



SOCIAL WORK INTERNS IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

***KDLA
MARCH 2, 2023***

SPEAKERS

- Beth Wahler, PhD, MSW- Founder/Owner of Beth Wahler Consulting and Director of the UNC Charlotte School of Social Work
- Rebecka Bloomer, PhD, MSSW- Research Manager, Department of Health Promotion and Behavioral Sciences, School of Public Health and Information Sciences
- Ahmed Farah, MSSW- Program Coordinator for Immigrant Services, Louisville Free Public Library

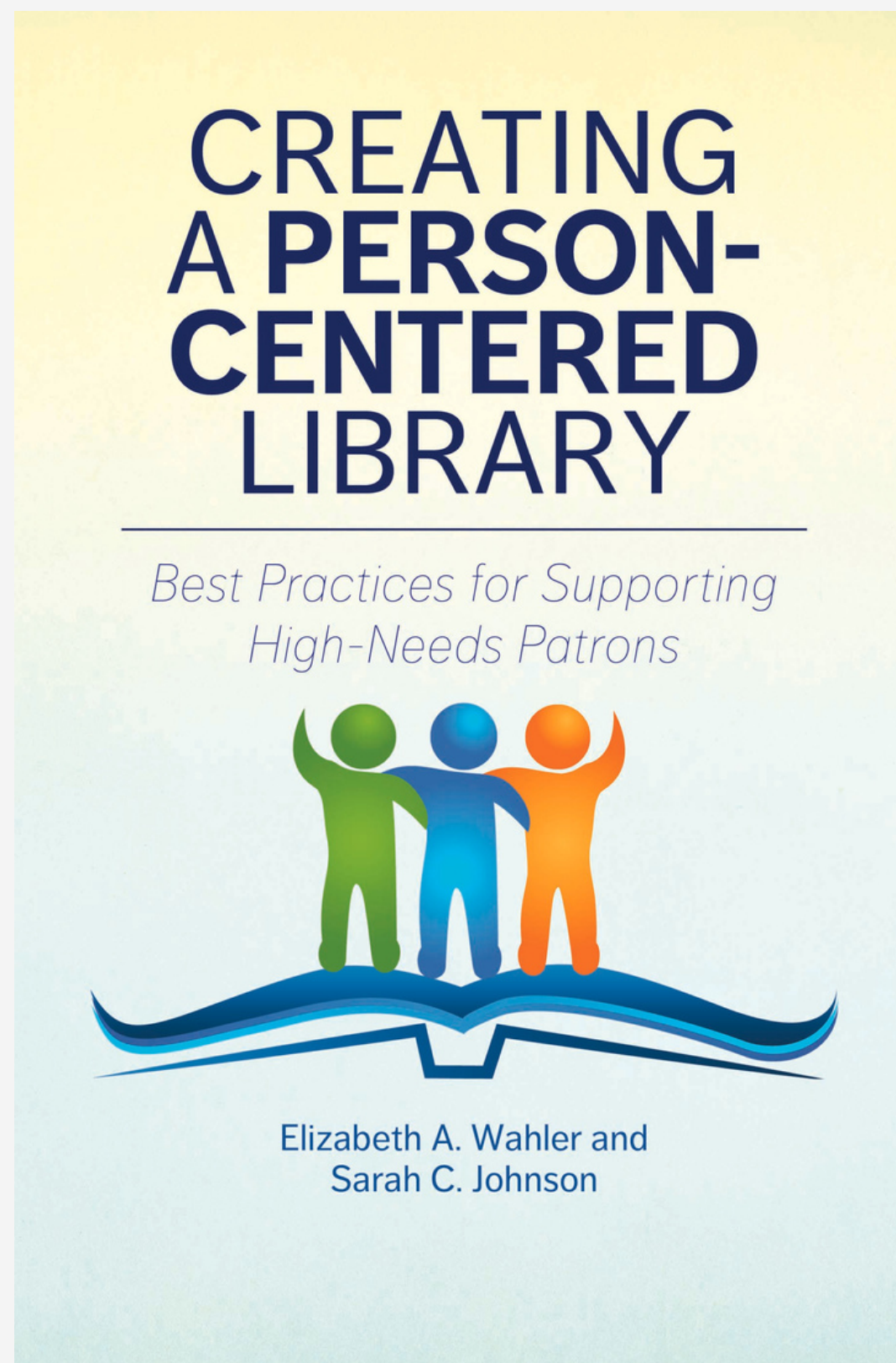
ABOUT ME:



- Social work professor, consultant, researcher, and trainer
- Research focused on public library patrons' psychosocial needs, library staff needs, and social work/public library collaborations to address these needs
- Consulting business focused on individual library needs assessments and personalized plans/support, trauma-informed librarianship, library-based social service program design/development, program evaluation, and training/professional development
- SW practice experience with poverty-related needs, substance use disorders, mental health, and other barriers to economic stability and mobility



FORTHCOMING BOOK IN SUMMER 2023



Published by Libraries Unlimited

ABOUT ME:



- Social work educator, consultant, researcher, and trainer
- Research focused on "third spaces" and community well-being, social justice youth development, immigrant and refugee communities and using community-based participatory action methods.
- Practice experience with youth and families in community-based programs, Out of School Time, intersection of social work and education.



ABOUT ME:



- Ahmed Farah is a master's level social worker with experience providing direct services in traditional and non-traditional social work settings.
- SW practice experience with children and families as a caseworker in DCBS. Worked with those experiencing mental and behavioral challenges and substance use disorder in unhoused and chronically homeless populations.
- Works as the immigrant and refugee coordinator. Provide outreach and programming for foreign-born populations, trainings related to engaging in culturally sensitive practices with international communities.



OBJECTIVES

- Discuss the roles of social workers in libraries
- Explain how social work students can help the library with patron and staff needs
- Describe common challenges of library-based internships
- Provide information on how to partner with your local school of social work to host a social work student in the future
- Share lessons learned from the Louisville Free Public Library's first social work practicum placement this year



