Belleville Area District Library Board
Regular Meeting Agenda
February 13, 2024 at 7:30 PM

The Belleville Area District Library Board will meet in person in the library's 2nd floor Conference Room.

Agenda:

1. Pledge of Allegiance
2. Roll Call: Cichewicz, Fleming, Hughes-Grubbs, Juriga, Peters, Priest, Stoudemire
3. Approve Agenda
4. Approve January 9, 2024, Regular Meeting Minutes
5. Public Comments
6. Committee Reports
    A. Building-Cichewicz
    B. Bylaws-Juriga
    C. Finance-Stoudemire
    D. Marketing-Hughes-Grubbs
    E. Personnel-Priest
    F. Policy-Fleming
    G. Art
7. Approve Accounts Payable
8. Director's Report/Comments/Communications
9. Trustee Comments
10. Chair Comments
11. Adjournment

Any citizen wishing to provide input or ask questions about any agenda item may speak during the meeting's Public Comments section or forward comments to the Library Director in advance by leaving a message at 734-699-3291 or via the Contact Us link at www.belleville.lib.mi.us. Any citizen requesting accommodation to attend this meeting may contact the library at least 24 hours prior to the meeting, using the above contact information.

Next Regular BADL Board Meeting: March 12, 2024, at 7:30 PM

DRAFT

Belleville Area District Library
Meeting Minutes
January 9, 2024

1. **Call to Order:** Chair Sharon Peters called the meeting to order at 7:40 pm.

2. **Roll Call:** The following board members were present: Joy Cichewicz, Dan Fleming, Alma Hughes-Grubbs, John Juriga (7:56 pm), Sharon Peters, Linda Priest, and Tanya Stoudemire. Also present: Library Director Mary Jo Suchy.

3. Selection of Board Officers: Motion by Juriga, seconded by Stoudemire to nominate Sharon Peters as Chair, Linda Priest as Vice Chair, Tanya Stoudemire as Treasurer, and Alma Hughes-Grubbs as Secretary. Peters, Priest, Stoudemire, and Hughes-Grubbs accepted the nominations. There were no other nominations. The motion carried unanimously.

4. **Approve Agenda:**
   Motion by Priest, seconded by Stoudemire, to approve the agenda as corrected (changing the date to January 9, 2024). The motion carried unanimously.

5. **Approve December 12, 2023, Regular Meeting Minutes**: Motion by Priest, seconded by Stoudemire, to approve the December 12, 2023, minutes as presented. The motion carried unanimously.

6. **Public Comments:** None.

7. **Approve 2024 Regular Board Meeting Dates:** Motion by Juriga, seconded by Priest, to approve the 2024 regular board meeting dates as presented. The motion carried unanimously.

8. **Committee Reports**
   A. **Building:** No report.
   B. **Bylaws:** No report.
   C. **Finance:** The library received a clean audit for 2022-23. Unspent construction funds were transferred into the debt payment fund. Revenues exceeded expenditures.
   D. **Marketing:** The committee will meet to discuss plans for National Library Week in April.
   E. **Personnel:** The committee met to review the director's evaluation. Director Suchy performed at an outstanding level in all categories and received positive comments from the board. Suchy shared ongoing goals which included improvements to the library website and policy updates. Goals for 2024 also include increased library outreach, enhanced engagement with the teens, and strategic planning. The committee recommends a 3.5% salary increase for Suchy.
   F. **Policy**: No report.
   G. **Art:** Photography by artist Gary Washington is on display.

Motion by Cichewicz, seconded by Juriga, to give the director a 3.5% increase in wages. The motion carried unanimously.

9. **Approve Accounts Payable:** Motion by Cichewicz, seconded by Juriga, to approve the accounts payable as presented. The motion carried unanimously.

10. **Director's Report:** See attached. The Classic Movie Series will resume on Thursday, February 8, with a showing of Alfred Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt.*

11. **Trustee Comments**:
Juriga – Apologized for being late. He was at a meeting at the Methodist Church regarding a $10,000 donation from Blue Sky to the Food Closet.
Cichewicz – Thanked the personnel committee for their hard work. Feels lucky to have a good director.
Priest – Was at the library yesterday after school was out. She invites the board to come visit at that time. She observed that the kids are nice, they just need to know they are being watched.
Stoudemire – Wished everyone a Happy New Year and Sharon a Happy Birthday.
Fleming – Thought today's meeting was productive and thanked the personnel committee.
Hughes-Grubbs – Praised Mary Jo for her commitment.

12. **Chair Comments:**
Peters – Noted that it has been a pleasure to serve for a full year with this board as it is currently constituted. She is appreciative of the board and director and is happy about the library's upcoming programming.

13. **Adjournment:**
Motion by Juriga, seconded by Priest to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 8:44 pm.

