

Mara K. Plantholt. Adapting to Evolving Needs: A Case Study of the Long Branch Free Public Library's Social Work Program. A Master's Paper Proposal for the M.S. in L.S degree. October, 2020. 54 pages. Advisor: Casey Rawson

The purpose of this project was to explore the recent trend of hiring full-time social workers as public library employees. The study focused on the benefits and concerns of providing social work services in a public library space, the process of creating public library social work programs, and assessment strategies used to measure the impact of these services. A case study was conducted in order to explore these topics. The case study focused on the Long Branch Free Public Library. Interviews and existing data were be used in order to collect data, and this data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings are be a much-needed contribution to the greatly lacking area of literature regarding social workers in public libraries. The conclusion includes suggestions for future research.

Headings:

Libraries & community

Libraries & the homeless

Libraries & the mentally ill

Libraries & the poor

Libraries & the unemployed

Library public services

Public libraries

Public library personnel

ADAPTING TO EVOLVING NEEDS: A CASE STUDY OF THE LONG BRANCH
FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY'S SOCIAL WORK PROGRAM

by
Mara K. Plantholt

A Master's paper submitted to the faculty
of the School of Information and Library Science
of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Science in
Library Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

April 2021

Approved by:

Casey Rawson

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	2
RESEARCH QUESTION AND KEY TERMS	3
LITERATURE REVIEW	5
THE NEED FOR SOCIAL WORKERS IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES	5
EXISTING PUBLIC LIBRARY SOCIAL WORK PROGRAMS	7
BENEFITS.....	9
CHALLENGES.....	12
CRITIQUES.....	14
METHODOLOGY.....	19
POSITIONALITY / RESEARCHER ROLE.....	19
CONTEXT	21
DATA COLLECTION METHODS	22
DATA ANALYSIS METHODS	23
RESEARCH QUALITY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	25
RESULTS & DISCUSSION	28
CREATING THE PROGRAM.....	28
INITIAL CONCERNS	31
CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE COMMUNITY	32
ASSESSMENT	37
FUTURE GOALS	38
SUMMARY.....	40
LIMITATIONS	42
CONCLUSION	43
REFERENCES	44
APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW GUIDE	49
APPENDIX B. RECRUITMENT SCRIPTS	51

Introduction

According to Sullivan (2003), “Like a comfortable chair, a good public library molds itself around a community, taking from the community in its shape and form and giving the community the support it needs where the community needs this” (Sullivan, 2003, p. 306). Recently, many public libraries have been giving their communities the support that they need by employing social workers to provide social services in public library settings. The purpose of this study was to explore this recent trend of public libraries hiring social workers to provide services in their spaces. Little literature has been published on this topic, so this research is an important addition to the field of Library Science, and it will hopefully inspire public libraries to consider providing new services to meet community needs and inspire researchers to continue collecting data on this recent phenomenon.

To collect data, a case study was conducted wherein interviews and existing data were used to collect information about the Long Branch Free Public Library’s current social work program. The case study focused primarily on the benefits and concerns of providing social work services in a public library space, the process of creating a public library social work program, and assessment strategies used to measure the impact of these services.

Research Question and Key Terms

The purpose of my research is to explore the recent trend of hiring full-time social workers as public library employees. The research questions that will be driving my study are the following:

- In what ways does a public library social worker contribute to their community?
- What are potential concerns that could arise with the creation of a social work program in a public library?
- What is the process of creating a social work program in a public library?
- In what ways do public libraries assess their social work services to measure their impact?

In addition, it is important to conceptually define key terms relating to my research. For my research, key terms and their definitions are the following:

- Public library: “A public library is established under state enabling laws or regulations to serve a community, district, or region, and provides at least the following:
 1. An organized collection of printed or other library materials, or a combination thereof;
 2. Paid staff;
 3. An established schedule in which services of the staff are available to the public;

4. The facilities necessary to support such a collection, staff, and schedule
 - Is supported in whole or in part with public funds” (Institute for Museum and Library Services, as cited by American Library Association, n.d.).
- Social Work: “Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing” (International Federation of Social Workers, n.d.).
- Social Workers: Professionals licensed to practice social work.
- Public Library Assessment: Adapted from the UNLV University Libraries’ definition of academic library assessment, public library assessment “is the practice of evaluating library services, resources, spaces, and other areas to determine:
 - The impact of library services and resources” on the community that it supports, and
 - “How to improve library performance and better align library services and resources” to the community’s needs (UNLV University Libraries, n.d.).

Literature Review

The Need for Social Workers in Public Libraries

Before discussing social work programs being provided in public library settings, it is important to understand why these programs are being introduced. Public libraries are spaces commonly used by people with a variety of backgrounds and needs including patrons who are low-income, jobless, or homeless. Regardless of whether or not they are qualified, librarians are already being expected by their patrons to provide social services and social service referrals. Lloyd (2020) explains, “As some patrons increasingly access books, movies, and the internet at home, a higher proportion of our patrons may be individuals who come to the library for safety, shelter, and socialization” (p. 61). While many public librarians do their best to meet these patrons’ needs, expecting public librarians to perform the duties of a social services employee while still maintaining their day-to-day workplace assignments is unrealistic.

The provision of social services and referrals by librarians untrained in the area of social work places a heavy emotional weight on librarians. Working with patrons needing these social services can be “emotionally draining” for librarians and can quickly lead to burnout (Smith et al., 2020). Smith et al. (2020) warns about the dangers of burnout in public libraries: “Organizations and leadership that ignore signs of burnout in their employees do so at their own risk, since the affected staff members may exhibit behaviors that are detrimental to the organization and its clientele” (p. 413).

The expectation for untrained librarians to provide social support is not only a detriment to the librarians attempting to provide this support but also to patrons needing this support. Patrons often do not receive the quality of support or the ideal resource referrals that would help meet their needs, as librarians are often unsure of how these patrons' concerns should be addressed. Westbrook (2015) explains, "The moral and political aspects of such public information services are so intertwined that librarians' professional ethics provide no firm guidelines for making many service decisions" (p. 8). While many librarians strive to provide helpful social support regardless of how much training they have received to do so, others turn patrons away due to the librarians' discomfort with social service inquiries. One such example is given by DeFaveri (2005): "For example, recently a teenaged boy asked a librarian where he could go because his parents had kicked him out of the house. The librarian thought that this was an inappropriate question because she was not a social worker" (p. 260). While most librarians might not completely turn away a patron solely because they felt unqualified to answer the patron's question, DeFaveri (2005) points out that *any* librarians turning patrons away is an issue that should be addressed: "Many librarians are appalled when they hear this story and express sympathy and concern for the boy. The issue is not what we feel or do individually, but what we do collectively as an institution" (p. 260). The inability to meet these patrons' needs is a glaring issue in librarianship, and it is the responsibility of the library community as a whole to find ways to address this problem.

The American Library Association (ALA) explicitly addresses the importance of libraries creating programs and adequately providing services that meet the needs of

libraries' patrons. In the ALA's "Services to the Poor" policy, the ALA (2012-2013) states the following:

The American Library Association promotes equal access to information for all people, and recognizes the urgent need to respond to the increasing number of poor children, adults, and families in America. These people are affected by a combination of limitations, including illiteracy, illness, social isolation, homelessness, hunger, and discrimination, which hamper the effectiveness of traditional library services. Therefore, it is crucial that libraries recognize their role in enabling poor people to participate fully in a democratic society, by utilizing a wide variety of available resources and strategies. Concrete programs of training and development are needed to sensitize and prepare library staff to identify poor people's needs and deliver relevant services. (p. 40)

In order to respond to patrons' needs, it is apparent that public libraries must consider new programs and services to provide to patrons that would help provide social service resources. Cathart (2008) writes, "If libraries are being increasingly utilized as social service agencies in a more explicit way, perhaps cultivating space and resources for such service and the appropriate providers (librarians or not) would go far to meet the needs of both our users and reference librarians" (p. 91). One way that public libraries have been introducing these new resources is by hiring social workers to work in public library spaces.