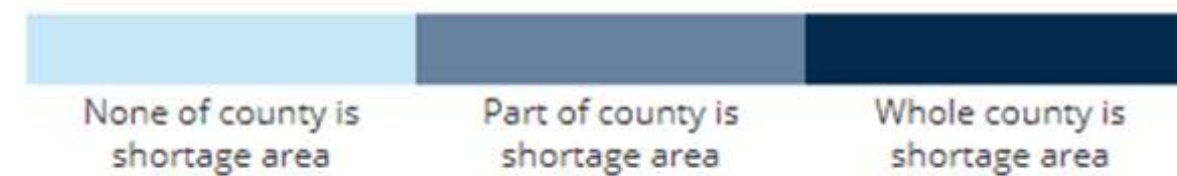
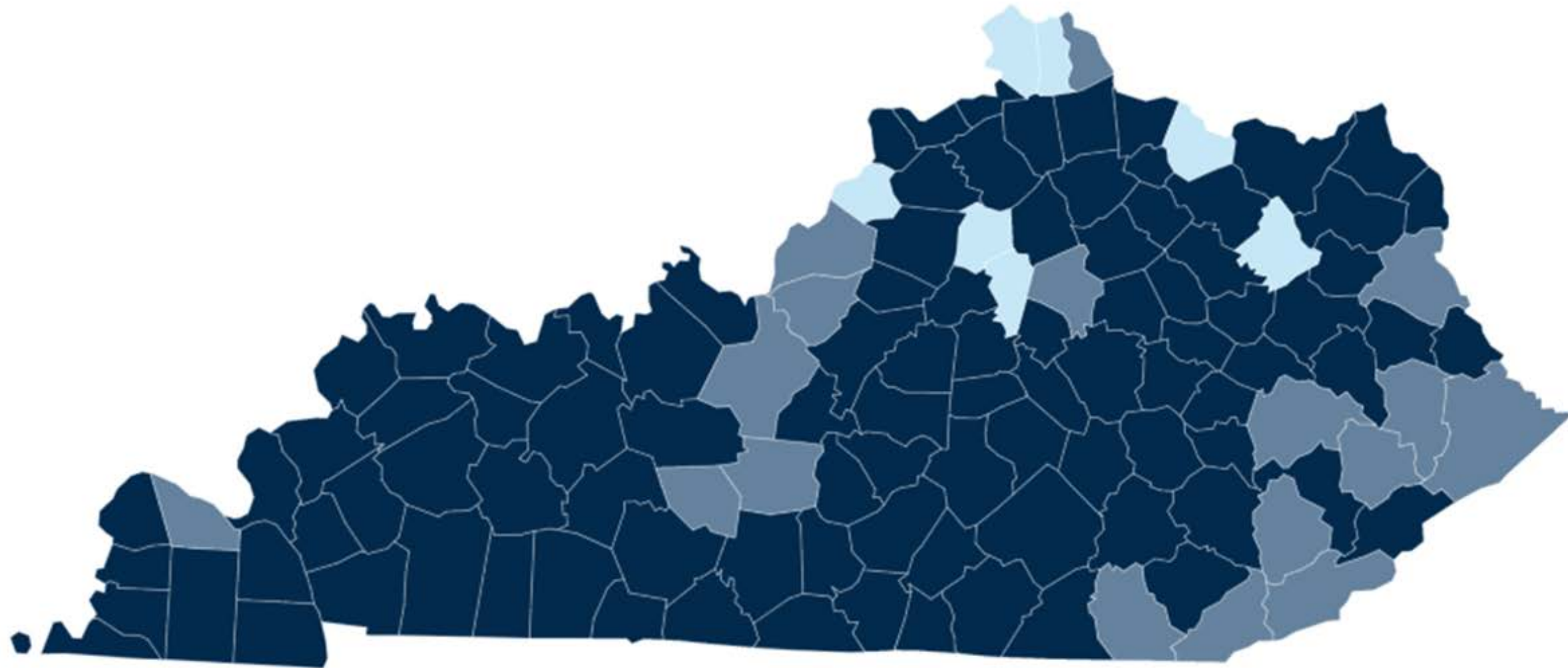


***OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL
WORK IN THE LIBRARY***

CHANGING LIBRARY NEEDS

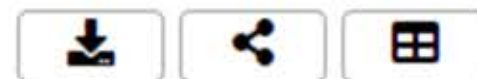
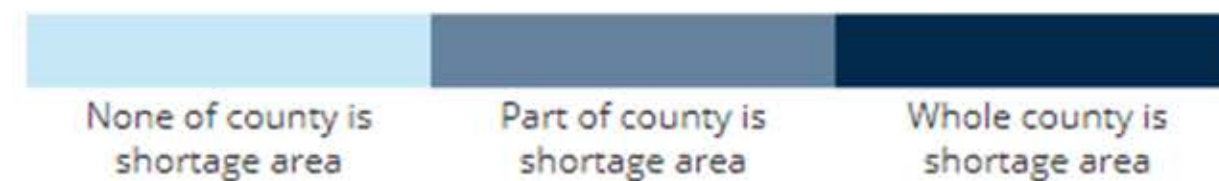
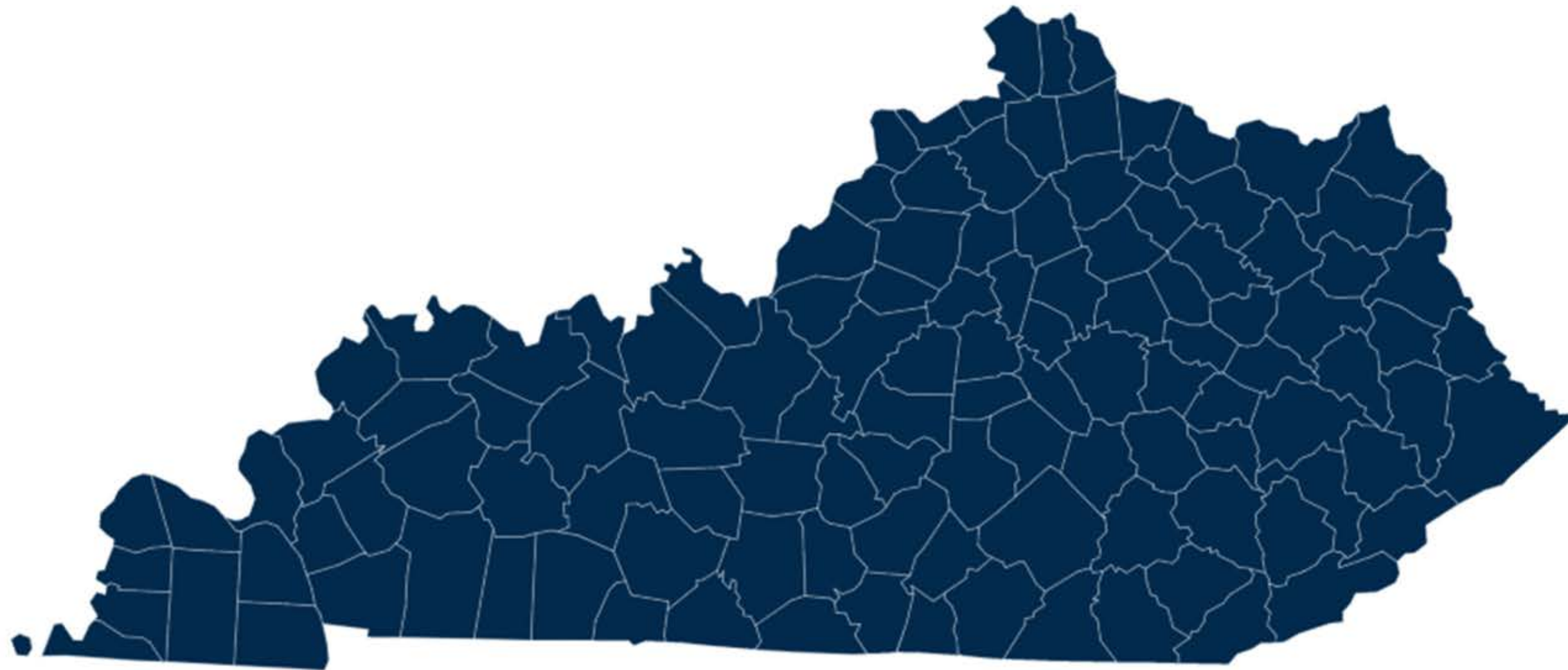
- **Historical changes affecting public libraries:**
 - **Deinstitutionalization in the 1960's brought increases in people experiencing homelessness and/or mental illness (Cart, 1992; Torrey, Esposito, & Geller, 2009).**
 - **The Great Recession and mortgage crisis in 2007-2009 brought an increase in people experiencing challenges related to poverty (Jaeger et al., 2014).**
 - **Shortage of emergency shelter beds (Henry et al., 2018)**
 - **Increasing costs with stagnant wages**
 - **Minimum wage has been \$7.25/hour since 2009**
 - **Estimated current living wage for Indiana for a single adult with 0 children = \$15.79/ 1 child = \$29.43/ 2 children = \$36.35 (MIT Living Wage Calculator, 2022)**
 - **Increasing municipal statutes that criminalize homelessness (National Law Center for Homelessness and Poverty, 2019)**
 - **The COVID pandemic**

