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The label “homeless” can be difficult for many people to use and understand. In many ways this term has come to be a label for people, replacing their identity. However, it is really only a description of a particular and, frequently temporary, housing condition.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) issues an Annual Homeless Assessment Report, reporting the number of individuals and families who were homeless in the previous year.

The homeless youth population is equally divided between males and females.

The National Coalition for the Homeless estimates that 20% to 40% of homeless youth are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. This particular population, although resilient, may be especially vulnerable to victimization, mental health challenges, sexual exploitation and violence, and increased rates of suicide.

Library services for people experiencing homelessness may be limited or denied in many circumstances, including:

- Library card or access policies requiring a permanent address
- Prohibitive fines, fees or other penalties or the perception that services incur fees
- Staff who are not trained in service to people who are poor or homeless or who are made uncomfortable by prejudices against people who are poor or homeless
- Limited promotion at the community centers and organizations (food banks, shelters, after-school programs) that serve people experiencing homelessness
- Limited access to the library building by either lack of transportation or service hours
- Lack of programs or resources that address people's experiences or current situations

Emergency housing: Temporary housing provided on an emergency basis. Stays at emergency shelters are limited in time and the amount of time varies among shelters. For some programs, emergency shelters are the first step in a series of steps as homeless adults and youth move from emergency to transitional to permanent housing.

Transitional housing: Housing that is more stable than emergency housing and that can be for a longer period of time, such as 1 to 2 years. Once homeless youth and adults have been stabilized in emergency housing, they may move to transitional housing as a next step.

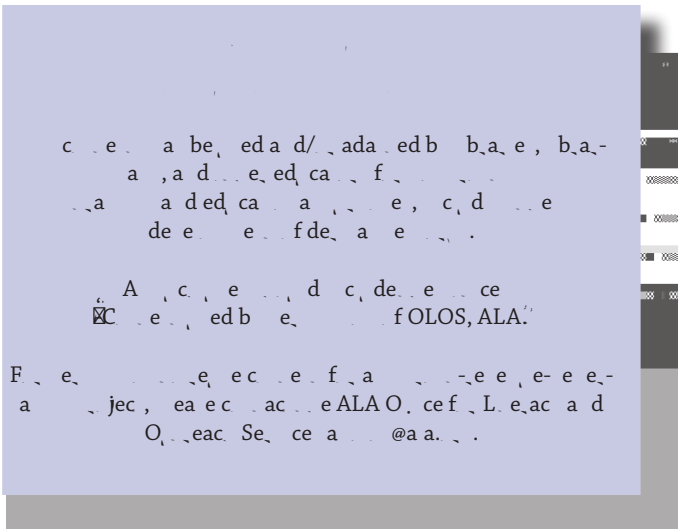
Supportive housing: Subsidized housing directly tied to specific supportive services for homeless individuals or families who have come from emergency shelters or the streets. Supportive housing may be categorized as transitional (people may stay for up to 2 years) or permanent (there is no limit on the length of stay and clients abide by a lease).

Housing First: A term that has come to mean providing a chronic homeless person with direct and immediate access to housing. It reverses the traditional concept of "treatment first and then housing" to "housing first and then appropriate treatment." Housing first is a consumer driven model. It is producing successful outcomes for keeping people from returning to the streets.

Harm reduction: Harm reduction is a nonjudgmental philosophy that allows young people and adults to have input into their own recovery plans. A harm reduction approach begins with the person, allowing each person to progress at a comfortable pace.

Case management: The process of arranging for provision of an array of services and supports for an individual or family that is based on assessment of their unique needs and designed to address the specific needs identified.

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Take a breath. You did not create the situations that cause homelessness and you probably will not be the superhero who solves them all. You are here to do your part and you are not alone.

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**Baltimore County (Mary.) Public Library
Street Card-Resources for Help**

<http://www.bcpl.info/community/street-card>

Created by the Baltimore County Public Library in cooperation with the Baltimore County Communities for the Homeless, the Street Card provides information on employment, food and emergency assistance, health, financial support, legal issues, and shelter. Information is available in print and online.

**Denver (Colo.) Public Library
Community Technology Center**

<http://denverlibrary.org/ctc>

Denver Public Library's (DPL) Community Technology Center team provides regular visits to the area day shelter for homeless and low-income women. Women receive instruction on job interviewing techniques and technology skills. Once class is over, participants receive bus tokens to go to the main library for a tour and to get library cards.

**Pima County (Ariz.) Public Library
Homeless Service Agencies**

<http://www.library.pima.gov/community/guides/homeless.php>

Pima County Public Library's Homeless Service Agencies guide provides information (phone number, address, description) for local

The American Library Association promotes equal access to information for all persons, and recognizes the urgent need to respond to the increasing number of poor children, adults, and families in America. These people are affected by a combination of limitations, including illiteracy, illness, social isolation, homelessness, hunger, and discrimination, which hamper the effectiveness of traditional library services. Therefore it is crucial that libraries recognize their role in enabling poor people to participate fully in a democratic society, by utilizing a wide variety of available resources and strategies. Concrete programs of training and development are needed to sensitize and prepare library staff to identify poor people's needs and deliver relevant services. And within the American Library Association the coordinating mechanisms of programs and activities dealing with poor people in various divisions, offices, and units should be strengthened, and support for low-income liaison activities should be enhanced.

The American Library Association shall implement these objectives by:

1. Promoting the removal of all barriers to library and information services, particularly fees and overdue charges.
2. Promoting the publication, production, purchase, and ready accessibility of print and nonprint materials that honestly address the issues of poverty and homelessness, that deal with poor people in a respectful way, and that are of practical use to low-income patrons.
3. Promoting full, stable, and ongoing funding for existing legislative programs in support of low-income services and for pro-active library programs that reach beyond traditional service-sites to poor children, adults, and families.
4. Promoting training opportunities for librarians, in order to teach effective techniques for generating public funding to upgrade library services to poor people.
5. Promoting the incorporation of low-income programs and services into regular library budgets in all types of libraries, rather than the tendency to support these projects solely with "soft money" like private or federal grants.
6. Promoting equity in funding adequate library services for poor people in terms of materials, facilities, and equipment.
7. Promoting supplemental support for library resources for and about low-income populations by urging local, state, and federal governments, and the private sector, to provide adequate funding.
8. Promoting increased public awareness—through programs, displays, bibliographies, and publicity—of the importance of poverty-related library resources and services in all segments of society.
9. Promoting the determination of output measures through the encouragement of community needs assessments, giving special emphasis to assessing the needs of low-income people and involving both anti-poverty advocates and poor people themselves in such assessments.
10. Promoting direct representation of poor people and anti-poverty advocates through appointment to local boards and creation of local advisory committees on service to low-income people, such appointments to include library-paid transportation and stipends.
11. Promoting training to sensitize library staff to issues affecting poor people and to attitudinal and other barriers that hinder poor people's use of libraries.
12. Promoting networking and cooperation between libraries and other agencies, organizations, and advocacy groups in order to develop programs and services that effectively reach poor people.
13. Promoting the implementation of an expanded federal low-income housing program, national health insurance, full-employment policy, living minimum wage and welfare payments, affordable day care, and programs likely to reduce, if not eliminate, poverty itself.
14. Promoting among library staff the collection of food and clothing donations, volunteering personal time to anti-poverty activities and contributing money to direct-aid organizations.
15. Promoting related efforts concerning minorities and women, since these groups are disproportionately represented among poor people.

ALA

Office for Literacy and Outreach Services