WWS403: Poverty in America

Professor Tim Nelson

Examining the Effects of Resources for Homeless Patrons on Staff Attitudes in Public Libraries: A Comparative Case Study

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This assignment has been completed in accord with University Regulations.

Introduction and Literature Review

Despite claims that the public library is dead (Richter et al. 2019), it continues to serve a multitude of roles in cities across the United States today. At a basic level, public libraries are hubs of information for recreation and research purposes. More broadly, many libraries have developed into venues for meetings, conferences, and other events – as well as spaces for informal congregation. As broadly accessible spaces that house "huge numbers of people from many socio-economic conditions every day" (Parker 2014), public libraries are tasked with the management of different groups – including vulnerable populations.

Taking note of this reality, the American Library Association (ALA) took an explicit stance on the relationship between libraries and poor community members in 1990, adopting Policy 61 (B.8.10 in the ALA Policy Manual). The policy states that the ALA promotes

> *equal access to information for all persons, and recognizes the urgent need to respond to the increasing number of poor children, adults, and families in America. …. 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. (ALA 2010:8)*

In their "Guidelines for the Development of Policies and Procedures Regarding User Behavior and Library Usage" (hereafter "Guidelines"), the ALA also states that staff training should "address the provision of service to…those experiencing poverty and homelessness, as well as the social, economic, and cultural diversity within communities." (ALA 2007). Clearly, there is a systematic expectation that libraries take particular note of the needs of impoverished community members and react accordingly.

But poverty encompasses a wide spectrum of different experiences – which is perhaps why the ALA made specific reference to homelessness in the Guidelines. Library visitors experiencing homelessness have gained special attention in sociological scholarship from the last decade. In libraries, people living in shelters and on the streets find a quiet and often unobtrusive environment in which to relax, connect with other community members, search for jobs, or just read. But homeless patrons sometimes engage in behavior in libraries that staff and other patrons see as problematic; these behaviors include bathing in restroom facilities, accessing inappropriate content on computers, and sleeping in library facilities (Anderson, Simpson, and Fisher 2012).

Public libraries have taken a variety of approaches in response to the increased presence of homeless patrons. Some, concerned with the special needs of this population, have attempted to improve the quality of relationships between library staff and homeless patrons through informal conversation programs (Fox 2015). Others have sought to be more proactive about connecting homeless patrons with critical resources for food, housing, and counseling. Others, still, have integrated offices into their physical spaces to house outreach workers from local service providers.

In some cases, however, libraries have enacted policies implicitly aimed at regulating or relocating homeless patrons (Giesler 2017). In 2012, the Newport Beach, VA City Council approved regulations that disallowed sleeping bags and blankets, as well as "a lack of personal hygiene." The Bethlehem, PA Area Public Library implemented similar rules "in response to an influx of homeless people who were being dropped off every morning by a church-run shelter program", introducing bag limits and a prohibition on "offensive body odor" (Nieves 2013). In Chicago, the Public Library Use Guidelines asks patrons not to "enter the library without shoes or appropriate attire" or "bathe, shave or wash clothes" (Chicago Public Library n.d.). In Canada, the

Edmonton Public Library System introduced a new rule in 2015 that prohibited sleeping in the library, which mirrors policies in many American libraries (Richter et al. 2019).

All of these policies, welcoming or hostile to homeless patrons, require an interface between them and library adminsitrators who enact the rules. That intermediary is often found in library staff, whose training in working with vulnerable populations may vary drastically. In responses to a survey conducted by Anderson et al., a majority (69%) of library staff indicated that they were either "not familiar" or "somewhat familiar" with local mental health services; similarly, a majority (67.3%) indicated a lack of familiarity with local physical health services to which they could refer patrons. At the same time, most respondents expressed a willingness to refer homeless patrons to services (94.7%) and interest in additional training on helping this community (80.7%) (Anderson et al. 2012). In light of this interest, it is crucial to understand how library staff perceive and react to various institutional approaches to homelessness, such that future programming and training can reflect successes and failures in this realm.

The present paper will seek to fill in a gap in the scholarship by examining library staff's attitudes about homeless patrons and the changing culture around homelessness in public libraries. Following a description of the research methods used to complete the project, the first section of the paper will summarize the useful resources available to homeless patrons at the Trenton Free Public Library and the San Diego Central Library; the second section will summarize relevant policies in place at each library; and the third section will summarize the extent of staff training around homelessness in each library. The fourth section of the paper will present an analysis of interview data that represents attitudes of staff at both libraries, and the paper will conclude with an evaluation of the findings presented and an overview of limitations, policy implications, and questions for future research.

