Social Workers and Public Libraries:
A Commentary on an Emerging Interprofessional Collaboration

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Abstract: A growing interprofessional collaboration between social work and library professionals has fueled the emergence of library social workers and the exploration of libraries as a setting for social work. This exciting partnership evolves from common historic roots, a strong alignment of values, and effectively addresses changing community needs that aligns with both professions. Social work and public libraries are both products of the Progressive Era along with the rise of charitable organizations and settlement houses. In examining the evolution of libraries in the wake of changing technology and patron populations, social workers are critical community allies to respond to diverse community needs. Social workers, human service providers, and funders also now see public libraries as community centers and civic hubs, as well as even settlement houses for the 21st Century. Libraries serve as civic hubs that are essential connectors of information, education, resources, and access that addresses human needs. This commentary's aim in exploring library social worker practice encourages community-university partnerships between our public libraries and the academic programs of social work and library science that strengthen civic and community engagement. Social work practitioners and educators are encouraged to spend more time at their public libraries through interprofessional internships, class projects, applied research, and dual-degree curricular development that can prepare next generation practitioner to work and lead in these community centers.

Keywords: Whole person librarianship, library social work practice, community engagement, lifelong community learning centers, interprofessional collaboration

From a Shared Progressive Legacy to Community-Centered Partnerships

Social workers looking for an innovative career pathway and opportunities to enhance community partnerships for extended social service reach should look to interprofessional collaboration at their public libraries. These inclusive and visible community institutions are reinventing themselves to better and more strategically address community needs, as well as to stay relevant and impactful to their patrons and community residents. In this challenging effort, social workers represent a logical professional partner. This article explores the roles of the public library, and how they parallel the Progressive Era roots of social work's settlement house legacy (Yan, 2004). We examine how social services can be integrated with librarianship, and how social workers and social work educators might practice more effectively in the future through interprofessional education (IPE) and collaboration.

With more than 16,500 public libraries in the United States, this number reflects on the historic value we hold for these institutions (American Library Association, 2019). When Industrialist and early philanthropist Andrew Carnegie first seeded libraries in the

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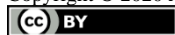
industrial valley towns near Pittsburgh, he recognized the importance of education and the potential for public libraries to help individuals, especially immigrants, to learn and participate in American society and the economy (Van Slyck, 1995). The ideal was that social improvement through educating the masses would lift them out of poverty, and Carnegie's libraries had a deep impact on American culture. It is important to recognize, however, that in the Deep South, libraries were segregated and hardly equitable in resources (Graham, 2002). Yet, the notion of libraries as social institutions serving as educational centers for society, has held steady over the years. Programs remain free and open for patrons now from all socioeconomic classes and ethnic/cultural backgrounds - a bastion to democracy and participation. Writing in *The Nation*, publisher, vanden Heuvel (2015) acknowledged that the access to social life provided by public libraries must be supported by public and private funding, and argues that America "not abandon the egalitarian living rooms that our public libraries have become" (para 6).

Libraries have long been sources of books and information for their communities; residents have considered them as one of our most important community assets (Pew Research Center, 2013). A Pew Research Center study titled, "How Americans Value Public Libraries in the Their Communities," found that while 67% of respondents felt a public library closing would have an impact on their family, fully 90% of respondents thought such a closing would adversely impact their community (Pew Research Center, 2013).

Public libraries have multiplied, survived, prospered, and embraced change. Public libraries have continued to evolve in an effort to stay relevant with community and patrons' needs. Many have become community hubs or *third places* (Butler & Diaz, 2016; Oldenburg & Brisset, 1982) – naturally-occurring places in communities where people congregate and interact. More than merely books and computers, libraries are places where individuals gather to explore, interact, and imagine. University of Kentucky Professor Pat Litzelfelner (2018) contends that today's public libraries are an evolution of the settlement houses. She notes that libraries share many of our social work perspectives beyond this historical comparison with the settlement house movement, in terms of: a) a commitment to social justice as places of social inclusion, b) working from a strengths perspective in terms of connecting to natural occurring resources, and c) stressing the importance of human relationship as places for people to connect and build social capital.

