

Community Needs for Library Services: Panel Discussion



Swartz Auditorium - Carlisle Area School District
February 25, 2015
7 to 9 PM

Report of Findings March 16, 2015

Table of Contents

Executive Summary and Analysis of Session Findings	2
Summary of First Session Discussions	5
Community Needs Panel Detailed Notes: 2-25-15	13

[Blank Page]

Executive Summary and Analysis of Session Findings

The Cumberland County Library System (CCLS) and the Cumberland County Commissioners hosted the first of three expert panel discussions on February 25, 2015 from 7 to 9 pm in the Swartz Auditorium of the Carlisle Area School District.

The first session of the discussion series “Cumberland County Libraries: An Evolving Vision,” was well-attended by about 100 people. Called “Community Needs for Library Services,” it featured presentations by a panel of experts on community needs, health, education, and libraries.

The purpose of these discussions is to begin informing and framing the debate about the role and importance of public libraries in Cumberland County. In addition, the panel discussions are intended to inform the community about the changing role of libraries and the challenges they face in meeting community needs with decreased funding.

Based on their recent community needs assessments, Capital Region and Carlisle United Way representatives, along with Tri County Community Action put forth a baseline of the County’s most pressing needs; issues that need to be addressed to improve our quality of life. Many of these were needs that libraries are addressing or could address effectively. They also cited other areas that no one might expect libraries to tackle; things beyond the current scope and resources of our library system.

This was followed by a series of proposals about things libraries could do to help meet the unmet needs of the County. Suggestions flowed freely, building momentum and generating enthusiasm. Many of these suggestions combined local options with examples of what’s been done in other library systems. The list of suggestions was notable for its creativity, ambition, length and breadth.

Many presenters proposed library-based solutions founded on the premise that libraries are “free”. However, libraries may be free to users, but they cost money to operate. This is the essence of this series; to reconcile the seemingly infinite service possibilities for libraries with what is optimal and sustainable.

The first event set the stage for the upcoming sessions on future visioning and finance. In the February 25th session, panelists were not asked to prioritize, assess costs and benefits, or perform comparative effectiveness analysis with other organizations working on similar community needs. This was appropriate for the opening session. A very positive outcome of the first meeting was a strong consensus on six areas where libraries were uniquely equipped to address our County’s unmet needs:

1. Help prepare very young children to be ready for school and to support children’s learning needs so that they are able to graduate successfully from high school.
2. Provide more programs and resources for the county’s growing elderly population.
3. Provide greater library access and support to the growing numbers of people in Cumberland

County who are living in poverty.

4. Provide resources and programs to address five essential literacies: basic, information, financial, health and civic/social.
5. Provide access to information technology, especially the Internet.
6. Provide community meeting and gathering spaces.

But next comes the difficult task of defining a sustainable scope for libraries even within these six realms let alone the many others that were suggested at the first session. This has to take place within the context of rapidly changing customer needs, preferences, and technology (session two), and limitations on funding (session three). In short, as partners in addressing County needs, where should libraries expand, contract, or possibly disengage its resources; and where can the funding come from to support it?

Following the event, someone commented that “What I see is an institution collapsing under the weight of its good intentions.” Another said that they see an institution struggling under the weight of the community’s expectations but with an insufficient level of financial resources. System wide, Cumberland County’s libraries are operating at austerity levels. One panelist remarked that libraries in the poorest areas of the County aren’t able to offer the same level of programming or hours of access as those in wealthier areas. These libraries are in the communities that need them the most.

A number of questions emerged from the first event which will be the focus of the next two sessions:

- How does the current array and distribution of library services match up to our County’s greatest needs?
- Assuming current offerings remain constant, should libraries expand the scope of services at this time?
- In the context of rapidly changing customer needs and technology, how can the libraries’ focus evolve over time to remain relevant?
- What community needs are our libraries uniquely or best suited to address?
- How can libraries support other community groups’ efforts to improve the quality of life in our County?
- Where should funding come from to support an optimal array and distribution of library services?
- How do we measure libraries’ impact on target issues in order to justify ongoing support?

Summary of First Session Discussions

The first session took place on February 25, 2015 at the Carlisle High School Auditorium from 7-9pm. The format was a moderated panel discussion with six panelists that represented different sectors of our community both locally and statewide.