Existing Public Library Social Work Programs

The first full-time social worker hired by a public library was Leah Esguerra, hired by the San Francisco Public Library (SFPL) in January 2009. Soon after, other libraries followed the SFPL's example in order to respond to the recession and housing crisis that occurred in the late 2000s (Dankowski, 2018). For example, Jean Badalmenti, the health and human services assistant manager at the DC Public Library, explained that Washington D.C. "lost 50% of its affordable housing between 2003 and 2015", so she

was hired in 2014 to “devise a systemwide approach to homelessness and leverage the expertise of homelessness service providers” (Dankowski, 2018, para. 4). Wahler et al. (2019) provide an idea of the number of ongoing social work programs in public libraries today:

The Homeless Engagement Initiative of the Dallas Public Library, The Forsythe County Public Library in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and the King Library in San Jose, California, all provide social services to patrons experiencing homelessness. The Indianapolis Central Public Library has a stocked resource room where library staff can get needed snacks, hygiene items, and warm items for patrons experiencing homelessness. The Pima County (Arizona) Library partners with their local health department to provide public health nursing and case management to patrons. The Free Library of Philadelphia and the University of Pennsylvania collaborate to provide a health and recreation center at the South Philadelphia Community Health and Literacy Center. According to the Whole Person Librarianship, 30 U.S. public libraries have full- or part-time social workers. In addition, at least 49 public libraries nationwide have reported collaborations with social work educational programs so social work students can complete practicum placements in the library and help meet psychosocial needs of patrons. (p. 35)

It is clear that, although public library social work programs are a recent phenomenon, they are becoming more common in public library spaces.

In response to this recent trend, the Public Library Association (PLA) assembled a Social Worker Task Force in the summer of 2018 (American Library Association, 2018). The task force consists of anywhere from four to ten members led by three co-chairs; as it stands today, the current roster of the Social Worker Task Force consists of three co-chairs, two members, and one staff liaison, all of whom will hold their positions until 2022 (American Library Association, 2018). The charge of the task force is the following:

To develop and recommend a strategic and coordinated approach for PLA related to how public libraries address the social service needs of customers. The task force will identify best practices and will consider resources to be developed that will allow PLA to offer guidance and technical support to libraries. Task force

activities include but are not limited to: recommendations for training and ways to engage library staff on the topic; identification of model programs in order to generate and share best practices; consideration of how social work methods can be integrated into libraries and PLA's educational programming; identifying ways PLA might influence social work services within public libraries; and helping libraries serve diverse communities. The group will also work to ensure that the model developed here can be adapted to support other non-librarian professionals working in public libraries (i.e., early literacy experts, IT staff, etc.). (American Library Association, 2018, para. 1)

For library professionals interested in learning more about library social work programs and connecting with individuals with similar interests, the PLA Social Worker Task Force created a Social Work Interest Group. According to the American Library Association (n.d.b), “The PLA Social Worker Task Force will use this space to discuss issues facing public libraries, provide a space to connect with others, generate and share best practices and resources” (para. 1). As of the writing of this literature review, the Social Work Interest Group currently has 215 total members (American Library Association, n.d.).

Benefits

A number of papers and articles have touched on some of the benefits of hiring a social worker to work in a public library, the most obvious being that social workers can efficiently connect patrons to resources and help patrons undergoing a crisis (Lloyd, 2020). Leah Esguerra (2019), a social worker at the San Francisco Public Library (SFPL), outlines some of the primary resources that she consistently provides to patrons in need: “At SFPL, a majority of the information requested is related to being unhoused or unsheltered. The team tries to see if the patrons also need a free place to eat, shower, store their belongings, apply for public benefits etc.” (para. 3). Social workers at the SFPL also encourage patrons in need to connect with primary care providers, hand out

fliers with information on free resources in the community, and provide information on how to apply for public benefits (Esguerra, 2019). Patrick Lloyd, a social worker at the Georgetown, Texas Public Library shares that he is primarily asked for help with circumstances related to “financial need, affordable housing, and emergency shelter”, but he also provides assistance with other needs including “educational resources (such as how to obtain a GED), affordable legal help, transportation needs and mental health issues” (Kiger, 2019, para. 10). Lee Patterson, a social worker at the Richland Library in Columbia, S.C., shares that communication needs including access to telephones is also a primary need of the patrons in her community. (Kiger, 2019)

Social workers are not limited to one-on-one sessions with patrons – they can also conduct useful library programs. Wahler et al. (2019) writes that social workers are able to provide community-focused workshops that discuss topics including “identifying common mental health problems, how to recognize when a loved one has a substance use disorder, or how to access public benefits and resources” (p.40). Similarly, social workers can lead trainings for library staff. Patrick Lloyd (2020) has facilitated a variety of trainings for the staff at the Georgetown, Texas Public Library:

...our staff has been trained in Mental Health First Aid, a low cost, day long course that teaches attendees basic skills to recognize and address mental health and substance abuse issues in others. They have been trained in the recognition of opioid overdose and the administration of Narcan, a medication that blocks the effects of opioids and is capable of reversing an overdose. I have facilitated staff training that simulate situations ranging from a patron sobbing in the library to extracting oneself from an overly demanding patron. We have begun to rethink the way that we interact with patrons demonstrating disruptive or problematic behaviors, addressing the specific behavior rather than focusing on the individual patron. (p.51)

These trainings help librarians feel more confident when providing human resource referrals and services to patrons. As a result of Lloyd’s trainings for library staff, “Staff

members who previously would point out a patron in hopes that Lloyd would help them now feel informed and empowered enough themselves to assist the patron, then tell Lloyd what they did” (Kiger, 2019, para. 11). Lloyd (2020) explains that it is important for library staff to feel confident answering these questions, even when a social worker is present: “I remind our staff that a patron has approached them with a tough problem for a reason” (p. 59). It is possible that the patron has had interactions with the staff member in the past that has resulted in the patron trusting this staff member more than others, or perhaps the staff member reminds the patron of a loved one (Lloyd 2020). Therefore, Lloyd (2020) tells staff to be mindful of the vulnerability that is required to approach a staff member with personal problems: “Our first reaction should not be to hand the patron off to another person but rather to explore that patron’s question and see if it can be appropriately addressed by the person to whom it was asked” (pp. 59-60). A patron should be gently handed off to another staff member or a social worker only when the staff member is unable to adequately resolve the patron’s concerns and requires additional help. Providing staff trainings increases the likelihood that these vulnerable interactions can stay between a patron and the staff person that they approached.

In addition to social service support, referrals, and trainings, social workers also help to build community partnerships between public libraries and community organizations (Wahler et al., 2019; Esguerra, 2019). By fostering strong relationships with local organizations like nonprofit agencies, neighborhood groups, and faith-based organizations, libraries are able to efficiently link patrons in need to organizations that can fulfill those needs. Esguerra (2019) writes, “Even with locations where resources might seem limited, at our smaller branch libraries, for example, we are amazed at how

many [local organizations] are providing services ‘under the radar’” (para. 10).

She also emphasizes the importance of having these relationships in place in order to accomplish more than the library would be able to achieve on its own: “By forging our services and resources together we are stronger together, and more people experiencing homelessness will receive that help that they need within the safety of the library” (Esguerra, 2019, para. 10).

Some public libraries have also been considering hiring social workers as an alternative to staffed security guards (Robinson, 2019; Lloyd, 2020; Selman et al., 2019). Lloyd (2020) writes, “According to conversations between my library director and that in Oak Park, IL, Oak Park’s need for security personnel has decreased since the hiring of Director of Social Services and Safety” (pp. 50-51). Other libraries hire social workers to supervise rather than replace security. At the Halifax Public Library, security staff reports directly to an in-house social worker: “This approach, and these types of in-house security that are actually part of the Library’s public services, could help to consciously build a culture that prioritizes safety and well-being without being exclusionary” (Selman et al., 2019, p. 15).

Challenges

While most literature focuses heavily on outlining the benefits of employing social workers in public libraries, some authors have pointed out a few of the primary challenges that make it difficult for public libraries to launch a successful social work program. Dankowski (2018) shares one of the struggles that Patrick Lloyd faced when trying to create a social work program at the Georgetown, Texas Public Library: “One of the obstacles is getting his smaller city (population of about 67,000) to acknowledge that

the community has homelessness and domestic violence” (para. 7). Having the support of the community and library administration is crucial. After all, the public library is a space created for the public with the public’s tax dollars. If one cannot justify the importance of the services that a social worker could provide for library patrons, then it will be difficult to justify the cost.

