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The Library as Social Connector: Forging Community Connections

Betha Gutsche and Jennifer Peterson

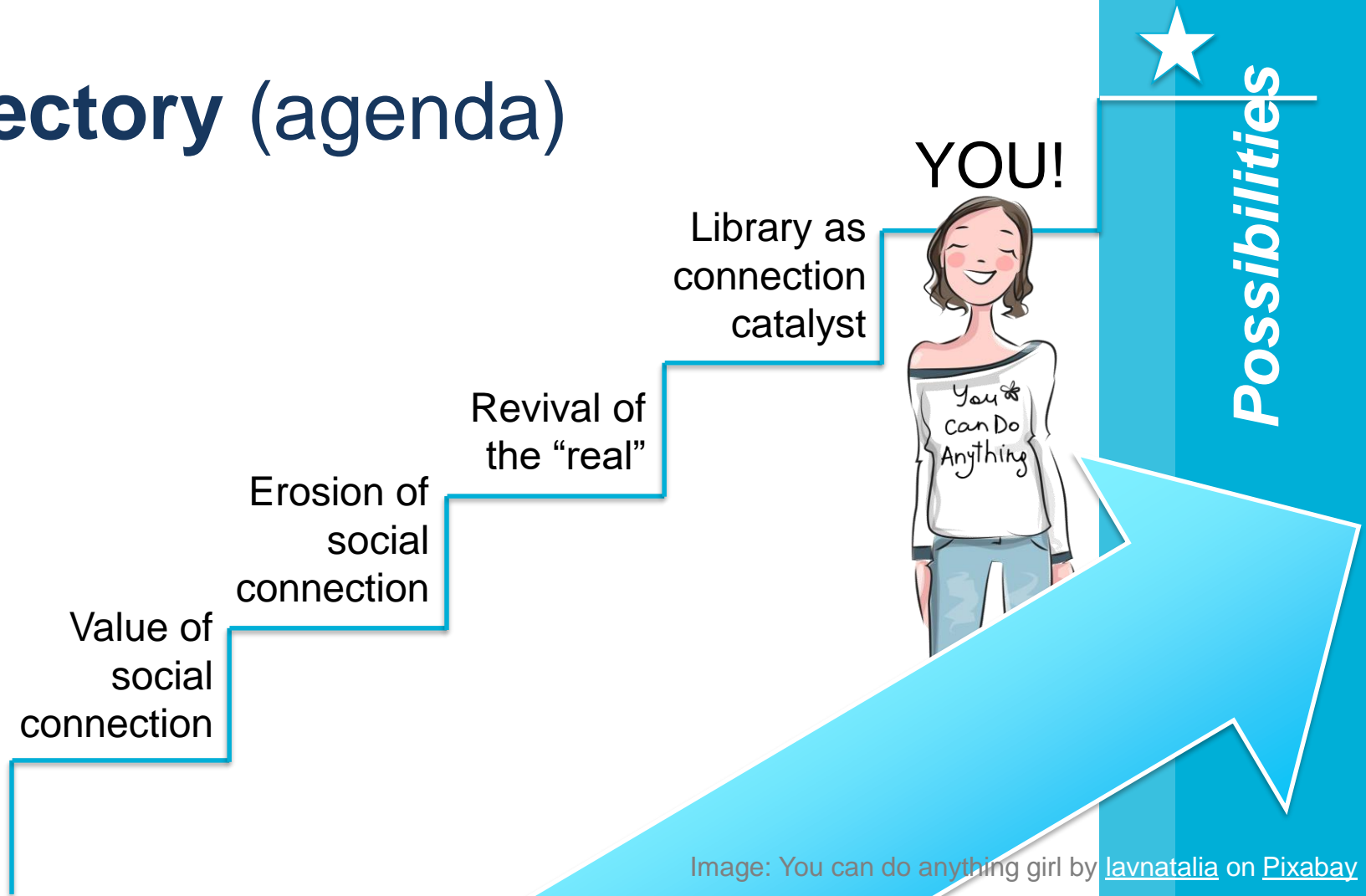
WebJunction

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)



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.”*



*Photo: 5 Tribe by [amanda.tipton](#) on [Flickr](#) CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

*Source: [Social Connection Makes a Better Brain](#); E. E. Smith; The Atlantic; Oct 29, 2013

“Social connectedness generates a positive feedback loop of social, emotional and physical well-being.”*

