

A Needs Assessment of APL Patrons: Final Report

**Submitted to:
Appleton Public Library**

**Submitted on 5-8-20 by:
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Executive Summary

Dr. Beth Wahler, Associate Professor at Indiana University School of Social Work, was hired to conduct a needs assessment of the Appleton Public Library (APL). This needs assessment focused on the “psychosocial” needs of patrons, including mental health, substance abuse, homelessness, and poverty. The first phase of the needs assessment was an online staff survey, completed in September and October 2019, which inquired about staff opinions of patrons’ most significant psychosocial needs, their perceptions of the library’s role in meeting those needs, and ideas they had for better addressing patrons’ needs.

There were 55 usable staff survey responses. Results included:

- Staff identified mental health, substance abuse, housing, employment, and behavior problems as the highest areas of unmet needs for APL patrons.
- To assist patrons with these issues, staff identified several strategies as being part of the responsibility of the library. On a scale of 1-5 (1 = none at all, 5 = a great deal), staff thought the library was responsible for providing information about poverty-related community agencies (M = 4.04), mental health problems (M = 3.67), substance abuse problems (M = 3.57), and medical problems (M = 3.54). They also thought the library was responsible for providing referrals to community resources (M = 3.83). Providing workshops on community resources (M = 3.70), how to access public benefits (M = 3.38), budgeting/finance (M = 3.15), and mental health problems (M = 3.04) were also perceived to be largely within the scope of the library’s responsibility.
- Staff identified a lack of training and education in these areas as a barrier to effectively serving patrons with psychosocial needs, and the majority felt that these

services could be more effectively provided by forming additional partnerships with external community agencies, or hiring a social service professional to work in the library. They also requested training from social service professionals on how to serve patrons and refer them to appropriate community agencies.

- Staff suggested additional ways to meet patrons' psychosocial needs, such as having walk-throughs or scheduled appointments by service providers to check on or otherwise serve patrons experiencing homelessness or other psychosocial problems, maintaining an updated list of community agencies, and having someone on-site to provide assistance to patrons with services or public benefits.

The second phase of the needs assessment was a patron survey about unmet needs and how the library could help, conducted in February and March 2020. There were 655 usable patron responses, and the top six unmet needs were having more fun and safe activities, making social connections, mental health needs, financial needs, dental problems, and help using a computer. Patrons also had suggestions for ways the library could better meet their needs, which are presented in the full report. Comparisons in responses are made to explore differences between patrons based on their housing status.

Recommendations are made for how APL can improve services for patrons with psychosocial needs and better support staff with serving these patrons, including continuing to have a social work practicum student on-site to help meet patron needs, providing staff training, and increasing collaborations with community partners to meet specific patron and staff needs.

Evaluation Report

Background Information

Colleen Rortvedt, APL Director, requested a needs assessment of the Appleton Public Library due to growing concerns about patrons experiencing homelessness or other psychosocial needs (mental health, substance abuse, poverty, etc.) frequenting the library and also increasing safety concerns in the community immediately surrounding the library. As APL administrators and staff have been exploring options for ensuring safety of patrons and staff visiting the library, Ms. Rortvedt expressed that she wants to compassionately respond to the needs rather than only respond from a safety and security standpoint. Ms. Rortvedt said she was exploring a potential partnership with a local school of social work (University of Wisconsin- Oshkosh) for placing practicum students in the library, but wanted to be sure she understood the needs that students would address. Thus, Dr. Beth Wahler and Ms. Rortvedt entered into an agreement for a needs assessment.

This needs assessment sought to answer five primary questions:

1. What do APL staff perceive to be the most significant psychosocial needs of patrons?
2. What do APL staff perceive to be the role of the library regarding meeting psychosocial needs of patrons?
3. How well is APL meeting patrons' psychosocial needs?
4. What do APL patrons perceive to be their most significant needs? Do these needs differ based on patrons' housing status?
5. What steps could APL take to better address these needs?

The needs assessment was conducted in two phases: 1) a survey of all APL staff asking about their perceptions of patrons' needs (to answer #1-3 and partially answer #5), and 2) a survey of APL patrons asking about their needs (to answer #4 and partially answer #5).

Staff Survey Methods

To answer the above questions, Dr. Wahler and Ms. Rortvedt designed a survey for staff, based on a previous needs assessment survey Dr. Wahler conducted with a different library system. Ms. Rortvedt sent the email to all APL staff on September 26, 2019 and sent two reminder emails on October 7 and 14, 2019. Approximately 93 people received the email invitation for the survey. The survey was closed on October 18, 2019 with 55 usable survey responses (a 59% response rate). In addition, Dr. Wahler met with APL staff on November 13, 2019 and discussed the preliminary results with them.

Patron Survey Methods

Similar to the staff survey, Dr. Wahler and Ms. Rortvedt reviewed a survey used for a previous library needs assessment and made some minor edits to it for use with APL patrons. Changes consisted of adding the names of Wisconsin area programs and public benefits. The survey was available for patrons to complete between February 10 and March 2, 2020 using a number of formats. The Qualtrics electronic link and survey invitation were emailed to the APL email list on February 10th. APL information technology staff created a link to the survey that opened on all library computers, including reference computers and ones used for internet access by patrons, and the invitation to participate popped up on all computer screens between February 10th and March 2nd. Paper copies of the survey were also available throughout the library during this timeframe, and the social work practicum student or other volunteers invited patrons to complete the survey and

assisted with the completion of the survey if patrons needed help. Paper surveys were put in a collection box after completion, and data were then entered from these surveys by an APL staff person.

