

# Library Outreach to Unhoused Populations

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## Background

People experiencing homelessness are increasing in number nationwide and have become popularly associated with their presence in public libraries. Bellingham Public Library sought to find ways to better serve this unique group. Though the library currently engages in a number of targeted outreach initiatives, a desire to thoughtfully and deliberately address service gaps led to this project.

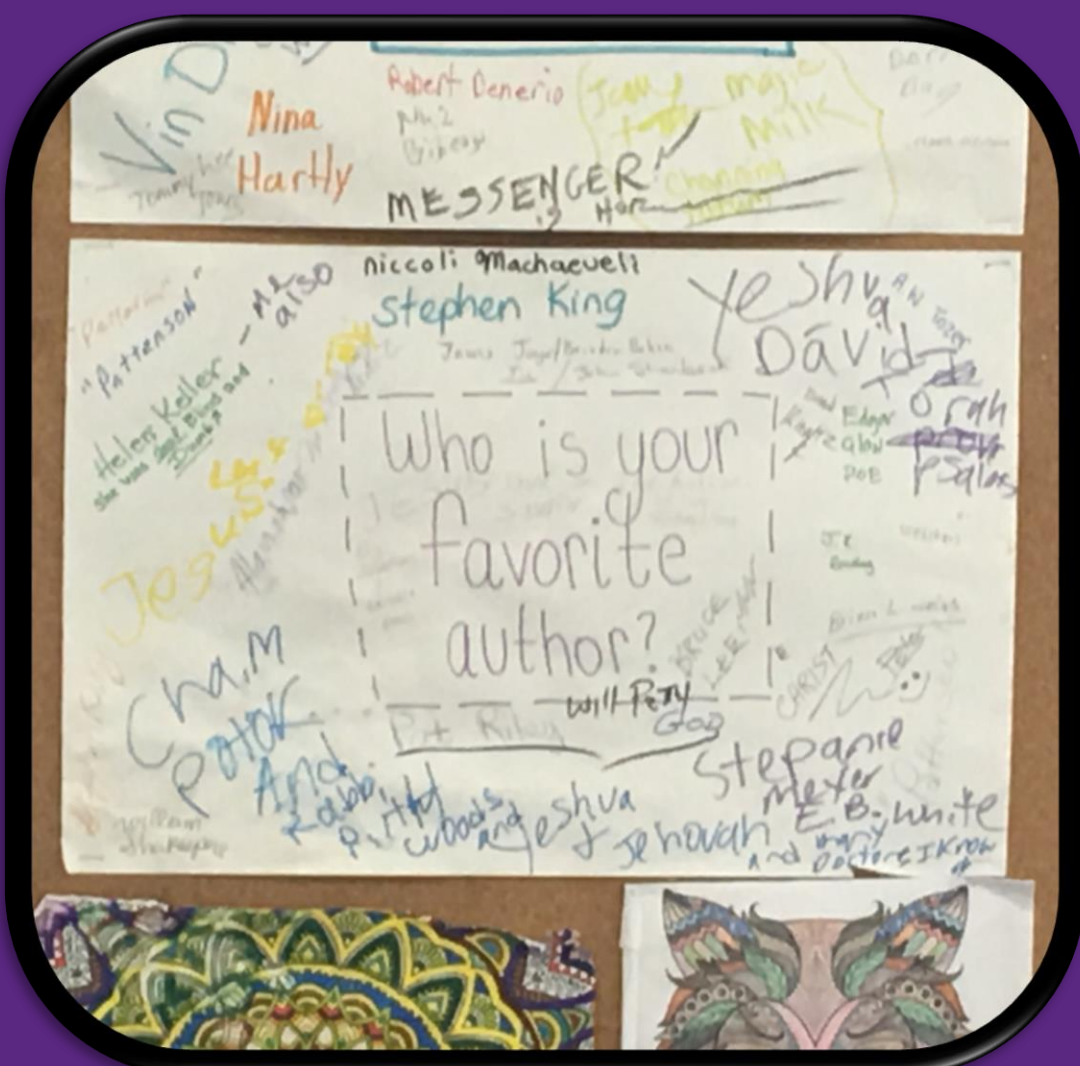
## Currently at BPL...

- Outreach visits to local homeless day shelter.
- A conscious move to reduce barriers to getting a library card.
- Referrals to community resources.

