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Social Work in Australian Public Libraries: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Social Justice

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ABSTRACT

Public library staff are increasingly required to work with members of the public with high social needs. Public libraries are places of sanctuary and connection for people experiencing challenges such as homelessness, poverty, mental illness, domestic violence and substance abuses. In recognizing their role to serve the needs of all people who enter their buildings, public library staff are often asked to work outside their areas of expertise to meet the needs of community members. Public library staff can experience feeling overwhelmed and anxious when working with this community, often wanting to help but not knowing where the boundary between providing support and undermining the self-determination of the individual lies, and not knowing what resources and services would best meet the needs of these visitors. To assist patrons with high social needs and library staff, the City of Melbourne Libraries followed an approach now common in the United States of America, but largely untested in Australia by working with a local housing group to place a social worker in their City Library. This article explores the early work of the Library Social Worker as she engaged with library patrons and provided training to library staff. Using statistics and case notes that describe her activities and their outcomes, we can see that although this practice is new for the Australian public library system, the placement of a social worker into a busy urban library has significant benefits to both patrons in need and the staff who work with them.



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Public libraries across the world are recognizing the complex social needs of their user groups who are experiencing homelessness (Dowdell and Liew 2019), unemployment (Lo, He, and Liu 2019), inadequate or non-existent IT facilities and connectivity at home, and multiple forms of social exclusion (Johnston 2018; Stickles 2018). In addition to these social concerns, Kelley et al. (2017) identify issues related to school success for children, health care including mental health needs, and food resources as ones of concern to public

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library users. Other writers add more issues to this list stating that vast numbers of people are coming to public libraries seeking support, comfort and shelter while living with poverty, immigration concerns and substance abuse (Wahler et al. 2020). Public libraries in multiple American and Canadian cities are choosing to meet these needs in part through the employment of professional social workers (Lloyd 2020). This article explores the history and role of library social work and discusses the recent inclusion of the first social worker into an Australian public library, including the nature of the work being undertaken and the resulting outcomes for both library users and library staff.

The employment of social workers in non-traditional social work settings has a longer history than their appearance in public libraries, with other such sites including private law firms, bars, health centers and parole offices hosting social work services and resources (Delgado 1999; Gountras 2010). The San Francisco Public Library were the first public library to state they had hired a social worker, doing so in 2008 (Guion 2019; Ruhlmann 2014). By 2017 there were 16 public libraries across the United States of America that had hired social workers to assist both library staff and library users (Karisch 2017). These social workers are connecting people in need with social supports such as food services, housing providers, mental and physical health treatment centers, and domestic violence shelters (Ruhlmann 2014). Lloyd (2020) discusses the role of public libraries as ‘protective factors’ in the lives of those who use them, recognizing protective factors as those cited by the United States Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (n.d.) as characteristics that lower the negative effects of risk factors such as homelessness, mental and physical health problems, and poverty. Lloyd (2020, 52) identifies protective factors as “resources, relationships and opportunities in an individual’s life” that can mitigate these risks, and sees public libraries as natural providers of such protective factors in the lives of their users. In addition, libraries have become training grounds for student social workers with Johnson (2019) reporting over 40 libraries in North America having host arrangements for social work interns in 2019. Aykanian et al. (2020) also discuss the potential for innovative partnerships between public libraries and university schools of social work. The practice of employing social workers in American public libraries has been common enough to lead to a satellite event prior to the 2018 American Public Library Association Conference, called “A Social Worker Walks into a Library” where panelists, library and social work professionals came together to explore models of social work service delivery in public libraries and to learn from each other’s experiences (Dankowski 2018).

When writing of the congruence between social work and libraries, Miles states that libraries and social work share many of the same goals, such as “a focus on supporting access, increasing wellbeing, facilitating social change

and development, building social inclusion and enabling community development” (Miles 2017). The Social Work profession, as defined by the Australian Association of Social Workers, is underpinned by the principles of human rights and social justice. Social work promotes wellbeing, empowerment, and social change by working holistically “at the interface between people and their social, cultural and physical environments” (Australian Association of Social Workers 2010, 7–9). Social workers are committed to redressing inequities, to reduce social barriers, and to work directly with individuals, groups, communities, and organizations, as well as indirectly through research, social policy, and education and training to achieve “social and systemic change”. Equitable access to social, economic, environmental, and political resources is central to the profession’s efforts to advocate for systemic change. The breadth of the social work domain intersects with the enabling, inclusive practices of libraries as they promote wellbeing, reduce barriers to engagement, and equity of access to a range of information and resources (Australian Library and Information Association 2018; Luo, Estreicher, and Lee et al. 2012). Reflecting this, Zettervall and Nienow describe the professions as “sister professions” and note the similarities in the origins and development of each profession over time, along with contemporary challenges and “shared ethics” based on trust, safety, and relationship-building (2019, 1, 4).