Patron Survey Demographics

In total, there were 655 useable responses to the patron survey. Participant demographics are in Table 1. Over two-thirds of the sample were women (n = 454, 63.9%), 186 participants were men (28.4%), four identified as genderqueer/nonbinary (.6%), and 10 participants preferred not to answer (1.5%). Most of the participants identified as White (n = 526, 80.3%), followed by Black (n = 13, 2.0%), Hispanic/Latino (n = 11, 1.7%), Asian (n = 7, 1.1%), Multiracial (n = 7, 1.1%), and Native American (n = 6, 1.0%). Eighty-five patrons did not answer this question. The average age of participants was 51.77, and ranged from 11-93. Most reported English as their primary language (n=641, 97.9%), but eight patrons reported Spanish (n = 1.2%), 1 Hmong (.2%), and 4 another language (.6%) as their primary language. The majority of participants reported owning a home (n = 466, 71.1%), 136 reported renting an apartment or house (20.8%), and 49 had no permanent home (7.5%).

Table 1. Demographic information of library patron respondents (n = 655)

Demographic Category		n (%)	Average
Race	White	526 (80.3%)	
	Black	13 (2.0%)	
	Hispanic/Latino	11 (1.7%)	
	Asian	7 (1.1%)	
	Multiracial	7 (1.1%)	
	Native American	6 (1.0%)	
	Did not respond	85 (13.0%)	
Age			51.77
Gender	Female	454 (63.9%)	
	Male	186 (28.4%)	
	Other	4 (0.6%)	
	Did not respond	11 (1.7%)	
Housing Status	Own a home	466 (71.1%)	
	Rent a home/apt	136 (20.8%)	
	No permanent address	49 (7.5%)	
	Did not respond	4 (0.6%)	
Primary Language	English	641 (97.9%)	
	Spanish	8 (1.2%)	
	Hmong	1 (0.2%)	
	Other	4 (0.6%)	
	Did not respond	1 (0.2%)	

Results

Question #1 What do APL staff perceive to be the most significant psychosocial needs of patrons?

To answer the first question, APL staff were asked a number of questions about the needs of their patrons. First, they were provided a list of potential areas of need and asked to check all that apply for their perceptions of the largest unmet need(s) of APL patrons. Staff indicated that the six highest unmet patron needs are mental health (n = 49, 89%), substance abuse (n = 38, 69%), housing (n = 34, 62%), employment (n = 30, 55%), and behavior problems (n = 28, 51%). The full results for this question are included in Table 2.

Table 2. Largest unmet needs of patrons

Identified Need	Frequency/Percentage
Mental health	49 (89.1%)
Substance abuse	38 (69.1%)
Housing	34 (61.8%)
Employment	30 (54.5%)
Behavior problems (manners)	28 (50.9%)
Financial	25 (45.5%)
Hygiene	23 (41.8%)
Medical/Health-related	22 (40.0%)
Relationship/Interpersonal issues	16 (29.1%)
Social connection/isolation	15 (27.3%)
Parenting/Child-related	14 (25.5%)
Transportation	12 (21.8%)
Education or literacy	11 (20.0%)
Food/nutrition	11 (20.0%)
Immigration/ESL	8 (14.5%)
Technology (access to or education about)	7 (12.7%)
Safe activities for teens	7 (12.7%)
Physical (related to disability or physical ability)	6 (10.9%)
Clothing	3 (5.5%)
Entertainment	1 (1.8%)

Question #2 What do APL staff perceive to be the role of the library regarding meeting psychosocial needs of patrons?

To address Question #2, participants were asked a series of questions about their perceptions of the library's responsibility to provide information, offer services, offer programming, or allow activities on-site to address patrons' psychosocial needs. They were asked to rate each item on a scale of 1-5, with 1 meaning that public libraries had no responsibility for that particular item and 5 meaning the library had a great deal of responsibility for that particular item.

Table 3 below summarizes participants' responses about the library's responsibility to provide *information* about poverty-related community agencies, medical problems, mental health problems, and substance abuse problems. Participants thought the library had the most responsibility to provide information about poverty-related community agencies ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 1.02$).

Table 3. Staff opinions of responsibility of library to provide information

Question: In your opinion, how much responsibility do public libraries have to provide the following types of information:	Mean (Standard Deviation)
	1=None at all 2= A little 3 = A moderate amount 4 = A lot 5 = A great deal
Information about poverty-related community agencies (food banks, housing shelters, low-cost medical providers, etc.)	4.04 (1.02)
Information about mental health problems (depression, anxiety, etc.)	3.67 (1.05)
Information about substance abuse problems	3.57 (1.01)
Information about medical problems (diabetes, heart disease, etc.)	3.54 (1.12)

Next, participants were asked about the responsibility of the library to offer *services* for patrons experiencing psychosocial needs, including assistance applying for public benefits, free food, hygiene items, or winter items for people experiencing poverty and/or homelessness, and referrals to community resources (see Table 4). These scores were understandably much lower than the above question about information. Participants thought the library had the most responsibility to provide referrals to community resources (M = 3.83, SD = 1.10) and the least responsibility to provide hygiene items (M = 1.83, SD = .92).

Table 4. Staff opinions of responsibility of library to offer services

Question: In your opinion, how much responsibility do libraries have to offer the following services:	Mean (Standard Deviation)
	1=None at all 2= A little 3 = A moderate amount 4 = A lot 5 = A great deal
Referrals to community resources (such as those for mental health, substance abuse, or health problems)	3.83 (1.10)
Assistance applying for public benefits (food stamps, health insurance, or social security)	2.67 (1.11)
Free food for people who are experiencing homelessness or poverty	1.93 (.96)
Winter items for people who are experiencing homelessness or poverty (coats, gloves, hats, etc.)	1.93 (.98)
Hygiene items for people who are experiencing homelessness or poverty	1.83 (.92)

Participants were then asked to rate the overall responsibility of the library to provide specific types of *programming*, including workshops on common medical problems, mental health problems, substance abuse problems, community resources, budgeting/finance, or how to access community resources (see Table 5). Participants were also asked whether libraries should offer support groups on the premises. Survey respondents thought the library had the most responsibility to provide workshops on community resources (M = 3.70, SD = 1.14), followed by workshops on how to access public benefits (M = 3.38, SD = 1.22), and budgeting/finance (M = 3.15, SD = 1.11).

