Not just a place to sleep: 
homeless perspectives on 
libraries in central Michigan

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to focus on a qualitative and quantitative assessment of how homeless people in the USA use libraries. Libraries, especially in urban areas, have a complicated relationship with homeless patrons. It is easy to assume that homeless populations use libraries as a safe place to avoid the elements or to sleep. This paper considers the other ways that people without permanent housing are using libraries, how they perceive libraries, and what their specific information needs might be.

Design/methodology/approach – The primary method of data collection involved surveys conducted with over 100 homeless individuals in central Michigan in 2009, supplemented with information about area library policies that specifically affect this population.

Findings – Many homeless people in central Michigan use libraries frequently. They most often read for entertainment and use the internet. Survey respondents tended to be appreciative of library services. Local social service agencies are a primary source of information for homeless people in this area.

Research limitations/implications – The challenges of identifying homeless people led to a respondent pool which seemed to be very high-functioning. Homeless people who are mentally ill or struggling with serious substance abuse may not have been as prevalent at the venues which were used to survey respondents.

Originality/value – Most articles regarding homelessness in the library literature focus on how librarians can handle these “problem patrons.” However, little substantive information is known about how homeless people themselves view libraries. This paper provides insight into the needs of homeless people and how US libraries might best serve them. It also references international studies on the homeless and libraries.

Keywords Homelessness, Libraries, Social responsibility, United States of America

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Libraries have historically been a haven for homeless people, providing shelter from the elements and relative peace and quiet. While homeless patrons may view libraries as a refuge, library staff members, especially in urban areas, have a complicated relationship with homeless patrons. They can be loud, smelly, or disruptive to other patrons.
They may take up space by sleeping in the comfortable chairs, or they might use the public restrooms to wash their clothes (or themselves) or to do drugs. They might talk to themselves, or yell obscenities at the librarians (Ward, 2007; Holt and Holt, 2010). Most librarians in this situation are sympathetic, but frustrated (Eaton and Sidor, 2010). Libraries regularly deal with shrinking budgets, and most library workers have neither the time, nor the training, to “play social worker” to their homeless patrons (Cronin, 2002; OLOS, 2008; Torrey et al., 2009).

The stereotypical “problem” homeless patron is probably a single man, who is either mentally ill or abusing drugs. These patrons are extremely challenging, and libraries will continue to struggle to find a balance between access and security. However, there are many homeless individuals who use libraries peacefully and appropriately, including homeless parents who depend upon library services for themselves and their children. According to the most recent numbers from Michigan’s Campaign to End Homelessness (MSHDA, 2011), 50 percent of homeless in Michigan are adults and children in families. Most articles in the library literature focus on tips for how librarians can “deal with” troublesome homeless people. However, little is known about how the homeless people themselves view libraries. This paper begins with a review of the current demographic information about homelessness in the USA and in Michigan, followed by an overview of ideas from library and homelessness research that have informed this study. Research methodology is presented to clearly illustrate how data were collected and analyzed. This is followed by the findings from the data analysis, and in the final section, conclusions, study limitations and further research are considered.

The initial goal was to survey approximately 350 people in a tri-county area, and to target a variety of agencies, including domestic violence shelters, runaway or homeless youth shelters, and transitional living programs. (Past researchers have used small samples, for example, interviews with 28 homeless parents.) It was hoped that this larger sample would be statistically significant, and would offer a greater understanding of the many non-traditional ways that libraries may be used. The current study aims to identify how often homeless people use libraries, and what library services are useful to them. The resultant data may help library workers better understand how best to serve this challenging population. Additionally, one hopes that this study will be used to advocate for increased library, or social service, funding or improved services for homeless people in general.

**Literature review**

**Facts about homelessness**

Homelessness in America has been acknowledged as a social problem since the early 1980s. Brevity precludes a thorough investigation of the causes here, but the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD, 2011) estimates that 650,000 people nationwide were homeless – either sheltered or unsheltered – on a single night in January 2010. Getting accurate statistics on such a transitory population is challenging, but federal and state agencies work together, at least once a year, to do a count. While the US homeless population is mainly comprised of single men, the number of individuals in homeless families seems to be on the rise, especially in rural and suburban areas (HUD, 2011).

