
PUBLIC LIBRARIES RESPOND TO THE OPIOID CRISIS WITH THEIR COMMUNITIES: CASE STUDIES

Case Study: Everett Public Library

Through a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, OCLC and the Public Library Association have conducted research into how public libraries are supporting their communities through the opioid crisis, and how libraries are partnering with organizations to meet local needs. This profile was created through interviews with five individuals: three staff members at the Everett Public Library, a staff member at Snohomish County Human Services Department's Behavioral Health division, and a library board member. Their thoughts and experiences may not be generalizable to all of the staff of the library or their partners.

This is one of eight research-based case studies highlighting varying opioid response efforts across eight locations in the US. Additional information about the project can be found online at oc.lc/opioid-crisis.

Community and Library Overview

Everett Public Library (EPL), located in Washington state's Snohomish County, has a service population of 109,800 and operates with one central and one branch location. It has an operating budget of \$5,804,314 with 17.2 full-time equivalent librarian staff and 34.3 other staff, totaling 51.5 personnel. The library reported over a half million visits per year.¹

Everett is comprised of approximately two-thirds White populations, followed by 15% Hispanic or Latino populations, and 9% Asian populations.² Eighty-eight percent of its population has at least a high school diploma, and one out of four of its residents has a bachelor's degree (23%).³ The median household income in Everett is \$54,562, and 16.3% of the population are living in poverty.⁴ Everett's unemployment rate is 4.2%,⁵ and 10.6% of the population does not have health insurance.⁶

The central library is located in an area with a shortage of mental health and primary care professionals.⁷ Snohomish County has an opioid prescribing rate of 60.9,⁸ which is the number of retail opioid prescriptions dispensed per 100 people. The number of general drug overdose

deaths for Snohomish County was 390 people per 100,000, during 2015 through 2017.⁹ Opioid related deaths comprise the majority of all drug overdose deaths in the county.¹⁰

In 2016, Snohomish County represented approximately one out of every six heroin deaths in Washington state.¹¹ As a result, the county has declared the opioid crisis a life-threatening emergency and activated the emergency management system.

The Snohomish County Health District estimated 5,000 to 10,000 people in the county have opioid use disorder and that another 35,000 to 80,000 people are misusing opioids.¹²



1 CENTRAL AND 1 BRANCH LOCATION



SERVICE POPULATION, 109,800



UNINSURED RATE, 10.6%



**OPIOID PRESCRIBING RATE, 60.9
(per 100 people)**



“I think most people who came to the public training didn’t leave feeling scared. They left feeling really empowered. Part of that training was us also connecting staff to the humanity of the crisis. That it’s not just these abstract people with this addiction problem. That this could be you. This could be your co-worker. And that you could see that there are a lot of people in our community who could fall victim to this. And it’s not just a street drug problem.”

—Everett Public Library Manager

Everett Public Library’s Opioid Response

To address the concerns connected to the opioid crisis in Everett, the library has engaged in a variety of opioid response activities independently and with their community partners.

NALOXONE TRAINING FOR THE STAFF AND PUBLIC

EPL was one of the first library systems in Washington state to offer optional naloxone training to its staff. This training program was offered in partnership with the Snohomish County Human Services Department’s Behavioral Health (SCHSD) division.

The program teaches how to administer naloxone, in addition to general opioid prevention education such as recognizing the signs and symptoms of an overdose, substance use disorder, addiction, and physical dependence, in hopes of demystifying and destigmatizing the opioid crisis. SCHSD also conducted these naloxone trainings at the library for the public.

FACILITY MODIFICATIONS

To make the bathrooms safer for both patrons and staff, EPL added sharps containers for needle disposal, made the stall height shorter so security could more easily see in if there was a problem, and added windows to the main doors to the bathrooms to also increase visibility.

Because they added the windows, they removed the mirrors for patron privacy.

COMMUNITY RESOURCE DAYS

The library holds monthly Resource Days where local service organizations offer information to community members about social services such as housing, health care, employment, and substance abuse treatment. The organizations send a representative to the library to host a table where they can share resources and speak with the public about the programs and services that they offer. Participating organizations include ChildStrive, Sea-Mar Community Health Center, Volunteers of America, Cocoon House, Community Health Centers of Snohomish County, Compass Health, WorkForce, WorkSource, and Employment Securities Division.

BOOK TALKS AND AUTHOR EVENTS

EPL hosted community events highlighting books related to the opioid crisis (e.g., *American Fix: Inside the Opioid Addiction Crisis - and How to End It* by opioid survivor Ryan Hampton)¹³ and author speaking events focused on substance use as part of the Everett Reads! community-wide reading program (e.g., *Beautiful Boy: A Father’s Journey Through His Son’s Addiction* by David Sheff),¹⁴ where over 350 patrons attended.