Methodology

This research project was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Princeton University prior to the commencement of field work. Research was conducted at two sites: the San Diego Central Library (in San Diego, CA) and the Trenton Free Public Library (in Trenton, NJ). These public libraries were selected for research primarily because of their positioning in counties with significant homeless populations (7,063 people in San Diego County, or 0.21% of the population, versus 478 people in Mercer County, or 0.13% of the population); however, other factors were also considered. The field researcher had spent several months conducting separate research about homelessness in the San Diego Central Library prior to the beginning of this project, so he was familiar with the prevalence of homelessness in the space. Moreover, both sites were relatively conveniently located; the San Diego Central Library is in the researcher's hometown, and the Trenton Free Public Library is fairly close to the Princeton University campus.

Once the study obtained IRB approval, the researcher made initial contact with staff members at each library in November 2019 and sent information about the study with a request for staff participants. Staff at each library were notified of the researcher's presence and research goals in advance of his visit; the names of some SDCL staff members who were willing to participate were also sent to the researcher in order to streamline the process of finding volunteers. To secure interviews with staff members, the researcher approached desks throughout the libraries where staff members were stationed, mentioning that the study might have been publicized by the library administration and that he was seeking participation. Staff were also offered a small slip of paper that described the purpose of the study and included the researcher's contact information.

Staff members who agreed to participate were asked to sign an IRB-approved consent form and to indicate on the form whether they would permit an audio recording of their interview; every interviewee agreed to have their interview audio recorded. Generally, guided interviews were conducted in a quiet office, private study room, or relatively empty area of the libraries. Staff were informed that they would be permitted to withdraw from the interview process at any point without consequence. Ultimately, the researcher conducted interviews with 5 staff at SDCL over three days in November 2019 and 4 staff at TFPL over two days in December 2019. Participants were not compensated for their participation.

Motivated by a hypothesis that a greater institutional focus on homelessness in public libraries might lead to greater acceptance or greater resentment of homeless patrons by staff members, the researcher conducted field work with the question in mind: *How do institutional approaches to homelessness in public libraries correlate with staff attitudes around homelessness and patron perspectives?* In order to ensure that the topic was explored in sufficient depth, and noting the departmental restrictions on the scope of this particular project, the researcher opted to include only data from staff interviews in the analysis. This decision should not be taken as a judgement on the quality of the patron interviews conducted, as they revealed valuable perspectives on the subject matter. Future research may seek to incorporate the patron interviews conducted during the data collection period for this research.

In order to answer the research question, the researcher sought first to understand three independent variables: the in-house resources available, the nature of patron conduct policies upheld, and the extent of staff training offered at each library. While other operational and cultural dimensions of the libraries (such as local political atmosphere) could have been evaluated for this study, these three categories were thought to be significantly influential on staff attitudes. Staff

and patron interviews were used in conjunction with official library websites to demonstrate the details of these elements, and to inform the depiction of the dependent variable (staff attitudes toward homeless patrons).

Once data collection was complete, interviews were transcribed and transcriptions were compiled in a master document. In order to facilitate the data analysis process, the researcher coded interview portions along the following input categories: (1) in-house library resources for homelessness, (2), library policies, and (3) staff training for interacting with homeless patrons. Once interview portions had been grouped together, they were evaluated and summarized by the researcher, and staff attitudes were placed in the context of in-house resources, library policies, and staff training at SDCL and TFPL.

Findings

I. In-House Resources

As library user populations have changed, so too have the types of resources available in their facilities; between computers, workshops, and specialized support centers, a homeless patron might make use of a library every day without ever touching a book. Resources that are particularly useful to homeless patrons (hereafter referred to as "Supportive Resources") take many forms and may significantly alter the user experience in a library. While the needs of homeless patrons are considered in administrative decisions about Supportive Resources at both TFPL and SDCL, the outcomes are different between the two locations. Unless otherwise specified, all information listed below was derived from staff interviews.

Among the resources listed on the TFPL website, one-on-one computer classes and tutoring services (open to all ages) might be particularly useful for homeless patrons. SDCL's website

outlines a much broader range of Supportive Resources, including free professional attire, literacy instruction services, mental health services, veteran's resources, and career support.