CURRENT FACTORS IN KENTUCKY IMPACTING LIBRARIES: HEALTHCARE



Source: [data.HRSA.gov](https://data.hrsa.gov), January 2022.

CURRENT FACTORS IN KENTUCKY IMPACTING LIBRARIES: MENTAL HEALTH



Source: [data.HRSA.gov](https://data.hrsa.gov), January 2022.

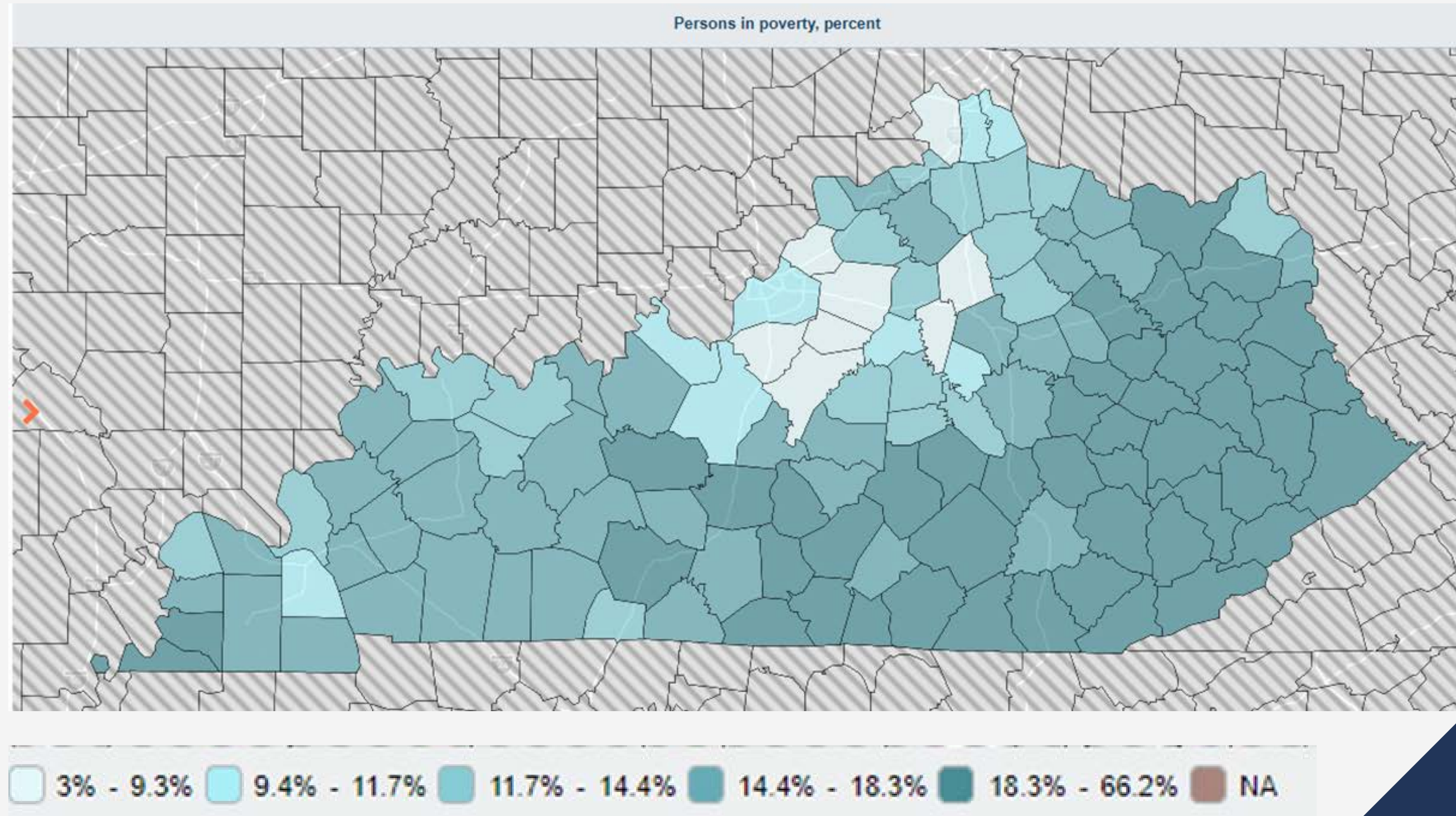
CURRENT FACTORS IN KENTUCKY IMPACTING LIBRARIES: HOUSING

- **Annual point-in-time estimate from 2020 found an estimated 4,011 individuals homeless on any given day in Kentucky (US Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2022)**
- **Nearly 19K children in Kentucky public schools experienced homeless during the 2020-2021 school year (National Center for Homeless Education, 2022)**
- **There's a shortage of rental homes across the state available for low income households at or below the poverty guideline or 30% of the area median income (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2022). KY needs nearly 80K more affordable rental homes to keep up with the need.**
- **Of Kentucky residents with housing, 30% of renter households (170,779 households) in the state are considered extremely low income (making less than 26,200 for a family of 4), and 63% of extremely low income renters pay more than half of their income on housing (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2022)**

CURRENT FACTORS IN KENTUCKY IMPACTING LIBRARIES: POVERTY

STATEWIDE % OF PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY (CENSUS.GOV)- 14.9%

FEDERAL POVERTY RATE IN 2021 (HHS.GOV); FAMILY OF 4 MAKING \$26,500 OR LESS



PSYCHOSOCIAL NEEDS OF PATRONS



- **Any psychological or social/environmental factor associated with chronic stress or strain or poor health outcomes in general populations:**
 - **Social isolation**
 - **Mental health problems**
 - **Substance abuse**
 - **Poverty-related needs:**
 - **Housing instability**
 - **Food insecurity**
 - **Difficulty with transportation**
 - **Financial needs**