INTERNAL OPIOID RESPONSE POLICY

The library developed an internal policy that addresses naloxone administration procedures for its staff. To encourage continued availability and use of naloxone at a city-wide level, the

city's human resources department worked with the library, parks and recreation department, and the police to develop a policy for the city.

EPL garnered internal support for these activities through administering an informal survey to the staff about perceived needs, and then discussing the potential trainings and changes at staff meetings. The administration was also able to evaluate community needs by reviewing staff-submitted incident reports, which are required to document events such as where and when needles are found, or if there is a concern about a specific patron, to keep everyone updated on potential safety issues. Staff also learn about incidents that may be relevant to their work through a weekly staff newsletter.

To increase awareness about their work and advertise the naloxone trainings to the public, the library shared flyers with agencies they work with and posted them on their website and social media. The library's public relations officer creates press releases and communicates with the media. The Board also receives copies of all press releases and relevant updates via email.

Partnering for Success

Partnerships have been key to the library's ability to implement several of their opioid response activities. One partnership is through the city-wide task force that started in 2014 called Community Streets Initiative, that has evolved into the present-day Safe Streets Directive. This original task force was comprised of 23 community partners working with the city of Everett, charged with finding "comprehensive, collaborative, and compassionate responses to street-level social issues." The group developed a report with 63 short and long-term recommendations to address street-level social issues, many of which directly address substance misuse and opioids.

Today, the initiative, called the Safe Streets Plan, uses "outreach and enforcement, supportive housing, and diversion programs to address issues of homelessness, mental illness, crime and addiction." By participating in the task

force, the library staff were able to increase their awareness about issues impacting the community, which prompted the growth of the library's opioid response activities.

EPL's partnership with SCHSD started when the library inquired about having its staff trained in naloxone administration. SCHSD has since provided training to the library staff, the public, and provided EPL with naloxone free of charge. By offering the training at the library, SCHSD also increased their profile in the community and saw an increase in requests for similar training in other locations, allowing them to form new partnerships and reach more people to address community health concerns.



Community Resource Day event.
Photo courtesy of Everett Public Library

Local Conditions Leading Up to the Library's Response

Local factors and conditions that led to EPL's response to the opioid crisis with their community partners include:

- an increase in the number of people who needed services
- drug use occurring within and near the library
- physical location of the library in the city center

- the city of Everett as the county seat
- the implementation of the city-wide Community Streets Initiative

Drug use happening in and near the library served as a major prompt for discussions to address the opioid crisis. Moreover, some community partners and library staff reported there was an increase in the number of people seeking help for substance abuse within the community, and this prompted the library to begin asking what they could do to help.

The city of Everett is also the county seat, making it the center of all of the social services provided within the county, including shelters, food assistance programs, bathing facilities, and treatment. The library's location near these social service points may also be why the library has become an epicenter for those seeking services. An EPL board member stated, "There's a debate about whether or not this brings more people that need these services to the area or is, in fact, meeting a need that already existed in the area. But what ends up happening—because the library is a public space and welcoming for everyone—is we become sort of a gathering place for people who have no other place to go."

Finally, the library's involvement with the city-wide Community Streets Initiative provided opportunities for continued discussions about the opioid crisis, as well as the needed supports to continue their work.

"We made our decision because we did want our staff to be educated and trained and prepared. It saves lives, and it saves them instantly and immediately. And that kind of training, knowing what that is and what to do in that moment, absolutely can save lives. And that is something we thought was both valuable and empowers our staff in a situation where you can feel pretty powerless."

—Everett Public Library Board Member

Reactions and Experiences of Library Staff, Board, and Community Members

Overall the reactions and experiences of EPL staff, their community partners, the media, and the community as a whole, are supportive of EPL's opioid response activities.

