

**Library Patrons Experiencing Poverty and Homelessness: Identifying Needs and
Developing Evidence-Based Practices and Services**

The Newnan Carnegie Library Improvement Project

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Executive Summary

Organizational Context

Established in 1904 and situated as a cornerstone of the court square in historic downtown Newnan, Georgia, the Newnan Carnegie Library currently serves as a library, community programming and event center, and reading room. The Newnan Carnegie provides innovative and educative programming to the Newnan community. The library has built its programming around its mission as an open-access informational resource to the community. In doing so, library staff take great pride in treating all patrons equally as they work to meet their service and information needs. The Newnan Carnegie Library serves all people who walk through their doors, but their primary patron base is seniors, children, and people experiencing poverty and homelessness.

In recent years, the library has become a sanctuary to a small number of persons experiencing poverty and homelessness. Library staff spend significant amounts of time working with these patrons to help connect them with a limited number of basic social and health services. Computer stations open to the public free of charge have also become a critical service to community members needing access to the internet to complete social and health services and benefits applications. The availability of free internet access through the library's computer stations has become even more critical during the COVID-19 pandemic due to state and local benefits office closures, which have led to social and health services applications being moved solely online.

Library staff are passionate about serving all patrons, but they are especially passionate about serving patrons in vulnerable positions such as those experiencing poverty and homelessness.

The Newnan Carnegie Library staff reported that, based on their interactions with patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness, they believe there may be a need for services specific to this population beyond what the library currently provides. Library staff are interested in better serving patrons who are experiencing poverty and homelessness because they believe there are limitations in their current approach to serving this population.

Purpose

The purpose of this quality improvement project is to assist the Newnan Carnegie Library in identifying the needs and expectations of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness and to develop an evidence-based and actionable approach to best serve patrons within the scope of the library's mission and goals. For this study, I define a patron experiencing poverty and homelessness as a person "who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate night-time residence; and has a primary night-time residency that is either provided by a shelter or an institution that provides temporary living accommodations, or a place not designed for use as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings" (Wong, 2009). The homeless patron population for this study is comprised explicitly of persons meeting both the criteria of experiencing poverty and homelessness.

This study's project design draws on a conceptual framework that utilizes elements of cultural competence (Overall, 2009) and gatekeeping (Anderson et al., 2012). Cultural competence and gatekeeping are complementary concepts in this study because they allow for understanding, awareness, and the cultivation of positive interactions that inform and enable service access (Overall, 2009; Anderson et al., 2012).

Research Questions

I designed three research questions to guide my work that draw on information collected during initial informational interviews with library staff and patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness, discussions with city leadership, field observations conducted over four days at the library, a review of library documents relevant to addressing my research questions, and literature pertinent to the problem of practice.

Research Question 1: What are the needs of library patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness?

Research Question 2: What are the library's current practices for serving patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness?

Research Question 3: What is the capacity of the library to meet the needs identified in Research Question 1?

Findings

Finding 1a. The needs of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness include access to the library as a haven, referrals to community assistance services, and computer and internet use to access online social and health services and benefits applications; however, computer literacy is a significant obstacle for these patrons in navigating and completing these applications, resulting in library staff having to provide time-consuming assistance.

I found that patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness at the Newnan Carnegie Library increasingly rely upon the library computer stations to complete online services and benefits applications. However, they struggle to complete these applications due to little

computer proficiency and the need for considerable assistance from library staff. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated this problem, with government and community resource offices moving benefits access to online platforms.

Finding 1b. While the needs of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness include accessing the library as a haven, referrals to community assistance services, and navigating and completing online services applications, the library staff and the patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness described additional physical and mental health services and shelter and food pantry access needs beyond what the library can currently provide.

I found that patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness have health and social services needs that go beyond the services currently provided by the library. These services include access to in-person social, physical health, and mental health services, shelter access, and food pantries.

Finding 2. Library staff interact regularly with patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness and report drawing on a set of practices grounded in empathy. Nevertheless, staff reported feeling personally under-resourced in meeting the needs they discover as they interact with these patrons.

Although librarians consistently participate in methods of self-education, all four librarians of the Newnan Carnegie Library noted a desire to participate in more formal and continuous learning opportunities to fulfill the mission of the library and meet their moral obligation as librarians to help vulnerable patrons to the best of their ability. While informal self-education practices have helped library staff utilize empathy in their interactions with patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness, they noted that more formal learning interventions

would increase staff's self-efficacy and improve their professional practice. Library staff would also like to better understand and serve challenging patrons and avoid banning them from accessing the library.

Finding 3. Staff reported a tension between the intrinsic motivation to better serve patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness and the finite resources available to meet their additional service needs.

Library staff are intrinsically motivated to increase awareness and understanding to better serve patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. However, available resources and explicit barriers limit the library's capacity to meet these patrons' needs. Library staff utilize their self-taught knowledge and understanding to serve the library's mission of meeting the needs of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness; however, this study found that these patrons' needs extend beyond the library's current capacity to deliver them.

Recommendations

I developed four explicit and strategic recommendations that seek actionable pathways for addressing each finding.

Recommendation 1a. Develop a computer literacy support program that will be made available to library patrons.

I recommend that the library consider offering personalized computer support sessions for patrons seeking assistance with computers. I further recommend that the library explore partnerships with the local university to develop a way for students to provide these trainings for the library.

Recommendation 1b. Form partnerships with community and government resources to improve referrals to critically needed services.

I recommend that the library engage and partner with external government and community entities to provide new or enhanced services to patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. I also recommend that the library dedicate a staff member to act as a liaison with the community and to develop a social services and benefits partnership plan to guide staff in this effort.

Recommendation 2. Increase opportunities for learning that support staff in the areas of patron advocacy, strategic partnerships, relationship building, and engagement with challenging patrons.

I recommend that the library research and prioritize available and relevant learning opportunities available for staff that are specific to serving vulnerable patrons, building strategic partnerships and community engagement, building relationships, and assisting challenging patrons. The American Library Association provides resources for model training that the library may consider. The Homeless Training Institute, founded by Ryan Dowd, also provides evidence-based training sessions for those who serve people experiencing poverty and homelessness.

Recommendation 3. Develop an actionable services plan to clearly define the parameters of services and to communicate available services.

I recommend that the library develop a more comprehensive way of cataloging and communicating available service offerings. Doing so would benefit both the library staff and the patrons they seek to assist by clearly articulating the parameters of services the library can and should provide. The library should periodically evaluate its services plan by conducting future

programmatic assessments to determine plan compliance and to re-examine the scope and appropriateness of the services provided.

These actionable recommendations benefit both patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness and the library staff by enhancing the library's ability to provide services that meet the needs of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness while also helping librarians recognize the boundaries of what the library can and cannot do to assist this patron population.

Introduction

Established in 1904 and situated as a cornerstone of the court square in historic downtown Newnan, Georgia, the Newnan Carnegie Library currently serves as a library, community programming and event center, and reading room. The Newnan Carnegie Library provides innovative and educative programming to the community. It has been an integral component of the city's increasing involvement with the cultural arts, as it hosts cultural arts-related events and programming through multiple partnerships and collaborations.

The City of Newnan owns the Newnan Carnegie Library, and it operates outside of the regional and state library networks. This designation as a city facility allows the library to operate flexibly. One unique aspect of the library is its mission as an open-access institution. The library does not levy fees or fines for late books; rather, they provide all media types to the public following an honor system. The open-access status is an important part of what defines the Newnan Carnegie Library as an exceptional asset to the community because it provides accessibility of information for all types of people with no barriers to access such information, such as huge fines.

The library has built its programming around its mission as an open-access informational resource for the community. In doing so, library staff take great pride in treating all patrons equally as they work to meet their service and information needs.

In recent years, the library has become a sanctuary to a small number of persons experiencing poverty and homelessness. Library staff spend significant amounts of time working with these patrons to help connect them to certain basic social and health services. Computer stations open to the public free of charge have also become a critical service to community members needing to access the internet to complete social and health services and benefits

applications. The availability of free internet access through the library's computer stations has become even more critical during the COVID-19 pandemic due to state and local benefits office closures, which have led to social and health services applications being moved solely online. Assisting patrons with online public services applications has become a fundamental role of librarians as libraries have increasingly become a lifeline for persons experiencing poverty and homelessness over the last few decades (Kelley et al., 2017).

The Newnan Carnegie Library staff are very interested in better serving patrons who may be experiencing poverty and homelessness because they believe there are limitations in their current approach to serving this population. Library staff reported that, based on their many day-to-day interactions with patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness, they believe this population may need services beyond what the library currently provides. Library staff requested that this study provide some insight into these preliminary observations, while noting that several circumstances often make properly assessing the needs of this population difficult. These issues include a lack of trust, mental illness, and the stigma of living in poverty and homelessness (Argintaru et al., 2013). I chose the library as my organizational partner because of its significance to the community in which I live and for the ability to provide assistance to a potentially vulnerable population of persons that are part of our community.

I should note that I have a personal connection to the Newnan Carnegie Library. I am 42-year resident of Newnan, Georgia, and the Newnan Carnegie Library served as a staple of learning for me in my adolescence. Moreover, my spouse has worked at the Newnan Carnegie Library since September 2017 and became the director of the library in May 2019. As I designed the study, I remained aware that I am in a unique position as a researcher and spouse of the library director. The benefits of this position include unfettered access to the library director as

one of the primary sources of data for this study. I weighed information derived from the library director equally to that of all other subjects. While being mindful of maintaining a professional relationship during conversations with the library director regarding this study's subject, I also remained cautious during the data collection phase to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of employees taking part in the interviews. The library director also maintains a trustworthy relationship with patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness, as do other library staff. The director facilitated introductions between me and these patrons, which helped put the patrons at ease during my interviews with them. Both patrons interviewed commented that their trusting relationship with the director made them more comfortable with me as an interviewer for this study. My relationship with the library director also helped me access patrons and build trusting relationships with them, which ultimately improved my ability to collect data and provided a better view into the library's operations and the interactions that occur within it than I would have had otherwise.

The purpose of this quality improvement project is to work with the Newnan Carnegie Library staff to identify the needs of library patrons who are experiencing poverty and homelessness and to develop actionable recommendations that strategically address the findings of the study.

Organizational Context

Carnegie Library Mission Statement:

“The Carnegie provides a central dynamic gathering place that serves residents of all ages and backgrounds as well as community organizations with a non-circulating reading room, children’s area, and meeting spaces enhanced by an art gallery. It seeks to be an integral part of the community by offering print and electronic materials, services, and programs to adults and children to enrich daily lives.”

The Newnan Carnegie Library seeks to enrich the Newnan community by offering diverse media, cultural arts, and academic, informational, and health-related programs and services. The library provides programs for adults, children, and teens that are available to the public free of charge. Classes and programs for adults include personal fitness, technology, photography, crochet, writing, history, arts, crafts, movie days, themed afternoon teas, silversmith crafting, and book clubs. Adult programming also includes art demonstrations, artist visits, collaborations with the local university’s school of the arts, and the Newnan Artist-in-Residence program. Children’s programming includes art classes, story times for multiple age groups, magicians, cooking classes, puppeteers, and comedians. Teen classes have included crafting, movie makeup, magic, comic book drawing, jewelry making, and financial literacy. Services offered at the Carnegie include public computer usage, public notarization, copying, faxing, scanning, technology help, book borrowing, seed library check out, readers’ advisory, and assistance with signing up for public services. Library staff track attendance and services usage and have shared this information with me for this study. Table 1 below details the most used services offered at the library.

