Return to the Real: The Library as Social Connector

Betha Gutsche and Jennifer Peterson
WebJunction

Slides and Resources on WebJunction: oc.lc/socialconnector
Let’s stay connected! #libsocialconnect
THESIS

By applying an intentional focus on rebuilding social bonds, public libraries have the position and power to heal fractured communities.
Trajectory (agenda)

1. Erosion of social connection
2. Value of social connection
3. Revival of the “real”
4. Library as connection catalyst

YOU!

Image: You can do anything girl by lavnatalia on Pixabay
How do you make social connections when you enter a room where you don’t know anyone?

*Photo: Chess pieces by Markus Spiske temporausch.com on Pexels*
VALUE OF SOCIAL CONNECTION
“Social connections are as important to our survival and flourishing as the need for food, safety, and shelter.”

*Source: Social Connection Makes a Better Brain; E. E. Smith; The Atlantic; Oct 29, 2013

*Photo: 5 Tribe by amanda tipton on Flickr CC BY-NC-ND 2.0
“Social connectedness generates a positive feedback loop of social, emotional and physical well-being.”*

- Lowered anxiety and depression
- Stronger immune system
- Faster recovery from illness
- Increased chance of longevity
- Higher self-esteem, greater empathy

*Source: Connectedness & Health: The Science of Social Connection; Dr. Emma Seppala; Stanford Medicine; May 8, 2014
Social connection = more trusting and cooperative
“When people engage in sustained, recurrent interaction, particularly while doing things they enjoy, relationships inevitably grow.”
EROSION OF SOCIAL CONNECTION
Bowling alone

“If people bowl alone, they do not participate in social interaction and civic discussions that might occur in a league environment.”

—Wikipedia
Technology “individualizes” leisure time

Photo: Social media bubble by geralt on Pixabay
HOW FACEBOOK MAKES US UNHAPPY

6 Ways Social Media Affects Our Mental Health

Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?

Feeling Lonely? Too Much Time On Social Media May Be Why

New Yorker

Forbes

Atlantic

NPR
We’ve lost that “we feeling”
REVIVAL OF THE “REAL”
“Analog gives us the joy of creating and possessing real, tangible things”

—David Sax
“This desire for human interaction — and a sense of community and place — is one of the magnets that draw people to neighborhood bookstores…”

Photo: Build a City by CSM (CA) Libraries on Flickr; CC BY 2.0
Why libraries?

“‘Why build a library when we have an internet?’
Put another way, ‘Why go to a party when I have food and music at home?’

Internet surfing is largely a solo endeavor.

A library is a shared experience.”*

*Quote: A Library for All Ages; Louie Castoria; Half Moon Bay Review, Aug 22, 2018
Libraries foster social cohesion

- People forge bonds in healthy infrastructure
- Open and inclusive
- Safe space
- Nurture civility
- Cultures of learning, improving self and society

*Palaces for the People*, Eric Klinenberg, 2018
Active, connected learning at the library

DIY becomes DIT (doing it together)

Photos: Digital Media Lab, Laurel (DE) Public Library, with permission from Tameca Beckett; and Silent Reading Party, courtesy Maryborough Regional Library – Victoria on Facebook
Nerf Wars Build Social Connection!

Photo: courtesy Carnegie-Stout Public Library on Facebook
See also video https://youtu.be/FjOVue0jitA

Photo: Courtesy Prince George Public Library
See also video https://youtu.be/QvrBeq8bWKg
What active learning or participatory programs are you offering in your libraries?
Build social capital

What can the library do to amplify social connections?

Photo: Gold coins by alevsandra85foto on Pixabay
CHALLENGE

For a public program that brings people together at the library to do or make things, design ways to enhance social connections, especially between/among individuals who are unlikely to connect in their everyday lives.
Possibilities

*YOU*
are idea generators

Photo: Team spirit by dimitrisvetsikas1969 on Pixabay
Think like a party host

Best strategies to:

- Get a variety of people to the party
- Get people who don’t know each other to mingle
- Get people to learn more about each other

Photo: Grand Summer Event by Yelp Inc on Flickr CC BY-NC-ND 2.0
Socialize that program!

Program: Cardboard Challenge

Tell the story

Promote the program

Set up the space

Welcome people

Program activities: everybody participates
“[Libraries are] amazing institutions that would be kind of inconceivable if we didn’t already have them.”

—Eric Klinenberg

How will you tell this story to your stakeholders?
Return to the Real: The Library as Social Connector

Betha Gutsche gutscheb@oclc.org
Jennifer Peterson petersoj@oclc.org
Slides and Resources on WebJunction: oc.lc/socialconnector
Let’s stay connected! #libsocialconnect
thank you