

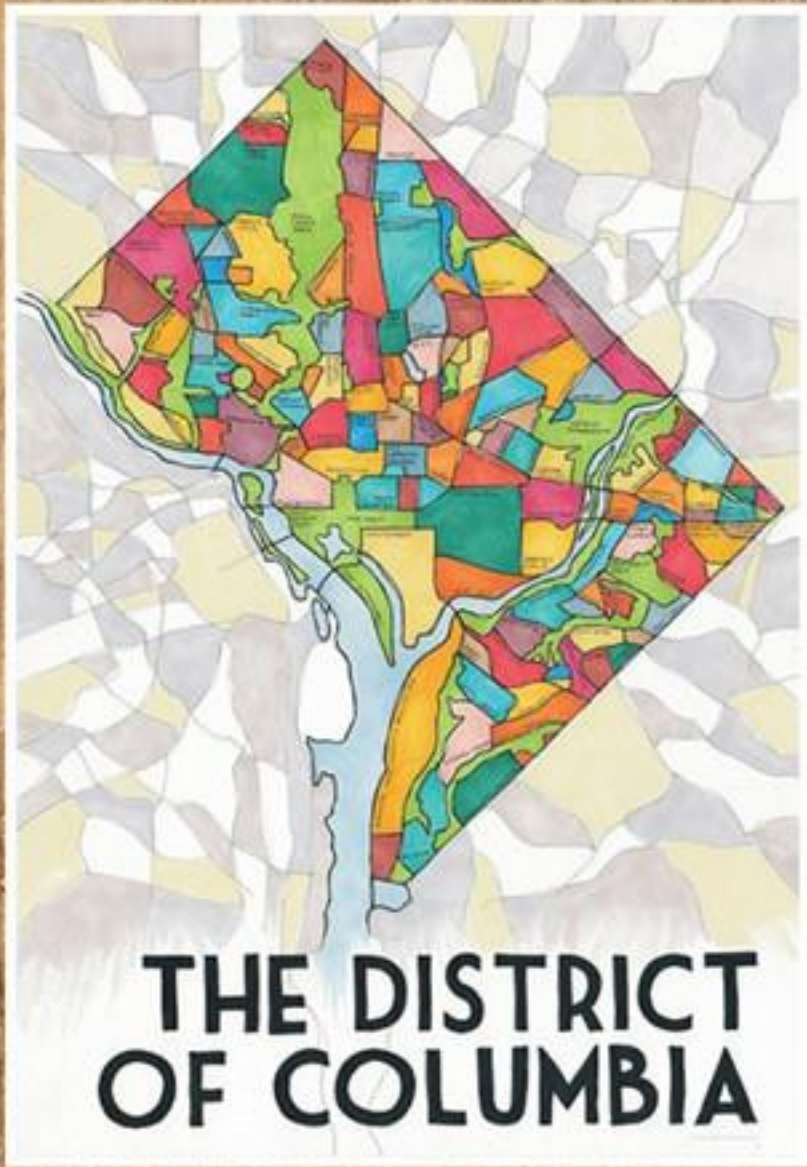
Social Work in Public Libraries

Meaghan O'Connor
Assistant Director,
Programs & Partnerships
District of Columbia Public Library

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

897

72,000

What does this have to do with libraries?

**LIBRARIES ARE ABOUT
BOOKS, RIGHT?**

free, quiet, warm/cool,
safe(ish) space open to all



THE MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. MEMORIAL LIBRARY

THE PUBLIC LIBRARY
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



THE MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. MEMORIAL LIBRARY

THE PUBLIC LIBRARY
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



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>