



How Libraries and Librarians Can Champion Mental Health:

Public Services, Collection Initiatives and Working with Individuals in Distress

Contributions by:

John Pateman, Chief Librarian and CEO, Thunder Bay Public Library

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The Big Picture

John Pateman, Chief Librarian and CEO
Thunder Bay Public Library





Thunder Bay Public Library

- 100,000 population, urban, large indigenous population, social issues
- 4 branches, 75 staff, \$6.5m budget
- Poverty Reduction Strategy
- Anti Racism Accord
- Needs Based Library
- Strategy, structures, systems, organizational culture

Case Study

- Social Workers within Canadian Public Libraries: a multi-case study by Elizabeth Schweizer, University of Calgary, 2018
- Partnership with Alpha Court Community Mental Health and Addictions Services
- Social Worker at Brodie library one day a week and at Waverley Library once a month
- Drop in – no appointment needed



Complex needs

- Better serve increasing number of library patrons with complex needs
- Supporting library users who are marginalized, homeless, living in poverty
- Supporting library staff



Systemic solutions

- Systems based solutions that can disrupt Traditional ways of dealing with library users in order to make better use of resources and create more sustainable relationship driven solutions that ultimately improve the well being of marginalized and vulnerable patrons
- From social exclusion to social inclusion – banned patrons procedure



Social inclusion

- Strategy - social inclusion and diversity
- Values - social justice, equity
- Practice - not neutral and apolitical but proactive, interventionist, advocating for the dispossessed, marginalized and oppressed
- Removing barriers to access – physical, perceptual, institutional



Community led

- Identifying, prioritizing and meeting community needs
- Maslow's hierarchy of needs
- Actively engaging and involving all sections of the community – particularly those with the greatest needs – in the planning, design, delivery (via co-production) and evaluation of library services
- Service Structure - Community Hubs, partners, AETS

Open to All?

- Libraries are for everyone – Open to All?, Working Together Project
- Evolution and relevance of libraries
- Libraries are a logical fit for social work practice
- Staff Structure - Community Hub
Librarian & Technician - Indigenous Relationships



Promising practice

- Desire to engage in emerging promising practice
- Organizational culture - the way we do things around here – hearts and minds, attitude and behaviour
- From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs

Moving from Reactive to Transformative at Saskatoon Public Library

Beth Côté, Director, Public Services
Saskatoon Public Library



**SASKATOON
PUBLIC
LIBRARY**



Saskatoon Public Library

- Population: 278,500
- Active Library members: 126,860
- 24% Saskatchewan children reported living in poverty
- Higher in Indigenous and newcomer populations
- Estimated 9.5 – 11 % Indigenous population in Saskatoon
- Estimated 10% newcomer or refugee population in Saskatoon



Where we were

- Traditional library services
- Serving some segments of community very well and missing others
- Collections-based services

