

I. Research Proposal Cover Page

Title of Proposed Research: Linking Vulnerable Populations to Social Services: A Public Library's Role

Abstract: Many patrons visiting Hillsborough County Public Libraries are faced with unmet social service needs which can include, but are not limited to, low socioeconomic status or risk factors like homelessness, physical or mental disabilities, and cultural and sexual minorities. These vulnerable populations seek out libraries for help meeting these needs despite the existence of community organizations that do this work. This mixed methods study intends to address this problem by linking social workers to the library through consultations with patrons at three Tampa library locations. Following a consultation, patrons will be asked via survey to provide demographic information and describe their psychosocial needs. Researchers will facilitate monthly focus group interviews consisting of social workers and library staff together for greater conversation and collaboration. Researchers believe that by linking social services to vulnerable patrons using Hillsborough County Libraries, patrons will receive greater access to social services information and assistance preventing further marginalization of these vulnerable populations.

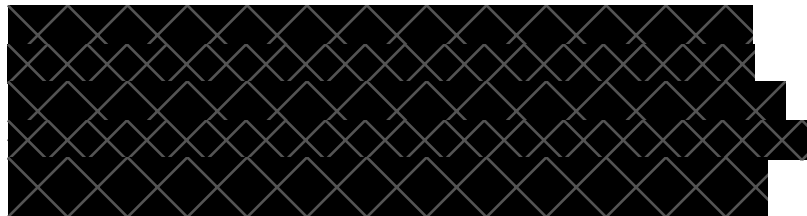
Project Start Date: 05/01/2020

Project Completion Date: 07/31/2021

Amount Requested: \$176,000.00

Proposal Submission Date: 04/25/2020

Principal Investigators' Names & Affiliations:



II. Statement of Need and Significance of Study

A. Needs Assessment

Libraries strive to provide equal access to information; however, patrons rely on their libraries to fulfill their social service needs in addition to their informational needs. Despite existing community programs, many patrons turn to libraries because of the stigma associated with seeking help, location of available services, and minimal knowledge of how to utilize them. For this proposal, vulnerable populations are defined as patrons whose overall well-being is affected due to low socioeconomic status or risk factors such as homelessness, physical or mental disabilities, and cultural and sexual minorities. This problem of linking vulnerable populations to social services can be addressed at public libraries via collaboration with social workers and librarians. More research is needed in this emerging field because few studies have been conducted regarding social work in libraries or with social workers and each library's vulnerable population and their needs looks different from other libraries in practice. Access to information is a core value of library science so addressing emerging methods to provide greater access by vulnerable populations is necessary.

This mixed methods proposal will address how to best provide social services outreach to vulnerable populations in Tampa in three branches of the Hillsborough County Public Library Cooperative. In this proposal, a survey will be used to learn which types of services vulnerable population patrons require and then interviews with library staff and community social service organizations will be conducted to determine how best to provide these services.

B. Literature Review

Public libraries are held up as sanctuaries by vulnerable populations because they feel



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welcomed and safe while receiving access to information (Kelley, Riggelman, Clara, & Navarro, 2017; Lloyd, 2020; Luo, Estreicher, Lee, Thomas, & Thomas, 2012). Library protective factors include patrons' access to "resources, relationships, and opportunities that mitigate risk" (Lloyd, 2020, p. 52). Risk factors are associated with negative outcomes at "biological, psychological, family, community, or cultural level[s]" (Lloyd, 2020, p. 52). Vulnerable populations' risks can be offset by protective factors through an emerging practice which involves partnerships between public libraries and social services and seeks to address social exclusion while engaging in social justice strategies (Kelley et al., 2017). Both fields share similar core values including community "access, advocacy, engagement, development, wellbeing, and inclusion" (Johnson, 2019, p. 15 quoting Miles, 2015, p. 51). Despite budget restrictions affecting implementation (Giesler, 2017), providing outreach programs at libraries helps vulnerable communities receive social services (Richter, Bell, Jackson, Lee, Dashora, & Surette, 2019).

The needs of a community must be addressed to determine which library interventions to utilize. Interviews and surveys conducted by Kelley et al. (2017) found patrons request social services resources for children, basic needs, family support, homelessness, mental illness, and domestic violence. The National Association of Social Workers (2018) defines social work as "helping people obtain tangible services;...helping communities or groups provide or improve social and health services..." (as quoted in Lloyd, 2020, p. 52). Integrating social work into a library will assist in developing staff resilience, empowering patrons, and connecting the library to the community through new collaborations, creative problem solving, and empathetic customer service (Lloyd, 2020). Libraries are ideal settings to implement social work practice because patron interactions will be more comfortable in its familiar space (Kelley et al., 2017).