Belleville Area District Library
Budgetary Comparison Schedule
General Fund
For the Six Months Ended December 31, 2023

Account	Revenues	2023-2024 Budget	6 Months 2023-2024 Budget	6 Months Actual	Variance Favorable (Unfavorable)
403.000	Current Taxes less chg backs	$ 2,460,000	$ 1,230,000	$ 1,230,000 *	$ -
	Total Current Taxes	2,460,000	1,230,000	1,230,000	-
502.000	Grant Revenue	6,300	3,150	6,343	3,193
665.000	Interest Income	1,500	750	165	(585)
575.000	State Aid	43,000	21,500	22,488	988
	Library Fines and Fees				
659.000	Late Fees	2,000	1,000	514	(486)
658.000	Penal Fines	36,000	18,000	717	(17,283)
677.000	Lost Book Fees	700	350	1,091	741
	Total Fines and Fees	38,700	19,350	2,322	(17,028)
674.000	Contributions and Donations	2,500	1,250	3,194	1,944
674.002	Contributions New Library	-	-	1	1
	Miscellaneous Income				
680.000	Miscellaneous				
630.000	Copies				
631.000	Fax Fees				
647.000	Newspaper Sales				
	Total Miscellaneous	20,000	10,000	13,849	3,849
	Grand Total Revenues	$ 2,572,000	$ 1,286,000	$ 1,278,362	$ (7,638)
	Expenditures				
	Salaries				
702.000	Salary- Librarians				
705.000	Salary- Library Aides				
	Total Salaries	$ 1,160,000	$ 580,000	$ 495,624	$ 84,376
	Benefits and FICA				
715.000	FICA/ Medicare	88,740	44,370	37,915	6,455
716.000	Employee Health Insurance	215,000	107,500	115,874	(8,374)
718.000	Retirement (MERS)	78,000	39,000	35,978	3,022
	Total Benefits and FICA	381,740	190,870	189,767	1,103
981.000	Books and Acquisitions	275,000	137,500	93,412	44,088
809.002	Contracted Services-Acq.	23,000	11,500	9,450	2,050
	Supplies				
730.000	Office Supplies				
775.000	Supplies- Maintenance				
950.002	Library Programs Supplies				
	Total Supplies	50,000	25,000	25,149	(149)

* Actual taxes collected to date $8,550.24

Belleville Area District Library
Budgetary Comparison Schedule
General Fund
For the Six Months Ended December 31, 2023

Account		2023-2024 Budget	6 Months 2023-2024 Budget	6 Months Actual	Variance Favorable (Unfavorable)
	Professional Fees				
804.000	Audit	$ 8,600	$ 4,300	$ 8,575	$ (4,275)
805.000	Finance	13,500	6,750	6,150	600
801.001	Legal	7,000	3,500	-	3,500
801.002	Legal-Building Program	-	-	-	-
807.000	Architect	10,000	5,000	-	5,000
806.000	Other	10,000	5,000	1,425	3,575
	Total Professional Fees	49,100	24,550	16,150	8,400
815.000	Bank Fees	1,000	500	503	(3)
808.000	Dues	5,000	2,500	719	1,781
	Contracted Services				
809.001	Contracted Services	20,000	10,000	15,506	(5,506)
809.005	Delivery	6,000	3,000	4,369	(1,369)
720.000	Payroll	15,000	7,500	5,693	1,807
809.003&4	Automation System & Cataloging	41,000	20,500	19,886	614
809.007	Outside Maintenance	20,000	10,000	1,673	8,327
	Total Contracted Services	102,000	51,000	47,127	3,873
	Telephones & Telecommunications				
851.000	Telephone	15,000	7,500	3,791	3,709
851.002	Telecommunications	16,000	8,000	4,182	3,818
	Total Telephone and Telecommunications	31,000	15,500	7,973	7,527
	Insurance				
	Building Insurance				
810.000	Liability Insurance				
811.000	Worker's Comp. Insurance				
	Total Insurance	38,000	19,000	22,302	(3,302)
	Utilities				
921.000	Heat				
922.000	Electrical				
923.000	Water and Sewer				
	Total Utilities	86,000	43,000	21,971	21,029
931.000	Repairs and Maintenance	85,000	42,500	40,979	1,521
	Printing and Publications				
901.002&5	Printing				
901.004	Publications- Newspapers				
	Total Printing & Publications	24,000	12,000	4,049	7,951
727.002&3	Postage	12,000	6,000	5,902	98
820.000	Computer Hardware/ Software/Maintenance				
982.000	Hardware and Software				
		80,000	40,000	15,991	24,009

Belleville Area District Library
Budgetary Comparison Schedule
General Fund
For the Six Months Ended December 31, 2023

Account		2023-2024 Budget	6 Months 2023-2024 Budget	6 Months Actual	Variance Favorable (Unfavorable)
	Miscellaneous				
863.000	Travel and Meetings	$ 8,000	$ 4,000	$ 1,225	$ 2,775
950.001	Miscellaneous (Programming)	18,000	9,000	3,251	5,749
983.001	New Equip/ Office Furniture	25,000	12,500	894	11,606
	Other	4,000	2,000	87	1,913
	Total Miscellaneous	55,000	27,500	5,457	22,043
	Total Expenditures	$ 2,457,840	$ 1,228,920	$ 1,002,525	$ 226,395
	Current Year	$ 114,160	$ 57,080	$ 275,837	$ 218,757

Belleville Area District Library

Date: 02/05/2024
Time: 10:57 AM
Page: 1

Operating:

