Overview of *First Draft* of Guidelines for Library Service to People Experiencing Homelessness and A Brief Overview of Services to Youth Experiencing Homelessness Without Parents or Guardians

Julie Ann Winkelstein

School of Information Sciences, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN, USA
jwinkels@utk.edu

Abstract:

*This paper provides an overview of the **First Draft** of the Guidelines for Library Service to People Experiencing Homelessness. It also includes a section on addressing the specific needs of youth ages 12 to 24 who are experiencing homelessness and are unaccompanied by parents or guardians. The Section for Library Services to People with Special Needs (LSN) is creating these international Guidelines for libraries that want to address the topic of homelessness in their communities. Worldwide, libraries are recognizing there are community members who are experiencing homelessness and in response, they are providing resources, creating public conduct policies and procedures related to being unstably housed, implementing staff trainings, engaging in outreach, providing in-house services and partnering with local agencies. LSN is committed to providing relevant and practical Guidelines that will be useful to libraries as they address the many barriers encountered by those in their communities who are experiencing homelessness or who are unstably housed. LSN considers this topic a question of human rights, and these Guidelines reflect that approach. The goal of these Guidelines is to respond to frequently asked questions related to this topic, to provide examples of what libraries are doing, offer concrete suggestions, and provide useful resources for further information. It is hoped library staff can incorporate information from these Guidelines and any other sources and create positive and specific steps to address homelessness in their libraries and communities. LSN will continue to work on these Guidelines, incorporating suggestions and comments as part of a worldwide reviewing process. The final Guidelines will acknowledge these contributions.*

Keywords: homelessness, refugees, Guidelines, LSN, human rights

Part I

Introduction
The Section for Library Services to People with Special Needs (LSN) is creating international Guidelines for libraries that want to address the topic of homelessness in their communities. Worldwide, libraries are recognizing there are community members who are experiencing homelessness and in response, they are providing resources, creating public conduct policies and procedures related to being unstably housed, implementing staff trainings, engaging in outreach, providing in-house services and partnering with local agencies. LSN is committed to providing relevant and practical Guidelines that will be useful to libraries as they address the many barriers encountered by those in their communities who are experiencing homelessness or who are unstably housed. LSN considers this topic a question of human rights, and these Guidelines reflect that approach. The goal with these Guidelines is to respond to frequently asked questions related to this topic, to provide examples of what libraries are doing, offer concrete suggestions, and provide useful resources for further information. LSN will continue to work on these Guidelines, incorporating suggestions and comments as part of a worldwide reviewing process. The final Guidelines will acknowledge these contributions.

Why These Guidelines
Homelessness is a worldwide challenge for millions of people. As central locations for essential resources for all community members, it makes sense for libraries to be part of the caring community that seeks to address and even ameliorate the effects of homelessness and poverty. In addition, libraries can provide education to the housed community members regarding the lives of those who are experiencing homelessness. Stereotypes, prejudice and stigmatizing attitudes can create barriers between those who are housed and those who are not and these negative attitudes can also affect library services, policies and resources. It is hoped these Guidelines will help libraries meet the needs of their unstably housed library users, whether as a variation or expansion on their traditional services or as entirely new services.

Background
As an aid in creating these Guidelines, LSN sent a survey to libraries around the world. Forty-nine libraries responded and LSN has used their responses to inform the Guidelines. Their responses have been organized into sections. These sections represent what is being done in libraries, as well as support for this work. LSN members are heartened by the interest and creative responses of libraries to this enduring and critical challenge faced by millions of people every day.

Below are the questions posed in the survey. The questions were prefaced with this statement:
WE NEED YOUR HELP! *The IFLA Section on Library Service to People with Special Needs is writing guidelines for providing library services to people who are experiencing homelessness. Can you send us examples?*

The first goal of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is to end poverty in all its forms everywhere. Homelessness is an extreme and complex form of poverty.

Although the number of people experiencing homelessness is rising worldwide, attitudes towards those who are without a permanent and safe place to live differ from country to country, and this reflects on the organization of quality services for them. Libraries are an important part of the network of organizations that can be allies and help provide equal access to information, skills, and knowledge.

