

Napa County Mental Health Library Partnership and Co-Located Staffing Model

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When people think of a library, they do not typically think of it as a place where they can get help beyond the traditional scope of services, including reading materials, reference books, tutoring, computer access, librarian assistance, and bulletin boards pinned with community events. More recently, libraries have become known as places unhoused individuals utilize for temporary daytime shelter, parents with young children frequent for interactive reading circles, community patrons seek social services, work references, and

computer resources, and school-aged youth convene for study groups and after-school socializing. However, libraries are not typically known as places where a person can go and receive in-person direct care, connection to resources, and referrals for community health concerns, mental health, and social service needs. This case study includes a brief background on library social work, an overview of the Napa County Library co-location model, and potential recommendations for Contra Costa County.

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Background: Library Social Work

Library social work is a relatively new phenomenon as libraries are beginning to be classified as venues that serve as protective factors for vulnerable community members.¹ Patrons know they can go to local libraries for refuge from inclement weather, access to water, and a safe place to be. However, there are instances in which patrons seek library spaces to engage in illegal drug use, which has typically been addressed by dispatching law enforcement to the libraries, which often results in arrests of unhoused and substance-addicted individuals. In place of these patterns, library social workers and peer navigators can intervene and refer patrons for services instead of involving law enforcement.

According to the Whole Person Librarianship, an education and advocacy collaborative, there are over 80 libraries across the nation that employ full-time social workers, over 30 libraries that host social service hours in their facilities, eight libraries that have part-time social work staff, and over 150 libraries that host social work interns.² These numbers are anticipated to grow as the benefits of connecting patrons directly with support services in local libraries increase.

Each library that has implemented social work components to its systems has done so in distinct ways. In 2009, the San Francisco Public Library created the first dedicated

full-time position for a helping professional. The San Francisco model also employs peer navigators with lived experiences to support the mission of compassionate care, outreach, and support.

Libraries as Access Points for Essential Services

Libraries are an ideal location for social services since they are often centrally located and easily accessible. They are free public spaces where everyone is welcome, and people can go for information. As automation has continued to progress, there continues to be a population of community members who do not have access to internet services who can access them through libraries. In addition, individuals who experience literacy and comprehension challenges can further benefit from library social work services.

The Need for Skilled Mental Health Workers

Librarians are increasingly interfacing with patrons in need of resources and support beyond that of the Librarians' scope of knowledge and expertise. Librarians are not social workers; they are individuals with knowledge and skills in library science and assist in navigating libraries. While they are also often viewed as knowledgeable and helpful, they are not expected to be knowledgeable in identifying patrons who may be experiencing mental health issues or are in crisis. Therefore, library social workers are increasingly recognized as a needed support and resource for librarians and patrons. Some library models use social workers, and some use mental health workers to support library patrons. The mental health workers have the added skill of mental health identification to assist in triaging and de-escalation. The services that

¹ Nonko, Emily. (January 22, 2019). Library Systems Embracing Their New Roles as Social Service Hubs. <https://nextcity.org/urbanist-news/library-systems-embracing-their-new-roles-as-social-service-hubs>

²Whole Person Librarianship. (No date). The Hub for Library Social Work Collaboration. <https://wholepersonlibrarianship.com/>

have become identified as typical referrals include mental health, public health, code enforcement, food resources, domestic violence, job resources, and public assistance, including cash aid.

Funding Library Support Models

Funding for libraries' social work and mental health roles has been challenging and varied. Some library systems have sought grant funds for the positions, some libraries have designated funding allocations, and some employ the support by way of volunteers or social work interns.³ As the benefits of library social work continue to be studied and highlighted, library social workers have also become actively involved in policy advocacy and lobbying.

The Napa County Mental Health Library Partnership

The Napa County Library and Napa County Health and Human Services entered into a partnership in 2022 after a proposal was presented in February 2021 for Mental Health Workers to be co-located at the Library's two main branches. The proposal to have two and a half Mental Health workers co-located was imagined in response to the number of incident calls being made in response to patron disruptions in the library and the desire for more supportive and compassionate interventions. There is library security available to support disruptions, and librarians are provided with de-escalation training; however, a large percentage of the incidents continued to result in calls to law enforcement and

mobile crisis for support and intervention. The interventions, however, would not immediately resolve in a beneficial way for the patron or the library. The partnership between the Library and Health and Human Services enhances outreach, engagement, and access to mental health and other health and social services in the Napa community and seeks to replace security with support.⁴

Partnership Model Components

Two mental health workers were assigned to work at Napa's main library campus and at the American Canyon branch six days a week. They are supported by the Health and Human Services Supervising Mental Health Counselor, Chelsea Stoner, who provides supervision, guidance, and oversight. They have a very amicable working relationship with the library director and staff, who are all appreciative and supportive of their role.

The mental health workers peruse the library and around the outside perimeter of the library to familiarize themselves with regular patrons and to avail themselves to be recognized as supportive individuals. They greet patrons and randomly introduce themselves to patrons to advise them of the support services they offer. Both mental health workers are bilingual. The mental health workers do not provide ongoing case management and are not required to document in any database; thus, there are no HIPPA concerns. Their work includes resource identification, referrals, and assisting patrons with applying for aid and other services. The mental health workers do not possess the ability to 5150 any patron experiencing a mental health crisis. Their

³ Public Library Association Social Worker Task Force. (September 14, 2021). Guidance for Social Work Positions at the Library. <https://publiclibrariesonline.org/2021/09/guidance-for-social-work-positions-at-the-library/>

⁴ Napa County Annual Report. (2022). <https://www.countyofnapa.org/DocumentCenter/View/28324/Napa-County-Annual-Report-2022-PDF?bidId=>

mental health training and skills aid in their ability to assess, engage, and appropriately refer or determine the next level of intervention if warranted.