Library staff also have much to gain from receiving professional development training from social workers who are able to advise on how and when to create boundaries when working with library users with high social needs to ensure the well-being of library staff is maintained, along with the user’s self-determination and privacy. Having a social worker provides training on how to deal with library users in crisis, or in how to respond to situations where other library users, including children are in danger fills in gaps of knowledge and expertise that may not have been filled by more traditional library training (Schofield n.d.). For example, the American Library Association have formed a Public Library Association Social Work Task Force, who are responsible for training public library staff in strategies such as ‘Trauma-informed care’ (Public Library Association Social Work Task Force n.d.). Library staff are taught about the use of ‘people first language’ that stresses the importance of using language such as ‘people who are experiencing homelessness’, rather than ‘homeless people’, recognizing experiences such as homelessness do not define individuals. Library staff are trained to take a ‘strengths-based perspective’ when working with people with high social needs, recognizing that every person has strengths that can be acknowledged and built upon to help solve the problems they are experiencing. Another social work principle that has been identified as useful to library staff is that of a ‘trauma-informed approach’ (Badalamenti and Hardy 2019) where library patrons with high social needs are recognized as

people who have experienced trauma and adverse life challenges. Library staff are taught to recognize behaviors that can result from such life experiences and to respond in a positive and non-judgmental way that indicates to the person exhibiting these behaviors that they are welcome and respected in the library, but their behavior is not (Scheyett 2019). Social workers are able to provide training that supports library staff to be part of the solution to the problems their library users are facing by approaching all visitors to their libraries with compassion, a focus on managing the behaviors exhibited, rather than the person exhibiting those behaviors and by creating welcoming spaces for everyone, without judgment of their circumstances.

Although the practice of ‘library social work’ is now common across America and Canada, it is a new and unusual practice for Australian public libraries. One Australian library service established a relationship with Launch Housing, a Melbourne-based secular and independent community agency to provide social support services to their users. Following a successful four-month trial where an outreach worker operated from the library, the City of Melbourne evaluated the nature of the need for support from Launch Housing and through them employed a qualified social worker to support users, and to train library staff to better meet the needs of vulnerable members of their community (City of Melbourne 2019).

The Melbourne City Library experience

The City of Melbourne’s libraries sit within a small, inner city municipality in Victoria, Australia that has seen rapid change over the past decades. Once the city’s lifeline, manufacturing industries have almost entirely closed down and been replaced by the knowledge industry – universities, and technology and research institutions – that drive the new economy (City of Melbourne n.d.; Dingle and O’Hanlon 2009; Strategic Planning and Forecasting Division: Department of Planning and Community Development 2012). An initiative that began 30 years ago to attract more people to live, work in and visit the city center saw the rejuvenation of Melbourne’s laneways, and food and culture providers (City of Melbourne 2016). The Economist Intelligence Unit named Melbourne the world’s most liveable city for seven years running (Global Victoria 2020). Melbourne’s transformation story has been told and celebrated worldwide, but the human impact of these changes took longer to manifest, starting to show a few years ago when the number of people visibly sleeping rough rapidly increased. Changing employment opportunities, shifting housing affordability, social housing shortages, inadequate financial support structures, and a stressed community health system all played a role in this human impact. By the end of the decade, the City of Melbourne had established street-based outreach services for people sleeping rough and funded safe spaces and support programs, but the libraries were seeing an increase in people calling

out for help, seeking assistance to manage their daily lives and using library facilities for daily ablutions (Mitchell 2018).

Conversations with library staff and a closer review of their shift notes and incident logs indicated that many of the same people who the city was helping on the streets were also accessing libraries. Library staff knew many of these people by name, having built relationships over years. While some felt comfortable working with a diverse range of customers, others struggled. Logs showed that library staff were helping people exhibiting a variety of complex needs – drug and alcohol dependencies, health and mental health needs, people escaping violence, and those dealing with trauma or economic hardship. Many staff wanted to help but did not know how. Some went too far in their response, while others felt stretched and unsure about their capacity to assist. Looking at this situation as an occupational health and safety issue, management at City of Melbourne Libraries turned to examples in the United States, where the relationship between formal social support provision and public libraries was more established. The approach being taken there is to embed social support and assistance within the public library system (Goldberg 2016).