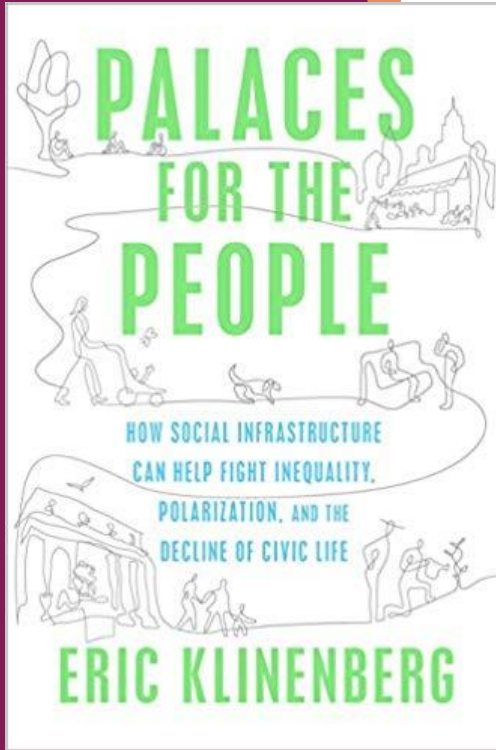
- Lowered anxiety and depression
- Stronger immune system
- Faster recovery from illness
- Increased chance of longevity
- Higher self-esteem, greater empathy

*Source: [Connectedness & Health: The Science of Social Connection](#); Dr. Emma Seppala; Stanford Medicine; May 8, 2014

**Social connection = more
trusting and cooperative**



The Social Infrastructure Factor



“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

New
Yorker

6 Ways Social Media Affects Our
Mental Health

Forbes

Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?

Atlantic

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

NPR

A photograph of a man sitting on a wide set of grey stone stairs. He is wearing a light-colored short-sleeved shirt and dark trousers. He has a distressed expression, with his right hand covering his face and his left hand holding a smartphone. The stairs are very wide and lead up to a building with a metal railing on the right. The overall mood is one of stress or isolation.

We've lost that “we feeling”

Photo: Stressed by [aaayymm eeelectriik](#) on [Flickr](#) [CC BY 2.0](#)

REVIVAL OF THE “REAL”

MOLESKINE®

Legendary notebooks



“Analog gives us the joy of creating and possessing real, tangible things”

—David Sax

Photo: Moleskin display by B. Gutsche; used with permission

Logged off: meet the teens who refuse to use social media

The Guardian
Aug 29, 2018



Photo: Cornwall Public Library Smart Space, used with permission

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



libraries

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.

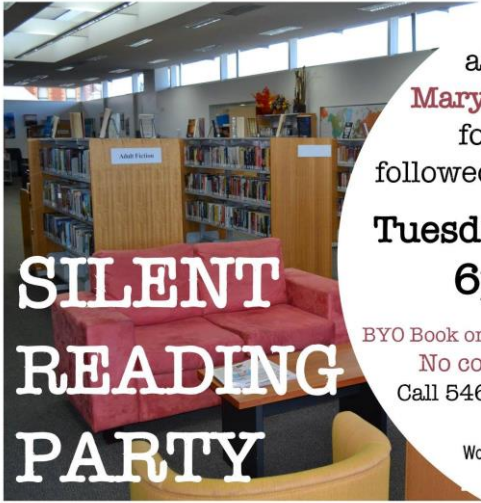
A library is a shared experience.”*

*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

Active, Participatory Learning at the Library



Please join us
after hours at the
Maryborough Library
for **Silent Reading**
followed by a **Book Chat**
Tuesday 7th August
6pm-7.30pm
BYO Book or grab one from our shelf
No cost • Supper provided
Call 5461 1950 for more info.

Words in Winter
CENTRAL
MELBOURNE
SOUTH
COUNCIL
MARYBOROUGH
REGIONAL LIBRARY
A MEMBER OF THE COOPERATING LIBRARIES

The complex block features a photograph of a library interior with bookshelves and a red sofa. Overlaid on the right side of the image is a white circular graphic containing text about a 'Silent Reading Party'. The text includes the date and time of the event, a list of activities (Silent Reading and Book Chat), and contact information. At the bottom of the graphic are three logos: 'Words in Winter', 'Central Melbourne South Council', and 'Maryborough Regional Library'.

