Findings
Survey Results
88% Staff who say the social worker helps patrons access resources they didn’t know about before
44% Staff who feel the social worker has altered the way they respond to patrons
49% Staff who say the social worker helps patrons feel more comfortable in the library

Organizational Context
Pikes Peak Library District
• Serves population of over 650,000 in El Paso County, CO
• 15 library locations, about 480 employees
• $35 million budget

Decision to Add Social Worker
• Added full-time social worker in 2018
• Came amid increasing complaints about downtown library
• Wanted to fill a gap in traditional library services

Professional & Scholarly Background
The Intersection of Social Work & Library Science
• First library social worker hired in 2009
• Substantial research on shifting role of libraries and librarians
• Librarians not adequately trained to assist social services needs

Library Need for Social Services
• Libraries are community anchors and providers of reliable information, and as such must fill information need
• A measurable increase in patrons experiencing homelessness
• Library staff is unable to meet specialized needs of patrons experiencing homelessness with current training

Methods
Survey of Frontline Staff
An 18-question anonymous survey was sent to all frontline staff via email, asking questions about general work environment to set benchmarks, then about the social worker’s impact.

Expert Interviews
Interviews were conducted with the Chief Librarian and CEO; Chief Safety, Social Services, and Security Officer; and the full-time Social Worker. Questions focused on how the position has changed perceptions of the organization and delivery of services.

Interview Findings
• The role and mission of libraries are changing, and social workers fit within that new role
• More communication is needed internally and externally about the position and reasoning behind it
• Adding a social worker was specifically intended to assist library staff with difficult patron interactions, fill a gap in traditional services
• The addition of the social worker has improved perceptions of and experiences within the library

Takeaways and Recommendations
Areas of Positive Impact
• The social worker is effective for patrons, stepping in where library staff lack expertise and training
• The social worker allows PPLD to provide better service as an organization
• Patrons can now access more resources than they could before
• Patrons are receptive to the social worker and feel more comfortable at the library now
• Positive perceptions of PPLD have increased

Recommendations for Improvement
1. Staff need more information on how to refer patrons to the social worker.
2. More information about the reason for adding a social worker is needed internally and externally.
3. The social worker is at capacity and needs additional assistance.

Conclusion
The social worker has had the intended positive impact on Pikes Peak Library District. Patrons can access more information and resources, while all library users feel more comfortable in the library space. Staff now feel more equipped to fill the specialized information need of patrons experiencing homelessness.

To further that positive impact, it is important that staff are educated on how to use the social worker to further assist their patrons. It is also important that another social worker be added to staff to fill the need existing across the district.

“We Keep Discovering New Ways that it Helps”: A library social worker can address increased and unique needs of modern public libraries

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