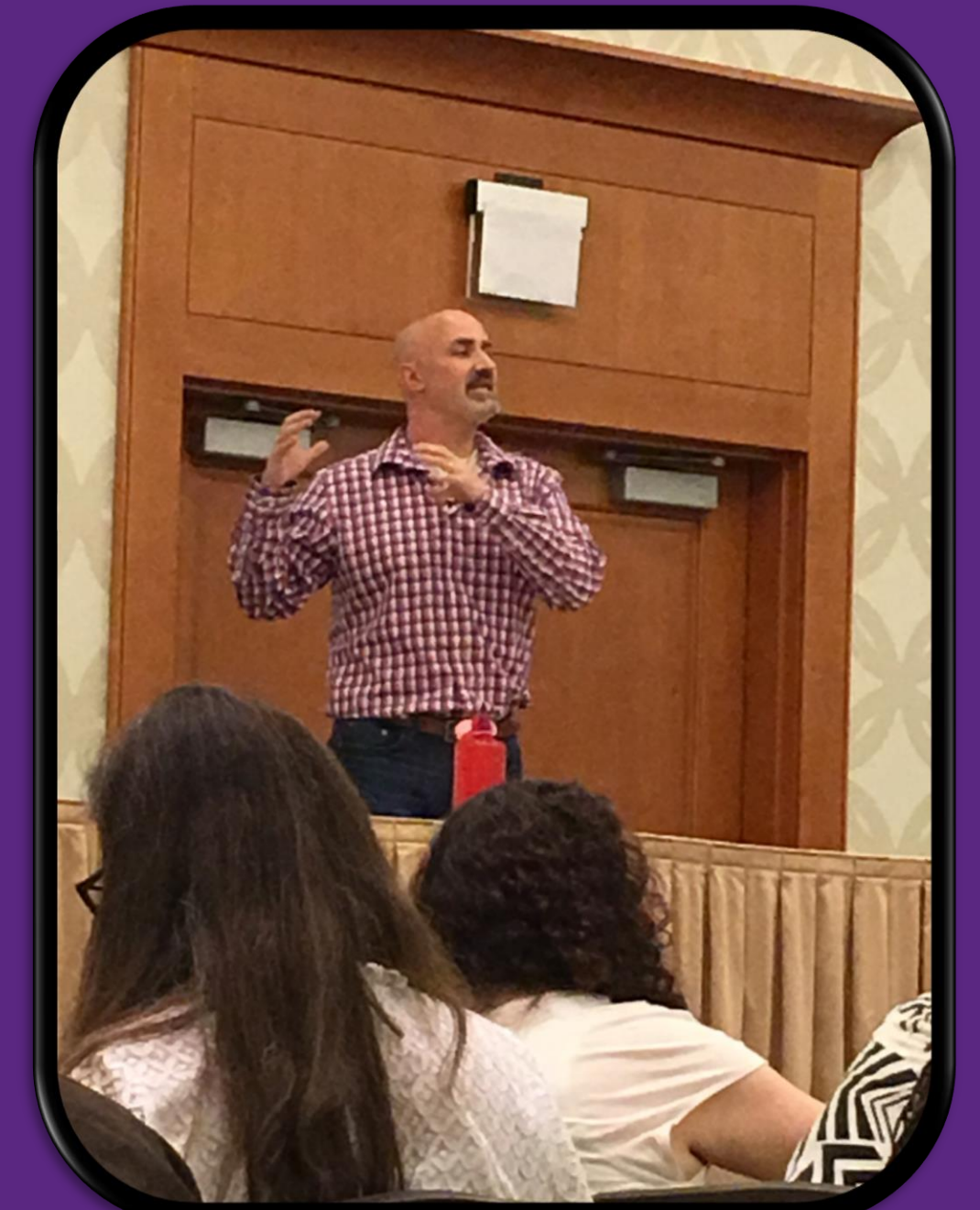
## What homeless patrons say they want...

- Respect.
- Library cards.
- Increased computer time.
- Equitable treatment.
- Inclusion

*How can public libraries better serve unhoused patrons?*



A collection of unhoused people's favorite authors at Lighthouse Mission Homeless Drop-In center.



Ryan Dowd, author of *The Librarian's Guide to Homelessness*, addresses the OLA/WLA Conference in April 2019.

## The Inquiry

- Research into current successful practices throughout the world.
- Community conversations.
- Interviews with homeless people in Bellingham, Washington.
- Interviews with libraries providing services to people experiencing homelessness.
- Conversations with professionals in the field of homelessness in libraries.



A person experiencing homelessness sleeps outside Bellingham Public Library.

## Recommendations for Implementation

- Provide every patron with the same level of compassion and respect.
- Recognize that many library services are essential to people in poverty.
- Understand that all people experiencing homelessness are also experiencing trauma.
- Implementation of provisional library cards for people unable to obtain photo identification.
- Develop concrete policies around areas of concern and enforce them equitably and compassionately.

*We think sometimes that poverty is only being hungry, naked, and homeless. The poverty of being unwanted, unloved and uncared for is the greatest poverty. We must start in our own homes to remedy this kind of poverty.*

- Mother Teresa of Calcutta