Conversations with staff at both libraries revealed other available resources and illuminated which ones were most frequently utilized by homeless patrons. One TFPL staff member viewed the library space as a Supportive Resource in and of itself, characterizing it as "a judgement-free zone" where people can seek safe shelter from the weather and find free entertainment.

In interviews, TFPL staff made note of a variety of classes offered to patrons – including English as a Second Language classes, computer classes, and other technology workshops – as well as periodic resource fairs where patrons can connect with external service providers (such as healthcare specialists). In addition to these types of resources, SDCL provides a number of "feel-good programs" centered around improving mental health outcomes; ongoing workshops listed on the website include guitar lessons and "HEAL with HeART", which the website describes as "an art program for downtown San Diegans impacted by homelessness…[focused] on beautifying the community with the healing power of art." (San Diego Public Library) (San Diego Public Library)

One TFPL staff member noted that the library is looking into hiring a social worker as part of the introduction of an incoming Fresh Start program designed to support people reintegrating into society post-incarceration. But in a significant departure from the resources currently provided by TFPL, SDCL already hosts third-party social services providers (contracted by the county) at regular tabling events and in more permanent office spaces throughout the library, including 2-1-1 San Diego (a hub for homelessness resources) and the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). This particular partnership has evolved to ensure that two outreach workers are stationed in the library five days a week; according to the Supervising Librarian, "they assist staff with deescalating situations with patrons, they assist security with deescalating situations with patrons,

and they also make outreach contact with people who are in need of services and try to connect them with either the organization that's providing the service they're in need of – whether it's an ID, or shelter, or some sort of voucher – or they will work with someone consistently…to get them to the services that they need to get them off the streets." Moreover, SDCL has designated spaces for the Veteran's Resource Center and the Workforce Partnership Center, where homeless patrons can meet with specialists to access more targeted support. Advertising of Supportive Resources took place mainly through library websites and on-site posters and flyers; in 2019, TFPL also hired an Outreach Librarian in hopes of increasing outreach to patrons on-site.

Budget constraints pose a major barrier to introducing and advertising in-house Supportive Resources at both libraries. TFPL's funding comes mainly from the city, though the library also relies on state aid and donations; however, several staff at TFPL revealed that the local library system faced significant budget cuts in 2010, resulting in the closure of the four other library branches in the city. Conversely, news reports show that SDCL moved to a much larger building in 2013 (Perry 2013), which staff say greatly expanded the library's capacity to provide for patrons. As it stands, TFPL employs 31 staff to serve around 300 patrons each day; SDCL employs 120 staff to serve around 3,000 patrons per day. Accounting for the respective budgets of the library (around $2 million for TFPL and around $20.8 million for SDCL), this amounts to a $6,933 budget per capita at SDCL and a $6,666 budget per capita at TFPL. While it is tempting to attribute SDCL's programmatic advantages to the size of the library's budget, in light of these figures, it can be determined that the Supportive Resources offered at SDCL are traceable either to a difference in institutional priorities or to a varied vision of what resources are most helpful to patrons.

TFPL staff linked the 2010 budget cuts to staff shortages that stymied their ability to provide the full scope of services to homeless patrons and forced a reliance on community organizations to supplement the services provided by the library. The Library Director at TFPL seemed to feel that these constraints were out of the control of the library staff, explaining that administrators "don't have an awful lot of say in the budget, just because there are certain things for facilities and then for staffing, paying salaries that eats up most of your budget." Crucially, the San Diego library system also enjoys $4 million in funds for "administration", some of which funnels into SDCL. With the funds remaining for programming, TFPL's Library Director designated literacy as the "top priority" for the library and indicated an investment in homelessness, post-incarceration reintegration, and youth services programming. SDCL's online resources show an institutional focus on literacy as well, with programmatic emphasis on career support, homelessness, and veteran services.

II. Library Policies

TFPL and SDCL both list rules and regulations for patron conduct on their websites. While some of these rules might affect all patrons equally (such as rules against "soliciting, petitioning, or canvassing"), each list contains certain policies that might disproportionately impact homeless patrons over the general population, whether or not they were formulated with that outcome in mind. Rules of conduct (listed on the libraries' websites) that could restrict library access to homeless patrons (hereafter referred to as "Restrictive Policies") target patrons' appearance, belongings, and behavior, among other things.

