The Library as Social Connector: Forging Community Connections

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WebJunction

Let’s stay connected! #libsocialconnect
By applying an intentional focus on rebuilding social bonds, public libraries have the position and power to heal fractured communities.
Trajectory (agenda)

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

Image: You can do anything girl by lavnatalia on Pixabay
What active learning or participatory programs are you offering in your libraries?
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.

Palaces for the People, Eric Klinenberg, 2018
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
Logged off: meet the teens who refuse to use social media

Photo: Cornwall Public Library Smart Space, used with permission

The Guardian
Aug 29, 2018
“This desire for human interaction — and a sense of community and place — is one of the magnets that draw people to neighborhood bookstores…”
LIBRARY AS CONNECTION CATALYST
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, Participatory 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
From Nerf Wars to Community Gardens

Libraries build social connection!

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

Photo: courtesy Berkeley County Library System on Facebook
Escape Rooms Build Social Connection!

March for Change Escape Room, courtesy Kings Highway Library on Facebook

Library Escape Room, courtesy Socastee Library on Facebook
Build social capital

What can the library do to amplify social connections?

Photo: Gold coins by alevandra85foto on Pixabay
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.
Be an intentional host

You are the HOST of your event.

Own it!
Let’s do an Intergenerational Cardboard Challenge!

- It’s low tech and low barrier.
- It works well as a team event.

[cardboardchallenge.com](http://cardboardchallenge.com)
The event *starts* with the invitation

How might you prepare your guests ahead of time?
Crossing the threshold

What might you do to help people feel comfortable in this new experience?
Equalize and connect your guests

What might you do to eliminate hierarchies and equalize social standing?
Dual-purpose wrap-up

What might you do to help people reflect on what they experienced at the event? How might you capture their responses?
“[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?
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Learner Guide

Event Description: "Strong social cohesion is a crucial factor in a community's resilience and success. Unfortunately, we see that our communities are faced with challenges, including increasing homelessness, depression, and isolation. The time spent online and the lack of human contact in our community is concerning. Libraries have a unique role in rebuilding social bonds, offering a sense of community and shared purpose that inspires learning programs that bring people together for participation and shared experiences."

Presented by: Betha Guteke, Webinar Co-Manager, OCCL and Jennifer Webinar Center Manager

What are your goals for viewing this webinar?

Personal Goals

Team Goals

Applying the Social Connector Lens to Programming

Libraries have been making a dramatic shift from passive to active engagement. Community connections are particularly important programs that bring people together, participate, and share experiences.

List active learning or participatory programs you currently offer (or would like to offer):

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 

Crossing the Threshold

- How might you welcome and usher guests to the event experiencing new experiences?

- Look carefully at the space where you will gather.
  o Will guests be able to find it easily?
  o Is it welcoming to new people?
  o How could you ensure that people will feel comfortable?

Equalize and connect your guests:

- What ideas do you have for helping guests to engage fruitfully?
  o Suggestion from Priya Parker: Avoid introducing identities that reveal hierarchies or status; talk about their work, degrees or titles.

- Considering the diverse backgrounds and orientations to create an open, inclusive and safe space?

- How will you continue connections, and find ways to maintain their usual clusters?

Closings matter:

- What closure activity could you do that allows guests to:

- How can you provide a space for guests to share their experience or stories of their experience with others outside of the library, i.e., with their networks?

The Art of Gathering at Libraries

Betha and Jennifer were inspired by Priya Parker's book, "set and Why It Matters" in exploring the importance of embracing gatherings. Read the short Q&A with Priya Parker, published in [article](https://example.com), to get a taste of her approach, or read her book.

With a "social connector" lens, consider how existing intentional design toward creating social cohesion. Select your list above, and consider the ways you could build into the experience.

The event starts with the invitation:

- What is your clear, specific purpose in gathering guests?

- How might you rename your program to reflect this purpose?

- Who are your intended guests? Do you have age or intergenerational?

- How will you market this event to reach your intended audience?

- Set expectations for your guests so they can be prepared to bring to the event? E.g., bring their child or pet.

Note: If the event involves program partners, be sure to model and set expectations for them as co-hosts of your gathering.
THANK YOU!

Stay connected – Share what you’re doing to forge community connections

#libsocialconnect