WINTER 2020

PNLA QUARTERLY

The official journal of the Pacific Northwest Library Association

Wallace, Idaho Public Library, 1932. Image courtesy of University of Idaho Archives and Special Collections (B-113-11)

Editors, Robert Perret and Jennifer Ward

Table of Contents

Letter from the Editor

Virtually Thriving in 2021

If there is one positive thing that can be said to have come out of 2020, it is that we were forced to adapt to online conferences. I have easily attended three times as many library events as I would have otherwise, and it has been less disruptive to my (admittedly very disrupted) schedule. Online events are cheaper to attend, require no travel (which is good for the traveler and the environment) and provide many new options for accessibility, including closed captions and asynchronous viewing. Will there come a day once again when we sit in a hotel banquet room having the kind of impromptu conversations that virtual meeting spaces can't replicate? Of course. When that day comes again should we maintain options for hybrid attendance and participation? Now that we know that it is possible I truly hope that we do.

As I am sure you are very aware, Pacific Northwest reader, our geographic area is very large, with a lot of interstitial spaces that are difficult to cross for a chunk of the year. With an in-person meeting model, this impacts who can serve in leadership positions and inherently clusters that participation in the large metropolitan areas that are already serviced by local conferences and opportunities that have traditionally not existed for librarians in more rural areas or on the outlying states of PNLA. Many of these leadership opportunities have also effectively been limited to academic librarians or librarians who are already in administrative roles in other organizations who have the job flexibility to travel for conferences and committee work. Being able to pop into and out of meetings without the expectation of travel opens up leadership opportunities to a much broader group, and that helps address some of the scaffolding and transitional-planning issues our profession has so long dealt with.

We talk a lot about inclusion, and inequitable access, and creating opportunities for success for our patrons but it is also fair to talk about those concerns for ourselves. If we can reasonably include more people, different people, than we traditionally have, then we should. Or so it seems to me. Let us take something positive from 2020 and let us keep virtually thriving as we move onwards.

Robert Perret
Co-Editor

Library Leads Community in Commitment to Mask Policy

by Marcy Timblin
East Bonner County Library District

For libraries across the country, the decision to require patrons to wear face masks has been met with mixed reviews. Some communities have proven to be more divided than others in this regard.

The East Bonner County Library District in Northern Idaho closed its doors at its two branch libraries and bookmobile in mid-March due to safety concerns amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Upon reopening in June, they instituted a policy requiring all patrons over the age of two to wear a face mask inside the library. Contactless curbside pick-up service and digital options were offered to those who could not or would not observe the policy. Some patrons conveyed their gratitude for the library's interest in their safety while others objected to the policy, contending that it restricted taxpayers from accessing public services.

Despite the divisive nature of the issue, Library Trustees stood their ground. Citing research from the Centers for Disease Control, World Health Organization, and Panhandle Health District, they approved an official library policy in which anyone who refuses to wear a mask inside the library will be trespassed and, if necessary, escorted out by police. Idaho Code empowers public libraries to establish their own bylaws and policies as long as they do not conflict with the laws of the state. As an official policy, the mask requirement is legal and enforceable.

That didn't stop a small band of protesters who gathered outside the Sandpoint Library in mid-July. The group, which included several small children, moved their demonstration inside to further prove their point. Library security and staff tried to reason with the protesters who were attempting to use force to enter the building. The situation was resolved when the local police arrived. After conducting some research (because that is what librarians do), library staff learned that many of the demonstrators were from outside the local area and were not registered patrons of the East Bonner County Library District.

In the days and weeks that followed, library staff endured threatening phone calls, voicemails, and emails. Negative online reviews and threats of another demonstration were circulated on social media. The library closed a second time.

Meanwhile, the community fired back with letters, emails, and phone calls of support. Trustees and the Director received over 500 encouraging emails, which they shared with staff to boost morale. For every Letter to the Editor in the local paper denouncing the mask policy, there were at least two in support of it. Patrons delivered flowers, cards, and treats to library staff and Trustees, commending them for their firm, brave stand. Businesses offered free merchandise and special offers to library staff. Local newspaper reporters covered the story and the overwhelmingly

positive community response. Patrons continue to comment on their appreciation for the library's enforcement of the mask policy.

It's not that library officials are trying to stir the pot. In fact, they want nothing more than to serve their constituents in the best way possible. But, with such a diverse service population, there are bound to be conflicts. The library has been said to be the living room of the community. If that is the case, everyone in the family has to learn to share the space, regardless of their individual preferences.

Early on, library leadership could see a potential public relations crisis on the horizon. The library enjoys a loyally supportive constituency normally, but it was clear that closing the library and limiting services would ruffle some feathers. A short time later, when it seemed that new information and changes to library services were happening almost daily, frequent and wide-spread communication became vital.

The East Bonner County Library District had recently completed a communications and fundraising campaign for a remodel and building project for the Sandpoint Library, so they knew what style of communications would resonate with their community. The goal was to be clear and concise while keeping the message light. The theme would be on-brand with a tone and visuals that align with what people are used to experiencing from the library. The campaign included bold colors familiar to the American Library Association's *Libraries Transform* public relations campaign. Each image contained a white icon and basic font with a humorous message relating to one of three calls to action; wear a mask, practice safe distancing, and use sanitizer. The images were posted on all of the library's digital and physical communications platforms including inserts in materials for curbside pick-up service. Community partners agreed to post the share-worthy images in their newsletters and social channels. The messaging was further published via the library's weekly newspaper column, blog posts, public service announcements, community radio interviews, and podcasts. Contributing to the authenticity of the campaign, staff also sought to use humor and clear, direct communication when explaining and enforcing the mask requirement.

A library staff member shared this experience: "One guy came in without a mask. I said, 'I see you don't have a mask. We do require patrons to wear them here. Can I offer you one?' The patron grumbled, 'That's ridiculous.' Then, I said, 'Well, put it on, and let's see if it looks ridiculous.' The man laughed, slipped on the mask, and walked into the library."

Variations of the campaign served to promote digital services when physical materials were not available and to offset the demand for online holds and physical materials during and after the closure. As new information becomes available and services are adjusted, that messaging is folded into the campaign.