Check Date	Vendor Namne	Check Description	Amount
01/09/2024	AMAZON CAPITAL SERVICES	Books, Library of Things, Supplies	770.69
01/09/2024	AMAZON CAPITAL SERVICES	Bldg/Office Supplies	1,219.62
01/09/2024	APPLIED INNOVATION	Copier/Printer Usage	613.75
01/09/2024	BELLEVILLE AREA INDEPENDENT	Advertising Jan 4	216.00
01/09/2024	CHASE CARDMEMBER SERVICE	Program Supplies	167.55
01/09/2024	DC LAWN & SNOW	Nov/Dec	755.00
01/09/2024	DEMCO	Office/Program Supplies	251.47
01/09/2024	DTE ENERGY	Electric Service 4th St	2,540.43
01/09/2024	GARDEN FANTASY GREENHOUSES	Outdoor Pots	250.00
01/09/2024	O'NEAL CONSTRUCTION, INC	Broken glass replacement	777.13
01/09/2024	ODP BUSINESS SOLULTIONS LLC	Office/Bldg Supplies	722.61
01/09/2024	PHILLIP HALE	Jazz Program	100.00
01/09/2024	UNIFIRST CORP	Maintenance Mats	143.32
01/09/2024	UNIQUE MANAGEMENT SERVICES INC	Dec. Placements	48.60
01/09/2024	WASTE MANAGEMENT OF MI, INC	Dumpster Service	446.72
01/23/2024	A PRODUCTION BUILDING SOLUTION	Monthly cleaning/January	3,565.00
01/23/2024	AMAZON CAPITAL SERVICES	Library of Things	67.94
01/23/2024	AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION	Membership Mary Jo Suchy	162.00
01/23/2024	BLUE CROSS BLUE SHIELD OF MICH	Dental	934.12
01/23/2024	CLEAR RATE COMMUNICATIONS	Fax Service	126.54
01/23/2024	DEMCO	Office Supplies	117.86
01/23/2024	DTE ENERGY	Sumpter Branch	228.67
01/23/2024	DTE ENERGY	Gas Fourth St.	1,051.67
01/23/2024	FORMSITE	Online Library Cards	399.95
01/23/2024	FRIENDS OF THE BELLEVILLE AREA	Dec. Payout	840.30
01/23/2024	GA BUSINESS PURCHASER LLC	Sumpter Alarm Service	52.05
01/23/2024	JASON PRINCE	Building Supplies	20.96
01/23/2024	ODP BUSINESS SOLULTIONS LLC	Office Supplies	71.93
01/23/2024	SHARON DUCKWORTH, CPA	Accounting Services	1,025.00
01/23/2024	SUMPTER TOWNSHIP	Water & Sewage	111.45
01/23/2024	TARA MCCANN	Program Supplies	8.47
01/23/2024	THE LIBRARY NETWORK	Acq., Books, Telecomm., Telephone	18,224.64
01/23/2024	UNITED HEALTHCARE	Health Insurance	16,580.35
01/23/2024	WESTLAND FIRE EXTINGUISHER INC	Equipment Inspection	72.00
01/23/2024	WYANDOTTE ALARM COMPANY	Commercial Radio Monitoring	462.00
01/30/2024	AMAZON CAPITAL SERVICES	Books	46.97
01/30/2024	CHASE CARDMEMBER SERVICE	Bldg/Program Supplies	145.19
01/30/2024	DTE ENERGY	Electric Service 4th St	2,801.35
01/30/2024	MAURICE IMHOFF	Library Program Feb 7, 2024	300.00
01/30/2024	STANDARD INSURANCE COMPANY	Long/Short Term Disability Plan	683.90
40	**Checks Total:**		**57,123.20**
40	**Bank Total:**		**57,123.20**
40	**Grand Total:**		**57,123.20**

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

February 2024

LIBRARY PROGRAMS **January: Adults: 10 Youth: 13**

LBRARY VISITS	2023/24	2022/23	% change
January	9,548	9,051	5.49%
Fiscal Year	78,580	69,844	12.51%

TOTAL CIRC	2023/24	2022/23	% change
January	20,184	20,427	-1.19%
Fiscal Year	149,956	146,152	2.60%

ADULT PROGRAMMING	2023/24	2022/23	% change
January	151	82	84.15%
Fiscal Year	812	806	0.74%

YOUTH/TEEN PROGRAMMING	2023/24	2022/23	% change
January	274	208	31.73%
Fiscal Year	2,928	2,339	25.18%

ALL AGES PROGRAMMING: January: 0 Fiscal Year: 450

REF. QUESTIONS	2023/24	2022/23	% change
January	1,599	1,605	-0.37%
Fiscal Year	11,253	10,441	7.78%

INTERNET USE	2023/24	2022/23	% change
January	868	999	-13.11%
Fiscal Year	6,982	6,580	6.11%

YOUTH/TEEN INTERNET	2023/24	2022/23	% change
January	213	191	11.52%
Fiscal Year	1,972	1,257	56.88%

BUILDING: The heater in the entryway, powered by the library's boilers, sprang a leak. It has been fixed, and we now know where the water shutoff valve is for that unit.

PROGRAMMING: The Phil Hale Jazz Quartet performance in January was highly successful with about 65 people in the audience. Our children's department had 150 people take part in games and activities in their Bluey Party on February 3. (Bluey is a highly popular preschool television series). The library is partnering with the Belleville Rotary Club on two programs – "Midnight: Detroit and the Underground Railroad" on February 27, and "The Potato Famine" on March 12.

STAFF: Incoming staff: Circulation clerk Sully Gregoire. Outgoing staff: Harper Klotz, Lisa Meadows, and Esther Walker. COVID has continued to impact our staff with four staff members having to call off over the past month.

LIBRARY CALENDAR/EVENT SOFTWARE: I have a staff committee from multiple departments who have attended vendor demos for our needed change in our events and room booking software. Although this is our immediate focus, some of the companies also design websites, and we are asking them some preliminary questions about those services as well.