Restrictive Policies targeting appearance are not uncommon in public spaces. Both libraries require that patrons wear clothing and shoes, which might be difficult to attain for homeless patrons

who possess relatively few belongings and whose clothes may not be clean or dry. TFPL's policy also included a section stating that "your body odor must not be so offensive that it disturbs others," (Trenton Free Public Library) which the Library Director justified as respecting the "greater good" of all library patrons:

> *It's a very sensitive topic, so you have to be very careful with it…so again, if we speak to them, it's say somebody does have a very strong odor and patrons are complaining, it's very offensive to people. In that case, you might have to say, okay, you know, we can send you to such and such, reach out to this person. Go ahead and get a shower come back that kind of thing. But always with the stipulation that they're definitely welcome.*

But while patrons are expected to practice good hygiene in order to access library services, they are also barred from pursuing cleanliness in library spaces. TFPL and SDCL regulations prohibit the use of restrooms for laundering clothes or bathing, behaviors which might be more common among patrons who don't have their own space in which to clean their bodies or garments.

While the two libraries are aligned on bathroom use policies, they differ on patrons' behavior throughout the rest of the library. Between the two facilities, only TFPL practices a no-sleeping policy. (Trenton Free Public Library) Generally, staff who notice patrons sleeping will report the instance to security guards, who tend to enforce the no-sleeping policy more harshly than other policies, according to a staff interview. Conversely, SDCL replaced its no-sleeping policy with a practice of "wellness checks", which the Supervising Librarian said mitigated conflict and acknowledged the plight of homeless patrons facing sleep deprivation:

> *When we used to have a no-sleeping rule…it was contributing to a lot of security incidents because people who are homeless are very tired, they're out on the streets all night, they're trying to catch a nap in here. [A] staff person goes to wake them up, and then because they*

also have trauma most likely, then they respond very aggressively and violently…. But we just asked staff and security to do "wellness checks" and check in with people and just make sure that they're not experiencing any sort of medical crisis, and wake them up and just make sure they're alert and, like, in charge of themselves and their belongings.

Roaming librarians and security guards also implement "wellness checks" if patrons are sleeping in a way that might disturb other customers (by snoring, for example).

At both TFPL and SDCL, a library card is required in order for patrons to check out library materials and access some of the other resources noted in Section I (such as career support). But in order to receive a library card at either site, patrons must present a valid photo ID and a proof of residence at a local address – an impossible standard for many homeless patrons who don't have their own property. TFPL's Live, Work, Learn, Serve program ensures a free library card for "anyone that is a resident of Trenton, owns property in Trenton, works in Trenton or goes to school in Trenton", as well as any veteran. All others are required to pay a $75 annual fee (or $10 for seniors). (Trenton Free Public Library)

According to their website, TFPL also offers Limited Library Cards for patrons "who can produce valid New Jersey driver's license or other government issued photo ID but whose living situation is unresolved such as a crisis center, half-way house, or other similar circumstances" (Trenton Free Public Library); similarly, at SDCL, guest passes for internet access and "Internet Only" cards are available. But these cards curb access to library resources in notable ways.

One TFPL staff member explained that an unrestricted card allows patrons to check out up to 25 books and 4 DVDs at a time, while a Limited Library Card only allows patrons to check out one print item and one audio-visual item at a time (Trenton Free Public Library). Though he a belief that this structure was "just a policy" and had nothing to do with homelessness, he also

acknowledged that the rule mainly affected people without a permanent address. Another TFPL staff member bolstered these claims, describing unrestricted library cards as **"**really kind of hard to get for homeless [patrons], because they don't have a proper address." One SDCL staff member claimed that address-based library card restrictions can be bypassed if a patron brings a note or mail from a nearby homeless services provider, and that an ID photocopy is accepted in certain cases.

But lacking an ID or an accepted alternative can make a big difference in homeless patrons' library experience in a number of ways, as one SDCL staff member explained:

> *Unfortunately, some of these resources do require a person to have an ID. And that's not always the case that they have an ID, so it's a big deterrent, you know? They come to us and they tell us that their ID was stolen or that they lost it. So, off the bat, without an ID…they can't access the Workforce Center on the fifth floor. Because they do require [patrons] to register with an ID. A person can't use the computers if they don't have an ID. If they don't have an ID, they can't sign up for a library card. We do try to make an exception sometimes. I feel like the ID issue is a big problem.*

An ironic result of these policies is that homeless patrons without an ID may be unable to access crucial programming targeted at them.