Participants thought the library had the lowest responsibility for providing workshops on common medical problems (M = 2.77, SD = 1.06).

Table 5. Staff opinions of responsibility of library to provide programming

Question: In your opinion, how much responsibility do public libraries have to provide the following types of programming:	Mean (Standard Deviation)
	1=None at all 2= A little 3 = A moderate amount 4 = A lot 5 = A great deal
Workshops on community resources	3.70 (1.14)
Workshops on how to access public benefits	3.38 (1.22)
Workshops on budgeting or finances	3.15 (1.11)
Workshops on mental health problems	3.04 (1.13)
Workshops on substance abuse problems	2.94 (1.14)
Support groups	2.94 (1.22)
Workshops on common medical problems	2.77 (1.06)

Last, participants were asked to rate the responsibility of the library to allow specific *activities* to take place on the premises (see Table 6). Activities were included such as allowing community agencies to use library facilities to meet with patrons or conduct outreach activities, allowing people experiencing homelessness to come inside to stay warm/cool in the winter/summer, allowing people experiencing homelessness to use the restroom facilities for washing/hygiene, or allowing people experiencing homelessness to nap in the library during the day. Participants thought the library had the most responsibility to allow poverty or homelessness related agencies to come in the library for outreach services with their clients (M = 4.00, SD = 1.04) and the least responsibility to allow patrons experiencing homelessness to nap in a chair in the library (M = 1.80, SD = 1.01).

Table 6. Staff opinions of responsibility of library to allow activities

Question: In your opinion, how much responsibility do libraries have to allow the following	Mean (Standard Deviation) 1=None at all 2= A little 3 = A moderate amount 4 = A lot 5 = A great deal
Poverty or homelessness-related agencies to come in the library for outreach services to their clients	4.00 (1.04)
People who are experiencing homelessness to use the library to stay warm in the winter or cool in the summer	3.98 (1.03)
Community agencies to use library facilities for pre-scheduled meetings with their clients	3.86 (1.14)
People who are experiencing homelessness to use the library bathrooms for washing/hygiene	2.33 (1.25)
People who are experiencing homelessness to nap (in a chair) in the library	1.80 (1.01)

After answering the questions about the library’s responsibility to provide services beyond traditional information needs, participants were asked whether these services should be provided by trained library staff, social services professional(s) hired by the library, or partnerships with external community agencies (Table 7). They were also given an option to select none of the above, to indicate that these services or programs should not be provided in a public library. Participants could select as many as applied. The majority of participants thought the library should develop more partnerships with external agencies to provide these services (n = 48, 87.3%), followed by three-quarters (n = 42, 76.4%) who thought the library should hire its own social service professionals. Approximately one-third (n = 19, 34.5%) thought trained librarians or other library staff

could provide these services. A small number (n = 4, 7.3%) responded that they did not think it was the role of the library to provide these services at all.

Table 7. Staff opinions of who should provide non-traditional services

Provider	Frequency/Percentage
Partnerships with external community agencies	48 (87.3%)
Social service professional(s) hired by the library	42 (76.4%)
Trained librarians or other library staff	19 (34.5%)
None of the above – These services or programs should not be provided in or by a public library	4 (7.3%)

Question #3 How well is APL meeting patrons’ psychosocial needs?

Participants were asked how well they think APL is doing to meet the needs of patrons experiencing poverty and/or homelessness. Responses ranged from 1-5, with 1 meaning not well at all and 5 meaning extremely well. The average response was 2.75 (SD = .76). See Table 8 for the full range of responses.

Table 8. Staff opinions of how well APL is meeting patrons’ psychosocial needs

Response	Frequency/Percentage
Not well at all	3 (5.5%)
Slightly well	13 (23.6%)
Moderately well	31 (56.4%)
Very well	4 (7.3%)
Extremely well	1 (1.8%)

Question #4 What do APL patrons perceive to be their most significant needs? Do these needs differ based on housing status?

Patrons were presented a list of potential unmet needs they might have and given the instructions to “Think only about the areas in which you are not receiving any help or not receiving enough help. Mark as many as apply.” The top six unmet needs reported by patrons were fun and safe activities (n=105, 16.0%), social connections (n=91, 13.9%), mental health (n=67, 10.2%), financial (n=66, 10.1%), dental (n=53, 8.1%) and help using a computer (n=50, 7.6%).