Speaking of cost, multiple authors indicated that public libraries’ limited budgets are a main obstacle when wanting to create a public library social work program. Blank (2014) recounts a conversation that she had with Sari Feldman, the director of the Cuyahoga Community Public Library in Ohio and a former ALA president: “There would probably be more social workers in libraries, she says, except libraries have faced extreme budget cuts in recent years, and adding positions is a challenge” (para. 25).

While many social workers in public libraries are funded by the public library’s budget, other libraries have had to find alternative ways to provide social services. Kiger (2019) explains that “some social workers (such as Lloyd in Texas) are library workers, but the funding source is a time-limited grant”, while other libraries like the Evanston Public Library in Chicago “host outsourced professionals” (para. 14). Other libraries have “procured volunteer social workers who provide services to patrons” (Wahler et al, 2019, p.40).

Even after a social work program is funded and supported by administration and the community, it can still be difficult to make the in-house social worker approachable. Dankowski (2018) writes, “Another challenge is discretion, as not everyone who could benefit from social services is actively seeking them when they come to the library” (para. 7). Leah Esguerra (2019) tries to make the services that she provides more

accessible by being present in the library space rather than hidden behind a desk; she and her team of Health and Safety Advocates “walk around with a thick binder of free resources that they hand to patrons as needed, with an invitation to come back to ‘check in’” (para. 4). Esguerra (2019) explains, “Resources not only help us link our patrons with the right services but are also great tools to ‘break the ice,’ help people feel welcome and express our concerns regarding their well-being” (para. 4). It is crucial for public library social workers to actively work to make their services feel easily accessible.

Critiques

Although the services that public library social workers provide sound highly beneficial for public libraries’ communities, there has been very little formal research done on this topic. Provence (2018) writes that social work literature on the subject is “deafeningly silent” (p. 1054). Similarly, Lloyd (2020) writes, “It is important to note that, as an emerging practice area, there is as of yet little to no substantive research on library social work as conducted by trained social work professionals” (p. 51).

While the benefits of these programs seem clear, it is dangerous to assume the needs of a population that one is not a part of: “Librarians design programs and services to promote resources and to meet community needs. But without community consultation, the programs and services we create reflect only our own interpretations of what people want” (DeFaveri, 2005, p. 260). Provence (2018) acknowledges the alarming lack of published studies that involve libraries systematically asking people experiencing homelessness what their needs are: “A survey of the professional literature of the past ten years using EbscoHost revealed six published studies that specifically included the input

of people that were experiencing homelessness about their use of their libraries” – three of these studies took place out of the United States and, out of the three remaining studies, only one took place in a library (p. 1054). DeFaveri (2005) agrees that asking patrons about their needs before providing resources is crucial:

Even when we acknowledge our responsibilities to communities that are not reflections of ourselves, our institutional culture lets us impose our concept of appropriate services on people who were never interested in them in the first place. Thus our culture of comfort becomes a culture of colonialism. Like colonialism, it assumes that the colonizers understand the needs of the colonized better than they do themselves. (p. 259)

Lloyd (2020) cautions that developing programming based on assumed needs will result in programs that “may be met with low interest, scant attendance, and disappointed founders” (p. 59).

Few studies were found that explored patron needs and linked the findings to social work resources. Of the studies that were found, all of them failed to ask their communities’ homeless populations about their needs. The first study (Wahler et al., 2019) involved conducting an exploratory needs assessment by having library employees respond to a survey focusing on information “about staff perceptions of patrons’ needs and the library’s responsibility to meet those needs” (p. 36). Wahler et al. (2019) indicates that the goal of the assessment was “to provide data and guidance for the social work/library partnership” (p. 36). Similarly, Hill & Tamminen (2020) conducted a case study evaluation of the Innovative Solutions to Homelessness project in Canada; a project that has been delivering social work services to homeless individuals through public libraries. Specifically, the authors aimed to research the following:

(1) Outline the strengths of the project, (2) identify opportunities to improve project awareness and effectiveness in order to increase program success in the future, and (3) develop recommendations for future strategies to enhance the goal

of creating operational solutions to homelessness in urban libraries.
(Hill & Tamminen, 2020, p. 474)

Much like Wahler et al. (2019), all data gathered was from surveys and interviews distributed to employees – no patrons were surveyed or interviewed. While feedback from library staff is helpful when developing programs, these studies are an example of the approach to program creation that DeFeveri (2005) and Lloyd (2020) warn against: focusing on librarians' opinions on patrons' needs rather than patrons' statements of their needs.

The second study (Kelley et al., 2017) was more thorough. The researchers split into three groups for data collection. The first research group collected data from the library staff regarding “their attitudes and beliefs about the patrons, their understanding of roles and workload, and perspectives on their own morale and job satisfaction” (Kelley et al., 2017, p. 117). The second group conducted an online search of existing data that discussed “public libraries that had already implemented ways to address their patrons' social services needs”, paying special attention to libraries in neighboring library systems (Kelley et al., 2017, p. 118). The third group conducted face-to-face interviews of 32 patrons that responded to a flyer asking for research participants; Kelley et al. (2017) notes that “[student researchers] approached each survey interview using an ‘others-orientation’ rather than imposing answers or perceptions onto the patrons” (p. 118). After analyzing data collected by all three research groups and sharing this analysis with the library director, the library director decided to hire a social worker to work in the library in order to meet the needs of the library's patrons. Although Kelley et al. (2017) took the important step of consulting directly with patrons about their needs, the study still had some flaws.

The first problem with the Kelley et al. (2017) study is the failure to interview patrons experiencing homelessness. Kelley et al. (2017) explicitly state this limitation: “Although the library staff communicated some of the needs of the homeless they interact with, the homeless patrons themselves were not interviewed” (pp. 122-123). Like the previous studies (Wahler et al., 2019; Hill & Tamminen, 2020), this study failed to ask the homeless population what services would help them and instead relied on the interpretation of the homeless population’s needs from the library staff. While the researchers were interested in learning the social service needs of all patrons – not just the homeless population – patrons experiencing homelessness still should have been interviewed rather than relying on information from staff. As Provence (2018) states, “The direct input of patrons experiencing homelessness is needed in order to ensure their needs are included in library programming” (p. 1054).

Another concern with Kelley et al.’s (2017) study is the implication that the library director did not gather the data in order to figure out what services should be provided by the library to meet the needs of its patrons, but instead that the library wanted to gather this data in order to support their desire to hire a social worker. Kelley et al. (2017) write, “Although the city librarian suspected value in having a social work presence, the data gave him valuable information on patron needs to include in proposals for grant funding” (p. 122). Needs assessments should be conducted *before* library staff decides what programs should be created for patrons. By conducting the needs assessment with the idea of hiring a social worker already in mind, the library director approached the analyzed data with a preconceived notion of the best service for the library’s patrons, thus using the data from the needs assessment to elevate his proposals

for grant funding rather than allowing the findings of the research to shape the library's programming and services.

More research must be conducted to discuss how public library social work programs impact their communities: "While social workers are becoming more common in library settings there is still remarkably little data about their effectiveness. This is an area in need of further study" (Robinson 2019, para. 30). Therefore, this research study will contribute much-needed data to the emerging area of public library social workers.

Methodology

The purpose of this research was to explore the recent trend of hiring social workers in public libraries. The project focused on the benefits and concerns of providing social work services in a public library space, the process of creating public library social work programs, and assessment strategies used by public libraries to measure the impact of these services. To do this, I conducted a case study that focused on the services provided by the in-house social worker at the Long Branch Public Library. Because the presence of full-time social workers in public library settings is a relatively new service, little research has been conducted on this topic, and using a case study in order to conduct exploratory research is ideal. According to Barbara Wildemuth (2009), “Case studies are often used in exploratory studies to define phenomena worth studying further. [...] When the research is highly exploratory, a case study can be used as a pilot study for trying out particular data collection methods in a specific context or to help the investigator become more familiar with the phenomenon in a specific context” (p .52). Therefore, I used a case study in order to conduct exploratory research so as to become more familiar with the recent phenomenon of full-time social workers providing services in public libraries.

