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Envisioning Libraries as Collaborative Community Anchors for Social Service Provision to Vulnerable Populations

David P. Moxley and June M. Abbas

The authors envision libraries as collaborative centres blending information provision, opportunities through Local Authority and human services in partnership with members of vulnerable populations. The authors offer a rationale for local public libraries as community anchors, offer a dual focus guiding interprofessional collaboration, identify five roles librarians working with social workers can serve to strengthen libraries as community anchors and suggest intersections among libraries and Local Authorities. They conclude the paper by offering blended strategies to enact libraries as community anchors for assisting people who either are reluctant to access formal assistance or who find that assistance too limiting or stigmatising.

Keywords: vulnerable populations; social and human services; libraries; information access and utilisation; interprofessional collaboration

Introduction

In many communities, people assign considerable importance to the role of public libraries in their lives ranging from borrowing books, accessing the Internet, obtaining information and using media resources (Miller, Purcell, and Rainie 2012). In addition to traditional library services and access to information systems offered to multiple groups, the authors assert that increasingly libraries serve as community anchors for at-risk and vulnerable populations, including people who are unemployed, immigrating or seeking refuge, homeless or in re-entry from incarceration (Dowling 2007; Fisher, Durrance, and Bouch Hinton 2004; Lilienthal 2011; Mars 2012; Muggleton and Ruthven 2011). In the USA, the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) offers a specific rationale for the library as anchor by emphasising vital contributions local institutions make to advance the quality of life of whole communities, particularly during periods of social change (Taylor et al. 2012). The IMLS emphasises that libraries are safe places for 'community gatherings, centres for community

vitality, a connecting point for community services, and a venue for cultural expression and lifelong learning (IMLS 2012, 13)'.

Nonetheless, like other local public institutions, libraries offering a broad spectrum of opportunities for education, literacy, cultural enhancement and access to information technologies as well as entertainment are facing cutbacks, given austerity measures local, regional or national governments enact. Along with public social services, those provided by nonprofit and public authorities, libraries face considerable cutbacks in a manner Buschman (2003) calls 'dismantling the public sphere'. For Jaeger and his colleagues (2013), since public libraries have not been successful in demonstrating their essential value to community life, they become easy targets for retrenchment by politicians seeking to trim public budgets and expenditures.

Buschman (2012) reveals how shortsighted such a stance is in an age in which citizens require enhanced information systems. According to Jaeger et al., libraries support democracy as transmitters of essential knowledge, literacy, social awareness and cognitive development. Perhaps more importantly, librarians serve as public evaluators interpreting the quality of information to users who face considerable diversity of information in an age of what Jaeger and his colleagues characterise as 'information richness'.

Both libraries and social services serve as important if not critical opportunity structures within local communities. Cutbacks can limit already ageing infrastructure. They make such opportunity structures unresponsive to local demand as retrenchment in the public sphere leaves citizens with limited scope of opportunity for advancing their well-being outside of market transactions. Collaboration among libraries and providers of human services in the face of austerity can be a strategic interinstitutional or interorganisational response in communities in which there is considerable need for information. Collaboration within the context of shared facilities not only can be one form of response to cutbacks, but it may stimulate innovation in the face of limited resources.

In this sense, public libraries can open opportunity structures specifically for members of vulnerable populations who require added value information because of their struggles with physical or mental health issues, income disparities, economic dislocation or poverty. Those avenues of added value information can help people advance their literacy in its many forms (including health literacy), augment education, receive social support and obtain information about vocational, employment and housing resources.

For such populations, as well as others, the library can be a gateway to information vital to increasing well-being, understanding social programmes and accessing health promotion opportunities (Blackburn 2001; Dearnness and Tomplin 2001; Library & Information Update 2010; Lukenbill and Immroth 2009; Malachowski 2011). But the retrenchment of the public sphere is not without consequences for the nonprofit or voluntary sector, which is increasingly taking on additional responsibilities for public service with limited resources. Although collaboration can certainly serve as one strategic response

to retrenchment, it does demand considerable investment in team work, introduces space or facility requirements, adds additional layers of personnel, some of whom may not be under the supervisory oversight of library administrators, and can occur without certainty about the sustainability of collaborative arrangements.