Using knowledge drawn from the experience of public libraries with established relationships between social workers and libraries, such as the San Francisco and Denver Public Libraries, along with insights drawn from the Whole Person Librarianship Project established by Sara Zettervall (n.d.), the City of Melbourne Libraries embarked on a Library Social Worker Program designed to support the increasing number of people coming to them for help with housing, food and health and other concerns, and the staff who were working with them.

The library social worker program

Phase one – assertive outreach worker

Melbourne's Library Social Worker program was established in two phases following a major piece of work in 2018 to understand and improve the safety and security needs of library staff, along with mentoring of front-line and managerial staff by key contacts including Leah Esguerra, from San Francisco Public Libraries, who was the first library-based social worker in the United States (Dwyer 2019). An initial pilot in early 2019 saw an outreach worker from the city's homelessness assertive outreach team seconded into the position for four months and later, after further review, the recruitment of a qualified social worker for a period of up to 12 months. In both phases, the program engaged one worker across the six City of Melbourne Library branches. The first phase of the program involved engaging a homelessness outreach worker (not a qualified social worker) and ran from 29 January to 25 May, 2019.

Over this four month period, the worker delivered 41 individual consultations and conducted staff meetings and training sessions across the six library sites. A strong emphasis in this first phase in the program was to support staff needs and skills development. As such, the outreach worker participated in 30 support meetings and training sessions with library staff, including sessions conducted with persons with a lived experience of homelessness. These sessions were recognized by many staff in their program feedback to have been highly valuable in building their understanding of homelessness issues. Pre- and post-trial surveys indicated positive outcomes for staff in relation to their knowledge, confidence, and training received to help them to work with people with complex needs. These surveys are discussed in the 'Evaluation' section of this article.

Approximately one-third of interactions by the worker with visitors to the library were with people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Other intersecting support needs included assistance for behavioral issues, mental health, and the abuse of alcohol and other drugs. This evidence supported previous analyses of library incident logs revealing the multiple and complex needs of people using the pilot service as frequently extending beyond housing needs alone. In recognition of the complexity of needs experienced by library users experiencing homelessness, the decision was taken to broaden the focus of the services offered by the outreach role, and phase 2 of the pilot project was devised.

Phase two – library social worker

The second phase of the project saw the cessation of the outreach worker role, and the recruitment of a Library Social Worker through a partnership with the local homelessness service provider, Launch Housing, commencing in August 2019. The partnership allowed the position to be linked with the City of Melbourne's Daily Support Team, contracted through Launch Housing, to provide direct assistance to people sleeping rough in the central city, while addressing the complexity of needs that had led to homelessness. It was expected that the connection with Launch Housing would provide a network within which the social worker would be able to operate, allowing access to a community of practice, databases and housing assistance tools, along with established pathways into long-term permanent housing.

The Library Social Worker commenced work on 11 November 2019, undertaking direct engagement with people experiencing homelessness and other complex needs to link them to support services and, in co-designing and co-delivering staff training to improve capacity and resilience in working with changing community needs. A significant element of the social worker's role was to assist library staff in their daily interactions with people with complex needs. In addition to providing ongoing advice and support to staff, the social

worker provided training and mentoring activities and helped staff with key skills development. This assistance included debriefing, boundary setting, modeling positive behavior and destigmatising language. The social worker also provided practical information and advice to staff regarding how to respond to complex patron situations, such as what to say and which service may be appropriate to call.

Social worker program outcomes

Over the four-month period from mid-November, 2019 to mid-March, 2020 when library buildings were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Library Social Worker completed 642 patron interactions. Approximately two-thirds of these interactions were initiated proactively by the social worker, with the other third being referrals from library staff. For many, the interaction was quick, with the social worker providing on-the-spot emotional and practical support. Deeper engagement activities included providing access to homelessness, health, and mental health services or providing referrals into complex case planning and care services. The social worker also provided assistance in accessing income or housing and helped people access employment, education, and legal information. Interactions with any one individual ranged from a single interaction to more than 100 with a given client. As an employee of the homelessness service provider Launch Housing, the Library Social Worker had access to all resources and databases managed by Launch and the City of Melbourne. In addition, individual connections and referral pathways were established with major service agencies in the city. These connections allowed the social worker to make the most appropriate referrals for each client.