As a brief introduction of the panel participants, the panelists included:

- **Dr. Kent Chrisman**, a professor of early childhood education at Shippensburg University, spoke about the needs of young children and how library services can help prepare infants, toddlers and preschoolers to enter school, ready to learn and succeed.
- **Kathy Possinger**, Executive Director of Tri County Community Action, a non-profit Community Action agency serving Cumberland, Dauphin, and Perry Counties, talked about how the lives of those living in poverty can be changed by library services that can help them achieve self-sufficiency.
- **Kathy Silks**, Project Manager of PA Forward / Pennsylvania Libraries for the Pennsylvania Library Association, discussed the ways in which libraries improve the community's quality of life by meeting the County's literacy needs.
- **David Kalinoski**, Associate State Director for Community Outreach at AARP – Pennsylvania, discussed how older adults use libraries and the services that they need to enjoy a good quality of life.
- **Tim Whelan**, Vice-President for Community Impact with the United Way of the Capital Region, discussed some of the recent findings of the United Way's in-depth community needs assessment and how libraries can address some of Cumberland County's most pressing needs.
- **Lucy Suter Zander**, Executive Director of United Way of Carlisle & Cumberland County, spoke about how the needs of central Cumberland County communities are similar or differ from those on the West Shore and how libraries can positively address those needs.

During the panel session, Jonelle Darr provided a high level report of the CCLS. She shared with the audience that the CCLS serves a diverse group of ages, colors, and social classes. Ranging from young children, to the elderly community, business people, prisoners, immigrants, and job seekers, the library is considered the "Cornerstone of the community" that connects, informs, educates, entertains, and inspires. They help provide services like high speed Internet, job application assistance, helping people seeking assistance with health care, technology and tutoring.

CCLS is the busiest library system in the state of PA. Since 1994, the population has increased 21%, but the number of items borrowed has increased 74%. Program attendance has increased 274% and summer reading program registrations for youth have increased 133%. In the last five years, web site visits to the library have increased 37%. Many of the people that the library system serves are low income and are in need of extra support.

Despite an increase in demand for services, funding for the CCLS has remained the same for the last 10 years. Currently, more than half of the library's revenue comes from the county library tax, which funds over \$3.2 million of its \$6 million operating budget.

Identifying Community Needs

Following the high level report, the moderator, Monica Gould posed a series of seven targeted questions to the panelists. The first question was, **"What are our community's greatest needs – especially as they might relate to library services?"** The question was targeted first to Tim Whelan and Lucy Zander from United Way.

Tim Whelan, representing the Capital Region's eastern portion of Cumberland County, focused on trends seen in the County. He shared that Cumberland County is growing 12.9% faster than any other county in the capital region with the current population at approximately 560,000, which is projected to grow to 628,000 people by 2040. Significant demographic changes include:

- The increase in the aging population over 65 by 80% over the next 30 years, and seniors 85+ will increase by 132%,
- The high increase in foreign born and limited English speaking populations by 60%,
- The minimal increase in wife-husband family composition but significant increase by 13% of single parent homes in the population.

Community needs are also changing. One of the most influential factors of the community are literacy rates, which directly affect high school graduation rates. Whelan shared that between 2010 and 2012, 56.4% of students in Cumberland County scored "basic" or "below basic" in third grade reading levels. Studies show that students are four times more likely to not graduate from high school or are less likely to finish/attend school past high school if they cannot read at proficient levels by 3rd grade. One of the most important community needs is making sure people graduate from high school. This is considered a benchmark for success in the community. Literacy challenges in the community are not just related to reading. Financial and health literacy are also major community needs which the library supports through their collections and programming.

David Kalinoski from AARP emphasized that libraries help educate people on how to use technology, learn about the affordable care act, and how to manage their discretionary income. Lucy Zander said that the United Way of Carlisle and Cumberland County's needs assessment in 2012 outlined the following needs:

- Increase the supply of affordable housing and provide better public transportation,
- Provide more effective treatment for those with cognitive disabilities, mental illness or drug addictions, and
- Provide better child care and nutritious foods for children.

All of which can be better accomplished through effective collaboration with the community, agencies and faith-based organizations.

Kathy Possinger added that due to the significant disparity between the rich and the poor in Cumberland County, the poverty rate has increased by 5.2%. This is higher than any other county in the capital region.

There is a clear and growing need for the poor in the community to obtain Internet access and other resources from the library system, because they do not have the means to do so at home. She also noted that studies have shown that an individual's basic needs for housing and food must be met before they are likely to use the public library.

Dr. Kent Chrisman re-emphasized the importance of literacy and the radical difference that it makes when children at a very young age are exposed to books and reading. Books are the ultimate starting point for cognitive development. Equity of access to the services the library system provides can continue to support these children and young families.

Kathy Silks of PA Forward stated that 13% of people in PA lack basic literacy skills and this percentage has not changed since 1992. She emphasized that nothing affects a person's health status more than literacy, and that is true of all types of literacy. Studies show that 41% of adults in the US give themselves a C, D, or F in knowledge of their finances and financial decision-making.