PSYCHOSOCIAL NEEDS OF PATRONS

- **Psychosocial needs of public library patrons have been increasing in recent decades**
- **Top areas of patron need (Pressley, 2017; Provence, et al., 2021; Torrey et al., 2009; Wahler et al., 2021)**
 - **Homelessness or unsafe/unstable housing**
 - **Mental health challenges**
 - **Substance use/overdose**
 - **Poverty-related needs**
- **Areas of need vary based on housing status (Provence et al. 2021; Wahler et al., in press)**
- **These needs are expected to continue increasing due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Hertz-Palmor et al., 2021; Horowitz et al., 2021; NAEH, 2020)**
- **Although frequency of needs varies, rural and suburban libraries are experiencing the same categories of unmet patron needs (Wahler, 2022)**
- **Many libraries have added programming, services, and/or collaborations to respond to or address these needs**

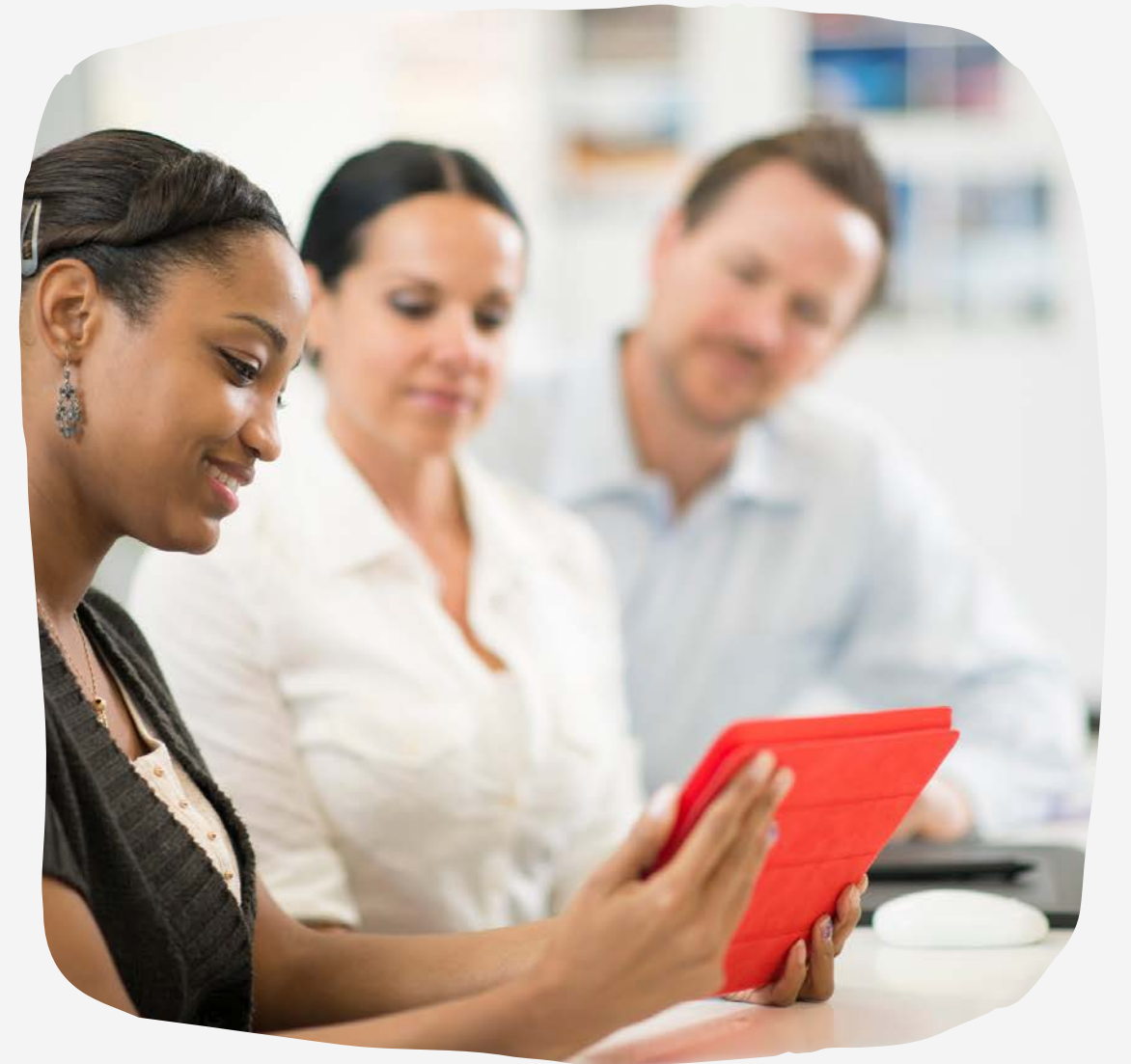
LIBRARY WORKER TRAUMA

- **Front-line library workers from all types of libraries (urban, suburban, and rural) report high rates of trauma from workplace incidents (Fisher, 2022) and over half report experiencing violence in their job (Wahler, 2022).**
- **Incidents include verbal abuse, physical aggression and attacks, threats of violence, sexual harassment, threatening with weapons, and destroying library property**
- **These incidents have increased since the COVID-19 pandemic began**
- **Some library staff experience symptoms of PTSD or experience worsening of a pre-existing mental health condition**



SOCIAL WORK IN THE LIBRARY

- There's a growing movement to partner social work services with public libraries across the US and Canada (see Anderson et al., 2012; Aykanian et al. 2020; Johnson, 2019; Johnson, 2021; Soska & Navarro, 2020; Williams, 2016; Wray, 2009; Zettervall & Nienow, 2019)
- Many different models
- This is NOT to say that public libraries are to become social service organizations!
- Focuses instead on a different type of information needs, and "relationships as the new reference collection" (Zettervall & Nienow, 2019)