While some interactions were brief and required no follow-up or connection with support services, the Library Social Worker reported on 59 individual clients who received substantial assistance during this four-month period. Forty-three of the 59 clients in this group were noted as experiencing some form of homelessness or housing stress. This included upcoming tenancy hearings with the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal as well as those facing rental arrears, or with links to a tenancy maintenance program. Of these 59 clients, 73% were male, 66% were aged between 30 and 50 years, more than half received a social security allowance, and more than 50% had slept rough for more than one year. During the four months in operation, the social worker placed 17 people into short, medium- or long-term housing and an additional 10 onto housing lists. The complexity of issues and support needs reported by these clients were vast, confirming that the issues people experiencing homelessness faced did not occur in isolation. This complexity is illustrated in the following graph indicating the additional issues faced by the 43 clients experiencing homelessness ([Figure 1](#)).

Presenting issues and support needs reported by 43 clients experiencing homelessness

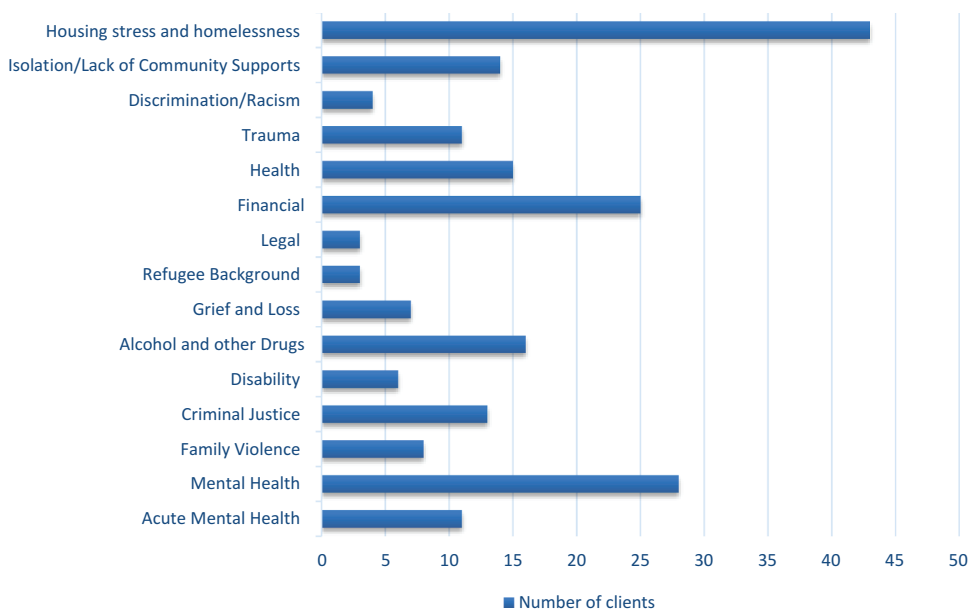


Figure 1. Presenting issues and support needs reported by 43 clients experiencing homelessness.

Despite patrons having a plethora of presenting issues, upon initial engagement with the social worker, approximately 80% of the clients had no current service connections or formal supports in place. Case studies (see [Appendix A](#)) demonstrate how effective a gentle, yet consistent approach is in building rapport and establishing trust. In reflecting on the outcomes of her work, the Library Social Worker acknowledged how patrons' connections with library staff – often built over years – helped her establish trust with people in need of support, and often assisted in making connections. Around one-third of referrals came through library staff, who had known and observed patrons over time. The social worker commented that often her ability to connect with clients was made much easier because the first steps in building trust had been established already by library staff.

The City of Melbourne libraries closed on 16 March, 2020 due to COVID-19. In the period until the libraries re-opened on 9 June, 2020, the social worker's interactions with her clients continued both at a distance and in person, with her undertaking 413 interactions with 54 clients. Some of these referrals came from library staff, while others were from patrons reengaging with the social worker. During this time, working with Launch Housing and other services in the city, the library social worker successfully placed clients in crisis into motel accommodation and with other housing services, or placed them onto permanent housing waitlists. She was also able to provide access to

emergency and food relief, assistance with finances, bookings for health appointments, and help in accessing social security payments. She liaised with rooming house providers, and provided case coordination and links with other supports currently in place. The city libraries closed again on July 9, 2020 due to rising numbers of COVID-19 cases across the State and remain closed through to September, 2020 as we write. The library social worker has continued to provide what services she can during this time.

Evaluating the project

The activities and outcomes of both the Outreach Worker Pilot Program and the Library Social Worker Program were continuously monitored to understand the effectiveness of interventions for both staff and clients served. The outreach worker's, and the Library Social Worker's case notes provided an understanding of the needs and characteristics of the people served and the interventions that were put in place. To evaluate the library staff experience of both the pilot outreach worker's presence in the library and the Library Social Worker Program, individual library staff were interviewed, and three library staff surveys were undertaken. Consistent sets of information that tracked staff experiences of working with clients with complex needs both before and after the implementation of the Library Social Worker program were sought over a twelve-month period from January 2019 to January 2020.

