

Item 24-0601: Trustee Development: An Exploratory Social Justice Framework to Develop Public Library Services with Underserved Families

Library Board

Tue, May 14, 2024 1:00PM

Margaret Mann (Library Board Member) 16:48

All right. Then that moves us to the President's Report and Trustee development, item 24-0601.

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 17:03

All right, so for our trustee development today, we were going to focus on children and youth library services. So, there was an article that was sent in the packet to you. And if you had a chance to look at the discussion guidelines, it's a typical triangle square circle type of discussion, where we would start with talking about what are three important points related to children and youth library services that you found in the article, then the square would be what squares with your thinking, what do you agree with? And then the circle is what's still circling in your head? What questions do you have after reading the article? So, we've only allocated about 10 minutes for this, so we're not going to be able to go in depth with, you know, great discussion, but certainly I'd like to just open it up for the first question, which is: what are some important points related to children and youth library services that you found in the article?

Brian Looker (Library Board Member) 18:17

I appreciated the point that children and youth services are family services, and I thought it was pretty clever the shift of planning with families rather than for them and how that could expand, you know, the availability of library services by adding the expertise that parents could bring in collaboratively planning programs. That was pretty neat.

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 18:40

I really appreciated the three social justice outcomes, looking at our services, with the three focus areas as Access, Inclusion, and Engagement, which I think Brian goes a little bit—piggybacks off of what you indicated as well, that was one of my big points.

Alderperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 19:09

Just piggybacking off of what Brian had said, I thought it was interesting where it says "respect family roles," and I think often you think about the library serving the children; you're not thinking about what's in between. You know, the library isn't going over parents or going over family roles; you know, we're respecting those and we're folding those into our programming.

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 19:41

I appreciated—just going off of that thought about the idea of removing barriers to access. So, we can't go over but how do we even open the door a little bit wider?

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 20:00

Other Ahas?

Lisa Nett (Library Board Member) 20:00

I appreciated—

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 20:05

Go ahead, Brian. [Note: she said "Brian" but it was actually Peter who spoke.]

Peter Lee (Library Board Member) 20:06

I appreciate the part about just being responsive to the interest of families, and how families are change agents and how parents are the change agents.

Nancy Scheuerman (Library Board Member) 20:25

Back on there, because that's what hit me is that the parents and families are the experts. They know what they need, and they're the change agents. And I can't help but say, looking at the square what do I agree with? Well, I'll take you back. Some of you weren't alive, but in 1972, parents of handicapped kids were change agents. And that's when I started my career as a special ed teacher. The world of special ed would have never changed if it wasn't the parents who stood up for their kids. So that really hit home for me.

Alderson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 21:02

And I'll just add that parental advocacy always comes before self-advocacy. So that's where we're headed, and that's really important.

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 21:17

I like how Nancy went from the triangle to the square as far as what—if anybody has any, has, as far as things have squared with their thinking? Or we could certainly move into the circle part? What's still circling in your head? And what questions do you have after reading this article? So, I do believe that at the next meeting, we will have a connections to this article from our current practices.

Rebecca Kellner (Library Board Member) 21:43

Well, maybe I withdraw my comment then. There was so much in here that squared with what we already are doing in the library, and so I guess, sort of segwaying already into the circling, what was circling around in my brain is how can we take this information and do more do better in our new library? So, I guess we'll hear that next week or next meeting.

Margaret Mann (Library Board Member) 22:06

And I would just jump on that. I mean, this idea of helping people understand that that's the role we play is we're working with families and that we can be a partner, and I think that's a really neat thing for the for us to continue to let the public know that we're here to partner with rather than anything else. And that's going to open up, I think, access and inclusion to more people in the community if we can make that known.