According to the United States Conference of Mayors, at the end of 2009, 94 percent of people living “on the street” were single adults, 4 percent were part of families and
2 percent were unaccompanied minors (US Conference of Mayors, 2009). Homeless families tend to stay in emergency shelters or transitional housing. Not surprisingly, many homeless people face challenges in addition to their lack of housing. An average of 26 percent of homeless people are considered severely mentally ill (these may be the most visible in libraries and other public places), while 16 percent of homeless individuals are physically disabled (US Conference of Mayors, 2011). The same report shows that 13 percent of single homeless people are victims of domestic violence, while 13 percent are veterans and 4 percent are HIV positive. Another common assumption about homeless people is that they have no job or income, but fully 15 percent of homeless Americans are employed (US Conference of Mayors, 2011).

In Michigan, there are approximately 94,000 homeless people, enough to populate a large city (MSHDA, 2011). Michigan’s percentage of employed homeless is higher than the national average – over a quarter are working poor (28 percent), and over 65 percent are female heads of households. As mentioned above, approximately 50 percent of homeless in Michigan are adults and children in families. Michigan has more homeless people than most states, ranking 8th in the USA for number of homeless residents, at 0.28 percent of the state population (HUD, 2011).

Field research in the library literature
The relationship of homeless people to libraries was initially explored in US library scholarship by Julia Hersberger. In her original research, she found that homeless parents use social networks as their primary source of information (Hersberger, 2001). Her research also revealed the importance of sequence when addressing the needs of the homeless. For example, a person may need to find a car and childcare before s/he can find a job. Hersberger (2003) considered the digital divide and found that her pool of 25 homeless parents suffered from a lack of resources, but not a lack of information. General information and service needs of homeless people were examined in 2005, and here she summarised the reasons why libraries should not discriminate against homeless populations (Hersberger, 2005).

Several US researchers choose interviews as their methodology, which produces rich qualitative data about how the homeless people perceive and use libraries. However, the scale for such research is necessarily small. Dr Hersberger interviewed 28 homeless parents in her initial research and others have used even smaller pools, such as Harvey (2002), who did in depth interviews of five homeless people. A student getting her Library and Information Studies (LIS) degree created a web site with resources for homeless people, then surveyed 36 people (eight of whom were homeless) to evaluate the usefulness of the site (Murray, 2004).

Other US researchers have chosen to examine librarian experiences with homeless patrons. One notable study was conducted by mental health professionals (Torrey et al., 2009). They surveyed 124 public librarians about their experience dealing with mentally ill patrons. Their respondents indicated that people with serious psychiatric disorders use a disproportionate amount of staff time and resources, that such patrons often disturb other people, and that they have had to call the police to assist with the behavior of such patrons. Unsurprisingly, the respondents felt that the problem is much greater in urban libraries than in suburban or rural ones. Another theme that emerged was the “ongoing dilemma of weighing the civil rights of each individual against the rights of other library patrons to not be disturbed or threatened while using the library” (Torrey et al., 2009).
Several European library researchers have similarly embraced the issue of library use by poor or homeless people. The Bibliotheque Publique d’Information (BPI) in Paris commissioned a French sociologist to study the many poorly-housed and homeless people who frequent the BPI. He identified three stages of homelessness, and observed that each stage correlated with certain behavior in the library (Gaudet, 2012). The UK began to make social exclusion a priority for libraries in 2003 (Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 2003), and has witnessed some success in encouraging library access for marginalised groups, such as the homeless, refugees, and the disabled. Many libraries in Ireland charge a fee for library membership, so that is a significant barrier for potential patrons who are homeless (Combat Poverty Agency, 2004). In a study commissioned by London Libraries Development Agency and other stakeholders, over 60 users were interviewed to learn what homeless people want from libraries. Researchers found a general interest and enthusiasm for libraries, but again, several barriers to access (Clarke, 2007). Library service for traditionally-excluded groups has been investigated and promoted by several other English researchers (Muddiman et al., 2000; Pateman and Vincent, 2010), who encourage UK libraries to offer services based on the needs of their communities, and to put social justice at the heart of public libraries. Of particular importance are staff training and support, partnerships with relevant community organisations, and removal of barriers to library card or membership (Willett and Broadley, 2011). Many countries face the same challenges as US libraries, but may find even less institutional or government support for serving homeless patrons. Developing nations (e.g. India and Botswana) often have a fragile, neglected or underfunded public library system. When there is little money for basic needs like staff, books, or computers, one can understand how outreach to homeless patrons might not be a priority (Jain, 2012; Gulati and Riley, 2006; Radiporo, 2012).

