Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Evidence Summary

Public Libraries May Facilitate More Inclusive Programming with the Collaboration of Trained Partners for Patrons with Dementia

A Review of:
Dai, J., Bartlett, J. C., & Moffatt, K. (2023). Library services enriching community engagement for dementia care: The Tales & Travels Program at a Canadian Public Library as a case study. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science, 55*(1), 123–136. https://doi.org/10.1177/09610006211065170

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Abstract

Objective – To explore the potential of public libraries to contribute to community-based dementia care, and to examine the lived experiences of users partaking in the program.

Design – Case study.

Setting – A public library in Montreal, Canada.

Subjects – Public library patrons with dementia and their caregivers engaging in Tales & Travels, a program for participants with early- and middle-stage dementia who learn about a new country through multi-sensory experiences.

Methods – Semi-structured dyadic interviews with eleven people with dementia and their caregivers, as well as interviews with four program facilitators. Researchers implemented unobtrusive participant observation and thematically analyzed results.

Main Results – Researchers discovered two primary themes via thematic analysis of interview transcripts: "community platform" and "librarians' roles" came out of the data most often when discussing the program. Participants and caregivers felt a sense of familiarity and normalcy in a public library and appreciated the de-emphasis on dementia as the focus of the programming. Librarians felt the partnership with the Alzheimer Society allowed them to push past their uncertainties in their capacity to provide quality programming for this user group and found that collaborative relationship integral to the program's success.

Conclusion – With an intentional setting, collaborative partners with expertise in this user group, and person-centered programming, libraries can be a welcoming location to offer engaging and inclusive programs for patrons with dementia. However, these elements are of a high priority given the vulnerability of the population, and librarians who are willing to be trained in inclusivity, safety, and hospitality should handle programming. Replication of this study in other libraries would strengthen the conclusion of the case study.

Commentary

This case study adds to multiple bodies of published literature: community engagement in public libraries, which has been heavily studied; and programming specifically for library users with dementia, which is a smaller field. As libraries continue to work toward inclusive programming that creates a "third place" (Wood, n.d.) for all patrons, research is focusing on more niche user groups.

The authors are well established in this area of research, having at least two other efforts they cited focused on social sharing and effective inclusion for people with dementia (Dai and Moffatt, 2020 & 2021). The corresponding author has a doctoral focus on assistive technology and information services for people with dementia. One other author on the study is a professor focusing on technology meeting the social and informational needs of people with disabilities.

Measuring this study's validity took place via the CASP Qualitative Checklist (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme, 2018). Upon appraisal, the design was appropriate for the overall research questions, and researchers recruited participants appropriately. Overall a success, a key highlight is this study's efforts toward ethical responsibilities in researching a vulnerable population. There was an emphasis on participant's decision-making capacity and capability to consent to being studied. The authors established a consent protocol that their University Research Ethics Board approved: "If participants with dementia were competent to consent . . . they would sign their own consent form; if they were not competent to consent (e.g. they already had a Power of Attorney in effect), the consent would be sought and maintained from the authorized third party (i.e. their legal guardian) that was not a member of the research team nor in a position of conflict of interest. However, in our case, all participants were competent to consent and signed their own consent form."

The variance in interview types serves the paper well as it attempts to gather voices from all sides of the program: participants, caregivers, and program facilitators. Particularly, the authors conducted participant and caregiver interviews as dyads, allowing for interdependent voices answering the same question conversationally. The authors share their interview guide online, strengthening the opportunity for reproducibility.

As COVID-19 moved Tales and Travels online in 2021, further exploration of this design may be strengthened by comparing online-only versus in-person programming for patrons with dementia.

The only noted limitation by the authors was the general population of this Canadian municipality had higher education and socioeconomic statuses, so future replications of this study would benefit from a more diverse location.

As many public libraries offer programming for a wealth of user types, this study is applicable to any library with outreach librarians who can dedicate the time. However, training in inclusive programming is essential for this group: the corresponding author was a pre-existing registered volunteer for the Alzheimer Society and had previously volunteered at similar events for users with dementia. This lead-in of experience supported the author's capacity to conduct this study, and coordinating programming should have the same level of preparation and care.

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