Through the surveys, staff initially indicated a low to moderate understanding of the main issues impacting patrons with complex needs, with some increase in knowledge measured after the employment of the outreach and social workers, particularly in relation to mental health, child safety, and homelessness. Over the time of the project evaluation, staff reported a slight increase in confidence in being able to support people experiencing complex issues, and while half of the staff agreed that they had received adequate training and support, they asked for more so that they could respond to different behavior issues and better understand mental health issues, homelessness, family violence, and child safety. In the post pilot and January 2020 surveys, three quarters of staff indicated that the presence of a social worker helped them to better respond to people with complex needs. The key reasons cited being that an on-site social worker provided reassurance that they were able to defer complex issues onto someone with the qualifications and experience to respond, and that the social worker took the pressure off staff and reduced stress. Library staff indicated that their confidence and knowledge in handling complex user-related issues had increased, and that they believed the presence of the Library Social Worker created a more positive environment in the library with patrons seeming to be calmer and exhibiting fewer concerning behaviors. The following comments were among those given by library staff when asked to explain their survey responses:

I can't overstate the positive impact [that] having a social worker on-call has had to the way I am able to work with patrons presenting with challenging situations. Having a social worker present to give advice has broadened my knowledge of what service providers are appropriate to suggest and connect with depending on the patron's needs.

I am not an expert or trained in any of these things and it's comforting that there is someone available that has these qualifications

I believe having a social worker has helped library staff give advice and assistance to at risk people. I think having a social worker has provided a sense of calmness and relief for at-risk people that there is help for them at the library.

It is great to know that the social worker is finding and assisting people who may otherwise [have] fallen through the gaps.

I feel confident in my ability to engage with people knowing that if it goes beyond what I can do there is someone I can contact and hand off to.

Three surveys of library staff were undertaken throughout the project: one before the Outreach Worker Pilot, one after the outreach worker pilot and the final survey was conducted in January 2020 after five months of the Library Social Worker being in place. The statistics from these surveys provide evidence of the need for continuous staff training in both awareness of social issues faced by library patrons, and in skills to raise staff confidence in working with library visitors living with these issues. The following chart indicates the understanding by library staff of the complexities of the issues faced by their patrons in need of social support. It illustrates the improvement of library staff understanding of the issues of child safety, mental health, financial hardship, homelessness, and family violence after they had received training from the outreach worker compared to before they received this training. It also indicated that their level of understanding of these issues decreased slightly during the 5-month period after the outreach worker was replaced by the Library Social Worker (Figure 2).

It is possible that the decrease in awareness measured in the January 2020 results compared to the post-pilot measure may be attributed to a shift in the delivery of staff development programs over that period, but more research to confirm this reason was not possible due to the library closures that followed soon after. To meet immediate workforce occupational health and safety needs during the Phase One pilot, priority was placed by the outreach worker on staff training and support activities. As the program developed into the second phase, client and customer service processes were identified as key priorities for the Library Social Worker. Outcomes could also be attributed to changes in staffing in the period between the post-pilot stage and January 2020 that led to staff who had not received training from the Outreach Worker being included in the survey. Although the rates of understanding have remained higher from the first to the last measure, the reduction in understanding by January 2020

Question: How would you rate your understanding of the complexities faced by people experiencing the following issues...? (0=Low understanding; 10= High understanding)