Beyond passively barring certain patrons from library access, both libraries respond to extreme patron behaviors by administering suspensions. Neither TFPL nor SDCL has a publicly accessible suspension policy, but staff interviews illuminated some of the triggers for administrative action. At TFPL, staff cited cases of repeated sleeping, stealing, and cursing as reasons for suspension, noting that most suspended patrons are able to return without penalty after a certain amount of time has passed. (Permanent bans, though rare, had been administered.) At

SDCL, staff highlighted their zero-tolerance policy for drug use, assault, verbal harassment, and sexual harassment by patrons.

In mild cases, staff sometimes avoided formal suspension altogether and just asked patrons to return the next day to "start over." But more severe consequences associated with the violation of behavioral policies, while considered essential for the maintenance of a stable library atmosphere, might pose particular challenges for homeless patrons facing mental illness. Still, this penalty is administered on a regular basis at both libraries; the Supervising Librarian at SDCL estimated that up to 60 suspensions are issued per week, and the Library Director at TFPL estimated that 1-2 suspensions are issued per week.

One TFPL staff member mentioned that the library waives overdue fees for patrons who bring in canned goods during the library's food drives. SDCL, apparently driven by studies showing that fines were mostly ineffective for low-income patrons, took more drastic systematic measures and eliminated late fees altogether in 2018. (City of San Diego)

III. Extent of Training

Since homeless patrons have different needs than other patrons, many scholars have argued that library staff ought to be trained to respond to these needs respectfully and efficiently. Staff at TFPL and SDCL claim they are exposed to training relevant to working with homeless patrons; however, the nature of this training is very different between the two facilities.

Different types of staff training might include in-person workshops, online multimedia courses, and written materials that detail specific policies and practices that affect homeless patrons and facilitate relationships between staff and homeless patrons. The bulk of training provided to TFPL staff members comes at biannual staff meetings, where a police officer usually

gives a presentation about various neighborhood issues and touches on working with homeless patrons. TFPL's Library Director recounted an officer presentation from a previous meeting, which ended with questions and a discussion of scenarios that have happened in the library; she recalled a conversation gauging staff sentiments about various incidents and noted that "the staff also open up and talk about it and try to come to resolutions if there are any issues."

At SDCL, there has been a greater investment in staff training for working with homeless patrons on an individual level. According to staff interviews, all SDCL staff are given access to the Librarian's Guide to Homelessness, a program created by Ryan Dowd (the executive director of a homeless shelter outside of Chicago); other types of training pertaining to homelessness and collateral issues – including suicide prevention training, burnout prevention training, compassion fatigue training, and meditation workshops – have been introduced in recent years. According to a staff interview, mental health training was mandated but the Librarian's Guide to Homelessness was opt-in; an email from a library administrator clarified that all professional development apart from Customer Service, Sexual Harassment, Information Technology, and specified library policy/procedure training is voluntary for staff.

As with the incorporation of resources for homeless patrons, budget concerns were cited as a major barrier to the provision of training resources for staff. In an interview, the Library Director at TFPL explained that staff were sometimes directed to external resources to supplement the training resources available in the library:

> *We do try, if staff want training for something specific, regardless of what the topic is, we'll even send them out if there's something being offered through a community organization or somewhere in the city, the state. You know, we are all for training, but unfortunately, we can't always send everyone.*

In spite of these impediments, TFPL administrators are looking into providing access to Ryan Dowd's training program down the line.

Analysis (Staff Attitudes)

On the whole, SDCL provides a more holistic set of formal in-house resources for homeless patrons than does TFPL, especially in its incorporation of third-party social service providers into the physical space of the library. The balance of intake over outreach is relatively consistent between the libraries, though TFPL has made a greater effort to bridge this gap by hiring an Outreach Librarian. At both libraries, budget constraints were a major impediment to greater resource access for homeless patrons. Both libraries uphold and enforce a number of Restrictive Policies; they also both remain flexible and offer certain avenues for forgiveness for homeless patrons, though SDCL has eliminated more of these Restrictive Policies to date. SDCL provides much more extensive training resources to staff than does TFPL: staff are given access to individual learning materials, offered small-group workshops in the library, and briefed on the needs of homeless patrons at staff meetings. While TFPL currently only provides the latter and outsources other training, administrators are actively seeking opportunities for more intensive training contingent on financial attainability. The differences in resources, policies, and available training at TFPL and SDCL were then evaluated and considered alongside interview segments that seemed to exhibit staff attitudes about homeless patrons and the changing library culture around homelessness.