The communications campaign has proven effective for this rural library district with a service area of about 37,000. For instance, on social media, posts associated with the "COVID Communications Campaign" reached an average of 100 more people than similar types of posts and garnered an average of twice the engagement.

In addition to communications, the library Board of Trustees and staff introduced new and enhanced services, contributing further to positive public perception. Since the pandemic began, the library discontinued fines for overdue materials, added mobile WiFi hotspot devices into circulation, and added a new BookMatch service allowing patrons to receive the book and DVD lists and bundles based on their preferences. These types of "reveals" contributed valuable content for the PR campaign and also encouraged people to keep checking the website updates page to see what was new. People viewed the updates page 9,418 times from March through September.

Frequent service changes may be the primary reason for the high level of interest in the updates page, but the policy itself has been a source of intrigue. In April, Bonner County made national news when Sheriff Darryl Wheeler wrote to urge Idaho Governor Brad Little to reverse the stay at home order, saying it was unconstitutional. The protest in July attracted some local and regional media attention. In October, a member of the Idaho House of Representatives called upon her supporters to seek seats on the Library Board of Trustees to overturn the mask policy.

One possible reason for the heightened interest in this small-town story is that the library is setting the example of leadership on this issue. Other businesses and organizations have instituted mask requirements, even stationing staff outside the building to enforce the policy upon entry, but not enforcing it inside.

"The Library is the only place I can go, outside of my own home, where the mask policy is actually enforced. I feel safe there," said a patron who called to thank the staff for the policy.

The library, with its reputation for introverted, cardigan-clad librarians who would be content to avoid conflict, has been at the forefront of the community in its commitment to public safety. That the library would be the target of a volatile debate and subsequently take the lead in standing firm on the side of safety is an irony not lost on the community. The library may be a quiet place, but when it comes to prioritizing public safety, it doesn't mind making a little noise.

Marcy Timblin is the former Public Relations, Marketing, and Community Development Librarian at the East Bonner Library District

Addressing the Backlog: Prioritizing Archival Accessions for Processing

by Courtney E. Berge and Michelle A. Shannon
University of Idaho Library, Special Collections and Archives

Abstract

Archival institutions often have a mountainous backlog of unprocessed material and insufficient human resources to adequately address it. In late 2019, the University of Idaho Library, Special Collections Archives Department decided to create a standardized strategy to help address the backlog. Taking limited available human resources into account, the Processing Prioritization project was developed. This project involves two staff members dedicating a couple of afternoons each week to assess the backlog box-by-box, ranking each collection's priority for being processed based on a rubric that considers preservation risk, research value, digitization potential, and materials relating to underrepresented and/or marginalized communities. This article discusses the creation of the prioritization rubric, the successes and difficulties of the project thus far, assessment and evaluation efforts, and key adjustments that have been made since the project began.

Introduction

Archival institutions often possess a mountainous backlog of unprocessed materials and insufficient human resources to adequately address it. In late 2019, the University of Idaho Library, Special Collections and Archives department developed a strategy to prioritize processing projects to address and efficiently reduce the backlog. Unfortunately, processing archival collections had not been on the forefront of the department's work for several years, and then the department endured a fluctuating employee situation – lacking an official Head of Special Collections for almost two years, lacking a University Archivist for several months, and dwindling to only two staff members for several months before a third staff member was hired. Despite the vacillating faculty and staff situation, materials were continually accepted and accessioned, but few were being processed or made easily available for researchers. This resulted in a continuously growing backlog, on top of an existing backlog. The few remaining staff decided that action had to be taken to address the backlog and they could no longer wait for a Head or University Archivist to properly care for their materials.

Once we, the staff, decided to address the backlog ourselves by regularly processing accessions, the question became how to decide which accessions should be processed first. The stacks held over 1,500 unprocessed accessions, taking up approximately 7,000 cubic feet. While it was clear that accessions relating to the research interest of patrons would be a high priority for processing, it was less clear how to balance research needs with preservation concerns, since many of the accessions had been left untouched with little-to-no preservation work done for decades. These

concerns, combined with the fact that most of the accessions were stored in an area without proper temperature and humidity control, further elevated the need to consider preservation needs. These preservation concerns were validated when we pulled accessions for reference requests and discovered actively degrading, poorly housed, or inefficiently stored materials.

Beyond lacking knowledge regarding the condition of the materials, we also realized that we lacked a solid understanding of the subject matter and formats within the collections. Many older accession records were limited in the information listed. In many cases, the only information available was the name of the donor and the year it was received, with no indication of subject matter, types and formats of materials, or why the collection was accepted in the first place (was the donor a prominent professor or community member, were the photographs of an important person, etc.?). We realized that we needed a deeper and more detailed understanding of the accessions to accurately prioritize them for processing – information about the condition and content of each accession would help us direct departmental resources towards the accessions in most need of care and what would have the most value to researchers. The only way to prioritize collections while also taking these considerations into account was to go through each accession, box by box, to determine its overall value relative to other accessions.

Conducting the Project

To carry out this project, we created a rubric to help us rate different aspects of each accession and to help us remain consistent in ranking the priority of the accessions for processing. We researched other institutions and the aspects they considered in their assessment projects, and we adapted them to fit our collections better. One of the main sources we used was the Columbia University Libraries Survey of Special Collections Materials Project, which looked at housing condition (what the materials are stored in), physical condition (condition of materials themselves), intellectual value, and local value. We also referred to the University of Illinois Preservation Self-Assessment Program to help us identify legacy audio-visual materials and assess appropriate preservation needs based on specific media formats. We adapted these resources to better fit the University of Idaho's collections and the result was the creation of a rubric to rate and prioritize processing based on four major categories: condition, content, digital value, and the presence of materials related to underrepresented communities.