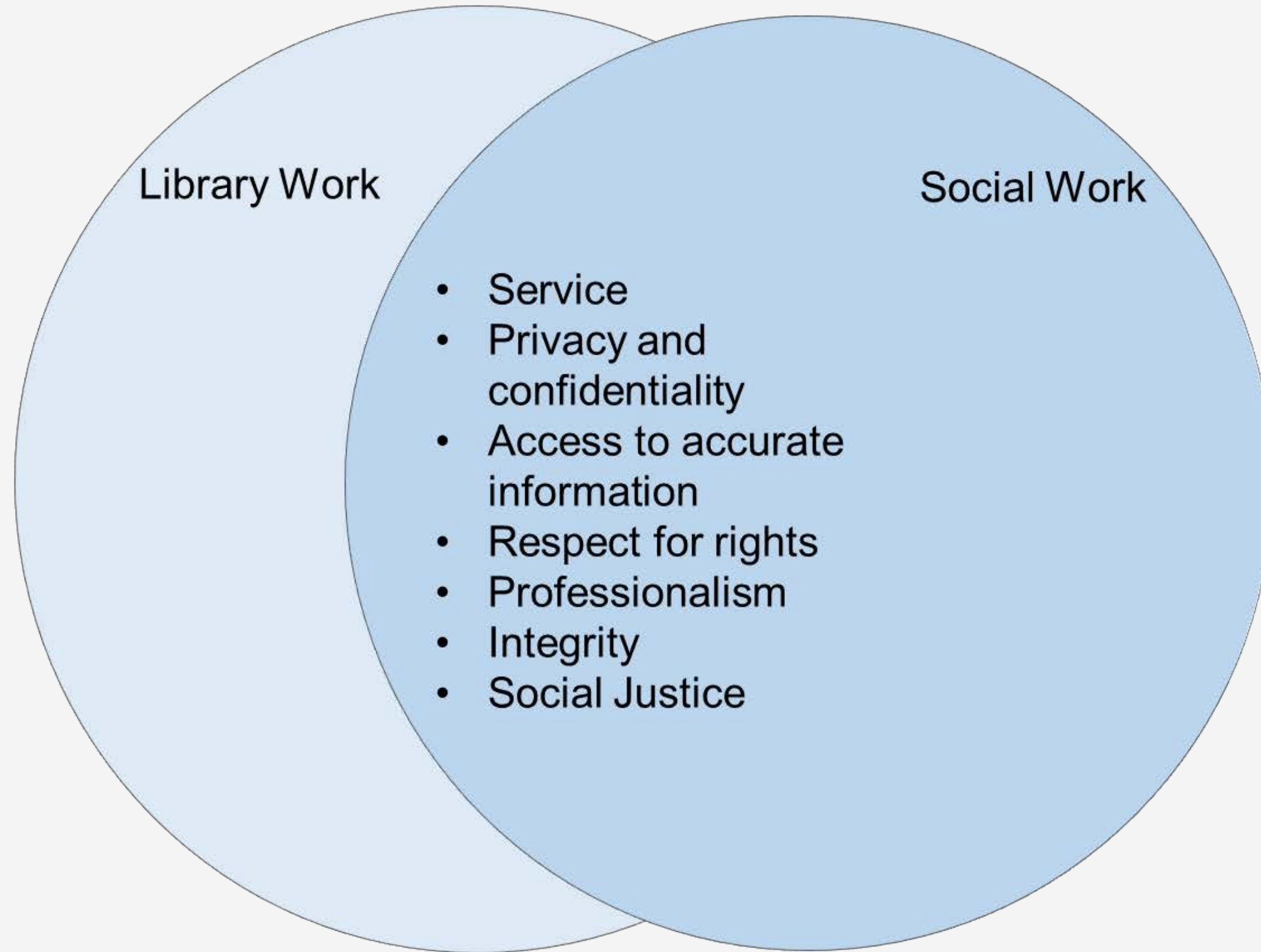
SOCIAL WORK

“The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. A historic and defining feature of social work is the profession's dual focus on individual well-being in a social context and the well-being of society. Fundamental to social work is attention to the environmental forces that create, contribute to, and address problems in living..”

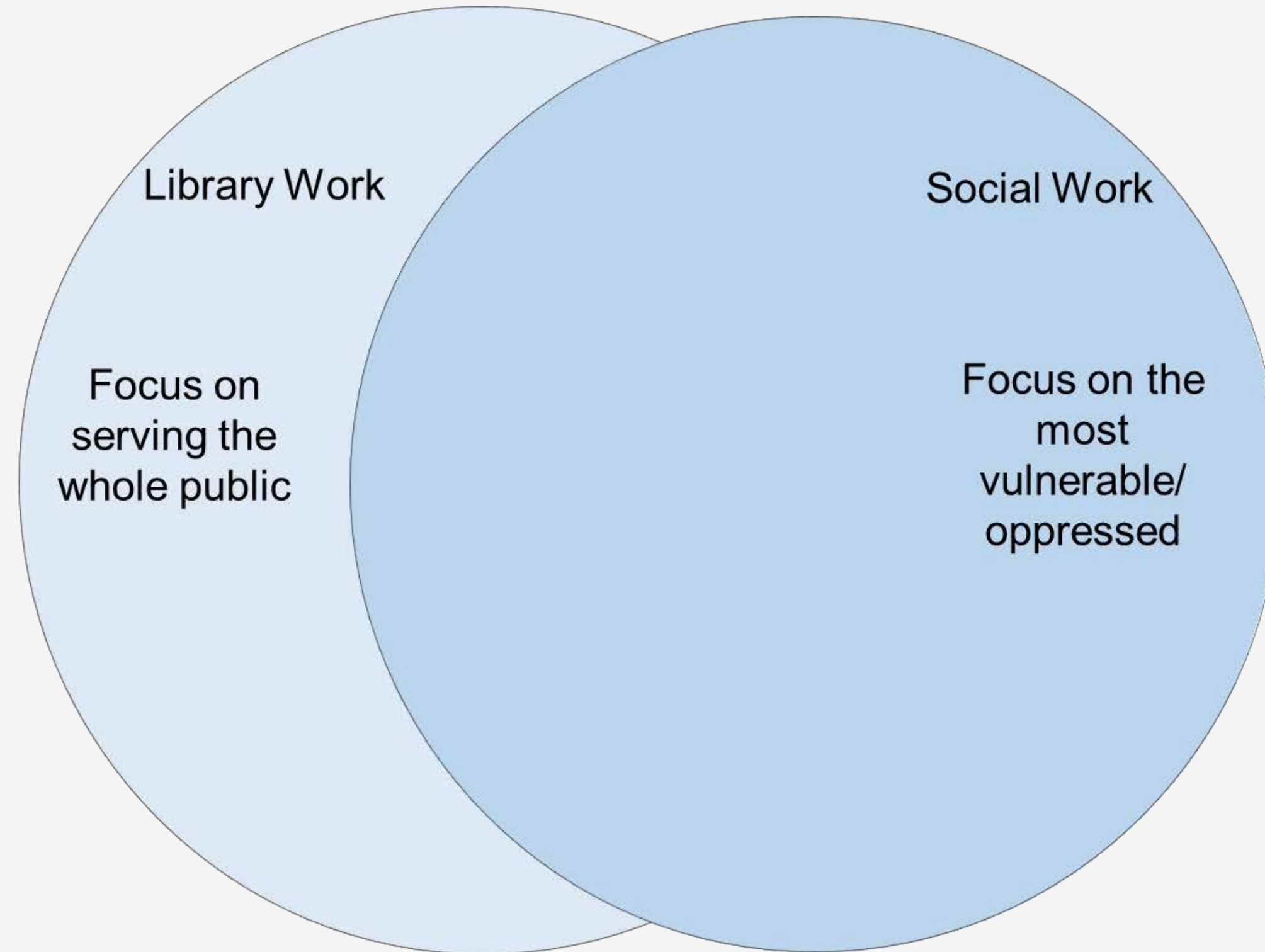
--National Association of Social Work, 2021 (3)