TFPL staff indicated that homelessness was not a major part of regular conversations at the facility. One TFPL staff member said that the biannual staff training was all that could be expected of library staff, rehashing the belief that patrons' living situations are "not really our business".

Conversely, homelessness was a frequent topic of conversation at SDCL. An SDCL staff member described the issue as an "unavoidable" part of daily operations at the library and noted that it was a crucial consideration in library planning and strategy. Nonetheless, staff at both libraries seemed to take a generally positive view of homeless patrons.

Staff at both libraries leaned into the idea that public libraries provide services for everyone, and that policies and resources therefore did not (or ought not) target a specific population. TFPL staff asserted this repeatedly, using phrases like "we don't specifically target any population"; "we treat everybody equally"; "as long as you're following the library rules, then it's fair, and it's equal"; and "we do not just terminate, nor do we give special treatment or handouts to anyone because they are homeless." Though less frequently emphasized, this sentiment was shared among SDCL staff, who used phrases like "nobody gets special treatment" and "you give them the same level of service that you would anyone else." The Supervising Librarian at SDCL spoke to the tension between providing for specific populations while also upholding the institutional mission of treating all patrons equally:

> *I think one of the most interesting things that I still learning to navigate is that we have to walk a very fine line between empathetically helping people who are in need and offering services to those people to help them improve their lives, while also politically being very careful to have a neutral role…. So there's a lot of controversy, and we're kind of in the middle of it, because we try to treat everyone equally and provide equal access to services, regardless of what your housing status is, or your socioeconomic status. And sometimes that can be perceived by people in the community with a little bit [of a] different perspective as being a waste of taxpayer resources.*

In spite of these concerns, housing status seemed to be at least informally considered in the administration of certain policies at SDCL, like in cases of suspension.

One way in which the belief in equal treatment manifested at TFPL was as a reluctance to assume patrons' housing status. Several staff at TFPL noted that it was difficult or impossible to know which patrons present at the library are experiencing homelessness, which complicated the process of connecting them to resources. One encapsulated this hesitation in his interview:

> *...we don't pry into your business, so I can't be like, 'Hey, you look homeless, how about I sit down and educate you about our programs?' because we can't do that, obviously. So it's a little bit of a crossroads, an impasse, because you can't target specific people. I think we're doing the best we can…we put our information up on the wall, put it on our website, tell people about it when they show a little interest, make it sound exciting. I think that's kind of all we can do right now, without targeting specific people and running the risk of making them uncomfortable, which is the last thing we want to here at TFPL.*

Another TFPL staff member justified non-intervention by highlighting that each individual patron might choose to divulge that information differently. However, one newer TFPL staff member seemed to find it easier to identify and approach homeless patrons.

Most staff at both libraries expressed that conversations respecting resources were usually initiated by patrons, and that librarians didn't engage in much outreach. One TFPL staff member indicated that she had bucked the trend and connected several patrons to resources by approaching them with flyers, though, and some SDCL staff seemed comfortable referring patrons to the offices in the building. Still, staff at both libraries cited better advertisement of online and in-house resources to patrons as a potential area of improvement for the library.

While SDCL staff seemed less hesitant than TFPL staff about assuming a patron's housing status, – one staff member estimated that 60% of SDCL patrons are homeless – they also defer to in-house social workers for certain types of patron engagement. Justifying this practice, an SDCL staff member said that social workers' extensive training and relevant life made them "better able to identify who is in need of services and what type of services they might need." Multiple SDCL staff seemed to agree, mentioning the frequency of referring patrons to external community partners or to internal resources.

Regarding resources that already exist for homeless patrons, staff at both libraries seemed confident in their effectiveness. One TFPL staff member claimed that she knew of several homeless families and individuals who had left abusive relationships and found safe shelter after getting connected to library resources. Another TFPL staff member said that he had witnessed patrons finding employment after learning to use the computers from him, and that those types of meaningful life changes were what cemented him in his career as a librarian. One SDCL staff member expressed that it was difficult to know how helpful resources were to homeless patrons without some avenue of recurring contact, which was not guaranteed between staff and patrons. Another SDCL staff member said that people have been housed through social service providers hosted by the library but noted that some patrons face obstacles in accessing the benefits of these resources: "There's a lot of hoops to jump through…it's hard to go through the system, like, you know, calling people, filling out paperwork, waiting in line, like, that's a lot to ask…. So some people are helped, but there's definitely a lot of work to do."

