workplace organisations to community groups. Learn about: The importance of leaders in violence prevention; Bystander approach and intervention framework to prevent gender based violence; Gender inequality and why gender equality is vital to the prevention of men's violence against women.

Link to website: <https://makethelink.org.au/mate-training/>

Organisation: White Ribbon Australia

Training: [Online Training: Understanding Domestic Violence](#)

Description: Covers: Impact of violence and abuse on women and the community; Factors of abuse; Types of violence; Practical tips.

Link to website: <https://www.whiteribbon.org.au/stop-violence-against-women/educate-yourself/>

Organisation: Safe Steps

Training: [Family Violence Training](#)

Description: Experienced Safe Steps staff members are able to provide presentations to workplaces, community groups and schools (subject to staff availability).

Link to website: <https://www.safesteps.org.au/our-services/services-for-community/workforce-support/>

Aggressive customers

Organisation: Conflict Resolution Training and Consulting

Training: Conflict Resolution Training (Difficult customer training)

Description: Conflict Resolution Training & Consulting (CRTC) offers a range of quality training packages that cover everything from conflict resolution services to crisis intervention, customer aggression, and dealing with difficult customers.

Link to website: <http://crtc.com.au/>

Other training

Organisation: Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation Inc

Training: Culturally Safe Practices

Description: VACCHO's Aboriginal cultural safety training encompasses some of the information that is often included in cultural awareness training. We do, however, build on cultural awareness training and provide practical tips and skills that can be utilised to improve practice and behaviour, which assist in making Aboriginal peoples feel safe. Participants begin to learn how to strengthen relationships with Aboriginal people, communities and organisations so that access is improved.

Link to website: <https://www.vaccho.org.au/educational/cs/>

Organisation: Foundation House

Training: Incidental Counselling

Description: This two day workshop provides an approach to working with young people from refugee backgrounds in a range of settings. Participants will gain incidental counselling and other skills for responding to difficult and distressing situations. The workshop involves presentations, practical exercises, roleplays, and discussions in large and small groups.

Link to website: <https://learn.foundationhouse.org.au/arlo/events/14-incident-counselling/>

Organisation: Foundation House

Training: Seeking Asylum: Working with Prolonged Uncertainty

Description: This workshop explores the psychosocial realities of living with long-term uncertainty for people from refugee and asylum seeking backgrounds. The mental health consequences arising from pre-arrival experiences are compounded by the uncertainties of the determination process and the political environment, as well as other factors such as concern for family overseas.

Link to website: <https://learn.foundationhouse.org.au/arlo/events/33-seeking-asylum-working-with-prolonged-uncertainty/>

Organisation: Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY)

Training: Cultural Competency and Settlement

Description: CMY offers in-depth training packages which explore the essential skills and knowledge required for effective work with young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Link to website: <https://www.cmy.net.au/training>

Organisation: Heartlinks

Training: Trauma informed practice

Description: Training delivery is tailored to your team's knowledge and skill levels, and the organisation's workplace development goals, but as an example you could expect: Understanding the neuroscientific principles of brain development and the implications of trauma; Development and consolidation of knowledge and skills in working with others with a trauma informed lens; Practical application of principles and strategies; Self-care strategies.

Link to website: <https://heartlinks.com.au/trauma-informed-practice-training/>

Appendix 3

US Libraries full interviews

David Perez, Social Worker at Long Branch Public Library

1. Can you please describe the scope and delivery of social work programs or services in your library?

As a bilingual library social worker at the Long Branch Free Public Library; I operate a “full service” office. Here we will encounter micro, mezzo, and macro social work. My academic/professional social work focus is “International and Community Development”. Macro social work pertains to systemic engagement. However, we are all “generalists” by profession.

2. What was the original motivation for starting the social work program?

The original motivation came from our library director, Tonya Garcia. After our region was devastated by superstorm Sandy in 2012, Tonya witnessed the community flocking to the library for help, information, etc. It was then that Tonya realized her staff was not equipped with the social work lens needed to effectively serve the patrons.

