

Connecting Communities: One Library at a Time

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Outreach and strategic locations are key components to service delivery and client engagement. It is vital for programs to continually review and evaluate their service delivery models against available resources to ensure client ease of access to programs and benefits.

In 2022, the Napa County Library (Library) partnered with the Health and Human Services Agency (HHS) to embed a Mental Health Worker (MHW) in its local

libraries to address the unmet behavioral and/or social services needs of patrons. Since its inception, the calls to 911 for acute interventions have significantly reduced.

This case study illuminates the pathway for social service agencies to partner with the public library system to increase outreach and community engagement efforts to vulnerable populations in an established and trusted environment.

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Collaboration - The Start of a Beautiful Friendship

To maintain a haven of knowledge, as well as address the needs of some of the most vulnerable patrons, the Napa County Library (NCL) partnered with the Napa County Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA), “to enhance outreach, engagement, and access to mental health and other health and social services in the community” by co-locating two Mental Health Workers (MHW) at the main branch of the NCL.¹ These MHWs “support residents in need of mental health services, address food insecurity, and connect those experiencing homelessness with helpful resources.”² Through this partnership, the NCL is able to provide access to mental health and social services to patrons in all stages of life.

MHWs are available 6 days per week to provide Napa County residents with information and linkages to community services such as:

- Mental Health
- Alcohol and Drug Services
- Health and Medical
- Shelter/Housing
- Food/CalFresh
- Employment
- Advocacy and Support
- Bilingual Services

Why the Library?

Public libraries are like Switzerland; they maintain a neutrality that creates a safe haven for residents regardless of socio-economic standing. All are welcome to enter and access the wealth of knowledge and wonders housed within the library. As a

result, patrons trust libraries.³ Ten million California residents visited libraries in 2017.⁴ Libraries are centrally located within communities. If agencies could share the library’s existing space to provide services, this could increase the social network of the library, agencies, and patrons.

Napa County Library

The mission of the NCL is to enrich lives with books and information by, “providing free and equal access to public library facilities, resources, and services that enable the county’s diverse population to acquire information, pursue life-long learning, explore ideas, experience recreational and cultural enrichment, and enjoy the pleasure of reading.”⁵ Like their counterparts throughout the United States, the NCL offers a variety of services to their patrons; from reading material to digital access, air conditioning during the summer heat waves, and shelter during the rainy season. The library is both a node of information and a refuge for patrons. But not all patron needs are the same. Some may have bad days and others may be experiencing distress or an unknown crisis that library staff and contracted security personnel are not properly equipped to handle. This results in staff requesting assistance from 911 to address, de-escalate and/or remove the “problem” patron.

¹ Napa County Annual Report 2022 Napa County Annual Report (countyofnapa.org)

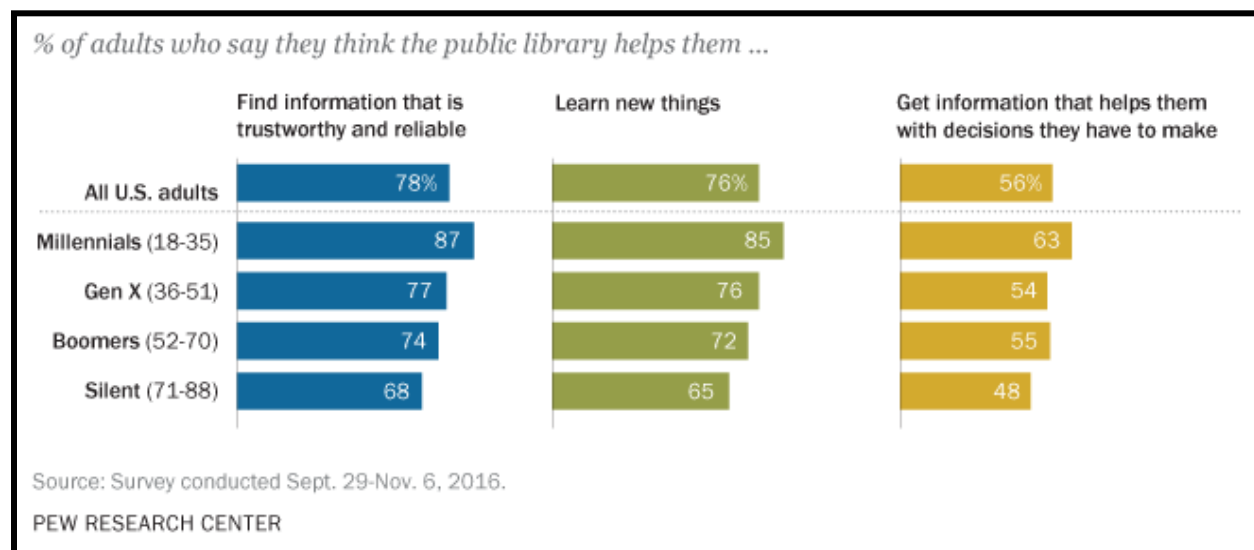
² *ibid*

³ Pew Research Center (2017, August 30). Most Americans – especially Millennials – say libraries can help them find reliable, trustworthy information. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2017/08/30/most-americans-especially-millennials-say-libraries-can-help-them-find-reliable-trustworthy-information/>

⁴ California State Library (N.D.). Mental Health Initiative. <https://www.library.ca.gov/services/to-libraries/mental-health-initiative/>

⁵ Napa County Library (2019). Napa County Policy Manual Section 29 <https://www.countyofnapa.org/DocumentCenter/View/1894/Library-Policy-PDF?bidId=>

Figure 1.



