

Project Justification

• **Which program goal and associated objective(s) of the IMLS American Rescue Plan grant program will your project address?**

Goal 1: Strengthen the institutional capacity of museums, libraries, and related organizations to respond to community needs quickly, effectively, efficiently, and responsibly.

Objective 1.3: Build community-focused partnerships, networks, and alliances with organizations such as other nonprofits, school systems, service organizations, community groups, government agencies, and institutions of higher education with an emphasis on complementing, rather than duplicating, resources and services.

• **What need, problem, or challenge will your project address, and how did you identify it? Describe how you have used demographic information, economic conditions, and other relevant data from reliable sources to define the need, problem, or challenge and develop the scope for the project.**

Libraries are in a unique position to engage community members in need of information, support services, and referrals related to health, housing and employment. New Haven's most vulnerable populations struggled with basic well-being before the COVID-19 pandemic: 21% of New Haven residents were food insecure; 21% were transportation insecure, and 28% were underemployed. The poverty rate in New Haven is 27% and the low-income rate 48%, compared with statewide levels of 10% and 23%, respectively. The New Haven median household income is \$42,222 compared to the statewide median of \$78,444.¹

People turn to the library for a great variety of information related to basic needs, and the New Haven Free Public Library (NHFPL) strives to meet the diverse needs of all who walk through our doors. Some of the Library's most frequent users are New Haven's most vulnerable residents, and we serve many individuals and families who deal with mental and physical health issues, isolation, and a lack of safety and independence. This project will build upon a successful 6-year partnership between NHFPL and Liberty Community Services, Inc. (LCS) to provide full-time, on-site consultations and case management services with a licensed social worker across three NHFPL locations: the Ives Main Library in downtown New Haven, the Fair Haven branch library in the Fair Haven neighborhood, and the Wilson branch library in the Hill neighborhood. These locations were selected due to both the quantity of requests for help with basic needs from library patrons as well as the demonstrated need in the surrounding neighborhoods.

Patrons heavily utilize the case management services located at NHFPL and we anticipate need to increase as pandemic emergency response measures lapse. The 2014 City of New Haven Needs Assessment validated this approach to services – urgent access to case management, nontraditional outreach, collaboration with community partners and the expertise to address immediate basic needs – and NHFPL continues to play an active part in the community dialogue regarding homelessness, health and wellness.

• **Who will be served by your project in the short- and/or long-term?**

Public libraries serve a crucial role that goes well beyond traditional community engagement, and libraries today are the default front door to the homeless services system of care. NHFPL recognizes that many of our patrons are experiencing homelessness, and staff are frequently approached by patrons for information about housing (immediate and long-term), health resources, and income. These community needs have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and as patrons increasingly return to NHFPL locations seeking shelter and respite from the elements, a quiet place to spend the day, or access to information, the need for case management services to supplement traditional library services is also growing.

¹ "Connecticut Neighborhood Profiles" *DataHaven*, <https://www.ctdatahaven.org/data-resources/connecticut-city-neighborhood-profiles>.

Project Work Plan

• What specific activities will you carry out?

Since 2014, NHFPL has partnered with LCS to help people resolve housing instability and homelessness. Key to LCS services is intensive outreach and “in-reach,” and it was determined that the library patrons and staff would benefit from having a qualified social worker provide support services and referrals through office hours at the library. At present, LCS provides one-on-one consultations for those with basic needs related to jobs, food, shelter, and health and wellness questions as well as case management services. The case manager is on site at Ives Main Library part-time six days a week with occasional drop-in hours at Fair Haven and Wilson branch libraries. NHFPL is requesting IMLS funding to increase the library’s LCS case manager to a full-time presence working in the library system with scheduled office hours at three locations: Ives Main Library in downtown New Haven, Fair Haven branch library in the Fair Haven neighborhood, and Wilson branch library in the Hill neighborhood.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, LCS saw over 500 individuals per year at library locations whose needs generally fell into one of three categories – health, housing and income. There are over 1,000 contacts documented in a typical year, and the library case manager is trained to use the citywide Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and is credentialed to conduct emergency Coordinated Access Network (CAN) assessments. Referrals are made to appropriate providers for long term services; most referrals are made to housing and homeless services providers, medical clinics, employment services, and for assistance with state and federal benefits.