Accession	Collection Title	Condition Rating (1-5)	Content Rating (1-5)	Digital Value Rating (1-5)	Under-represented Community Rating (1-4)	Overall Rating (1-20)	Notes
MA 2015-23	Earl J. Larrison Retirement Scrapbook	1	1	1	1	4	Letters, some pictures
MA 1992-12	Hispanic Oral History Tapes	4	5	5	4	18	Non-archival boxes, includes transcript
MA 1996-28	Fred H. Winkler papers	3	4	2	0	9	WWII, albums, diaries, was a professor

Example of rubric created

Condition Rating

The first category is the Condition Rating, which considers both the housing condition (what the materials are stored in) and physical condition (the condition of the materials themselves). In this category, we consider the following:

- Are the materials stored in archival (acid-free) boxes and folders?
- Is the box over-stuffed or is there one folder in a giant box (a waste of space)?
- Are materials sitting upright vs. folded and stuffed into the box?
- Are there signs of pest damage, mold, or other damage (such as rusting metal, etc.)?

The Condition Rating is measured on a scale of one to five:

1. **Excellent:** all archival boxes/folders, well-fitted, good labels, known acidic materials are absent or few in number, little to no evident wear, little hardware with no apparent damage.
2. **Good:** mostly archival boxes/folder, labeled accurately, likely partially processed, few tears, little loss of information, little yellowing or fading, acidic materials without visible deterioration, no materials in terrible or poor condition.
3. **Fair:** non-archival boxes/folders but good condition, containers fitted to content, collections placed in archival boxes with no other attention, materials are largely intact with no apparent loss of information, staples/clips/tape may be present but show no significant rust or widespread damage.
4. **Poor:** non-archival boxes/folders, worn enclosures, slightly damaged, dirty, overstuffed, signs of past mold/water/insect damage but no active degradation, moderate information loss, materials may be fragile/torn/dirty but may be handled without further damage.
5. **Terrible:** no container, exceedingly dirty, hard to handle due to condition, active mold/water/insect damage, wrong or missing labels, informational loss due to damage. Preservation intervention is vital to process this material.

Content Rating

The second category is the Content Rating, which considers local, regional, and national research value. In this category, we consider the following:

- Do the materials relate to Moscow, the North Idaho region, or the greater state of Idaho?
- Do the materials document the institutional history of the university?
- Can the materials be added to existing collections or complement existing collections?
- Do the materials fill a gap in our existing collections?
- Are the materials well-labeled?

The Content Rating is measured on a scale of one to five:

1. **None:** no local value or interest.
2. **Limited:** pertains to the functioning and history of the institution/region or complements more prominent collections but consists mainly of photocopies and/or secondary materials.
3. **Pertinent:** the history of the institution and/or plays a significant role in adding new content to processed collections.
4. **High:** reflective of the institution's history, achievements, and collections. Materials relating to major University and/or local events, people, topics of high research interest, etc.

5. **Unique:** scope, quality, quantity, and value of materials about a subject that is of great local interest. Papers of great university professors, primary source material dealing with major developments and historical events relating to the university/region.

Digital Value Rating

The third category is the Digital Value Rating, which considers whether these materials would be a good candidate to be digitized and added to our digital collections online. In this category, we consider the following:

- Are there photographs or other visual materials present?
- What level of metadata is available for the materials?
- Do the materials have research value?
- Are we logistically able to digitize the materials? (for example, we don't currently have the equipment to digitize reel-to-reel)
- Are the materials already available online at another institution?
- Are there potential copyright restrictions, donor restrictions, or privacy concerns that would prevent us from making the materials available online?

The Digital Value Rating is measured on a scale of one to five:

1. **None:** materials are available online from other institutions, no local/regional/national research value, subject area never requested, vast donor/copyright/privacy issues, multiple copies, materials in stable condition.
2. **Limited:** no known digitized versions, little local/regional/national value, topics already covered by digital collections and not worth adding to existing materials, little research value, some donor/copyright/privacy issues, one copy but in good condition.
3. **Pertinent:** topics of interest with no digitized material, materials stable, easy to resolve donor/copyright/privacy issues.
4. **High:** no known digitized versions, complements other collections, materials starting to deteriorate, no known donor/copyright/privacy issues, donors expressed wish for digitization, unique formats soon to be completely obsolete.
5. **Unique:** one-of-a-kind materials, high research interest, vast deterioration, nearly obsolete formats, public domain and/or no known donor/copyright/privacy issues, donor expressed wish and gave money towards digitization.

Underrepresented Community Rating

The fourth category is the Underrepresented Community Rating. This category was added several months after we started the project, resulting from the social unrest that took center stage in May 2020. The University of Idaho Library committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts and the Special Collections & Archives Department considered how to incorporate this commitment into departmental practices and projects. Department staff brainstormed and created an original scaling system and added this fourth category. In this category, we consider whether any of the materials relate to underrepresented and/or marginalized communities. This rating is measured on a scale of one to four:

1. **Limited:** there are few materials related to underrepresented and/or marginalized communities.
2. **Partial:** there are materials related to underrepresented and/or marginalized communities, but those materials were collected by or created by non-underrepresented and/or non-marginalized communities.
3. **Pertinent:** there are first-hand experience materials regarding any subject, collected by or created by underrepresented and/or marginalized communities.
4. **High:** there are first-hand experience materials about underrepresented and/or marginalized communities, collected by or created by members of the community themselves.

Since this category is complex and important, we have made several adjustments to how we rate accessions with the representation of underrepresentation and/or marginalized communities. We began by using the standard one to five rating system that we used for all the other categories. However, as we continued moving through the project, we realized that, unfortunately, many of our collections do not contain any materials relating to underrepresented and/or marginalized communities. After some experimentation, we settled on the four-category system described above. This category is still a work in progress, but we are willing to adjust as the project continues.

Notes

In addition to the four categories that we rate, we also take notes on each accession. The notes field is open to anything that we want to remember about the accession – subject matter, outstanding questions that we have, a possible related collection to look at, personal interest/expertise with the subject matter, etc.

Evaluating the Project

At the time of writing, we have spent approximately one year on this project. Since this is a multi-year project, it is important to evaluate the project along the way and make key adjustments when necessary. Although the project is nowhere near completion, we have identified several challenges, successes, and other aspects for consideration as we continue working on it.