In 2020, the NCL documented more than 80 incidents of patrons in distress that resulted in calls to 911. While external partners are quick to respond, this method may not address the underlying issue(s) or provide ongoing behavioral support for the patron, which causes behavior(s) to escalate upon their return to the library. To prevent further escalating behaviors, the NCL partnered with the HHSA to co-locate MHWs in the main library to support patrons in need.

Funding – What Money?

The NCL system is funded through dedicated county tax revenues with additional support from the NCL Foundation and Friends of the Library. New projects are subject to the review and approval of the County’s Board of Supervisors.

When the NCL identified the need for mental health services, library administrators reached out to the HHSA to propose a partnership and co-location of services. With leadership buy-in from both

agencies, the proposal was submitted to the Napa County Board of Supervisors for review and approval.

Currently, the 2 MHW positions are supported by both the NCL and HHSA funding, and subject to annual budgetary review.

Where to Begin?

Co-location started with defining the role of the MHWs within the library system:

- *Provide Resources and Referrals:* MHWs serve as a bridge between library patrons and social services. They assist patrons with applications for public benefits and navigation of patron needs in real time. At times, the MHWs will provide follow-up inquiries and services, thereby strengthening the relationship between staff and patrons.

- *Implement Crisis Intervention:* MHWs are employed under the Napa County Behavioral Services' Mobile Crisis Team and receive continual training around trauma informed care and de-escalation. When library staff notice patrons in distress and/or crisis, the MHW is dispatched to intervene and de-escalate the situation. While the MHWs are not certified to place a 5150 hold⁶ on a patron in crisis or hospitalize, they have a direct connection to the Mobile Crisis Team to request immediate assistance.
- *Conduct Outreach:* The initial goal was to serve patrons who physically entered the library. Staff did not conduct patron outreach to avoid targeting specific populations. However, outreach efforts are expected to increase.
- *Engage the Community:* Staff visit the community and nonprofits near the library to introduce the new Mental Health Services program at the library. They bring flyers and business cards to each session to raise awareness of the new program and connect with resources in the area.
- *Collect Data:* MHWs track demographic information of patrons seeking their services through an

internal spreadsheet. Light touch services are provided to patrons on a voluntary basis and information outside of basic demographic information is not recorded. To protect the privacy and confidentiality of patrons, information is not shared with library staff.

Program Highlights

Since implementation, the calls to external partners for assistance in addressing negative behaviors, such as safety, violence or aggression, have significantly reduced. The MHWs have been able to de-escalate situations and provide ongoing support to patrons in a courteous and timely manner, through a variety of means:

- The library practices a “warm handoff” model to ensure supportive and successful connection(s) to the next step. This has led to seamless transitions and interactions between patrons, library staff and MHWs.
- The program is ramping up their outreach and community engagement. Staff are in the process of planning activities to spotlight Mental Health Awareness Month in May, 2023. Additionally, MHWs combine their daily walk breaks to outreach and engage potential library patrons.
- Staff continue to evaluate and define the success of the program. They are currently in the process of developing patron and staff surveys to obtain user feedback.

⁶ 5150 Hold refers to the Welfare and Institutions Code 5150 allows a peace officer or designated County professional to involuntarily detain, up to 72 hours, an adult deemed to be a danger to themselves or others. During the 72 hours detention, the individual is placed in a facility designated for evaluation and treatment.
https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?sectionNum=5150.&lawCode=WIC

Recommendations for San Francisco

The San Francisco Public Library (SFPL), in partnership with the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing, already provides robust social services programming to its vibrant and diverse reader base. Additionally, SFPL created the Health and Safety Associate Program – a 12-week vocational rehabilitation program that trains and employs formerly homeless patrons to provide social service resources to library patrons.

The Human Services Agency (HSA) can partner with SFPL to increase outreach and community engagement by utilizing the library's existing infrastructure of social programs and neighborhood locations. Last year, SFPL served a daily average of 6,621 in-person users across its 28 branch libraries and 1 mobile library. SFPL provided 1,443 adult programs and recorded 62,478 adults in attendance.⁷ Activities could include the following:

- *Provide Education:* Add HSA presentations to SFPL's Social Services programming schedule to provide library patrons the opportunity to learn about available social services in a familiar and trusted environment.
- *Conduct Outreach:* Create outreach events at the local branches to engage and educate patrons on available services – include acceptance of applications and case status reviews. This strategy would remove the referral process and

provide patrons with immediate information around program eligibility and/or application submission.

- *Encourage and Facilitate Co-location:* Identify neighborhoods that may have barriers to accessing HSA offices and assess if co-location of HSA staff in the branch library is appropriate. Designate and schedule HSA staff availability on a regular basis (i.e. weekly, bi-weekly) to create and establish rapport with patrons who seek services. Consistency is key to patrons utilizing services at co-located branch libraries/satellite offices.

Through this mutually beneficial partnership, HSA would be able to provide eligibility and benefits services in neighborhoods that have a high concentration of clients but no traditional office. SFPL would gain an additional social programming partner to add to their events calendar. Additionally, co-location of staff could increase the number of new patrons served by both SFPL and HSA. SFPL would provide a neutral, trusted space and HSA could introduce new patrons to the branch libraries, thereby reconfirming both Agencies' commitment to the community.

Next Steps

- *Identify People:* Identify internal programs and staff to conduct outreach at the branch libraries. HSA can capitalize on its existing Outreach Teams to expand their network to include the SFPL branch libraries. Depending on staff availability and programmatic needs, this could be a no-cost strategy.
- *Start Dialogue:* Connect with SFPL's Social Services Team to identify

⁷ San Francisco Public Library Annual Report FY 21-22
https://sfpl.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/%21AnnualReport_2022_FNL3lowres%201.pdf

their patron and/or program needs. Set goals and expectations of the partnership.

- *Track Impact:* Create shared language to define metrics, tracking mechanisms and success of partnership.

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