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Case manager works with homeless at Tulsa libraries

Case manager aids homeless

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Posted: Wednesday, June 25, 2014 12:00 am

By NOUR HABIB World Staff Writer | 1 comment

A larger, renewed grant from The Anne & Henry Zarrow Foundation has allowed a case manager position at the library to expand.

The change to a full-time position, made possible by the \$60,000 grant, happened this spring. The position is a partnership between the Tulsa City-County Library and Family & Children's Services.

Library CEO Gary Shaffer said the program began as a pilot in 2012 and turned into a part-time position last year.

"Primarily, it was started to help the homeless population connect with services," said Shaffer, who came up with the idea after reading about a similar program at the San Francisco Public Library.

In the past year and a half, the part-time case manager was able to offer nearly 800 services to homeless clients at Central Library and the Librarium.

Services range from helping people with job applications to directing them toward health and housing resources.

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Deborah Hunter, the new case manager with Family & Children's Services, and based out of Tulsa City-County libraries, stands inside the Librarium, on Monday, June 23, 2014. CORY YOUNG/Tulsa World



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Library case manager

The case manager at the library offers resources to help people with a variety of things, including:

- Employment
- Crisis intervention
- Mental health treatment

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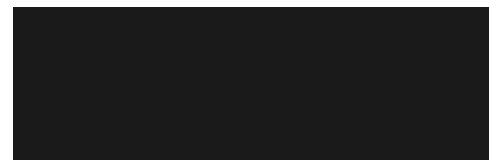
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Deborah Hunter, who took up the position last month, said she expects to be able to reach more people because of the expansion of the role. The full-time position means the case manager can visit other library branches, being on hand to deal with any behavioral or other issues as they arise, as well as training staff.

Hunter, who has worked as a case manager for Family & Children's Services for three years, said the library population is more mobile than clients she previously worked with. That means one of the challenges is being able to build a relationship and establish a rapport with those she seeks to

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help at the library.

"Sometimes, I just move around and hand out business cards," she said.

When she identifies people who may need assistance, Hunter said she pays close attention to body language to determine if they are ready to be approached. But as people have grown more accustomed to seeing her at the library and have witnessed her helping others, they have begun to seek out her help.

Kendi Weygand, Family & Children's Services' supervisor of the homeless outreach team, said that some people who may not have sought out services elsewhere — such as homeless shelters — may do so at libraries because the environment is calmer and less stigmatized.

Greer Fites, FCS program director for homeless services, said those who work with the homeless know that libraries are a popular spot for them to go.

Fites said not everyone is willing to seek out services, which is why the FCS homeless outreach team goes out into the streets and to the shelters.

"But plenty of people are not on the streets and in shelters," she said. "But they will come to the library for all that it has to offer.

"So this opens us up to a different set of individuals that we could not come in contact with."

Shaffer said the program is perfectly aligned with the library's mission to change lives.

"We're in the business of helping people," he said.

A case manager brings a new set of ways to help people who have needs that go beyond library employees' scope of work and qualifications, he said.

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