3. What barriers or difficulties, if any, did you encounter in starting the program? How did you overcome these?

One of our initial barriers was the fact that since this is not a traditional social service agency (the library), we did not have any social work field supervision; which is needed in order to be a recognized field placement. A local retired social worker actually volunteered to supervise me for one hour a week. Then we needed to create a safe private space within the library, so we built a social work office with sound proof insulation to provide confidentiality. We purchased file cabinets with locks; in order to keep clients files secure.

4. What was the recruitment process for social/outreach workers (e.g. are they employed directly by the library or seconded from an external agency)? Do they require qualifications?

I began library social work as a social work intern. I interned for two years. Within those two years, I established a successful track record and credibility. Once I graduated, my Director recommended hiring me full time, to the board of trustees. They voted unanimously to hire me and thankfully, the Long Branch Public Library was able to fit my salary into their budget.

5. How is the program/service funded and for how long?

I am hired directly by the library. My position is now a civil service Bilingual Social Worker position. I am actually a municipal employee. I am hired indefinitely.

6. How did existing library staff respond to social workers being employed in the library?

I have been welcomed by all staff members. They all understand the impact of my work within the community. They value me being on staff.

7. Can you describe the impact of library-based social work programs/services (e.g. the impact on staff and on the community)?

Libraries have been transformed with this social innovation. We are truly a “community hub”; offering a social work lens and advocacy when it comes to social services. The staff understand the correlation and “fusion” of the two professions and the community is very happy we offer these professional services free of charge.

8. Do many patrons now come to the library seeking out social work services, or are the interactions incidental? Do you promote these services and if so, how?

Yes, many people come specifically for social services. Local and county agencies now know I am here so they will often refer clients to me. Some encounters are incidental. We have a manager who is in charge of programming and publicity. We advertise our services on our website, the City website, and all social networking platforms.

9. Does your library offer (or partner with agencies to offer) any other social support initiatives (e.g. clothes donation racks, free haircuts, laundry services, etc)?

Yes, we will partner with anyone and everyone in our community, to help improve the quality of life. We started a barbershop literacy program Fade to Books. We have partnered with state and local government to offer re-entry services. We partner with our local school district to bring many programs to the library.

10. What do you foresee as the future of social work programs and/or services in your library?

The future of library social work is very promising. The Public Library is one of the last remaining social protections left in our society. Every library, around the globe, should have a library social worker on staff.

Heather Lowe, City of Dallas Libraries

1. Can you please describe the scope and delivery of social work programs or services in your library?

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Getting to know the folks who visit the library regularly has improved the experience for everyone, staff and library visitors alike. Because staff have made efforts to learn about our homeless neighbors, it's easier for them to notice if something is wrong and to act proactively. Building relationships with our homeless neighbors also provides critical support to folks who may have little to no support network.

EDUCATING THE PUBLIC

Ending homelessness is complicated. Mythology and prejudice around homelessness is widespread. One of the greatest services the library can provide for our homeless neighbors is to educate housed neighbors about the causes of homelessness and evidence-based solutions. Each year, the library presents a Community Forum and takes a close look at one aspect of homelessness. Throughout the year, the library partners with MDHA to provide quarterly education opportunities.

ENGAGING MINDS

The library supports local service providers by providing some of the intellectual and creative needs of our homeless neighbors. Every day of the week, there is something to do from classic movies to game day and arts programs. The library offers music classes three times a week to give neighbors an opportunity to express themselves.

SERVICE REFERRAL

Two full-time H.E.L.P. staff and a group of trained Central Library staff, operate a referral and support desk that focuses on the needs of homeless patrons. The Homeless Engagement Coordinator, Suzanne Glover, has an extensive work history in homeless services, and she is able to help nearly every homeless neighbor who asks. The H.E.L.P. desk see over 1,500 visitors in any given year.