Positionality / Researcher Role

According to Austin & Sutton (2015), researchers conducting qualitative research have a number of responsibilities. Researchers should “attempt to access the thoughts and feelings of study participants” and ensure that participants and data are safeguarded:

“Mechanisms for such safeguarding must be clearly articulated to participants and must be approved by a relevant research ethics review board before the research begins” (pp. 226, 227). Austin & Sutton (2015) also emphasize the importance of researchers’ positionality being clearly communicated:

Qualitative work requires reflection on the part of researchers, both before and during the research process, as a way of providing context and understanding for readers. When being reflexive, researchers should not try to simply ignore or avoid their own biases (as this would likely be impossible); instead, reflexivity requires researchers to reflect upon and clearly articulate their position and subjectivities (world view, perspectives, biases), so that readers can better understand the filters through which questions were asked, data were gathered and analyzed, and findings were reported. (p.226)

Therefore, before any further discussion of my methodology, I feel that it is crucial that I share my positionality.

As a straight white cisgender woman, I have a large amount of privilege. I recognize that I am approaching this research with values, beliefs, and inherent biases greatly influenced by my whiteness. In addition, as a MSLS student, I care very deeply about public libraries and believe that they are important institutions that provide critical resources for communities. While I have taken the time to educate myself on the multitude of issues in the Library Science community, I am sure that my love for libraries will impact my interactions with participants and how I interpret the data that I gather. Although I have never had to seek services from a social worker, I received my bachelor’s degree in Psychology and worked for over a year for a crisis phone line. Here, I worked directly with others specializing in psychology and social work. Therefore, I have a large amount of respect for social work as a profession, and I will be conducting this research with previous positive interactions with and beliefs about social workers.

Context

This case study focuses on the Long Branch Free Public Library (LBFPL)'s social work program. The LBFPL is located in Long Branch, New Jersey – an ocean-side city that is located less than two hours from Manhattan, New York. According to the United States Census Bureau (2019), Long Branch's estimated population is 30,241 people. During one of the interviews for this project, Roberto Ferragina (president of the LBFPL board and assistant director of the Office of Community and Economic Development) summarized the diversity of the LBFPL community:

We have a downtown environment with a business sector which is non-contiguous, meaning we have several small business districts that are separated from each other in various locations of the municipality. We have a lower middle class, we have a class of residents that need public assistance, and then we have an upper middle class, and then we have an upper-upper middle class, meaning individuals whose net earnings are anywhere above a million dollars. We even have, I think, two or three actual billionaires that live in the municipality. So the range of economics is grand. Furthermore, when you start drilling down a little bit more in terms of other demographics, such as ethnicities, Long Branch is extremely unique. Very diverse. It has been for many years, many decades, many generations. Currently the dominant ethnic categories within Long Branch would be the Spanish-speaking community from various different nations [including] Mexico and different entities within Central and South America. You have a very large Portuguese community, and you have a very large Brazilian community. In fact, our Portuguese-speaking community, which would encompass Portuguese and Brazilian residents, is (I believe) the second-largest in the United States second to Newark, New Jersey. We have a sizable African American population. I believe the percentage of African American population within the city of Long Branch has been decreasing, but nevertheless it's still a very sizable entity within the municipality. [...] So it's very multicultural, it's very ethnic, it's very diverse.

According to the Long Branch Free Public Library (n.d.) website, the Social Work office's goals are to “provide resources, expand awareness and education, and build a diverse inclusive environment within the community”. I initially found out about the Long Branch Free Public Library's social work program through an article written by Colin Dwyer (2019) for NPR that highlighted David Perez's work at the library. I chose

to highlight this particular program because it provides a number of innovative opportunities for Long Branch community members, and it merges social work and DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) work. The following people participated in interviews about the social work program at the LBFPL¹:

- David Perez: LBFPL's full-time social worker
- Tonya Garcia: director of the LBFPL
- Roberto Ferragina: president of the LBFPL board and assistant director of the Office of Community and Economic Development

Data Collection Methods

I collected data for my research by analyzing existing data and conducting a series of semi-structured interviews. I began my research by focusing on existing data. This existing data included the library's website and various news articles. After analyzing this data, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the library's social worker, director, and board of trustees' president. After the interviews, I revisited existing data and found additional existing data as needed. By beginning my research process with an analysis of existing data, I was able to approach the interviews with helpful pre-existing knowledge about the program.

Using interviews and existing data as methods of collecting data has both benefits and limitations. Existing data is helpful because it can be accessed at any time and

¹ Since this exploratory case study was not intended to be generalizable, but rather focused on a single and unique instance of social work programs in public libraries, this project was determined to be "Not Human Subjects Research" (NHRSR) by the UNC IRB. Despite this determination, standard ethical guidelines for research were followed and participants consented to have their real names shared in this paper. Recruitment materials and interview questions are included in this paper's appendices.

allowed me to focus on the language used to describe library services. In addition, unlike interviews, no transcription was needed to collect this data. However, existing data has its limitations. Existing data can be difficult to find and access depending on websites' organization and search engines' ordering of results. Also, it is possible that these materials might be inaccurate, outdated, incomplete, or biased – because of this, it is important to be mindful when consulting existing data sources.

Interviews provide researchers with a look beyond the text in existing data; they allow researchers to learn more about background information, internal thoughts, and the feelings of those directly related to the research topic. Because interviews give participants an opportunity to provide important context and historical information, I used the interviews as an opportunity to address existing data's limitation of potentially being outdated or inaccurate by giving interviewees the opportunity to either confirm or correct information gathered from the existing data. Interviews also give researchers an opportunity to control what information is being gathered, while the information provided by existing data is completely out of the researchers' control. However, like existing data, interviews also have limitations. Data gathered through interviews is indirect and filtered, and the researcher is forced to rely on the knowledge and recollections of the participant. In addition, the presence of the researcher is likely to impact the responses given by the interviewees. Because of this, I concluded that pairing existing data with interviews would provide me with a helpful and thorough collection of data.

Data Analysis Methods

I transcribed the questions and answers for all of the interviews that I conducted for my study. I used Zoom's transcription feature to transcribe the interviews, and then I

re-listened to the interviews and edited the transcripts in order to ensure that the transcriptions were accurate. When coding the data collected from existing data and interviews, I used thematic analysis. Braun & Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as “a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail” (p. 6). Boyatzis (1998) describes the benefits of using thematic analysis when interpreting data: Thematic analysis “allows a researcher using a qualitative method to more easily communicate his or her observations, findings, and interpretation of meaning to others who are using different methods. This increased ability to communicate allows more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon” (p. 6). Because of its benefits and its compatibility with my methodology, I used thematic analysis when coding my data in order to identify themes within my data and categorize pieces of data accordingly.

Research Quality and Ethical Considerations

It is imperative to establish the trustworthiness of my research. In order to do this, I had plans in place to establish the credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability of my study. In this section, I will elaborate on the strategies that I implemented in order to establish the trustworthiness of my study. I will also discuss ethical considerations and how I addressed them in order to protect the participating library as a whole and the individual participants.

Bradley (1993) defines credibility as the “adequate representation of the constructions of the social world under study” (p. 436). To establish credibility, I am transparent about my positionality in my paper. I dedicated a section of my completed master’s paper to my positionality as a researcher and my relationship to the topic of social work in public libraries. Triangulation also helped me establish credibility. Stake (2000) defines triangulation as “a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation” (p. 443). In my study, I used the method of triangulation by gathering and analyzing data from both interviews and existing data sources. To further establish credibility, I will include examples from raw data alongside my conclusions and interpretations of the data. This will consist of including direct quotations in the final paper from both the interviews and from the preexisting data. Finally, in order to build credibility, I will call on the feedback

of others. To do this, I debriefed with my master's paper advisor to review my methodology and interpretations of the data.

Dependability is the "coherence of the internal process and the way the researcher accounts for changing conditions in the phenomena" (Bradley, 1993, p. 437). Similar to my methods used to establish credibility, I used triangulation methods and provided examples of raw data in my paper in order to strengthen my dependability. I also provided a thick and detailed explanation of the methods I used to conduct my research as well as the research context. Finally, I included a limitations section in this paper where I honestly described challenges that presented themselves while conducting my research.