Those patrons who are vulnerable can place considerable demand on libraries. The authors, however, hypothesise that by combining both traditional and electronic information resources with opportunities offered through Local Authorities or social service providers, there are libraries that are increasingly responsive to groups whose members require augmented assistance in using information. The introduction of preventive services to the 2014 Care Act in Britain may be quite relevant to advancing collaborative arrangements among public libraries and Local Authorities. By outposting social workers in public spaces, like libraries, a local authority such as in Britain, or social service providers in North America, can reach people who need considerable support in everyday life. Organisational innovation in the face of retrenchment may augment or even strengthen public responses to human need.

In this paper, the authors consider how the library, as a local anchor institution, can facilitate social participation and involvement of people who experience unfulfilled needs because of limited infrastructure within their communities, often indicative of places in which poverty is prevalent. The paper, authored by an information scientist and librarian, and a social worker and social scientist, reflects their collaborative work in understanding the integration of libraries and opportunities offered by human service organisations. Their intent is to elaborate the qualities of the library as a community anchor.

Possibilities for the Library as a Community Anchor for People who are Vulnerable

The Library: From Fortress to Public Utility

Libraries serve as the repositories of human communication and thought and their founding in the ancient world implicated efforts to preserve knowledge, transmit this knowledge to others and support scholarly work (Harris 1999). The library made what Harris calls 'graphic representations' — organised under the oversight of a caretaker — accessible to users, even though early on such users were limited to a narrow scope of people. Beard (1990) indicates that libraries were once symbols reflecting the control over knowledge exercised by those who were invested with power to engage in such control. It is no accident, says Beard, that libraries were structured as fortresses in the ancient and even mediaeval worlds in which caretakers protected sacred forms of knowledge.

It was the modern library that opened its collections to the public. Recognising the information or literacy needs of citizens in societies undergoing considerable

social change, libraries in Britain and the USA expanded as a means of accommodating a growing literacy among people, the rise of public education, including primary, secondary and higher forms, and the expansion of commerce, itself demanding new institutions supporting the diffusion of information and knowledge. In the nineteenth century, thanks to the philanthropy of industrial moguls, like Carnegie, libraries grew in vast numbers across the English-speaking world including the UK, the USA, Australia and New Zealand. With the establishment of the first Carnegie library in Scotland in 1883, others soon followed. Carnegie established his model of financing libraries in the USA in 1898, resulting in the establishment of Carnegie libraries across the country.

For Carnegie, the library represented a local institution supporting the values of self-initiation, personal improvement and self-education, values he saw as essential to economic success and moral development, and ones favoured by a Capitalistic philosophy of individualism in the USA. By the time Carnegie concluded his philanthropy, some 2500 libraries were erected between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in local communities and institutions of higher education. Carnegie's efforts made libraries public, and established libraries as community infrastructure.

While it appears that visits to libraries, especially in Britain, have decreased from 2005 to 2013, several hundreds of millions still visit them seeking fulfilment of diverse information needs. Many libraries make computers and the Internet access available to their patrons, increasing the information value they achieve for common citizens. The range of media and information systems available to public patrons as a standing feature of their infrastructure constitutes one of their greatest strengths. And still another strength is a public library's existence as a storehouse of heritage, particularly local heritage, informing local patrons of the significance of place, ecology, institutions, people and traditions (Crawford 2015).

But what goes likely unappreciated is the cultural role of public librarians. They serve in important roles in helping people not only access information but also to evaluate and interpret it for their own uses (Wiegand 2015). In an information-rich world constituting a global bazaar of options, the assessment of the quality and veracity of information is essential to open societies. This interpretative role of librarians as information specialists enables people not only to access a community's collection of information, but to interpret it for their own purposes (Palfrey 2015). In this sense, a librarian serves as an information navigator. Observation of public librarians reveals their adeptness at interviewing people, assessing their needs, connecting them to content and helping them interpret that content for a specific purpose. It is the library as a public place in which professional staff are readily available to users so they can fulfil their information needs that may make the library an attractive and useful destination for people whom social work may consider vulnerable. For all citizens, and especially for members of vulnerable populations, the local public library may serve as an essential public utility.