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Since 2009, there has been a growing interest in libraries hiring outreach workers with vulnerable populations' experience (Johnson, 2019; Lloyd, 2020). Collaboration requires building relationships with pre-existing community groups (Lloyd, 2020). For example, one university collaborated with its local library to launch a pilot program which enabled social workers and library staff to provide consultation services for communities at risk (Luo et al., 2012). MSW students also serve as a viable option for libraries that cannot afford a social worker or want to test this type of outreach; at least 40 branches around the country have MSW interns who work on needs assessments, library staff training, and programming (Johnson, 2019).

Social workers can train librarians in soft skills which empower them to handle social work situations on their own (Lloyd, 2020). Further, emphasizing behavior-focused policing of patrons versus targeting a specific population improves policies and allows patrons to be treated inclusively (Dowdell & Liew, 2019; Lloyd, 2020). This mental and cultural shift begins with libraries understanding their patrons, and then developing inclusive policies that guide staff in working with vulnerable populations. (Lloyd, 2020). Daily challenges of procedural consistency, coordinated communication, and proactive training must be addressed (Giesler, 2017). Due to minimal research studies on this topic, the Public Library Association has only begun to identify effective practices (Lloyd, 2020). Substantive research is needed to replicate and generate new studies to determine vulnerable populations' needs (Kelley et al., 2017).

C. Significance of the Study

Libraries are perceived as welcoming institutions that strive to fulfill their communities' information needs. Implementing social work services through staff training by social workers or MSW students, one-on-one consultations, and referrals will help prevent marginalization as well



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as support social justice. A variety of issues may be addressed including, but not limited to: poverty, unemployment, education, housing, immigration, domestic violence, and addiction. This study will take an innovative approach through community partnerships in order to connect vulnerable populations to the social services they desperately need.

D. Research Goal and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to determine how to best incorporate social services in a public library to serve patrons from vulnerable populations.

RQ1: What social services are vulnerable populations seeking from a library? Is it more comforting to receive social services in a public library setting?

RQ2: How will coordination of library staff and social workers improve social services to vulnerable populations?

RQ3: What tasks will each be assigned in order to achieve the proposal's goal?

III. Research Design

Self-administered questionnaires as well as focus group interviews will be administered to determine how to effectively incorporate social services in a public library setting. Library patron respondent surveys will allow library staff and social workers to pinpoint those who are considered vulnerable populations, and focus interviews for library and social service agency staff will be administered in a group, making room for conversation and collaboration.

A. Questionnaire Survey

a. Sampling

Potential population respondents for the survey will include those currently patronizing and/or residing near three Tampa libraries geographically adjacent to downtown Tampa: the John



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F. Germany Public Library, Robert W. Saunders, Sr. Public Library, and West Tampa Branch Library. These libraries were selected because of their urban location and demographic data; their zip codes are 33602 for the Germany and Saunders libraries and 33607 for West Tampa. Additional zip codes 33603 and 33605 will be included for population purposes to bring its estimated total to 77,608. The population sample design will be single stage and will be confidentially conducted using libraries' patron lists to contact them by email using a systematic sampling process. Patrons will also be selected via convenience sample amongst those utilizing the three libraries to allow for including patrons without addresses or who would not otherwise respond to written contact. The survey population will be stratified before selecting the sample to ensure vulnerable populations are sufficiently represented in the survey. There will be an estimated 383 people sampled. This estimation was based on a Qualtrics Sample Size Calculator entering the population size (77,608) and a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error.

b. Instrumentation

Patron feedback in consultation with social workers will be gathered via self-administered survey questionnaires. The following are key areas that will be addressed in the survey: helpfulness of services, professionalism of social workers, professionalism of library staff, needs fulfilled by consultation, and areas that need improvement. To ensure reliability and validity of collected results, researchers collaborated together in determining what and how many items the instruments will contain. Parallel-forms reliability will be measured for survey questionnaires. Two sets of questionnaires will be developed to measure the same concepts in the five key areas, and then the results will be correlated to determine whether both questionnaires actually measured the key areas the researchers wanted to address. A portion of the survey



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questionnaire (60%) will be constructed in a Likert scale format with the scale anchors measuring levels of agreement from 1 being strongly disagree to 7 being strongly agree. The 40% of the remaining format will be questions that focus on unconditional positive regard - meaning that they will be phrased in a way that encourages socially undesirable answers. Library and social service agency administrators will evaluate the two sets of questionnaires prior to their distribution to promote face validity. This in turn will increase its construct validity so that researchers can ensure that accurate measurements are being retrieved.