According to Wildemuth (2009), transferability is "the extent to which the researcher's working hypothesis can be applied to another context" (p.313). Similar to dependability, I established the transferability of my study by providing a description of my research context, subjects, and methods that is as detailed as possible.

Finally, confirmability is the "extent to which the characteristics of the data, as posited by the researcher, can be confirmed by others who read or review the research results" (Bradley, 1993, p. 437). Along with credibility, including a positionality section in my final master's paper that details my relationship with my research topic helped build my paper's confirmability. In addition, I maintained an audit trail throughout my research. This means that I kept all versions of research instruments, data, codes, and interpretations of my data in an organized folder on my computer. By holding on to these documents, I will be able to conduct a reanalysis of my data later if needed, and I will have a physical representation of the evolution of my research.

Social work programs in public libraries are relatively new and individualized to their library and their community. Therefore, because I wanted to collect data about specific services provided by a public library's social worker, the library and participants in this paper anonymized. However, all participants were given the option for both themselves and their library to remain anonymous. Because the participants did not ask to be anonymized, I had two primary strategies that I implemented in order to reduce ethical concerns. First, I sent interview questions to participants approximately one week prior to the interview (see Appendix A). By doing this, participants were able to carefully think through their responses to each question and feel confident that the answers that they provided to me are accurate and adequately represent their viewpoints. Second, I reminded participants at the beginning of their interviews that they could choose to refrain from answering any questions that they did not feel comfortable providing an answer to.

Results & Discussion

Creating the Program

Tonya Garcia (the LBFPL director) grew up in Monmouth County, and she remembers when the social services office for the county moved to a different town: “In New Jersey, particularly Monmouth county, it's very difficult to navigate transportation. And it was very difficult even to afford the buses to get there to apply. [...] That was always in the back of my mind”.² Garcia became the director for the LBFPL in 2013, and one of her first goals was to help community members recover after The Great Recession. She shared that the “catalyst” for the social work program was Hurricane Sandy – a deadly hurricane in 2013 that was responsible for 223 deaths across eight countries (Diakakis et al., 2015). She explained the following:

I saw our staff members open by generator. We did 150 FEMA applications in 48 hours, and I saw my staff having to endure those stories of families that had lost everything in superstorm Sandy. They were destitute and hopeless, and I was very concerned about my staff and how providing these social services would affect them in the long term, because they themselves are going through it. [...] I was very worried about us providing social services as Librarians. We're not trained in library school -- at least back then, we certainly weren't.

Garcia knew that she wanted to start a social work program in the library, but also understood that there was no funding for a full-time social worker. Because of this, she

² All quotes in this section come from personal interviews with the participants unless otherwise noted.

contacted Monmouth University's School of Social Work and spoke with the Dean and Assistant Dean, both of whom were excited about the prospect of placing MSW (Master of Social Work) students at the LBFPL for their field experiences. Because all MSW students at Monmouth University are required to work as unpaid interns in the field while they are pursuing their degree (Monmouth, n.d.), this partnership would benefit both Monmouth University and the Long Branch Free Public Library.

Garcia pitched her idea to the Library Board during their monthly meeting with the Board of Trustees. Not only was the Board thrilled that no funding would be required, but they were also excited about the partnership with Monmouth University. Roberto Ferragina, president of the Library board since 2017 and a member of the board of trustees since 2015, said, "Monmouth university is literally a mile or so up the road, so that was very pleasing to the board, because it allowed more simple and easy communication to explore this process."

Once the program was approved by the board, Garcia started interviewing potential interns, and the library's social work program officially began in the fall of 2015. One of the first interns brought into the library was David Perez. In his interview, Perez described his first project as a social work intern at the LBFPL:

So the first project was a project called Community Connects. Community Connects was a program that reached out to surrounding social service agencies in order to collaborate with them or partner with them in order to physically bring them into the library and create resource fair event or events, because we had multiple throughout the month. And then in between the events, I was there to sort of field the questions of anyone who would just simply walk into library and maybe asked, 'Hey listen, I found out that the electric company is going to be here next Monday, and so I need to talk to them about utility assistance'. [...] I can actually apply for snap benefits, food stamps, financial assistance, affordable housing, affordable health care, and so that's what I did. What I did was I spent

time initially creating those relationships with all of these [organizations]. [...] And then on [Community Connects days], they had their tables set up with their tablecloths. [They would have] information to distribute, and a lot of times they were able to register individuals right on the spot for their particular programs. And so the community that was socioeconomically challenged was able to access these benefits or these social protections without having to figure out transportation. A lot of these programs we don't have here at Long Branch. We have it within the county, but they would have to travel far to get there, [which is] sometimes hard to do with small children and that sort of thing, so the library was able to empower the Community in order to access these social protections. That's how we started, we started with that program.

After a highly successful internship, Perez was offered a full-time social work position at the library.

All three participants mentioned the importance of buy-in when developing the social work program; this includes buy-in from the library board, the library staff, and the community. Perez explained that buy-in from the board was key:

What's going to be integral in order to create a successful library social work program is the support of the board. And this particular board supports Tonya and just about everything that she presents. They trust her. The board trusts her, the mayor trusts her, the Council trusts her, the New Jersey state library trusts her. She's been able to gain trust from just about everyone that she's come in contact with.

Garcia spoke about buy-in from her staff, explaining that initially some staff members were not sold on the idea of a library social worker:

I think in the beginning, probably 50% of the staff saw the vision immediately, and I'm very transparent and try to articulate what the vision is. And half we're a little like, "Do we need a library social worker? Could the funding go somewhere else?" Not challenging, but questioning.

However, part of what helped her receive support from her staff is her track record. She explained, "Our staff is really good at knowing that we're going to try something that has never been done before. We've done it in the past, and we have trailblazed many different [programs]". Because of this, even if some staff members had some hesitations about the social work program, they trusted that Garcia's vision would be a success.

Finally, Farragina talked about how Perez has buy-in from the community. He explained that having the community's trust is key, because sharing your problems with a stranger – even a professional social worker – requires a large amount of vulnerability. Because of this, Perez makes himself an active member of the community:

Part of the success is also David Perez who actually talks the talk and actually goes out to the community. He will engage with the community. So the community engagement aspect is critically important, because if you have an individual who's just sitting in the office all day, does the Community really know who he is? Do they trust him? So there's a very large trust factor when it comes to social work. And the trust factor is significant. We have been blessed that our social worker is an extrovert, and he's somebody who's very passionate about what he does, and he is very willing and able to go out to the Community and introduce himself; have a conversation with somebody, shake their hand, explain to them what he does and offer his assistance, hand out his business card, return a phone call, answer the phone call if it rings, return an email. So he's proactively engaging with the Community on a regular basis, and that's been part of the success of Long Branch as well.

Receiving this buy-in from the board, the library staff, and the community contributed to the success of the social work program.

Initial Concerns

Although the board was intrigued by Garcia's idea for a social work program in the LBFPL, there were still some concerns. Ferragina explained that, in addition to funding, the board also had the following concerns about having an in-house social worker:

One of the concerns the board had as well was: who's going to supervise this intern? Where will they be physically located in the library? Will there be privacy? In terms of this individual meeting with individuals within the Community, you don't want individuals sitting there talking about private matters, sensitive issues that they're having -- whether they're economic or what have you -- with patrons walking by. You want a certain level privacy. So those were the board's primary or initial concerns.

Ferragina shared that the board brainstormed solutions to these problems with Garcia and, by the end of the meeting, they felt far more confident in Garcia's plan to introduce social work interns to the library space. Perez explained how the LBFPL addressed the board's concern about supervision:

The only thing is that a social work intern, whether you're doing it at the library, a hospital, school, wherever you are, requires social work supervision in the field. And that's very easy at a social service agency -- everyone's a social worker. But at the library, there are no other social workers. So in order to provide field supervision, [Tonya Garcia] had to sort of be creative. [...] We were very lucky that a local community member walked into the library; she was a retired social worker, and she walked in to volunteer her time for story time to read to the children. So when Tonya realized that she was a retired social worker, she presented the opportunity. She said: 'Would you be willing to supervise a social work intern? It's just one hour a week,' and she agreed, and this person actually was my field supervisor for the two years that I was in grad school.

