

# Balancing Books and Social Issues: Homelessness and Trauma

An Infopeople Webinar  
February 6, 2019

Elissa Hardy, LCSW  
Community Resource Manager  
Denver Public Library  
[ehardy@denverlibrary.org](mailto:ehardy@denverlibrary.org)



---

---

---

---

---

---

## Agenda

- Libraries are Faced with Being the Last Public Space Available to People
- Language and Terminology We Use Makes a Difference
- Utilizing Empathy and Compassion
- The Effect of Trauma on Society and How It Affects Those of Us in Public Service
- Define Vicarious Trauma and Vicarious Resilience
- Create a Self Care Plan
- Q&A

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Why are Libraries Challenged with Providing Social Service Connections and Service?

---

---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

---

---

---

**Libraries are the last Public Space**

**FREE &  
EQUAL  
ACCESS  
FOR ALL**

---

---

---

---

---

---

## **Libraries are a “Protective Factor”**

Protective Factors are “characteristics associated with a lower likelihood of negative outcomes or that reduce a risk factor’s impact.”

~[The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMSHA\)](#)

Risk Factors are defined as: “characteristics at the biological, psychological, family, community, or cultural level that precede and are associated with a higher likelihood of negative outcomes.”

Protective Factors might include: growing up in a two parent home, educational opportunities, supportive friends and community, access to healthcare and transportation.

---

---

---

---

---

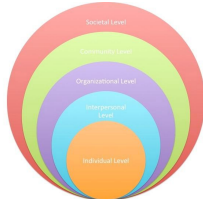
---

## Libraries are a “Protective Factor”

Many of our library customers don't have access to many protective factors.

However the Library is a Protective Factor.

- The Library provides:
  - Space to exist
  - A place to meet basic needs
  - Climate control
  - Connection
    - Information
    - People
    - Resources and Services



---

---

---

---

---

---

## Applying Social Services to Your Library

1. Collaborating with community agencies to meet the needs of your customers.
  - a. Welcome them into your buildings to outreach and connect customers to services.
2. Contracting with community agencies to have their staff member(s) work in the library as library social worker(s)
  - a. The social worker has space within the library in which to work, and may be included in decision making around policies, etc.
3. Creating a social work program within your library. The social worker is hired by the library and is an integrated staff member.
  - a. The social worker is seen as an important piece to the puzzle of making long lasting social change

Other Considerations: Peer Navigator Program (Not without Social Work supervision!)

\*Whole Person Librarianship - connect with Librarians and Library Social Workers to consult:  
<https://wholepersonlibrarianship.com/>

---

---

---

---

---

---

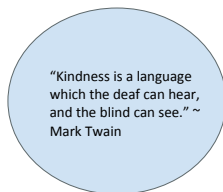
## The Importance of Language and Terminology

Unaware Language Will:

- Stigmatize
- Marginalize
- Separate

Strength Based Words Will:

- Strengthen Community
- Empower
- Create Connection
- Develop Empathy and Compassion



---

---

---

---

---

---

## Language

- "Homeless customers", "homeless people", "transient" vs. "unhoused" or "person experiencing homelessness"?
- Being unhoused is not a lack of character, it's lack of an address.
- "Disruptive" behavior vs. challenging behavior
- "Addict" vs. person who uses drugs or alcohol
- "The mentally ill" vs. someone with a mental health issue

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Terminology

- U.S. culture uses terminological differences to enforce the otherness of unhoused people by calling their sleeping spaces "encampments" and their everyday items of living "paraphernalia."
- Stigmatization pushes unhoused people out of public spaces, decreases their visibility, and forces them to accept stigmatized identities to receive services.
- The unhoused are subject to various nonverbal marginalization, including dirty looks, being avoided, having more space put between them, poorer face-to-face interactions and can mean being rejected by peers.

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Trauma

- We often define "trauma" as an event, or series of events. Which is true, however most trauma we cannot see, and we might not even be aware of its affects until later.