PROVIDER PARTNERSHIPS

The Dallas Public Library partners with many of the city's homeless service providers as well as the city's Office of Homeless solutions to provide space for case manager office hours, transportation to get identification, and family reunification.

REDUCING BARRIERS

The Dallas County Court District and the City of Dallas Attorney's Office have partnered to develop a Homeless Diversion Court that can help individuals who may have been charged with violations related to homelessness. This court takes place in the Dallas Public Library and can help individuals avoid warrants or arrests. The local food bank comes regularly to help individuals to sign up for SNAP and other forms of assistance.

2. What was the original motivation for starting the social work program?

In 2011 during the height of the financial crisis, the J. Erik Jonsson Central library observed increasing numbers of homeless neighbors using the library every day. Dallas Public Library then made a conscious decision to begin building relationships with and programs for this very vulnerable population. Here in Dallas, we have a serious affordable housing problem with nearly half our residents living in housing that they can't really afford. We like many other major urban cities are also a regional transportation hub, so we see lots of individuals who have come through Dallas seeking help but who may not have a family support network in the area.

In 2011, our then Central Administrator now Library Director, led our staff to just start having conversations with our homeless neighbors. Library staff greeted folks in the morning when they were entering the building. The first program we started was Coffee & Conversation, which is exactly what it sounds like—having coffee, snacks, and conversations between staff and homeless neighbors. From there we wanted to expand our efforts, so we applied for a grant from our State Library and were awarded funds that allowed us to hire one full-time and one part-time staff member. Our original plan was to have these staff do case management, but it quickly became apparent that the need was too great for one or two individuals to manage. We realized we needed to reassess. After working with many of our service provider partners, we shifted to doing what libraries do best: information navigation, mental and social stimulation, and a willingness to help.

Today, the Homeless Engagement and Leadership Program has three goals: provide warm referrals, offer opportunities for mental stimulation, and organize public education around homelessness and poverty. Treating our homeless neighbors like any other neighbor often means the library is the one place where people feel recognized.

3. What barriers or difficulties, if any, did you encounter in starting the program? How did you overcome these?

When you're thinking about the homeless population in the U.S., it's important to be aware of how bias in our culture impacts people's vulnerability to become homeless. Historical government policies like red-lining (zoning and lending guidelines that made it nearly impossible for people of color to buy homes) as well as so many other types of structural racism and prejudice make the prevalence of homelessness among people of color much higher than for whites. We know that homelessness disproportionately affects African Americans who make up just 13% of the general population but make up 40% of the homeless population. African Americans are 16x more likely to end up living in a shelter than white. In the homeless youth population, around 40% identify as LGBT whereas in the general youth population they make up around 5%. Racism and bigotry lead many housed neighbors to perceive homeless neighbors as dangerous and lazy. These attitudes about the homeless make it difficult for cities to make real progress on putting folks into housing.

The system is exhausting for people, and it often fails them. Many folks have given up on receiving help because they have been so mistreated or misled by service providers and the government. It can take a while to break down the protective wall they have for themselves. Though few library staff might perceive themselves as such, library staff are in positions of power and can be perceived to be one more government institution that will fail them. Adding to this, the overall whiteness of librarianship in the United States adds to this power imbalance. Too often, library efforts can come off as another 'white hero' narrative.

The only way to overcome these issues is really to build relationships with folks that are based on dignity and respect. There's also a need to educate the public and provide opportunities for housed folks to build relationships with our unhoused folks. This is the quickest way to dismantle the stereotypical narrative surrounding homelessness.

There will always be barriers with government assistance, transportation, and IDs for folks but we can work to help people get through those hurdles more quickly.

