**Homelessness in Small and Rural Communities: Libraries Can Help!**

**Learner Guide**

<https://www.webjunction.org/events/webjunction/homelessness-in-small-and-rural.html>

See also collection on WebJunction, [Resources on Libraries and Homelessness](https://www.webjunction.org/news/webjunction/resources-libraries-and-homelessness.html)

**Event Description:** Homelessness means having no predictable and safe place to sleep. Libraries in rural and small communities are often a source of information and daytime shelter for individuals facing homelessness or housing insecurity. In an already busy library with limited resources, staff may be challenged to respond to the needs of these patrons and to cope with compassion fatigue. This webinar will provide practical insights on providing services to people who don't have stable housing. Learn how to create an environment that feels welcoming, informative and supportive, including ideas for reducing policy barriers. Learn how to host conversations that explore public perceptions, help to debunk myths around homelessness, and strengthen community ties.

**Presented by:** **Mallory Pillard and Sara Zettervall**

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| **What are your goals for viewing this webinar?** |
| **Personal Goals** |   |
| **Team Goals** |   |

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| **Understanding Homelessness** |
| [IFLA Guidelines for Library Services to People Experiencing Homelessness](https://www.ifla.org/publications/node/12642) (page 26-29) provides insight into the complex issues of homelessness that can help to overcome stereotypes, prejudice and barriers faced by people experiencing homelessness. In reviewing the causes, consequences, and social groups at risk, list and discuss factors that align with homelessness in your community that you may or may not have recognized before: 1.
2.
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| **Policies and Procedures** |
| The webinar explores a number of possible approaches to adjusting or clarifying policies and procedures. Consider and clarify the policies your library has in place and the scripts your staff could use related to: * Sleeping
* Hygiene
* Bags and belongings
* Safety
* Library cards/fines
* Food in the library and access to food resources in the community
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| **Partnerships** |
| Are there social services organizations in your community you could contact for referrals? Consider hosting a **community services fair or dialogue with local social service providers**, to share and learn about competencies for serving the homeless. Consider non-profits, government agencies and educators. List three agencies and contacts you could connect with. For an extended list of options, review potential partners for collaboration in WebJunction’s [Community Partnership and Collaboration Guide](http://www.webjunction.org/documents/webjunction/Community_Partner_Collaboration_Guide.html).1.
2.

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| **Connect through Conversations** |
| The power of conversation, in moving towards understanding, can be accomplished in a variety of settings. **Community Leaders**Mallory has been involved in public conversations and presentations with town council and other community members. At which meetings or events could you present or join to help grow awareness and understanding about those experiencing homelessness in your community? And how might you share how your library is involved and impacted?**Community Members Experiencing Homelessness**Hosting weekly or monthly conversations at the library is a great way to connect community members experiencing homeless. [Coffee and Conversations](http://dallaslibrary.evanced.info/eventcalendar.asp?ag=&et=&kw=coffee+%26+conversation&dt=dr&ds=2014-10-18&de=2014-12-31&df=list&cn=0&private=0&ln=0) is a one-hour session that caters to homeless people at the Dallas Public Library and has since been replicated in several other systems, bringing together library staff and patrons as peers. (See also, [Coffee and Conversation](https://www.webjunction.org/events/webjunction/community-connector.html), in WebJunction webinar, April 2015). **How might a program like this one look in your library?** |
| **Taking Care of Ourselves** |
| **Practicing regular and intentional empathy for others can be draining.** To protect ourselves, we need to set healthy boundaries. To recover and maintain balance, we need to **schedule time for reflection and processing**.**Think about a time an interaction in the library felt uncomfortable.** What did you learn about your personal boundaries from the experience? How can you enlist coworkers and/or use library policies to help maintain your boundaries?**Reflective practice or reflective supervision** provides structure for dealing with challenging interactions and learning from successes. The [Reflective Activity for Library Staff](https://www.webjunction.org/content/dam/WebJunction/Documents/webJunction/2018-02/reflective-activity-library-staff.pdf) (pdf) is a tool for breaking down component parts of an experience and then rebuilding them with reflection and planning. How might you use this tool in your daily work?  |
|  **Action Plan:** (include some simple next steps, along with who, when, etc.) |
| The questions in this guide prompt a number of possible activities. Which seems most achievable to you right now? How will you make it happen?   |