Zettervall and Nienow (2019) similarly underscore the Progressive Era roots of both libraries and social work's settlement houses, and, in many ways, they showcase how social work and librarianship can be described as "sister professions" (p. 1). The authors compare and contrast their respective values and perspectives through their concept of *Whole Person Librarianship*. Social work's settlement houses provided educational, artistic, and social programs for immigrants, the poor, and the working class. Established as community centers, settlements engaged people of different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds to share knowledge, skills, and social capital. Settlement houses offered formal classes, provided meeting spaces for clubs and associations, held free concerts and lectures, conducted training for employment and English literacy, and instructed on cooking, nutrition, and public health needs (Yan, 2004). One could look at the earliest Carnegie Libraries that still remain in Pittsburgh industrial towns like Braddock – the first Carnegie

Library – and Homestead to find concert halls, classrooms, and large event rooms, as well as even gymnasiums, bowling allies, and swimming pools. As Davies (1974) notes in his book. "Public Library as Cultural and Social Center," addressing this concept of providing such larger social services dates back to the nineteenth century's voluntary uplift and cultural societies, and, yet, he argues libraries should keep to being places for books and readings and librarians to fields like history, printing, writing, and publishing. However, libraries in the 21st century are reexamining their roles in responding to their communities.

Many libraries, like their settlement house kin, are focusing on the needs of immigrants and refugees by helping them acclimate and transition to their communities and the United States, as well as helping them with language skills, tutoring, job searches, technology, and social service resources to help with housing and other pressing individual and family needs. For example, in the Pittsburgh/Allegheny County region in Pennsylvania, public libraries in communities of Baldwin, Brentwood, and Whitehall boroughs are engaging with large groups of Somalian and Nepalese/Bhutanese refugees who have resettled in subsidized housing complexes in their communities. The three libraries combined to host a cultural festival in the area as both a welcoming and an orientation to the immigrants and refugees that are settling in these communities, setting up businesses, buying homes, and becoming library patrons, public school students, and neighbors. Libraries are reaching out to newcomers by providing access to many learning and cultural enrichments opportunities, not only for these refugees, but for other patrons and the communities at large. Public libraries have become a vital hub for the immigrant and refugee communities in many cities, with this Pittsburgh area example being replicated across the country.

Public libraries today provide similar programming, including: employment search; computers/internet instruction; GED and English as a Second Language classes; enrichment programs for adults and children; speakers/lectures; book, chess and science clubs; summer tutoring and reading programs; and room for a range of group meetings from Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) to foster parenting. Teens have positive interactions and develop interests, seniors interact with others avoiding isolation, children find safe after-school space, and any patron can find the computers and online information to connect with today's virtual world (Cabello & Butler, 2017; Zettervall & Nienow, 2019).

The Public Library Association's *Libraries Online* (Edwards et al., 2013) detailed "23 reasons why public libraries are community-centered," (para. 1) including the roles of libraries as: a) community builders – helping residents understand and civically engage in their communities, even solving social problems; b) centers for diversity, inclusion, and global perspectives; c) hubs for arts and culture to enrich and enliven community life; d) life-long learning centers where residents learn from one another and engage in civic discourse; and, e) champions for children and youth development, relationship building, and learning.

What the Fields Are Telling Us About Human Service Collaboration in Libraries

In an evaluative study of the social workers in a San Jose library, Luo and colleagues (2017) found that the social work program aimed at advancing social justice by providing access to social service information, particularly to disadvantaged populations using the

libraries. The authors stressed that interactions between human services and libraries do not represent a new connection and are rich with studies on building internal library capacity to respond to such human service informational needs (Luo et al., 2017). They further note, "More importantly, there is a dearth of scholarship and research regarding collaborative service models that partner these two disciplines to better meet community needs (Luo et al., 2017, p. 76). As authors, we have also found studies and scholarly articles lacking in this vein, but, again, this is an emerging area of interprofessional collaboration.