OVERLAPPING PROFESSIONAL VALUES



COMPLEMENTARY PROFESSIONAL VALUES





***ROLES OF SOCIAL
WORKERS IN THE
LIBRARY***

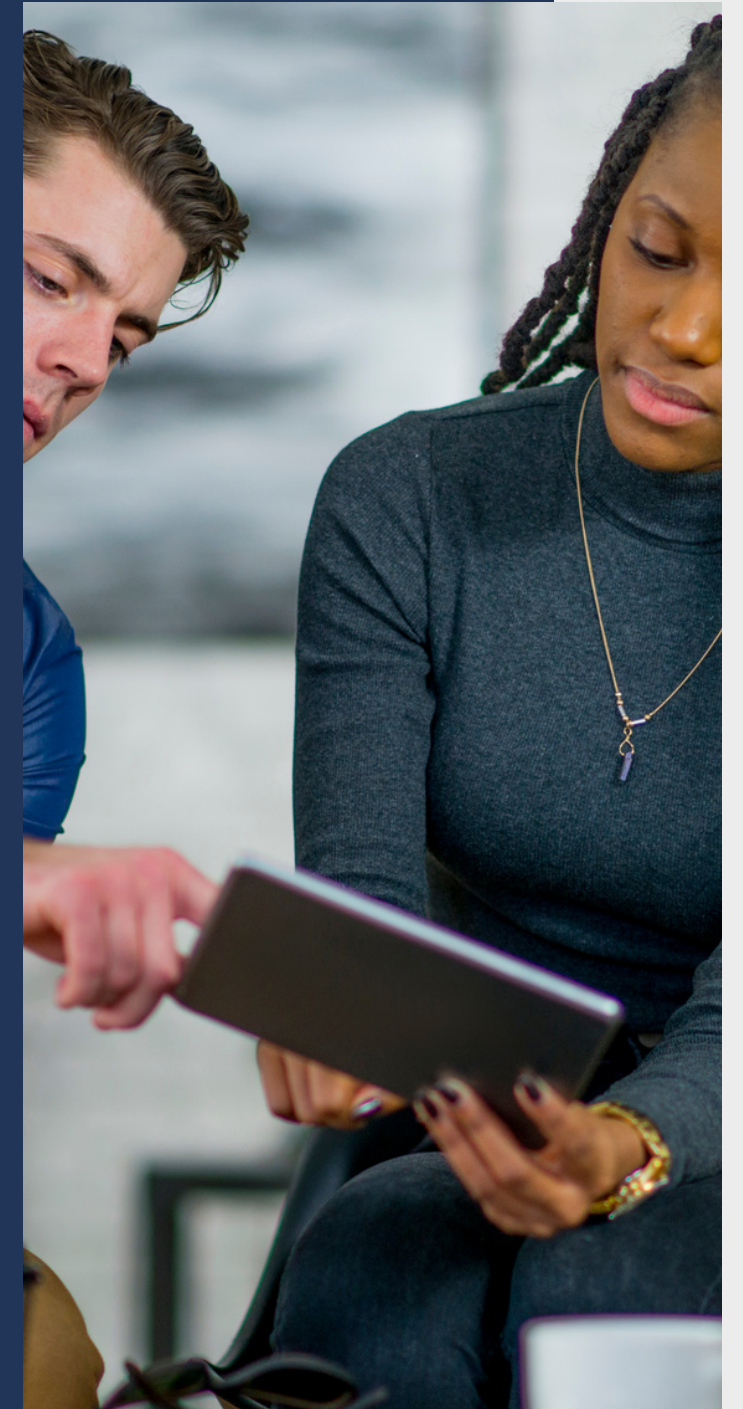
SOCIAL WORK AND LIBRARIES



- Why are social workers and public libraries great partners?
 - Libraries attempt to be accessible to everyone, are stigma-free environments, try to provide safe spaces for everyone, and are knowledgeable about a variety of resources and sources of information.
 - However, library workers are trained to primarily connect people to resources for their immediate needs/questions.
 - Social workers are a good fit for these environments due to training in:
 - Working across the micro-to-macro continuum of services and in generalist environments
 - Looking for and attempting to address the root cause of a problem
 - Working to foster independence and being wary of things that might create dependence
 - Using clinical skills, even if not working in clinical environment
 - Assessment
 - Stages of Change
 - Motivational Interviewing
 - Brief interventions

SOCIAL WORK IN THE LIBRARY

- Sample of activities from the micro-to-macro continuum of social work services in libraries:
 - Micro- Work with individual patrons, such as assisting with information and referral, assessment, crisis intervention, case management, or individual-level advocacy
 - Mezzo- Work with groups of people, such as facilitating programming/workshops for patrons, non-clinical/mutual aid support groups, book groups on psychosocial needs, or staff training sessions
 - Macro- Work at the organizational or community level, such as identifying gaps in services in the community, participating in advisory groups or task forces to address community-level needs, advocating for issues on the community level that impact individuals in the local area, creating mechanisms for increasing the capacity of the library to support patrons with psychosocial needs, or analyzing policies which disproportionately impact specific groups of people



EXISTING MODELS OF COLLABORATION

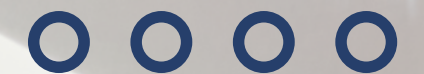


Libraries have designated personnel to maintain resource lists and relationships with community partners

Community partners hold “office hours” or conduct outreach in the library

Social work students complete internships in the library and work on time-limited projects

Libraries hire or contract with on-site social workers





SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS

- Frequently a first step for a library considering social services
- Benefits:
 - Inexpensive
 - Students can work across the micro-to-macro continuum doing many of the things mentioned earlier
 - Can gather data that can be used to support funding proposals for a permanent social worker
- Challenges:
 - Frequent turnover
 - Gaps between student placements
 - Students cannot operate independently
 - Social work supervisor is needed
 - Many libraries may not have a social work program close to them



