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

Case Study: New Orleans 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 nine individuals: three staff members at the New Orleans Public Library, two staff members at the New Orleans Health Department, a library board member, and three community members who participated in training at the library. 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

New Orleans Public Library (NOPL) has a service population size of 393,292 and comprises 15 locations. It has an operating budget of \$19,451,435 with 140.88 librarian staff and 52.5 other staff, totaling 193.38 personnel. On average there are over 1.6 million visits per year.¹

New Orleans, Louisiana, is made up of mostly Black or African American populations (60%), followed by White populations (34%). About one-third (37%) of its citizens hold a bachelor's degree, and 86% have at least a high school diploma.²

The median household income is \$38,721, and one-quarter of its citizens are living in poverty.³ New Orleans's unemployment rate is 4.7%,⁴ and 12.4% of the population does not have health insurance.⁵

The main library location is in an area with a shortage of primary care and mental health care professionals.⁶ Orleans Parish has an opioid prescribing rate of 59.8,⁷ which is the number of retail opioid prescriptions dispensed per 100 people. The number of general drug overdose deaths for Orleans Parish was 405 people per 100,000 from 2015 through 2017.⁸



15 LIBRARY LOCATIONS



SERVICE POPULATION, 393,292



UNINSURED RATE, 12.4%



**OPIOID PRESCRIBING RATE, 59.8
(per 100 people)**



“We connect patrons to resources, whether they are books, computers, people, or organizations. That’s what we do. This is another resource: putting people in touch with certain health department–level groups that would be able to help them, whether it’s a short-term, ‘I need naloxone right now,’ or, ‘I need to talk about a relative that I need to get into treatment.’ We’re just connecting those resources, just like we connect everything.”

—New Orleans Public Library Administrator

New Orleans Public Library’s Opioid Response

The New Orleans Public Library, in partnership with the New Orleans Health Department (NOHD), is coordinating and offering opioid overdose and prevention educational and training programs both internally to library staff and externally to the public. The curriculum provides education on the opioid crisis in New Orleans, how to recognize overdose symptoms, and how to administer naloxone (the opioid overdose reversal drug) to someone suspected of experiencing an opioid overdose.

This program, Bystander Response Training, is unique in that it is offered in combination with Stop the Bleed⁹ and CPR training, an approach that often encourages higher attendance because people opt to attend for the less stigmatized topics. The training is offered at locations throughout the NOPL system to increase community reach.

The curriculum was developed by NOHD; NOPL and NOHD work together to coordinate the locations, recruitment, and advertising. Publicity about the classes is distributed through the library’s monthly magazines, flyers displayed in the buildings, the library’s and NOHD’s websites and social media, and press releases for the radio and TV.

To encourage participation in the training events, the library and NOHD do not require attendees to provide their real names or full addresses, in case interested individuals are concerned about privacy or they may be experiencing homelessness or living in transitional housing. Library leadership encourages staff participation in the training, and managers support the effort by coordinating schedules to ensure that staff members who want to attend are able to do so. Library staff are informed of training opportunities via email communications.

NOPL and NOHD are also working together to secure funding to install sharps containers in all library restrooms and on the exterior of library buildings. So far, NOHD has provided NOPL with seven sharps containers at four library locations.

Partnering for Success

NOPL worked closely with their partners to implement the naloxone training, specifically NOHD and New Orleans Emergency Medical Services (EMS). NOHD coordinates with the library to offer naloxone training, and if the library uses a naloxone kit or if they have kits set to expire, EMS will replace them.

NOHD has also tapped into a federal program called the Medical Reserve Corps. The Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) is a program that started after the September 11 attacks, and can be found in localities around the

“I like that it was spread out geographically, and that during the training, I could tell they really put effort into it. I could tell that the person who was training us really cared about it, and that they wanted to make sure that we all really knew how to do this. We all went up and had to actually practice administering naloxone several times.”

—New Orleans Public Library Frontline Staff Member

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

Overall the reactions and experiences of NOPL staff, their community partners, the media, and impacted community members are positive and supportive of NOPL’s opioid response activities.