Litzelfelner (2018) references libraries as one of Western society's first great experiments in social justice, striving to provide "free access to all." Vanden Heuvel (2015) notes "After all, you can't get more populist than the public library" (para. 2). Zettervall and Nienow (2019) have begun referring to this growing social work focus within public libraries as "whole person librarianship," a lens through which they see a "social work approach to patron services" (p. 1). In examining how library staff address psychosocial issues that patrons present, Wahler and colleagues (2020) conducted a study of psychosocial needs and service gaps in a large metropolitan library system. Their study underscores how social workers can assist libraries in responding to patron psychosocial issues (Wahler et al., 2020).

Public libraries have taken on social service programming to benefit patrons and their communities and are seeking collaboration with social services to enhance their ability to build stronger connections to resources to meet the changing and expanding community needs (Lloyd, 2020). More recently, public libraries are hiring social workers, initially to assist with persons experiencing homelessness who find libraries safe havens (Knight, 2010; Shafer, 2014), as was the case for a San Francisco public library, the first to hire a social worker (Blank, 2017). Now social workers in libraries also work with children after-school, assist new immigrants and refugees transitioning to life in their new countries, as well as with idle youth and isolated seniors. Others seeking information on social and mental health needs are turning to their libraries for help (Dankowski, 2018).

This emerging human service collaboration is not unique to social work. A University of Pennsylvania study found, "public libraries are dynamic, socially responsive institutions, a nexus of diversity, and a lifeline for the most vulnerable among us" (Cabello & Butler, 2017, p. 4). The study focused on partnering between Philadelphia libraries and the university to respond to social determinants of health through university training for librarians to become community health specialists offering public health programs to their patrons (Cabello & Butler, 2017). Thus, many libraries are exploring partnerships with other disciplines, notably social work, public health, and health-related professions (Blank, 2017), such as the Pima County Library system in Arizona, which was the first library to hire a public health nurse to work on community health needs.

Butler and Diaz (2016) reported that with health care and other social issues libraries utilize the trust and access characteristics of a third place, serving a hub role in the community through partnerships with other institutions to connect people with services and assistance. Community needs and visitor requests often strain and overwhelm library funding, as libraries work to retrain staff, in search of the right mix of skills (Butler & Diaz, 2016). Butler and Diaz (2016) argued that policymakers and government officials need to

recognize this challenge and incorporate libraries into planning and budgeting designed to build healthy and vibrant communities. The Hawaii Public Library System, for example, sought major funding over fiscal years 2018 and 2019 to hire a manager responsible for training library staff statewide and creating partnerships with social service agencies (Friedheim, 2017).

Public Libraries and Social Work Collaboration

The evidence notes that librarians are not trained to handle many of the issues they now encounter, such as resources for homelessness, substance abuse, and mental health issues; thus, some libraries have hired social workers to help address patrons' social service needs (Blank, 2017; Butler & Diaz, 2016; Cabello & Butler, 2017). The San Francisco Public Library recognized a number of the library patrons were experiencing homelessness and, therefore, determined they would add a caseworker to provide assessments and interventions, such as case management and housing assistance (Daigneau, 2010). In 2009, Leah Esguerra became the nation's first full-time, library psychiatric social worker; she was hired to do outreach to patrons in need of social services, particularly homeless patrons (Shafer, 2014). Similarly, the D.C. Public Library hired a social worker to help improve outcomes for homeless patrons (Shafer, 2014).

Public library professionals do their best to serve whoever walks through their doors as ably and as knowledgeably as they can. Despite their best intentions, homeless patrons sometimes need more immediate, skilled, or complex assistance than a single library visit can provide. In the downtown Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, a social service staffer and a social work intern were integrated into the library personnel, not only to support the significant at-risk and homeless populations that come into the free space, but also to assist with the growing number of opioid overdoses that were occurring at the library (H. Anderton, personal communication, July 29, 2019). As a free and public space, many urban libraries have become vital refuges for people with an array of social, mental health, and health issues (Blank, 2017; Cabello & Butler, 2017).