Challenges

One major challenge of this project is that it requires a significant amount of human and material resources. This project is most efficiently executed with two people – one person looks through each box while another person records the rating and notes in a spreadsheet. Because our department regularly juggles multiple long-term projects simultaneously, we must limit ourselves to spending 2-3 hours once or twice per week on the project. By doing this, we can effectively balance low staffing levels with growing responsibilities. By limiting our time spent on this project, we have been able to slowly – but consistently – continue making progress without allowing this project to overtake other departmental projects. If volunteers or student workers are available, another day may be added in the week where one staff member works on the project with the volunteer/student worker, depending on other projects.

Another challenge has been working with historic department accessioning practices. Although we were aware that many accessions had been untouched since they were accessioned and that their accession records contained minimal information, it is still challenging. Often, materials were received in the mail and placed on a shelf without being opened, still in the original shipping container. These accessions take more time to assess due to the amount of packing tape, packing peanuts, or oddly shaped boxes that we must deal with. It also takes more time to piece together the context of the collection if the accession record has little or no information – who was this person, why are they important, why did the department accept these materials? Finally, these historic accessioning practices can often result in wasted space. In some cases, materials were placed in archival boxes when they were accessioned, but the amount of material was significantly smaller than the container it was placed in. A box that is one cubic foot may contain three folders that could easily have been placed in a smaller container, saving shelf space. In some cases, the poorly fitting boxes have caused their own damage to materials because folders have slouched causing materials to have a significant bend. As we continued the project and noticed this having been a frequent historic accessioning practice, we began adding notes when there was a vast misuse of space, so that it could be addressed more quickly, as space is a concern for our growing collections.

A final challenge has been our rubric. Although it gives us a standard baseline to evaluate our collection, it is not a strict rule for our processing projects. We process accessions that do not rate highly on our prioritization rubric for many reasons – maybe it is relevant to another departmental project, such as a grant; maybe it is small enough that it can easily and quickly be added to an existing

collection; maybe it is small and straightforward enough that it is a good candidate for a student worker project. On the other hand, some of the highest-rated collections are simply too large to process with current staffing levels and resources. The rubric has been exceedingly helpful, but unfortunately, these other influences also contribute to selecting new processing projects. Additionally, as flexible as the rubric is, it cannot always replace the institutional knowledge of archivists. As a result, we sometimes give an accession a half-point rating for a category, such as 2.5 rather than a 2 or 3. This allows us to give collections the nuanced treatment they sometimes require.

Successes

Despite these challenges, there are several successful aspects of this project. Since the project began, we have processed over 34 accessions into approximately 20 collections and are currently processing 27 accessions into 3 new collections. The rehousing and weeding that the first 34 accessions required allowed us to reclaim 12 cubic feet of shelf space, while the 27 accessions currently under processing will allow us to reclaim at least another 10 cubic feet of space. These collections not only enhance accessibility to our institution's strongest collecting areas (mining, forestry, and local genealogy), they also enhance accessibility to the histories of underrepresented communities in Idaho, such as Asian American, Latinx, and women's histories. This enhanced accessibility has been utilized by our researchers: the online finding aids have been accessed approximately 700 times and despite the Reading Room being closed due to the COVID-19 shutdown in the spring of 2020, 2 of the 20 collections have been requested by researchers for in-person viewing.

We have also been able to address preservation concerns as a result of this project. Within the first few months, we found one collection with extensive mold damage. The mold had eaten its way through most of a business ledger and likely would have spread to other materials in the box and potentially surrounding boxes if it had continued to sit on the shelf untouched for several more years or decades. Upon discovery, we addressed this major preservation concern immediately, removing the collection from storage, ensuring it had not spread beyond the one ledger, and preserving the remaining data before safely disposing of the hazardous material. We have found similar preservation concerns throughout this project and although they generally do not require immediate action for the survival of the material, we do note them and rate them highly on our rubric.

As a result of this project, we have increased our knowledge of the types of materials and subject matters within our collections. This has helped us in performing reference, knowing whether or not our accessions may contain any helpful information for researchers. Beyond that, knowing the subject matter and materials of our collections has helped us with departmental projects. They have been able to inform research into future grants for processing and preservation projects, as well as subjects that may be of future interest for exhibits.

This project has also helped in identifying appropriate projects for student workers. We have been able to find "easy" collections for student workers to begin processing. These generally are

accessions that are already decently organized, and may just need some simple arrangement and re-foldering. With the limited number of hours our student workers have, these small simple projects work well. If, however, the collection does not possess any apparent original order or appears to have been haphazardly thrown into a box, we know we likely won't give it to a student worker to process. Such difficult projects are not appropriate for student workers due to the level of archival knowledge and decision-making required. For these projects, staff are the primary processors, but we may use student workers to help. By identifying these collections, we have been better able to allocate staff time and resources, allowing smaller and more straightforward accessions to be processed by student workers. This saves staff time while also giving student workers important experience in processing archival collections.

Conclusion

Although we are far from being done with the project, the outcomes have been fruitful thus far. In the first year, we have gained a deeper and more detailed understanding of our collection, addressed major preservation concerns, and processed collections that we believe will be valuable for current and future researchers in our community and nation-wide.

Look for the Helpers: Public Libraries and the Homeless: A Literature Review

by Kellian Clink

Abstract

This literature review looks at some recent studies about homelessness in the library. Recent general studies, a look at rules and codes of conduct, studies of services for populations, and finally some explorations of the notion of housing social workers in the library are reviewed. Libraries have a complex role and sometimes a conflicted one wanting to be a helper to the homeless while remaining welcoming to the general population and keeping their staff safe.

Introduction

After briefly noting the staggering number of counted homeless in the PNLA regions, a brief outline of some of the reasons for homelessness is presented. Librarians serve the homeless and of course, can advocate for more affordable housing, more mental health, and substance abuse services, but in the meantime, Librarians will be helping the homeless in their libraries as we reopen. The salient issue is the navigating between wanting to be a helper and wanting to make sure your library is an inviting space for all (Geisler 2019).