DIY becomes DIT (doing it together)

From Nerf Wars to Community Gardens



Photo: courtesy [Carnegie-Stout Public Library on Facebook](#)
See also video <https://youtu.be/FjOVue0jitA>



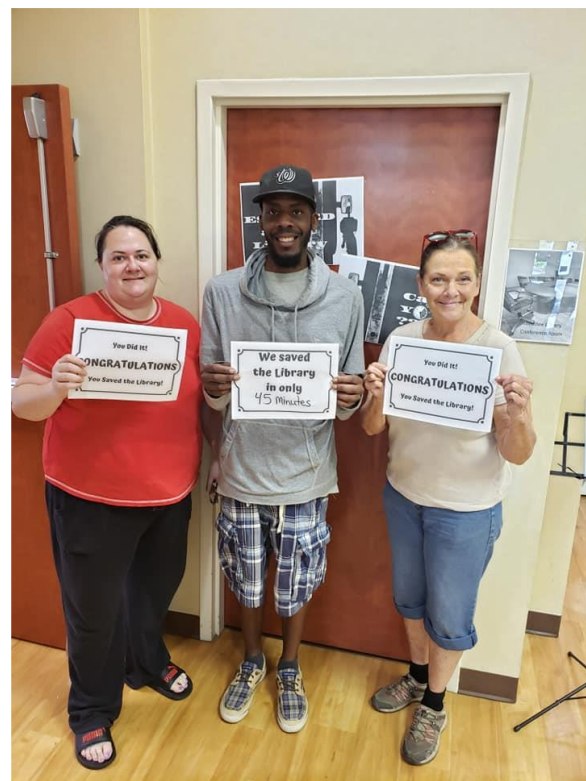
Photo: courtesy [Berkeley County Library System on Facebook](#)

**Libraries build
social connection!**

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 [aleksandra85foto](#) 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

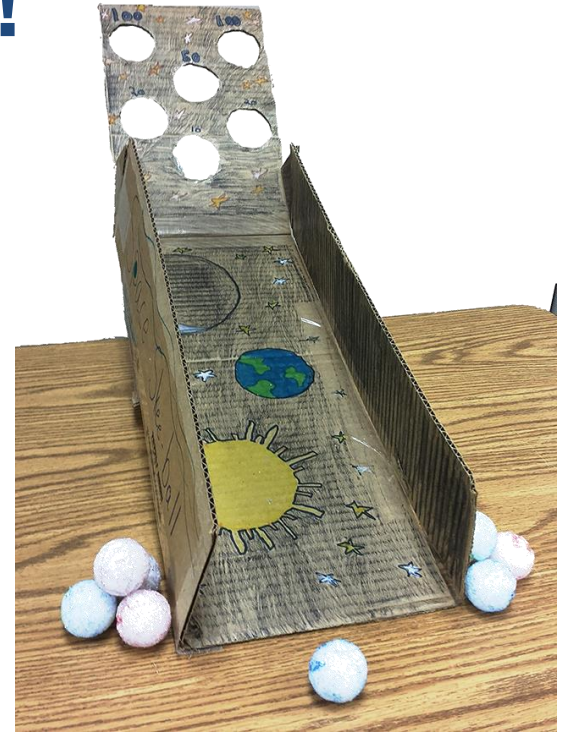
Be an intentional host



**You are the HOST
of your event.
Own it!**

Let's do an Intergenerational Cardboard Challenge!

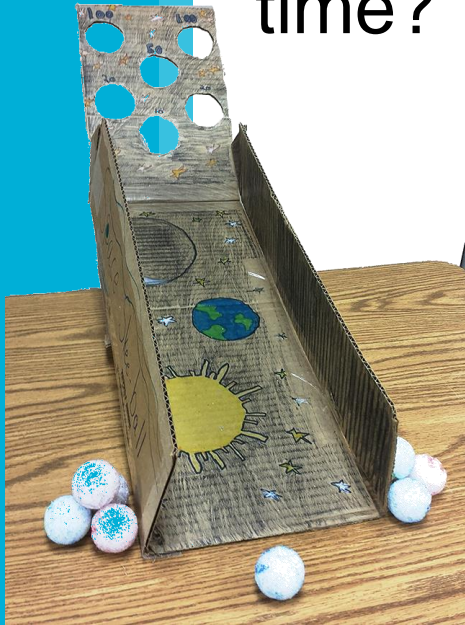
- It's low tech and low barrier.
- It works well as a team event.



cardboardchallenge.com

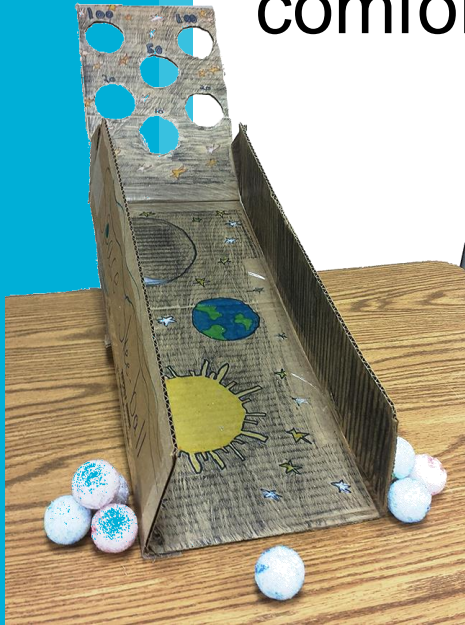
The event *starts* with the invitation

How might you prepare your guests ahead of time?