LIBRARY STAFF AND BOARD

NOPL staff and board were very supportive of the naloxone training program, though staff initially raised questions about safety and liability, specifically if something were to go wrong while administering naloxone. To assuage any concerns, the library worked with city attorneys to confirm that Good Samaritan Laws in Louisiana would protect staff members who aided an individual experiencing an overdose.

Some staff were also worried about their personal safety—either with individuals under the influence of cross-contaminated fentanyl or the behavior of someone who has just been revived with naloxone. Library leadership and NOHD anticipated these concerns; they provided information about what to expect in an overdose situation and they did not make the training mandatory. Staff appreciated that the training was available at multiple sites and reviewed the class positively.

In a presentation to the library board, the NOHD medical director outlined the severity of the opioid crisis in New Orleans and explained what

the naloxone training would entail. One board member shared, “It’s one thing to watch the opioid epidemic and what is happening across the United States. But to be involved in the process and understand the necessity to help someone that may be suffering or in an opioid crisis and how naloxone can assist with saving a life, I just thought that it was extremely positive for the board to be educated on this and understanding what it can do to save a life.”

MEDIA

The media’s coverage of NOPL’s opioid programming was positive. Members of the media often attended training events, which helped to publicize these offerings to the public.

COMMUNITY PARTNER

Prior to the development of the opioid response training, partnership activities between the library and the health department were informal and infrequent. For example, NOHD brochures about emerging public health issues would be available in the library. Now the partnership is stronger, with both organizations looking for additional ways to work together in the future.

The partnership between NOHD and NOPL has resulted in the implementation of similar training at additional community organizations. NOHD has reached out to other groups, like the recreational departments, to host opioid response classes, and points to the program at the library as a success story. Moreover, the mayor’s office has been supportive of naloxone training, overdose prevention work, and harm reduction strategies.

“It’s turned out to be a great partnership, in terms of logistics and support. The library and their staff have gone out of the way to spread the word in ways that we wouldn’t have access to, like getting it on the events pages, flyers at the library, and the magazines, things like that. And the physical space actually has been very useful because the libraries are somewhere that is publicly accessible and publicly comfortable for people to show up and not feel like they’re being funneled into some government agency.”

—Community Partner Frontline Staff

COMMUNITY MEMBERS

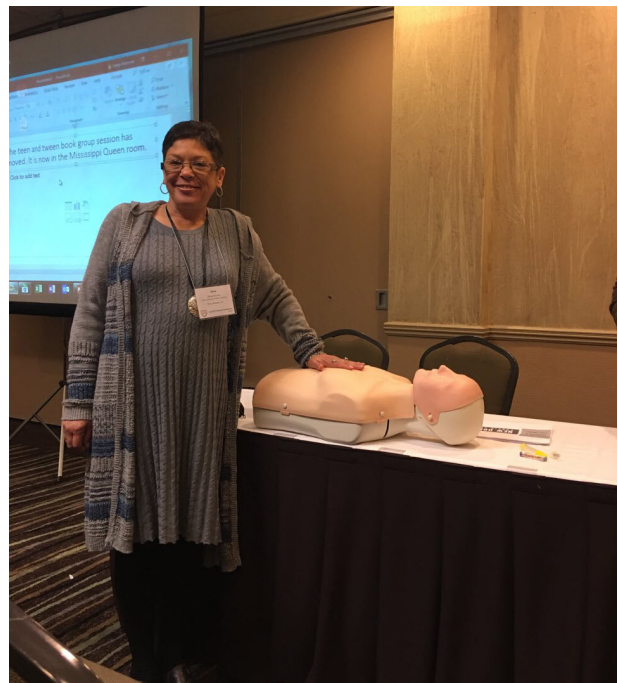
The larger community has responded positively to the Bystander Response Training; they are interested in the work the library is engaging in, and appreciates that the library is hosting trainings at various locations throughout the city. At first, some community members wondered why NOPL and NOHD were focused on helping people with substance use disorder, but the curriculum proactively addressed this concern by explaining who is affected by the opioid crisis and how addiction can develop, which helps to reduce the stigma.