Table 1

Utilization of Library Services

1	Computer Use, Technology, and Social/Public Services Assistance
2	Children’s Programming
3	Programs, Classes (In-Person and Virtual)
4	Books, Reference Materials
5	Book Reviews
6	Teens and Young Adult Programming
7	Speaker Series
8	Copying, Faxing, Scanning
9	City Merchandise Sales

The Newnan Carnegie Library serves all people that walk through its doors, but its primary patron base is made up of seniors, children, and people experiencing poverty and homelessness. Two full-time employees and four part-time employees comprise the library’s staff. The director manages the library, supervises all employees, handles the day-to-day operations of the library (including financial and budgeting matters), develops the adult and non-fiction collection, serves as the point person with other City of Newnan officials, coordinates with the Newnan Carnegie Library Foundation for additional funding, manages meeting room rentals, and develops the patron newsletter. The other full-time staff member who works at the reference desk is a public notary who also coordinates all teen programs and the young adult collection development. The children's programmer plans and executes all children's programs and takes care of the children's collection development. The adult programmer oversees all adult programs, supervises volunteers, and manages the library’s social media accounts and websites with the director. Two reference assistants fill in at the front desk when needed. Staff are

passionate about serving all patrons, but they are especially passionate about serving patrons in vulnerable positions such as those experiencing poverty and homelessness. Some of these patrons access the library to receive vital services such as assistance with applying for public benefits and paying bills.

Area of Inquiry

For this study, I define a patron experiencing poverty and homelessness as a person "who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate night-time residence; and has a primary night-time residency that is either provided by a shelter or an institution that provides temporary living accommodations, or a place not designed for use as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings" (Wong, 2009). Patrons who experience both poverty and homelessness are the subjects of this study. Over the last decade, the Newnan Carnegie Library has become a daytime haven for a small population of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. Because the library exists to serve all community members equally as an open-access institution, there are no developed policies and procedures on record for specifically addressing distinct patron populations, including those who are experiencing poverty and homelessness.

Library staff would like to explore the information and programming needs and expectations of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness to maximize their utilization of library services. In addition, staff have encountered challenges in addressing the emotional and healthcare needs of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness while they are at the library. In the pre-meetings with library staff, they spoke of challenges associated with serving the patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. Staff also expressed the need for additional training to better communicate with patrons who have a history of unpredictable behavior toward staff and other patrons of the library. The library has banned two patrons for the rest of the 2021

calendar year for exhibiting problematic behavior. Library staff would like to better understand and serve these challenging patrons as opposed to banning them. Library staff also reported spending a significant amount of time assisting patrons with basic computer literacy and helping them complete online services and benefits applications. The increasing amount of time spent helping patrons with computer use has been challenging for library staff. They feel they are continually pulled away from other library duties in order to provide basic computer assistance for patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness, who routinely struggle with using the computers.

The purpose of this study therefore is to identify the needs and expectations of the Newnan Carnegie Library patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness and to develop an evidence-based approach for the library to best serve these patrons within the scope of the library's mission, goals, and resources. This approach draws on data collected during initial interviews with all four members of the library staff and two patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. It also draws on discussions with two members of city leadership; field observations focused on library operations and staff-patron interactions conducted over four days at the library; a review of library documents relevant to addressing my research questions; and research literature pertinent to the problem of practice.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

In the following literature review section, I outline the primary definitions of the subject population and research literature that informs the problem of practice for this study. I explore literature that speaks to defining the patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness, the role libraries play in serving them, and the importance of understanding the care and information

needs of these patrons. I also examine literature that speaks to the barriers that impact the ability of libraries to meet the needs of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness.

Wong (2009) defines a homelessness person as someone "who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate night-time residence; and has a primary night-time residency that is either provided by a shelter or an institution that provides temporary living accommodations, or a place not designed for use as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings." For this study, the subject population is comprised of persons who are experiencing both poverty and homelessness. The library staff and I agreed early on that narrowly defining the focus of this patron population to those experiencing poverty and homelessness would be smart for this study in order to illuminate details specific to the population at the core of the library's stated problem of practice. This definition also allows for the proper identification of the subject population. Library staff regularly assist a group of patrons who experience poverty and homelessness with services. These persons have conveyed their situational contexts to staff who are well situated to connect me to these patrons due to their existing relationships. Expanding this project's scope to include patrons only living in poverty would be difficult because these circumstances are less transparent and not frequently self-reported to library staff. However, in my conversations with librarians, they did also clearly express their support for the library's critical role in assisting patrons living in poverty as a barrier to homelessness. One librarian noted that some patrons they assist are "but one service denial away from them potentially becoming homeless."

For homeless patrons, the library may act as more than just a shelter from the elements. It can provide a quiet and peaceful environment where connections to the community may occur (Wong, 2009). In a large survey research study in New Zealand, Zhang and Chawner (2018) found that homeless patrons used libraries primarily for educational and current event

information, to stay connected to the world, and to interact with other people. Also, most homeless respondents commented that the library provided a welcoming and comforting sense of community (Zhang & Chawner, 2018).

Identifying and understanding a patron's circumstances to determine their information and care needs is essential to successfully serve this population as they may suffer in health and find refuge and linkages to needed services in the library setting (Wong, 2009; Gehner & Freeman, 2005). In a 2012 study exploring librarian and homeless patron relationships, Anderson, et al, found that librarians typically utilize three methods of response when interacting with the homeless population to determine their needs: listening, offering support and sympathy, and discussing alternative courses of action (Anderson et al, 2012). Furthermore, studies have found that the skills acquired by library personnel from relevant education and training opportunities allow for the strategic use of patron advocacy and relationship building as critical components library staff utilize to assist in gauging patron needs (Anderson et al, 2012). The American Library Association (ALA) showcases many of the available learning opportunities library staff may utilize to improve their practice. The ALA has developed a mass array of literature on the topic along with website resources, services, training toolkits, and a catalog of model programs libraries may refer to when considering service offerings to patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness (American Library Association [ALA], 2015).

The ALA has also provided a charge to libraries to meet the service needs of vulnerable patrons, including those experiencing poverty and homelessness, within a policy statement specific to services for the poor (American Library Association [ALA], 2005). Through this policy, the ALA encourages public libraries to utilize existing resources and services and strategies to identify and meet the needs of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. The

ALA also encourages public libraries to review existing policies to determine their impact upon vulnerable populations. The examination of library policies and procedures as methods of supporting the value of services provided to patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness is also essential because they guide the work of library staff and set the basic parameters of the capacity of the library to provide needed services (Dowdell & Liew, 2019).

Barriers that often inhibit libraries from understanding and meeting the needs of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness are often two-fold (Morgan, 2016; Wong, 2009; May 2008). While libraries often act as a safety net for vulnerable populations, the specific needs of these patrons are often unknown to library staff, and services, access to the library and other establishments is rarely clearly defined by the library (Morgan, 2016; Wong, 2009). The ambiguity of these needs, services, rights, and access acts as a barrier to serving patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness (Wong, 2009). Understanding the care and information needs of homeless patrons can be quite problematic given the complexities of these circumstances (Argintaru et al, 2013). A common second barrier to serving persons experiencing poverty and homelessness is that they may often be positioned as problem patrons by librarians and other library patrons in public library settings (Holt, 2006). This positioning often occurs because of the stigma related to poverty and homelessness and the perceived prevalence of mental health issues often associated with this population (May, 2008). These perceptions often act as a stigmatic barrier to developing and promulgating effective service practices due to the lack of trust between homeless persons and those who are in positions to assist them (Anderson, et al, 2012). For these reasons, it is critically important to examine library staff perceptions of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness because these perceptions inform the practices

staff utilize to form an understanding of patrons and ultimately the services they provide to assist them (Zhang & Chawner, 2018).

Conceptual Framework

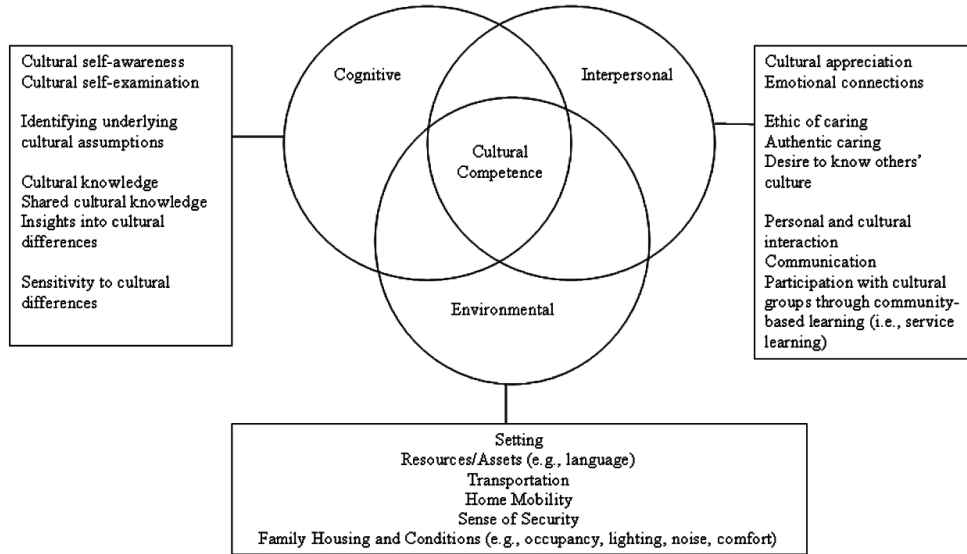
For this research study, I utilize the concepts of cultural competence (Overall, 2009) and gatekeeping (Shumsky and Pinker, 2003) as key elements of the conceptual framework. Overall's cultural competency framework provides the holistic conceptual framework necessary to guide a quality improvement project seeking to improve services to an underserved and vulnerable population. For this project, a cultural competence framework drew attention to the unique skillsets necessary for staff to support patrons, not because homelessness is a culture but because it focuses on the ways library staff interacted with homeless patrons in terms of facilitating linkages and critical needs of each individual.

Figure 1 illustrates Overall's cultural competence model framework for library services professionals. Cultural competence requires an understanding of the critical aspects of cultural knowledge defined within this model. The framework provides three specific domains, cognitive, interpersonal, and environmental, where cultural competence is necessary to understand the needs of diverse and underserved populations (Overall, 2009). Each domain includes considerations that inform knowledge attainment based on the cultural understanding of oneself and others.

Figure 1

Cultural Competence Model for Library Information Science Professionals

(Overall, 2019)



The cultural competence framework supports the development and implementation of services to better meet such patron's needs because it affords insight into understanding patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness and their circumstances (Hurley, Kostecky, & Townsend, 2019). The three dimensions and associated considerations within Overall's (2009) cultural competence conceptual framework provide a standard set of practices and sociocultural lens to view and assess interactions with diverse populations. The intersection of cognitive, interpersonal, and environmental factors informs the holistic application of cultural competence. I used the cultural competence framework to study libraries and patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness, not as a cultural phenomenon, but because it allows the investigator to see what is happening within the context and setting where interactions occur and

provides a sensitive look into the unique needs of particular communities. As an analytical tool, cultural competency draws attention to relational interactions and participants' descriptions of interactions between librarians and a given population.