Defining who the homeless are is complex and fraught (Muggleton, 2013) and may include those staying at shelters, couch surfing, or sleeping rough, to name a few situations. Also, demographics are governed by local conditions. When there are tent cities across our country and with Covid potentially causing a tsunami of increased homelessness, I offer up a review of some of the recent literature. The most recent statistics I could find for the PNLA areas:

Alaska: 2019 --1907

Alberta: 2014—6663

British Columbia: 2018--7,655

Idaho 2017: 2,037

Montana 2016: 2,060

Oregon 2018: 15,800

Washington 2019 21,621

This narrative will outline findings from big general studies, those that looked at services for special populations, look at the sticky area of policies and codes of conduct, glance at the articles that have studied social workers in the library, and touch on one homeless person's cry in the wake of Covid.

Covid has resulted and will result in more homelessness, a study by a Columbia economist suggesting a possible 45 percent increase (Oreskes 2020), a tsunami of homelessness. When Eugene, Oregon, for just one example, is opening "three temporary shelters in the parking lots of the Amazon, Peterson Barn and Hilyard community centers where people can camp in tents or vehicles" (Scalpone 2020, Apr 23) there's a problem. There are 102 encampments in the Twin Cities in Minnesota for the homeless (Cashman, 2020). As an article in the *Daily Beast* asked, "Will coronavirus make America finally care about the homeless? Suddenly it is a lot harder to pretend hundreds of thousands of people don't exist" (Nelson 2020). The reasons and demographics are touched on in several resources, though every individual's path is their own. Big picture issues include the lack of affordable housing (Zaru 2020). [To name but one example in Seattle, rent increased by 57% in 6 years (Seattle.Gov)]; closure of single room occupancy housing (Rukmana 2020); deinstitutionalization (Rukmana 2020); substance use disorders (Rukmana 2020), poverty (Rukmana 2020); and long term impact of evictions (Harding 2017) all play their part. Some of the demographics that might or might not be true in your library's service area: low educational levels, LGBTQ status, race (African-American youth were especially overrepresented, with an 83% higher risk of having experienced homelessness in MN) (Gibbert-Kline 2018); veteran status (Pressley 2017); and in Canada, "urban Indigenous Peoples experience homelessness at a disproportionate rate and make up a significant percentage of people experiencing homelessness in cities. Research shows that Indigenous homelessness in major urban areas ranges from 20-50% of the total homeless population in Canada" (Homeless Hub). One solution is Housing First which is cheaper. "A Housing First initiative for people with mental illness undertaken in five Canadian cities — show that the current system costs three times more than affordable housing with key supports. A 2019 Toronto Life story broke it down: about $60,000 per person per year in the current system vs. $22,000 in permanent housing." (Braun 2020)

Methodology

Articles I studied came from a search of the library literature, along with Google Scholar and results from a Google Alert. Most studies were performed in the US or Canada. The values of the public library were well stated in a guest editorial in the Edmonton Sun:

> In response to a negative piece by Lorne Gunter, complaining about library patrons in the neighborhood," Pilar Martinez wrote a piece in the *Edmonton Sun* that sums it up nicely:
>
> "Edmonton Public Library works to help at-risk Edmontonians through literacy, education, skill-development, social connections, housing, and social support.
>
> Libraries are one of the few public spaces in our city that are truly open and welcoming to all. This includes our vulnerable neighbors who find refuge, hope, and opportunity through

the public library. Because of the positive impact of this work EPL was awarded a 2015 American Library Association Presidential Citation for the program and has presented both nationally and internationally on the service.

Indeed, public libraries across North America are bearing a huge burden and doing more than their fair share in supporting those in our community with the highest needs. Rather than blame the public library and homeless individuals for society's woes, it would be more useful and productive to acknowledge the complexity of poverty and homelessness and contribute to the creation of innovative solutions. For EPL's part, we are incredibly proud of our services to ALL Edmontonians, and we will continue to be a place of solace, warmth, and understanding for our city's most vulnerable and other Edmontonians" (Martinez, 2020)

On the flip side of value, there is always the threat. Of not providing a place of solace to the homeless--"When poverty and homelessness are considered on a community level, impacts such as the financial costs of poverty on the whole community, and costs in terms of physical infrastructure, culture, social inclusion, healthcare, are apparent. These costs reveal the erosion of social fabric, where the safety, health, and overall wellbeing of a community is threatened when cycles of poverty are unaddressed." (Hill & Tamminen 2020) and of course, when kids are experiencing the erosion of the social fabric, many of us are even more horrified. Some of the young people in a study of LGBT teens talk about the library as "the safest place to be. It's safe from the outside world." The research continued, "Although it was dangerous living on the streets, the youth did not talk much about this. There were references to feeling safe at the drop-in center or the Library, but there were not many stories about the risks they encountered daily. Karter, Avery, and Zion did mention friends who had died, and Karter made a connection to this and being survivors" (Winkelstein 2019, 204).

General Studies

Both the American Library Association and the Canadian Librarian Association advocate for services for all patrons. The ALA statement about serving the poor has 20 points, including staff training about serving the poor, advocating policy in a more general way that supports people who live in poverty or are homeless, and "promoting the review of public conduct policies and administrative procedures to ensure they are not creating unintentional barriers to people experiencing poverty." (ALA) Public libraries are in a unique position to understand the issues presenting themselves in a community for the homeless and others (Richter et al, 2019). One social worker writes about the library as a protective factor, likening it to others. "Protective factors include growing up in a two-parent household, consistent access to healthy food, educational and professional opportunities, and little to no transportation challenges. Protective factors are resources, relationships, and opportunities in an individual's life that mitigate risk" (Lloyd, 2020). The library is another factor, Lloyd argues. Depending on the location of the library, there may be a significant portion of patrons who are homeless, whether that means couch surfing or anywhere along the spectrum. One study of six branches in a large city in Western Canada found that "most (77%) library users live in stable housing, but a sizeable number 22.2% confront unstable housing or are homeless." (Richter et al 2019, 434). In Philadelphia, at the Free Library, Morgan et al wrote,