The Library and Vulnerable Populations

Much has been written on the topic of patron vulnerability through the years, ranging from training staff on how to 'deal' with those groups characterised as 'difficult' patrons (Torrey, Esposito, and Geller 2009) to socially inclusive and innovative ways of helping, such as partnering with community organisations to meet the information needs of vulnerable populations (Hersberger 2005; Knight 2010; Woodrum 1988). As populations of vulnerable people become more visible in communities, libraries are recognising their responsibility to provide more than just a 'place to sleep' (Kelleher 2013). Librarians are seeking to understand the societal context in which vulnerable individuals live and their unique information and service needs flowing from their social situations so libraries and librarians can help people obtain resources that improve their well-being (Hersberger 2005; Westbrook and Gonzalez 2011).

People coping with challenges emanating from unmet mental health, physical health and economic needs that can diminish social functioning or well-being may call on librarians for information useful in steering them to medical or housing services, thereby blurring the lines between information provision and the traditional role of referral agent so prevalent in human services (Cathcart 2008; Lukenbill and Immroth 2009; Malachowski 2011). Those individuals may call on libraries in times of crisis (Will 2001; Westbrook and Gonzalez 2011) or during major life transitions (Wicks 2004). As a principal community institution, libraries are often at the threshold of social change as reflected in the dynamic change in substantive information and its sources. They are well positioned to address in local communities those information needs emanating from social issues in partnership with social service providers (Canham-Clyne 2009; Cathcart 2008).

Case study research indicates that partnerships between libraries and social service providers may be growing in the areas of health, public health and health promotion (Collins, Howard, and Miraflor 2009; Johnson, Mathewson, and Prechtel 2014; Knight 2010; Levin 2008; Ren, Cogdill, and Potemkin 2009; Ryan and Donaldson Boyle 2011; Ryder et al. 2009; Schwartz et al. 2002). And public libraries likely engage in the support of people who, as a result of their cognitive, physical, health and mental health vulnerabilities, are searching for productive opportunities for social participation, learning and cultural enrichment (Barker 2011; Bryant, Matthews, and Walton 2009; Wicks 2004).

The authors' exploratory research in the USA reveals the diversity of collaborative efforts among libraries and human service programmes, both public and nonprofit ones. These efforts serve as potential exemplars of collaborative work incorporating into libraries opportunities like access to food stamps, immigration assistance, outreach to LGBTQ teens, access to benefits, specialists representing state human service programmes, provision of education for

English as a Second Language, weekly health clinics for children and services for people who are deaf and hard of hearing. Although these examples are products of the authors' initial exploratory work, they do reflect interesting and vital collaborations designed to combine information provision with access to and provision of human services.

Public libraries may be picking up the slack of failing human service systems, ones that have collapsed or have been vitiated in the retrenchment of public investment in human services. There is ample evidence that many human service systems are inadequate, leaving people who face considerable problems of daily living to fend for themselves (Bloom and Farragher 2010). The public library can stand as one institution offering assistance, given their user-centred cultures, welcoming staff members and structured programmes that cut across numerous information resources and systems. In this sense, the library can build a community's social capital (Johnson 2011) and, as a result, strengthen trust among residents of local communities (Camaratta 2009; Varheim 2009). Libraries can enhance a community's culture (Gayton 2008; Goulding 2008) and can further strengthen their standing as inclusive institutions open to all citizens, particularly those who are vulnerable (Terrile 2009), by offering public meeting and gathering places in local communities (Bryant, Matthews, and Walton 2009; Johnson 2011).

While the literature includes numerous portrayals of programmes in which libraries reach out to and engage members of vulnerable populations (Dowling 2007; Mars 2012; Terrile 2009), or underscore the need to reach those populations (Bloom and Farragher 2010; Cathcart 2008; Lilienthal 2011), there is little systematic empirical data revealing the extent to which libraries provide health or human services, the kinds of partnerships they sustain and the innovations they foster, particularly involving collaborative arrangements with partners in health and human services. But given the authors' experience with the social service aspects of libraries, there are promising practices these local institutions can and often do incorporate to meet the needs of vulnerable populations as libraries: (a) provide traditional information resources, (b) involve social service providers through novel collaborative arrangements, (c) include the delivery of health services and (d) offer specific outreach services to people coping with serious mental illness, cognitive and physical disabilities, homelessness and community re-entry from incarceration.