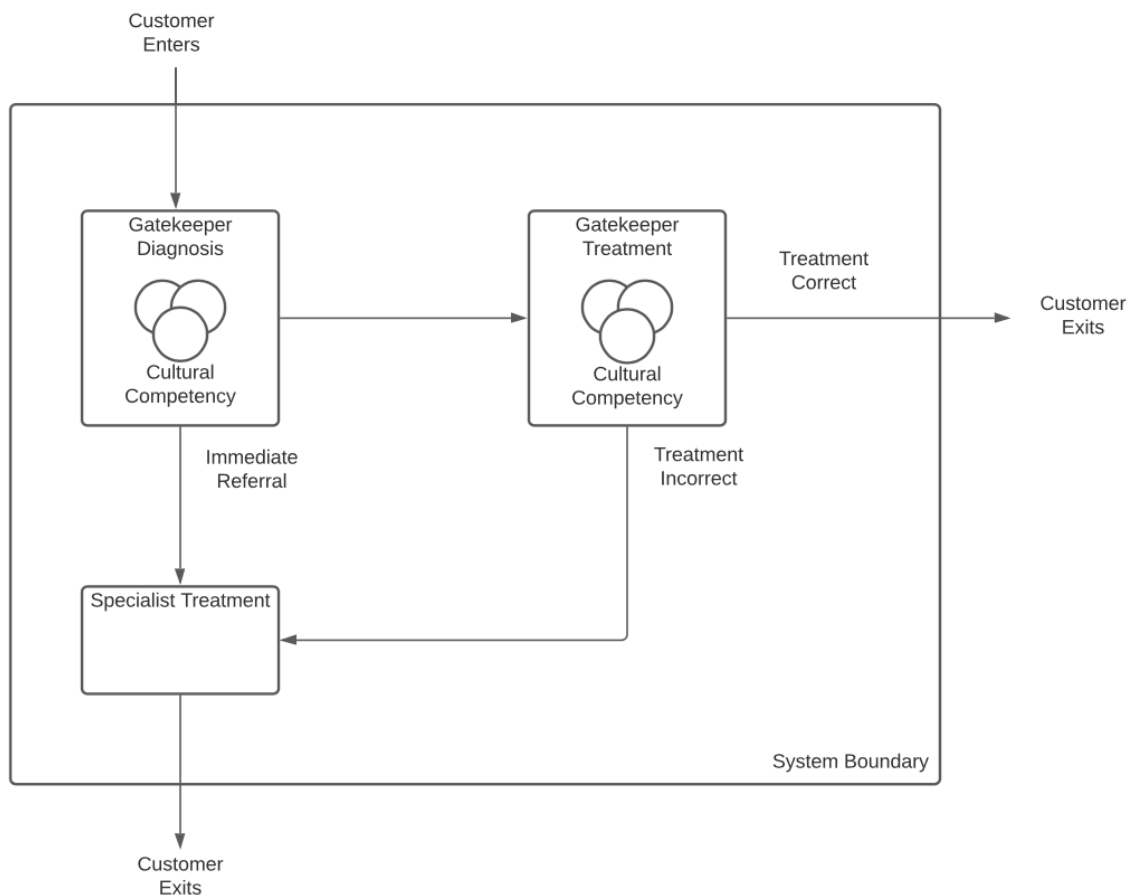
Library staff often serve as gatekeepers to facilitate access to critical needs and services for patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness (Anderson et al, 2012). While initial gatekeeping models focused on a gatekeeper's role as rationing access to services, more contemporary literary research demonstrates gatekeeping in a more collaborative and facilitative connotation (Barzilai-Nahon, 2009). Corroborative research on the topic defines the transitioning role of librarians from "gatekeepers" of knowledge to "gateways" to knowledge (Oyelude, 2012). More contemporary models of gatekeeping, as illustrated by Shumsky & Pinker (2003), reframe the functions of service personnel, such as librarians, as occupying a more facilitator role, where diagnosis and determinations are made based on the knowledge, understanding, and mutual trust between those needing and providing information and services. Additionally, Rowley (2003) describes the facilitative gatekeeper as one who possesses exceptional knowledge in areas that support their role as a networked hub in facilitating information and connections to needed services. Health and capacity factors (disability and literacy) that limit patron abilities and act as barriers to gaining access to information and services only enhance the importance of gatekeeper knowledge and experience in providing services.

Cultural competence and gatekeeping are complementary conceptual relationships within this capstone study because they depend on the knowledge, understanding, and awareness of patrons to facilitate linkages to the services needed to maintain well-being and survival (Overall, 2009; Anderson, 2012). Overall's (2009) cultural competence dimensions act as tools in diagnosing patron needs and the treatment provided by library staff gatekeepers in meeting these

needs. Specifically, figure 2 illustrates how I have inserted the three cultural competency dimensions and considerations into the patron service framework developed by Shumsky & Pinker (2003). While library staff act as gatekeepers in facilitating services for patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness, the tools, practices, and behaviors they utilize in doing so become illuminated through my application of the cultural competency framework. Cultural competence informs the unique skillsets staff employ in aiding patrons. Under this context, understanding individual patron needs in their cultural and community settings is essential in reducing the barriers required to successfully connect patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness to needed services (Rowley, 2003).

Figure 2

Conceptual Framework Integration



Study Design

This study seeks to identify the needs of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness at the Newnan Carnegie Library and develop evidence-based practices that serve the needs and expectations of these patrons. To collect data to inform the study, I drew on relevant institutional documents, field observations, discussions city leadership, semi-structured individual staff interviews, and semi-structured individual patron interviews.

Part I: Document Review

The document review process began with a search for all available operating documents, which was followed by a review of these documents to determine if they could help answer the research questions. Library policies and procedures guide the work of library staff and set the basic parameters of the capacity of the library to provide services (Dowdell & Liew, 2019). I reviewed library policies and procedures for discriminatory practices that inhibit innovative service delivery to patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness (Zhang & Chawner, 2018). I also reviewed the library's documents that align library practices with its mission and vision while also reviewing all standard operating procedure documents. I also asked the library director for the following: the Carnegie Library strategic plan, the library building manual, the library mission statement, the policy and procedures for computer and internet use, the customer behavior policy, and library staff job descriptions. I also reviewed the library's budget as part of the overall city budget. This document review provided formalized information pertaining to the operating guidelines and mission statement that direct librarian practices and detail the resource capacity of the library; this information may be important for understanding how the library operates (Saunders, 2015). There is tremendous pressure placed on libraries to be many things for the communities they serve. Therefore, it is helpful to understand how a library handles the competing priorities and pressures placed on them in order to meet the needs of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness (Saunders, 2015). I then summarized documents into notes related to the research questions. I added document summary notes to the thematic analysis process illustrated below to reveal recurrent themes within and across the different data types.

Part II: Semi-Structured Interviews

I utilized Dowdell and Liew's (2019) interview methodology to develop interview questions related to the concepts of cultural competence and gatekeeping. The semi-structured interview questions were used to gather data on patron needs and the librarian practices employed to deliver them. Dowdell and Liew's (2019) interview methodology provided me with a clear framework for meeting the requirements of this study. I tailored interview questions to elicit information about the three research questions. Table 2 below details how the semi-structured interview questions corresponded to the study's research questions.

Table 2

Research and Interview Question Alignment for Patrons and Library Staff

Research Questions	Patron Questions	Library Staff Questions
Context-Gathering Questions	<p>What does the Carnegie Library mean to you?</p> <p>How long have you been attending the library?</p>	<p>What does the Carnegie Library mean to you?</p> <p>What drew you to want to work here?</p>
Research Question 1: What are the needs of the patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness who frequent the Newnan Carnegie Library?	What kinds of information do you search for, access, and utilize in the library?	What kinds of information do you think patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness

	<p>How do you search for this information?</p> <p>What are other services you access at the library?</p>	<p>search for, access, and utilize in the library?</p> <p>What are the existing services, practices, and policies offered to patrons experiencing homelessness and poverty?</p>
<p>Research Question 2: What are the library's current practices for serving patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness?</p>	<p>Are library staff helpful in assisting you with your information needs?</p>	<p>How do library staff perceive patrons experiencing homelessness and poverty and their use of the library?</p>
<p>Research Question 3: What is the capacity of the library to meet the needs identified in Research Question 1?</p>	<p>Are there barriers that prevent you from accessing services?</p> <p>Do you think library staff are trained and well</p>	<p>What are the barriers to services?</p> <p>Do staff feel trained and well equipped to serve this population?</p>

	<p>equipped to meet your service needs?</p> <p>What is the capacity of the library to meet your service needs?</p>	<p>What is the capacity of the library to serve this population?</p> <p>How should the library weigh the needs of a specific population in relation to the needs of the entire patron population?</p>
	<p>How should the library enhance or develop services to meet your needs?</p>	<p>How should the library enhance or develop services to meet the needs of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness?</p>

Once I had a clear set of interview questions addressing each research question, I then created two sets of interview questions to capture the perspectives of the two subject groups scheduled for interviews. One set was tailored explicitly to library staff, and the other set was tailored to patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. Library staff connected me with two patrons who they identified as experiencing poverty and homelessness for individual interviews.

Interview sessions with each patron began with an introduction facilitated by the library director. The director maintains a trusting relationship with these patrons, and her presence during the introductions put these patrons at ease. Interviews with the patrons were conducted in a corner of the library to maintain confidentiality. I recorded each interview session with an audio-recording application on my smartphone and with an audio-recording application on my laptop computer. Library staff members were each interviewed in the privacy of the director's office using the same recording methods. I began each interview with two context-gathering questions to elicit background information on each interviewee's relationship with the library.

Four library staff members were interviewed, including the director. Two full-time employees and four part-time employees comprise the library staff. The director manages the library, supervises all employees, handles the day-to-day operations of the library (including financial and budgeting matters), develops the adult and non-fiction collection, serves as the point person with other City of Newnan officials, coordinates with the Newnan Carnegie Library Foundation for additional funding, manages meeting room rentals, and develops the patron newsletter. The other full-time staff member who works at the reference desk is a public notary who also coordinates all teen programs and the young adult collection development. The children's programmer plans and executes all children's programs and takes care of the children's collection development. The adult programmer oversees all adult programs, supervises volunteers, and manages the library's social media accounts and websites with the director. Two reference assistants fill in at the front desk when needed. All interviews with patrons and staff lasted approximately one hour. I had hoped to interview as many as six patrons identified by staff as experiencing poverty and homelessness, but the COVID-19 pandemic limited my ability to conduct such interviews. This issue is detailed in the limitations section of this study. Only two

of these patrons returned to the library after it reopened following the end of the mandatory state-wide shelter-in-place order.

I conducted staff interviews in October, November, and December of 2020. Interview sessions began in late October due to COVID-19 social distancing and non-essential visitor restrictions put in place by the library post-reopening. These restrictions and protocols limited my ability to be onsite to conduct interviews during this period. Patrons were only allowed into the building in limited numbers and only for a limited number of services. The two patrons identified as experiencing poverty and homelessness who I scheduled to interview returned to the library in mid-October 2020.

In the data analysis phase, interview data served as the basis for my preliminary findings. The interviews provided the most relevant and substantial data because they provide the first-hand perspectives of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness and the library staff who serve them.

Part III: Informational Interviews with City Leadership

Two informal discussions with city leadership yielded beneficial information regarding the library's resource capacity for executing strategies to meet the needs of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness and regarding barriers to meeting these needs. I made notes of these discussions immediately after they occurred. I initially approached city leadership to gain approval for this project. These two conversations turned into informational sessions that provided some detail about the city leadership's perceptions of the needs of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness and the library's role in meeting these needs. I documented these conversations by drafting notes about the content of the conversations and my impressions immediately after they occurred.