During the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent closure of public library spaces, the LCS case manager continued working with modified outreach strategies, connecting with people that had been engaged in case management prior to the pandemic to assist with referrals or new needs. Issues addressed included housing, connections to shelters or hotels, longer term case management, and any other resources that helped people fulfill the needs they were experiencing.

As the pandemic recedes and associated emergency support services, unemployment benefits, and housing assistance wane, we anticipate the need for case management services to further increase. Increasing the LCS case manager to a full-time presence in the library will allow for more consistent contact with patrons as well as additional night and weekend hours to meet patrons and address concerns that arise outside of the traditional workday.

• Who will plan, implement, and manage your project?

NHFPL has been proud to partner with LCS to offer on-site case management services and address the needs of the library’s most vulnerable users before and during the pandemic. LCS offers services to individuals who are either experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness and who are living with HIV/AIDS, mental illness and/or addiction. LCS services are organized in a broad continuum that is not necessarily linear, and interventions begin with strategic and intensive outreach. LCS values collaboration and works under the principle that ending homelessness requires organizations to work together as no one agency has the strengths, culture, or resources to achieve this goal alone. Services are inclusive, culturally competent, trauma informed and, when programmatically indicated, gender-specific.

NHFPL and LCS will continue and expand one-on-one consultations and case management office hours at the New Haven Free Public Library. The purpose of the service is to respectfully meet people where they are – geographically, economically, and psychologically – in order to address critical concerns in their lives. These may include homelessness, risk of homelessness, hunger, mental health, substance abuse, medical conditions, unemployment, under-employment and access to benefits or services.

The library case manager is a licensed social worker, and is supervised by the LCS program director. The project design will augment the successful model developed over the past six year with additional hours at Ives Main Library and scheduled hours at Fair Haven and Wilson branch libraries. Working with the branch managers and adult reference manager, the case manager will coordinate a schedule across the three locations, including evening and weekend hours. The LCS program director and NHFPL director are also in frequent contact, having served together on the Homeless Outreach Taskforce. NHFPL also convenes an internal, system-wide Homeless Engagement Links and Partnership group to discuss best practices towards engaging patrons experiencing homelessness, identifying needs, and finding solutions for common concerns within the library system. The LCS case manager is a critical resource in this toolbox.

• **How will you track your progress toward achieving your intended results?**

There are over 1,000 contacts a year that are documented by LCS, and the library case manager is trained to use the citywide Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and is credentialed to conduct emergency Coordinated Access Network (CAN) assessments. Referrals are made to appropriate providers for long term services and are also tracked. Most referrals are made to housing and homeless services providers, medical clinics, employment services and for assistance with state and federal benefits.

The library case management services are data-driven, and information is collected about every patron that uses the service and quarterly reports are prepared to describe the activities. In addition, activities are documented in the Coordinated Access Network (CAN), the City of New Haven's entry and exit mechanism for the homeless service system, contributing to citywide data collection and improving access to services.

Project Results

• **What are your project's intended results?**

The project will address the needs of patrons who come to the library with questions regarding basic needs: housing, health, mental health and counseling, substance use, employment, access to benefits, and other immediate wellbeing concerns. The library is a safe refuge and source of information, knowledge, community, and learning where everyone is welcomed equally as patrons rather than stigmatized as 'recipients' or 'clients.'

NHFPL's partnership with LCS has resulted in a variety of successful interventions and referrals, including:

- housing assistance: rapid rehousing, permanent supportive housing, housing applications and documentation, rental arrears assistance, access Housing Choice Voucher wait lists
- employment assistance: resume writing, unemployment benefits, assist with online job applications and access to computers, referral to LCS employment initiatives
- basic needs: food, clothing, transportation, access to phones
- health concerns: COVID-19 vaccinations, access to health care, distribute masks and PPE
- referrals to social service agencies and organizations: referrals to local day programs for people experiencing homelessness, connect LGBTQ+ patrons to New Haven Pride Center, long-term case management services including for those with justice involvement

We anticipate that continued services will result in a similar variety and scope of outcomes.

• **How will your project help with recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic?**

Many of the needs addressed in this project are ongoing, however the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the strains on New Haven's vulnerable populations. Emergency assistance has helped to ameliorate the short-term effects of the pandemic over the past year, but as these programs and benefits lapse the underlying needs remain. NHFPL and LCS are actively planning to scale up services in order to meet the increasing inquiries for help with basic needs and well-being at the library.