Certainly, the current literature offers case studies either asserting the importance of such institutional support or describing the provision of innovative programmes. The principal hypothesis here is that through collaborative partnerships, public libraries are substantially involved in the innovative provision of social, human and health services that are well integrated into their facilities, programmes and events. As a result of this engagement in innovation, libraries are likely emerging as community anchors in which their traditional involvement in the provision of information resources blends with many other ways of helping.

Developing Public Libraries as Information Anchors in Human Services

Practicing librarians and their collaborators in Local Authorities, actual or potential, may constitute the new stakeholders of collaborative libraries as community anchors that possess numerous ways of facilitating literacy. The practices and capacities of the public library complement the current IMLS strategic plan that calls for the positioning of local public libraries as 'community anchors'. Particularly for those institutions located in high-need rural or urban areas (characterised by weak social service delivery systems, considerable poverty, serious health disparities and aged and migrant populations), public libraries may be the destinations of choice since they are likely visible, available, affordable and accessible to citizens coping with cognitive, emotional and physical issues, all of which can be exacerbated by poverty and social exclusion.

The IMLS 2012–2016 strategic plan identifies two compelling strategies that infuse the idea of libraries as community anchors with considerable relevance: Strategic Goal #1 identifies the importance of learner-driven cultures within libraries. Such learners can benefit from proactive engagement in which librarians and their allies in Local Authorities advance their involvement in local community life. Helping people who are vulnerable can require an augmentation of technologies, facilities, collections and programmes. The inclusion of social service and health providers can potentially reshape the programmatic, physical and information architectures of libraries. Strategic Goal #2 calls for the positioning of public libraries as 'community anchors' that can integrate an array of opportunities including resources for civic, cultural and economic development. Both the co-location and positioning of social and health services within existing public libraries can augment those kinds of opportunities to better meet the needs of so-called special populations, the members of which may be unable to take advantage of programmatic options without such support.

Mindful of those two strategic national goals, the researchers propose operational tactics for developing the empirically inspired practices relevant to public librarians seeking to augment the involvement of social and health service personnel when libraries evolve as community anchors. These tactics are: (1) track library users and their aggregate information use practices to better appreciate how they incorporate information resources to address their daily living needs; (2) appreciate how social service and health service professionals utilise libraries as ways of augmenting the support they offer people who are vulnerable; (3) identify how libraries and social or health service personnel actually collaborate in the design, organisation, provision and utilisation of information resources that can facilitate the well-being and functioning of people who are vulnerable; (4) document actual models of collaboration librarians and human service personnel use to respond to the needs of social service

users; (5) understand how access to information resources influences the well-being and social participation of the members of vulnerable populations; and (6) illuminate how public libraries create a bond of trust when they reach out, engage, welcome and involve patrons whose information needs are considerable and even complex. Use of these tactics reveals how public libraries can evolve as collaborative anchors in which access to information resources equips people requiring social support with the knowledge base they need in the areas of social benefits, community amenities, employment possibilities, social service referral and housing and employment options, among many others.

Multiple roles of librarians as information specialists within the collaborative community anchor make the most sense, and those roles can strengthen collaboration with social workers seeking novel and accessible ways of meeting human needs. The roles the authors identify nest well within the community anchor metaphor. This metaphor stands as a way of envisioning the community library as a principal local institution in its aims to operate as a strategic location for the fulfilment of information needs and for the advancement of information competencies within the community it serves.

Through their preliminary work, the authors conceive of this role set as composed of five central packages, all of which express the local public library as a community anchor. For the authors, the use of the concept of anchor is both metaphoric and substantive. Substantively, the local public library as a community anchor expresses its core competencies to connect people to resources, whether those involve information, education, relationships or opportunities. As an apt metaphor, the anchor provokes an image of centrality within a given community. The library as community anchor is a holding place of information and related assets that can benefit its patrons whose principal eligibility for using the library is their status as fellow human beings who seek information.

Five Role Packages within the Community Anchor Metaphor Relevant to Human Services

Information Navigator

One of the most pivotal roles is that of information navigator, one perhaps synergising with what social workers and other human service professionals fulfil in community settings. The information navigator makes users aware of their information needs and facilitates their access to knowledge bases in which they can address those needs. Given the challenges members of vulnerable populations may face in the broad domain of information literacy, the navigator can help vulnerable users understand how to set search objectives and engage in actions to fulfil those objectives.