Contributions to the Community

As a full-time library social worker, Perez provides a variety of services to the community ranging from one-on-one support to community outreach programs. Garcia explained that the library is a "full-service venue for social work. Anything from individuals living with substance abuse, re-entry, lack of literacy, disabilities, mental health issues, food insecurity, immigration, cultural competence, socio-economic disenfranchisement, etc. The list goes on." Perez explained that a large part of his job is resource and referral in order to help these individuals:

I am absolutely here to partner with you. To help you to help yourself. And I do have certain relationships with social service agencies in the county, in the state, and even in the country, that I might be able to access in order to get you the help that you need. So resource and referral is a big deal, and I would say resource and referral is probably 50% of what I do. Because I'm not going to do psychotherapy. I cannot really maintain case management. I'm not going to continue to follow up and call you and stuff like that. We can set appointments; like let's say I meet you today, and you said, 'David, can I come back next week?' Absolutely, and I'll get you on a calendar and you come back next week, but it's

not like a traditional social service program where I'm going to have an ongoing, recurring caseload. I don't have a caseload.

Perez also plans and facilitates a number of community events. Two of the most popular are the LBFPL's Latino Fest and Black History Month Celebration. Perez explained, "Whatever it is, every culture should be made to feel like they belong when it comes to the community".

Perez is also the face of the Fade to Books program. The library's website states the following about Fade to Books:

The library is pleased to join with local barbershops in an effort to promote youth literacy. Fade to Books recognizes the role of the barbershop as a community gathering space and the role of the barber as a mentoring figure for young men and boys. Participating barbershops are now offering incentives to youth that read while visiting the barber! (Long Branch Free Public Library, n.d.b)

Garcia was initially inspired to create the Fade to Books program in order to promote reading and literacy rates among children of color. In an article published by Monmouth University, Maureen Harmon (2017) writes about Garcia's inspiration to start the program:

The idea came to her after she watched a video posted to social media by a barber friend. The video, which focused on the importance of literacy in the African-American community, got her thinking how fundamental barbers are to local areas. 'We need to really pay homage to the community leaders that are so important to our culture,' says Garcia, who is Latina. 'I was sitting there, brainstorming a way I could unite our two roles—my role as a library director and his role as a barber. How can I bring the two together?' (para. 4)

Garcia came up with the idea for the Fade to Books program and met with the LBFPL's Community Engagement Librarian (Kathryn Angelo) in order to discuss a plan to introduce the program to the community. When Perez joined the LBFPL team, he was assigned to be the outreach coordinator for the program. Perez and Angelo contacted the "Bridge of Books Foundation", which donated over 1000 children's books for the Fade to

Books Program. The books were distributed to local barbershops in Long Branch. Perez explained that, to motivate children to read the books, they are offered an incentive:

So the idea was: how about we put books in their way? Just put them in the way. Why don't we get some awesome book shelving for the Barber shop and then sort of make it this thing that just kind of jumps out at you when you walk in and it's like, 'Oh my God, I need to take a book. I want a book.' And when you're socio-economically challenged like this, many times these families don't have money for the Book Fair. They can't take home these awesome children's books, right? And everybody else coming with five bucks, 10 bucks, and they buy whatever they want. And sometimes these kids walk away with nothing. In the barbershop, they were able to take these books home. If they wanted to keep it, they can keep the book. If they read 10 books, they would get a free haircut. So this was the incentive, right? It was also an economic incentive for the family.

Fade to Books is now a statewide program and is being implemented with 10 municipalities and 50 barbershops throughout New Jersey (Long Branch Free Public Library, n.d.a).

Another initiative that Perez took the lead on was Fresh Start: a re-entry program created by Garcia after the library was awarded a \$44,000 New Jersey State Library Literacy Grant (Kelly, 2014). Garcia explained that she created the program in order to help community members break the cycle of incarceration:

I started the Fresh Start program here [in 2009], and I provided one-on-one assistance with job development, job training, [and] interview practice. So a client comes in that has just come home from incarceration, and we sit one-on-one, and we develop a plan.

Once Perez was hired, he became directly involved in the Fresh Start Program:

The reach of the "Fresh Start" program increased when Ms. Garcia hired social worker David Perez. Mr. Perez meets individually with returning citizens, assesses their needs, provides information, and makes referrals to the appropriate classes offered by LBPL and connects individuals to the organizations and businesses with which LBPL has relationships. (Thomas Edison State University, 2019)

Since then, the Fresh Start program has expanded; the State Parole Board now partners with the LBFPL and made the library the official reconnection center. Garcia explained, “The State Parole Board and various entities now, correctional institutes and so forth, refer returning citizens to us, and we serve now the whole Monmouth County area because we’re the only library that does it in our county”. The LBFPL also collaborated with the New Jersey State Library, New Jersey State Parole Board, New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, and the Free Library of Philadelphia to submit a proposal to the National Leadership Grant for Libraries Program in 2019 (Thomas Edison State University, 2019). In the proposal, they requested \$628,774 to meet the following goal:

The long-term goal of this project is to provide public libraries with a model to help them build capacity to serve the significant number of returning citizens residing in communities nationwide. The project aims to position public libraries as key collaborators in strengthening the work of government agencies and nonprofit organizations that help returning citizens find jobs, acquire stable housing and complete other essential tasks. *Reconnecting Returning Citizens* builds on the locally tested collaborative model of Long Branch Public Library to assist formerly incarcerated individuals in that community. For this proposed scaled-up effort, the project will rely on New Jersey State Parole Board to advise returning citizens about available assistance and refer them to the participating libraries.

The grant was awarded and, over the past year, five libraries joined LBFPL to provide these re-entry services. Garcia described the additional services made possible by the grant:

Through that grant we got free GED training, we imburse for the GED, we have attorneys helping. The Department of motor vehicles signed on to run abstracts for the people coming home, because a lot of times what trips them up is fines: they have fines, and they don't pay their fines, and then it just becomes a cycle. So we like to have the DMV straighten out that for them. We have Salvation Army on board that will assist with some fines. We just have a whole robust calendar getting ready to launch when we open to the public again.

Although creating these services available is important, they make little impact if the community does not know that they are available. Because of this, all three interview participants were asked how the library increases community awareness of social work resources. Ferragina expressed the importance of social media:

It sounds simple, but Long Branch Free Public Library system is extremely active with social media, and they have a very significant social media following in the local community. That's primarily because they actually hold a tremendous amount of events throughout the year. There's events for children, there's reading events, and a lot of these things get streamed online. [There are] events where they read to the children, and they stream it. There's events where they actually bring in endangered animals to children. They stream it. There's book series where authors come in and discuss their books, and they may stream some of those. There's poetry evenings where poets come in from the local community and read their poetry. All of these events are publicized; they're advertised.

Ferragina also explained that the library promoted the social work services on the library website, the city website, and a popular local newspaper called The Link.

All three participants also emphasized the importance of word of mouth. They explained that news about the LBFPL's social work services spread quickly, and Perez offered some insight as to why:

Word of mouth is huge. It's huge in this Community especially. Huge. Especially in the immigrant population, because they know that I'm bilingual, and they know that, being bilingual, I'm able to help them better when it comes to Spanish. And that's not always the case. When a person does not speak Spanish or Portuguese or Russian or whatever it is, they're not able to get everything that they need, whether it's understanding legal verbiage on a mortgage or even a rent lease agreement, or even the bills, utilities.

Because Long Branch is such a diverse community, the library is prepared to assist patrons by providing a translator for whatever language they speak. This additional effort to make the social work services as accessible to community members did not go unnoticed, and the community members of Long Branch spread the word that Perez was available to provide help to anyone that needed it.

Assessment

When discussing assessment, Tonya Garcia noted the importance of assessing community needs when designing public library services: “some of the time, we [library directors, and planners, and so forth] design our programs and services around what we *think* our community needs rather than really going out in the community and asking”.

She shared that, when she started Diversity Services at the library in 2004, she went out into the community to ask what community members needed:

I went up and down Broadway, and I knocked on all the doors, and I got a Portuguese speaking intern and a Spanish speaking intern. And we knocked on all the doors on our business district and asked, ‘Do you know about the library? How can we help you? What do you need from us?’, and 90% said they have no idea of the services that we offer. So it really helped.