Part IV: Field Observations of Patron Activity and Patron/Staff Interactions Within the Library

Data collection also included field observations of library operations. I initially conducted field observations in the library's main floor library and reading room. These observations revealed what services patrons request and how staff interact with them to serve their needs. As I observed relationships (interactions and transactions) between library staff and patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness, I took chronological notes to record, identify, and explain patterns and their connections with one another (Nespor, 2006). I observed four non-consecutive days of library operations and interactions between library staff and patrons. There are typically three library staff on duty during standard library open hours. The director of the library occupies the only individually enclosed office, while another staff member works primarily from the front desk. The third library employee is typically one of the three program-specific employees and works from a shared office behind the front desk. Although library staff have several assigned duties within the library, they apply a community approach where staff work together in a collaborative fashion to cover most day-to-day tasks. This strategy became evident during field observations, as staff continually performed several duties at once to maintain coverage of patron service throughout the day. Because staff share in their work at the library in a coordinated fashion, they all consistently interact with patrons to provide access to multiple forms of informational resources. I took detailed notes during each observation period, documenting events in the order they occurred (Nespor, 2006).

As mentioned above, I observed interactions between library staff and patrons identified as experiencing poverty and homelessness during three-hour sessions over four separate days. I specifically looked for how these patrons spend their time in the library, in particular, what

information they access and how they interact with library staff. I spoke with library staff at the end of each observation period to receive more information regarding their interactions with patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness that could not be obtained through observation. Through these observations I witnessed several instances of staff exchanges with patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness in which staff connected them with services and provided assistance.

Data Collection Challenges

I encountered several challenges in collecting data. Initially, I had hoped to use a survey tool to collect needs and perceptions information from a larger sample to corroborate the findings of the interviews, discussions, and observations. I did not use a survey tool due to three main issues that limited patrons' ability to provide such feedback. Library staff specifically requested that a survey not be conducted due to the literacy limitations (reading, writing, and computer literacy) of some patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. Staff also expressed concern that certain patrons' eyesight disabilities could limit the utility of a survey that must be filled out individually. Library staff also expressed concern that a survey targeting patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness would stigmatize them.

Because this quality improvement project requires interpersonal engagement with a potentially vulnerable population, establishing a safe and friendly interview environment was critical (Dowdell & Liew, 2019). I gave special consideration to interactions with the homeless patrons, including the facilitation of introductions by library staff members who have established trusting relationships with them. I remained mindful of any potentially threatening, intimidating, or exploitative consequences that could occur through interactions with patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness, and I made every effort to maintain a safe and productive research

environment. Given the possibility of exploitation, I sought to comply with anonymity practices by redacting all personal or identifying information from all data collected, and I maintained controls for the confidentiality of responses to interview questions through secure electronic storage methods. With the help of library staff, I also made gradual connections with the subject patrons to develop trust.

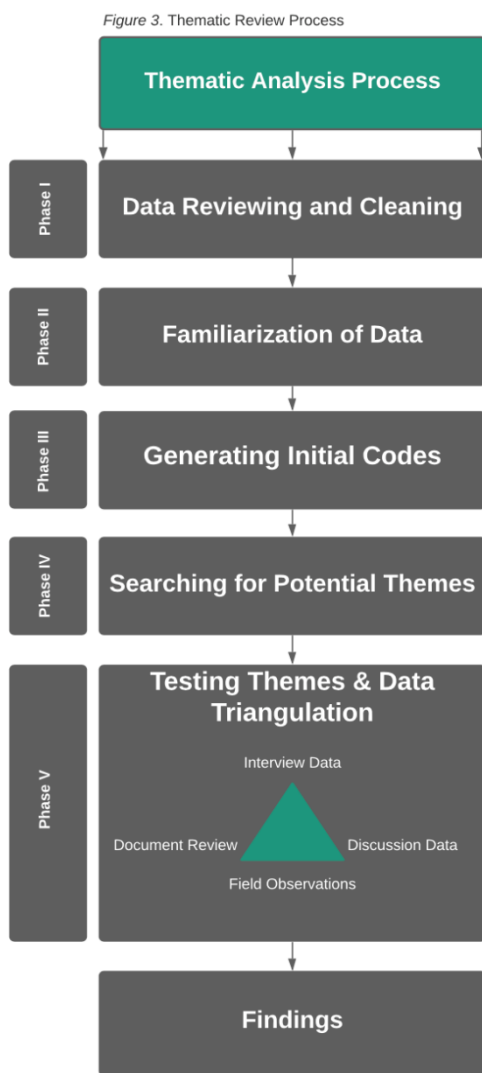
The COVID-19 pandemic also had a significant impact on the original data-gathering plan. The library was closed to the public from April 2020 to June 2020, and upon reopening, many of the known regular patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness did not immediately return to the library. I was unable to determine whether these former patrons left the area or found refuge elsewhere. However, two long-standing patrons identified by staff as experiencing poverty and homelessness returned and agreed to participate in interviews to inform this study. The limitations section will explicitly address the ways these challenges limit the scope and strength of my findings.

Analysis

For the data analysis process, I utilized a thematic analysis that followed the phased approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). While the initial phases of the thematic analysis process were meant to identify recurring themes within each data set (interview transcripts, discussion and observation notes, memos, and relevant library documents), the third, fourth, and fifth phases were targeted at refining recurring coded data into highly relevant and correlated thematic categories that align with this study's theoretical framework and research questions (Ryan, 2003). Figure 3 illustrates the thematic review process used in this study.

Figure 3

Thematic Analysis Process



Phase 1 - Data Reviewing and Cleaning

For the first phase of the thematic review process, I reviewed all of my collected data, including interview transcripts, discussions, observation notes, memos, and relevant library documents. I made necessary edits and organized the data by type and in chronological order to ensure that the content was clear, concise, and easy to reference. Transcriptions and memos included in this first phase also allowed me to become more familiar with the collected body of

data and to prepare for subsequent phases of the review process, where I would seek to identify themes.

Phase 2 – Familiarization of Data

During the second phase of the thematic analysis process, I re-read the entire clean data set in order of which it was collected. I started with relevant library documents, then moved to interview transcripts, and finally, the discussion and observation notes. This second phase of the analysis process allowed me to understand the data more holistically, and I began to notice themes within each subset of data and across the entire collection of data. In this second pass, I periodically made notes of consistent themes I recognized and wrote memos to document potential themes that would help organize the subsequent analysis phase.

Phase 3 – Generating Initial Codes

During the third phase of the thematic analysis process, I reviewed each subset of the data line by line in sequential order (relevant library documents, interview transcripts, and discussion and observation notes) and noted recurring patterns that related to the research questions. I then utilized code labels (short phrases) corresponding to my research questions to identify significant or recurring patterns in the data. I coded interview data first and utilized this data as my preliminary findings. I then coded the remaining data to use it for data triangulation against my preliminary findings. I coded the data manually in Microsoft Word by adding comments to interview transcripts, observation and discussion notes, and library documents. For non-electronic documents, I made comments within the existing paper ledgers. The thematic review process that I used was initially a deductive (with no a priori codes) analysis because it was informed by the three research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase 4: Searching for Potential Themes

When I finished coding each data subset, I categorized the codes associated with each research question, formed a framework of identified codes within a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, and noted the number of times I used the code and the type of data the code referenced. I then listed the top 15 recurring codes on small pieces of paper and formed theme piles to examine potential relationships between codes.

Phase 5: Testing Themes and Data Triangulation

For Phase 5 of the thematic analysis process, I sought to identify coherent and correlated patterns among the themes produced in Phase 4 within each data subset. I then triangulated the preliminary themes identified from interview data against the remaining data sources to identify recurrent themes across all data subsets. I utilized a cutting and sorting process to identify and group the recurrent themes found across data subsets. Once I completed triangulating the data subsets with the preliminary findings from the interview data, I developed a framework listing the most recurrent final themes. Table 3 details recurrent correlated themes across each data subset in relation to the preliminary findings from interviews. The list of the most recurring final themes triangulated across the four data sets is the basis for this study's findings.

Table 3

Association of Themes in Context Across Data Sources.

Research Questions	Preliminary (Interview Data) Themes	Observation Data Themes	Discussion Data Themes	Document Data Themes
<p>What are the needs of the patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness who frequent the Newnan Carnegie Library?</p>	<p>Computer use:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computers as an important resource • Computers as a means to access services/benefits assistance <p>Library staff primarily assist with referrals to community services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a need for additional social and health services referrals 	<p>Computer use:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • most used resource • staff spend most time providing computer assistance 	<p>Patrons primarily go to the library to use computers and internet</p> <p>Need for additional health and social services offerings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referrals to community/government services 	<p>Computer use policy is the most referred to policy at the library</p>

<p>What are the library's current practices for serving patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness?</p>	<p>Patrons noted positive treatment and acknowledgment from library staff and positive levels of trust with library staff</p>	<p>Library staff are overwhelmingly kind and courteous in their treatment of patrons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal interaction with patrons to cultivate trust <p>Library staff use their understanding of patrons (built through interactions and trust) to better serve them</p>	<p>Library staff are protective of vulnerable patrons</p> <p>Library staff treat patrons with respect</p>	<p>Mission statement and policy and procedures review focus on open-access services</p> <p>Staff behavior expectations (professionalism, courtesy, and empathy) listed in job descriptions</p> <p>Job description focus on continuous training and professional development</p>
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<p>What is the capacity of the library to meet the needs identified in Research Question 1?</p>	<p>Library staff participate in self-education to serve vulnerable patrons, and they would like more learning opportunities to enhance services</p> <p>Librarians believe it is their mission to serve vulnerable populations</p> <p>Library resources (staff and funding) are limited</p>	<p>Library staff utilize self-taught knowledge to identify needs and provide services to patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness</p>	<p>Staff utilize self-learning, but they are eager to identify additional learning and development opportunities</p>	<p>The library service mission is broad: serving all patron information needs – providing all informational services</p> <p>Budget review shows limited resources (staff and funding)</p>
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The most recurrent themes have been identified through the thematic analysis process and triangulated across the four sources of collected data. Table 4 lists the final themes.

Table 4

Final Themes

Social and Health Services Assistance
Computer Use
Computer Literacy
Referrals to Services
Additional Service Needs
Personal Interaction
Empathy and Trust
Self-Learning
Additional Learning Opportunities
Intrinsic Motivation to Better Serve Patrons
Broad Service Mission
Resources Limitations

Findings

Research Question 1: What are the needs of the patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness who frequent the Newnan Carnegie Library?

Finding 1a. The needs of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness include access to the library as a haven, referrals to community assistance services, and computer and internet use to access online social and health services and benefits applications; however, computer literacy is a significant obstacle for these patrons in

navigating and completing these applications, resulting in library staff having to provide time-consuming assistance.

Using interview data from both librarians and library patrons, I found that patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness use library computers to access online social services and require the time-consuming support of librarians in navigating computer and internet use. In the interviews, the librarians noted that patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness possess low computer and internet proficiencies and require beginning-to-end assistance when attempting to use the computer stations. My data also indicates disability and literacy issues may be reasons patrons require assistance with computers and online forms. The computer stations and the free internet are the most utilized resources at the library. Currently, librarians provide computer-related assistance whenever it is requested by patrons using computers. Providing this level of assistance has become an especially cumbersome and time-consuming practice for librarians. They cannot quickly assist other patrons who need help, leading to longer wait times for assistance. In interviews with the patrons who are experiencing poverty and homelessness, they too reported a lack of proficiency in their computer and internet knowledge and their desire to learn how to use the computers on their own.

Interview Subject 1:

“I don’t know how to use the computers, but I want to learn. I would like to get the staff to teach me how to use the computers so I can check on my benefits.”

Social and health services applications are increasingly being moved online, making computer and internet access essential for patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness.