As libraries take on these new challenges and build social capital, they are looking for social work partners with expertise to collaborate with libraries and library science professionals (Kelley et al., 2017). *Public Libraries Online* (Nemec-Loise, 2014) described the Washington, D. C. public library's newly appointed Health and Human Services Coordinator as a social worker, operating on a system-wide basis by developing programs and partnerships focused on awareness and sensitivity within the library and among its staff. We found a number of notable examples across the United States that have built on this model of social work and public library collaboration (see Table 1).

Social work is increasingly collaborating with public libraries, not only in the U.S., but in Canada and around the world. Articles and anecdotes from online sources, as well as in peer-reviewed journals in both social work and library science fields have examined this growing community collaboration between library and social work professionals using the library setting as a community and information center to underscore the importance of this partnership (Blank, 2017; Hines, 2015). Such partnership connects shared professional

missions to support democracy, provide open access to resources, and work toward social justice. It is encouraging to see this interprofessional collaboration growing globally.

Table 1. *Examples to Address Patron's Psychosocial Needs in Public Libraries*

Location	Public Library (PL) Activities	Employee	Community	Library
Azusa, CA	A library grant was used to add a part-time MSW social worker, a position adopted as a line item in the city budget. Testimony provided in support of the county's Measure H, a sales tax designed to prevent and reduce homelessness. This Measure passed and funded a library toolkit, called Neighborhood Connections with steps and sample documents for replicating their Community Resource Specialist position (Kelley et al., 2017).	✓	✓	✓
Chicago, IL	An experienced youth social worker was added at Oak Park PL, an innovative approach to both policing the library's unsupervised youth, as well as providing services to all marginalized patrons who frequent the library (Oak Park Library, 2018).	✓		✓
Dallas, TX	The Dallas PL launched their "Homeless Engagement Initiative" in 2013 (Urban Libraries Council, 2017).		✓	
Denver, CO	A team was created to visit homeless and low-income women in day shelters, providing classes for job interviews and technology skills, as well as access to library services through transit tokens and library cards (Campbell, 2018).		✓	✓
Evanston, IL	Hired their first full-time social worker. She used Presence Behavioral Health's limited social work student intern hours, with a partnership that then continued as a city-funded social work position (Evanston Public Library, 2020).	✓		
Glendale, CA	An experienced social worker was hired 20 hours weekly, initially funded through the California State Library's Mental Health Initiative specifically referred to as the Healthcare Worker grant (T. Barrios, personal communication, April 11, 2018).	✓		
Hartford, CT	A free program of support and assistance was created, "The American Place," to aid new immigrants acclimating to the city (Hartford Public Library, 2018).			✓
New York, NY	A partnership between Queens Borough PL and the area's largest healthcare provider, Queens Health Network, was designed for health-related and community-centered programming targeted at the needs of their immigrant populations (Wahowiak, 2018).		✓	✓
San Jose, CA	Partnered with People Assisting the Homeless (PATH) to provide outreach and social work services at Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library (Luo et al., 2017).			✓

Note: *Employee*-involves social worker as an employee; *Community*- Services occur outside the library; *Library*-community services/ programs in the library.

Beyond the United States, the Edmonton Public Library (Canada) established an outreach services team headed by a social worker that focuses on support and

empowerment of residents and patrons to access social services they might otherwise be reluctant to access (Blank, 2017; Edmonton Public Library, 2020). The library provides a safe and welcoming space to connect to these resources. Winnipeg Public Library (Canada) also added a social worker to help anyone needing assistance with emergency shelter and housing, social assistance, employment, counseling, mental health programs, health care information and more (CBCNews, 2018). Melbourne's Public Library added a full-time social worker to work with patrons in crisis and with special needs. (Clark, 2019). Collaboration between libraries and social workers seems to be gaining ground outside the United States.