---

---

---

---

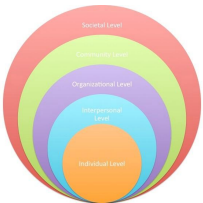
---

---

Stating Trauma only applies to a dangerous event does not give credit to the severe effects of:

Oppression, Racism, Sexism, Ableism,  
Discrimination related to sexual orientation,  
Discrimination related to gender identity,  
Ageism, Poverty/Homelessness, Political

Other Trauma Considerations:  
Generational Trauma, Historical Trauma,  
Cultural Trauma



---

---

---

---

---

---



---

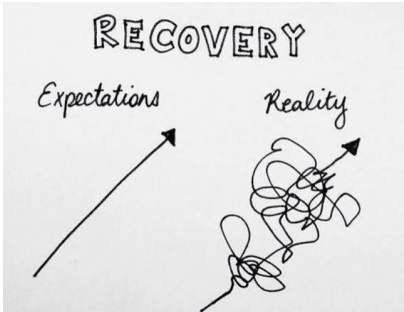
---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

---

---

---

## Moving Beyond Verbal Cues

### Eye Contact

- Eye contact is important when establishing rapport with customers but the amount of eye contact varies depending on the customer's cultural background.

### Attentive Listening

- First, the distinction must be made between hearing and listening. Listening implies more than just audio reception of words that are said. It focuses on comprehending the meaning of what is said.

---

---

---

---

---

## Moving Beyond Verbal Cues

### Facial Expressions

- Facial expressions can be used to reinforce what is said verbally and corroborate the fact that you mean what you say.

### Body Positioning

- **Body tension** involves how rigid or tense our muscles appear as we position ourselves and most frequently coincides with emotional tension.
- **Relaxation** can be portrayed by slow, loose movements and a decidedly casual, informal presentation of self.

---

---

---

---

---

## Using Empathy and Other Interpersonal Skills

- Displaying **warmth** involves conveying a feeling of interest, concern, well-being, and affection to another individual. Warmth is a vehicle for acceptance.

- "Hello. It's good to meet you."
- "I'm glad we have the chance to talk about this."
- "It's pleasant talking with you."
- "It's good to see you again."

---

---

---

---

---

## Using Empathy and Other Interpersonal Skills

- Genuineness** simply means that you continue to be yourself despite the fact that you are working to accomplish goals in your professional role.

- Empathy** involves not only being in tune with how a customer feels, but also conveying to that customer that you understand how he or she feels.

- It does not necessarily mean you think the customer's feelings are positive or negative, nor does it mean that you are having the same feelings yourself.

---

---

---

---

---

## Compassionate Practice: Being Present

- With individuals experiencing homelessness, especially young adults, simply being present conveys care.

- The actual service provided takes a secondary role to the mere act of ongoing presence.

---

---

---

---

---

## Strengths Based Service Delivery

- When employing a strengths-based approach, it is necessary to identify not just concerns but also what things are going well in the customer's life in order to highlight current coping mechanisms.

- Phrasing the solution as a goal will help differentiate the goal from tasks.

- Strengths-based** service calls for a focus on people's assets (you've got the library here to help you), resilience (it's great that you're here working at this and if you keep trying, you'll only get better at \_\_\_\_), and capacity for self-direction (now that you've got that, these are the other things you can do with that knowledge).

---

---

---

---

---

## Empowerment, Choice, and Voice

- Throughout the library and among customers, resilience and strengths are recognized, built upon, and validated as new skills are developed.
- The library allows customers, staff, and family members to experience choice and recognizes that every person's experience is unique and requires an individualized approach.
- There is a belief in resilience and in the ability of individuals, organizations, and communities to heal and promote recovery from trauma, building on what customers, staff, and communities have to offer rather than responding to perceived deficits.

---

---

---

---

---

## Trauma Informed Care and Trauma Informed Services

What Happened to You?

---

---

---

---

---

## Vicarious Trauma and Burnout

**When our own experiences overlap or are affected by the people we encounter, we are even more vulnerable to vicarious trauma and even burnout.**

---

---

---

---

---



## Trauma exposure response

---

---

---

---

---

## Vicarious Trauma VS Vicarious Resiliency

---

---

---

---

---

### Resiliency

1. the power or ability to return to the original form, position, etc., after being bent, compressed, or stretched; elasticity.
2. ability to recover readily from illness, depression, adversity, or the like; buoyancy.

Dictionary.com

---

---

---

---

---

## Vicarious Resiliency

A unique and positive effect that transforms service workers in response to trauma survivors' own resiliency.

---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

---

---