Government benefits applications are also increasingly becoming available in online formats, and sometimes they are only available online. This trend toward an e-government model has increased the computer literacy gap between those who have computer and internet access and those who do not (Kelley et al., 2017). Patrons experiencing homelessness and poverty are more likely to require computer and internet assistance to complete social and health services and benefits applications because they do not have their own computer hardware or devices. Additionally, computer use increased exponentially during the COVID-19 pandemic, as benefits and social services offices closed and transitioned most of their existing in-person service delivery processes to online formats.

My observational data corroborated the interview findings and conclusions. I noticed that a large portion of the library staff's time is spent assisting patrons with basic computer literacy to complete online services and benefits applications. Focusing primarily on the observed interactions between library staff and patrons during October 2020, I found that patrons mainly went to the library to use computers. They continually asked for assistance from library staff. I observed that only two library staff members worked during operating hours on most days, with an occasional period of overlap where three employees were on duty. I observed that both team members experienced some trouble assisting patrons who requested computer or internet assistance, especially when multiple computer users requested assistance at once. This finding was corroborated within the thematic review process and is the top recurring theme found among the four data collection methods. The interviewed patrons said that the computer stations are critical resources for them, and one patron confided to me that computer literacy is an issue for them and that they depend on library staff to provide technical and writing assistance. All library

staff members interviewed also spoke to the volume and critical importance of computer use for patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. One librarian said that, for these patrons, this access is a lifeline to essential services for survival and wellbeing.

Finding 1b. While the needs of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness include accessing the library as a haven, referrals to community assistance services, and navigating and completing online services applications, the library staff and the patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness described additional physical and mental health services and shelter and food pantry access needs beyond what the library can currently provide.

I found that library staff act as gatekeepers that facilitate connections for patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness to critical health and human services information and services they need to survive. In addition to helping patrons complete online social and health services applications, the library also links patrons to some critical health and social services. Additional services offered include limited access to bill payment assistance, shelters, and food pantries.

Library staff do not currently provide much outreach to community service entities. The library currently has people in recovery programs come once a week to use computers and to check out books, and they have mobile libraries at various nursing homes.

Each staff member described scenarios where they encountered service needs specific to patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness that they were unable to address. Interviewed patrons also reported that they experience issues locating the services they need.

As noted above, I found that patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness also have health and social services needs beyond the level of service the library currently provides. These

services include broader access to in-person social, physical health, and mental health services, shelter access, and food pantries. Research on library service to patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness shows that, as the complexity of issues increases, the library staff's ability to provide solutions to meet those needs on their own decreases (Shumsky & Pinker, 2003). Table 5 below details the services currently available to patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness provided by the Newnan Carnegie Library and the additional patron service needs identified from the data.

Table 5

Current Library Services and Service Needs Identified through this Investigation

Current Services Offered by NCL	Needed Services
<p>Computer/internet assistance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services and benefits applications • Monthly benefits renewals 	<p>Computer literacy support</p> <p>Personal access to social services administrators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social and health program eligibility services • Disability services • Unemployment benefits services • Connection to social workers • Connection to counseling services
<p>Referrals to community services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bridging the Gap • Bill payment • Shelters • Food pantry 	<p>Needed community services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to health information • Access to public health department and free health clinics • Access to health providers

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Action for Improvement (CAFI) – utility assistance • One Roof (temporary lodging, food pantry, ministry) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to more nutritious food • Communication and awareness of available services
<p>Currently, the library will hold personal documents (birth certificates, legal documents) for patrons who have no place to store important information</p>	<p>Official, secure personal items/legal documents storage</p>
<p>Open access: safe haven, place to rest, use of public bathrooms</p>	<p>Additional shelter needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shelter access: library is not open during the coldest parts of the day - Warming shelter is only open periodically • Additional safe places to sleep/rest

The library staff currently provide service referrals to the local homeless shelter, Bridging the Gap, and to bill and rent assistance programs available in the area. Interview data consistently pointed to needs that transcend these services. Patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness have increasingly displayed broader social-service and healthcare-related needs. While the library staff act as gatekeepers in facilitating referrals of patrons in need to limited social and health-related services, working with other local community and government entities to make the facilitation of service referrals easier will significantly benefit patrons. One observation session illuminated the existing needs gap of patrons. In this session, I witnessed a patron requiring emergency medical assistance while at the library. Library staff noted that such instances are common and are caused by these patrons’ lack of access to preventative health care.

Research Question 2: What are the library’s current practices for serving patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness?

Finding 2. Library staff interact regularly with patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness and report drawing on a set of practices grounded in empathy.

Nevertheless, staff reported feeling personally under-resourced in meeting the needs they discover as they interact with these patrons.

Interview Subject 1:

“The staff here goes above and beyond to help me. They always make sure I am alright. They are fantastic people to be around, and I have a lot of respect for them. It’s good to have good friends here and people that care. That is what community is all about – pulling together to help one another.”

The librarians of the Newnan Carnegie Library are highly committed and motivated to assisting patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. They utilize self-taught knowledge that enables them to provide valuable assistance to this patron population.

Library staff are kind and courteous to patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. Librarians are also attentive, which results in the patrons being more likely to disclose additional needs they have beyond what the library can provide. Librarians often walk throughout the library and ask patrons if they need anything. Library staff mentioned the importance of informally reserving a chair in the back corner of the library for a regular patron experiencing poverty and homelessness. Reserving the chair helps establish a welcoming sense of place and belonging for this patron. During my observation period, I saw the staff treat all patients equally,

courteously, respectfully, and diligently in order to provide patrons with what they needed. I

“Like a comfortable chair, a good public library molds itself around a community, taking from the community its shape and form and giving to the community the support it needs where the community needs it” (Sullivan, 2003, p. 306).

noticed staff spent the majority of their time assisting computer users. The service level I observed librarians providing to patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness is consistent with findings in the literature, which show that

librarians typically utilize three response methods when assisting the homeless population and their needs: listening, offering support and sympathy, and discussing alternative courses of action (Anderson et al., 2012). During my observations, I noticed that staff frequently and thoroughly listened to patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. They utilized sympathy and offered support when they had to tell one patron not to sleep (patrons are not allowed to sleep in the library per library policy). There is a significant level of mutual understanding and trust between library staff and patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. This trust level between librarians and patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness can serve as the foundation of informing service needs and additional community partnerships to facilitate the appropriate service referrals.

Patron interviewees noted that staff are always caring and go above and beyond to meet their service, information, and care needs. Likewise, all four library staff members interviewed spoke of how serving vulnerable patrons and those experiencing poverty and homelessness is part of their mission and is a moral obligation for them as librarians. That librarians serve as de facto or improvised social workers is well documented in research (Morgan, 2018). Interview and field observation data detail the interactions and relations between library staff and patrons

experiencing poverty and homelessness and reveal that the services and meta-services provided by librarians produce a great sense of intrinsic meaning for both staff and patrons. The data I collected show that the interactions between staff and patrons alike are as meaningful as the actual linkages to critical knowledge or services that result from their interactions. The library staff's provision of valuable information regarding external entities, which enhances services coordination, exists because of patron-staff relationships built through the library staff's skills and continued education.

During interview sessions, librarians noted they had reviewed literature on serving patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness and that they have used this information to better serve patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. In addition to this literature, librarians mentioned they had read several books on the subject and the guidance issued by the ALA. In particular, librarians have employed this information within their practice to build relationships and cultivate trust. In discussing preliminary findings with the library director, the director noted the need for community engagement training to learn how to better facilitate the building of strategic partnerships that offer new and enhanced services that may address unmet needs identified through this research project.

Although librarians consistently participate in self-discovery and self-education, all four librarians noted a desire to participate in more formal and continuous learning opportunities to better fulfill the mission of the library, to serve all patrons, and their moral obligation as librarians, to help vulnerable patrons to the best of their ability. As libraries give vulnerable populations a place to seek refuge and consume services that connect them to the community, libraries have also become a haven for people seeking librarianships to serve this mission (Badalamenti & Simmons, 2017). Through the document review process, I found that library

staff job descriptions provide expectations for training and continuous improvement. Several librarians interviewed noted they wanted to gain further knowledge by participating in more formal training programs and other learning opportunities.

While informal self-education practices have helped library staff, they noted that more formal learning interventions would increase their collective knowledge and their self-efficacy and improve their professional practice. Library staff initially said they would like formal learning interventions to include attending trainings held by leading authorities for serving homeless patrons, visiting other libraries that have developed programs for persons experiencing poverty and homelessness, and attending library conferences with breakout sessions on the topic of homeless patron interventions. Library staff would also like to better understand and serve these patrons to avoid banning challenging patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. In the interviews, library staff spoke about challenges in serving a few patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. Staff expressed a lack of self-efficacy in serving challenging patrons and the need for additional training to communicate better with specific patrons with a history of unpredictable behavior toward the staff and other library patrons.

Research Question 3: What is the capacity of the library to meet the needs identified in Research Question 1?

Finding 3. Staff reported a tension between the intrinsic motivation to better serve patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness and the finite resources available to meet their additional service needs.

Library staff are intrinsically motivated to increase their awareness and understanding of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness to better serve them. Librarians attempt to serve the breadth of needs of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. However, limited

resources and explicit barriers hinder the library's capacity to meet this patron population's needs.

Library staff utilize their self-taught knowledge to serve the library's mission of meeting the needs of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness; however, this study found that these patrons' needs extend beyond the library's current capacity to deliver them.

In addressing the tension between the intrinsic motivation of librarians and the finite resources of the library available for serving patrons experiencing homelessness or poverty, I found that there is also a greater need to clearly define (coordinate, and catalog) and communicate the services available these patrons.

The resources limitations identified by library staff are specific to human capital, funding, and other resources including space. Librarians noted needed additional staff to increase the number of and scope of services available to this population. For example, library staff reported the need to provide legal service referrals and storage for important documents – both of which are not recognized services of the library. Librarians are asked to serve a wide variety of needs, including facilitating access to legal information and resources for patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness; these services are needed due to these patrons' living circumstances and lack of secure storage (Tashbook, 2009). These occurrences acknowledge the tension and the reality

Interview Subject 2:

“We all believe this is part of who we are as librarians, and this is part of why we are drawn to the profession – to help anyone who comes into the library any way that we can. Providing assistance to those who are experiencing poverty and homelessness is well established and researched as being a fundamental aspect of the librarian’s mission. For us, it’s a mission to help those in need and to connect them to assistance so that they can sustain and enrich their lives.”

of the situation – library staff serve as front-line workers who are required to be many things to serve this patron population effectively, but they may not possess the skills or resources needed to provide all services these patrons require.

Limitations

Some factors contributed to challenges in collecting data that limited the strength of this investigation's findings. As noted above, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the project timeline and the resources available for data collection. A mandatory state-wide shelter-in-place order closed the library to the public for two months and greatly limited my access to staff and patrons. The COVID-19 protocols enacted post-reopening also affected my opportunities for conducting patron interviews, as there were restrictions on the number of people that could occupy the library at one time. The library's closure also impacted my ability to conduct onsite observations, and occupancy restrictions initiated upon reopening limited access to patrons utilizing the library to access informational media. Furthermore, several patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness who frequented the library before the library closure did not return after the library reopened. If I had access to the entire sample population of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness over the initially scheduled data collection period, my findings may have been more substantial. However, my findings do indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic was a critical incident that affected my findings and the necessity of the recommendations, as COVID-19 has created a greater need for patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness.