Institutional reports and recommendations
What do professional library organizations have to say about serving the homeless? The American Library Association (ALA) adopted Policy 61 in 1990, commonly known as the Poor People’s Policy. It makes several recommendations, including that libraries remove barriers to accessing services, improve services to the poor, and train their staff about the needs of poor people. The policy also encourages libraries to advocate for community services for these populations (ALA, 1990).

In 1996, members of the Social Responsibilities Roundtable (part of ALA) formed the Hunger, Homelessness and Poverty Task Force to promote and implement Policy 61 and to raise awareness of poverty issues. This group published recommendations for action, for citizens and for library professionals, in 2001, which urged modification of library policies, better staff training, increased library funding of services for low-income patrons, and outreach to antipoverty organizations in communities (ALA HHP Task Force, 2001). The group continues to raise the issue within the library community, asking if libraries are “criminalizing poor people” by enacting “odor policies” and banning certain types of behavior. They ask us to consider the definition of community, such that if homeless people are a part of our communities, we have a responsibility to serve them (ALA HHP Task Force, 2005).

Observational and editorial articles
Most articles in the American library literature that mention homeless people are of the “problem patron” variety, or offer one person’s observations about the challenge...
of serving the homeless. A *Library Journal* article noted that much like the general public, homeless patrons appreciate internet access provided by libraries. In fact, web access may be crucial to some, if they have no permanent address and no cell phone. In addition to e-mail, homeless people are using the internet for news, social networking, and to store personal files (Rogers, 1999). Some librarians are interested in reaching out to the homeless people in their library services areas. Grace (2000), from Seattle Public Library, encourages other public librarians to be aware of the appropriate resources and advocates in their communities. Giving a library card to a homeless person can be tricky, since s/he may not even have an address to list on the registration form. However, some libraries have decided to work with local homeless shelters and advocacy groups to develop a way for homeless patrons to get cards too. This may require a leap of faith on the part of the library, and perhaps a willingness to lose a certain amount of library materials. However, a library card can provide a feeling of legitimacy for a homeless person who is not welcome in many other public arenas. A former librarian, writing in *Public Libraries*, encountered a homeless woman whose bag had been stolen. While she had likely lost money and other belongings, she was most concerned about losing her library card (Lawry, 2002).

In “What they didn’t teach us in library school: the public library as an asylum for the homeless”, Ward (2007) made many people in the USA aware of this issue for the first time. Ward, a former Assistant Director of the Salt Lake City Public Library System, takes a broader look at how the gaps in our social safety net have resulted in more and more homeless people using libraries. He examines how the current system, in which a troubled homeless person ends up in jail or the hospital, is more expensive than treating chronically homeless with more effective programs. These might include agencies that work to stabilise an individual in housing first, and then offer treatment for addiction or mental illness. Ward also acknowledges that it is hard to force someone into getting help, but concludes that:

\[
[\ldots] \text{when the mentally ill whom we have thrown onto the streets haunt our public places, their presence tells us something important about the state of our union, our national character, our priorities, and our capacity to care for one another (Ward, 2007).}
\]

*Newsweek* acknowledged a growing trend when it reported an average of 100 homeless people a day in Washington DC, Las Vegas, Detroit, and Portland libraries (Dokoupil, 2008). Clearly, the magnitude of the problem creates a strain on staff and other visitors. Public libraries (and a few academic libraries) are often at a loss for how to effectively handle their troubled homeless patrons. They may be struggling to prove their worth in communities and fighting to maintain current services with shrinking budgets. Are libraries simply warehouses of information, or socio-cultural centers that provide for other human needs? Knowing more about the specific ways in which homeless people use libraries can help to inform any discussion of community values, not to mention local, state and national budget priorities.