Table 9. Unmet needs of patrons (n = 655)

Identified Need	Frequency/Percentage
Fun and safe activities	105 (16.0%)
Social connections (lonely, need to make friends, etc.)	91 (13.9%)
Mental health	67 (10.2%)
Financial	66 (10.1%)
Dental	53 (8.1%)
Help using a computer	50 (7.6%)
Job-related Training	49 (7.0%)
Education	46 (7.1%)
Health insurance	46 (7.1%)
Employment	45 (6.9%)
A place to store items while visiting the library	45 (6.9%)
Computer and/or internet access	44 (6.7%)
Parenting skills	43 (6.6%)
Transportation	36 (5.5%)
Legal	30 (4.6%)
Clothing	28 (4.3%)
Housing (no permanent housing or in unsafe housing)	27 (4.1%)
Help with a disability	27 (4.1%)
A place to keep warm or cool	26 (4.0%)
Utilities (unable to pay for utility bills)	21 (3.2%)
Not enough food	19 (2.9%)
Childcare	18 (2.7%)
Help applying for food stamps, social security, or other benefits	18 (2.7%)
Personal hygiene (a place to shower, soap/shampoo, etc.)	17 (2.6%)
Reading/literacy	12 (1.8%)
Substance use	7 (1.1%)
English as a second language	4 (.6%)
Immigration-related needs	2 (.3%)

Patrons were presented with a list of seven topic specific workshops and asked “If the library were to host free workshops on the following topics, how interested would you be?” Participants rated the workshops on a scale from 1 to 5 with 1 being “None” and 5 being “A great deal.” (See Table 10). Patrons reported that they were most interested in workshops about substance abuse problems (M =4.30, SD = 1.03) and least interested in workshops about community resources (M = 3.18, SD = 1.34).

Table 10. Patron interest in workshop topics

Topic	Average Interest Level (SD) 0 = No interest 5 = A great deal
Substance abuse problems	4.30 (1.03)
How to access public benefits	3.91 (1.35)
Common medical problems	3.79 (1.19)
Support groups	3.73 (1.30)
Budgeting/finance	3.71 (1.34)
Mental health problems	3.56 (1.33)
Community resources	3.18 (1.34)

Finally, participants were asked to “Please make any suggestions for ideas you have about how Appleton Public Library (APL) can better meet your needs or the needs of other people visiting this branch.” This was an open-ended question and participants were able to fill in the blank with their responses. Three hundred and sixty (360) patrons did not write in any response to this question, and 67 others specifically wrote in that they thought the library was great as is. Themes were identified in the 228 write-in suggestions, and the number of responses corresponding with each theme are presented in Table 11.

Table 11. Themes from patron suggestions for improvement (n = 655)

Improvement Needed	Frequency/Percentage
More workshops/programming/events	53 (8.1%)
Too many homeless patrons or people who are “frightening”	32 (4.9%)
Parking should be free	27 (4.1%)
APL should add more resources for patrons w/psychosocial needs	21 (3.2%)
APL shouldn’t be concerned with psychosocial needs	20 (3.1%)
The library shouldn’t move	19 (2.9%)
The library should move to a new location	17 (2.6%)
More activities for kids/teens needed	17 (2.6%)
More digital/audio resources needed	15 (2.3%)
APL needs longer/different hours	9 (1.4%)
APL needs more computers or electronic games	6 (.9%)
A café should be added	4 (.6%)
Specialized services should be added for patrons with disabilities	3 (.5%)
Patrons should be able to check out household items	2 (.3%)

Some of the themes are self-explanatory, so examples illustrating those themes are not included here. However, examples of patrons’ specific suggestions (in their own words) are included for themes that needed additional explanation.

More Workshops/Programming/Events

Fifty-three patrons had many suggestions for specific workshops, programming, or events that should be added. Many patrons suggested more than one idea for a new program or event they would like to see at APL. For example:

- activities that somehow bring together groups that are not presently interacting (i.e. Different races, different socio-economic classes, etc)
- art lectures, author's book signing, musical recitals (high school students especially), local electoral candidate meet and greet
- board game nights and a community led monthly book recommendation source by genre or age

- continued increase in a variety of programs on diversity and showcasing the countries and cultures of Appleton and the world. Programs on plugging into social justice and community service work. Programs connecting neighbors (social and for people of all ages).
- free movies shown
- computer lab with classes for word, excel, powerpoint, etc.
- grant writing classes, how to start a non-profit, coding classes
- scheduled time for people learning languages to get together to practice conversations
- having a tax expert on hand during tax time would be helpful
- Hmong and Spanish language classes
- public speaking events by invited experts or authors or lawmakers
- classes on how to use kindle, mac skills, or smart phones
- I'd like to learn about protecting the environment
- family planning
- new mom's group
- vegan/vegetarian food discussion and cooking classes

APL Should Add More Resources for Patrons with Psychosocial Needs

Twenty-one patrons commented about wanting to see APL have more services or resources for patrons who had psychosocial needs. Ideas included:

- mental health support and substance abuse support

- men being stalked group
- help with housing
- help with finding a part-time income to care for my family while on disability
- teen resources for mental health and wellbeing
- suicide prevention workshop
- community-based meetings to tackle homelessness, unemployment, and substance abuse in our community
- Resources for veterans
- Support groups
- Counseling programs

APL Shouldn't Be Concerned with Psychosocial Needs

Capturing the complexity of trying to meet the needs of the public, 20 patrons specifically commented that APL should not be asking about psychosocial needs or trying to meet these community needs. Comments included:

- All the "unmet needs" identified in this survey (ie. childcare, dental, food, personal hygiene, etc.) belong under the heading of "Community Resources" and should not be considered by the library as something "they" should be providing to the public. Information about the Community Resources that are presently available is what the library needs focus on, which could be met by a workshop, if need be.
- The library shouldn't be a halfway house for addicts and homeless.

- I don't want it to become another shelter. If those needs have to be addressed they should not be through the library.
- I think we need other places for the homeless...don't know where, but I question that the library is the home for the homeless.
- A library should focus on its core business of providing media to the public.
- I go to the library to just get books. Is it appropriate for a library to be hosting events better offered by a social worker or someone trained in those issues? I am uncomfortable with the library as a hub for social services. It's a library! with librarians! I want to hear more reading options,etc. I also visit the library less due to safety concerns and the number of homeless in the parking lot.
- Libraries should concentrate on library materials services, not social service programs, which need a different type of facility.