LIBRARY STAFF AND BOARD

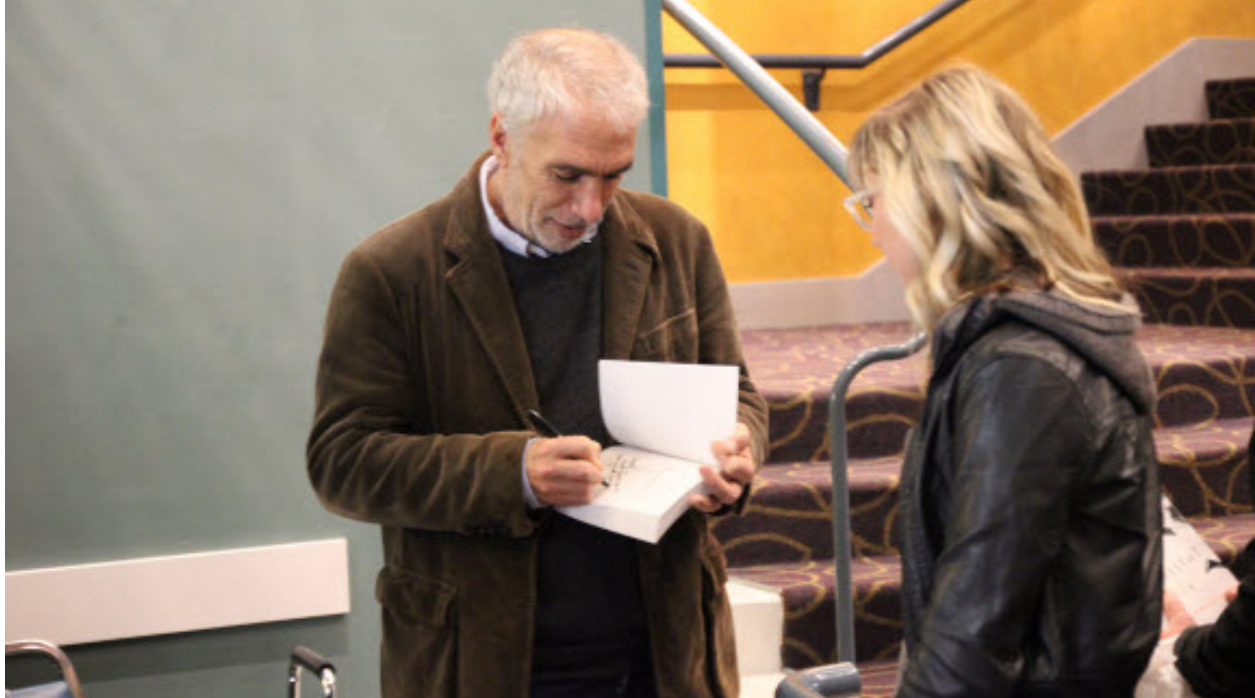
Largely, EPL's staff was supportive of the opioid response work the library decided to engage with, however, there were initially some mixed opinions. The naloxone training was intentionally offered as optional to respect the fact that some staff may not be comfortable intervening in overdose situations. Interviewees felt that the library director's efforts to communicate with staff about their opioid response, along with conducting an informal staff survey, helped build stronger internal support for the work.

The board has been supportive by recognizing the library's role in the community as not only an information center and community resource, but also as an organization with a goal to be a safe and welcoming place for everyone, no matter what life challenges patrons might be experiencing.

MEDIA

The media responded to and engaged with EPL's opioid activities positively. EPL did not publicize some of its opioid work, such as the staff training in naloxone or physical changes made to the bathrooms. However, the public training in naloxone was shared with the media via press releases. The library shared the press release via email to about 80 recipients including different media groups and neighborhood leaders.

The media took an interest in the public training in naloxone because there was curiosity surrounding why the library was engaging in this work, as it differed from the standard author talks and events EPL typically hosts. The media also covered EPL's first overdose reversal via naloxone.



Author David Sheff at a library event.
Photo courtesy of Everett Public Library

COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE

Library staff noted that the community had mixed reactions to EPL's opioid activities. The reaction was most noticeable when physical changes were made to the building, specifically to the bathroom, to discourage drug use. Some community members felt that the changes condoned drug use, even though the changes were made to make the space safer for the public. Others vocally supported these changes and appreciated the library addressing the issue.

The opioid-focused author events hosted by the library were well-received and well-attended by the public. Some community patrons might find it easier to attend an informational session at the library than reaching out to different service or information providers that may have a stigma associated with them. But following the opioid-focused sessions, library staff also heard feedback from the community that patrons wanted to revisit lighter subject matter as well since the topic of the opioid crisis can be intense and emotional.

"I think a role the library plays is really the community education piece. We may not be the answer for everything, but we are pretty good at finding who knows the answer and connecting people to resources."

—Everett Public Library Director

Outcomes of the Library's Response

Positive outcomes that have occurred as a result of EPL's opioid response work include:

- reduced stigma for addiction issues
- a more connected, educated community
- new partnerships created

Within the community, library staff and community partners believe there has been at least an anecdotal reduction in the negative stigma associated with drug use, as well as a change in perception regarding who is affected by the community's opioid crisis. In Everett,

many of the drug overdoses in the community are people over the age of 60, which defies the stereotypical images of who is impacted by drug use. Through the library's training events, community members are learning that the opioid crisis affects everyone.