"Libraries are that safe place for discussion of ideas."

Illustration by Shonagh Rae

Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden discusses the dynamic and essential role libraries play in American life.

Carla Hayden is the first woman and the first African American to lead the Library of Congress. In addition to preserving millions of books, newspapers, films, photographs, audio recordings, maps, and manuscripts in its collections, the library—the world's largest—also serves as the main research arm of the US Congress and houses the US Copyright Office. Before being sworn in as the fourteenth librarian of Congress in 2016, Hayden held leadership roles in libraries for decades, including at the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore, the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago, and the Chicago public library system. In an interview with *Issues* contributing editor Molly Galvin, Hayden discusses the library's role in informing public policy, how artificial intelligence is challenging notions of copyright, and how libraries can help fight misinformation and disinformation, strengthen communities, and maintain democracy.

You sometimes refer to yourself as an accidental librarian. What do you mean by that?

Hayden: Even though I grew up loving to read, and loving books and libraries, I didn't really know about the profession of librarianship. I graduated with a major in history and minor in political science from Roosevelt University. I was thinking about what to do next. In between job interviews, I went to my favorite place, the central library in Chicago. Someone who had graduated with me came in and said, "Hey, you here for those library jobs? They're hiring anybody." I applied.

That's what libraries still do. We bring in people with any type of undergrad degree through library technician or other entry-level positions, and we introduce them to the profession.

I got put together with a young lady who was going to graduate library school. She would do story time with children with autism. She wore jeans. It showed me that being a librarian was more than just, "Here's a book." I applied to graduate library school too. That's how it all started. I've been a librarian ever since.

A primary mission of the Library of Congress is, of course, to serve Congress. How has the library helped inform public policy historically?

Hayden: The first librarian of Congress was appointed in 1802. The library started with about 600 law books. Think about it: you have a new nation, you have a Congress, and they need reference books. By 1812, they had 1,000 or so books. The Library of Congress was located in the Capitol then. The British used some of the books to start the fire in the Capitol in 1814. There's still a fireplace there that has the markings of that event.

But the destruction of the library was an opportunity. Thomas Jefferson sold his library to the nation. At that time, his was the largest personal library in the United States, with 6,000 or so volumes. As he said, there's no subject to which a member of Congress should not have occasion to refer. It was the start of a vast collection of not only law volumes but of books on every subject in different languages.

Today the Congressional Research Service (CRS) has over 400 people who are the reference arm for Congress. It's nonpartisan. You have experts in just about every area. There are policy experts in energy, social services, any topic. We have embedded librarians who are research people and policy experts. It's not unusual for them to be at CRS for 20 or 25 years. They know the prior legislation. They only serve Congress and congressional staff. They're evolving and using infographics, data analysis, and big data. They really use technology as a tool to help with the analysis of information.

We still serve Congress. That's our primary mission—to serve as the research organization for them, but also the people that Congress serves: the American public.

How do you ensure that the Congressional Research Service stays nonpartisan in an era when so many issues are politicized?

Hayden: It's rigorous. The analysts have a code of honor and ethics that their personal views and feelings about subjects should not interfere with how they present the information.

The analysts only analyze what is there. The challenge is that they have to maintain the rule of not giving an opinion. They try to be balanced. And they do have those layers of reviews of the reports—like a journal where you have review panels. No reports ever go straight to a congressional office without being reviewed by our senior analysts.

One of the analysts told me she was asked to do a report on a subject that she personally felt strongly about. When the report was delivered to the congressional office, they thought she felt the other way. She was really proud.

You've said before that libraries are the cornerstone of democracy. Can you elaborate on that?

Hayden: One of the principles of democracy is an informed citizenry—when you have that ability to have free and unbiased provision of information. Libraries are a trusted source. We are giving citizens an opportunity to have the information to make those informed decisions. That's why we say it's a cornerstone in communities. Let the books battle it out on the shelves. We have different perspectives, and you can choose.

Public trust in many institutions has been declining in recent years, but polls indicate that most people still trust libraries. Why is that?

Hayden: Even libraries now are being questioned and especially librarians, mainly about providing materials for young people. It's been very difficult for librarians to be drawn into that discussion because we feel that it's every parent and caregiver's right and responsibility. You can decide for your own child what that child is going to read. But not for other people's children. That's where we draw the line.

The number one information request to public libraries in this country is for health information. People would come in from their doctor's appointment and hand us their prescriptions so we could look through the reference. We're that trusted source—they know we're not in it for the money, obviously. You must really stand your ground in terms of dealing with facts, and science is based on that.

The proliferation of misinformation and disinformation is very concerning to the science community. As a librarian, what is your philosophy on dealing with false or misleading information?

Hayden: We're part of the information ecosystem—sciences and information and technology—and we just need to keep working together. We have to, because it's hard.

We emphasize that you need to look at where the information is coming from. What's the source? Then you determine, is that a reliable source? But misinformation and technology make it very tricky because things look legit sometimes when they aren't.

Our websites are digital front doors. For instance, the Library of Congress website has "Ask a Librarian." People type in their questions, and a live librarian will get back to them and do the research and go to certain sites. And they also give you the references so that you can then go to the link and do your own

research. When people are asking questions, we not only give them the answer, but we give them the citation. We take this responsibility seriously.