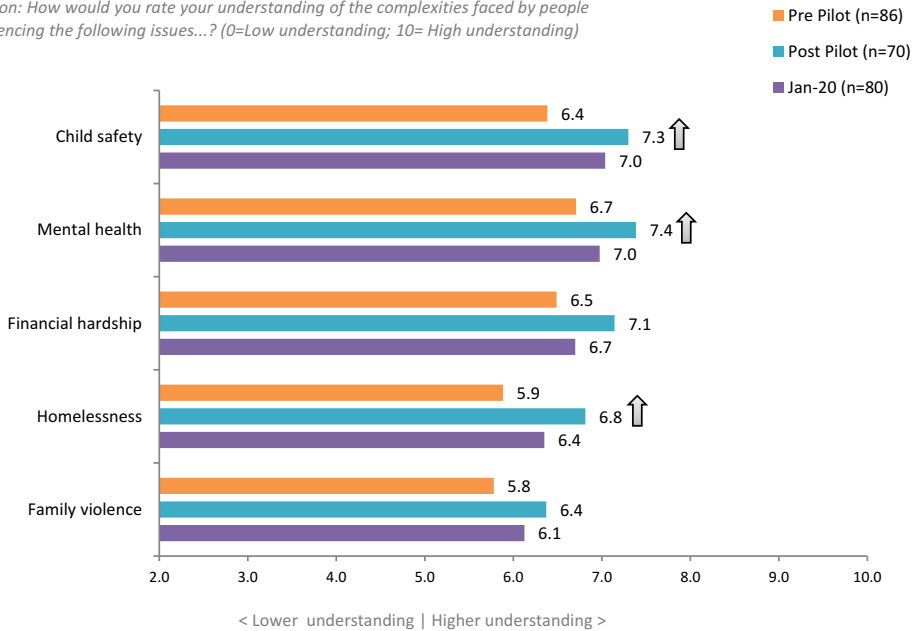


Figure 2. Understanding the complexities faced by people experiencing issues (mean scores out of 10).

indicates an ongoing need for a training program where staff receive regular refresher sessions. In addition, orientation programs for new staff need to include social issues awareness training to develop their understanding of these issues within a library context.

Staffs' self-reported confidence in being able to respond appropriately to library visitors displaying disturbing behaviors was also measured throughout the project. The following chart illustrates the growth in confidence of staff to respond appropriately to library visitors who are unkempt or disheveled in appearance, difficult to understand, behaving inappropriately, showing signs of emotional distress, displaying poor personal hygiene, uncooperative or defiant, verbally hostile or abusive, affected by drugs or alcohol, or physically hostile or abusive. The chart identifies that staff confidence in being able to respond appropriately to people experiencing issues continues to vary depending upon the issue. Staff were moderately confident in responding to issues relating to appearance, communication and inappropriate behavior. However they lack confidence in responding to physically hostile or abusive behavior or those affected by drugs or alcohol. Since the post-pilot measure, a significant decrease in confidence levels was recorded for responding to people who are unkempt in appearance or displaying poor personal hygiene. The reasons for this are unknown. It may be that the severity of these cases has escalated increasing the complexity or perhaps new staff have been hired who lack experience in this area (Figure 3).

Question: Thinking about interacting with someone experiencing these issues, how confident are you in being able to appropriately respond if they are...? (0=Not at all confident; 10=Extremely confident)