"Our interviews suggest, however, that libraries are disproportionately frequented by vulnerable populations, including those experiencing mental illness, substance use, and homelessness, as well as recent immigrants and children" (Morgan et al 2016, 2031). One study of about 60 librarians indicated that they had no training to help or knowledge of resources but offered up empathy and a willing ear and would be happy to have the training to better understand referral resources (Anderson, Simpson, & Fisher, 2012). The homeless come to the library sometimes because of proximity to shelters and bus routes. They fear being kicked out, so respond to directives to change bad behaviors. (Geisler 2017). Although only 4 homeless persons were interviewed, the results indicate that in addition to using the library as a place, these patrons appreciated catching up on the news, using the genealogy databases, and reading for entertainment. The librarians indicated barriers might include needing an address for a library card and judgmental attitudes of some librarians although patrons did not express this. One interviewee said, in response to the question "What about the staff, are they nice and helpful?" Homeless Participant B replied: "Yes, they're awesome." He further explained that this had been his experience in libraries throughout NZ: "Yeah, they're all really good. When I was living in Auckland, I was quite scruffy, and I'd go waltzing up, and they didn't judge me!" (Dowdell and Liew 2019, 4th page)

Rules

What ALA recommends is "promoting the review of public conduct policies and administrative procedures to ensure they are not creating unintentional barriers to people experiencing poverty."(#20 of ALA) The guru of homelessness and public libraries Ryan Dowd (http://www.homelesslibrary.com/) recommends having a minimum number of rules, but some being absolute (red) and some being breakable if common sense dictates (blue) rules. (Dowd, R. J. 2018). The only issue might be with the court's ruling about public libraries in Kreimer v. Morristown. Policies must conform to standards of reasonableness, and not exhibit vagueness or overbreadth (Geiszler 1998). I will leave it to the legal scholars to work on that. Some of the rules outlined by Geisler in an article in the *Journal of Access Services* include:

> "All bags and other containers must fit completely under a library chair." Several libraries mandated "no sleeping" rules and "proper attire," the latter of which included, but was not limited to, 'shirts and shoes required.' Nearly all code of conduct policies included an injunction against harassment, intimidation, or threatening behavior. One library clarified these behaviors in specific terms—'Persons may not behave in a rowdy manner, stare at another person, follow another person about the building, play audio equipment so that others can hear it, sing or talk loudly, use profane or abusive language, or behavior in any manner that can reasonably be expected to disturb others.' Three libraries referenced 'inadequate personal hygiene' as interfering with the use of the library by others" (Geisler, 2017 190).

One study described the discrepancies, including the example of babies who can be smelly and noisy, and their prams are large and are allowed but homeless folks can be smelly and their belongings are bulky and not allowed. (Winkelstein 2019, 205) Sleeping is seen as a major problem and policies were examined in Zhang & Chawner 2018.

Programming

Muggleton (2012) wrote an essay that admonishes librarians, not to 'other" homeless people and unintentionally alienate them. "It is also important to be mindful of the fact that a person's experience of homelessness will be heavily influenced by the initial reason or reasons for them becoming homeless, as well as by the duration of their homelessness "(10). He urges librarians to think about their core library goals and fulfill them. He writes, "An excessively simplistic perspective in this regard is likely to lead to ineffective solutions not only for the reasons detailed above concerning "otherness", but also because they will address themselves only to one section of the homeless population. Moreover, there is significant potential to patronize and alienate people with overly simplistic or prejudicial attitudes, even if they would otherwise benefit from the initiatives in question" (Muggleton 2012, 13).

Farrell reported on a program in Minnesota to work with homeless youth. The population has "glaring racial disparities, are overrepresented by LGBTQ youth, 9 of 10 have experienced at least one Adverse Childhood Experience, including abuse, most have mental or physical health issues and have experienced violence or exploitation. Staff at Minneapolis Public Library teamed with a local nonprofit to provide youth who are homeless with access to technology. The results include participants feeling they had stronger organizational and team skills, understood the writing skills needed to write a resume and cover letter, and "a sense of safety, stress relief, support, hope and pride in their community " (Farrell 2018). Winkelstein in Tennessee worked with LGBT youth and public librarians. The highest need from the library staff perspective was training about available services for the kids and a working knowledge of referral resources. One of the librarians interviewed talked about her feeling that she wasn't keeping the staff safe because of the lack of knowing who to call (Winkelstein 2019).

Interviews with homeless people indicated their surprise and dismay with librarians' lack of medical knowledge, "Participants expressed concern that library staff seemed unprepared for medical emergencies. "I'm not asking them to be paramedics," explained one participant. "Just … understanding some of the types of diseases they may come across" (Richter et al, 2019, 437). Health educators and librarians can successfully team-up. Librarians report often (80 percent) helping patrons with all kinds of health information and can benefit their homeless patrons by having a basic list of resources such as free or low-cost care health care, transportation services, as well as basic health information about common conditions affecting the homeless. (Mi, Stefaniak, & Afonso 2014).

Social Workers at the Library?

There are arguments to be made for housing social workers in the library. Just as libraries sometimes create satellites in community centers to be where their patrons are, the people seeking social services often end up at the library, because of its proximity to homeless shelters, its central location in many towns, or just because it is a place that is regarded as safe, unthreatening, clean, with facilities such as air conditioning/heat, bathrooms, drinking fountains, and computers. If a social worker is housed in the library, they can help the homeless find housing, health services, transportation, etc. and free librarians to do their work with collections and readers advisory, circulation, and whatever programming is on offer to community members.