Some libraries responded to all the questions, and others responded to selected ones. Although the responses came from many countries, for example, Australia, Japan, Croatia, Russia, Germany, the United States and Canada, there was consistency in many of the responses that offered insights into the shared challenges and accomplishments, as well as the range of possibilities and concerns shared by the international library community.

The questions on the survey included basic information about the library itself (name, geographical location, type of library, contact person), as well as these specific questions:
- Description of your program
- What kind of services does your library organize for people in your community who are experiencing homelessness?
- Are your programs for specific populations among those experiencing homelessness (e.g., single adults, youth under 18, youth over 18, families with children? (Please describe):
- If your library organizes library services for refugees who are unstably housed, please describe what kind of services:
- What are the outcomes of your services and how people experiencing homelessness benefited from your services?
- Do librarians have the professional support of a social worker, psychologist, partner organizations, and the community? (Please describe):
- Does your library provide extra education or training for librarians who organize library services for those who are experiencing homelessness? (Please describe):
- Please share with us any policies you have, such as public conduct, sleeping in the library, odors, size and amount of belongings, use of public restrooms, fines or fees, identification to obtain a library card, or other policies:
- If these policies cause some challenges in providing library services for those who are experiencing homelessness please share with us how your library solve them?
- What other kind of challenges have you faced in organizing services and how did you solve them?
- How are you working on communication and advocacy of your services for those who are experiencing homelessness**?**

Sections of the Guidelines
The LSN Guidelines for people experiencing homelessness is divided into 21 sections. These include:

Preface: This section provides a chronology of the creation of the Guidelines and lists those persons who have been active participants in their creation.

Chapter 1 Introduction: The introduction provides an overview of the evolution of the Guidelines, as well as the impetus for specific information included in the final document. Historical information related to the international library community's awareness of the complexity of homelessness is mentioned, and a timeline and supporting citations and documents are also provided. The Introduction briefly describes such topics as:

Why are the Guidelines necessary?
Why libraries need them
How libraries can use them
Their purpose

Chapter 2 Executive Summary and Recommendations
As is common with long detailed documents, LSN has also provided a **Draft** Executive Summary and concrete recommendations. This Executive Summary will be excellent for libraries and individuals who want a brief but thorough explanation of the Guidelines, including specific suggestions for action steps related to this topic.

Chapter 3 Homelessness: An Overview
This section of the Guidelines offers in-depth information about the topic of homelessness around the world.

It begins with a discussion of the definition of homelessness and numerous examples of what constitutes homelessness are included. Categories of homelessness are divided into three broad categories:

- People without accommodation:
  o This category includes people sleeping on the streets or in other open spaces, like parks, under bridges, in forests, or in other places not meant for human habitation; people sleeping in cars, rickshaws, fishing boats, or other forms of transport.
- People living in temporary or crisis accommodation:
  o This category includes shelters of all kinds, from emergency to transitional, from hostels to camps. The key to this category is that these are temporary accommodations – they are not necessarily predictable, sustainable or reliable.
- People living in severely inadequate and/or insecure accommodation
  o This category includes people temporarily sharing with friends and relatives; people under threat of violence; people living in inexpensive hotels, motels, and similar; people staying in conventional housing without permission or that is unfit for human habitation; people living in tents or similar; people living in extremely overcrowded conditions; and, people living in non-conventional and temporary structures.

The Guidelines include all of these. The LSN emphasis is on people who have no safe, inhabitable, predictable, reliable and/or consistent place to sleep each night. It is worth noting that having a place to be during the day – a place that is safe, healthy, out of any inclement weather, and private – is also necessary. A lack of privacy in particular is one of the outstanding characteristics of homelessness and one that affects all, no matter where they sleep at night.

People who are experiencing homelessness are forced to live their private lives in public and this fact impacts them in their daily lives, causing trauma as well as contributing to a judgmental attitude toward them, which further stigmatizes their very existence.

This section also includes a description of the causes of homelessness. As noted in the Guidelines, these include structural failures, such as lack of affordable housing or sufficient employment; systems failures, such as when care and support systems fail; and, individual

and relational factors, such as both mental and physical health challenges, traumatic events, personal loss and a lack of support for immigrants and refugees.