More Activities for Kids/Teens Needed

Seventeen patrons commented about wanting more activities for kids or teens. Many of these comments were nonspecific, such as “activities for kids” or “continued programs for kids” but some were more specific, including:

- Edutainment opportunities for kids that help inspire learning or spark curiosity
- Coding classes for kids
- More homeschool programs
- More K-12 programs during the day/afternoon.
- High school programs to increase civics knowledge and involvement

- More diverse and varied children's books
- We love makerspace. More children's programs after school.

Specialized Services Should Be Added for Patrons with Disabilities

Only three patrons wrote-in a response related to disability services. Their specific comments were that they would like to see:

- a drive-through for disabled people to pick up and drop off books at a window
- a place in the children's area for adults with cognitive disabilities, or a special card allowing them to be in that area (currently, this patron indicated that their adult child is not allowed to be in this area and that the parent would need to accompany this adult child if allowed to visit the area with books that are cognitively appropriate)
- social events for people with mild intellectual disabilities to prevent social isolation

Because APL was particularly interested in how well they were serving their most vulnerable patron groups and because the survey went to a broad sample of APL patrons, responses were examined by housing subgroup to see if there were differences in patron needs. Comparisons were made between individuals who reported owning a home, renting a home, or having no stable housing. The demographic makeup of each group is included in Table 11 below. The biggest differences between groups were in age and gender. Patrons who did not have stable housing were the youngest group (34.56 versus 49.71 for patrons in rental housing and 54.21 for patrons who owned a home), and more likely to be male (49.0% versus 32.4% of the rental housing group and 25.1% of the home owner group).

Table 12. Demographic makeup of patrons based on housing status

		No stable housing (n = 49)	Rental housing (n = 136)	Own a home (n = 466)	All
		n (%) or average	n (%) or average	n (%) or average	n (%) or average
Race	White	41 (83.7%)	98 (72.1%)	387 (83.0%)	526 (80.3%)
	Black	4 (8.2%)	6 (4.4%)	2 (0.4%)	13 (2.0%)
	Hispanic/Latino	1 (2.0%)	6 (4.4%)	4 (0.9%)	11 (1.7%)
	Asian	1 (2.0%)	1 (0.7%)	5 (1.1%)	7 (1.1%)
	Multiracial	0 (0.0%)	3 (2.2%)	4 (0.9%)	7 (1.1%)
	Native American	1 (2.0%)	2 (1.5%)	3 (0.6%)	6 (1.0%)
	Did not respond	1 (2.0%)	20 (14.7%)	61 (13.1%)	85 (13.0%)
Age		34.56	49.71	54.21	51.77
Gender	Female	25 (51.0%)	89 (65.4%)	339 (72.7%)	454 (69.6%)
	Male	24 (49.0%)	44 (32.4%)	117 (25.1%)	186 (28.4%)
	Other	0 (0.0%)	2 (1.5%)	2 (0.4%)	4 (0.6%)
	Did not respond	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.2%)	8 (1.7%)	9 (1.4%)
Primary Language	English	49 (100.0%)	131 (96.3%)	458 (98.3%)	641 (97.9%)
	Spanish	0 (0.0%)	3 (2.2%)	5 (1.1%)	8 (1.2%)
	Hmong	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.2%)	1 (0.2%)
	Other	0 (0.0%)	2 (1.5%)	2 (0.4%)	4 (0.6%)
	Did not respond	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.2%)

Next, patron unmet needs were examined based on housing status. The top six needs for the entire sample of participants were:

- 1) fun and safe activities (16.0%)
- 2) social connections (13.9%)
- 3) mental health (10.2%)
- 4) financial (10.1%)
- 5) dental (8.1%)
- 6) help using a computer (7.6%)

However, many of the top six needs of the group with no stable housing were different, and the percentages of participants in these groups with these needs were much higher:

- 1) mental health (46.2%)
- 2) financial (42.9%)
- 3) housing (40.8%)
- 4) employment (34.7%)
- 5) social connections (32.7%)
- 6) a place to keep warm or cool (28.6%)