Given the library's role in the provision of computers to access government services, public libraries can address the digital divide by providing social workers. A study by MSW students demonstrated the need for the homeless, immigrants, as well needs of school-aged children, and résumé building that were needed and could be provided by a social worker (Kelley Riggleman, & Navarro 2017). A study done in Mississauga, Ontario looked at providing training to staff, develop programming, and create a community hub in addition to having the library be a place of respite. The program resulted in an uptick in library cards, use of housing services, shower passes, food bank referrals, job search assistance, and e-government help. It's a three-way win situation to have a social worker in the public library…librarians can focus on their primary roles while being able to direct patrons to appropriate experts but gain knowledge about local services, social workers have a ready-made hub where their clients would be found, and the clients get easier access to the services they need. (Hill & Tamminen, 2020)

A Cry from the Locked Out

While public libraries have been heroic through the pandemic, providing wi-fi in its parking lots and eBooks to those with the technology to access them, their space for the homeless has been irreplaceable– One man who is homeless in Los Angeles had this to say:

> "We aren't locked down; we are locked out. Locked out of libraries, McDonald's, Starbucks, community centers, gyms, you name it. We all used to hang out at this Coffee Bean, charging our stuff and using the internet. Now we must find one place to hang out, another place where we can charge our stuff, ANOTHER place to get internet."
>
> Over the last several weeks Bumdog set out to capture how his life and the lives of those around him changed due to the coronavirus pandemic. When speaking on the reality of being homeless during a pandemic Bumdog has this to say: "People are told to stay home and not go anywhere. And if you don't have a home, stay where you are and die. And try not to cough on anyone in the process" (Sanchez 2020, May 15).

Conclusion

The studies about the public library and people who are homeless are valuable, if nothing else, just because they reassure us that we're not the only ones wrestling with the issues. Most writers in passing note the difficult dilemma…how to be welcoming and accessible for everyone when the presence of the disadvantaged in our communities may seem and even be a threat to

others in our libraries. While we of course can advocate for affordable housing and for a stop-gap measure, day centers where folks who are homeless can rest, do laundry, take a shower, and take care of all the daily chores that we take for granted. Post-Covid, there may very well be a huge increase in the number of homeless in our communities.

I hope the articles that follow will help public librarians get some ideas to bring to your staff, your governing boards, your communities. What I discerned from reading them, and I fully realize I do not wrestle with these issues every day can be summarized. Librarians are conflicted. Safety is a priority, and the priority is keeping our libraries safe for the staff and the visitors. One study included the role of a security officer, which helped take the pressure off the librarians to some degree. Regulating behaviors is difficult and in the U.S., there are laws that govern how regulations must be written. Regardless of the law, rules and regulations must be enforced by someone, and that someone must feel that they are written in such a way that they can guide enforcement fairly without ambivalence. We should concern ourselves with understanding the needs of the patrons we serve, including the homeless, and our programming should reflect that, whether it is assistance with health information, job hunting, or readers' advisory. I was struck by the interviews from New Zealand, where the patrons felt like they could find their own aboriginal roots at the library.

Librarians in many of the studies expressed a wish to get training of all sorts: on local services, de-escalation, and nonviolent crisis intervention, how to talk to the homeless and the patrons offended by the presence of the homeless. Some of the recommendations that made sense to me was having the library have official communication channels with social service agencies…so they have a current understanding of resources and they can informally do pattern recognition to share with municipal officers about trends they are seeing with the people they serve. Having a resource booklet and perhaps some time at library meetings for social service agencies to talk about how those in need access those services seems like a good idea and a strategy to make librarians feel more comfortable, with something in their pocket and a little bit of context from the social work providers.

I do hope the list of resources below are helpful and perhaps can act as starting points for conversations in your libraries. They are divided roughly into the studies, statistical resources I consulted, and other articles. When Mr. Rogers remembered his Mother saying to look for the helpers, it was to find hope in the midst of tragedy and the homeless situation in both of our countries is an unspeakably deplorable tragedy.

References

Anderson, K. A., Simpson, C. D., & Fisher, L. G. (2012). The ability of public library staff to help homeless people in the United States: exploring relationships, roles and potential. Journal of Poverty & Social Justice, 20(2), 177–190.

Dowd, R. J. (2018). The Librarian's Guide to Homelessness: Advice for managers and leaders from the director of a shelter. (excerpt from "The Librarian's Guide to Homelessness: An

Empathy-Driven Approach to Solving Problems, Preventing Conflict, and Serving Everyone"). American Libraries,.49(6), 54–.

Dowdell, L., & Liew, C. L. (2019). More than a shelter: Public libraries and the information needs of people experiencing homelessness. Library & Information Science Research (07408188), 41.

Farrell, B. (2018). Family and community engagement: Powerful partnerships bring out the best in everyone. Young Adult Library Services, 17(1), 18–24.

Giesler, M. A. (2017). A place to call home. A qualitative exploration of public librarians' response to homelessness. Journal of Access Services, 14(4), 188–214.

Giesler, M. A. (2019). Collaboration between homeless shelters and public libraries in addressing homelessness: A multiple case study. Journal of Library Administration, 59(1), 18–44.

Geiszler, R. W. (1998). Patron behavior policies in the public library: "Kreimer v. Morristown" revisited. Journal of Information Ethics, 7(1), 54–67.

Gibbard-Kline, M. (2018). Centering youth of color and LGBTQ young people in efforts to end homelessness. United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. https://www.usich.gov/news/voices-of-youth-count-centering-youth-of-color-lgbtq-young-people-in-efforts-to-end-homelessness/

Hill, R. A. (2016). Almost home. School Library Journal, 62(2), 26–28.

Hill, T. & Tamminen, K.A. (2020) Examining the library as a site for intervention: A mixed-methods case study evaluation of the "Innovative Solutions to Homelessness" Project, Journal of Library Administration, 60(5), 470-492.

Homeless Hub. Indigenous Peoples. https://www.homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/population-specific/indigenous-peoples

Kelley, A., Riggleman, K., Clara, I., & Navarro, A. E. (2017). Determining the need for social work practice in a public library. Journal of Community Practice, 25(1), 112–125.

Lloyd, P. (2020) The public library as a protective factor: An introduction to library social work, Public Library Quarterly, 39:1, 50-63.

Martinez, P. (2020, June 2). Guest Column: Libraries offer a place for all to gather. Edmonton Sun. https://edmontonsun.com/opinion/columnists/guest-column-libraries-offer-a-place-for-all-to-gather

Mi, M., Stefaniak, J., & Afonso, N. (2014). Community needs assessment to reach out to an underserved population. Medical Reference Services Quarterly, 33(4), 375–390.

Morgan, A. U., Dupuis, R., D'Alonzo, B., Johnson, A., Graves, A., Brooks, K. L., McClintock, A., Klusaritz, H., Bogner, H., Long, J. A., Grande, D., & Cannuscio, C. C. (2016). Beyond books: Public libraries as partners for population health. Health Affairs, 35(11), 2030–2036.