Consequences of homelessness are also included in this section and these comprise effects on health, social relations and inequality in access to services and rights.

Finally, this section provides information on social groups at particular risk of homelessness. These include women, unaccompanied youth, families with children, people on the move (in particular, immigrants and refugees), indigenous peoples and persons with disabilities. Unaccompanied youth will be discussed in more detail in Part II of this paper.

Chapter 4 Human Rights and Homelessness
This chapter highlights the human rights aspect of homelessness. The areas of emphasis in this section highlight equal and barrier-free access to information in all its forms and aspects. Whether the resources are related to social, economic, legal, political, educational, cultural, or personal information needs, they must be freely available for all. Libraries can help address the myriad obstacles encountered by those who are experiencing homelessness.

Chapter 5 Attitudes Toward Homelessness
Attitudes matter. A negative or hostile attitude toward those experiencing homelessness can make it difficult for both the library staff and the library users. On the other hand, a welcoming and friendly approach can make library users feel included and seen. Personal connections as well as the awareness their presence is desired, their needs are important, and the library is committed to serving all of its library users well can all make a significant difference to those who are experiencing homelessness, as well as those who are stably housed.

This chapter offers examples of actions libraries are taking to create this welcoming and supportive environment, as well as some suggested Guidelines. Some ideas for library staff include:
- Consider who you are welcoming
- Assess your posted rules and policies
- Be all-inclusive
- Listen and learn

Chapter 6 Outcomes/Needs Assessment/Evaluation of Services
Since the causes of homelessness can differ from community to community, LSN Guidelines include this section on how to assess local needs, by using local data, by reaching out to local service agencies, by listening to library users who are experiencing homelessness and by evaluating library services that are being provided. This chapter highlights specific recommendations, such as:
- Connect with community agencies and NGOs to discuss the perceived needs of those community members who are experiencing homelessness.
- Keep a record of positive anecdotes relating to the results of specific library services for this population.
- Document assumptions and observations through interviews, surveys, and focus groups.

Chapter 7 General Services
This chapter gives an overview of the kinds of services being offered by libraries to those who are experiencing homelessness. The services described by survey respondents fall into five broad categories:

Basic access to library services
There can be multiple barriers to accessing library services for those who are experiencing homelessness. These barriers include policies and procedures (such as requiring a permanent address to be able to register for a library card); transportation to and from the library; attitude of library staff or housed library users; hunger, fatigue, trauma, physical and mental health challenges related to homelessness; and lack of specific resources or programs related to the challenges and causes of homelessness.

Engagement in community life
Community members experiencing homelessness can feel disconnected from or stigmatized by those who are housed. Survey respondents addressed this providing opportunities for all patrons to interact, such as the bi-monthly "Coffee and Conversation" at Dallas Public Library, in Texas, USA. They also offered programs and services that are provided directly to those experiencing homelessness, such as the Queens Public Library in New York, USA, which offers summer reading programs at family shelters. These two examples highlight the importance of providing spaces where all library users can interact as equals and the commitment to providing appropriate services wherever library users can be found.

Preparation and assistance in finding employment
Many (possibly most) libraries provide community members with access to employment resources, such as résumé writing and employment listings. Library users experiencing homelessness need the same resources and access. Libraries committed to serving their library users experiencing homelessness can examine the barriers they experience and help them address these as they look for meaningful and sufficient employment. Some examples of relevant library services include:
- Extending the time on Internet computers so applications can be completed and filed.
- Assistance in creating and using an email account.
- Career counseling.
- Interview practice

The Guidelines include specific and excellent samples of services in this area.

Educational services and collection access
Educational services can be a key factor as unstably housed library users work toward stable and predictable housing. As with employment resources, libraries are already providing these kinds of resources. However, there may be specific barriers related to homelessness that impede access to these resources, lack of library privileges due to having no permanent address, lack of computer expertise needed to discover and apply for educational opportunities and lack of fluency in the local language, especially for those who are immigrants or refugees. By providing an awareness of these barriers and concrete suggestions on how libraries can address them, the Guidelines help libraries become active partners with their unstably housed library users who are seeking educational opportunities.

