THE SEATTLE PUBLIC LIBRARY STRATEGIC PLAN

Focus Group Summaries

OVERVIEW
To inform its strategic planning process, The Seattle Public Library together with consultant Berk & Associates (BERK) conducted focus groups to solicit input from specific Library audiences. The objective of these focus groups was to learn how the Library can better serve specific populations, either directly or through collaboration with public-sector or community-based partners.

The focus groups are one of a number of ways the Library has obtained community input to help plan for future service needs through the Library’s strategic plan. One of the themes that emerged early in the strategic planning effort was the importance of building partnerships in the community. By working with service providers, the focus group process itself has moved that effort forward. We are grateful to the dedicated and thoughtful experts and advocates who leant their time and enthusiasm to helping the Library brainstorm about better ways to serve the people they work with every day.

This document compiles summaries of the six focus groups that were held. Each summary is written as a stand-alone piece.

Contents
Teen Center Advisors Focus Group Summary ................................................................. 2
Teen Service Providers Focus Group Summary ............................................................... 4
Older Adults Service Providers Focus Group Summary .................................................. 7
Immigrant and Refugee Service Providers Focus Group Summary ............................... 11
Service Providers for People who are Homeless Focus Group Summary ..................... 16
Children’s Service Providers Focus Group Summary ................................................... 20
Teen Center Advisors Focus Group Summary

OVERVIEW

About The Focus Group

As a part of its strategic planning process, The Seattle Public Library together with consultant Berk & Associates (BERK) conducted focus groups to solicit input from specific Library audiences. The objective of these focus groups was to learn how the Library can better serve specific populations, either directly or through collaboration with public-sector or community-based partners.

BERK staff facilitated a focus group with the Library’s Teen Center Advisors on April 21, 2010. The Teen Center Advisors is a yearlong service program at the Central Library for high school students. About 13 teens, in grades 9 through 12 in public and private high schools in the Seattle area, attended the focus group. The Teen Advisors were given the focus group questions in advance; a total of 18 teens turned in written responses to the discussion prompts.

About this Summary

This summary is not a verbatim record of the conversation, focusing instead on those points of discussion that will be useful in developing the Library’s Strategic Plan.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Early Library Experiences and Use of the Library Today

- Some of the participants’ first childhood experiences alone at a library were intimidating. Most participants remembered first going to a library with a parent or grandparent, for story times, a summer reading program, or to read and get books. Their first memories of going to the library alone as children, however, were described by some participants as “scary” and intimidating. Friendly and approachable library staff seemed key to lessen participants’ fears and making the library experience more positive with repeat visits.

- Many participants are attracted to the Library because of its free content and resources. Participants come to the Library for recreational and educational resources, including free books, magazines, music, movies, online databases, and reference materials. Many reported that they didn’t mind waiting for holds because they are free and usually less of a hassle than ordering a book from a bookstore.

- The Library is a safe, quiet, and comfortable place for teens to go. Many of the teens cited the Library as a safe, comfortable, and quiet place to go, where teens can get work done with fewer distractions than at home or at a café. Participants go to the Library to read, do homework, sit and think, work on group projects, meet with friends, and hang out. Reasons why participants prefer the Library to other options, including retail stores and cafés include the “academic mindset” of the Library, the fact that a purchase isn’t required to be there, and that the Library can’t ask someone to leave without reason.

- Library staff is helpful and provides valuable expertise and assistance. Most of the discussion participants said they have asked library staff for help, but acknowledged that asking for help isn’t typical of teens generally. Most teens, they think, would prefer to find materials themselves; the online catalog and book lists are helpful tools. The chat and text services are convenient and provide an opportunity for human interaction that is less intimidating than talking directly to a
The Seattle Public Library Strategic Plan
Teen Center Advisors Focus Group Summary

Library staff person. Participants found that teen librarians in particular are “warm and welcoming” and more approachable than general Library staff. Participants noted that they ask librarians for reading suggestions and find that Library staff is more knowledgeable than staff at bookstores.

- **Many participants prefer Library research over “googling.”** With regard to school research, many participants preferred asking a librarian over googling for the answer. Reasons for their preference included: Google provides too many results; participants have more trust in resources referred by librarians; and books are easier to use and cite than websites.