Tonya also mentioned that a social work intern conducted a community needs assessment in order to better understand the needs of the Long Branch community:

We were working on a construction bond act grant which we would build an addition to the library and a Community Center, so it'd be a library Community Center. And [as] part of that grant, we tasked one of the interns with assisting with that and doing a Community analysis first. So she worked on this and really went out in the Community conducting surveys and one-on-one interviews and everything that goes into it, and we've used this Community analysis not only for that grant but with other city departments and with the library, focusing on what our needs are.

When asked specifically about assessing the social work program, Tonya explained that she cares about quality over quantity: “It’s about impact, how we measure success. Not how many, but how it’s done. [...] And really client feedback: ‘How did it go?’.”

However, David Perez noted that it can be difficult to gather this qualitative data – especially for outreach programs like Fade to Books:

I in particular was going to look at the Fade to Books Program, and how that was impacting [the community]. But then I needed the barbers to engage with me, and that’s hard because they need to cut hair. That’s their livelihood. So they’re not

really interested in documenting or providing statistics and that sort of thing, so. It's been hard for us to have a national research study.

Perez also pointed out that it can be more difficult to follow up with the people that he helps at the public library than it is to follow up with clients at a traditional social service agency because he does not have an official case load.

When assessing the success of the social work program, The Long Branch Free Public Library board primarily relies on quantitative data. Roberto explained the kind of data that the board looks for:

How many phone calls does he receive? How many emails has he received? How many events as he spearheaded? How many events has he participated in? What Community engagement has he has he engaged in, and how? And that's what we gain back from the library director: is the actual data to, for lack of a better word, justify that position.

Overall, while the library consistently collects and reports on quantitative data, formal qualitative data is less common. Qualitative data is gathered informally in the form of stories of impact: being told about the benefits of the program in person while interacting with a patron. Although Perez is interested in obtaining more formal qualitative data, more work needs to be done to determine effective ways that library social work programs can use qualitative data to assess the success of their programs – especially outreach programs like Fade to Books.

Future Goals

In addition to the main research questions, I also asked about the library's goals for the social work program. When asked about future goals for the program, all three interview participants expressed that they were pleased with the current state of the social work program. Their goals focused on sharing information about the program with other

professionals and continuing to connect with the Long Branch community.

Roberto Ferragina explained the importance of evolving with the community:

I think our hope and goals for David would be: number one, that he stays with us. That he doesn't leave, because he does such a good job. But number two, that he evolves as the town evolves, and that's very significant.

David Perez mentioned a similar goal – especially because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it will be important for him to make an effort to reconnect with community members:

Especially after the pandemic, or as a result of the pandemic, I feel like whenever it's safe, I want to reconnect with the Community. Because remember, I was telling you I made it my business to become super visible in the Community. And because of this, a lot of people are like, 'Hey Dave, are you guys still there?'. And so I can say, 'Yes', and I can help, but I can help if you have virtual abilities, if you have a phone, if you have a computer, that sort of thing. If you don't have any of those things -- which is a huge population of my clientele -- then I can't help. You're kind of invisible right now in the pandemic.

When it comes to sharing information about the program, David Perez explained the following:

I personally would like to be more of a mentor to other library social workers, or even other libraries. [...] This is absolutely what I want to be doing: spreading the word, encouraging other libraries, empowering other libraries with information or even statistics on how to do this, why to do this.

Perez shared that he just accepted a field liaison position for the Rutgers school of social work, where he will act as an advocate for student interns in the program. He is also in the process of planning a virtual conference in collaboration with Rutgers University and Monmouth University.

Tonya Garcia emphasized the importance of sharing information about the Long Branch Free Public Library's social work program:

I know change is scary. Starting new things is frightening, especially now. But I do strongly believe that now, more than ever, is the time for social work in libraries. If ever there is a time, it is during a pandemic, that we are going to see needs from our Community members, from our patrons, like never before. And we don't even know what that's going to look like post-pandemic, because we're

not there yet. But we can take every other challenge or crisis that we've had in our lifetime and multiply that, because that's what it's going to be. And the need is going to be that great. And if we needed a social worker back then, libraries, I think, really should take the time look at our program, look at other library programs. [...] Why we agree to the interviews, for [David Perez] to present (he's presenting in California in a couple weeks), is so that we increase awareness of social work in libraries That would be my goal next, because I think we're pretty solid here in Long Branch and the area. But really for other libraries not to shy away from it. It really will benefit their staff -- your staff will be relieved. Their staff will not be performing duties that they're not trained for. And the Community, you will see the need. Again, every community has seniors, or disabled, or a disadvantaged, or addiction. And so I really hope to see our program and the success of it really be a model for other libraries.

Summary

The information collected from participant interviews and preexisting data sources thoroughly answered the four research questions presented at the beginning of this paper. As a reminder, the research questions were the following:

- In what ways does a public library social worker contribute to their community?
- What are potential concerns that could arise with the creation of a social work program in a public library?
- What is the process of creating a social work program in a public library?
- In what ways do public libraries assess their social work services to measure their impact?

The Long Branch Free Public Library's social worker (David Perez) contributes to the Long Branch community by providing a variety of opportunities for community members. These opportunities include one-on-one meetings with Perez where he provides resources and referrals for community members in need and library events including the library's annual Latino Fest. Perez also plays a large role in the LBFPL's Fresh Start and Fade to Books programs.

When creating the social work program, primary concerns of the LBFPL and the library board included funding, privacy, and supervision of social work interns. The LBFPL's director (Tonya Garcia) responded to these concerns by suggesting a partnership with Monmouth University's Master of Social Work program and asking a library volunteer and retired social worker to supervise the social work intern.

To create a successful social work program, buy-in from the community, the board, and the library staff was key. Because Garcia was known for creating innovative programs for the LBFPL, all three of these groups gave Garcia their support and trust when she proposed the creation of the social work program. By working with Monmouth University and starting the social work program by hiring a social work intern, Garcia was able to demonstrate the value that a social worker could bring to the LBFPL, and she was able to justify the need for a full-time social worker.

The LBFPL primarily relies on quantitative data in order to assess the impact of the social work program. The data collected includes the number of phone calls that Perez receives, the number of emails that Perez receives, and the number of events that Perez organizes. Qualitative data is gathered through stories of impact told by patrons that participate in the social work program. Although a formal large-scale qualitative assessment of the social work program – specifically the Fade to Books program – is something that Perez is interested in, this would be difficult for the library to conduct, because the assessment would likely be time-consuming and would require lots of additional help.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations of this study. As mentioned previously in the paper, relying on interviews and existing data as the sources for my data collection has some weaknesses. The information gathered in interviews is indirect, filtered, and relies on the memories of participants. In addition, the presence or phrasing of the researcher might impact the responses of interviewees. Using existing data also has limitations. For example, existing data could be outdated, vague, or incorrect. Also, because much of the existing data that I used is came directly from the LBFPR or prior interviews with its staff, it is possible that this data was biased in favor of the library and its services.

The major delimitations of this study were primarily caused by the current global pandemic (COVID-19) that was ongoing throughout the course of this research study. In order to prioritize participants' health and safety by maintaining social distancing guidelines, all interviews took place through video chats or over the phone. In addition, although conducting observations of the social work program would likely provide relevant additional data, no observations took place in order to maintain social distancing guidelines. Furthermore, because of the time constraints and the inability for myself and patrons to be in the library space because of the pandemic, recruiting patrons willing to participate in the study was unrealistic. Therefore, only library employees were interviewed.

Conclusion

Future research should be conducted in order to continue adding literature to this emerging area of public library social work services. Researchers should focus their studies on the development and assessment of these public library social work programs, prioritizing interviews and surveys from patrons that would be or are impacted by the program. The case study conducted for this research can be modified and expanded by interviewing a larger number of people, engaging in observations of the social work program in the public library space, and researching more than one public library. In addition, researchers interested in the LBFPL's social work program could focus specifically on assessing the impact of the library's Fade to Books and Fresh Start programs.