As artificial intelligence proliferates, how is the Copyright Office dealing with the issues it raises about creative content?

Hayden: The Copyright Office and the registrar have been working with Congress about what revisions in the copyright law need to be made. This has been going on for a while because when some of those laws were developed and passed, technology wasn't as far along. For instance, with streaming services, they worked on how to determine the rights and permissions.

For AI, the first few cases the Copyright Office encountered had to do with "Who does the copyright go to?" You have copyright whenever you create something. That's what copyright registration does for you. But they had a test case where someone submitted something for copyright, but it was all created by a machine. The office caught it and had the person resubmit it, but where's that dividing line for a creative work? Is it the person who programs the machine to do it? That's where they are. Right now, copyright law says that the work has to be created by a human.

How is the rise of new technologies and the age of digital information changing library science, and how is the profession evolving?

Hayden: Today, we're attracting people who see it as a first career. Thirty or forty years ago, people were in social work or they were in education, and then they went into librarianship. It was a second career.

We're getting people coming in saying "We want to work with the websites. We want to do digital." We're now attracting people who see libraries as a testing ground for a lot of things.

Today, what used to be called library schools are information science schools or information studies. Some of our grads go straight to tech companies because they learn about search and how people think of reference questions and things. That's our competition.

But many people want to work in libraries, and what draws a lot of them is serving, and the whole concept of "knowledge is power." You can empower and work with communities. A lot of libraries now are so much more than just the basic information. They circulate musical instruments, they circulate sewing machines, laptops, all of that. They're really boots on the ground in communities, helping people.

In Baltimore libraries, for example, they have a lawyer in the library, a social worker in the library. You can get your passports there. You can register to vote. Some of the younger people who want to help people say, "Well, here's a direct way to do that."

What are some of the biggest trends you see for libraries on the horizon?

Hayden: Libraries are getting back into being a place in communities and in people's lives. It's "library as place." Libraries are being built to be gathering places, places for community.

I was just out in Dayton, Ohio, and their new central library has a theater. Local theater groups can book the theater and have their performances or dance groups. There's an art studio, a recording studio for people to come in.

Library as place is definitely a trend, and you'll see that in new buildings and branches in communities that are incorporating all kinds of other things. Some have community kitchens. Philadelphia had one of the first libraries where you're teaching science and chemistry by having cooking classes. You have to measure, you have to monitor temperature, and all this stuff. You're seeing a lot of that going on.

Libraries are also being seen as a convening place for civic engagement. Community meetings are being held there, with many sides of an issue being discussed. Libraries are that safe place for discussion of ideas.

The Library of Congress social media posts and your own personal posts are drawing a lot of attention to some of the library's amazing historical artifacts. What are some of your favorites?

Hayden: We have 178 million or so items, and we digitized about 61 million of them. That includes historic maps and all types of things. We can highlight items from our collection—from a diary to a letter or another physical item—based on what's going on in the world.

In terms of science-specific items: we have Galileo's treatise, *Starry Messenger*. We have Carl Sagan's papers. You can go online and see what he thought space travel would be like when he was about 12 years old. We have Sigmund Freud's papers, and we shared some of his personal correspondence. Also, [Red Cross founder] Clara Barton's diaries have just been transcribed. She suffered from depression, and she describes the early days of nursing.

Something that really meant a lot to me—coming from Illinois and having spent summers in Springfield, where my family's from—is you can actually see the contents of Abraham Lincoln's pockets the night he was assassinated. To see the handkerchief that he had and the button that he put in his pocket—it makes history come alive. We also have one of the copies of the Gettysburg Address, and they speculate that it's the one he took on the field. You see that in his own handwriting. You can go online and see Teddy Roosevelt's diary in his own hand and Rosa Park's peanut butter pancake recipe in her own hand.

That's what social media has been doing for us. We can share this with people.

Hungry for Connection: Addressing Loneliness Through the Library

by Hallie Rich
Feb 05, 2024 | Filed in News

Library programs are part of a national strategy to combat a major public health epidemic: loneliness

When the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) officially declared an end to the COVID-19 public health emergency in May 2023, many libraries reported a transition back to what felt like pre-pandemic days, with children joyfully attending story times and crowds reconvening to hear their favorite authors. Yet, as just as we breathed a collective sigh of relief at the formal end of one emergency, United States Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy issued a new advisory warning of a pernicious health risk: loneliness.

The latest research from the Cigna Group indicates that more than half (58 percent) of American adults are considered lonely—and those percentages jump among minoritized populations (75 percent of Hispanic adults; 68 percent of Black adults). People with lower incomes report higher levels of loneliness than those with higher incomes; and, while older adults are often considered the most affected by social isolation, it's young adults (18–24) who are twice as likely to be lonely as seniors (55+).

This matters because loneliness is crippling physically and figuratively. It's as deadly as smoking 15 cigarettes a day and more damaging than consuming six alcoholic drinks daily, according to the Surgeon General's advisory. Researchers from the National Institutes of Health link loneliness to higher risks for anxiety, Alzheimer's disease, cognitive decline, heart disease, high blood pressure, and obesity. But it's not just the risks to individual health that make it so dangerous—loneliness is destructive at the community level, too. "When we are less invested in one another, we are more susceptible to polarization and less able to pull together to face the challenges that we cannot solve alone—from climate change and gun violence to economic inequality and future pandemics," wrote Dr. Murthy in an April 2023 *New York Times* op-ed.

BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER at libraries can take many different forms. Guests chat over a meal at Howard County Library System's "The Longest Table" event on September 30, 2023. *Photo by Doug Kapustin/Howard County Library System*

WHERE ARE ALL THE PEOPLE?

If library visit data give any indication of community connectedness, then this is a moment to sound an alarm. The latest data from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) Public Library Survey, which lags by two years, reflects the limbo that was 2021—the world opened up for a "hot vax summer" and then retreated when faced with subsequent Delta and Omicron waves—leaving library visits 96 percent lower than 2019.

The Urban Libraries Council (ULC), endeavoring to provide a more current snapshot, surveyed its members in 2023 only to find a 44 percent decline in visits from 2019 to 2022. Anecdotal feedback signaled a more optimistic outlook for 2023, with respondents anticipating growth over 2022. Yet, as circulation and visit statistics show an upward trajectory from recent lows, the fact remains there are fewer people visiting libraries than before the pandemic.

Libraries have responded to this challenge by launching creative programs and events designed to increase foot traffic, while also acknowledging a growing intensity to their interactions with the public. Patrons grappling with issues ranging from mental health to addiction to chronic

physical conditions, compounded by a diminished social safety net and increased reliance on social media, contribute to difficult, traumatic, and sometimes dangerous situations that front-line library workers face. These problems aren't a result of the pandemic, but the behaviors observed in many libraries over the past 18 months might be tied, at least in part, to a complex public health issue: people are starved for connection.

LIBRARIES ARE PUBLIC HEALTH

According to the CDC, social isolation, which contributes to loneliness, is a lack of social connections, whereas loneliness is the feeling of being alone regardless of the amount of social interaction. Libraries possess the physical infrastructure and community relationships to tackle loneliness and social isolation—but they may not view their community engagement work through the lens of public health. According to the Public Library Association's 2022 Public Library Services for Strong Communities report, when asked to list the areas where libraries are currently doing work or have plans to address their community's most pressing needs and priorities, public health and well-being ranked 7 out of 10. But the many program options offered by libraries that are listed in the report—gaming for teens, book clubs, and family engagement events, for example—are activities that can build the very relationships our nation's public health experts say we most need to cultivate.

Libraries provide a space where people can build what sociologists and psychologists call "weak ties," or casual connections and loose relationships with people such as neighbors, classmates, or even near-strangers. Although they lack the intimacy and frequency of "strong ties"—the relationships we have with our family or closest friends—these social connections help shape a feeling of belonging that one needs to combat feelings of loneliness. In fact, they are an essential part of individual well-being.

HERE FOR EVERYONE "present," a garden installation by fiber artist Larissa Killough at Greenport, NY's Floyd Memorial Library, invites visitors to pause and reflect while delivering messages of support and care (inset). *Photos by Larissa Killough*

BREAKING BREAD BUILDS A BOND

As libraries practice different ways of bringing people together, many have started to use food as a convener. The body of research coming out of the Big Lunch initiative in the UK, which is focused on building more connected communities to reduce social isolation, reinforces the benefits of communal eating, demonstrating that eating together can provide social and individual benefits that include feelings of happiness, greater satisfaction with life, and greater engagement with participants' local community.

In 2017, Howard County Library System (HCLS), MD, launched "The Longest Table," a communal eating event inspired by the Village Square program out of Tallahassee, FL. In partnership with Howard Community College, HCLS's The Longest Table invites residents to come together over a meal and get to know people from their community that they might not otherwise meet. "The simple act of breaking bread with people generates conversations," says Christie Lassen, HCLS director of communications.

The program itself is simple—anyone high school age and up can register, and they are randomly assigned a seat. Tickets are $15 per guest, but sponsors help cover the cost for individuals who cannot afford a ticket and wish to attend. Each table has a host who helps facilitate conversation, which is sparked by a series of questions.

When the pandemic threatened to shut down the 2020 event, residents asked for a virtual option as a way of addressing the social isolation many faced. In 2023, 200 guests at The Longest Table joined together in person to discuss personal strengths and community assets. "We asked people to share one thing they're good at and something they want to learn," explains Lassen. Guests answered questions such as "What's the most important life lesson you've learned?" and "How do you wish we could grow and progress as a community?"

The positive response to The Longest Table helped elevate HCLS's focus on nurturing community connections, which is part of its new strategic plan. "People enjoy The Longest Table so much that they ask us to hold the event monthly instead of annually. They are literally hungry for connection," says Lassen.

& MEDIA DROP
TO OPEN

TEXTILE
TALES
FIBER ARC

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Hallie Rich is Editor-in-Chief of *Library Journal*.

TRUE COLORS Colorful knits and playful patterns created by community members and artists during its "Yarnstorming" event adorn Floyd Memorial Library. *Photos courtesy of Floyd Memorial Library*

CREATIVE EXPRESSION LEADS TO COMMUNITY CONNECTION

In 2002, Dr. Jeremy Nobel attended an art show that changed the trajectory of his research. The exhibit marked the first anniversary of 9/11 by showcasing art made by New York City schoolchildren reflecting on their experience of the terror attack. The power of their work inspired Nobel to explore how creative expression could be used to reduce risk for physical and mental illness—which led him to research the role of creativity and art as a public health intervention. In his book, *Project UnLonely*, Nobel describes how sharing in creative expression can generate the physiological and psychological conditions that weaken the grip loneliness can have on an individual.