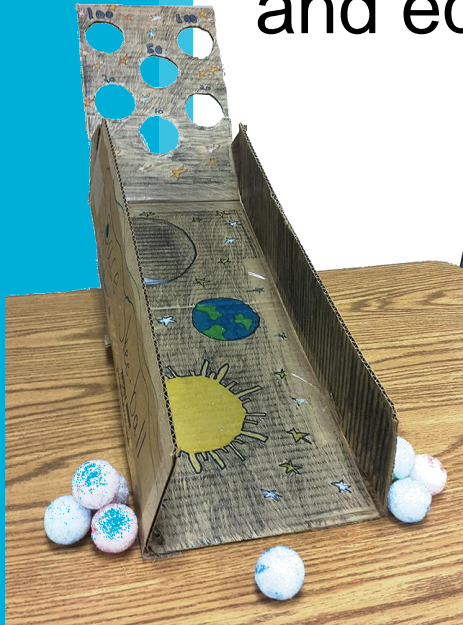
Crossing the threshold

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?

Learner Guide

The Library as Social Connector: Forging Community Conn Learner Guide

<https://www.webjunction.org/events/webjunction/library-as-social-connector-web>

Event Description: Strong social cohesion is a crucial factor in a community's resiliency and disruption. Unfortunately, studies show that our communities are experiencing social cohesion, pointing to an increase in loneliness, depression, and separation because time spent online and too little time spent in community. Libraries have the potential to rebuild social bonds, offering that sense of community and shared place that human learning programs that bring people together for participatory, shared experiences: community strength, but they could go even further to amplify social connection and infrastructure. Join us as we explore library programs through the lens of social position strategies to be more intentional about forging stronger community bonds.

Presented by: Betha Gutsche, WebJunction Programs Manager, OCLC; and Jennifer WebJunction Community Manager, OCLC

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 members, particularly through programs that bring people together for participatory, shared experiences.

List active learning or participatory programs you currently offer (or would like to offer) at your library.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

The Art of Gathering at Libraries

Betha and Jennifer were inspired by Priya Parker's book, [This and Why It Matters](#), in exploring the importance of embracing gatherings. Read the short Q&A with Priya Parker, published [you wish existed](#), to get a taste of her approach, or read her book.

With a new "social connector" lens, consider how existing programs and intentional design towards creating social cohesion. Select your list above, and consider the ways you could build intentionality.

The event starts with the invitation

- What is your clear, specific purpose in gathering your guests?
- How might you rename your program to reflect this purpose?
- Who are your intended guests? Do you have age or generational considerations?
- How will you market this event to reach your intended audience?
- Set expectations for your guests so they can be prepared to ask your guests to bring to the event? E.g. bring/serve a dish in past year.

Note: If the event involves program partners, be sure to model and set expectations for them as cohosts of your gathering.

Crossing the threshold

- How might you welcome and usher guests to the event and new experiences?
 - Look carefully at the space where you will gather.
 - Will guests be able to find it easily?
 - Is it welcoming to those who are new to the library?
 - How could you ensure that people will feel comfortable?

Equalize and connect your guests

- What ideas do you have for helping guests to engage and connect?
 - Suggestion from Priya Parker: Avoid introducing identities that relate to hierarchies or status; instead, talk about their work, degrees or titles.
- Considering the diverse backgrounds and orientations of your guests, how will you create an open, inclusive and safe space?
- How will you create connections, and find ways to mix up guests staying in their usual clusters?

Closings matter

- What wrap-up activity could you do that allows guests to share their experience with others outside of the library, i.e., with their networks?

How will you tell this story to your stakeholders?

Libraries have a long history of improving the social infrastructure of a community, but we don't talk about it enough! Eric Klinenberg, in [Palaces for the People](#), encourages us to be prepared to advocate for the role libraries play in creating social infrastructure. After you have more intentionally applied the social connector lens to the program identified above, discuss or consider how you might communicate the experience and impact to your stakeholders. How does this fit into the big picture of advocating for the value of your library?

Reflect on this experience applying social connector intentionality to your program and REPEAT with a new selection from your list above!

THANK YOU!

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

#libsocialconnect