The Library Director at TFPL recalled that she had been exposed to more intensive training at a library she worked at before coming to TFPL. She regretted that budget constraints impeded TFPL from mirroring that practice, because she thought that these more intensive trainings from

social workers and former police officers offered "such a deeper knowledge" than shorter trainings and webinars. "Yes, you're reading about it, yes, you're seeing it," she continued. "But when you're as a group and its collective, and you're doing scenarios, it really helps to do that and to really be put in that place where- what if this was your family? What if this was happening?"

Numerous SDCL staff brought up the Librarian's Guide to Homelessness in interviews, some claiming that the program helped them understand how better to develop relationships with homeless patrons through body language and self-presentation. One staff member recounted that the training had taught him to assume a less combative stance when approaching patrons, insisting that "you're trying to be kinder." When asked if he thought these practices had made a meaningful difference in interactions between patrons and staff, he responded affirmatively. Staff at both libraries also seemed willing to support homeless patrons through informal avenues, such as assisting with resume writing and helping patrons cover printing and copying fees. At SDCL, one staff member noted "unwritten rules" that staff should support patrons however possible while being mindful of the needs of other patrons and staff members.

Reflecting on library policies that might present obstacles for homeless patrons, staff at both libraries took issue with certain regulations on patron access. First, several staff at TFPL expressed distaste with the no-sleeping policy. One TFPL staff member compared the policy to "saying, 'Oh, we know someone's hungry, come to the buffet, but you can't eat.'" Another staff member characterized the policy as "a little bit on the problematic side." Other TFPL staff lamented the difficulties of accessing resources without an ID or permanent address, calling the library card address requirements "maybe a little bit archaic".

At SDCL, staff members seemed to think that the library's policy regarding suspensions was "the best way" and expressed support for the wellness-check policy. One SDCL staff member

who had worked at the library prior to the replacement of the no-sleeping policy appeared to see the change as common sense, so long as care was given to patrons in need of medical attention. "As long as you're not disturbing somebody else, I don't think it's an issue," he said.

SDCL staff members seemed to take a positive view of the training provided to them, and at least one staff member interviewed for this project indicated that he had relied on the Librarian's Guide to Homelessness. Another SDCL staff member mentioned that one of the training programs had helped him understand homeless patrons' need for an emotional outlet, and that he had simply talked to a patron who was loudly swearing in the library instead of calling security immediately (which might have led to a suspension). In another instance, he calmly mitigated a patron's concerns about another patron's talking on the phone. Another similar situation involved a woman with PTSD whose behavior was deescalated by social workers. One TFPL staff member indicated that he tries to respect patrons' comfort even when enforcing the no-sleeping policy or alerting security about the patron's slumber. He said that he delivers the information to security guards gently and mentions if the patron isn't disturbing anyone else so that "the off-hours guard can choose what they want to do with it and what they don't."

Staff at both libraries seemed open to the integration of more resources for homelessness, including a social worker and the presence of more third-party social service providers. Others voiced wishes for more radical measures to accommodate homeless patrons; one TFPL staff member described his vision of a 24-hour library "so that people always had somewhere to somewhere to stay," and an SDCL staff member pined for the expansion of basic resources for homeless patrons through the addition of laundry and dryer services for homeless patrons.

Some staff felt that their roles had expanded to involve more social work and expressed a desire to find new ways to support homeless patrons. Others were more passive about the changes

to the role; one TFPL staff member explained that he was comfortable not knowing much about his patrons' personal dilemmas: "Usually I don't get to learn that much about [patrons' living situations] working my job. And it's not really- it's not really part of my job to learn that. My job is to give people- help people out and give them their books and make sure they have all that information. And you know, anything else is just icing on the cake." But not all librarians are keen to embrace these new responsibilities. An SDCL staff noted that some staff "didn't realize what they were getting into", and that they are less enthused about the predominance of homelessness in the library user population and in staff conversations.

Conclusion and Discussion

Public libraries' roles in the public sphere have shifted drastically in the last few decades. As research materials and recreational reading resources have become increasingly digitized, libraries have become less and less critical to the masses. At the same time, the explosion of homeless populations in cities has begged libraries to assume a new role: one as a social services provider.