Meeting Community Needs

The second question was, **"How does the CCLS help meet our community's greatest needs? And, how have those services changed; and in what way?"** The question was directed towards Kathy Possinger first who said that CCLS could help address the root causes of poverty and provide ways to reduce them. The library provides the network to address the service needs of the community as a whole, including:

- Financial literacy,
- Providing a community gathering place,
- Providing assistance for job seekers,
- Providing trained staff able to help with health care related inquiries and issues, and
- Providing classes for people to promote self-sufficiency and technology fluency.

It is not just about books anymore; it's about being an education and resource center for the community.

Kathy Silks reiterated that libraries build literacy and learning, and no one is positioned to support the community better. Through print, online, public programs and outreach services, libraries guide citizens to lead healthier lives, make better financial decisions, prepare them for life, and support and engage people in community life.

Lucy Zander made the statement that if libraries cease to operate, she predicts that the needs of the community would change significantly. The library is an indispensable institution that gets taken for granted unless someone uses it directly. Because it is one of the only things left in our society that is public and free, everyone is allowed to use it, regardless of who you are or what you are. Zander says, “We can survive without movie theaters, but we can’t survive without libraries.”

Service Duplication

The third question was, **“Are there any other groups that are already addressing these needs and perhaps causing a duplication? Is duplication needed and how has that changed over the last few years?”** Kathy Possinger said “no, we are fortunate to have these services for free to anyone in the community. And, yes there are other community-based organizations that provide these services that CCLS does; BUT continuing to offer these services in the community should be based upon community needs and complement the services that are already provided in the community in a different way.” Libraries house the core services in the community that the constituents need and they change with the community’s demands.

Critical Library Services

The fourth question was, **“What do you see as the most critical service(s) the CCLS provides and how have these changed over the past few years?”** Kathy Silks said that the contribution the library makes to the health and vitality of the community is the most critical. There are five essential types of literacy skills, which the library helps to support:

- Basic literacy,
- Information literacy,
- Civic and Social literacy,
- Health literacy, and
- Financial literacy.

Some examples of current programs are the literary lunch for low income children where they serve lunch and give/read books to children to increase their reading skills during the summer. They deliver books to prisoners at Cumberland County Correctional Facility. They have a kids’ read to dogs program that gives children a way to gain confidence in their reading skills, which makes a huge difference in learning. The library also provides job application assistance, technology classes, volunteer speed dating events to learn about community volunteer opportunities, financial assistance classes, and affordable care act literacy support. Dr. Chrisman also mentioned that the library serves not only as a place to learn but also a place to socialize for young parents to share ideas and tips about raising children.

Suggested New Services

The fifth question was, **“What services should the CCLS provide that it doesn’t currently?”** Dr. Kent Chrisman first stated that CCLS should provide support to groups of business owners that operate

childcare facilities. They need technical assistance, help with business plans, and other business support services from the library as well as support for the children in those programs.

David Kalinoski said that CCLS should provide more support to the growing elderly population. Currently York County supports an ‘Embracing Aging Initiative’, in which the entire community adopts an “age in everything” lens. CCLS could emulate such a focus so that no one’s possibilities are limited by age, while demonstrating that experience has value. As community centers, the library could serve as a positive disruption to the aging cycle. All sectors within our community should strive to be more “age friendly”. Libraries should reflect the pulse and fabric of the larger community. They should serve as connectors within the community, ensuring that people of all ages have access to information and services to lead healthier lives; that they have the financial resources and opportunities to match longer life spans, and; that people age 50 and older are seen as an integral and inspirational asset to society.

CCLS could provide a service similar to Giant Foods shuttle bus transit system that picks up and drops off people from the elderly living centers and facilities in the community. CCLS could provide a shuttle service between hospice care centers and elderly facilities to the local libraries so that they may attend events, classes and partake in other services.

Kathy Possinger reminded the audience that we must stay mindful of the equity of services within the system. Considering we have the highest poverty rate, we should accommodate everyone by rethinking the hours of operation based upon who may need access to it the most.

Kathy Silks said we should also be mindful of the library’s role in the conversation because they are already providing resources to agencies and families that serve prisoners and other at risk populations. She believes that more can be done to support those communities. Also, CCLS could provide more services for children’s financial literacy so that children can grasp these concepts young so that they can make good financial decisions leading to a more productive society in the future.

Future Roles of Libraries

The sixth question was, **“What do you see as the future role of the CCLS in meeting our community’s needs?”** David Kalinoski said “the library is the future.” We have to remain cognizant of what services are needed based upon a current community needs assessment which is affected by the pockets of poverty and wealth that represent our community. He gave some examples of other programs across the United States and Pennsylvania that library systems offer. These include:

- Using CDBG funds to create tool and kitchen appliance lending programs.
- Providing classes for filmmaking, sewing, making records, etc.
- Video kits for lending that include high definition digital video cameras and microphones.
- Hosting authors and offering programs through podcasts.
- Including forms to order books with Meals on Wheels deliveries.