Funders are also exploring this emerging community collaboration opportunity as strategically important to sound community service delivery and coordination. For example, in the greater Pittsburgh region, libraries are studying their community's demographics, surveying residents, and identifying information and program needs. These needs have often revolved around health, mental health, substance abuse, and other social issues. The Jefferson Regional Foundation, a community health foundation created when a major health insurer purchased the Jefferson Regional Hospital, has invested in public libraries in its service area. The foundation, headed and staffed by social workers, sees public libraries as growing community centers. It has invested in community mapping and demographic studies, as well as a community assessment process to engage the libraries with their community stakeholders and constituencies through a civic engagement partnership with the Allegheny County Library Association, a state federated system for county public libraries in this region (M. Phan-Gruber, personal communication, July 18, 2019). Libraries are now actively represented within the Jefferson Regional Collaborative, a coordinating network among community and nonprofit human service organizations (Jefferson Regional Foundation, 2020).

Development of Social Work Education Partnerships

Schools of social work have brought both practice and research capacity to support libraries in their efforts to enhance social services programming and access to resources by supporting community needs assessments, information and referral, and outreach (Provence, 2018). As many library social workers have come on board to assist with supporting homeless and other disadvantaged patrons (Aykanian et al., 2020), social work interns have also been added at libraries to assist these populations and others. In some instances, libraries can provide field supervision, and in other settings an external field supervisor is arranged to support the MSW intern.

While not an exhaustive catalog, several schools of social work partner with public libraries including. The University of Maryland - Baltimore School of Social Work (UMB-SSW) through its Social Work Community Outreach Services (SWCOS) conducts internships that partners with the Enoch Pratt Free Library system to provide information referral and support to patrons. Students also organize peer support groups, recruit community volunteers, help in training staff on social services and benefits, and assist with youth programming. SWCOS provides field instruction for these students (UMB-SSW, 2018). In a university-community partnership, one of Azusa Pacific University's graduate social work classes provided a community needs and social service survey for the nearby

public library. This class project helped underscore the social service needs of library patrons. The findings were used to help secure grant funding for hiring a part-time social worker, which has expanded to two social work staff now included in the city's budget. They both address the varied needs identified in the social work class' survey (Kelley et al., 2017). At the University of Pittsburgh, social worker interns have been placed at an urban Carnegie Library and three other suburban Allegheny County Library Association (ALCA) libraries. Student interns received field supervision from their respective library directors and field instruction from an emeritus faculty member. (M. Jenkins & K. Degnian, personal communication, February 27, 2019)

The New Social Worker, a social work careers magazine, reported "Public Libraries Add Social Workers and Social Programs" (Blank, 2017), adding they should spur greater interest in both internships and potential dual-degree studies. Social workers and social work educators would do well to spend more time at the library by positioning their organizations and schools to partner and innovate with these vital civic hubs. National conferences of the Council on Social Work Education and the Network of Social Work Management in 2018 highlighted interprofessional collaboration and social service innovation respectively, with presentations on library social work, and library and social work professional collaboration (Soska, 2018; Soska & Navarro, 2018; Nienow & Zettervall, 2018). Library social work has become a cutting-edge practice in communities, becoming a career pathway on micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

Whole Person Librarianship: A Social Work Approach to Patron Services (Zettervall & Nienow, 2019*)* showcases interprofessional guidance for libraries seeking to partner with social service organizations, hiring a social worker, or considering a social work internship. Zettervall and Nienow (2019) have also developed an online presence at Whole Person Librarianship (n.d.), a virtual community for mutual exchange of dialogue on ideas and resources among both librarians and social workers seeking to build these interprofessional collaborations. Guidance is provided for library professionals to better understand the perspective of "person in environment" and serving through "relationships as the new reference collection" via library patron services, library organizations, and the larger community; they also provide important implications for social work education and practice (Zettervall & Nienow, 2019, p. 11).

Implications for Social Work Education and Practice

Today, libraries are increasingly partnering with social workers and social services significantly in response to their communities and patrons, but libraries have also progressively evolved into de facto community centers and vital lifelong learning hubs. Whether they resemble the social work settlement houses or model a more neighborhood-center approach, libraries provide an important setting for social workers and social service organization to interact, outreach, and partner. As Zettervall and Nienow (2019) underscore, library and social work professionals need to better understand one another to more fully actualize this interprofessional collaboration. From the social work lens, this interprofessional movement holds several timely implications and opportunities for professional education and practice.