Two potential benefits stand out here. First, the navigator can facilitate the user's fulfilment of their substantive information needs. Second, the navigator can help users understand information systems and how to engage in behaviours that will produce the results they seek. The navigator can potentially advance the information self-efficacy of users by instilling confidence within users that they can fulfil the outcomes they seek through information and knowledge a community institution like a library can offer them.

Information Advocate

Like any advocate in the human services, the librarian seeks to enhance the status of people as users of information worthy of the attention they require to fulfil their needs for knowledge. Advocates are interested in being proactive and in this sense, they begin to shape their understanding of the needs of vulnerable populations by helping them fulfil their information requirements. The advocate can build the collaborative capacity of the library in addressing and fulfilling those requirements users present. So, for the librarian, this means creating and refining databases useful in addressing the current questions users pose and anticipating the ones they may present in the future.

A person who is in the early period of re-entering community life after prison incarceration, for example, may request information from a librarian about existing vocational training programmes in a given community. The manner in which the librarian comes to frame this person's information need and the manner in which the librarian seeks to fulfil it is a form of advocacy since this action seeks to augment the information competence of a patron. Then, as librarians recognise limitations in the capacities of existing information systems to address those needs, they may become advocates for creating databases specifically geared for assisting people in re-entry. This makes considerable sense as the librarian orients to the heightened need in a given community because of the location of prisons or other forms of incarceration. People may access the library when they are on leave from an actual programme. Building this overall information capacity stands as an augmentation of formal assistance within the community, given the centrality of referral systems in helping people fulfil their needs.

Information Literacy Specialist

Here, the librarian can create structures of training and education in which groups of people convene to focus on expanding, deepening and refining information competencies. While the librarian as advocate builds appropriate and useful information or even knowledge systems, librarians recognise their merits as community educators. The literacy specialist may lay out a progression of

training steps each with their own learning objectives and aims, and make organised programmes of training or instruction accessible, available and appropriate to users.

Understanding that members of vulnerable populations may be reticent in using such curricula, the information literacy specialist may take into consideration ways of enhancing the motivation of potential users. Making the context engaging, welcoming and inviting can engage individuals who at first may be leery or anxious. Some individuals will engage in incidental learning remaining on the so-called side lines, observing the primary interactions participants have with librarians. As trust increases, and as patrons reflect on their information utilisation requirements, these individuals may seek out librarians to address their information needs.

Hands-on training in specially designed classrooms, computer labs or information learning centres may make events more engaging and practical for users who sometimes enter the library facility in considerable distress. The availability of modest refreshments can facilitate user involvement, and ease participants into either a self-directed learning centre or classroom-type training event. Additionally, a period of socialisation or even some recreational content can make the training setting more appealing to those who too often face isolation.

Information Group Worker

Librarians as information literacy specialists or trainers serve as group workers. They convene group meetings and involve participants in the process of forming cohesive group situations. The emergence of such cohesion requires multiple meetings in which participants get to know one another. The inclusion of mentoring can strengthen group life, augment the positive affective climate of the group and build leadership resources among participants, thereby decreasing the central role of the librarian in the group. A standing programme of information education or training can foster membership among participants and equip the group with its own identity in the community. As a result, an ongoing learning community, even one of short duration, can emerge. The library can serve as a place in which fellowship, the acquisition of learning competencies and the fulfilment of information needs blend or otherwise synergise into a powerful support system for people who may have few options, breaking through social isolation too often characterising the lived experience of people who experience marginalisation.

Community building among members of a vulnerable population, such as people who are homeless, may be one of the most potent ways of making the library a vibrant and vital community anchor (Scott 2011). The library can represent the inclusion of all citizens of a given community, and its role as a public commons is indicative of local democratic culture (Shiva 2005). Librarians who serve as group workers may demonstrate for that community how the library is an anchor of

both information and hospitality in which people from diverse backgrounds can fulfil their substantive information needs as they gain competencies relevant to citizenship. The provision of hospitality may be one of the most important qualities of a responsive and inclusive institution in which staff members welcome all people (Ennis and Tatlock 2008; Murray 1990).

Interprofessional Information Liaison

In this role, the librarian interacts with social service and human service professionals, serving as a liaison. Often, social and human services professionals serve in information and referral roles. By assessing needs and identifying potential resources for fulfilling those needs, social and human services' professionals connect those they serve to relevant opportunities, benefits and social supports useful in helping them achieve a substantive goal, such as locating housing opportunities, gaining income benefits or accessing mental health or physical health care.