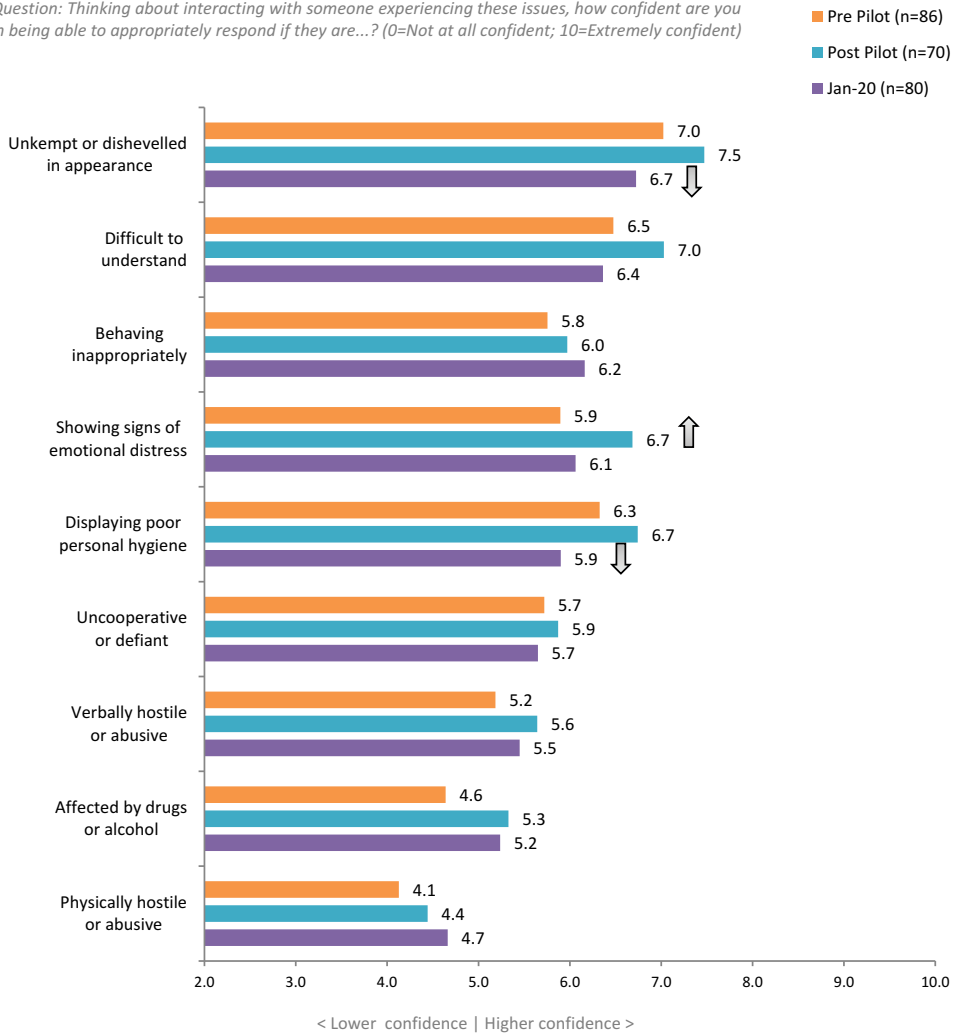


Figure 3. Confidence in being able to respond appropriately to people (mean scores out of 10).

Again, these results indicate the need for an ongoing program of staff training that allows new staff to develop their skills and confidence, and existing staff to remain confident in their skills. Regardless of the need for ongoing staff training, it should be noted that both an understanding of the relevant social issues, and the confidence in responding appropriately to people displaying the listed characteristics in [Figure 3](#) have an average score of 6.64 and 5.82, respectively, indicating only medium results for both measures. These results suggest that the training provided to library staff could be redesigned to improve these measures. Further research could be undertaken to identify the elements of the existing training that have been successful, and what additional elements could be integrated into the training activities to further improve training outcomes.

Conclusion

The City of Melbourne's library social work program has seen many positive outcomes, both in improving the welfare of library patrons and in building knowledge, confidence, and resilience among library staff. The library has proven to be a safe and welcoming place that perhaps allows for more positive interactions between the social worker and their clients than in other more traditional social work locations, such as those that work within charities and service providers. Both library staff and the Library Social Worker believe that the existing relationships and trust built between library staff and their patrons contributes significantly in breaking down barriers between library visitors in need and those who can facilitate the meeting of those needs. These existing relationships and trust make it easier for the Library Social Worker to approach people in need and to offer unsolicited support. The high numbers of clients identified in the libraries who had no service connections or formal supports in place highlight the possibility that public libraries may provide significant opportunities for social workers to identify and make connections with people who have high support needs but little connection into the service sector, supporting Lloyd's (2020) identification of public libraries as protective factors in the lives of those who use them.

The City of Melbourne Library Social Worker program highlights the strengths of libraries as safe places and demonstrates many positive social work outcomes may be attributed to the setting and the relationships that library staff are able to build with their patrons. These outcomes point to the opportunity presented in integrating social work into library practice to establish rapport and link people with services, and a need to build the skills of library staff to respond to people with high social needs. Staff feedback throughout the project highlights the high levels of angst felt by many staff in working with customers who present with more complex or harder to service social needs. Feedback from library staff supports Schofield's (n.d.) observations that the introduction of a social worker into the library increases staff confidence, builds skills and reduces staff stress, while feedback from the library visitors who engage with the Library Social Worker demonstrates the role has multiple positive outcomes in their lives. If public libraries are tasked with the role of connecting people with the information and resources they need, the inclusion of a social worker in the library clearly assists them in being part of the solution and in meeting this goal for members of our communities with high social needs. Schofield (n.d.) writes of the potential for public libraries to become 'hybrid spaces' where both patrons and library staff are the beneficiaries of the partnerships between social workers and the library. These spaces, and the service provision made possible by the presence of a library social worker truly maximizes the potential for public libraries to be protective factors in the lives of their users and supports public library workers in their work with library users with high social needs.

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Appendix A. Case Studies indicating the nature of work and outcomes resulting from the Library Social Worker program

Case Study #1: Steven

Steven presented to the Melbourne City Library on multiple occasions suffering from problematic alcohol use. Steven disclosed that his alcohol dependence started after his ex-partner died in a car accident. Due to the impacts of this traumatic incident, Steven's life fell apart. He could no longer work; his housing broke down and so too did his other relationships. He began drinking daily to self-medicate. Steven had been sleeping rough at the Salvation Army's night café for several months and had not had a proper sleep in a long time. He was unable to cope with the grief. On top of this, he had a formal diagnosis of depression and suicidal ideation.

On one occasion, Steven presented to the City library intoxicated and had a fall. As it was an OHS issue and his drinking was posing high risk to his health, an ambulance was called, and Steven was admitted to the hospital's Emergency Department. Following this initial admission, Steven was discharged back into homelessness. After having had detoxed while in hospital for two days, Steven began drinking again. Despite everything, Steven had a motivation to change and get help. He had been waiting for rehab for a number of months.

