

Free online training from Ryan Dowd provided by the State Library

Librarian's Guide to Homelessness

This online, self paced tutorial is available to all Oregon library staff
through **May 22, 2020**.

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LIBRARIAN'S GUIDE TO HOMELESSNESS™

Compassionate Tools for Reducing Problems

www.HomelessLibrary.com

Top Ten Things Every Library Employee Should Know About Homeless Patrons:

- 1) **Homeless individuals want to look dangerous:** It is really dangerous to be homeless. Homeless individuals get robbed, attacked and raped much more frequently than housed individuals. Consequently, homeless individuals want to look a little dangerous so that bad people won't want to attack them. Unfortunately, there is no way to look dangerous for would-be robbers, but not also look dangerous to librarians.
- 2) **The best thing you can do to help is just be nice:** Homeless individuals are treated very poorly by most people. They are constantly subjected to harassment and disrespect. Most homeless people are craving to be treated with respect. Believe it or not, the most important thing you can do for homeless patrons is not to help them get a job or get sober. The most important thing you can do is treat them with hospitality and respect.
- 3) **Homeless people love libraries:** Libraries are everything that shelters and the streets aren't: quiet, calm, spacious, safe, police-free... In survey after survey, homeless individuals identify their local library as one of their most important resources.
- 4) **You only see 10% of homeless people:** Only about 10% of homeless individuals are homeless for a year or longer ("chronically homeless"). These individuals are the only ones that fit the stereotypes of homelessness. The other 90% don't "look" homeless. In fact, you serve a lot of homeless people that you had no idea were homeless.
- 5) **Homeless people just want to be treated the same:** Most homeless individuals are not looking for special treatment. They just want to be treated the same as non-homeless patrons. They especially don't want to be discriminated against because of the actions of a few trouble-makers.

- 6) **Space is different:** When you are homeless, there is not a single place in all of the world where you can go that is truly yours. There is nowhere you can go to be alone that other people can't intrude upon you. That is why the spaciousness and relative privacy of libraries is so important.
- 7) **Time is different:** When you have to worry about where you will sleep tonight and where you will get your next meal, you don't worry about anything that happens more than 24 hours from now. The long term horizon becomes irrelevant in the face of surviving today. As a librarian, you might think periodically about retirement. A homeless person rarely thinks about beyond next week.
- 8) **Possessions are different:** When you only own a few things, those few items become very important to you. You don't want to let them out of your sight for fear that they will be stolen from you or you will lose them. Imagine if everything you owned in the world fit in one bag. Would you ever let that bag out of your sight?
- 9) **Homelessness is exhausting:** Imagine sleeping outside or in a room with 100 other people (with 30 people snoring simultaneously). Imagine skipping meals periodically. Imagine walking everywhere you go. Imagine being worried 24 hours a day about where you will eat and sleep. You would be absolutely exhausted. So are homeless people.
- 10) **The homeless information network is really efficient and effective:** Homeless individuals talk to each other a lot. It is necessary for survival. Word about anything and everything spreads really fast (and relatively accurately) amongst homeless individuals. I guarantee that they talk about which librarians are helpful and which security guards don't enforce the rules. They also share which library programs are the most beneficial and which parts of the library are the quietest. You can use this to your advantage. Share key messages with a few homeless individuals and it will spread on its own without you telling everyone.

About the author: Ryan Dowd has worked in homeless shelters almost his entire career. The Homeless Toolkit is the training he provides to staff at homeless shelters.

Top 10 Homeless Myths from The Librarian's Guide to Homelessness by Ryan Dowd.

Book can be purchased from the ALA store or borrowed from the State Library professional development collection. ISBN 978-0-8389-1626-1

- Myth 1: People are homeless for a long time
- Myth 2: Most homeless people are mentally ill
- Myth 3: Most homeless people are addicts
- Myth 4: Most homeless people are unemployed
- Myth 5: Most homeless people are old men with long beards
- Myth 6: Most homeless people are stupid and/or uneducated
- Myth 7: Homelessness can happen to everyone
- Myth 8: Homeless people know they are homeless
- Myth 9: Homeless people like libraries because libraries are warm and dry
- Myth 10: Homeless people are nothing like you and me.

Empathy Driven Enforcement from The Librarian's Guide to Homelessness by Ryan Dowd.