The mental health workers become familiar with the patrons of the library and, as a result, have built a friendly rapport with some of them. Their presence and rapport are what have lent to the effectiveness of de-escalation and often intervening before a patron escalates to the degree of requiring crisis support. The workers share a small portable cubicle onsite. When occupied by both workers and patrons, confidentiality and general space is an issue. The library is identifying an alternate cubicle to increase space, comfort, and privacy.

The mental health workers are required to maintain a log of services provided, which is the current extent of the data that is being compiled. They track the number of patrons served, whether or not the patron is a repeat consumer, service provided, housing status, and preferred language. The data is reviewed and discussed quarterly.

Funding the Partnership

The mental health workers' salaries are supported by the Napa County Library. Money is journaled over to Health and Human Services to fund the mental health workers' salaries and benefits. The partners involved in this co-location model in Napa are fortunate in that there are designated funds for this partnership, and there is an interest and investment in this partnership being supported to remain viable. Best practices are often limited and stifled from implementation due to budgetary limitations. The investment in ensuring the Library remains a safe and resourceful place for all patrons is very noble. There has been a notable decrease in incident calls.

Evaluating the Model's Impact

The co-location service is very early in its inception, and there have been no points of evaluation to date. Their model seems to suit their community needs at this time. After almost one year of service, it would be interesting and informative data to collect directly from patrons. It was suggested that perhaps the workers can provide QR code surveys to patrons and incentivize completion and response of surveys so that information and data can be reviewed to determine the degree of support and effectiveness the service is providing. Continuing to gather the data on the number of patrons being served will also prove to be valuable in determining the usefulness of the service.

There are a number of iterations of library social work models budding across the nation. With the increase of research and published articles, Napa may find that there are other possible program enhancements they can replicate from other established partnerships, such as stocking a supply of Narcan to address the increasing opioid overdose epidemic. There was also a brief discussion in the interview regarding the possibility of exploring the implementation of brief therapy and some sort of case management service. However, by adding such a service, there is no indication that this is an actual need or would be a benefit. It seems best to preserve the outreach for what it is currently designed to be. Implications to implementing ongoing service programs could have impacts on staffing and space.

Ultimately, based on the interview with the Mental Health Workers, Mental Health Supervisor, and Library Director, the service is proving to be useful and beneficial. Client response to the presence of the Mental Health Workers is positive and reinforcing, and Library staff are appreciative of their support and presence.

Implications for Contra Costa County

Child Welfare has been under ongoing reform since 2017, beginning with the Continuum of Care Reform and now the Families First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA). One of the common threads throughout each of the reform efforts is greater community engagement and partnership to support families in need. Some of the underlying goals are to center services and bolster resources in communities of origin.⁵

Contra Costa County is actively engaging community stakeholders to support the implementation efforts of FFPSA Part I. The vision for FFPSA Part I is centered on enhancing prevention-based services and supports to achieve reduced entries into foster care and juvenile probation, increase the number of children and youth who can remain safely at home with their families, and increase equitable approaches to supporting children and families by addressing existing disparities in child welfare.⁶ A comprehensive prevention plan is required to be submitted for review and approval that highlights services to children and families that address mental health, substance abuse, and in-home parenting skills.

⁵ California Department of Social Services. (2023). Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) Overview. <<https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/cdss-programs/ffpsa-part-iv/overview>>

⁶ California Department of Social Services. (2023). Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) Part I. <https://cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/cdss-programs/ffpsa-part-iv/ffpsa-part-i>

Challenges Adapting Library Social Work Models to Child Welfare Context

The services must have at least three prevention levels, and an evidence-based practice must be tied to the services. While library social work appears to be an effective community-based support, the Napa County Mental Health Library Partnership model does not fit the stipulated criteria to be considered as a part of the Comprehensive Prevention Plan. Furthermore, upon an exploration of possibly incorporating libraries as a stakeholder, and co-locating a social worker, the FFPSA funding is very specific and time-limited and, therefore, would not be sufficient to fund a full FTE to be placed at library locations. There would still need to be a general fund match.

Recommendations

There are still opportunities to support library social work options in Contra Costa County outside of child welfare divisions. As Contra Costa County's mission entails partnering and empowering individuals and families to achieve self-sufficiency,⁷ consideration can be given to the Workforce Services Bureau, 4 Our Families navigators, to consider exploring the benefit of out-stationing the navigators at local libraries. There would be minimal expenditures involved in outstationing staff for this role and would, at a minimum, require the Library to accommodate space for this service. This case study and findings can also be shared with our Behavioral Health partners as well as local library partners for further exploration and consideration. This case study can also be

⁷ Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services Department. (2023). Excellence in All We Do. <https://ehsd.org/overview/>

shared with our Masters of Social Work Internship Coordinator for consideration and exploration of expanded internship opportunities.

Library social work is a supportive community-based model that fits well within systems reform efforts occurring nationwide. While it does not appear to be suitable for child welfare social workers due to the nature of support and intervention of child welfare mandates, it has relevance in the larger continuum of community support. There are at least two additional models of library social work local to the Bay Area in San Jose and San Francisco that have been effective means of community support and would benefit from further evaluation. It would also be advantageous for schools of social work to begin to build curricula around this topic area as well.

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