B. Focus Group Interview

a. Sampling

The group interview population will include library staff from the three libraries listed as well as social workers and supervisors from key social services agencies serving the targeted zip codes. The sample will have a single stage design and will be a non-random, targeted group based on whether individuals fall within either the library staff or community social worker categories. The population will not be stratified. Eight to twelve individuals will be selected as the sample; there will be equal proportions of library and social services individuals sampled.

b. Instrumentation

Focus group interviews will be conducted with library staff and social workers to gather qualitative data on both experiences and attitudes on areas of satisfaction and areas that need improvement. These interviews will be moderated by one of the researchers to ensure that the discussion remains on topic and that everyone has the opportunity to participate. Focus groups will be held monthly following the weekly distribution of survey questionnaires; there will be 8-12 participants as the researcher leads the discussion. To estimate reliability researchers will



implement the inter-rater method by collecting participants' answers at the end of each discussion and analyzing their responses. The areas that the group collectively agree on will ensure reliability because of consistency in responses. Validity will be measured by the credibility of participants' roles and interactions with vulnerable populations. This will increase the validity or trustworthiness of the study because results can be generalized to other public libraries who chose to implement social services.

C. Pilot Study

Researchers will administer a pilot study for six months at West Tampa Branch Library, one of the selected branches, due to its poverty level of 22.2%. A month before the pilot study begins, researchers will create various forms of promotional material, such as print and electronic posters, to advertise the new service to the vulnerable population of the Old West Tampa area. Researchers will compile emails using patron library cards to develop a randomized personal invite list for electronic promotion, and print advertisements will be displayed in the library, social service offices, and the Old West Tampa community to announce consultations to those who do not have internet access. A six-month time frame for the pilot study has been selected because of the structure of consultations and focus group interviews. Consultations will be held weekly on Wednesday evenings and Saturday afternoons; once a patron has concluded a consultation the social worker will then administer a survey questionnaire allowing them as much time and privacy as they need. Researchers will also ensure anonymity so patrons can be comfortable sharing their true input on library services. Participants (library staff and social workers) will meet at the end of each month for focus group interviews to discuss their experiences and attitudes. Once the pilot study has concluded, researchers will analyze the



results to determine optimal generalization of implementing social services in the Germany and Saunders libraries as well as other public libraries for vulnerable populations.

IV. Project Resources

A. Personnel

This project will have 5 principal co-investigators who will be responsible for supervising the project, creating survey and focus group instruments, creating and distributing promotional materials, coding the data, facilitating focus group interviews, and interpreting the results. A data manager will be utilized for data coding and providing data analysis. Three graduate assistants (GA) from the University of South Florida's School of Information will assist both social workers and library staff; one GA will be assigned to each of the three project libraries. Two social workers will be assigned to each project library; six total will be part of the project. These social workers will be selected via current partnerships with community organizations based on expertise with vulnerable populations and will work with project staff by conducting consultations with patrons.

B. Timeline

Task	Design Phase (5/2020-12/2021)	Month 1-3 (1/2021-3/2021)	Month 3-6 (4/2021-6/2021)	Analysis (7/2021)
Formulate Strategic Plan				
Communication with project manager	X	X	X	X
Develop and review evaluation plan (short-term/long-term objectives, library staff and social worker duties/responsibilities, mission statement)	X			



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• Identify sample libraries	X			
• Consult with social workers/social service agencies	X			
• Consult with library staff at selected branches	X			
Instrument Development Revisions				
• Participant Questionnaires	X			
• Focus Group Interviews	X			
• Promotional materials (physical & digital format)	X			
• Compile email addresses from patron library accounts (consult with library administrators)	X			
• Meet with library staff & social workers involved (review roles/responsibilities, determine time slots, address any questions/concerns)	X			
Data Collection				
• Site visits	X	X	X	
• Obtain Quantitative Data (Ex:Participant questionnaires)		X	X	
• Obtain Qualitative Data (Ex: Focus group interviews)		X	X	
Data Analysis		X	X	X
Monthly Report Completion		X	X	
Final Report Completion				X