Meeting social needs

Libraries can help meet the social needs of their community members who are experiencing homelessness. These needs can be connected to social services, such as housing, food, legal, hygiene and food resources, but they can also be related to the simple need to socialize and to expand social capital by creating social connections with housed community members as well as library staff.

This section offers specific examples of how libraries are meeting the social services and daily living needs of their library users experiencing homelessness.

This chapter also includes recommendations for library staff. These include:
- Assess the need in your community for services specifically related to homelessness and the staff attitudes in your library.
- Identity potential community partners.
- Form a staff committee to plan services for people experiencing homelessness.
- Assess your current services. Could they be adapted or expanded to address the needs of those experiencing homelessness?

Chapter 8 Services for Refugees

Libraries are at the forefront of the current refugee crisis as many European countries accept a vast number of refugees. Libraries can play an active role in the lives of refugees, by providing access to relevant and necessary services and resources. This chapter defines refugees, compares them to people experiencing homelessness, gives examples of current good practices, and offers recommendations for libraries that want to address services to refugees in their communities.

There is much overlap between those who are experiencing homelessness and those who are refugees, but refugees also have unique needs.

Some of the recommendations included in this chapter are to provide services such as:
- Basic local information related to meals, shelter, health
- Regional maps and information about transportation
- Connections to original culture of refugees
- Activities for refugees to learn about the culture of the host county
- Information about basic principles of European, International and National Law
- Resources available in multiple languages

Chapter 9 Services for Families and Youth Without Parents/Guardians

Families with children and youth without parents or guardians have unique needs in addition to the needs of anyone experiencing homelessness. This chapter provides information about these two groups, as well as recommendations for libraries on how to serve them well. These recommendations include:
- Provide staff training related to identifying and communicating with families and individual youth experiencing homelessness.
- Create partnerships with youth and family serving local agencies, by attending meetings, inviting them to attend library meetings, creating shared goals, and learning about each other's services
- Reach out, connect and listen

Chapter 10 Staff Support and Partnerships
Many library staff members may feel ill equipped to handle the range of issues people experiencing homelessness can bring into the library and staff discomfort and fears may impede their ability to serve these library users fully and equitably. This chapter provides examples of how these challenges are being met and includes concrete examples of what libraries are doing or could be doing. It is broken down into three sections, with specific examples included in each section: Staff support, training and professional development; community partnerships; and, recommendations.

Recommendations in this chapter include:
- Formally or informally survey library staff members regarding their attitudes or expertise in serving library users experiencing homelessness
- Educate local agencies and potential partners about the advantages of partnering with a library, since many service providers may not understand the potential for a two-way benefit to these relationships

Chapter 11 Library Policies and Their Effects
Barriers for library users who are experiencing homelessness include library policies, procedures and codes of conduct. This chapter addresses these barriers and provides examples of existing policies and procedures, as well as recommendations for creating new ones.

The chapter is divided into:

Policies and procedures
This section includes policies about procedures such as registering for a library card and using the library computers, including accessing the Internet. It also includes public conduct rules, including those governing odor, sleeping, baggage size and use of the public restrooms for general hygiene purposes.

Examples of library policies related to this topic range from prohibitions and restrictions (e.g., no sleeping in library; no strong odors; limits on baggage size; no use of restrooms for bathing, shampooing, laundry, changing clothes) to flexibility related to these topics (e.g., using a "case by case" approach; providing storage).

Effect of the policies
This section of the chapter gives examples of the effects of these policies on library users who are experiencing homelessness.

Recommendations
The chapter ends with recommendations, including:
- Have as few rules as possible
- Consider the impact of policies and rules on those experiencing homelessness and explore ways any barriers can be addressed
- Advocate for local and national funding that will address homelessness and poverty, so all community members can be safely housed or have their health or life needs met.

Chapter 12 Communication and Advocacy
Communication is an essential element of any library initiative or service. Because of stereotypes related to both homelessness (e.g., lazy, dangerous, smelly, homeless by choice)

and libraries (e.g., quiet, static, mainly for books), libraries must make can effort to raise awareness about homelessness, advocate for excellent library services, have in-depth knowledge of local issues related to addressing homelessness, and create a strategy for library involvement in finding solutions. This chapter provides examples of these aspects of communication and advocacy and ends with recommendations, including:

- Use the library's positions of trust in the community to raise awareness and advocate for community members experiencing homelessness.
- Make the library's efforts SMART – Specific, Measurable, Action-oriented with Responsibilities stated and Timed.
- Involve those who are experiencing homelessness in advocacy efforts.