- Working with food banks to get an extra free week of time with an item if you donate non-perishable goods.
- Providing makerspaces for audio recordings, vinyl recordings, button makers, sewing machines, and recording studios.

They are also doing great things in the community like the Music and Memory project that collects recycled and restored iPods to help Alzheimer's patients regain memory and improve their quality of life.

Kathy Silks emphasized that libraries can help solve economic and social problems in the community, but need the resources from the County in order to provide the access, education, and basic needs to ensure a successful future for Cumberland County.

Summary Question

The seventh and final question was, **“Have you learned anything new this evening as a result of our discussions that has sparked an idea as to how CCLS libraries could better serve community needs?”** David Kalinoski said that he learned a lot from Kathy Silks and about PA Forward's programs. He thought it was great to hear that another organization is concerned about financial literacy and fraud protection. He learned the great importance of partnerships and collaboration between other organizations including senior centers, and he wants to now form a partnership between AARP and PA forward on these initiatives.

Dr. Chrisman said he was pleased that Kathy Silks helped him to reiterate his important point about how there is an absolute connection between early childhood literacy and the success of students at the high school/college education level. Without a continued emphasis placed upon literacy and reading, the community's success would decline.

Questions from the Library System Board and Commissioners

After the panelists answered the above questions, the moderator, Monica Gould opened it up for questions to the County Commissioners and Library System Board Members.

Jonelle Darr posed a question to Kathy Possinger related to the equity of access and areas of poverty in the community to clarify where the most poverty ridden areas are in Cumberland County. She told everyone that Shippensburg and the 'River Districts' are considered the most impoverished areas with the highest number of students on free/reduced price school lunches.

Jim Hertzler, County Commissioner, then followed by stating “I know we aren't supposed to talk about taxes but the goal of this process is to build a sustainable plan for funding. What is a fair way to do this? For every \$3 in county taxpayer dollars, the libraries only get \$1 from the state.” He explained that the 3:1 ratio of county government tax funding to the state government tax funding for the library

may deserve some consideration posing the question about whether we should be asking the state for more money and support to meet the needs of the future. Should this money just be coming from the county?

Commissioner Hertzler also made a suggestion for additional services. Considering the increasing number of children in single partner households and number of married couples who are both working, CCLS should find a way to bring together children and the growing senior citizen populations to provide a gathering place for both groups to learn and benefit from one another. Kathy Silks agreed and shared that there are many programs like this in place across the nation and it would be a great way to continue conversations with the Commissioner and the library system in the near future.

Questions from the Audience

To complete the panel discussion, the audience was asked if they had any questions.

Representative Will Tallman discussed the PA house bill 102 from the Career and IT Education Subcommittee. Currently there are 10,000 skilled labor jobs, which need to be filled in York County and across the state. He asked the panelists, **“What are we doing to meet the needs of technical skilled labor training?”** Kathy Possinger said that in our community there are increasing numbers of young people who are not preparing for a 4-year degree and the library is helping to provide resources for social and life skills like managing one’s finances, communication, math/science tutors and programs, etc. She believes it would be an excellent partnership if the library could work with job placement or on the job training programs and centers to provide collaborative services for the core skills needed to fill these jobs. Dr. Chrisman emphasized that high school graduation is the top priority and early literacy and reading will help children to get there and will help to build interest in any career.

Kathy Silks posed the final question based upon a lot of negative comments and questions she has received in the past about libraries, stating **“Why would you need libraries if all they provide is entertainment?”** She said, “It’s like making the statement, why do we need school, if they offer recess?” There are so many reasons that even the entertainment that the library provides is important.

Cate Mellen, a former staff member of Bosler Memorial Library, shared a story about a program series at a local library where an elderly woman who had attended a movie event expressed her deep gratitude and appreciation for the library and people who helped to offer events like these. The woman had recently lost her husband and had been feeling like she was wasting away. The library gave her a place to be around people and to feel alive again. Mellen reiterated that “yes, it’s entertainment but it’s so much more than that.”

Joanna Reinhardt made the final comment that “the library system gives me a sense of security – without the funding they need to keep it open, I feel that sense of security will be lost. I am deeply concerned what will happen if it goes away.”

Summary

Monica Gould thanked the panelists for sharing their time and expertise with the group. She announced that there will be two more sessions that will take place on March 25th and April 30th. On March 25th, a panel will discuss library services of the future; and on April 30th, a panel will discuss library finances.