"Trauma in the Library: Symptoms of PTSD Among Staff and Methods for Ensuring Trauma-Informed Care"

Statement of Broad Need: The University of Washington (UW) requests $500,000 for a two-year, Community Catalysts, Research in Service to Practice grant. In the exploratory phase of project maturity, the project uses trauma cognitive-behavioral theory and mixed methods to answer: "Do public library staff experience symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) due to incidents in the workplace? "How prevalent are PTSD symptoms among staff?" and "How can libraries support those employees more effectively?"

Danger in public libraries from problematic patrons and other factors has been recognized for decades [1-2]. Societal shifts in employment, education, health, housing, social support, and family cohesion are bringing unprecedented numbers of users seeking support and refuge in public libraries, especially as libraries have broadened their community engagement and programming through the IMLS Community Catalysts initiative [3]. However, the hallmark features of unfettered, open, free access also make libraries susceptible to trauma: "Access and vulnerability often go hand-in-hand, yet we rarely, if ever, talk about safety and security in libraries" [4]. As extreme examples, in 2019 in Cleveland a patron was shot inside a library bathroom, adding to death tolls at branches in 2016 and 2013 [5]. In 2017, a shooter killed two staff in the Clovis-Carver Public Library [6]. In 2018, a Sacramento librarian was murdered in the parking lot by a patron previously banned from a Missouri library for making threats against staff [7], while the Director received death threats from a different patron. In 1993 two Sacramento Library staff were shot to death at the reference desk; the assailant was killed by a SWAT team—an event viewable on YouTube. At ALA 2019, an impromptu session on library worker safety brought more than 60 people together to discuss concerns and issues. In short, anecdotal data suggest that public library staff are subject to unsafe conditions due to serving a population that may exhibit high risk behaviors.

Information from the National Center for PTSD and National Institute of Health indicate that risk factors for developing PTSD include living through dangerous events and traumas, getting hurt or seeing another person hurt, and having little social support after the event. Untreated, symptoms can exacerbate additional mental health conditions or create problems with work, relationships, and other health concerns. Fortunately, evidence indicates that a supportive environment and knowing how to find support can help in recovering from these symptoms. Tools such as ALA's 2007 "Guidelines for User Behavior" and 2019 "Guide to Gun Violence and Libraries" have seen increases in libraries hiring security guards, social workers, and training library staff in social work and trauma-informed care [8]. These approaches aim to increase the safety of public libraries and improve patron-centered understanding of how trauma affects patrons' behavior. However, scant attention has focused on *the effects of increased workplace trauma on library direct-service staff themselves*. Trauma-informed care is defined as the adoption of principles and practices, as well as organizational culture change, that promotes a culture of safety, empowerment, and healing [9]. This project is designed to help libraries fulfill all aspects of that positive culture change by applying the same principles and practices to library staff.

Project Design: The cognitive–behavioral theory of trauma [10] together with mixed methods will be used to answer: "Do public library staff experience symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) due to incidents in the workplace?" "How prevalent are PTSD symptoms among library staff?" and "How can libraries support those employees more effectively?" The project goals are: 1) to identify the types of post-traumatic symptoms experienced by library staff through in-depth case studies in diverse library settings where violence has occurred; 2) to conduct a national online survey to ascertain the extent of workplace-related PTSD symptoms on staff and their awareness of existing resource help; 3) to identify trauma-informed care tools, policy and procedures that libraries can implement; and 4) create trauma-informed care for library staff curricula for teaching in MLIS programs. The outcomes include the first comprehensive baseline study of library workplace-related PTSD symptoms, tools for supporting library staff who experience those symptoms, and curricular materials for sharing across LIS schools and professional associations. Using trauma cognitive-behavioral theory, this project will collect and analyze data about:

- Traumatic events in the public library workplace using a case study approach and critical incident technique (interviews, focus groups) in 4-6 library systems such as Sacramento, Cleveland, Seattle, Boston, Birmingham, Sioux Falls, New Orleans, Albuquerque, Omaha, Charlotte, Helena, and El Paso;
- Symptoms of PTSD that have been experienced by library staff and reactions as a result of these events using a nation-wide online survey with a PTSD screening tool such as the PCL-C;
- Equip libraries with ways to support employees during and after these events by providing recommendations on best practices and promising approaches for treating these symptoms; and,
- Pilot MLIS curricula at the University of Washington on trauma-informed care for staff and users

Diversity Plan: To ensure diversity, the project will include libraries country-wide of all sizes and locations and will provide financial support to cover staff interview time. The investigators will actively seek case study and survey participation from staff of all ethnic, gender, ability and age backgrounds. UW MLIS students and diversity officers will participate in developing and testing all project curricula. PhD research assistant Kit Lowrance holds a Masters of Social Work and MLIS and is highly trained in working with diverse populations and dealing with trauma. Dr. Karen Fisher is also highly experienced with diverse populations in libraries across the U.S., and in refugee settings in the Middle East. Both Mr. Lowrance and Dr. Fisher have disabilities.

Broad Impact: While the LIS community is beginning to incorporate trauma-informed care in services to patrons, no studies have examined the impact that serving high-needs populations who exhibit high-risk behaviors can have on staff, and how adequately staff's mental health needs are being met. This research-practice gap is especially vital as many staff work part-time, and may not be aware of or the ability to access/afford Employee Assistance Programs or insurance for mental health care. Impact of the study may include:

- Advocacy from interest groups such as ALA, National Association of Social Workers, and Labor Rights organizations to expand access/awareness of benefits to library staff, with focus on behavioral health.
- Having a dedicated therapist on site each month to provide triage, assess needs and make referrals for staff.
- Providing staff with tools on how to increase their resiliency and encouraging them to seek assistance (eg, Eye-Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing is a relatively brief but effective treatment for PTSD).
- Curricula in LIS programs and professional community on how to manage crises/process traumatic events.

Budget Summary: $500,000, which includes the UW indirect rate 55.5%, is the total anticipated costs with $298,078 for personnel and tuition (Dr. Karen Fisher will spend 4 full months in Year 1 as part of her sabbatical leave intensively preparing and conducting fieldwork, and 2 months in year 2 focusing on integrated analysis and dissemination; PhD student Kit Lowrance, MSW, MLIS, will work 50% during the Academic year and 100% during the summer in Year 1 and 2); $18,182 for travel to 4-6 field sites in Year 1, and for conference dissemination in Years 1 and 2; $14,000 for participant support and incentives; and $10,000 for transcribing, publications and materials.

References
[1] Easton, C. (1977). Sex and Violence in the Library. *American Libraries*, 8.9: 484-89.
[2] Clark, K. (2019, April 23). Keep Library Workers Safe. *American Libraries*.
[3] IMLS (2019). *Public Libraries in the United States Fiscal Year 2016*. Washington, DC.
[4] McBride, K. (2017). https://lithub.com/librarians-in-the-21st-century-we-need-to-talk-about-library-security/
[5] Ferrise, A. (2019, July 25). Deadly violence an anomaly in the Cleveland Public Libraries which experienced first homicide since 1984. Cleveland.com
[6] Kravarik, J. (2017). www.cnn.com/2017/08/29/us/new-mexico-library-shooting/index.html
[7] Cummings, B. (2018). www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/north-natomas-library-amber-clark-murder-13477763.php
[8] Ford, A. (2019). americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2019/06/03/toward-trauma-informed-model/
[9] www.integration.samhsa.gov/clinical-practice/trauma-informed
[10] Whealin, J. et al. (2008). Cognitive–Behavioral Theory and Preparation for Professionals at Risk for Trauma Exposure. *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, 100-13.