

The Introduction of a Community Resource Specialist into the Public Library: A Case Study

Melissa Gross^a, Don Latham^a

^aFlorida State University, School of Information, USA

mgross@fsu.edu, dlatham@fsu.edu

ABSTRACT

Social services in libraries have traditionally ranged from helping immigrants assimilate into mainstream culture to responding to user needs related to home and food insecurity, the opiate epidemic, and disaster recovery. Community needs have continued to grow and the public library is increasingly stepping in to help bridge the gap in part by adding a position, often filled by a social worker, to help library users find social services information, complete applications for SNAP and other government programs, and to connect library users with community resources. Additional duties often include training and coaching librarians to provide these services, performing outreach, and developing partnerships with community agencies. Although this is a growing trend, there are no established guidelines for these positions and relatively little research has been done to document the benefits and challenges, identify issues, and consider the impact on librarianship. This case study design follows a recently hired community resource specialist for the period of one year to understand why a community resource specialist position was needed, how this position was implemented, and with what result. Study findings will help to bridge the gap by documenting benefits and challenges and considering the impact of this position on practice and the development of professional competencies in social services information, as well as implications for teaching and learning in LIS programs.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Public libraries; Community engagement; Research methods; Social justice.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

case study; social workers; social service information; professional boundaries; outreach.

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