One additional limitation regarding data collection is that I did not use the anonymous survey tool I originally intended to distribute to library patrons to assess library services and potential patron needs. In my deliberations with library staff, they conveyed concerns about the difficulty and possible negative stigma associated with sending a survey to the patrons

experiencing poverty and homelessness. Library staff also noted that disability and literacy might hinder these patrons' ability to complete a qualitative survey that requires individual review and response.

Recommendations

I developed four recommendations specifically targeted at addressing the findings of this study. Each recommendation is followed by a table that illustrates the thematic review process and research question alignment that led to the study's findings and informed the development of explicit and strategic recommendations that seek actionable pathways for addressing each finding.

Recommendation 1a. Develop a computer literacy support program that will be made available to library patrons.

This study found that patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness primarily utilize library-provided computers to complete services and benefits applications. This service has become especially critical during the COVID-19 pandemic, as many social services offices now operate remotely. This study's findings indicate that the computer literacy of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness is insufficient. Library staff therefore provide time-consuming computer assistance to patrons completing critical social and health services applications.

I recommend that the library develop a personalized computer support program that offers training sessions for patrons seeking assistance with computers. Additionally, library staff possess knowledge of the attendance schedules of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. Library staff note that patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness tend to access the library between 9 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. Offering computer support courses during this

time will increase the chance that this patron population attends such courses. If the library explores partnerships with the local university, they may codevelop a way for students to provide personalized computer support sessions. This pathway would create a more intimate environment for personal learning and would allow students to gain teaching experience in a non-classroom, community setting. A personalized computer support program will allow patrons to learn skills needed to better use computers to complete services and benefits applications. Improving these patrons' computer literacy will reduce the need for staff assistance, provide patrons with new and transferable skills, reduce errors on applications, and limit potential gaps in benefits coverage.

Libraries across the country have increased their capacities for providing adult literacy services (Terrile, 2016). A personalized computer support program will improve computer literacy among traditionally underserved library patrons, improve their health literacy, and allow them to more easily access health and social programs and benefits. Improved computer literacy may also increase underserved patrons' awareness of and access to employment opportunities. From a library resources perspective, creating a pathway to enhance computer and internet skills would relieve the current computer-assistance burden of library staff, who routinely assist patrons with basic computer needs.

Following this recommendation, the Newnan Carnegie Library should enhance health literacy and social services opportunities for underserved patrons by making computer and internet literacy support available to patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. Public libraries are prime locations for computer and internet support programs for older adults and the socially and economically disadvantaged (Xie & Jaeger, 2008).

Recommendation 1b. Form partnerships with community and government resources to improve referrals to critically needed services.

My findings indicate patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness have a need to be linked to additional support services. Persons experiencing poverty and homelessness are more likely to experience poorer health outcomes because they lack reliable connections to healthcare providers (Argintaru et al., 2013). Prolonged lack of access to healthcare resources, which occurs in part due to a lack of awareness of care options, may lead to systemic homelessness, declines in health status, and increased risk of death (Argintaru et al., 2013). Gatekeeping research details the gatekeeper's role in removing barriers to knowledge sharing by building seamless collaborative partnerships (Rowley, 2003). The Newnan Carnegie Library is well situated for partnering with external social and health service entities to diminish barriers that limit access to services because librarians have trusting relationships with patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness where they can gain insight into patron needs.

This study's findings indicate there may be additional opportunities to engage and partner with external government and community entities to provide new or enhanced services to patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. For example, there are several ways to expand services in partnership with the local department of family and children's services (DFCS), which determines health and human services eligibility, and with the local public health department and free health clinics. Partnering with the DFCS may lead to additional services and benefits consultations for library patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. It may be possible to have a benefits and eligibility counselor at the library to provide information and assistance regarding social services and benefits applications. Such a counselor would help fill the identified service gap of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. The DFCS could also

provide a direct phone line that librarians could utilize for library patrons needing assistance. Establishing regular meetings between the library staff and local DFCS personnel would also help build a better understanding of the needs of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness for both entities. Working with the local university to develop a pipeline for counseling and social work majors to provide counseling services to library patrons would provide mutually beneficial learning opportunities for patrons and students while also helping to close the service gap of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. The literature also suggests that social workers in the library can be valuable assets in meeting the needs of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness (Westbrook, 2015; Terrile, 2016). A 2017 study conducted between the Azusa City Public Library and students in a social work master's program at a nearby university found that libraries employing the part-time assistance of a social worker or community resource specialist increased access to critical needs assessments and referrals to social providers and government entities for patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness (Kelley et al., 2017). The study also suggests that libraries are a prime setting for social work because they connect professionals to patrons in need within a familiar and trusted context (Kelley et al., 2017).

I also recommend that the library designate staff resources for community outreach. A community outreach coordinator, for example, will identify and improve partnerships and links to additional resources that benefit patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. Currently, the library has no coordinated approach to community outreach. A community outreach coordinator will identify and enhance connections to services for patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness by establishing initial and regular contact with external community service entities and programs. Community outreach coordination will provide a better understanding of

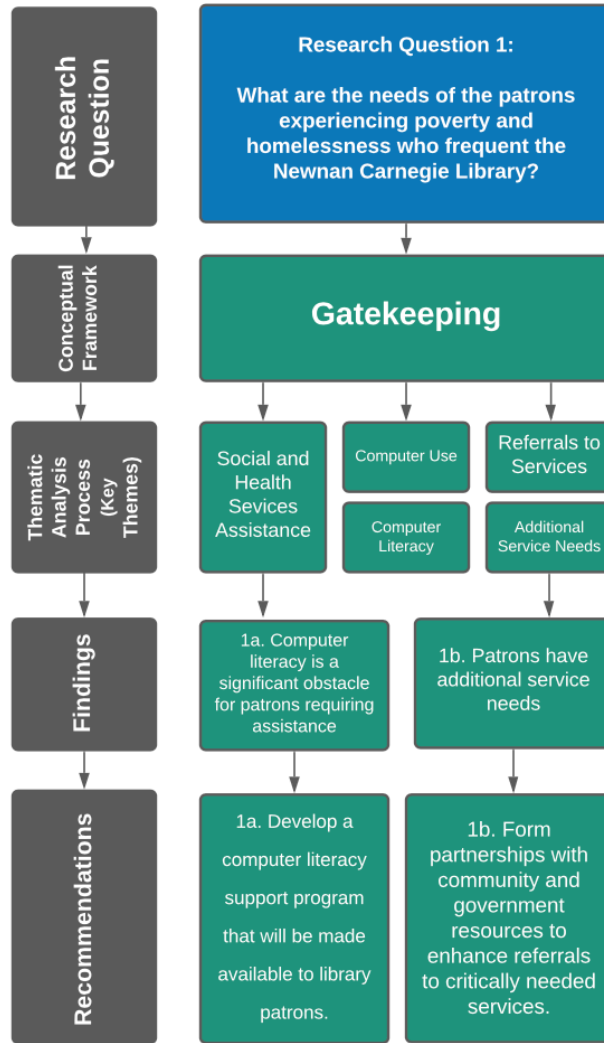
what opportunities currently exist in the community and help in developing and implementing new collaborative services through new strategic partnerships. Further connecting patrons to services will support the librarians' role as gatekeepers, as defined in this research study. Adding community outreach duties to an existing staff position or across several positions could also serve as a development opportunity for library staff in the areas of community engagement, relationship building, and program development and evaluation.

I further recommend that the Newnan Carnegie Library review the University of Georgia model collaboration with the Athens-Clarke County Public Libraries. This approach utilizes the intellectual capacity of the local university and its graduate students to provide Athens-Clarke County libraries with graduate student resources for a variety of administrative and programmatic endeavors. I am offering my services to help the Newnan Carnegie Library establish a connection to program officials so that we may schedule a site visit or video conference to learn more about the program.

Figure 4

Research Question 1 Thematic Review Process, Findings, Recommendations

Figure 4. R1 Thematic Review Process, Findings, Recommendations



Recommendation 2. Increase opportunities for learning that support staff in the areas of patron advocacy, strategic partnerships, relationship building, and engagement with challenging patrons.

Finding 2 indicates that librarians are proficient in serving patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness and that this proficiency was attained through self-learning. Librarians sought relevant knowledge to improve their interactions with patrons and ultimately build relationships and cultivate trust. Although librarians consistently participate in self-discovery and explore self-education methods, all four librarians noted a desire to participate in formal learning interventions. Librarians also indicated that additional training and participation in learning interventions would help them fulfill the library's mission to serve all patrons and their moral obligation as librarians to serve vulnerable patrons to the best of their ability. Library staff also noted that additional learning opportunities would enhance their self-efficacy within their professional practice. The document review process further supported increasing and enhancing staff training opportunities, as I found training and continuous improvement listed in library staff job descriptions.

Librarians that informally fill the role of a social worker are susceptible to secondary trauma commonly associated with other social servants who assist vulnerable populations (Morgan, 2018). Library staff may often feel unprepared to address the multifaceted social and health needs of library patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness, but there are model programs in the literature to consider implementing to better equip staff for addressing these patrons' needs. A 2018 study by Morgan, for example, provides a case-based training "community health specialist" curriculum to assist librarians in the service-referral process. The study found that community health specialist training significantly improved librarians' self-

efficacy in helping vulnerable populations (Morgan, 2018). Research has shown that increased opportunities for training have enhanced library staff's abilities as effective gatekeepers linking patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness to critical services (Anderson et al., 2012). Moreover, additional training opportunities would support the librarian's desire for continuous improvement and while fortifying their ability to improve service offerings and assistance to patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. Increased training for librarians coupled with building strong, cross-sectional partnerships with community and government service entities will help the Newnan Carnegie Library better serve patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness (Morgan, 2018).

The ALA provides resources to connect libraries to appropriate model learning opportunities. The ALA Model Programs provide a collection of evidence-based trainings developed and implemented throughout the library community.

In addition to the ALA training resources, the Homeless Training Institute, founded by Ryan Dowd, provides over 18 hours of education specifically made for librarians on topics including but not limited to Homeless 101, Advanced Body Language Skills, Burnout, Stress when Dealing with this Population, and Managing Front Line Staff who serve people experiencing poverty and homelessness.

To strengthen Newnan Carnegie librarians' capacities for supporting patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness, I recommend that the library prioritize learning opportunities for staff specific to the following:

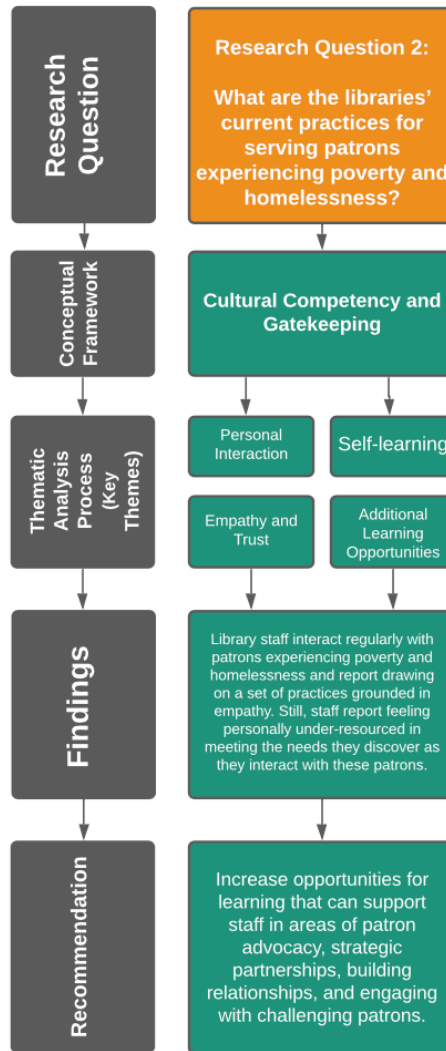
1. serving vulnerable patrons;
2. building strategic partnerships and community engagement; and
3. building relationships and assisting challenging patrons.

