



Library Services to People with Special Needs

**Report of the Workshop
*Library Services for Homeless People:
Sharing Experiences for the development of Guidelines***

16.30 - 20.00 Friday 27th February 2015

Location: National and University Library in Zagreb, Croatia

Purpose:

- to gain information about library services for homeless people
- to obtain suggestions for what should be included in the Guidelines for Library Service to Homeless people

Presentation topics:

- experiences in serving homeless people
- barriers to serving homeless people and how to remove them
- partnership in serving homeless people and developing the guidelines
- recommendations regarding what should be included in the guidelines and relevant resources

Participants:

Committee members:

Misako Nomura

Nancy Bolt

Erlend Ra

Marie-Noelle Andissac

Sanja Bunic

Heidi Carlsson Asplunde

Elke Greifeneder

Anne Sieberns

Dunja Marija Gabriel, corresponding member

Helle Arendrup Mortensen, corresponding member

Marie Engberg Eiriksson, incoming member via Skype video conference

Knut Michael Nygaard, incoming member

Guests:

Zeljka Miscin, librarian (Zagreb City Libraries)

Drazen Vikic Topic, scientist (Ruder Boskovic Institute)

Marija Cristina Crnkovic Pilas, translator

Moderator: Nancy Bolt

Presentations about Croatian experiences

Sanja Bunic, *librarian, Zagreb City Libraries, Zagreb*

On the basis of five years of experience in organizing library services to the homeless, Sanja talked about the results achieved so far, as well as the challenges and ways in which the library overcame them. She discussed why she felt that Guidelines for Library Service to Homeless people were necessary, emphasizing that homeless people do not have equal access to libraries and information (no ID card, permanent address or money for membership) and most homeless people have some kind of disability. The number of homeless people is growing steadily in most countries while attitudes toward the homeless are different from country to country. Libraries are an important part of the support network but librarians who work with the homeless need extra education and support. Sharing examples of good practices could avoid mistakes and taking the wrong steps in working with them. She also suggested what should be included in the Guidelines. She stressed that since there is no single and unified definition of homelessness and behavior towards homeless people varies from country to country, examples of good practices of library services for the homeless from around the world need to be collected.

Mile Mrvalj, *user of the library services for the homeless people in Zagreb City Libraries, Zagreb*

Mile was homeless for four and a half years. He started using library services for the homeless around two years ago. There are a number of reasons why he attends programs for the homeless in the library. First of all, to become more computer literate, and second of all, and the most important reason for him, that he feels like a person who is welcomed with respect and acceptance. He said that many of his problems were solved thanks to the staff that led this project. Mile emphasised that there are two types of homeless people, the first and unfortunately the largest group is made up of homeless people in difficult, depressive states, with a mild or serious psychological disorder, and unfortunately there are many alcoholics amongst this population. The second group of homeless people are psychologically stable and are not extremely depressed, they want to get out of the social position that they currently find themselves in, and even though they live in very difficult conditions, they accept various small jobs in the black market and take care of their hygiene as much as possible. Library services can provide significant support to this group of homeless people to get out of the situation they have found themselves in.

Marina Dimic Vugec, *social worker, ODRAZ, Zagreb*

Marina has three years' experience in researching homelessness issues, evictions and housing policies in Croatia and the EU. She presented research results that she participated in. The main reasons for homelessness in Croatia are: unemployment, divorce, evictions, domestic violence. Even though there are more and more homeless people in Croatia which is connected to social risks, a very important role and support of the organization and team care for the homeless is lowered to the local level but there is lack of understanding of city authorities. Also there is a lack of research and evaluation of existing programs for the homeless, insufficient communication in the system, needs for training, financial problems, lack of prevention programs, need for the establishment of professional teams...it is difficult to expect expert support for the library teams that organize library services for the homeless in this situation. Key European trends in homelessness are: an increase in the number of homeless families, of homeless women, and of young people in homelessness.

Dragana Knezic, *psychologist, Rehabilitation Centre for Stress and Trauma, Zagreb*

For a one year Dragana participated in the Zagreb City Libraries services for the homeless in which she implemented empowerment workshops and individual support in job search for homeless persons. She thinks that library services for the homeless are important because of: destigmatization, accessibility to information and structure, nontraditional and informal source of support, social inclusion, respite. Her recommendation for the Guidelines for providing psycho-social support to homeless by non-professional: programs have to be accepted and supported within the institution, become acquainted with the program - basic orientation to support staff, provide basic training and support, individual approach - avoid generalization, be informed regarding available legal, health, housing and other services - create a database, set priorities - health and safety first, provide short and simple information on what to be expected, practice active listening: "keep on distance" your own assumptions, personal experiences, viewpoints, be focused on what the service user is saying and how he feels while saying it, help yourself (and service user) understand, be empathetic but guard yourself (provide/seek support), maintain a positive attitude and hopefulness (do not lie), refrain from double standards inconsistencies. She emphasized the importance of maintaining healthy boundaries.

Presentations about American experiences via Skype video conference

Vikki Terrile, librarian, Queens Public Library, Queens, New York

Terrile spoke on *Family Homelessness and the Queen Public Library*. She defined homelessness as those without fixed or adequate nighttime lodging, those in danger of losing regular lodging and those in danger of losing regular lodging because of violence in the home. She discussed federal and state laws in the United States that authorize and support services for the homeless, particularly for families. The Queens Public Library focuses on services for families, children, and youth who are homeless. Terrile pointed out that family and youth homelessness is growing in the US. She also pointed out that 84% of families experiencing homelessness are female-headed and that 42% of

children in homeless families are under age six. The Queens Public Library (New York) provides services to families that are homeless through multiple cooperative relationships, particularly the New York City Department of Education. They provide library cards for parents and children, parent workshops, and special events. Terrile raised policy considerations in serving people who are homeless such as policies on behaviors, identification requirements, food and drink, and amnesty for fines.

Heather McCue, librarian, and **Sarah Gough**, librarian, Richland Public Library, Richland, South Carolina

McCue and Gough discussed homelessness in Richland and the services provided by the Richland Public Library. They also focused on the importance of cooperation with community agencies in serving people who were homeless. They distributed a copy of an emergency services database they had created that has lists of services available for the homeless: medical and dental services; parenting education and legal aid; emergency shelters; housing; and clothing, food, and utility assistance.

Based on this workshop the group drafted a Preliminary outline of the Guidelines for Library Service to People Who are Homeless.

DRAFT OUTLINE

Section 1: Background on homeless people

1. Homelessness around the world – where are they? How many? Issues of homeless around the world
2. Types of homelessness
 - a. Children/families
3. Causes of homelessness
4. Impact of being homeless on homeless people
 - a. Food
 - b. Space
 - c. Library as third place
 - d. Health
 - e. Safety
 - f. Rest
 - g. Information
 - h. Self - esteem
 - i. Education
5. Prejudice, stigma, stereotypes about the homeless
 - a. Dirty
 - b. Smelly
 - c. Mentally ill

- d. Violent
 - e. Thieves
 - f. All men
6. Issue of Human Rights, Lyon Declaration

Section 2: Guidelines for Libraries

1. Introduction - Benefits to serving the homeless
2. Administration of Services
 - a. Support from top administration
 - b. Policies that take homeless needs and situation into consideration
 - c. Staff training
3. Needs Assessment - “Don’ t plan for me, plan with me.”
4. Collaboration with community agencies and other groups
5. Dealing with the challenges of serving the homeless
6. Communication and advocacy - publicizing services

Section 3: Examples and Resources

1. Best practices from around the world
2. Resources