Creative expression was central to a 2023 summer art event at Floyd Memorial Library, Greenport, NY, which invited community members to get involved. For many years the library has maintained an art curator on staff to contribute to programming and design local exhibits. Last spring, the library launched a collaborative "Yarnstorming" event, wherein anyone who wished to participate could make a piece that was woven into a public art installation. Together with local artists and an area nonprofit, the library requested donations of yarn and other supplies for

makers to use in developing pieces that would festively adorn the library. Residents attended guided sessions at the library, where expert knitters and crocheters shared their skills with novices, who, in turn, got to learn something new.

The yarnstorm project leveraged the aspects of creative expression that Nobel identifies as key to addressing loneliness—being present in the act of making art, opening the imagination, and sharing the resulting work—all through a collaborative process. From seniors to students, the community created colorful knits that became part of an art installation and shared experience. "I think the one thing people liked most about Yarnstorming was that it was a community effort—it was designed that way. We saw that people do want to be together," says Ellen Nasto, Floyd Memorial Library director.

At the exhibit opening in June 2023, residents and tourists alike stopped by the library to view the colorful display; neighbors bumped into one another while children ran through the library's garden, where textiles hanging from tree branches conveyed a resonant message: "I am here for you."

THE LONELY GEN Z WORKFORCE

Among members of Gen Z aged 18–24, the first generation that's younger than Google, nearly 8 in 10 report feeling lonely. And, despite recent research from the American Library Association (ALA) finding that Gen Z and millennials use libraries at higher rates compared to older generations, many libraries struggle to engage young adults in meaningful and consistent ways.

San Diego Public Library (SDPL) sought to forge relationships with teens and young adults in its City Heights community while also supporting workforce skill development when it launched a new digital media workforce program. In partnership with Media Arts Center San Diego, the library hosts a quarterly six-week training program where participants develop skills in filmmaking, marketing, social media, and other aspects of the creative economy. Following that training, participants enter a 12-month paid internship with the library and the City of San Diego. Interns are tasked with creating videos and social media content to help tell the library story, expanding its reach and better connecting the broader San Diego community with library programs and services.

The library selects its interns from the local community, using equity-based metrics to ensure low-income residents, those involved in the foster or justice system, and those residing in communities of concern—demographics that experience higher rates of loneliness—have an opportunity to participate. The program is now in its fifth cohort; 70 percent of its interns come from minoritized populations.

The attention to a workforce cohort is particularly relevant in the context of loneliness, as lonely employees are more than twice as likely to miss a day of work due to illness and more than five times as likely to miss work due to stress. For the library, the intern cohorts create a small community within which they have a shared experience of learning. According to Misty Jones, SDPL director, "In this last round we had 130 applications—more people applying for the program than we have spots to fill. These are often people who say they hadn't previously come to the library, and now they are learning what we have to offer and helping to tell our story."

WHAT COMES NEXT

Loneliness isn't just about isolation—it's a feeling of being alone or disconnected even in a world where technology enables instant contact. Fewer people visiting libraries can be viewed as a symptom of a lonelier nation, but it's also one part of the cause.

Working to grow library visits will be key to addressing our nation's loneliness problem; how libraries choose to do that will depend upon the unique interests and needs of their community. The Surgeon General's advisory lays out explicit actions for community-based organizations to take in this effort, including advancing public education on the importance of social connection, providing programs and services that engage the community, and fostering a culture of connection by modeling and highlighting healthy social engagement.

Positioning libraries as part of the public health ecosystem can provide a renewed sense of purpose for those working in the field while also reinforcing the indispensable role libraries play in modern American life.

Brooklyn Public Library Brings Community Together with "Book of HOV"

Sometimes bringing people together requires unusual partnerships—a lesson that Brooklyn Public Library (BPL), NY, learned in 2023.

On a crisp, sunny September morning, about a dozen people waited in front of BPL Central Library in the minutes before opening—a rather small gathering given the long lines seen in the first few weeks of BPL's Book of HOV exhibit, produced by Roc Nation. A man paced around the library entrance, approaching the security guard to inquire if it was time yet for the library to open. One woman sat at an outdoor table, hand on a cart filled with files and belongings, while

others stood, backpacks slung over shoulders, scrolling on their phones. A couple snapped photos in front of a massive LED cube flashing video snippets of Brooklyn's own Shawn "Jay-Z" Carter, the subject of the library's special exhibit.

At exactly 9:00 A.M. the library doors opened, and the crowd entered the building. Some paused to orient themselves and find a section of the exhibit to explore; others beelined to areas where they could do their regular library business. In this mix of library users and exhibit viewers, the library came alive. One visitor from Queens, NY, remarked about the exhibit, "for this to be at a public library, it surpasses expectations."

PICASSO

THE BOOK OF HOV's popularity drew record crowds and saw BPL issuing an average of two new library cards per minute in its opening weekend. ***Photos by Gregg Richards/Brooklyn Public Library***

The exhibit drove record attendance numbers for BPL in the second half of 2023. More than 600,000 visitors came to Central Library in the five months the exhibit ran, marking a 74 percent increase in foot traffic. Thirteen limited edition Jay-Z library cards also spiked card signups, accounting for nearly 40,000 new cardholders.