Making such learning opportunities available to staff as part of their annual employee development credits could incentivize participation. Training programs should also be reviewed every three to five years to determine their relevance and effectiveness, and reviews should also survey other available opportunities that may be relevant to library staff. I envision operationalizing this review process through a collaborative mapping session between library staff. I also recommend that one staff member be responsible for identifying and cataloging current and available training programs and other learning opportunities for library staff as an added part of their job description.

Figure 5

Research Question 2 Thematic Review Process, Findings, Recommendations

Figure 5. R2 Thematic Review Process, Findings, Recommendations



Recommendation 3. Develop an actionable services plan to clearly define the parameters of services and to communicate available services.

I recommend that the library develop a services plan to guide them in providing services to patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. The services plan should include Recommendations 1a and 1b (computer training program and enhanced community resources referrals). A precise and actionable services plan will allow the library to realign available

resources and time to the most-needed services identified in Recommendations 1a and 1b.

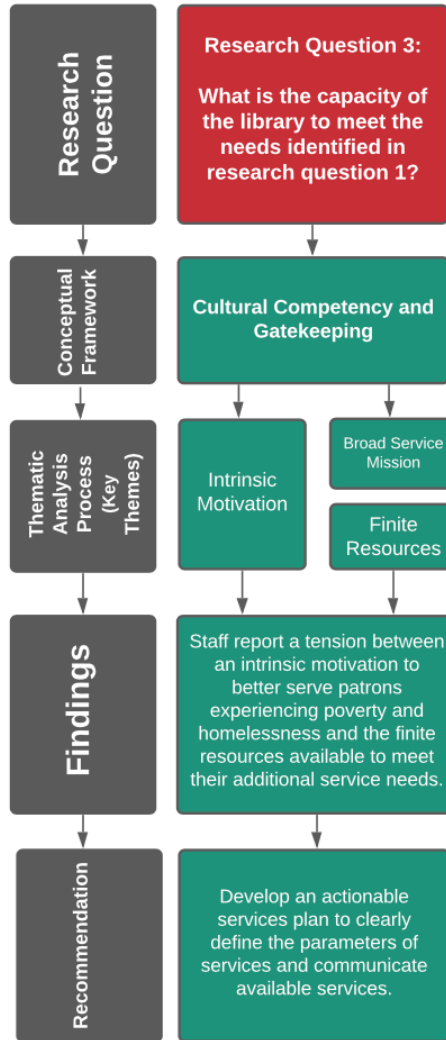
Creating an actionable services plan to clearly define relevant services would also allow the staff to clearly communicate the services offered by the library.

As Finding 3 states, library staff reported a tension between their intrinsic motivation to better serve patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness and the resources needed to further their mission. Developing a more streamlined way of cataloging and communicating relevant service offerings would benefit both the library staff and the patrons they seek to assist by clearly articulating the services the library can and should provide. The ALA offers a cataloged summary of models conducted at libraries across the United States. A relevant model for the Newnan Carnegie Library to consider is the Baltimore County Library Street Card program, which developed and utilized accessible resource directories (ALA, 2015). The services card provides a listing of cataloged services in the community that patrons in need of social and health services can easily reference.

Figure 6

Research Question 3 Thematic Review Process, Findings, Recommendations

Figure 6. R3 Thematic Review Process, Findings, Recommendations



Assisting patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness will continue to be challenging, as the library continues to decrease restrictions in place due to COVID-19. If the population of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness increases again, the library may not be well-equipped to provide services to this population. Although the number of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness that access the library is currently decreased due to the COVID-19 pandemic, library staff expect patrons will return once the pandemic has subsided. Library staff

also conveyed to me that they hope that improving the services for this patron population will benefit other members of the community who experience poverty and homelessness, and this could increase the number of these patrons in the future. Implementing the actionable recommendations above will better situate the library to address increases in patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness.

The recommendations I have provided benefit both patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness and the library staff. They enhance the library's ability to provide services that meet the needs of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness while also helping librarians recognize the boundaries of what the library can do and what it cannot do to assist this patron population. All of the individually-proposed recommendations consider the recommendations provided for the other research questions. Furthermore, library staff stressed that recommendations should be actionable. I therefore worked to identify evidence-based actions the library can realistically operationalize.

I recommend that the library conduct periodic assessments of services and patron needs every three to five years to determine the effectiveness of these recommendations and the library's ability to meet the needs of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. The plan should be constantly evolving and based on the needs of the patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness who use the library's services. For instance, some people choose homelessness, and they have different needs than the people who are not homeless by choice. A one-size-fits-all approach is inappropriate. The diverse range of needs is why existing and needed resources must be identified and aligned. The library could utilize the local university to leverage its academic centers or graduate students, who could perform a programmatic evaluation at little or no cost.

The library may use this study as a basis for future needs assessments and evaluate the services they provide to meet the needs of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness.

Conclusion

This study's findings indicate that the library's staff currently meet some needs of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. However, there is a greater need to enhance and expand the services available to these patrons. I identified the need to improve the computer literacy of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. This intervention expands these patrons' access to online services applications. Enhancing these patrons' computer and internet proficiency through computer training courses will empower them, as computer literacy will give them greater access to and knowledge of online services; provide them with relevant, transferable skills; and relieve staff who routinely provide essential but time-consuming computer assistance.

The study's findings also indicated the need to enhance service referrals beyond the library's current capacity by partnering with local community and government entities. These services include connections to the DFCS program and benefits eligibility, social workers, and mental health, physical health, and wellness services. By having a framework illustrating collaborations and services, the library will achieve a more coordinated and robust service offering and referrals system. This framework will also better position the library to communicate these services to the patrons who need them. A services plan will create a path to accomplish the library's collaboration and service goals.

The recommendations developed to help the library improve and expand services are rooted in the cultivation of partnerships with the external community and governmental organizations. These partnerships should be focused on leveraging the intellectual capacities and talent located in the community to diminish the needs gap of library patrons experiencing

poverty and homelessness. In addition to forming partnerships with the local community and government entities, the local technical college and the local university would also be valuable partners because they could provide faculty and student resources to help the library increase its capacity to offer and measure services to patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness.

The findings suggest a need to increase service offerings, and they also indicate that the library staff are determined and eager to fill that need. The recurrent themes seen in the data overwhelmingly revealed the library staff's knowledge, passion, and understanding, which they use to improve their interactions and relationships with vulnerable patrons. The findings from both the observations and the interviews with library patrons indicate that the Newnan Carnegie Library's staff are its greatest asset for decreasing the needs gap of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness because the library staff are determined and willing to improve the practices and services that will benefit this patron population. Library staff reported that they feel called to their positions and are intrinsically motivated to help vulnerable patrons. These patrons verified this information. Library staff also participate in continued self-education to enhance their efforts, as they believe it is their mission and a moral obligation to assist vulnerable patrons. However, this study's findings noted the eagerness of library staff to learn more through additional learning opportunities that will increase their professional development and self-efficacy within their professional practice.

The purpose of this study is to identify the needs of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness and to build a framework for improvement that utilizes the strengths of the Newnan Carnegie Library as a critical community resource. My sincere hope is that the library staff find this study's findings compelling and the proposed recommendations actionable and

strategically valuable for furthering the library's mission to better serve patrons, specifically those experiencing poverty and homelessness.

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Appendix A: Tables

Table A1

Research and Data Collection Methods (Dowdell & Liew, 2019)

Sample Population	Method/Research Tools	Timeline	Data Collection
Patrons Experiencing Homelessness or Poverty	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Interviews (semi-structured, one-on-one) 2. Observations 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. August 2020 – October 2020 2. October 2020 – December 2020 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information-seeking behavior, expectations 2. Observations to determine actual behavior 3. Care needs 4. Perception of library services
Library, City Staff, External Library Program Assessment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Interviews (semi-structured, one-on-one) 2. Observations 3. Literature review and qualitative assessment 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. August 2020 – October 2020 2. October 2020 – December 2020 3. May, 2020 – December 2020 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Staff needs 2. Observations to determine actual behavior 3. Resources needed 4. Training needed 5. Perception of homeless patron needs 6. Policies and procedures needed

			7. Potential external collaborations
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Table A2

Interview Questions

Sample Population	Sample Interview Questions
Patrons Experiencing Poverty and Homelessness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What kinds of information do you search for, access, and utilize in the library? 2. How do you search for this information? 3. Are library staff helpful in assisting you with your information needs? 4. What are other services you access at the library? 5. What are the barriers to you receiving services? 6. Do you think library staff are trained and well equipped to meet your service needs? 7. What is the capacity of the library to meet your service needs? 8. How should the library weigh your needs in relation to the needs of the entire patron population? 9. How should the library enhance or develop services to meet your needs?

<p>Library, City Staff</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What kinds of information do you think patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness search for, access, and utilize in the library?2. How do library staff perceive patrons experiencing homelessness and poverty and their use of the library?3. What are the existing services, practices, and policies offered to patrons experiencing homelessness and poverty?4. What are the barriers to services?5. Do staff feel trained and well equipped to serve this population?6. What is the capacity of the library to serve this population?7. How should the library weigh the needs of a specific population in relation to the needs of the entire patron population?8. How should the library enhance or develop services to meet the needs of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness?
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Appendix B: Data, Codes, ALA Policy

Recurrent Themes Identified by Data Source

Interview Data Review

I identified six recurrent key themes in my review of interview data. I found computer use to be the most recurrent theme, as it was noted as a highly utilized resource at the library by patrons and because staff spend a great deal of time assisting patrons with basic computer and internet use. The primary services related to computer use were social and health services forms (e.g., applications and monthly authorizations). The second-most recurrent theme produced from this process was the need for additional services for patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. The skills and practices of library staff were frequently noted and thus represent a recurrent theme of the interviews. The interviews revealed that staff both possess and utilize knowledge and are courteous and empathetic in their interactions with patrons. Patrons overwhelmingly positive behavior and trust regarding their interactions with library staff, another recurring theme. The final two most recurrent themes identified concern staff education for better understanding and serving patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness and the limited resources (funding and staff) that the library has for serving the needs of this patron population. I corroborated the theme of limited resources through the document review process.

Observational Data Review

I identified six key recurrent themes through the observational data thematic review process. Computer use was the most recurrent theme identified, along with staff assistance for patrons using computers and the internet. The next most recurring theme was the courteous and professional behavior of staff, along with the understanding and skill they utilize in personal interactions to cultivate relationships and build trust with patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness.

Discussion Data Review

A thematic review of discussion data produced three key recurrent themes. Computer and internet use were classified as the most prevalent themes. Service needs beyond what the library currently provides were identified as the next most recurrent theme, along with library staff being protective of patrons and treating them with empathy and respect. The final theme produced through the thematic review process of discussion data concerns library staff and their eagerness for professional development opportunities that enable them to better serve patrons, particularly vulnerable populations and those experiencing poverty and homelessness.

Document Data Review

Through the document review process, I identified the main themes regarding the library having a broad service mission, a robust computer-use policy, staff expectations when dealing with patrons, and resources limitations.

