

# Chapter 1

## Neighborhood Resource Center: The Library Partnership

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The Library Partnership is a jointly operated facility that offers area residents full public library services and access to approximately thirty (30) social service agencies. The collaboration provides a unique environment for clients to receive counseling and advice from social service agencies and the resources, assistance, and services to address their needs from the public library all in one location. Clients are often referred to the library for a variety of eGovernment and other services. The presence of a public library allows potential and scheduled clients to come to the facility without the stigma often attached to entering a social service assistance center.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

This case study will provide an overview of the project, how and why the project was conceived, how the agencies work together, the project's effectiveness, and how this project has been a catalyst for other projects that have secured a new appreciation for the place of a public library within a community.

For several years, the Alachua County Library District (ACLD) has been shifting its focus from providing residents with the very best library services to providing library services that make a

better community. This is reflected in its mission statement, "Alachua County Library District: a key to building a better community by creating opportunities to participate, connect, and discover" and through our tag line "...thinking outside the book..."<sup>1</sup> ACLD continues to value the importance of delivering traditional library services. But, ACLD recognizes that by positioning its services to meet community needs, the public library becomes more relevant to its residents and the community groups with which ACLD partners. In turn, these community organizations have become library advocates. The Library Partnership project

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is a prime example of this form of community librarianship that is described as "...being tied to the creation of partnerships that involve local people, multiple local government agencies, and business and volunteer organizations. Community librarianship also links to a commitment to concentrate on helping the information poor and a willingness to step beyond conservative practices in public librarianship."<sup>2</sup>

Alachua County is located in north central Florida. The 2010 county population was estimated at 255,692 of which 65% is non-Hispanic White, 22% is non-Hispanic Black, 9% Hispanic origin, and 4% other.<sup>3</sup> Gainesville is the county seat and also the home to the University of Florida.

## **WHAT IS THE LIBRARY PARTNERSHIP?**

The Library Partnership, a Neighborhood Resource Center is a collaboration of ACLD, the Partnership for Strong Families, Inc. (PSF), the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF), and the Casey Family Programs. The initial project concept focused on the desire by PSF and DCF to redesign traditional approaches to foster care and, through preventative services and programs, reduce the number of children who enter foster care due to abuse or neglect. They were supported in their efforts by the Casey Family Programs through strategic consulting and grant support.

The operating expenses for this 7,100 square foot leased spaced are split 60/40 between ACLD and PSF. The renovation expense was also split by the same percentage. ACLD and PSF pay for their own staff who work at the joint facility.

The goal of The Library Partnership is to strengthen families in the service area by providing a comprehensive array of information, programs, and services so families can help themselves and get the resources they need. The focus is on the basic elements that often lead to child removal

and include economic self-sufficiency, family support, child welfare, health, and safety. On site PSF staff coordinate the activities and schedules of the more than thirty (30) social service agencies that rotate through The Library Partnership.

Shared offices and meeting rooms are available for social service agency counselors to meet with clients. PSF staff perform an intake analysis for new clients, match clients to agencies, and set up initial agency appointments. PSF and participating social service agencies also present a variety of programs open to the public that are co-sponsored by ACLD and appear in the Library's online and print program guides. Programs include spousal abuse and parenting support groups, computer training, assistance with government housing applications, interview skills, clothing and food drives/distribution, and nutrition advice,

ACLD supports the social service agencies and their clients by offering a wide range of eGovernment services and library materials/resources tailored to complement client needs. For example, this library collection has a higher percentage of parent resource, job skill, early learning, and literacy materials than our typical branch. Library and social service agency staffs meet quarterly to discuss and coordinate services, resources, and programs.

## **WHY THIS COMMUNITY NEEDS THE LIBRARY PARTNERSHIP**

The goal of this project by the primary agencies involved, PSF, DCF, and the Casey Family Programs was to redesign the foster care model and prevent children from being removed from their homes and families. Nationally, the traditional foster care focus has been on the care of the child after removal and then developing means to reunify the child with his/her family. More and more communities are realizing, through the efforts of agencies like the Casey Family Programs, that serious emotional harm occurs when a child is

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