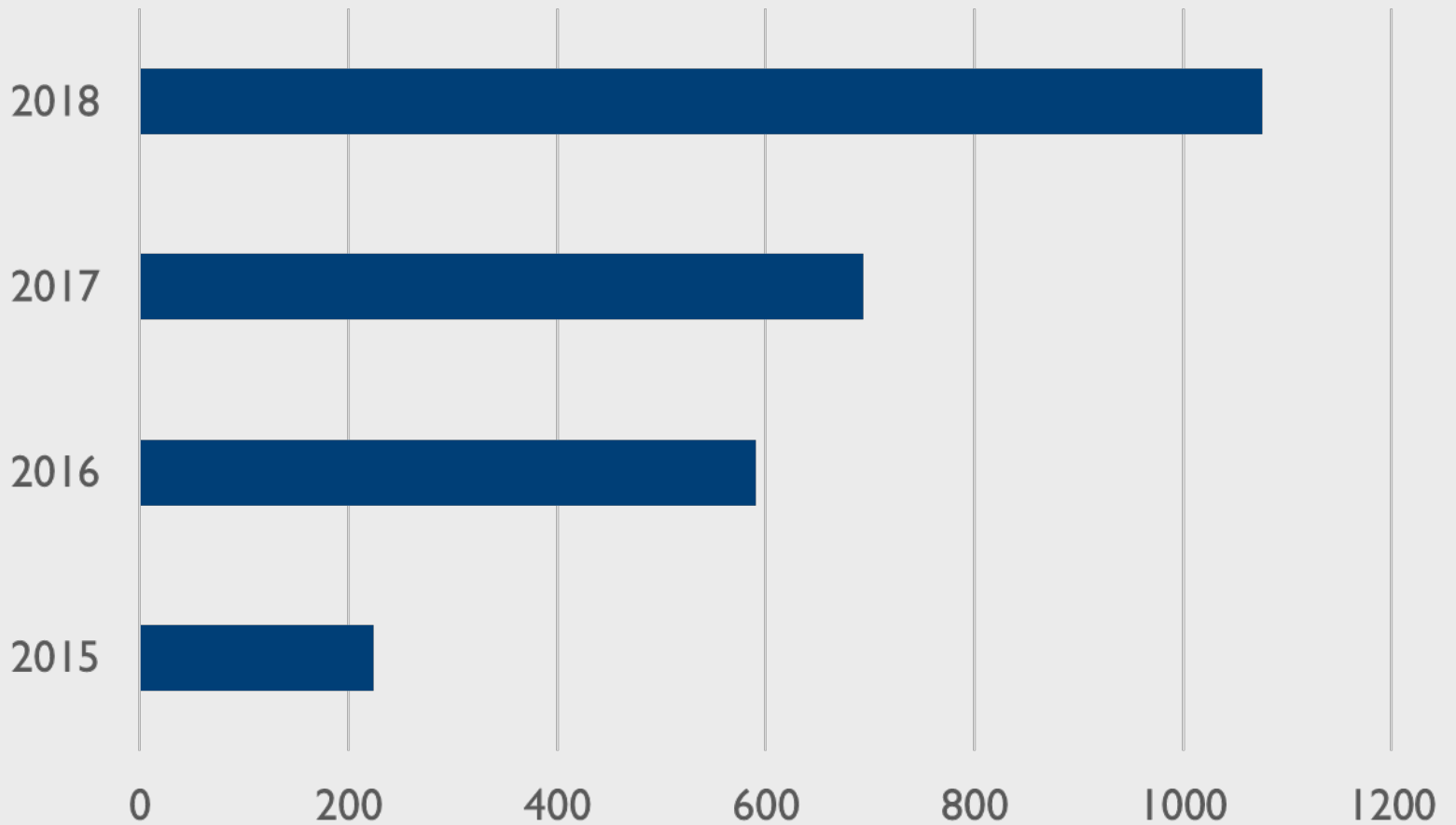


Community Expectations Changing

- Fewer traditional reference questions
- Increased need for assistance with computer usage, finding housing, navigating government forms, employment searches
- Increases in patron incidents in the library

Patron Incidents

Total Patron Incidents: Year Over Year





2016 – 2021 Strategic Priorities

- Goal 1
Inspiring learning, discovery and creation
- Goal 2
Honouring Indigenous perspectives
- Goal 3
Connection communities
- Goal 4
Preparing for the future



Goal 5

Preparing for the future

- Supports all of the other goals



A Case for Change

- 2015 practicum report by two University of Saskatchewan Social Work students
- 2016 – 2017 Staffing and Service Review
- SIIT Practicums 2016 - 2017
- Patron Incident increases and shifts



Staffing and Service Review

- Services very tied to traditional library desks
- Librarians 70 – 80% of time on desks
- Technology and automation lagging behind
- Roles reflected collection rather than community need
- Policies required regular “rule bending” to meet patron needs



Building Capacity

- Looking at services for efficiency
- Finding time and dedicated roles
- Becoming more responsive
- New roles and structure