References

- American Library Association. (n.d.a). *Definition of a library: General definition*.
<https://libguides.ala.org/library-definition>
- American Library Association. (n.d.b). *Social Work Interest Group*.
<https://connect.ala.org/pla/communities/community-home?CommunityKey=5c2df085-e960-4608-87e7-fc132b3a43d9>
- American Library Association. (2012, 2013). *Policy manual section B: Positions and public policy statements B.8.10-10.1 Policy objective (Old number 61-61.1) (Revised June 25, 2012 and Jan. 27, 2013)*, 40-41. Retrieved from
http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/governance/policymanual/cd_10_2_Section%20B%20New%20Policy%20Manual-1%20%28final%206-13-2017%20with%20TOC%29_0.pdf
- American Library Association (2018). *Social Worker Task Force*. Public Library Association. <http://www.ala.org/pla/about/people/committees/pla-tfsocwork>
- Blank, B. (2014). *Public libraries add social workers and social programs*. The New Social Worker. <https://www.socialworker.com/feature-articles/practice/public-libraries-add-social-workers-and-social-programs/>
- Boyatzis, R. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Bradley, J. (1993). Methodological issues and practices in qualitative research. *Library Quarterly*, 63(4), 431-449.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
- Cathcart, R. (2008). Librarian or social worker: Time to look at the blurring line? *The Reference Librarian*, 49(1), 87-91. doi:10.1080/02763870802103845
- DeFaveri, A. (2005). Shedding our culture of comfort. *Feliciter*, 51(6), 259-261, Retrieved from <http://libproxy.lib.unc.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/223157532?accountid=14244>
- Diakakis M.; Deligiannakis G.; Katsetsiadou K.; Lekkas E. (2015). "Hurricane Sandy mortality in the Caribbean and continental North America". *Disaster Prevention and Management*. 24(1): 132. doi:10.1108/DPM-05-2014-0082
- Dwyer, C. (2019, July 17). *Your local library may have a new offering in stock: A resident social worker*. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2019/07/17/730286523/your-local-library-may-have-a-new-offering-in-stock-a-resident-social-worker>
- Esguerra, L. (2019). *Providing social service resources in a library setting*. Public Libraries Online. <http://publiclibrariesonline.org/2019/01/providing-social-service-resources-in-a-library-setting/>
- GSSW Communication Team. (2018, June 26). *Library social work*. Graduate School of Social Work. <https://socialwork.du.edu/news/library-social-work>
- Harmon, M. (2017). A cut above the rest. *The Magazine for Monmouth University*. <https://www.monmouth.edu/magazine/a-cut-above-the-rest/>

- Hill, T. & Tamminen, K. A. Examining the library as a site for intervention: A mixed-methods case study evaluation of the “Innovative Solutions to Homelessness” program. *Journal of Library Administration*, 60(5), 470-492, doi:10.1080/01930826.2020.1729626
- Institute of Museum and Library Services. (n.d.). <https://www.ims.gov/>
- International Foundation of Social Workers. (n.d.). *Global definition of social work*. <https://www.ifsw.org/what-is-social-work/global-definition-of-social-work/>
- 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, doi:10.1080/10705422.2016.1269380
- Kelly, L. (2014). Long Branch Free Public Library wins innovation award for Fresh Start. *App*. <https://www.app.com/story/getpublished/2014/07/08/long-branch-free-public-library-wins-innovation-award-for-fresh-start/12384961/>
- Kiger, P. (2019). *Library social work: Separating fact from fiction*. SmartBrief. <https://www.smartbrief.com/original/2019/05/library-social-work-separating-fact-fiction>
- Lloyd, P. (2020). The public library as a protective factor: An introduction to library social work. *Public Library Quarterly*, 39(1), 50-63, doi:10.1080/01616846.2019.1581872
- Long Branch Free Public Library. (n.d.a). *Social work and diversity*. <https://www.longbranchlib.org/social-work-and-divesity>
- Long Branch Free Public Library. (n.d.b). *Fade to Books barbershop literacy initiative*. <https://www.longbranchlib.org/about-the-barbershop-program>

Monmouth University. (n.d.). *MSW field frequently asked questions*.

<https://www.monmouth.edu/graduate/msw-social-work/fieldwork/msw-field-frequently-asked-questions/>

Provence, M. A. (2018). From nuisances to neighbors: Inclusion of patrons experiencing homelessness through library and social work partnerships. *Advances in Social Work, 18*(4), 1053-1067, doi:10.18060/22321

Robinson, B. (2019). *No holds barred: Policing and security in the public library*. In *The Library With The Lead Pipe*.

<http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2019/no-holds-barred/>

Selman, B., Curnow, J., Dobchuk-Land, B., Cooper, S., Samson, J. K., & Kohan, A. (9 September 2019). Millennium For All Alternative Report on Public Library Security. doi:10.31229/osf.io/vfu6h

Smith, D. L., Bazalar, B., & Wheeler, M. (2020). Public librarian job stressors and burnout predictors. *Journal of Library Administration, 60*(4), 412-429, doi:10.1080/01930826.2020.1733347

Social Justice. (n.d.). In *Oxford Reference*. Retrieved from

<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100515279>

Stake, R. E. (2000). Case Studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed., pp. 435-454). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Sullivan, M. (2003). The fragile future of public libraries. *Public Libraries – Chicago Public Library Association, 42*(5), 303-308.

- Sutton, J & Austin, Z. (2015, May-June). Qualitative research: Data collection, analysis, and management. *The Canadian Journal of Hospital Pharmacy*, 68(3), 226-231. doi:[10.4212/cjhp.v68i3.1456](https://doi.org/10.4212/cjhp.v68i3.1456)
- Thomas Edison University. (2019). Reconnecting returning citizens with their communities at public libraries: Proposal to the IMLS FY2019 National Leadership Grants for Libraries Program.
<https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/grants/lg-17-19-0082-19/proposals/lg-17-19-0082-19-full-proposal.pdf>
- United States Census Bureau (2019). QuickFacts: Long Branch city, New Jersey.
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/longbranchcitynewjersey>
- UNLV University Libraries. (n.d.). *Library assessment*.
https://www.library.unlv.edu/about/library_assessment#:~:text=Library%20assessment%20is%20the%20practice,and%20resources%20to%20university%20needs.
- Wahler, E. A., Provence, M. A., Helling, J., & Williams, M. A. (2019). The changing role of libraries: How social workers can help. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 101(1), 34-43, doi:10.1177/1044389419850707
- Westbrook, L. (2015). "I'm not a social worker": An information service model for working with patrons in crisis. *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy*, 85(1), 6-25, doi:10.1086/679023
- Wildemuth, B. M. (2009). *Applications of social research methods to questions in information and library science*. Libraries Unlimited.

Appendix A. Interview Guide

Adapting to Evolving Needs: A Case Study of a Public Library's Social Work Program Interview Guide

Mara Plantholt

Note: Because this will be a semi-structured interview, interview questions will be adapted, added, or skipped as the researcher deems necessary for the research. All questions will focus on the existing library program and will relate to the following outline of interview questions:

1. When was the library's social work program established?
2. What was the library's motivation to create a social work program?
3. Can you describe the creation process of the library's social work program?
4. What were some of the library's primary concerns or hesitations when creating the program?
5. How does the library increase community awareness for the library social work program?
6. What are the services that the library social work program offers?
7. In what ways does the social work program help the community?
8. What are some of the most challenging aspects of running a successful library social work program?

9. Can you describe a typical day of a library social worker?
10. In what ways does the library social worker collaborate with other library employees?
11. In what ways does the library social worker collaborate with external stakeholders?
12. In what ways does the library assess its social work services to measure their impact on the community?
13. Moving forward, what are some goals that the library has for the library social work program?

Appendix B. Recruitment Scripts

Dear [name here],

My name is Mara Plantholt, and I am a student from the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I am writing to invite you to participate in my project about social work programs in public library spaces.

I obtained your contact information from [source here]. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in a 45-60 minute interview. This interview can be conducted over the phone or on video chat. The interview questions will be emailed to you one week prior to the interview, and you will have the option to skip any questions that you would not like to answer. I would like to record your interview and then use this information to write a master's paper describing a public library's social work program.

We have practices in place to protect your information and maintain your confidentiality, and you have the option of being identified by a pseudonym and having the library's name and location be de-identified in any publication or sharing of information.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the project or not. If you'd like to participate or have any questions about the project, please contact me at [email] or [phone number].

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Mara Plantholt