First, as libraries adapt and respond to the changing needs of their community and patrons in the 21ˢᵗ Century, their role as community learning and civic hubs should see them collaborating more and more with social workers and social service agencies. Clearly, social workers and social work managers are recognizing libraries provide vital outreach opportunities to educate and connect with those in need of social service information and resources. While some outreach has occurred in the past, the complexity of social issues involving substance abuse, mental health, health, aging in place, immigration, and many other community needs require social workers to spend more time at their public libraries. As referenced in the literature and the American Library Association *The State of America's Libraries 2020*, library member surveys, patron focus sessions, and community forums demonstrate that community residents look to their libraries as places to access information and resources on the interpersonal, relational, and social issues that challenge their lives (American Library Association, 2020; Kelley et al., 2017; Lou et al., 2017; Wahler et al., 2020). Whether a library chooses to hire a social worker or not, public libraries offer essential outreach settings to educate and connect with those in need. In the perspective of "whole person librarianship," libraries are searching for partnerships and social service providers need to utilize these community hubs.

Secondly, from our assessment of the library and social work fields, librarians are recognizing the limitations of their professional role in social service information and provision. As has often been the case at least in urban libraries, libraries have been employing full and part-time social workers to assist in responding to patron social service needs. While early social work positions have largely focused on the needs of homeless and transient populations, the safe space offered in libraries includes patron populations - youth, elderly, immigrants/refugees, adults seeking help with technology, and those just in need of that safe haven - who bring into the library the great human service needs and even life traumas. The rise of suburban poverty, especially in first-ring suburbs, and the recent rise in refugee and immigrant populations gathering in suburban communities, have also increased the needs and issues faced by patrons coming to the libraries (Kneebone, 2017).

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW), *Social Work Magazine*, and library professional journals have helped bolster library social work as a new career area beyond just a new practice setting. Given the growth of this emerging employment opportunity, social workers and social work schools should prepare for this exciting interprofessional practice setting. Thus far, this library social worker career pathway has been one more providential than planful; however, as we explored, several social work schools are focusing on this social service setting and career pathway in ways that are making this transition more intentional.

Social work educators and professional practice organizations are encouraged to respond to this new community setting and career opportunity. Some social work programs have utilized student service-learning partnerships with libraries to bridge a collaboration, and others have begun to utilize social work field placements to foster these connections with local public libraries and to prepare social work students to practice in this setting. NASW has shared timely stories and postings about library social workers, while the Council on Social Work Education has provided conference sessions on this emerging interprofessional collaboration, each advancing examples of schools building such

partnerships for field and classroom connections to public libraries. In *Whole Person Librarianship* (Zettervall & Nienow, 2019) social work educators can find clear guidance to prepare for such field and classroom partnerships, as additional literature from both social work and library professionals continue to grow and highlight effective models and approaches of library social work partnerships. While the intent of this discussion is not to provide a "how-to" on building such social work library collaboration, there is encouragement for social work educators and their academic institutions to explore this setting for internship and employment opportunities that will further the development of both professions and partnerships between them.

Interprofessional activities encourage and deepen the dialogue between schools of social work and library and information science. Librarian and social work professional associations might also better prepare professionals in both fields to work toward a collaborative future in library community centers. Zettervall and Nienow (2019) stress the importance for librarians and social workers to gain a greater understanding of one another's profession and to work to foster interprofessional collaboration in their communities, especially within public libraries. While these professions share a common legacy and many noted similarities, they also have differences and limitations that encourage cooperation towards mutual benefit. Interprofessional dialogue may be as simple as visiting cross-discipline colloquia or developing shared programs and events that bring students, faculty, and practitioners together. Educators might strive for common field sites for social work and library science students at a local public library. While partnerships are growing between public libraries and schools of social work, presently, only one school - Dominican University - has a master's-level, joint degree in social work and library sciences. Few educators are developing specialized interdisciplinary study options or dual degree programs, - with time and the current climate; the landscape is ready to support such interprofessional learning.