**Methodology**

In order to assess how and why homeless people use libraries, the author sought feedback from homeless people in the Lansing, Michigan area. Originally, the target area included three contiguous counties around the Michigan capital, but it proved quite difficult to identify homeless individuals in the counties without larger urban areas.
As a result, the majority of data was collected in or near Lansing, Michigan in spring and summer 2009. An anonymous survey containing ten questions was created. The questions gathered minimal demographic information about the respondent, as well as frequency of library usage, and reasons for using or not using libraries. The survey instrument was reviewed by a colleague who currently works with many homeless agencies and individuals. The author also made some minor survey changes based on feedback from the first homelessness event she attended. The survey instrument and research proposal were submitted to, and met with approval from, the institutional review board at Alma College. Survey respondents also were presented with an informed consent statement before they completed the survey.

The author contacted approximately 11 agencies in the tri-county area who work with homeless people. She asked permission to visit and survey their clients. Surveys were filled out in the presence of the researcher and returned within several minutes, but names and other identifying information were not collected. Ultimately, surveys were collected from five shelter facilities. Surveys were also collected at “resource fair” events, such as the Stand Down for Homeless Veterans, and Project Homeless Connect, both in Lansing. In recognition of the value of their time, participants were offered small personal-needs items (for example, deodorant, socks, toothbrush and toothpaste, and so forth). The option of approaching homeless people in libraries was considered, but the author felt it would be difficult to determine who was homeless and who was not, and potentially offensive to assume that someone was homeless. This method also might make homeless patrons suspicious that the researcher would share negative information with library staff, thus resulting in dishonest answers.

Results
The resulting sample consists of 121 completed surveys, collected over the course of five months. This represents approximately 2.7 percent of the homeless population in the Ingham/Eaton/Clinton county area. Over 30 percent of respondents were between 36 and 50 years old, while 13 percent were under 21. Because definitions of homelessness can vary greatly (among researchers and among the homeless themselves), the survey asked respondents to choose “a situation” that best fit them. Responses given are shown in Table I. Nearly 60 percent identified themselves as living on the street or at a shelter. Other categories of homelessness included staying with friends (15 percent), in a transitional living program (14 percent), or temporarily staying in a hotel/motel (0 percent). Responses given are shown in Table I. Nearly 60 percent identified themselves as living on the street or at a shelter. Other categories of homelessness included staying with friends (15 percent), in a transitional living program (14 percent), or temporarily staying in a hotel/motel (0 percent).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q3. Description of living situation</th>
<th>% of respondents</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am living on the street or a shelter</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am staying with friends, or “doubled-up” (couch, floor, etc.)</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am in a transitional living program or other agency program not mentioned</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am temporarily staying in a hotel/motel</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was homeless, but now have permanent housing</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have never been homeless</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I. Collected responses to survey question: which description best fits your situation?
staying at a hotel. Survey responses from participants who did not identify as some type of homeless were not included in the study. Additional demographic information (gender, race), while useful, was not collected, in an attempt to limit the survey to one page.

**Frequency of library visits**

The respondents to the survey use local libraries quite frequently, with approximately 58 percent reporting that they visit libraries at least once a week. Several respondents asked why the survey did not have a “daily” option for this question. Out of 121 respondents who answered this question, 29 (24 percent) use libraries “at least once a month,” 11 (9.1 percent) had used libraries “at least once a year.” Only 9.1 percent reported that they never or “almost never” visit libraries.

**Reasons for using libraries**

Of those respondents that use libraries, the majority (58.4 percent) like to use the library to read for entertainment. Other popular services include using the internet to look up information (38.1 percent), and using the internet to correspond with people (33.6 percent). In the other category, participants said that they use the library to study for classes or do homework, look for a job or a place to live, and check out movies and CDs. Table II shows the distribution of responses in answer to the question, “Why do you use libraries?”