New Roles

- Automation of manual processes
- Roles shift to community partnerships
- Roles added for assessment of outcomes
- Focus on outcomes
- Resources for consultation



Social Workers

- Outreach workers in the library
- Welcoming Initiatives with a focus on breaking down barriers for people who face social exclusion and marginalization
- Community Librarians focused on building relationships



Partnerships

- Cold Weather Strategy
- Saskatoon Poverty Reduction Partnership
- Reconciliation Saskatoon
- Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology
- AIDS Saskatoon
- RADIUS
- Saskatoon Food Bank
- Child Hunger Education Program (CHEP)



Community building

- It's slow work
- Meetings and conversations
- Keeping communication open



Community building in Action

- Challenging fall with youth
- Meetings with community
- Trial and error
- Readjusting policies
- Discovering gaps in community services for youth



Next Steps

- Mental Health First Aid training
- Naloxone training
- Community Partnerships
- Public engagement
- Service model strategy

Community Hub Approach to Mental Health

Anne O'Sullivan,
Manager, Customer Services and
Branch Operations
London Public Library





London Public Library

- 389,000 population
- 15 branches of varying levels of need, large Central Library in an urban downtown core with high needs
- Aligned with City of London priorities: Child and Youth Network, Poverty Reduction Strategy
- User First service philosophy that informs all of LPL public services



User First Philosophy

Service is first and foremost about **the experience** – it is how each person feels about their experience. We want every person to feel:

- individual and important;
- welcome and accepted;
- safe and comfortable;
- valued, respected and understood;
- personally engaged and invested, with a sense of collective ownership and pride;
- successful and competent at being library users;
- empowered to gain knowledge and be informed; and
- inspired, happy and satisfied.



Reducing Barriers + Empowering Staff

User First approach is particularly valuable at Central and high-needs branches:

- Connect Card
- Fine Free Children's Cards
- Staff are empowered to waive fines
- Incident response particular to individuals experiencing homelessness

Staff training has included:

- CMHA Mental Health
- Serving the Unpredictable Patron (offered by staff from Regional HIV/AIDS)



Central Library

- High numbers of individuals facing mental health and addictions challenges in the downtown core
- Many community assets in the downtown core, such as an Overdose Prevention Site
- Proactive approach to managing behaviours at Central, including connecting London Cares (homeless outreach) to individuals in need



Partnering for greater success

Community hub approach:

- Welcome Centres: Embedded mental health workers in the Central Library through Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) – London
 - Extension of this program now at 2 branches
- Close relationships with downtown partners (Homeless outreach, police, health unit), downtown London BIA



Social Work Students

- Western University's King's College has a School of Social Work
- Social work students placed at two high-needs branches: Beacock and Sherwood
- Social work students supervised by CMHA staff (clinical supervision) and site supervisor at branch



Reducing Stigma of Mental Health

In addition to a targeted approach for high-needs individuals, LPL supports community conversations around mental health:

- Bell Let's Talk day
- CMHA programs in all locations
- Light Therapy Lamps initiative
- Spotlight Collections promotions



Mental Health collections

- Middlesex County Library has launched!
- LPL hoping to follow suit
- In alignment with community curation approach to Collections
- Local doctor, mental health advocate has selected books to support mental health
- End product will be a “prescription pad” book list for local doctors linking patrons to LPL resources



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Future Initiatives

- Targeted high-needs approach; i.e., advocate to fund CMHA wellness workers in the Central Library for all open hours
- Continue to identify opportunities to improve community wellness
- Emphasize the link between Collections and community wellness



Simple Engagement

Kirstin Bindseil MSW, RSW

Kirana
Psychotherapy



Welcoming Environment

- What message says all are welcome in the library?
- Everyone wants to feel safe and secure.



Always events

- What can be identified as an always event for each staff member to enhance a safe and welcoming environment?



Safety

- What safety measures can the organization take?
- What safety precautions can you personally take?
- What is the most important safety tip?



90 second listening exercise