Community members who attended the training had very positive experiences. They appreciated the hands-on nature of the course and the opportunity to try the supplies on test dummies. Participants learned about the training through announcements on TV, the radio, and bulletin boards at the library. They attended to be able to help their fellow citizens, should it be needed, and felt it was important to have an educated public.

One suggestion from the attendees was a request to include more information in the training about substance abuse referral to better aid others in seeking treatment for addiction.

Community members shared the following about their experiences in the Bystander Training program:

- “I’m a pastor in a neighborhood where there are lots of drugs, and some of my congregation have family members who are abusing drugs. Two years ago, we actually had someone die outside of our gates from an overdose. We want to be able to assist our family members, but also our communities, and help the persons who are addicted to substance, particularly opioids.
- “I was so happy with that course in that they showed everything that a bystander or uninitiated person could do to save a life, and I think the library is doing an excellent job in teaching the public.”



New Orleans Public Library staff member preparing to present on their program at a conference..
Courtesy of New Orleans Public Library.

Outcomes of the Library’s Response

Many positive outcomes have resulted from NOPL’s opioid response work. Though NOPL and NOHD are not formally evaluating their opioid response programming, they do track attendance at the training sessions. To date 167 community members and 101 library staff members have been trained. Using naloxone,

library staff were able to revive one individual in the library who experienced an overdose.

Since its implementation, NOPL has presented the naloxone training program to other parishes in the area. Moreover, the training is being hosted at other organizations outside of libraries, including in the office of public defenders, the Sheriff's Office, and recreational departments. NOHD has also been contacted by training participants and asked to provide the classes at other sites.

NOPL received a grant from the National Network of Libraries of Medicine to fund a staff person to implement health education that will focus on strengthening the information the public receives.

Community members and library staff who attended the opioid training expressed feeling more confident and knowledgeable should an opioid overdose situation arise. As one library frontline staff member stated, "I think it generally just makes us feel more confident and competent to deal with this issue whenever it comes up."

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SUCCESS

Factors that contributed to the success of the collaboration between NOPL and NOHD to develop and implement the opioid curriculum include:

- **Having a champion to drive the work forward.** The director of NOHD is very invested in and supportive of the project. The library also has a dedicated staff member who serves as the key liaison to the health department to coordinate training and communicate needs.
- **External partner capacity and support.** Via the Medical Reserve Corps, NOHD has access to a group of volunteers that can be trained as instructors for the courses. The police department and the city attorney's office also support and enable the work. The local EMS replaces naloxone kits as they are used or expire.

- **Support of the mayor's office.** The library and health department are a part of the local government, which has support by the mayor. This provides credibility and signals approval from the city.

Challenges, Needs, and Opportunities

Through the course of developing and implementing the opioid overdose prevention training, NOPL experienced challenges and needs, and identified opportunities for the work moving forward.

"Not everyone is privy to the same life, and there are some people out there that need help and need assistance. If we each are aware of what is going on in our community and we are training properly and we are in a position of saving one life, then we've done a lot. Because even one life is too much to lose."

—New Orleans Public Library Board Member

CHALLENGES AND NEEDS

- **Additional naloxone supplies** are needed at each branch location, and program partners would like to distribute naloxone to all participants in the public training.
- **Supplies and equipment**, such as mannequins, to support the training are needed, as well as additional promotional materials to advertise the courses.
- In order for library staff to stay current and comfortable with naloxone administration, it is recommended that they **repeat the training** annually.
- **Debriefing and counseling** should be made available to staff after naloxone is used to reverse an overdose.
- It is important to ensure that all trainers have **cultural and community knowledge and awareness**.

- The training program needs to better **reach populations who are at a higher risk** for opioid overdose.

OPPORTUNITIES AND LESSONS LEARNED

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

- Offer the **opioid training to new staff** when they are hired.
- Highlight to library staff the **importance and ease of the training**.
- Remain in the forefront of community issues and **understand what problems your community is facing**.
- **Keep communication with partners open**, with a regular exchange of information.
- Begin any necessary **legal research** or processes immediately, including confirming local or state Good Samaritan Laws, and any training requirements.
- Work with “boots on the ground” **organizations that have the expertise** to support the program.
- **Research best practices** and identify what has already been done in the 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.

NOTES

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