At first Steven had not wanted to engage with the library social worker, however after multiple attempts, he started to engage. The library social worker provided emotional support and helped Steven follow up on the rehab waitlist, reestablish contact with the care coordinator who he had lost touch with, and advocated for Steven's care to be communicated across hospitals.

The social worker let hospital staff know that Steven had presented to the libraries intoxicated on multiple occasions and had been discharged from hospital several times without a care plan in place. The social worker discussed with hospital staff the impact that repeat admissions had been having on Steven's health, the cost to services, along with the vicarious trauma on library staff.

As a result, Steven was referred to drug and alcohol counseling and case management at a health service in the city. The social worker liaised with these services and encouraged Steven to attend on a daily basis. After some time, the social worker identified that Stephen's noncompliance with prescription medication requirements was the barrier to his being accepted into a rehab program. Knowing this, Steven was encouraged to make an appointment with a GP to get the medication, which he did.

After a further period of waiting, Steven let the social worker know that he had been accepted into accommodation and that he was looking at linking in with the onsite support there, "getting off alcohol", and looking for work.

Steven has three university degrees and said, "it is about time I use one of them". Steven said he has been attending his drug and alcohol counseling appointments and that he was now sleeping for the first time in years.

Case Study #2: Bill

Bill had been sleeping rough in the CBD for a number of years and attended the City library daily. He had no formal supports or income and no housing plan. He was known to services, but they had struggled to engage with him after multiple attempts.

The library social worker started to gently engage with Bill. He said he did not bother with things like Centrelink – "I've tried so many times, but they make it so hard. So I gave up". The last time Bill tried to make a claim was in 2013.

To help, the social worker first worked with Bill to set up an e-mail account, then a Mygov ID and with making a claim for Centrelink payment. After advocating to the Centrelink social workers, the payment was approved. The social worker continued to help Bill report to Centrelink on a fortnightly basis, to ensure he was receiving his payments.

Things like using a computer, remembering a password with eight characters, a capital letter and an exclamation mark was a huge barrier for Bill. He also had not been to a doctor in many years. The social worker booked an appointment and attended the GP with him. She then assisted Bill to apply for social housing and was successful in getting Bill's application backdated to 2011 under a 'housing first' category, due to his entrenched homelessness.

The social worker put Bill forward for a transitional housing property, where he now lives. She assisted Bill in establishing his tenancy by purchasing a TV, gaining bedding and essential household items. Bill said that it felt strange at first to be in a property, but he was slowly getting used to it.

Because he had felt unsafe for so long, Bill said that he was not used to sleeping at nighttime. Bill has been referred to case management support and is successfully engaging with his new worker. Bill said he did not know how to cook but would like to learn. His new case manager linked Bill in with a peer support worker to assist Bill to learn and he recently cooked spaghetti. Bill still goes into the CBD almost daily as he has strong links and ties to the city and it will take him a while to adjust, but he said that "being in a property is way better than being on the street".

Case Study #3: Colleen

Colleen presented to City Library extremely distressed. She had been experiencing and had become overwhelmed by homelessness, family violence, unemployment, legal, mental health and health issues. Colleen said that she was "embarrassed" by her situation and felt like giving up. Colleen was referred to the Library Social Worker by a library staff member.

Colleen had been self-funding a bed in a hostel for a few weeks, however this broke down when she was no longer afford it. The night before presenting to the library, Colleen slept on a couch in the Sofitel lobby, but was asked to move on by a security guard. Colleen said she then moved to Federation Square and fell asleep on one of the banana lounges. She said that when she woke up she was close to dehydrated as it was such a hot day.

When Colleen was asked about her experience of working with the Library Social Worker said she was surprised that the Social Worker had tried to call her so many times and that she "cared that much". Colleen said she was feeling so exhausted by her previous interactions with social services that she had not expected an outcome.

As the Library Social Worker was not present at the City Library that day, she was able to provide support over the phone. She booked Colleen into a motel and arranged a follow up appointment to make a plan for the future. Colleen was referred to legal and homelessness support agencies for case management support and has since been successfully engaging with the program for over five weeks. She had a successful interview for a property of her own through a women's housing agency.

Colleen later reflected on the day that she came into the library and how she hit "rock bottom". She said, "I seriously gave up and thought no one cared". "Then a librarian, came over to me and her timing was impeccable, how she communicated, her mannerisms, she was just so caring, and I thought I am so lucky to have met her that day".