In addition, the programming has led to a more connected, educated community, which ultimately leads to a healthier one. The Everett Public Library director expanded on this by saying, "I think the opioid work is definitely helping connect the communities. Not only connecting them to resources, but also to each other. They haven't met before, but they're in this—talking about a sensitive issue—and they hang out talking afterwards. You see them walking out together, and they didn't know each other before the meeting. And I think that's one of the things we do is connect people through our programming."

As the library's involvement in the opioid response garnered attention, the library started supporting the community by providing library materials to a local diversion program. The library was contacted by the program and asked to provide books that would be made available to people going through treatment and rehabilitation. Participants were leaving the program early and citing boredom as a key reason. The library materials were made available to participants, providing access to an activity that could encourage them to stay and complete the program.

Though EPL does not yet have a formal program evaluation set up, they do track attendance at their programs. For example, the opioid events offered through the library have garnered almost 600 participants. To date, there has been one overdose incident at the library, and staff were able to successfully administer naloxone and revive the individual. To support the tracking of local statistics, library staff will report overdose events by mailing in a postcard to the health department with basic demographic information about the naloxone recipient.

"It's not an easy topic. And it's not a fun topic. But I think it's great that our library has decided to be responsive to this, and to be part of the solution. Our library can stake a claim in the community. We're affected and we can help affect solutions and be a player in that space and use our strength that people trust us as an educational facility, as an information facility, and as kind of a social and community gathering point."

—Everett Public Library Manager

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SUCCESS

Several factors contributed to the success of EPL's opioid response activities including:

- **Credibility and importance of the library.** Local organizations and community members recognize the importance of EPL, and public libraries generally, seeing them as a place where a person can get access to credible information and resources.
- **A champion to move the work forward.** The Community Streets Initiative has a champion in its manager. This manager developed the initiative, propelled the work forward, and continues to serve as the main contact for the library.
- **Local prioritization of the topic.** The city and county declared this topic a priority to address. When the topic was acknowledged as a federal priority, this provided additional leverage to move the work forward, including successfully advocating for increased security and facility changes.

Challenges, Needs, and Opportunities

Through the course of developing and implementing the opioid response activities, the library experienced challenges and identified needs and opportunities for the future:

“We’re so grateful to libraries for their willingness to do this because it is sensitive messaging. We understand that culturally it has a lot of stigma associated with it and a lot of misinformation and that can be a delicate thing. But their willingness to address that, become ambassadors, and help eliminate some of that misinformation is a huge benefit to the community as a whole.”

—Community Partner Director

CHALLENGES AND NEEDS

- **Stocking naloxone.** Currently the library is provided with naloxone for free but this may not always be the case. It would be ideal if naloxone could also be provided to the public who attend the trainings.
- **Financial support needs**
 - Special programming often has an additional cost, such as travel or honorariums for speakers.
 - Developing a social worker program that would operate for a several hours per week at EPL would potentially be a large benefit to the community and those who are or know someone with substance use disorder.
 - There is a need to emotionally support library staff related to potential stress or emotional toll from engaging in the opioid work such as through acute or long-term debrief counseling or therapy.
- **Balancing programming needs.** Opioid prevention programming is just one aspect of the library’s efforts to serve community needs. Community members value diverse programming that reflects a range of educational, positive, and fun activities.
- **Not winning everyone over.** Not everyone will agree with the library’s programming and engagement with opioid misuse prevention, so it is important to focus energy on those willing to participate and learn.

OPPORTUNITIES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The following are ongoing and future needs to support efforts to best address the opioid crisis:

- **Develop more and even stronger partnerships.** There are always more partnerships and organizations to engage with, which can lead to a bigger impact and an opportunity to share in the development and distribution of resources.
- **Start earlier.** Respond as soon as feasibly possible to the community’s needs.
- **See the human in need.** Put your personal beliefs aside, and demonstrate compassion even if you do not agree with a decision or policy made to benefit the community or individuals in need. Not everyone will agree with all decisions and programming, so there is a need to be comfortable with potential pushback.
- **Provide a forum for people to come together in recovery.** The library could serve as a physical space for those who are in recovery to be able to express and support one another.
- **Engage with continuous education and training.** Regularly offer the library staff naloxone administration training and stay up to date on the community’s needs. This needs to be revisited so people feel confident in their ability to respond and have the opportunity to learn more about how the crisis is impacting their community.

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The views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this case study do not necessarily represent those of the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

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