4. How is the program funded and for how long?

When the program began, it was really an initiative to shift staff perceptions and behaviors as well as become more welcoming to our homeless neighbors. That, of course, had no cost to us. We applied for a grant to hire 1.5 FTE to be dedicated solely to serving our homeless neighbors. Originally, we envisioned this staff to be social workers who would carry a case load. However, we quickly realized that this task was more than we could execute ourselves, so we emphasized the things that shelters and other service providers can't typically do: social and intellectual stimulation. The grant was renewed for the full three years possible, and this gave us time to demonstrate impact and importance to our city manager and city council. When the grants ended, we established 2 full time positions that are now part of the regular city budget.

5. How did existing library staff respond to the HELP Desk staff being employed by the library?

We have made an effort to insure that our Homeless Engagement staff are not a separate crew from our public service staff. Like Brooklyn Public Library and others, our Homeless Engagement staff are as much there to help staff navigate interactions with higher need library visitors. We now employ a licensed professional counselor who has more than twenty years service in the social service provider field. She both knows the system and how to navigate it, and she can assist library members who may be having difficulty. This has alleviated a lot of stress among our staff. Even though Suzanne cannot be everywhere all at once, knowing she is there as guidance and backup allows staff to feel like they have needed resources.

The then Central Library Administrator, now our Director Jo Giudice started by taking staff to local service providers and bringing service providers to the library to educate staff. We toured their facilities so we could understand what the daily life of someone experiencing homelessness looks like, and the library offered training on the issue of homelessness, resources to help, mental health, de-escalation techniques, and having tough conversations. It's all been an ongoing learning experience. Since the beginning of the program, incident rates have gone down significantly, and staff have better relationships with the folks in our buildings.

We still have workshops and training sessions, but a lot of the learning that takes place now comes from modeling and coaching. The Homeless Engagement Coordinator now brings staff alongside her to speak with library visitors when they call her for help. After a time or two, she will encourage the staff to take the lead but is there to back them up. This type of learning makes it much more likely that staff will implement sensitivity and de-escalation techniques.

6. Can you describe the impact of the HELP Desk/other social work programs (e.g. the impact on existing staff and on the community)?

It's hard to quantify the impact to our homeless neighbors. Sometimes you won't see a homeless neighbor for a period of time, and you're not sure that they've moved on to a better situation unless they return to the library or we hear from their case manager. We've helped out in the processing of housing hundreds of folks, but I think the impact is far richer in areas that you can't quite measure—we hear over and over again from patrons that they feel 'human' in the library or that 'they're able to remember who they are.' It's that small slice of normalcy and recognition that I believe does the most good. We've also helped educate the public around issues of homelessness, and we've hear from many folks who were turned off by the homeless population in the library that they've now changed their minds.

7. Do many patrons now come to the library seeking out social work services, or are the interactions incidental? Do you promote these services and if so, how?

It's sort of both. We have a lot of patrons who will seek out library staff to talk about their options or to figure out what options there are. We also partner with service providers who hold office hours at the library, so this can be a way to have a very gentle handoff. We don't really have to do much promotion. As with most urban homeless populations, there is an incredible informal information exchange. Often, we only need to tell a few people about a certain service or an upcoming program to reach a large portion of the downtown homeless neighbors.

8. Does your library offer (or partner with agencies to offer) any other social support initiatives (e.g. clothes donation racks, free haircuts, laundry services, etc)?

For the most part, we try to insure that we are not acting in a way that would prevent someone from accessing a true social service provider. Our aim is to get our homeless neighbors to feel more comfortable seeking help with our local service providers. The one exception is that we have a backpack and winter supply drive and giveaway. We focus on things the shelters don't tend to get like blankets, gloves, playing cards, reusable water bottles, etc. Over the last 4 years we've given away more than 1,000 backpacks stuffed with winter supplies.

9. What do you foresee as the future of social work programs and/or services in your library?

Currently we are looking into a partnership with a local university that would allow us to offer more social services and counseling, not just to our unhoused folks, but to everyone. In terms of our homeless neighbors, our LPC, Suzanne Glover, is developing plans to screen clients for mental health issues that would qualify them for benefits and programs.

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