Muggleton, T. H. (2013). Public libraries and difficulties with targeting the homeless. Library Review, 62(1/2), 7–18.

Pressley, T. (2017). Public libraries, serious mental illness, and homelessness: A survey of public librarians. Public Library Quarterly, 36(1), 61–76.

Provence, M. A., Wahler, E.A., & Helling, J., & Williams, M. (2020). Self-reported psychosocial needs of public library patrons: Comparisons based on housing status. Public Library Quarterly. DOI: 10.1080/01616846.2020.1730738

Richter, S., Bell, J., Jackson, M. K., Lee, L. D., Dashora, P., & Surette, S. (2019). Public library users: Perspectives of socially vulnerable populations. Journal of Library Administration, 59(4), 431–441.

Sanchez, C. (2020, May 15) We aren't locked down, we are locked out: A homeless man's chronicle of life during a pandemic. LA Ist. https://laist.com/latest/post/20200515/bumdog-torres-photos

Schario, E. (2020, May 20). Local libraries stay free and open to all despite closing their doors. WGBH News. https://www.wgbh.org/news/local-news/2020/05/20/local-libraries-stay-free-and-open-to-all-despite-closing-their-doors

Smith, M. (2019). Top ten challenges facing public libraries. Public Library Quarterly, 38(3), 241–247.

Terrile, V. C. (2016). Public library support of families experiencing homelessness. Journal of Children & Poverty, 22(2), 133–146.

Winkelstein, J. A. (2019). The role of public libraries in the lives of Lgbtq+ youth experiencing homelessness. Advances in Librarianship, 45, 197–221. (forthcoming book Libraries and Homelessness)

Zaru, D. (2020, May 1). Mass evictions on the horizon as US confronts coronavirus housing crisis. ABC News.

Zhang, H., & Chawner, B. (2018). Homeless (rough sleepers) perspectives on public libraries: a case study. Library Review, 67(4/5), 276–296.

Statistics

Alaska: https://www.usich.gov/homelessness-statistics/ak/; Cerveny, L. K., & Baur, J. W. R. (2020). Homelessness and nonrecreational camping on national forests and grasslands in the United states: Law enforcement perspectives and regional trends. Journal of Forestry, 118(2), 139-153.

Alberta: Milaney, K., Kamran, H., & Williams, N. (2020). A Portrait of Late Life Homelessness in Calgary, Alberta. Canadian Journal on Aging / La Revue Canadienne Du Vieillissement, 39(1), 42–51.

British Columbia: The Homelessness Services Association of BC, Urban Matters, and BC Non-Profit Housing Association (2018). 2018 Report on Homeless Counts in B.C. Prepared for BC Housing. Burnaby, BC: Metro Vancouver

Idaho: Idaho's homeless population hovers around 2,000. (2017). The Idaho Business Review, Retrieved from http://ezproxy.mnsu.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.mnsu.edu/docview/1938739600?accountid=12259

Oregon: Point in Time Data: https://public.tableau.com/profile/oregon.housing.and.community.services#!/vizhome/2019Point-in-TimeDashboard/Story1

Washington: Point in Time Data 2019. https://www.king5.com/article/news/king-county-drives-statewide-drop-in-homelessness/281-6df0d7fc-931e-46e3-a1a4-2942b656bd8a

Other Resources

American Library Association. Poor and/or homeless library patrons. http://www.ala.org/tools/atoz/poor-andor-homeless-library-patrons

American Library Association. (2020). State of America's Libraries. http://www.ala.org/news/state-americas-libraries-report-2020/public-libraries

Braun, L. (2020, July 4). Braun: Tent cities highlight homeless crisis. Toronto Sun. https://torontosun.com/news/local-news/tent-cities-highlight-homeless-crisis

Cashman, T. (2020 May 18) Minneapolis park space to be allowed as place of refuge for homeless. Kare 11 TV. https://www.kare11.com/article/news/local/minneapolis-park-space-to-be-allowed-as-place-of-refuge-for-homeless/89-61668eb2-fdd3-4a48-8123-c52943ead940#:~:text=Currently%20there%20are%20102%20known%20encampments%20throughout%20the%20city.

Community Solutions. (2020). Analysis on unemployment project 40—45 percent increase in homelessness this year. https://community.solutions/analysis-on-unemployment-projects-40-45-increase-in-homelessness-this-year/

Harding, D. (2017). Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City. By Matthew Desmond. New York: Crown Publishers. The American Journal of Sociology, 123(1), 301–303.

Homeless Hub. Who is Homeless? https://www.homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/homelessness-101/who-homeless

National Alliance to End Homelessness. State of Homelessness: 2020 Edition. https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/homelessness-statistics/state-of-homelessness-2020/

National Alliance to End Homelessness. (n.d.) Population At-Risk: Homelessness and the COVID-19 Crisis. https://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Covid-Fact-Sheet-3.25.2020-2.pdf

Nelson, B. (2020, Mar 11). Will coronavirus make America finally care about the homeless? Suddenly it's a lot harder to pretend hundreds of thousands of people don't exist. The Daily Beast. http://ezproxy.mnsu.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.mnsu.edu/docview/2376047161?accountid=12259

Oreskes, B. (2020, May 14). Mass unemployment over coronavirus could lead to a 45% jump in homelessness, study finds. Los Angeles Times (Online).

Padgett, D., Henwood, B. F., & Tsemberis, S. J. (2016). Housing first: ending homelessness, transforming systems, and changing lives. Oxford University Press.

Rukmana, D. (2020). The Causes of Homelessness and the Characteristics Associated with High Risk of Homelessness: A Review of Intercity and Intracity Homelessness Data. Housing Policy Debate, 30(2), 291–308. https://doi.org/10.1080/10511482.2019.1684334

Scalpone, G. (2020, Apr 23). Cracking down during COVID. Eugene Weekly Retrieved from http://ezproxy.mnsu.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.mnsu.edu/docview/2400570607?accountid=12259

Seattle.Gov. Homelessness Response.