**Reasons for NOT using libraries**

Respondents who do not use the library (only 13 respondents) reported that the library has no materials that interest them, or that they do not feel welcome there. Several people

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q5. Why do you use libraries?</th>
<th>% of respondents</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading books/magazines/newspapers for entertainment</td>
<td>58.4</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading books/magazines/newspapers for specific information</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the equipment (copy machine, typewriter, fax) – note: computer use is a separate category</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the computer for word-processing, typing documents, etc.</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the computer to access the internet, to correspond with people</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the computer to access the internet, to look up information</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the computer to access the internet, to view entertainment material or games</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the computer for purposes not mentioned above</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting and talking with your friends, in person</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending a special program for yourself</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending a special program for your children</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the bathroom for personal hygiene (bathing/shaving/brushing your teeth)</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the bathroom to wash your clothing</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleeping/napping</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelter (safe, warm/cool place to be)</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting community information and referrals, or referrals to social service agencies</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II. Collected responses to survey question: if you currently use libraries, what do you use them for?
do not frequent libraries because they owe late fees, or because they cannot read. One
woman reported that she cannot use the library because her children are too noisy, and
the librarians have threatened to kick them out. The few teens that completed the survey
(mostly at a transitional living program for youth) rarely use libraries, and seemed to
perceive the public library as a place to get access to computers. Since they had computer
access at their shelter, they saw no need to frequent the library.

Ways to increase ease of library use for homeless patrons
When asked what would make libraries easier for them to use, nearly 22 percent of survey
respondents wanted increased operating hours. Other requests included programs on
special topics (like job searching) with 18.3 percent choosing that option, and the
possibility of getting a library card (16.5 percent). Over 15 percent wanted friendlier staff.
Many respondents seemed pleased with libraries as they are, writing comments like “they
do good” or “like they are is okay with me.” Computer access was a popular answer, with
several people requesting more time on the internet. Some suggestions may be outside the
scope of a public library, such as “more housing listings.” Most libraries will have
newspaper classified sections for patrons to review available housing, as well as internet
access to local housing resources. However, social services agencies that specifically work
with landlords and potential tenants may have more update information about local
housing availability. This may be one area in which libraries could offer more referrals.

Information and service needs of homeless patrons
An open-ended question asking what kinds of information and services libraries should
have available resulted in myriad answers. Roughly 30 percent responded quite positively,
with answers like “good as is,” “I like what they have,” and “it is what it is, I don’t expect
any more.” One survey participant acknowledged that “without having caseworkers to
help with jobs, there’s not a lot they don’t have, or have access to, to aid a person.” Others
asked for more specific resources on rental housing, jobs, substance abuse, health
insurance, or legal information. Programs for children, substance abuse support groups,
more computers, free phones, literacy programs and more restrooms were also desired.

Sources of information for homeless patrons
Respondents to this survey (43 percent) seem to be utilising social service agencies as
their primary source of information when they first become homeless. Many also rely on
friends and relatives. Not surprisingly, the number one information need was finding
long-term housing (57.3 percent). Finding a job was also important, with 49.5 percent
choosing that option. Types of information requested in the other category included
information on child support, information on spousal abuse or relationship violence, and
information on how to get furniture and clothing. Table III details the other responses to
this question.

Summary and conclusions
Data was gathered from 121 respondents, rather than the desired 350. Unfortunately, this
sample is not large enough to be statistically significant (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970).
However, this sample is larger than any other published US research on this topic. Many
homeless people use libraries frequently. Homeless parents are particularly appreciative
of library services. Having a safe, clean, free place to spend time with their children must be
invaluable to the struggling homeless parent. Most of those who chose to take the survey seem to feel quite favourably toward libraries, and to understand that libraries and library staff cannot necessarily provide more services or resources than they already are.

Very few participants reported using the library to sleep (2 percent), to get warm or cool (9 percent), or using the library restrooms to wash up (5 percent). As these are typically the “problem areas” in most reporting about homeless people using libraries, the researcher wondered if the sample surveyed just happened to be well-behaved in libraries, or more likely, they were embarrassed to choose this option. The other factor which skews a sample of homeless people, is that those using drugs or with severe psychiatric problems might not be organised enough to get to a shelter or resource fair. While a diverse pool of people without housing was sought, the resulting participants in this study may have been those who are generally high-functioning. This is clearly a limitation of research with homeless populations. Observation of library users might provide more realistic data on bathroom use, sleeping, etc. but again, the researcher would then not be certain that the subjects of observation are indeed homeless.