EXISTING COLLABORATIONS



FT SW



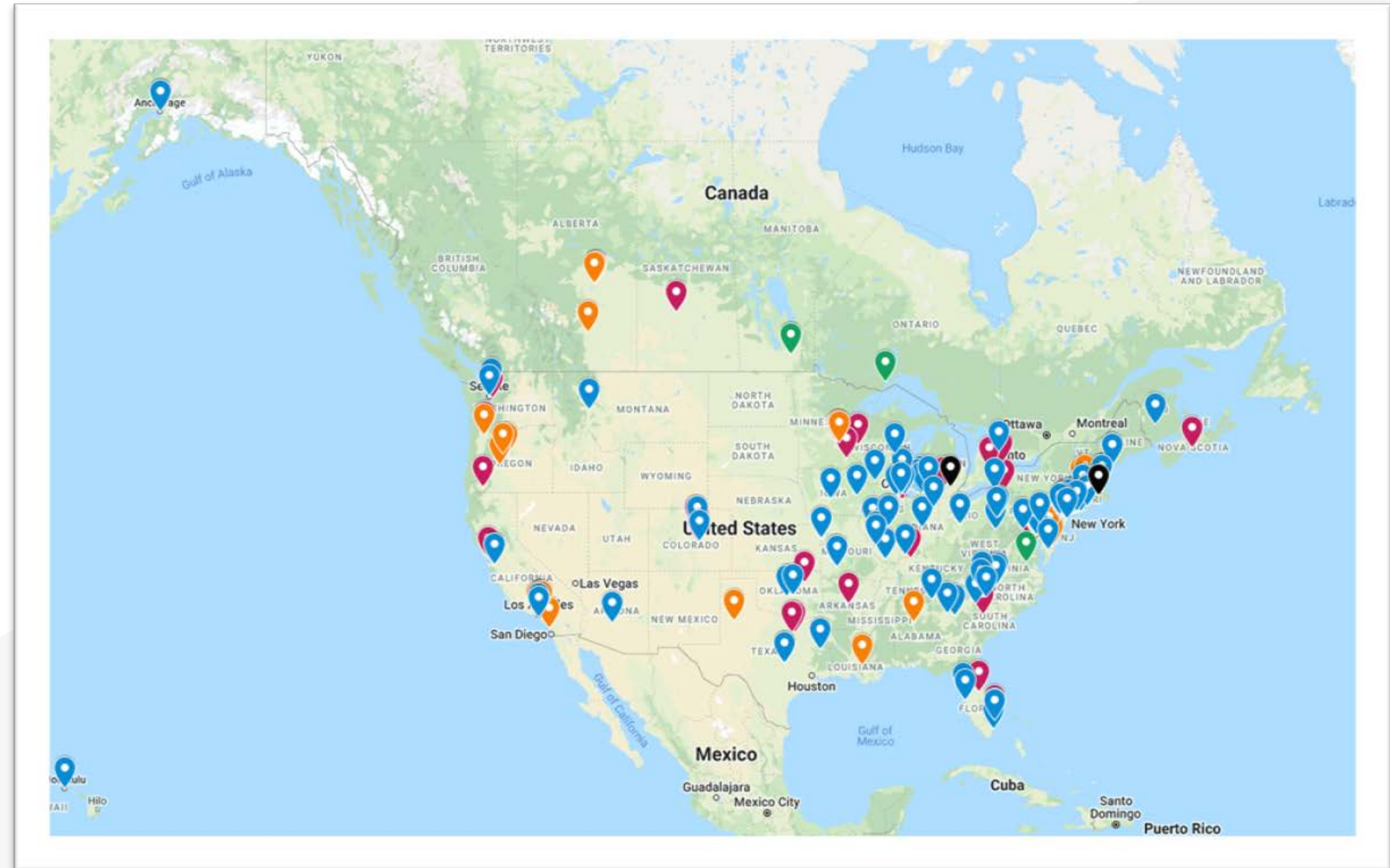
Office Hours



PT SW



SW Students



Source: www.wholepersonlibrarianship.com



COMMON MISPERCEPTIONS

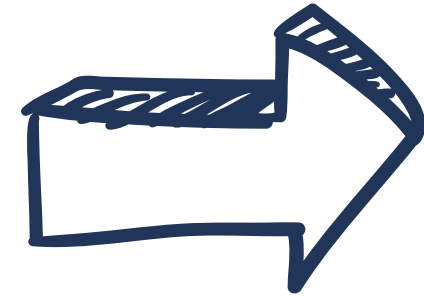
- Once a social worker is in the library, there will be no more patrons experiencing homelessness (or other identified problems)
- The social worker/student can provide security for the library
- Staff can send all of their "problem patrons" to the social worker/student so that person can handle all of their needs
- The social worker/student can fill in for other library staff as needed
- Hosting a social work student is the same as having a paid social worker in the library



***EXPERIENCES FROM
LOUISVILLE FREE PUBLIC
LIBRARY***

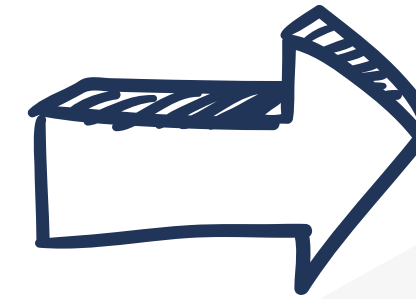
PROJECT OVERVIEW

Phase 1: Initiate Collaborative Process



- 1) IDENTIFY DESIRED OBJECTIVES OF**
- 2) ESTABLISH STRUCTURE AND ROLES/RESPONSIBILITIES**
- 3) SEEK FUNDING**
- 4) IDENTIFY STUDENTS THAT FIT WITH PROJECT LEARNING AVAILABLE**

Phase 2: Orientation and Onboarding



- 1) ONBOARD STUDENTS TO PROJECTS**
- 2) INTRO STUDENTS TO LIBRARY SPACE (INTEGRATION)**
- 3) STUDENTS SHADOW**
- 4) MEET WITH COMMUNITY AGENCIES SERVING SIMILAR POPULATIONS)**

Phase 3: Project Engagement

- 1) IDENTIFY AGENCIES FOR REFERRAL**
- 2) CREATE INTAKE/SCREENING PROCESS/SCOPE OF SERVICES**
- 3) DEVELOP CONTACT METHODS**
- 4) SEEK REFERRALS FROM COMMUNITY PARTNERS**
- 2) COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT—RESEARCH EXISTING TOOLS, DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT SURVEY**

STUDENT TASKS (MACRO)

- Identify organizations and services available and develop a “menu” of resource navigation services
- Create trauma informed policies
- Complete literature review to identify barriers and use findings to inform grant applications
- Assess primary areas of need for formal needs assessment process
- Find relevant and culturally appropriate/reliable/valid tools. Co-create survey instrument.
- Co-create questions for focus groups
- Provide resources to library staff
- Develop policies, procedures, and practices for resource navigation services (including development of documentation strategies)
- Co-write grant application for project expansion

STUDENT TASKS (MICRO)

- Attend and co-facilitate English Conversation Practice for immigrant/refugee patrons
- Shadow case managers at community organizations to gain familiarity with various strategies employed with client populations of interest (including homeless orgs and immigrant/refugee resettlement agencies and mental health providers)
- Attend meetings with community partners
- Provide resource navigation for patrons
- Co-facilitate focus groups

STUDENT CHALLENGES



- Limited availability to serve patrons- can't serve as many people with 10-15 hours a week as full-time staff
- Limited private space to serve clients- there are few rooms to discuss private information safely
- Lack of understanding- library staff have different training(s) and are unaware of the role, knowledge, and expertise social work students hold
- Lack of integration- no established referral process, name tag for students, signage, or area for patrons to know of the program being offered



KEY TAKE AWAYS



- ***CREATING PARTNERSHIPS/COLLABORATIONS PRIOR TO REFERRALS IMPORTANT***
- ***ESTABLISHING ROLES AND STRUCTURE OF PLACEMENT***
- ***ONBOARDING STUDENTS AND LIBRARY STAFF***
- ***IMPORTANCE OF ADMINISTRATIVE BUY-IN AND SHARED VISION***
- ***GOALS OF LIBRARY, GOALS OF STUDENT, GOALS OF SW PRACTICUM MUST ALIGN***
- ***IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN TASK AND FORMAL FIELD INSTRUCTOR***





