Social Work in Public Libraries

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THE MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. MEMORIAL LIBRARY

THE PUBLIC LIBRARY
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
“The average income of the top five percent is more than $530,000 …. Meanwhile, the average income of the bottom fifth of D.C. households is just $9,900.”
DC is experiencing a housing crisis
Hypothermia Season
840
What does this have to do with libraries?

LIBRARIES ARE ABOUT BOOKS, RIGHT?
free, quiet, warm/cool, safe(ish) space open to all
They didn’t teach this at library school…
“I’ve been looking for these people.”
“I’ve never seen these people.”
Librarians are not social workers
EMBEDDED SOCIAL WORKERS IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES
What is the role of social work in a public library?
Ask questions & listen
Staff survey
August 2014
95% report interacting with persons using the library primarily as shelter
85% report interacting with persons who may be experiencing crisis.
95% feel training would be beneficial in doing their job.
“I know the daily stress of customer service has not always been on par with my ideals... I should be able to name the nearest shelter and know where it is at the least.”
“Many patrons with mental health issues spend a great deal of time talking to themselves, which irritates other patrons who are hoping for some quiet time. Some of these situations escalate into verbal or physical altercations.”
Patron survey
January 2015
52% visit the library daily

33% visit the 3-5 times / week
Top Three Reasons for Visiting

1. Access to reading materials (55%)
2. Safe, quiet, comfortable place (48%)
3. Access to computers (45%)
Top Three Library Services

1. Books (67%)
2. Internet & computers (55%)
3. Magazines (33%)
84% report positive or somewhat positive experiences with library staff.
Staff training

Homelessness 101
Mental Health First Aid
Homelessness Task Force
Partnership

Pathways to Housing
Connecting to the District Network
Librarians are not social workers

Social workers are not librarians
Credits & Citations

• MLK with balloons, Meaghan O’Connor
• DC Income Disparity http://dcinno.streetwise.co/2014/03/16/study-dc-ranks-fourth-highest-in-income-disparity-among-the-50-largest-us-cities/
• Martin Luther King Library, Flickr User Alex Barth
• Statistics on family homelessness http://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/blogs/housingcomplex/2015/03/12/family-homelessness-crisis-is-worse-than-d-c-officials-feared/
• Sherman Ave NW Rowhouses https://www.flickr.com/photos/mr_t_in_dc/5578574444
• Lego Librarian https://www.flickr.com/photos/julochka