As liaisons, librarians will interact with other social service, human services and health science personnel including psychologists, social workers, rehabilitation professionals, nurses and physicians. Liaison librarians bring to bear their considerable expertise in helping others access information systems including expert ones and ones encoding research-informed practices. Liaison librarians can facilitate users' access to research-informed intervention practices and tailor those to addressing the needs of particular individuals or groups of people who share common needs.

Much of this knowledge may be functional in its orientation. The librarian with substantive expertise in social or human services understands how to access this functional knowledge in which the information focuses on guiding the social or human service professionals in key steps of the helping process at individual, group or community levels. The information can augment the strategies the social or human service professional seeks to implement and can match local knowledge with professional knowledge, thereby identifying local resources or options for addressing the human needs members of vulnerable populations often present to those professionals. In their liaison roles, librarians can interact with both professionals and consumers who are involved in human service organisations and programmes. Thus, the liaison role can serve an important integrative function within a community. It facilitates the utilisation of information among other professionals, recipients of human services and within the organisations and programmes serving as auspices of human service professionals and the people they serve.

Dual Focus of Interprofessional Collaboration

The interprofessional quality of the interactions librarians undertake with social workers and allied human service personnel underscores how they function as

peers to enhance the effectiveness of their colleagues. In collaborative settings, those interactions likely occur within contexts in which multiple professionals are functioning together so they can create more productive situations than one discipline can produce by itself. When collaboration exists librarians can fulfill information needs while they remain mindful of building the capacities of their colleagues in assessing using information effectively when librarians are unavailable. Through interaction with their social service colleagues, librarians also gain professional experience and increased expertise in serving members of vulnerable populations. For example, librarians can learn how to assess and understand the spectrum of social service interventions, the agencies available to assist vulnerable individuals and the kinds of programmes that can facilitate social involvement.

For librarians, the dual focus of interprofessional collaboration is salient here. A primary focus is apparent when librarians enable their human service colleagues to access and use information to achieve the aims they identify as important. In this way, the librarian extends the reach of those colleagues who require access to information for the purposes of meeting the needs of someone who is vulnerable. The second element is local capacity building: librarians are mindful of the importance of advancing the information competence of human service professionals while also increasing their own holistic understanding of potential interventions and resources needed to bring about such outcomes.

Intersections among Public Libraries and Social and Human Services

The collaboration among public librarians and social and human service providers, that unfolds within library settings, expands possibilities for advancing social inclusion within communities in which there are many needs. If, as the IMLS indicates, the local public library is a place of safety in which people can fulfil their information, education, cultural and social needs, there is the possibility that the library itself can become an anchor for advancing the well-being of particular groups whose members are struggling with the causes and consequences of serious social issues.

In the authors' view, libraries themselves as community anchors are composed of what Huston (2007) calls 'holding spaces' or what Nussbaum (2011) refers to as 'enabling environments'. Both concepts implicate libraries as community anchors. For Huston, a holding space incorporates those tools and relationships essential for achieving a human development outcome, either on individual or group levels. Certainly, the public library is such a space in which the admixture of information resources, key relationships among patrons and librarians as helping professionals and formal or informal training to use information potentially fosters competence among users. Nussbaum identifies the important role of community institutions in equipping people, particularly those living in poverty, with the requisite capabilities they require to navigate

society successfully and, as a consequence, bring about important quality of life outcomes they desire. For Nussbaum, the measure of an effective enabling environment resides in the range of capabilities the setting instills in its members or users.

The common thread connecting Huston's concept of holding space and Nussbaum's idea of enabling environment is the powerful competencies those kinds of places can facilitate in the lives of people, particularly those who require heightened or supplemental support. Understanding how public libraries advance human development by facilitating the acquisition of information competencies on part of patrons is an avenue for appreciating their institutional identities as community anchors.