WHERE TO START- HOSTING SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS



CONSIDER YOUR GOALS

- **What do you hope a social work student can accomplish in your library?**
- **What are you prepared to offer the student?**
- **Social workers are trained to work across the micro-to-macro continuum of services and in “generalist” environments**
 - **Most of the current media attention is on micro-focused work, but libraries can get the most impact from a macro-focused student**
- **If possible, start with a primarily macro-focused placement prior to adding a micro-focused student because that student can help with nearly everything else covered in this presentation!**



INITIATING THE PLACEMENT



- **Contact School of Social Work Field Director or Program Director**
- **Clarify timelines for the placement**
- **Allow time to negotiate the affiliation agreement**
- **Determine logistics of the placement:**
 - **Space for student**
 - **Phone and computer access**
- **For micro-focused work, determine how documentation will be stored**





PREPARING STAFF

- Placements don't work well if staff are not mostly on board- you need staff buy-in!
- Helpful to:
 - Explain existing models of social work/library collaborations
 - Clarify nonclinical nature of the placement and the perceived role of the library with psychosocial needs
 - Help staff understand current gaps in services in your community
 - Ensure staff understand the purpose of the practicum and role of the student



SELECTING THE STUDENT



- **Fit is important! It's better to have no student than to have a student who's a poor fit for a library placement.**
- **Students need to understand this is not a clinical placement**
- **Ideally, students will have:**
 - **Knowledge of library patrons' psychosocial needs and how social work can be helpful with those needs**
 - **Some experience with direct practice/case management or administration focused on similar needs as your patrons**
 - **Familiarity with community resources**
- **Ideally, students will be:**
 - **Able to act relatively independently and think on their feet**
 - **Interested in program development/design**
 - **Self-motivated**
- **These are not good placements for students without maturity and previous experience**





SUPERVISION

- Clearly identify a single library supervisor
- The school of social work will assign a qualified social work supervisor, ideally from an agency serving a similar population as your library, but this person may need time to learn the library context and will not be there every day with the student
- The two supervisors should work to communicate consistently with one another to ensure similar messaging to students
- Coordinate problem-solving as needed
- Understand that problems will arise and EVERYONE is learning through this process, including the student, the library supervisor, and the social work supervisor!



ORIENTATION



- **Orient them to the library's mission and values**
- **Allow time for orientation prior to meeting with patrons, if they will be doing micro-focused services**
- **Share resources focused on social work within a library setting:**
- **Growing body of peer-reviewed scholarship on library social work**
 - **www.swlibraryinterns.com- website focused on library-based social work practicum placements**
 - **Whole Person Librarianship book, website, and email list by Sara Zettervall and Mary Nienow (www.wholepersonlibrarianship.com)**
 - **Orientation resources found in toolkit document (www.SWinthelibrary.com/additional-resources)**





LEARNING REQUIREMENTS

- Student will have to develop a learning plan/agreement with your assistance
- Need “generalist” activities across the micro-to-macro continuum. Examples include:
 - Micro- Work with individual patrons, such as assisting with information and referral, assessment, case management, or individual-level advocacy
 - Mezzo- Work with groups of people, such as facilitating programming/workshops for patrons, non-clinical/mutual aid support groups, book groups on psychosocial needs, or staff training sessions
 - Macro- Work at the organizational or community level, such as conducting needs assessments, planning library services to meet patrons’ psychosocial needs, identifying gaps in services in the community, participating in advisory groups or task forces to address community-level needs, partnering with administration to plan mechanisms for increasing the library’s capacity to support patrons with psychosocial needs, or analyzing policies which disproportionately impact specific groups of people



REQUIRED COMPETENCIES FOR ALL SOCIAL WORK PROGRAMS (CSWE, 2015)



Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior

Social work students understand the values of the profession, use tools for ethical decision making, demonstrate professional demeanor in behavior, appearance, and communication, use technology ethically and appropriately, and use supervision and consultation to guide professional judgment and behavior.



Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice

Social work students understand the importance of diversity and difference in shaping life experiences and engage clients and constituencies as experts on their own experiences. Students understand how oppression and marginalization impact experience. Students practice self-awareness and self-regulation to manage personal biases in working with diverse clients and groups.



Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice

Social work students understand that all people share the same fundamental human rights, and actively engage in practice to advocate for human rights and social, economic, and environmental equity and justice.



Engage in Practice-Informed Research and Research-Informed Practice

Social work students understand research methods and how to apply these methods to evaluate practice, policies, and services. They also know how to evaluate interventions based on available evidence from multidisciplinary sources.



Engage in Policy Practice

Social work students identify policies that impact service delivery and access to resources, and advocate for policies that advance human rights, equity, and justice. They understand how policy impacts human rights and social justice as well as available services and service access. They understand their role in policy development and implementation.



Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Social work students value human relationships, and use relational skills to effectively engage with clients or systems at all levels of micro-to-macro practice



Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Social work students apply critical thinking and theory to assess clients and systems at all levels of micro-to-macro practice, and use assessment information to develop collaborative goals and guide interventions. They understand assessment methods and how to use them with diverse groups of people, organizations, and communities.



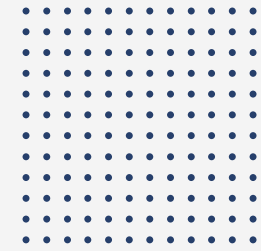
Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Social work students apply theory and knowledge of various practice techniques at the micro-to-macro levels to implement evidence-based interventions, work collaboratively towards desired outcomes, and advocate for and empower clients.



Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Social work students use appropriate research methods to evaluate interventions, outcomes, and program processes and apply findings to improve effectiveness at all levels of practice.



EVALUATION



- **Supervisors and student should focus on collaborative and continuous quality improvement:**
 - **Is this working as anticipated?**
 - **What are the challenges and how can they be reduced?**
 - **Where are the barriers to success (however you define this) and how can they be reduced?**
 - **What can be learned from this experience that will inform the next student placement?**
- **Evaluation resources can be found in toolkit document at www.swinthelibrary/additional-resources**
- **If there is a plan to try to hire a full-time social worker in the future, think about what data the student(s) can collect to help your library make this case to your board or funders**



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Toolkit Documents:
 - [Guidance for Hosting a Social Work Student in Your Library](#)
 - Contains:
 - Sample Job Descriptions of Student Interns
 - Suggested Interview Questions
 - Sample Learning Plan Activities
 - Orientation Materials
 - Glossary of Common Social Work Terms
 - [Measuring the Impact of a Library-Based Social Work Student](#)
 - [Public Library-Based Social Work Field Placements: Guidance for Public Libraries Planning to Become a Social Work Practicum Site](#) by E.A. Wahler, J. D. Ressler, S. C. Johnson, C. Rortvedt, T. Saecker, J. Helling, and M. Williams in Public Library Quarterly (open access article)
 - [SWlibraryinterns.com](#)
 - [WholePersonLibrarianship.com](#)
 - [SWintheLibrary.com](#)





QUESTIONS?



THANK YOU!

CONTACT US:



Beth.Wahler@SWintheLibrary.com
www.SWintheLibrary.com



Rebecka.Bloomer@louisville.edu



Ahmed.Farah@lfpl.org