Table 13. Unmet needs of patrons by housing status

Identified Need	No stable housing (n = 49)	Rental housing (n = 136)	Own a home (n = 466)	All
	Frequency/ Percentage	Frequency/ Percentage	Frequency/ Percentage	Frequency/ Percentage
Fun and safe activities	13 (26.5%)	20 (14.7%)	72 (15.5%)	105 (16.0%)
Social connections (lonely, need to make friends, etc.)	16 (32.7%)	22 (16.2%)	53 (11.4%)	91 (13.9%)
Mental health	18 (46.2%)	19 (14.0%)	30 (6.4%)	67 (10.2%)
Financial	21 (42.9%)	25 (18.4%)	19 (4.1%)	66 (10.1%)
Dental	13 (26.5%)	26 (19.1%)	14 (3.0%)	53 (8.1%)
Help using a computer	4 (8.2%)	12 (8.8%)	34 (7.3%)	50 (7.6%)
Job-related Training	12 (24.5%)	21 (15.4%)	14 (3.0%)	49 (7.0%)
Education	7 (14.3%)	10 (7.4%)	29 (6.2%)	46 (7.1%)
Health insurance	8 (16.3%)	15 (11.0%)	23 (4.9%)	46 (7.1%)
Employment	17 (34.7%)	19 (14.0%)	7 (1.5%)	45 (6.9%)
A place to store items while visiting the library	9 (18.4%)	16 (11.8%)	20 (4.3%)	45 (6.9%)
Computer and/or internet access	12 (24.5%)	11 (8.1%)	21 (4.5%)	44 (6.7%)
Parenting skills	5 (10.2%)	11 (8.1%)	27 (5.8%)	43 (6.6%)
Transportation	14 (28.6%)	18 (13.2%)	4 (0.9%)	36 (5.5%)
Legal	9 (18.4%)	7 (5.1%)	14 (3.0%)	30 (4.6%)
Clothing	13 (26.5%)	12 (8.8%)	3 (0.6%)	28 (4.3%)
Housing (no permanent housing or in unsafe housing)	20 (40.8%)	7 (5.1%)	0 (0.0%)	27 (4.1%)
Help with a disability	13 (26.5%)	10 (7.4%)	4 (0.9%)	27 (4.1%)
A place to keep warm or cool	14 (28.6%)	9 (6.6%)	3 (0.6%)	26 (4.0%)
Utilities (unable to pay for utility bills)	9 (18.4%)	10 (7.4%)	2 (0.4%)	21 (3.2%)
Not enough food	4 (8.2%)	11 (8.1%)	4 (0.9%)	19 (2.9%)
Childcare	4 (8.2%)	4 (2.9%)	10 (2.1%)	18 (2.7%)
Help applying for food stamps, social security, or other benefits	8 (16.3%)	5 (3.7%)	5 (1.1%)	18 (2.7%)
Personal hygiene (a place to shower, soap/shampoo, etc.)	6 (12.2%)	9 (6.6%)	2 (0.4%)	17 (2.6%)
Reading/literacy	1 (2.0%)	3 (2.2%)	8 (1.7%)	12 (1.8%)
Substance use	3 (6.1%)	3 (2.2%)	1 (0.2%)	7 (1.1%)
English as a second language	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.7%)	3 (0.6%)	4 (0.6%)
Immigration-related needs	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.7%)	1 (0.2%)	2 (0.3%)

Although the needs were higher, workshop interest was lower for the group of patrons without stable housing when compared to both other housing groups. Patrons who were homeowners had the highest interest in workshops on all topics, followed by patrons who rented their housing. For the group of patrons without stable housing, they were most interested in workshops on substance abuse problems and common medical problems.

Table 14. Patron interest in workshop topics by housing status

Topic	Average Interest Level (SD)			
	0 = No interest 5 = A great deal			
	No stable housing (n = 49)	Rental housing (n = 136)	Own a home (n = 466)	All
Substance abuse problems	3.60 (1.38)	4.26 (1.14)	4.38 (.94)	4.30 (1.03)
How to access public benefits	2.70 (1.44)	3.53 (1.55)	4.15 (1.18)	3.91 (1.35)
Common medical problems	3.20 (1.29)	3.65 (1.34)	3.88 (1.12)	3.79 (1.19)
Support groups	2.74 (1.39)	3.28 (1.51)	3.96 (1.15)	3.73 (1.30)
Budgeting/finance	2.65 (1.37)	3.40 (1.49)	3.90 (1.22)	3.71 (1.34)
Mental health problems	2.56 (1.44)	3.43 (1.42)	3.69 (1.24)	3.56 (1.33)
Community resources	2.49 (1.41)	2.90 (1.42)	3.32 (1.28)	3.18 (1.34)

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The majority of the suggestions for improvement came from patrons who were homeowners. As housing stability decreased, overall suggestions for improvement also declined. The one exception to this was the suggestion that APL should add more resources for patrons with psychosocial needs, which was reported by 14.3% of patrons with no stable housing.

Table 15. Themes from patron suggestions for improvement by housing status

Improvement Needed	No stable housing (n = 49)	Rental housing (n = 136)	Own a home (n = 466)	All
	Frequency/ Percentage	Frequency/ Percentage	Frequency/ Percentage	Frequency/ Percentage
More workshops/programming/events	3 (6.1%)	8 (5.9%)	42 (9.0%)	53 (8.1%)
Too many homeless patrons or people who are “frightening”	2 (4.1%)	3 (2.2%)	27 (5.8%)	32 (4.9%)
Parking should be free	0 (0.0%)	6 (4.4%)	21 (4.5%)	27 (4.1%)
APL should add more resources for patrons w/psychosocial needs	7 (14.3%)	5 (3.7%)	8 (1.7%)	21 (3.2%)
APL shouldn’t be concerned with psychosocial needs	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	20 (4.3%)	20 (3.1%)
The library shouldn’t move	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.7%)	18 (3.9%)	19 (2.9%)
The library should move to a new location	1 (2.0%)	1 (0.7%)	15 (3.2%)	17 (2.6%)
More activities for kids/teens needed	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.7%)	16 (3.4%)	17 (2.6%)
More digital/audio resources needed	0 (0.0%)	2 (1.5%)	13 (2.8%)	15 (2.3%)
APL needs longer/different hours	1 (2.0%)	1 (0.7%)	6 (1.3%)	9 (1.4%)
APL needs more computers or electronic games	1 (2.0%)	1 (0.7%)	4 (0.9%)	6 (.9%)
A café should be added	1 (2.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (0.6%)	4 (.6%)
Specialized services should be added for patrons with disabilities	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (0.6%)	3 (.5%)
Patrons should be able to check out household items	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (0.4%)	2 (.3%)

Question #5 What steps could APL take to better address these needs?

Participants were asked what services APL could offer to be more helpful to people experiencing poverty and/or homelessness. They were given a list of responses and could choose as many as applied (see Table 16). They could also write in additional suggestions they had for improving services for these populations. Three participants wrote in responses, including one person who suggested making referrals to substance abuse treatment, one who suggested following up with people who regularly show up in crisis or seem to have difficulty navigating community programs, and one person who expressed concern that library staff don't have expertise to be doing these types of activities.