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Differences in Empathy Driven Enforcement and Punishment Driven Enforcement – page 72

| | Empathy Driven Enforcement | Punishment Driven Enforcement |
|---------------------|--|--|
| Culture | Rooted in a culture of assistance and cooperation | Rooted in a culture of domination and legalism |
| How it works | Gains compliance with the rules by minimizing the power imbalance between the rule-enforcer and enforcee | Gains compliance with the rules by maximizing the power imbalance between the rule enforcer and enforcee |
| Mentality | Creates a “partner” mentality in the patron | Creates a “victim” mentality in the patron |
| Who Decides | Library staff decide the terms of engagement | Patron decides the terms of engagement |
| Benefit | Effective | Simple |

Empathy Driven Enforcement Basics – page 72

- You need to accept that your behavior determines 80 percent of patron behavior
- The secret is to lead, not follow – whoever controls the tone of the conversation, controls the situation
- Always use empathy-driven enforcement first, and punishment-driven enforcement only as a last resort

Empathy Driven Enforcement Tools – from The Librarian’s Guide to Homelessness by Ryan Dowd.

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The Name Game page 122:

Taking the time to learn someone’s name conveys great respect and instantly endears you to them. This is true for every human being, but doubly true for homeless human beings (because no one else bothers to learn their names.)

Encourage patrons – homeless or otherwise to call you by your first name. Asking others to call you by your first name humanizes you and makes you more likable. It also puts you on the same level as the other person, which homeless people really do appreciate (because most people act superior to them.)

The Baby Steps page 128:

If you are asking someone to leave the library, you can break it up into mini-steps. Instead of just immediately demanding that the person leave, you can say:

1. Sir, can you please collect your belongings so we can talk over here?
2. (After conversation near the door) “Unfortunately, I am going to have to ask you to leave the library for today.

If someone is breaking several rules at once, pick them off one by one. Pick the easiest one first and work your way up to the harder ones.

The Bad Cop page 128

For this tool you get to be the “good cop.” You are going to shift the blame to some nameless, faceless authority figure who makes the rules. You are merely a humble employee who is following orders.

Here are some examples

“I would love to let you smoke from your three foot tall bong, but I have to enforce the rules

“I would let you in with a penguin that you stole from the zoo, but the bosses say no pets”

The Sad Librarian page 129

There are two types of people in this world: people who enjoy causing harm and people who are saddened when others suffer. The easiest way to prove you are not the first type of person is to show that you are the second type of person. Show homeless individuals that you are actually sad.

Here are some examples:

“Hey Josh, since you stabbed that guy in the arm, I’m going to have to ask you to leave for today. I’m really sorry. I know it’s cold out there.

“Sally, please stop making voodoo dolls of our director. I may have to ask you to leave, which I really don’t want you to do because you’re my favorite”

Key phrases from page 241

1. You want to ask someone to speak more quietly:

"Would you turning down the volume a notch or two?"

"Would you mind speaking more quietly?"

2. When you want to ask someone's name without being pushy:

"Hi. I'm Ryan. I didn't catch your name"

"Hi. My name is Ryan. What is yours?"

3. You want to use someone's name without them thinking you are Big Brother:

"Good afternoon. It's 'Bob,' right?"

"Good Morning. Wait. Don't tell me. You are 'Susan,' right?"

4. You want to tell someone they are breaking a rule without making them defensive:

"You probably didn't realize we have a rule about this, but..."

"I'm sure you didn't know, but..."

5. You want to be the Good Cop

"I would let you do that, but the boss would probably fire me."

"I would let you do that, but the Library Board is really picky about that rule."

6. For active listening

"I think what I heard you say, was..."

"If I'm understanding you correctly..."

7. To escape a close talker

"I'm going to take a step back. I forgot my deodorant today."

"Do you mind if we talk from a little farther back? I had a lot of garlic for lunch"

8. A non-homeless person is complaining.

"We take the needs of all of our patrons seriously, regardless of their socioeconomic status"

"Thank you for your concern. We have the situation under control"

"Thank you for your concern. We are keep an eye on the situation"

9. A non-homeless patron is being noisy.

"It would really not be appropriate for me to talk about other patrons"

10. If you want to show empathy when you are asking someone to change their behavior

"I don't like enforcing the rules, but I have to"

"If you don't stop that, I'll have to ask you to leave and I don't want to do that because you are a fellow Stephen King Fan"