Chapter 13 Funding
This chapter addresses the question of funding related to addressing homelessness. For some actions taken by libraries, the cost may be minimal. Other actions may require additional funds. This chapter offers suggestions for inexpensive ways to address this topic, as well as ideas on how and where to acquire additional monies.

Appendices

Appendix A: Non-Professional Psychosocial Support
This appendix provides information and insights from a psychologist from Croatia.

Appendix B: Social Work in Libraries
This appendix provides experiences and suggestions from a U.S. social worker who works in a library.

Appendix C: Sample Policies
This appendix provides sample policies as examples for libraries that want to address homelessness in their communities.

Appendix D: Action Planning Tools
This appendix offers two Action Planning tools for libraries as they move make efforts to address the topic of homelessness in their libraries: "Addressing Homelessness Through Your Library: Needs" and "Addressing Homelessness Through Your Library: Challenges."

It is hoped that by using these Action Planning Tools, library staff can incorporate information they have been provided by the Guidelines and any other sources and create positive and specific steps to address homelessness in their libraries and communities.

Appendix E: Practiced Guide on Interaction with People Experiencing Homelessness
This appendix provides a link to a video created by Ryan Dowd, executive director of Hesed House in Chicago.

Appendix F: Vocabulary
Having a basic grasp of the vocabulary related to homelessness can help librarians communicate with those who are experiencing homelessness, as well as with service providers, such as local social services agencies. This vocabulary appendix includes terms related to kinds of housing, mental health, social services and sexual orientation and gender identity. It is important to use appropriate and respectful language when interacting with any library users, but particularly those who are frequently misrepresented or stigmatized.

Appendix G: Suggested Resources
This appendix offers specific suggested homelessness-related resources for libraries.

Appendix H: List of Libraries Sending Examples
This appendix simply provides a lists of the libraries who have provided examples of the resources, programs and policies that relate to their patrons who are experiencing homelessness.

Part II: Youth (Ages 12 to 24) Experiencing Homelessness Without Parents or

Guardians
The topic of libraries and unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness is a complex one. In many ways, these young people have the same life challenges as adults who are experiencing homelessness: Lack of food or proper nutrition; no access to mental and physical health resources; the need for educational and employment information; the need for a predictable, safe and reliable place to sleep at night; the need for social connections. However, there are some differences between these two groups.

First, in the United States up to 40% of these young people identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer/questioning (LGBTQ+). They are no longer living at home due to abuse or rejection based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. So they are doubly at risk on the streets, since their very identity as human beings is frequently stigmatized. This can make them wary of institutions, like libraries, and resistant to outreach that is not sensitive to their situations.

This is also a formative time for young people - physically, cognitively and emotionally. Unlike their housed peers, they must reach adulthood without the social and emotional support of caring adults who can guide and protect them as they mature. The trauma of being ejected from their homes and of living on the streets can have a lifelong effect on their emotional and intellectual development, since their brains are still developing. They also have higher fertility rates and are at risk for common pediatric diseases, in addition to those health challenges experienced by adults.

In addition, they frequently do not identify with the term "homeless," preferring instead to define their housing status in less stigmatized ways. Therefore they may not respond to lists of resources or even well-meaning conversations about their housing status if the word "homeless" is used.

Although many of them are teenagers, they also do not identify as such, so terms like "teens" are not recognized as relating to them.

They also may not be old enough to find legal employment, to sign legal documents or even to register for library cards without parental permission, so their very age can act as a barrier to much-needed services and resources.

However, these young people are resilient, courageous and responsive to respectful and sincere efforts by adults, such as library staff. With persistence and a willingness to engage slowly and carefully, libraries can serve these youth well. More information about libraries

and LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness can be found at http://library.ifla.org/1029/. Although that paper focuses primarily on LGBTQ+ youth, much of the information applies to any unaccompanied young people experiencing homelessness.