Some discussion around the implications for joint degree study is useful in this commentary, as already some social workers hold professional degrees in information and library science. Notably, social work academic librarians often hold degrees in both professions to serve the students more ably in their unique library environment. A few social workers with a dual Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) have specialized in the "information management" aspect of the library and information science profession. This pathway has most often led to career pathways in larger, often public, human service agencies and departments at county and state levels. Here they work as managers of human service information systems and records for monitoring, evaluation, and planning. This seems another appropriate career pathway for such social work and library/information science dual degrees.

We would also argue that as libraries grow their role and evolve as the new community centers, civic hubs, and settlement houses, this may present an organizational setting where dual degrees or at least interdisciplinary study would be advantageous. Managing and leading today's libraries as community centers and with great focus on social service needs would suggest additional professional background or study in social work. More specifically, a focus on advanced generalist or macro specialization that prepares a social

worker for greater organizational and community practice could offer a competitive edge in this emerging landscape of our libraries.

MLIS programs do not generally provide significant preparation in social services, intensive community practice, or organizational leadership that are so essential to running community centers or nonprofit organization, especially in challenging urban and community settings. However, MLIS programs are more intently incorporating greater organizational leadership and community engagement curriculum, as well as providing options for interdisciplinary study. Drawing on cross-disciplinary study in university settings with social work macro practice, public administration, or related disciplines with nonprofit and organizational leadership curriculum could be valuable in preparing the next generation of library directors. At the very least encouraging elective study in social work programs, particularly in macro social work specialized areas, might provide opportunities for developing these next generation leaders in the field. This exchange may also provide greater interdisciplinary exposure to MLIS students and professional opportunities for social work students to explore dual degree and elective interdisciplinary study in library and information science.

While most states that certify public libraries require library directors to hold an MLS/MLIS degree, a case may be made that the future calls for enhancing these positions with opportunities for cross professional education in social work. In addition, increasingly complex human service information systems and libraries of the future must be strong in library and information science, yet, also, in social service organizational management and community engagement practice. The competitive advantage of the MLIS and MSW as preparation might spur collaboration between schools of social work and schools of library and information science to begin discussions to build interdisciplinary and dual degree study in more university settings. We encourage continued dialogue on interprofessional education in these fields to evolve the needed interprofessional education that might address the emerging leadership workforce for library community centers and human service information systems.

Conclusion

The role of libraries as community and civic centers, which has resulted from changing community needs, technology, and competition in the library landscape, has emerged as at timely and topical theme in popular literature. We have found this topic much less prevalent in the scholarly literature in both in library science and social work fields. However, as social work has focused on more interprofessional education and practice, this topic is trending for research and study, at least in our opinion. The literature, especially in library and information science, has strongly supported writing about the changing landscape of libraries and their rise as community and civic centers, and our hope is to encourage greater research and study on areas of interprofessional collaboration. The rise of the library social work positions presents an exciting challenge for advancing interprofessional education and practice for social work and library professionals, which we hope will further spur scholarly examination.

   We have briefly explored the important, common legacy of social work and libraries, as well as past and current parallels between social work and public libraries, especially from a social work perspective. Commentary has covered why and how social work partnerships have grown in public libraries – in the U.S. and around the world – and examined the emerging needs and types of activities that have spurred opportunities for greater social work collaboration with and in community libraries. This commentary has sought to advance an understanding of the importance for social work practitioners, managers, and educators to reach out and engage with public libraries, as well as schools of library science. Engagement serves to develop vital partners in social services for our communities, provided in ways that are mutually beneficial as they build social capital and better respond to community needs. Innovative social workers are encouraged to spend a little more time at their public libraries and to build effective collaborative and interprofessional partnerships to address their community's human service needs, as well as expand the scope of social work education and practice with libraries, the library profession, and its educators.

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