Table 16. Additional services to be more helpful for people experiencing poverty and/or homelessness

Response	Frequency/Percentage
Walk-throughs by service providers to check on patrons experiencing homelessness	46 (83.6%)
List of community agencies and contact information	44 (80.0%)
Designated days/times for homeless service providers to meet with patrons experiencing homelessness	42 (76.4%)
Assistance signing up for housing programs	35 (63.6%)
Assistance signing up for public benefits like BadgerCare, TANF (“Wisconsin Works”), or FoodShare benefits (“food stamps”)	34 (61.8%)
Hygiene items	23 (41.8%)
Children and family meal programs	22 (40.0%)
Warm items such as blankets, hats, gloves, or coats	19 (34.5%)
Snacks/food	18 (32.7%)

Participants were then asked a similar question about what additional services APL could provide that would better help individuals experiencing mental health, substance abuse, or medical problems/needs. Answers from the provided list are included in Table 17. In addition to the suggestions mentioned in the table, participants had the option of writing in responses but did not do so for this question.

Table 17. Additional services to be more helpful for people experiencing mental health, substance abuse, or medical problems

Response	Frequency/Percentage
List of community agencies and contact information	46 (83.6%)
Designated days and times for select service providers to meet with patrons experiencing these issues	42 (76.4%)
Workshops by service providers	41 (74.5%)
Private room for patrons to discuss personal issues	36 (65.5%)
Assistance signing up for health insurance/BadgerCare	36 (65.5%)
Assistance signing up for SSI/SSDI (“disability”)	33 (60.0%)

Participants were asked an open-ended questions about policy changes APL could make to better support patrons with psychosocial needs. They wrote in responses, which included the following:

- Allow people to bring in and/or store duffle bags or other bags
- Have regular access to a social worker or community resource person
- Have better organized information on hand or a designated point of contact to provide patrons with psychosocial needs. Designated staff could be allowed to spend more time with people in need.

- Try to raise the tolerance level of other patrons who are not experiencing these issues
- Provide bus vouchers to help patrons get to community providers if providers can't come to the library
- Clarify expectations of library staff regarding helping patrons with psychosocial needs because there is sometimes confusion about the policies that should be followed
- Provide parenting workshops and consider incentivizing participants with tangibles such as diapers or bus passes
- Provide resources such as grocery coupons, food, or warm clothing to patrons in need
- Provide designated areas for sleeping or hygiene

As part of the survey, staff were asked whether they would be willing to attend trainings on specific topics related to patrons' psychosocial needs, including trainings on poverty, homelessness, mental health issues, substance abuse, health problems, or other topics. These results are presented below in Table 18. In addition to these topics, two participants wrote in responses and requested training on adverse childhood experiences/trauma, immigrants/ESL issues, and community resources.

Table 18. Willingness to attend specific trainings

Training Topic	Frequency/Percentage
Mental health issues	38 (69.1%)
Substance abuse	36 (65.5%)
Health problems	21 (38.2%)
Homelessness	21 (38.2%)
Poverty	19 (34.5%)

Staff were also asked whether there was anything else that would help them better assist patrons with psychosocial needs. Responses were open-ended and included:

- An easily-accessed handout or checklist of community resources. One participant specifically commented that this should be accessible to patrons without them needing to request it, to protect their anonymity.
- Specially trained staff, increased community partner presence, an on-call professional for crisis situations (as opposed to calling 911), or hiring an on-site social service professional
- Information about how to approach people to talk to them about difficult subjects such as hygiene
- Additional training on community resources and ways to connect patrons with those resources
- Clear communication about expectations and policies
- Communication between the library and local government officials to help address the root causes of poverty and psychosocial problems in the Appleton community

Conclusions, Recommendations, and Next Steps

This report summarizes the results of the staff and patron surveys conducted for this needs assessment of APL. The results of this needs assessment provide a snapshot in time of what patrons' needs may have been in early 2020; because of the timing of these surveys and the subsequent COVID-19 public health crisis, patrons' needs could be different if a survey was completed again in the near future. The current economic difficulties caused by COVID-19 are expected to greatly exacerbate financial difficulties, housing instability, unemployment rates, mental health problems, and other psychosocial needs so it is expected that psychosocial needs will only continue to rise. Even patrons who may have been in stable housing at the time of this survey may find themselves in different circumstances moving forward depending on the length of the public health and economic crises caused by COVID-19.

The results of these surveys capture the complexity of the issues faced by APL, given that the staff are often faced with patrons who have serious psychosocial needs (mental health, substance abuse problems, homelessness, poverty, among other issues) and some patrons expressed safety concerns and fear of people who are homeless or otherwise "frightening." Library staff are tasked with the difficult job of trying to address all patrons' needs while also ensuring that the library stays a safe and secure space for everyone. Multiple staff expressed concern that APL is doing the best they can with limited resources and that library staff do not have the training to deal with the serious and complex issues with which they are often faced. Overall, staff felt that APL was doing moderately well at meeting patrons' complex and varied psychosocial needs.

Further complicating matters, responses on this survey also captured the conflicting perspectives of different library staff and patrons about the library's role. For example, while the majority of the staff reported a desire to address patrons' psychosocial needs better in the library setting, there were others who felt that these types of efforts were not appropriate for a library. Additionally, although there were 21 patrons who thought APL should try to increase services for psychosocial needs, 20 patrons said that was not the role of the library. These conflicting opinions were observable throughout the data, and present additional difficulty for APL attempting to create a unified and systematic response to the problems faced at this time.

Participants from both patron and staff groups made suggestions for improvement. Notably, APL is already doing some of the things that were suggested, which could be a reflection of the timing of the surveys or could also mean that more communication needs to occur about strategies APL has already implemented to meet patron needs.

