

PARTNER HIGHLIGHTS

Library Services

How have libraries become a safe and essential resource for individuals experiencing homelessness?

Public libraries exist for the purpose of supporting humans. They are places and spaces in which all people are equal, providing opportunities for any individual to experience the dignity and connectivity of being part of a community. As a place of information, community, entertainment, and culture, Brown County Library (BCL) is a resource and refuge for every person, regardless of housing status. BCL's doors are open, our free Wi-Fi is on, our computers, materials, programs, drinking fountains, public restrooms, hotspots, and chrome books are all available. Our friendly, welcoming staff is here to help any patron navigate library services. To keep people connected (essential in this digital day and age), every BCL location has telecommunication technologies, including public telephones, printers, copiers, and fax machines. Public libraries also provide important community spaces that serve as third spaces, critically offering safety, engagement, and connection. For those experiencing homelessness, a library can help

facilitate a phone call, connect with friends and family online, answer questions about where to go next, or like libraries do for many patrons, give someone access to a book, movie, or music to enjoy. Public libraries are a safe and essential service for every person in their communities— and for those who may be experiencing homelessness, who may feel lost or alone or overwhelmed, libraries remain open and available.



Sarah Sugden
Executive Director
Brown County Library

What can the public do to support libraries in their role as a resource for the homeless community?

The stigma of homelessness can influence some individual's perceptions of the public library. We sometimes hear people indicate that they no longer frequent a particular public library location because of "those people". This is true for every public library located in communities in which people are experiencing homelessness. Holding on to these stereotypes has never helped any community advance, and Brown County Library is proud to serve all humans in our community.

Putting the "public" in public library, we support every person in our community and do not differentiate between who walks through our doors. We consider ourselves a partner in our community and believe we all share in looking out for each other. Holding empathy and compassion for others, we understand that a few too many bad days, a bad investment, an accident, or a personal loss could be all that stand between housing stability and instability.

The public library is here to support our community. To support libraries, and to support anyone at risk of or experiencing homelessness, all we need to do is remember that we are partners together, and we need to share in supporting each other. It takes more than a library, or a non-profit, or a single helping hand – it takes a community. We are proud and grateful to be part of this work.

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What library services or programs have made a meaningful impact in supporting those at risk of or experiencing homelessness?

Brown County Library's staff and community partners are the backbone of its programs and services, driving meaningful support and innovation. They work directly with patrons, answer questions and ensure the library meets the community's needs while maintaining a safe and welcoming environment. BCL provides essential resources like courtesy phones, chargers, laptops, computers, printing, faxing, and Wi-Fi - All invaluable for those with limited access to technology and amenities. Most importantly, we provide ready access to information and resources.

BCL hosts *Community Resource Tuesday*, a weekly program that brings community service providers onsite. BCL has partnered with the Bay Area Workforce Development Board, WI Department of Workforce Development, and the Nicolet Federated Library System to create *JobPod*, a groundbreaking initiative designed to provide job seekers with access to quality employment resources through public libraries. Further supporting job seekers and local employers, BCL partners with the Job Center of Brown County to host regular job fairs at multiple BCL locations.