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C. Budget

Task/Person completing	Rate of payment	Total
Co-investigators write survey instrument 1	\$30/hr x 4 hours = \$120	\$120.00
Co-investigators write survey instrument 2	\$30/hr x 4 hours = \$120	\$120.00
In 1st month, co-investigators write focus group instruments for each of six focus groups	\$30/hr x 3 hours = \$90 \$90 x 6 focus groups = \$540	\$540.00
Monthly focus groups: Facilitator and 2 notetakers roles assumed by co-investigators	\$30/hr x 3 hours x 6 months = \$540	\$540.00
Dataperson	\$30/hr x 2 hours/wk x 4 wks x 12 months = \$2,880	\$2,880
Graduate Assistant at each library for weekly check in	\$12/hr x 5 hrs per week x 4 weeks x 12 months x 3 = \$8,640	\$8,640
2 Contracted Social Workers for 12 months. Two days a week.	\$70/hr x 12 hrs per week x 4 weeks x 12 months x 2 = \$80,640	\$80,640
4 Contracted Social Workers for 6 months. Two days a week.	\$70/hr x 12 hrs per week x 4 weeks x 6 months x 4 = \$80,640	\$80,640
Advertising - flyers	\$30/hr x 4 hrs = \$120	\$120.00
Paper, office supplies	\$560	\$560.00
Computers,Copier/Scanner use	\$1200	\$1200.00
Total		\$176,000.00

D. Others

Supplies: Paper, Advertising-Flyers

Equipment: Computers, Copier/Scanner Use

Facilities: Social Workers' offices, 3 Libraries: John F. Germany, Robert W. Saunders, Sr., & West Tampa Branch Libraries.



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Appendix A - Survey Questionnaire

Help Us Help You

Faced with patron needs, the Hillsborough County Public Library is seeking ways to provide social services to our patrons. It is our intention to accumulate information from these surveys to determine the best resources that are inclusive of all patrons. These questions will identify concerns, especially those of vulnerable populations. Implications support the establishment of social services offered in this library system to maximize wellness opportunities for our patrons. All responses are anonymous and all identities are protected.

What is your age?

- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55-64
- ☐ 65+

What is your gender?

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Prefer not to say



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What is your race?

- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- ☐ White, Not Hispanic
- ☐ Hispanic or Latinx

What is the highest level of education you have achieved?

- ☐ 8th Grade or Less
- ☐ Some High School
- ☐ High School/GED
- ☐ Some College, No Degree
- ☐ Associate's Degree
- ☐ Bachelor's Degree
- ☐ Graduate or Professional Degree
- ☐ Prefer Not to Answer



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What is the primary reason you come to the Hillsborough County Public Library?

- ☐ Library Services (ex: Reference, Interlibrary Loan)
- ☐ Library Programs (ex: Children's Story Time, Adult Book Club)
- ☐ Special Services (ex: Computer & Tech Classes, Social Services)
- ☐ Events (ex: Board Game Tournament, Free Tax Help)
- ☐ Other: _____

What social service(s) does your household seek assistance with?

- ☐ Transportation
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Job Seeking/Employment
- ☐ Affordable Housing
- ☐ Drug Addiction
- ☐ Mental Health
- ☐ Financial Assistance
- ☐ Hunger
- ☐ Homelessness
- ☐ Healthcare
- ☐ Childcare
- ☐ Disability
- ☐ Veterans
- ☐ Special Needs
- ☐ Immigration
- ☐ Other (Please describe)



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What factors are contributing to your underserved community?

Choose ▼

The library's location made meeting with a social worker more accessible.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

The social worker was able to help me identify my social service needs.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

The social worker provided assistance in a timely manner.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

The library staff were willing to answer all my questions.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree



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The library staff were helpful in locating informative materials related to transportation.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly Disagree	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Strongly Agree

What social services do you need but are not available in your community?

Your answer _____

What barriers have prevented you from accessing local social services?

Your answer _____

My social services needs were fulfilled by the consultation with the social worker.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly Disagree	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Strongly Agree



Member Contribution

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Leslie Walbolt: Located three references for proposal. Created a literature map and outline for the Literature Review. Drafted and revised the Literature Review for Drafts 1 and 2. Contributed to Needs Assessment and Research Questions. Added a series of questions to outline our

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Research Design section. Drafted the Population and Sampling Section (including Appendix 1) of the Research Design for Draft 2. Revised Draft 1 as per Dr. Yoon's comments regarding the definition of vulnerable populations and research questions. Brainstormed reliability and validity. Edited and added to the Survey Design Section for Draft 2. Revised Draft 2 as per Dr. Yoon's comments regarding the research design section and removal of the Appendix spreadsheet. Drafted the Personnel section and revised the Abstract. Answered budget questions. Created and recorded audio for vulnerable populations, statement of need, and literature review slides.