Brian Looker (Library Board Member) 22:40

I'm also looking forward to the next meeting to hear about kind of applications, because in the in the square part, what I wrote down was that the whole "who how what" framework for organizing services to underserved families make sense. I thought it was a smart approach. But that led me into questions. Like how does this happen? Even for the libraries in the case studies, like, did they kind of happen on to something they realized was an underserved need? Or are they actively surveying? Like there's limited resources to try to find out what you need to do, so how do they do that? How do we do that? And then more specifically, from the board's standpoint of oversight and governance, like, how can we support that? Like, is there additional—I would hate to request more documentation because that takes more time away from the actual work of things. But what could the board do to help support utilization of the framework?

Peter Lee (Library Board Member) 23:46

I'm continuing to think about just access and inclusion. How do we help parents and families find agency and autonomy and make the library feel like it's a place they belong? And to utilize the resources that are available?

Nancy Scheuerman (Library Board Member) 24:13

Something struck me as, you know, for those of us who've been around while, we're getting closer to the goal of a new library. We're closer to that than we're further away than the start. So, as we look at this, you know, the next months, the staff, I assume, is starting to look and get excited about looking forward. And I—on page 67 of this they talked about "libraries are for people. They offer a safe haven for quiet and relaxation for families living with the stresses of crowded homes, poor cooling and heating systems, and few resources. They are welcoming spaces to help build emotionally close parent/child relationships," and it goes on. And I can't help but think about how the children's space in the new library will absolutely support what that says. So, I think that's something for us to keep in mind too, as we speak to people, and as we move closer to that opening, to embrace that part of this and say, "That's why this was a vision, is to give people the spaces they need to, to feel included, to be a part of what's going on in the library."

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 25:28

Thoughts?

Lisa Nett (Library Board Member) 25:32

Yeah, I guess I'll do the square and the circle. The circling in your head and maybe circling in my heart, too. So, the thing that squared with my thinking is, it's actually at the very beginning of page 53—it's like, it's important to remember that it's not necessarily who is using it; it's who's not being served. And that isn't necessarily underprivileged. Right?

Lisa Nett (Library Board Member) 26:06

If this—if we're really trying to build a library that is a community resource, it has to be offering lots of different things that are relevant to members of the community that may be at different life stages and different needs. And I think that we do that very well in some areas, and maybe could do better in other areas. So that's what squared with my thinking as far as—and then maybe have to get creative and broad about what is a family, not just parents and children.

Lisa Nett (Library Board Member) 26:45

So, we'll gonna move into the second part of in—I've had some experiences as in professional capacity to work with children who have, who are not in the care of their parents. And it is the collection. I don't think it is the problem of the collection not being adequate. It's just that the resources aren't there. It is very hard to find books or resources that speak to children in those configurations, in that care environment. And I wonder about a lot that the need is there, and it's just—it's ripe for possibility. Right? And it's tricky.

Lisa Nett (Library Board Member) 27:36

So, I did a little bit of looking further. I mean, when we think about that, like if you just travel down that pathway a little bit further with regard to incarceration—and this is all these are old numbers, but the Annie Casey Foundation did a research project years ago, and it said that in Wisconsin 88,000 children—that is more than the population of the city of Appleton. 88,000 children were impacted by parental incarceration. Right? So that's one piece. And there's a lot of creative possibilities, but there's also—the library can't save every—serve everything in every way. But are there places to develop the collection? Are there opportunities? What are the opportunities in the new space? That's what circling around?

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 28:22

Yeah, yeah. But it may not be us offering those services. Maybe it's partnering with an agency in this space.

Lisa Nett (Library Board Member) 28:28

Right, right. They—and they mentioned the Brooklyn Public Library. And they actually have specifics on how to find a job after incarceration. I mean, that's offered in the library, but it may not be offered by it. But they're there, and there's certain branches that are particularly high need for that. But that's a much different library system than we're in. But I really think about that a lot. Like I think about that as far as like 88 thou—like more people than are in Appleton, that's how many kids in the state of Wisconsin are impacted by that. And then guess what? They grow up.

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 29:19

Any last thoughts? Well, certainly when I looked at the framework moving from an only information access approach and solely information focused model in libraries to this model, we're definitely down the path toward the social justice framework model. So, I do—as others have said, we look forward to hearing a little bit more in a month about how this work plays into the work that's already happening and in the future.