The library is a destination for convening people who wish to learn, work together and enact opportunities requiring information and education. The library and its staff members can convene community conferences, hold community forums and sponsor information literacy programmes, supporting groups in their quest to strengthen local capacities of social support. As an example, in one case, a local public library was instrumental in supporting families of people struggling with serious mental illness to create a new kind of support system offering daily support. The library served an important role in the subsequent creation of this support system as stakeholders saw it as a caring but neutral place in the community that was welcoming and accommodating. The families and their loved ones struggling with mental illness were familiar with the library and knew its librarians whose record was exemplary in welcoming and helping even people who were experiencing considerable distress. As the forums took place over a period of almost a year, librarians staffed the meetings identifying the information needs of users and fulfilling those needs using their knowledge of and access to relevant information tools, including the professional human service literature.

The library in this case was indicative of what Connelly (2013) calls pluralisation inherent in a capacity of a local institution to respond to diversity and legitimise the needs of various groups composing a given community. For Connelly, pluralisation requires local institutions to refrain from characterising a community in ways that portray it as a simple collection of groups. Rather, through a policy and practice of pluralisation, an institution engages groups whose interests, aspirations and values require a differential approach to information provision. The members of those groups seek to use information to activate change, at either personal or community levels, access resources or create alternative resource structures and build local support systems (Connelly 2013)

As information specialists, librarians who engage in public service can strengthen the information and knowledge utilisation competencies of those groups, thereby enabling them to map out and even enact their own support systems. Membership organisations, clubs, support groups, mutual support and self-help can emerge within such a context. The local library can serve as a

physical place, digital portal, source of technical assistance, and provider of information as it serves as a community anchor for its users.

Further, it is inherent in the ethical stance of the librarian who is advancing democratic access to better serve the public good by promoting the use of information. This means that libraries should not only provide access to information, but with its services, programmes, events and opportunities libraries can provide individuals with avenues to learn the skills they need to help them become self-sufficient. Further, it means that libraries have a special obligation to advocate for the information rights of economically disenfranchised populations (Mars 2012). Libraries, the information they hold, their activity structures and programmes they offer, the outreach philosophy of many librarians and the competencies they offer, make them powerful public spaces in which the face-to-face relationships among librarians and people with substantive information needs unfold within a welcoming and enfranchising environment.

It is the attributes of the library as a physical entity that can make it a powerful public institution. Public attitudes are mediated by social institutions and can thereby influence how those institutions receive and interact with the people they assist. The street-level bureaucracy literature is instructive here. It documents the role of public bureaucrats in mediating the relationship between people seeking public benefits, too many times involving those who are poor, and public policy. Those public officials may enact barriers that prevent citizens from accessing essential benefits to improve their well-being and quality of life. While there are multiple potential barriers, street-level bureaucracies, such as social service or judicial agencies, can frustrate people's use of the very benefits they deserve as promulgated by public or social policy (Lipsky 1980).

Public libraries, however, are local community institutions whose purpose is defined by and influenced by the local contexts in which they operate. Polling information reveals the positive attitudes members of the public hold towards public libraries (Miller 2012). Involvement of citizens in creating programming and opportunities libraries offer do not suggest the qualities of street-level bureaucracies. Rather, they reflect the co-production movement in which public officials collaborate with citizens to create mutually beneficial relationships, offer products, services and opportunities designed mutually through collaboration among public officials and citizens and gear opportunities to fulfil social needs expressed locally (Bovaird 2007; Brudney and England 1983).

The public library is unlikely a dominant public bureaucracy positioned hierarchally to distribute narrow social benefits, but rather it likely serves as a horizontal structure within a given community, in which it broadens benefits in the form of information provision, education and cultural programming. Targeting such a broad network of benefits on specific vulnerable populations is an extension of the local public role of the library. In this sense, the public library is a principal expression of institutional social responsibility within a given community.

Often embodying qualities or characteristics that can create considerable stigma, and therefore produce negative attitudes and inaccurate stereotypes among members of the general public, people who are vulnerable may come to see the library as a refuge of first resort. Libraries as anchors may further strengthen inclusion starting with normalised interactions as people in need and the professionals who provide human services come together to use information for social betterment. The dual focus of the public library may very well serve as the essential building blocks of the library as anchor. Social inclusion as a value is the essence of democratic culture.

The preliminary collaborative work of the authors reveals the importance of this dual focus. As an example, Ralph Ellison Library, located in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA, serves a largely African-American community. It has extended itself considerably beyond the traditional range of library services. The library's horizontal structure offers value-added opportunities, moving youth from accessing computer technologies to vocational development and then to career development. The library is a principal provider in its local community of career-oriented information and educational opportunities for youth that then link to various strategies for assisting youth to access higher education.

