PROGRAMS THAT Pop

Linking the Needy to the Needed
By Katherine Torres

IT’S NOT UNUSUAL FOR PUBLIC libraries to host fairs for patrons to find the things they want to know—most often revolving around authors and books (see Lauren Gilbert’s “Author, Author,” Programs That Pop, LJ 8/14, p. 45). It is also not a rarity for libraries to conduct outreach to homeless and at-risk patrons. Yet Salt Lake City Public Library (SLCPL) has taken the uncommon step of combining the two. On November 18, 2014, an estimated 400 homeless or at-risk individuals attended the first Project Uplift, a social services information and resource fair coordinated by SLCPL, Salt Lake City government, and Volunteers of America—Utah (VOA).

Project Uplift, held at the Main Library in downtown Salt Lake City, was the first program of its kind in Utah, bringing together more than 30 area service providers, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and educational institutions. They worked jointly to serve individuals and families who needed—or were at risk of needing—housing, physical or mental health care, food, job preparedness skills, and more.

Why the library?
Tackling issues that contribute to homelessness is a citywide initiative being addressed by Salt Lake City government and several local organizations, and library staff felt that the Main Library was a natural fit for an information and resource fair. “We spoke with city government and VOA about the status of homelessness in Salt Lake City,” said Deborah Ehrman, deputy director, SLCPL. “Many homeless individuals come to the Main Library to speak to VOA staff and get referrals to social services, but we wanted to bring the resources to them.”

The Main Library’s location in Salt Lake City’s urban center also offers convenient access to those for whom transportation is an issue. Many visit the library daily in search of services and information.

Project Uplift was a welcome surprise to those who didn’t know about the program in advance. “I was actually just going to come here to charge my phone, and the library had this all going on,” said Colby Jackson, a patron who had recently become homeless. “Just being able to talk to people and having them say, ‘This is what you need to do,’ and having them point you in the right direction and letting you know what kinds of things they offer has been nice,” he said. “And I can get on the computer here and apply for different things.”

Working together
Many organizations appreciated the chance to work with one another in a central location.

Glenn Bailey, executive director of the Crossroads Urban Center, was able to get the word out about the center’s food pantry and Thanksgiving giveaway, as well as to direct individuals to services of which they might not have been aware. “It’s an excellent start to get all of these groups together on the same day and at the same place,” he said. “It’s pretty unique.”

The availability of a variety of services in a central location was also a big draw for many attendees of Project Uplift, including Don Cole, a veteran who has been experiencing homelessness. Through the event, Cole was able to address health issues with the VA Salt Lake City Health Care System in a location that was easily accessible to him. “I was able to see the doctor, get antibiotics—they gave them to me right here and told me what to do…and for now I’m thinking that I’ll be okay,” he said. Cole was also able to work on getting access to sober living housing and free books to own, all in a location that he visits frequently because of his love of reading.

Jackson also appreciated having several service providers “all in one place.” “All of these offices communicate with each other, and you usually have to get a paper from this place to send to this other place, to get to that place,” he said. “It’s nice...”

“It’s nice to have it all in one spot so you can get things all taken care of.”—SLCPL patron Colby Jackson

Hands-on benefits
Convenient access to a variety of services wasn’t all that Project Uplift offered attendees. The event also included access to free haircuts, breakfast, lunch, books, movie screenings, prize drawings, and children’s activities.

“The library wanted to incentivize attendance to this event,” Ehrman said. “We brainstormed ideas with VOA and thought, ‘What would bring people in?’ We wanted to incorporate elements that were fun and also provided something of value to attendees.”

“I think it’s great,” said Chanel Carlile, a counselor from the Utah Pride Center. “I’d like to see it be an annual event or happen regularly. I think it’s a great way to involve the community and let people know what’s going on.”

Carlile’s wish has come true: the library hosted a second Project Uplift event this past spring and is planning another for later this fall, according to Andrew Shaw, SLCPL communications manager. [For more on similar services, see News, p. 13.]

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