Based on the data presented in this report, it is recommended that APL consider the following suggestions:

1. Continue partnering with UW Oshkosh to regularly have a social work practicum student placed at APL, if possible. Students can help with addressing patron psychosocial needs on an individual or group basis, can help with staff training and support, and can also conduct ongoing data collection to document patron needs, information about interventions provided, and observed outcomes that could assist APL with identifying additional patron needs and potentially justifying funding for a contract or permanent social service professional to serve the library.

2. Equip all staff with readily available community referral information. Participants requested updated information about resources; the most frequently updated online website of local resources is maintained by United Way Fox Cities at <https://www.unitedwayfoxcities.org/our-work/united-way-2-1-1/>. Because many organizations change frequently, it is easier to use this existing resource rather than try to duplicate it and create one just for APL. APL should ensure that all staff know about this resource and how to use it. In addition, a handout of the most commonly used community resources could be created by a social work practicum student and updated regularly. This handout could be given to staff to distribute as needed when patrons request referral information.
3. Have an identified information area for patrons to easily access information on community agencies (food banks, housing shelters, low-cost medical providers, substance abuse treatment, affordable housing, etc.) and brochures or pamphlets about psychosocial problems and needs. To maintain patron anonymity, this information could be placed in the hallway by the main floor bathrooms so individuals could browse the info and take what is needed without needing to ask anyone. APL may already be aware of these resources, but many federal institutes offer free informational pamphlets that could be ordered and placed in these information areas. For example, the National Institute on Mental Health offers free pamphlets and booklets on many mental health disorders, and many are available in Spanish and English (see <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/index.shtml>). Their information booklets, brochures, and fact sheets cover topics such as anxiety disorders, autism

spectrum disorders, depression, eating disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, and schizophrenia, among others. They also have resources that pertain to all age groups. Similarly, the National Institute on Drug Abuse offers free resources pertaining to substance use and abuse, with many available in English and Spanish (see <https://drugpubs.drugabuse.gov>). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offer many free materials on child development and parenting (see <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/freematerials.html>). In addition, the handout of common local community resources mentioned in #3 above could be kept in this area for patrons to pick up without needing to ask anyone.

4. Ensure already existing information resources on medical problems, mental health problems, and substance abuse problems can be easily identified and accessible by patrons for check out.
5. APL already prioritizes community partnerships and even currently employs Adriana McCleer in the position of Community Partnerships Supervisor. During the meeting with APL at the beginning of the needs assessment process, numerous community partners met with me to discuss their ongoing collaborations with APL and APL's involvement in the community. This is quite positive, and bodes well for APL's ongoing ability to mobilize resources to meet patron needs as best as possible. However, this could be something with which a social work student or contracted social worker might be able to assist in the future. At the time of this needs assessment and thanks to staff's ongoing efforts to partner with community organizations, APL already had many community partners coming to share information about their services at a table in the front of the library. Although this

may continue to be the case due to resource limitations of nonprofit organizations, it is recommended that APL consider creating a more consistent schedule of organizations using their space to present info about their resources so patrons can depend on specific types of resources coming regularly or having resources presented on specific days of the week. This may be an area in which a social work practicum student could greatly assist, although this certainly depends largely on the resources of the community partners.

6. Form additional partnerships or make requests of existing community partners to provide trainings on poverty, homelessness, mental health, substance abuse, and health problems to staff. A live training on any of these topics could be recorded and distributed as a webinar to increase accessibility. The majority of survey participants requested information specifically on mental health issues and substance abuse problems, and a smaller but still substantial group requested training on health problems, homelessness, and poverty. Staff requested training on how to approach patrons to talk to them about difficult situations and how to de-escalate situations when patrons become upset. Staff also requested training on community resources and ways to better connect patrons with those resources. Social work practicum students may be able to assist with conducting some of these trainings or helping to recruit community partners to provide these trainings for staff.
7. Form additional partnerships or make requests of existing community partners to provide workshops on poverty, homelessness, mental health, substance abuse, and health problems to patrons. The most highly desired workshop topic for patrons

was on substance abuse, but patrons also reported relatively high demand for workshops on accessing public benefits, common medical problems, budgeting/finance, mental health, and community resources. Although APL is already providing some support groups, patrons also requested more on-site support groups but did not give examples of specific groups that were desired.

8. Ensure adequate security coverage of library parking areas and facilities, but also ensure that security personnel are trained in de-escalation tactics, crisis intervention, and Mental Health First Aid. Mental Health First Aid helps security personnel know how to respond effectively to mental health or substance use-related crises, recognize risk factors and warning signs, encourage individuals to seek appropriate professional help, encourage self-help and other support strategies, and reduce the possibility that the mental health crisis will escalate. Mental Health First Aid is also available for staff and is not limited to security personnel. In the absence of social work students or social workers on site, Mental Health First Aid training can be a way to empower all staff to address crises when necessary, and in an effective way. It has also been found to increase the mental wellness of people trained in it, which could be helpful given the amount of stress public library staff are under due to the needs of their patrons and the unpredictable nature of the work. More information about Mental Health First Aid and local trainings on the topic can be found at <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/take-a-course/find-a-course/>.
9. Consider creating an ongoing task force to monitor patron needs and help to suggest and develop new partnerships with community agencies as patron needs change.

10. Read *The Whole Person Librarianship: A Social Work Approach to Patron Services*, by Sara Zettervall and Mary Nienow (2019). Co-written by a librarian and a social worker, the book has many suggestions for assisting library patrons with psychosocial needs, partnering with social work students, and considering hiring an on-staff social worker. The book and its sister website (<https://wholepersonlibrarianship.com/book/resources/>) contain resources for libraries' use. This book might be helpful for many of the library staff members to read, as well as social work practicum students assigned to APL.