Internet access seems to be very important to many homeless people. This may be because they can use e-mail to keep in touch with important people in their lives. Or, they may just enjoy the ease of accessing information and entertainment online, like many of us do. Public library patrons, homeless or not, consistently want more time on the library computers. Several participants were very resourceful in finding public access computers, and mentioned other places around Lansing where they could get access, such as the lobby of a hospital. Often, computer usage in public libraries is tied to a person’s library card. A patron may need a library card to log-on to a public access computer and, even then, will be limited in how long they can stay. Policies regarding library cards (for homeless patrons) vary from library to library. The largest library system in the tri-county area is Capital Area District Library (CADL). CADL participates in the yearly “point-in-time” count of the homeless in Lansing, and their Head Librarian participates in the local Homeless Resolution Network. Their main library offers services specifically geared toward homeless patrons, like a literature rack with information about local social services, and a mid-day movie programme, scheduled so that the patrons can be back to the overnight shelters in time for check-in. They have also worked out an arrangement with local shelters, whereby a homeless patron can get a library card without a current ID if they bring a letter from the shelter where they are staying. Many of the libraries in less urban areas did not respond to requests for their

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q11. Information needs (now or in future)</th>
<th>% of respondents</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finding emergency shelter</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding long-term housing</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits/entitlements (for example, medicaid, food stamps, SSI)</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding a job</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health matters (including sexual health)</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life-skills (cooking, budgeting, etc.)</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal matters</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling/mental health</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance abuse</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table III. Collected responses to survey question: do you need information on any of the following (now or in the future)?
policies regarding homeless patrons. It is likely that no formal policies have been put in place, as they may not encounter many homeless patrons.

The results of this study could be more broadly applied to homeless populations in general if a larger sample was surveyed. In future, researchers might wish to survey homeless people that they find in libraries, if they can find a diplomatic way to do this.

This study also raises the issue of the perception of “deserving” homeless (children, teens, and families) versus “undeserving” homeless (single adults). It is easier to make a case for library services for homeless parents, than it is for single adult men, for example. An article in *Urban Library Journal* reviews library services for homeless children, parents, and teens (Terrile, 2009). The author recommends library services specifically for this population, and gives numerous examples of “model” programmes throughout the USA. These include paperback collections and story-tellers in homeless shelters, and outreach librarians who visit teen shelters and facilitate book clubs. Some libraries bring their summer reading programmes to shelters for the children staying there, and a Las Vegas library created a Homework Help Center specifically for homeless youth (Terrile, 2009). Tax-payers may more willingly share library resources with a homeless child, than with a disorderly homeless man. One must question, however, whether libraries are meant to serve all citizens within their service area, or just the socially acceptable ones.

Some public libraries are creating innovative programmes to employ their adult homeless patrons, such as the Philadelphia library that pays the homeless to monitor restrooms (Dokoupiil, 2008). More recently, San Francisco public libraries have hired “the country’s first full-time psychiatric social worker” to assist their homeless patrons (Knight, 2010). A partnership with the San Francisco Department of Public Health enabled the library to employ a trained professional to handle complaints from staff and patrons about the behaviour of homeless patrons. Security guards or police officers are still called if necessary. The social worker also supervises “health and safety associates” – formerly homeless people who undergo 12 weeks of training and vocational rehabilitation, and then become employed by the library to do things like monitoring the restrooms (Knight, 2010). Lilienthal (2011) summarises current measures by some US public libraries in serving their homeless patrons in *Library Journal* article. In addition to the models mentioned above, he cites technology training, book clubs, and partnering with local universities and professional associations, as possible avenues to better relationships with homeless patrons. A notable programme that has met with success in Zagreb (Croatia) involves the provision of computer and internet training, psychosocial support, and job-seeking skills to homeless people. Zagreb city libraries have offered these workshops in their facilities as well as in local shelters. Library advocacy has also led to free legal advice for homeless patrons, through Zagreb University (Bunic, 2012).

Ideally, communities would have enough funding and services to effectively care for their homeless citizens through social service agencies or, even better, more affordable housing and a strong social safety net would mean the end of homelessness altogether. Until then, libraries may be left to their own devices in deciding how to handle their homeless patrons. Obviously, most public libraries do not have the creative energy or the funding to support programmes like those mentioned above. Many of the homeless people who took part in this study seemed to understand that libraries are doing the best they can, and that they cannot really offer more than they already do to homeless populations. If respondents were not overwhelmingly positive in their comments about libraries, most were at least neutral. Very few participants recounted
negative experiences with libraries. Homeless people will continue to use public libraries for a range of needs, and homeless advocates will continue to push local and state governments to provide better services for their homeless constituents.