Libraries across the country have taken varied approaches to managing this expectation, but many have embraced the growing need for a social space that offers support for some of society's most vulnerable groups. This adjustment has taken form in numerous ways, including the provision of resources designed to uplift patrons facing financial or food insecurity; the introduction and elimination of policies that might serve to disproportionately impede library access to homeless patrons; and the expansion of training resources for staff who are now tasked with managing situations that may not have appeared in their job descriptions.

In the wake of these changes, librarians have also responded in varied ways to new responsibilities that seem more aligned with social work than research assistance. Some staff have rejected these duties, opting to occupy positions at libraries less frequented by homeless patrons or to leave the profession altogether. Others have accepted the challenge of being flexible and learning to address patrons' needs that might go beyond the scope of their formal training. And still others have developed such an enthusiasm for this new paradigm of library services that they believe that libraries ought to go further in assisting homeless patrons, offering laundry services and providing shelter in late hours of the night.

The nuanced relationship between institutional responses to homelessness and individual staff members' attitudes about homeless patrons has largely gone unexplored until this research. Through online resources and by conducting staff and patron interviews at TFPL and SDCL, the researcher was able to begin to clarify this relationship.

It should be noted that the results presented in this paper are limited in part by the many environmental differences between SDCL and TFPL. SDCL is a much larger library with greater financial resources than TFPL; it also employs far more staff and serves far more patrons every day than TFPL. Furthermore, SDCL is one of 36 library branches in San Diego, while TFPL is the only library in Trenton. San Diego and Trenton also differ in their political atmospheres, the relative sizes of their homeless populations, the proportions of their respective homeless populations that are sheltered and unsheltered, and the presence of homelessness resources beyond the library; these are all factors that might influence staff attitudes, but which are not considered in the present analysis. The conclusions drawn in this paper are further limited by the nonlinear patterns of interaction between each of the variables analyzed above; for example, the amount of staff training provided at SDCL may influence staff attitudes about homelessness, but staff

attitudes about homelessness (with or without training) almost certainly influence institutional investment in training resources as well. Nonetheless, these findings represent a valuable contribution to the literature.

Because no control was used, causality cannot be established. Nonetheless, a notable correlation was observed throughout this research. The two libraries provide many similar resources for homeless patrons, but SDCL goes further than TFPL in hosting third-party social service providers in permanent office spaces throughout the building. SDCL has also taken more administrative measures than TFPL to eliminate Restrictive Policies that might target homeless patrons' appearance, belongings, and behavior, or which might impede patrons' access to the library based on ID and proof-of-address requirements. Lastly, SDCL staff are provided with much more extensive training resources pertaining to working with homeless patrons than are TFPL staff. Correlated with these divergent approaches are differing degrees to which homelessness appears in daily conversations among library staff and administrators – SDCL staff seemed more accustomed to the conversation – which in turn might have a bearing on how staff perceive and execute their responsibilities.

Understood broadly, this analysis indicates that when more Supportive Resources are available, fewer Restrictive Policies are in place, and better training programs are used, library staff tend to be more positive, comfortable, and sensitive when considering and interacting with homeless patrons.

While most of the findings outlined in this paper pertain to internal library approaches to homelessness, there are important takeaways for policymakers as well. Both TFPL and SDCL struggled with budget constraints, which limited their ability to fully invest in the programming and resources they thought most valuable for their staff and patrons (especially in regards to the

issue of homelessness); library administrators noted in interviews that most funds for programming came from donations. Policymakers should consider the increasing value of investing in libraries such that libraries can provide more fully for some of their most vulnerable patrons, especially as they continue to occupy library buildings during the day.

This work has also raised important questions for future research. Most notably, understanding patrons' perceptions of Supportive Resources and Restrictive Policies might affirm or contradict some of the generalizations made by library staff about the effectiveness of library resources, which could clarify patrons' visions of the proper level of community engagement by library staff. Studying patrons' perceptions of their relationships with library staff might also yield interesting insights with which to frame the aforementioned findings on staff attitudes about homeless patrons.

It is crucial to note that this work only touches on one dimension of a complex social issue, and that other facets of the homeless experience – including intersections with space and identity – ought to be explored. But equally important to acknowledge is that there are real lives connected to poverty research; for many of the stakeholders in policy decisions within libraries and localities grappling with how best to support people in need, this research (and its repercussions) can translate major differences in daily routines, connections to resources, and even life trajectories. Much work lies ahead, but with every study comes a small push towards a greater collective understanding of the society we've created and what we must do to make it equitable for everyone.

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