While the librarians are credentialed professionals in library science, they bring considerable expertise to bear in the provision of information and referral, linkage to opportunities through local institutions, particularly public or nonprofit ones, and the promotion of the various literacies. Indeed, the library offers capacities for addressing five literacies: (1) technology and information literacy, (2) reading and information processing, (3) cultural and historical literacy, (4) health literacy and (5) community literacy. The latter can equip library patrons with the competencies to read, understand and appreciate their local community, perhaps a competence many people overlook in its importance to citizenship, economic involvement and involvement in the political life of a given community.

This example also shows how a library is integrated vertically within its community. At each level, there are key linkages the library has with other local community institutions involved in the provision of human services, mental health or physical health resources, economic development, vocational and career development, early education, primary and secondary education and higher education. The librarians are liaisons to those institutions possessing considerable social capital in facilitating access to them as librarians come to understand the needs of their patrons and the social issues they face.

It is the interplay of the horizontal and vertical dimensions of the local public library that enriches its own institutional social capital. Indeed, for the authors, it is this institutional social capital that makes a local public library an anchor, both metaphorically and substantively. The anchor comes to life as a real expression of institutional leadership through the role set of the librarian. While many of the roles the authors offer are not new, recasting them from a social service perspective can highlight the contributions librarians make as helping professionals.

Conclusion: Blended Strategies

What the authors call blended strategies would bring together librarians and social service providers into interprofessional contexts so together, they can produce value-added outcomes for people who are identified as vulnerable within their communities. One of the most potent strategies may be what we call social service information clinics. Designed along the lines of a medical clinic or legal clinic, people can visit an information clinic without an appointment and both information and social service specialists can assist patrons. Within a clinic, patrons can define their needs, obtain assistance in identifying their information objectives and gain technical assistance in searching relevant databases. Social service personnel may facilitate this search process helping patrons better understand local human service resources in addressing the needs they identify during a clinic.

Through a final consultation undertaken jointly with the information and social service specialists, a patron can leave with an action plan for better understanding the situation they face, interpreting the information they now have in hand and charting their course of action involving access to human resources. Information clinics can adopt specialised foci involving job search, vocational development and access to higher education, training resources, cultural enhancement and health concerns. Supplementing the information clinic can be workshops, additional information sessions, training events and events bringing substantive experts to the library.

Still another blended strategy may be the community forum social service personnel convene at a public library where they can hold issue-oriented workshops on topics of interest to people who require enhanced social support. The authors have seen such forums take place in the areas of social support for people coping with seizure disorders, who experience economic displacement, who are coping with the fall out of disasters, who are addressing geographic relocation or who are transitioning out of the military. A forum may be very important to families new to a community, people who are entering a community as refugees and those who come to a community as migrants.

In such settings, social service professionals likely do not interact with patrons as clients or patients, but as learners who are gathering information about a particular transition they are experiencing. Librarians stand ready to address the information needs of participants, helping them access requisite databases or information compendia useful in addressing the transitions people are making. Augmentation of the community forum through the inclusion of entertainment, movies, music and artwork can further expand the kind of information participants can access.

The kinds of blended strategies librarians and their partners in human services can create are endless and tap into the institutional creativity of the public library. In the spirit of the library as a collaborative space joining information specialists and social service personnel, the authors offer a way of

envisioning the library as a community anchor. Together, through collaborative culture, social workers and librarians can achieve multiple objectives involving the broadening of community learning assets, serving as a component of the community service infrastructure, fostering digital literacy, anticipating disaster responses and recovery and building information to support community literacy in its many diverse forms.

While public libraries as community anchors can create numerous interfaces, their collaboration with social workers is relevant in addressing the needs of those groups whose members require augmented social support, opportunities for assistance, and access to relevant information. With their expertise in reaching people who are vulnerable through public institutions, social workers are well positioned within communities to reach out to staff members and leaders, as well as users or constituencies of libraries. By becoming present in various library locations, social workers can initiate collaboration, particularly through activities involving outreach to and engagement of those library users who have unmet information needs or requirements as a consequence of the social issues they face. Through strong collaboration among librarians and social workers, the public library can become even more responsive to its users as a central element of a community's human service information infrastructure.

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