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Appendix. Questionnaire on library use, for individuals without permanent housing

Please spend a few moments to complete this questionnaire to help with research about how homeless people use the library. Your participation is voluntary and your answers will be kept confidential. The researchers will only share information, if at all, based on group response, and only with those libraries that are truly interested in improving service to homeless patrons. Please answer all questions below:

(1) How old are you? (please circle one answer)
   (a) 16-21
   (b) 22-35
   (c) 36-50
   (d) 51-70
   (e) 71 or older

(2) Which description best fits your situation? (please circle one answer)
   (a) I am living on the street or at a shelter
   (b) I am staying with friends, or “doubled-up” (couch, floor, etc.)
   (c) I am in a transitional living program or other agency program not mentioned
   (d) I am temporarily staying in a hotel/motel
   (e) I was homeless, but now have permanent housing
   (f) I have never been homeless
   (g) Other (please explain): ________

(3) How often do you visit libraries in your community? (please circle one answer)
   (a) At least once a week
   (b) At least once a month
   (c) At least once a year
   (d) Almost never
   (e) I do not visit libraries
(4) *If you currently use libraries, what do you use them for? (circle all appropriate answers)*
   If you do not currently use libraries, skip to question 5.
   (a) Reading books/magazines/newspapers for entertainment
   (b) Reading books/magazines/newspapers for specific information
   (c) Using the equipment (copy machine, typewriter, fax) – note: computer use is a separate category
   (d) Using the computer for word-processing, typing documents, etc.
   (e) Using the computer to access the internet, to correspond with people
   (f) Using the computer to access the internet, to look up information
   (g) Using the computer to access the internet, to view entertainment material or games
   (h) Using the computer for purposes not mentioned above
   (i) Meeting and talking with your friends, in person
   (j) Attending a special program for yourself
   (k) Attending a special program for your children
   (l) Using the bathroom for personal hygiene (bathing/shaving/brushing your teeth)
   (m) Using the bathroom to wash your clothing
   (n) Sleeping/napping
   (o) Shelter (safe, warm/cool place to be)
   (p) Getting community information and referrals, or referrals to social service agencies
   (q) Other (please fill in the blank) ________

(please complete both sides)

(5) *If you do not currently use libraries, why do you not use them? (circle all appropriate answers)*
   (a) The library has no materials that interest me
   (b) I am not aware of the library’s location, or what types of services they have
   (c) I do not feel welcome at the library, or I have been asked not to use the library
   (d) I have no transportation to get to the library
   (e) Not applicable (I do use libraries)
   (f) Other (please fill in the blank) ________

(6) *What would make libraries easier for you to use? (circle all appropriate answers)*
   (a) More staff to help find things
   (b) Friendlier staff
   (c) More comfortable chairs/tables
   (d) Greater selection of books/materials
   (e) Programs on special topics (for example, job searching)
   (f) Increased operating hours
   (g) More convenient locations, closer to me
   (h) Being able to get a library card
(i) Other (please fill in the blank) ______
(j) Nothing would make the library easier for me to use/I do not know

(7) What kinds of information do you feel the libraries in your community should have available?

(8) What programs or services do you feel the libraries in your community should have available?

(9) When you first became homeless, where did you go for information? (circle all appropriate answers)
   (a) Friend
   (b) Relative
   (c) Internet
   (d) Library/books
   (e) Newspaper
   (f) Yellow pages
   (g) Social service agency or shelter
   (h) Other (please fill in the blank) ______
   (i) I went to no one for information

(10) Do you need information on any of the following (now, or possibly in the future)? (please circle all that apply)
    (a) Finding emergency shelter
    (b) Finding long-term housing
    (c) Benefits/entitlements (for example, Medicaid, food stamps, SSI)
    (d) Finding a job
    (e) Health matters (including sexual health)
    (f) Life-skills (cooking, budgeting, etc.)
    (g) Legal matters
    (h) Counseling/mental health
    (i) Substance abuse
    (j) Other (please fill in the blank) ______

Thank you for participating in this survey. Make sure you hand in the completed survey to the researcher.

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