BPL's Chief Librarian Nick Higgins acknowledges the unique opportunity the Book of HOV created—how many other libraries have the opportunity to host an exhibit about a world-famous artist? The trick for BPL, he notes, will be maintaining the goodwill that the exhibit generates. So far, it seems to be on the right track—20 percent of new cardholders have already used their library cards, indicating an interest in continuing engagement.

The success of the Book of HOV offers a scalable takeaway that libraries everywhere can emulate: Find something that is highly interesting to your community and celebrate it. Did your local high school basketball team make it to the state championships? Organize a display of team jerseys over the decades or a program with the newspaper's sports columnist and team coach. Host a book buzz event with local social media influencers. Find a group or topic that captures the attention and energy of the community, and partner up to bring people together in the library.

loneliness | Howard County Library System | Floyd Memorial Library | San Diego Public Library | Brooklyn Public Library

Midnight: Detroit & the Underground Railroad

Presented by Billy Winkel,
Assistant Curator
the Detroit Historical Society

Tuesday, February 27, 2024 @ 6:30 pm

Codenamed Midnight, Detroit was a vital station on the Underground Railroad. Thousands crossed the river to freedom in Canada from Detroit. Detroit abolitionists helped freedom seekers from the South evade slave catchers and local law enforcement on their way to Canada. Detroit's abolitionist community fiercely supported runaways in the face of severe local opposition. Despite this opposition, Detroit's abolitionists persisted.

Sponsored by

Belleville Area District Library & Rotary Club of Belleville

167 4th Street, Belleville MI (734) 699-3291

BELLEVILLE AREA DISTRICT LIBRARY

Celebrates

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Born Free and Equal: Michigan's Colored Regiment

Wednesday, February 7, 7 pm

Maurice Imhoff, President of the Jackson Civil War Muster, will present the history of the 102nd United States Colored Troops, formed in Michigan in 1863. The 102nd saw action throughout South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. From being enslaved in the south to becoming soldiers for the union army after taking the underground railroad to Michigan, this regiment has one of the most distinct stories in our state's history.

Midnight: Detroit & The Underground Railroad

Tuesday, February 27, 6:30pm

Billy Winkel, Assistant Curator at the Detroit Historical Society, will give a presentation on Detroit's role in the Underground Railroad. Codenamed Midnight, Detroit was a vital station on the Underground Railroad. Thousands crossed the river to freedom in Canada from Detroit. Learn how Detroit abolitionists helped freedom seekers evade slave catchers and local law enforcement.

Detroit's City Walls Program: Highlighting African American History through Outdoor Murals

Thursday, February 22, 7 pm

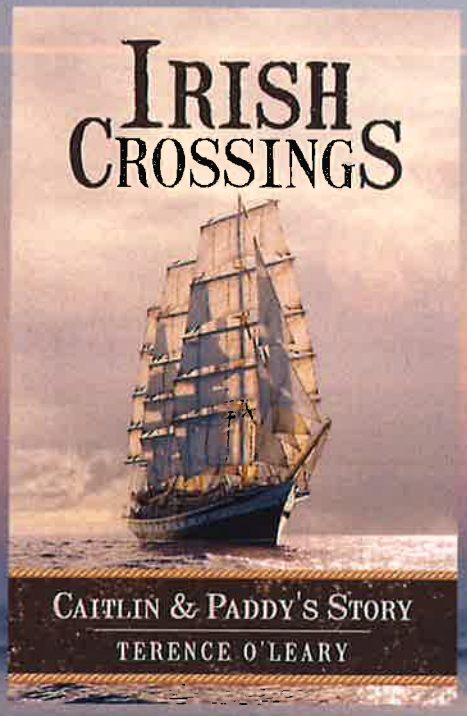
Detroit journalist and historian Ken Coleman will give a talk highlighting the City of Detroit's City Walls program. Through outdoor murals, the initiative integrates a multifaceted approach to enhancing public space. The presentation will highlight murals that depict images of noted people and institutions.

Belleville Area District Library 167 Fourth Street, Belleville, MI 48111

www.belleville.lib.mi.us 734-699-3291

THE POTATO FAMINE
&
THE COMING OF THE IRISH TO AMERICA

By Terence O'Leary - Author & Speaker



Ireland awoke to the beginning of the Great Hunger in 1845. Experience the heartbreaking stories of the Irish during the five long years of the Potato Famine. While it was a time of great injustice when more than one million Irish died, it also became a tragic blessing for over one million Irish who fled to America and survived.

Tuesday, March 12, 2024
@ 6:00 p.m

Through the years, Mr. O'Leary has traveled extensively throughout the Midwest, giving his talk about The Great Hunger. He has lectured at numerous libraries and universities. During the summer, you can find Mr. O'Leary on the stage of Irish Festivals, where he takes the audience back to the time of Black Potatoes and Famine ships.

Sponsored by

BELLEVILLE AREA DISTRICT LIBRARY & Rotary Club of Belleville

Classic Movies Series

Strangers On A Train (1951)

Thursday, March 14 @ 6:30 pm
at the Belleville Area District Library

Another of Alfred Hitchcock's classics hits the library screen! Based on the book of the same name by Patricia Highsmith, *Strangers On A Train* takes a chance meeting of strangers, Bruno and Guy, and turns it into a murder plot. Bruno (Robert Walker) has a simple plan, he will get rid of Guy's wife, if Guy will get rid of his father.

Brought to you by the Friends of the Belleville Area District Library and the Belleville Area Council for the Arts

Friends of the BELLEVILLE AREA DISTRICT LIBRARY