A review of the library budget corroborated a recurrent theme in interview and discussion data, that the library is currently maximizing the use of staff time and resources. For the library to expand inhouse services to the public on their own, an increase in funding and resources would be required. That said, staff noted in the interviews that the City of Newnan continues to recognize the importance of the library and has allocated funding beyond the levels one might find for libraries operating in regional and state library systems. This funding level is part of what makes the Newnan Carnegie Library and its status as a city entity unique. In addition, staff job descriptions state that staff should serve patrons' information needs with professionalism, courtesy, politeness, and empathy. Through the staff job descriptions, I also discovered that library staff are expected to partake in continuous training and professional development.

Table B1*Final Thematic Codes, Definitions, Supporting Information*

Code	Definition	Supporting Information
Social and Health Services Assistance	<p>Library staff act as gatekeepers that link patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness to critical health and human services information and services they need for survival. Services provided include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • aiding in the completion of social and health services applications via computer stations; • facilitating linkages to some critical health and social services; and • additional services offered include access to bill payment assistance, shelters, and food pantries. 	<p>Interview 4 – “We assist patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness with a lot of needs, primarily working to help them fill out services and benefits checks online. We also refer them to Bridging the Gap when necessary or the local food pantry.”</p>
Computer Use	<p>This study found that patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness primarily utilize library-provided computers to complete services and benefits applications. Computer use is the most utilized service at the library.</p>	<p>Computer use was identified as the most utilized service at the library in interview, observation, and discussion data.</p> <p>Interview 2 – “Patrons overwhelmingly come to the library to use the computers and internet, mainly to complete online services applications. We spend a great deal of time assisting patrons with their use of the computers. Most of them haven’t had a lot of experience with them, and they don’t have computers at home. We are happy to help but it gets very time consuming.”</p>
Computer Literacy	<p>This study’s findings indicate that the computer literacy of patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness is insufficient. Library staff therefore provide time-consuming</p>	<p>Interview 1 – “I do not know how to use the computers, but I want to learn.”</p>

	<p>computer assistance to patrons using computer stations to help them complete critical social and health services applications.</p>	<p>Interview 5 – “My friends (library staff) help me get what I need from the computers. I don’t understand them, but I need them to get paid, get my assistance. My friends come over and go through it for me.”</p> <p>During interviews with staff, staff noted computer literacy as a barrier to patrons’ computer use and the need to continually provide assistance to patrons using computers and the internet.</p> <p>Interview 4 – “Most homeless patrons I’ve helped with our computer resources aren’t completely computer literate, which means that more of our time, when helping a homeless patron, is used helping them achieve what they want to do on the computer than we would normally allocate to a housed patron.”</p> <p>Interview 2 – “As you see more desperation, you see less access of leisurely materials – they are more focused on survival. Their focus is on technology use, and the setup of benefits applications sometimes takes 45 minutes. Public phones could help. Most people in this population do not have a phone, or if they do, minutes are limited.”</p>
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Referrals to Services	<p>The library currently facilitates connections to limited community and government services that include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bridging the Gap • Bill payment • Shelters • Food pantry • Community Action for Improvement (CAFI) – utility assistance • One Roof (temporary lodging, food pantry, ministry) 	Interview 3 – “We keep a small list of places in town that we can call if one of our patrons needs something. It’s not a lot, but it’s something.”
Additional Service Needs	I found that patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness also have health and social services needs beyond the level of service the library currently provides. These services include in-person social, physical health, and mental health services, shelter access, transportation, and food pantries.	<p>Interview 1 – “I can come to the library to rest and to ask my friends here (the staff) to help me if I need help. I know where I can get help at Bridging the Gap, but there aren’t a lot of places I can get to easily. My friends helped me when I got sick by calling an ambulance for me, but I can’t get care unless I go to the emergency room, and they turn me away sometimes.”</p> <p>Interview 2 – “We have patrons who need regular medical assistance and preventative care, but they can’t get those resources easily. Transportation doesn’t readily exist. We know there are services available, but all of these entities don’t do a good job of collaborating. We only have a few shelters in town, and they usually only open in extreme weather conditions.”</p>

<p>Personal Interaction</p>	<p>Library staff are overwhelmingly kind and courteous in their treatment of patrons. They utilize personal interaction with patrons to cultivate trust.</p>	<p>Observational data found that staff utilize personal interaction in their practices to cultivate relationships and build trust with patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness.</p> <p>Interview 1 – “The staff here goes above and beyond to help me. If someone gets sick or fall out, they make sure they call for help or get an ambulance for them. They always make sure they are alright. They are fantastic people to be around, and I have a lot of respect for them. It's good to have good friends here and people that care. That is what community is all about – pulling together to help one another – working together as a team.”</p>
<p>Empathy and Trust</p>	<p>Library staff utilize empathy and trust within their interactions with patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness to better serve them.</p>	<p>The skills and practices of library staff were frequently noted in the interview process. The interviews revealed that staff both possess and utilize knowledge and are courteous and empathetic in their interactions with patrons. Patrons overwhelmingly reported positive behavior and trust in their interactions with library staff.</p> <p>The document review process identified expectations for serving patrons’ information needs with professionalism, courtesy,</p>

		<p>politeness, and empathy in staff job descriptions.</p>
<p>Self-Learning</p>	<p>Library staff utilize self-taught knowledge to identify needs and to provide services to patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness.</p>	<p>In the interviews with staff, staff noted they are continuously educating themselves to better understand and serve patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness.</p> <p>Interview 2 – “We spend a good amount of time doing our own research into how to serve patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness better. We’ve read research literature and some books. This has helped us work on communicating with our patrons and getting to know them better.”</p> <p>Interview 3 – “We do a fair amount of research through the American Library Association (ALA), [which provides] scholarly resources that have assisted in helping this population and have illuminated the way we serve them.”</p>
<p>Additional Learning Opportunities</p>	<p>While informal self-education practices have helped library staff utilize empathy in their interactions with patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness, staff noted that additional, more formal learning opportunities would increase their self-efficacy and improve their professional practice.</p>	<p>Continuous development was noted in job descriptions (identified through the document review).</p> <p>In interviews and discussions, staff conveyed an eagerness for professional development opportunities that will enable them to better serve patrons, particularly vulnerable populations and those who are experiencing poverty and homelessness.</p>

		<p>Interview 3 – “I definitely think we would benefit from more advanced training, and it would increase our level of confidence when assisting vulnerable or challenging patrons.”</p>
<p>Intrinsic Motivation to Better Serve Patrons</p>	<p>Library staff are intrinsically motivated to increase awareness and understanding to better serve patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness.</p>	<p>Interview 3 – “We believe this is our calling as librarians – to help our vulnerable patrons with anything they may need. This is in line with our holistic mission to provide information as a community resource. Our passion in helping people is a big part of what has called us to these positions.”</p>
<p>Broad Service Mission</p>	<p>The service mission of the library supports providing any and all requested information to patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness.</p>	<p>Interview 3 – “We try to meet all informational needs, no matter what the subject.”</p> <p>Interview 4 – “We spend a lot of time assisting patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. We are passionate about this. We try to help them with all of their needs, no matter the subject or issue, and this sometimes requires us to look beyond what we currently know.”</p> <p>Interview 2 – “Information is my job. If I have information, I am giving it to you. It's the mission of the library to provide patrons with the information they need.”</p>
<p>Resources Limitations</p>	<p>Staff reported needing more support resources and learning opportunities that may enhance their practice. Additionally,</p>	<p>In interviews, staff acknowledged the finite resources (funding and staff) the library has for serving patron needs.</p>

	<p>the library budget is limited to only current operating and programmatic needs.</p>	<p>Interview 2 – “The city has been great and cares about the library – and we are actually funded better than most regionally funded libraries – but as a community resource, we would like to be able to do more to help patrons experiencing poverty and homelessness. But to do more means you have to have more, and it’s been tough for us to visualize how to expand service capabilities by ourselves.”</p> <p>Interview 2 – “We could greatly benefit from more formal training opportunities. I would love to do more of this. I feel like we have learned all we can from going it on our own, and we need to achieve that next step up of knowledge. They exist, but we haven’t moved in that direction yet. There are some really great learning and support programs out there to help train libraries (and other sectors) to work with and serve people experiencing poverty and homelessness better.”</p> <p>Interview 4 – “There are only two employees working at a time most days, with an occasional period of overlap where three employees are on duty. I noticed during observations that, at times, two employees experienced some trouble providing</p>
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		assistance, especially when there are multiple computer users.”
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Policy 1. ALA Policy B.8.10 Library Services for the Poor (formerly Council Document 61) from the ALA Policy Manual

B.8.10 Addressing Poverty, Economic Inequality, and the Responsibilities of Libraries (Old Number 61)

The American Library Association promotes equal access to information for all persons and recognizes the need to respond to people experiencing poverty, which include people experiencing homelessness, in the United States. Therefore, it is crucial that libraries recognize their role in supporting these communities, so they may 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 prepare library staff to identify needs and deliver relevant services to people experiencing poverty. In addition, the American Library Association (divisions, offices, and units) should be strengthened to support low-income neighborhoods and people experiencing poverty through programs, services, and resources.

B.8.10.1 Policy Objectives (Old Number 61.1)

The American Library Association shall implement these objectives by:

1. Promoting the removal of barriers to library and information services, particularly fees, and overdue charges.
2. Promoting the publication, production, purchase, and ready accessibility of print and non-print materials that focus directly on the issues of poverty, that engage people respectfully, and are practical and responsive to low-income library users and their needs.

3. Promoting full, stable, and ongoing funding for existing legislative programs and services in support of people experiencing poverty and for pro-active library programs that reach beyond traditional service-sites.
4. Promoting training opportunities for librarians and library staff to learn effective funding techniques to improve accessibility for library users experiencing poverty.
5. Acknowledging economic equity in funding by promoting the incorporation of programs, services, and resources for people experiencing poverty into regular budgets in all types of libraries, regardless of the availability of "soft money" like private or federal grants to support these programs.
6. 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.
7. Promoting increased public awareness through programs displays, bibliographies, and publicity related to libraries' responsibilities in addressing economic barriers to service.
8. Promoting the determination of service outcomes through the active support of community needs assessments that directly involve community members who are experiencing poverty.
9. Promoting direct representation and support of community members who are experiencing, have experienced, or advocate for people experiencing poverty on local boards and advisory committees.
10. Promoting library staff training that raises awareness; relates to issues affecting the daily realities of people experiencing poverty; recognized and addresses attitudinal and other barriers that hinder equal access to library services and resources.

11. Promoting networking and cooperation between libraries and other agencies, organizations, and advocacy groups to develop programs and services that are useful and relevant for people experiencing poverty.
12. Promoting the implementation of an expanded federal programs that acknowledge and address poverty.
13. Promoting, supporting and facilitating local community efforts to meet the needs of all community members, especially those experiencing poverty.
14. Acknowledging the disproportionate rate at which poverty affects underserved populations, including but not limited to women, people of color, LGBTQ+ people, non-Native English speakers, formerly incarcerated people, and people with disabilities.
15. Encouraging the use of respectful, inclusive and person-first language, such as "community members experiencing poverty".
16. Encouraging a parity of library services, hours resources, and facilities between affluent and low-income library neighborhoods.
17. Promoting an attractive and inviting environment in all libraries including low-income neighborhoods.
18. Promoting the development of collections, programs, and services to help bridge the literacy gap for non-English speakers and new readers in all libraries, including low-income neighborhoods.
19. Promoting publications, outreach, and marketing in the native language for Speakers of Other Languages in all libraries, including low-income neighborhoods.
20. Promoting the review of public conduct policies and administrative procedures to ensure they are not creating unintentional barriers to people experiencing poverty.