Future Use of the Library

- **For “new teens,” instantly-available online and downloadable materials will be expected, but books are still important.** One participant expected that the next generation of teens will be even more impatient to get content right away. The Library will have to provide more downloadable and streaming content to meet the needs and expectations of these new teens. Potential new services included downloading MP3 or Kindle content on Library equipment and checking out iPod or other e-reading devices. There was debate whether the demand for public computers would increase or decrease. Even with this new focus on online content, however participants thought that teens will still want access to printed books that they can browse, pick up, and flip through.

- **When today’s teens become college students, they expect to use their college library more than the public library.** Participants observed that they do not see many people in their early 20s in the Library. Some participants stated that while they would likely still use a library for academic research, recreational reading, and as a place to study, they would be more likely to use their college library than a public library.

How to More Effectively Reach Teens

- **More collaboration and information-sharing with schools.** Many participants stated that more communication with public and private schools would enable the Library to more effectively reach teens. Specific tactics include promoting Library resources to school counselors and teachers, morning announcements about Library offerings in home rooms, and posters and flyers on school bulletin boards.

- **More advertising.** Participants thought that the Library should conduct more advertising on TV, radio, and in libraries, bookstores, and community centers. SAT prep classes were cited as a particular service worth publicizing more.

- **More events that appeal to teens.** Some participants stated that more fun events, such as a scavenger hunt or a capture the flag event in the Central Library could bring more teens to the Library. Having food at events was another way to make events more appealing to teens.
Teen Service Providers Focus Group Summary

OVERVIEW

About The Focus Group

To inform its strategic planning process, The Seattle Public Library together with consultant Berk & Associates (BERK) conducted focus groups to solicit input from specific Library audiences. The objective of these focus groups was to learn how the Library can better serve specific populations, either directly or through collaboration with public-sector or community-based partners. The Library and teen librarians in particular are of course engaged in an ongoing process of working to improve our services to teens; the strategic planning process offered an opportunity to gather some of our current and future community partners and continue this conversation.

Julie Ann Oiye, Branch Regional Manager, facilitated a focus group with several community leaders who work with teenagers on June 29, 2010. Participants in the discussion are listed below.

- Allison Conner, Seattle Youth Tutoring Program (NewHolly campus)
- Jenny Frankl, Seattle Youth Commission
- Richard Gold, Pongo Publishing
- Chris Gustafson, Whitman Middle School
- Teri Hein, 826 Seattle
- Kyla Lackie, SOAR
- Marjean McCraw, Camp Fire USA, Central Puget Sound Council
- Chris Tugwell, Seattle YMCA
- Hassan Wardere, Horn of Africa Services
- Eric Wirkman, the Crisis Clinic

About this Summary

This summary is not a verbatim record of the conversation, focusing instead on those points of discussion that will be useful in developing the Library’s Strategic Plan.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Understanding the needs and interests of Seattle’s teens

Schools and learning

- Learning in school does not happen in silence anymore. Teens want to interact when they’re studying, and often need to work in groups. Two or more may need to use a computer together.

- The technology in the Seattle Public Schools is less than ideal, and there are limits on what students are allowed to do on school computers, so often teens need a place to access technology.

- High school students have requirements to complete community service hours to graduate.

Teens under stress

- Teens are figuring out who they are, and looking for safe places to be themselves.

- In this economy, teens find it difficult or impossible to find jobs. Many are worrying not just about how they can earn spending money, but about how their family is going to pay the bills.

- Homeless teens need to check email/Facebook, need books to read, and a place to go when they have to leave shelters during the day.

- Kids who are deeply upset from traumas at home don’t venture much into the community. They
expect to be judged and rejected wherever they go. They need people who respect the intense feelings they have and engage them in a respectful way.

- Young people who are immigrants or the children of immigrants need ways to assimilate rather than integrate, losing their heritage. There is a huge gap between the kids and their parents.

**What the Library is doing well to serve teens**

- The Library has an incredible opportunity to help young people understand how to do searches for information and how to be good consumers of internet information.

- The “Text a Librarian” service is great.

- Kids are really impressed when they discover the online homework help. It’s a great resource.

- The Library’s Teen E-News, with youth involved in writing the content, is a good idea. Other teens are more likely to read it when they see that. It’s also an effective way to get information out to agencies serving youth.

- It’s really helpful when Teen Services Librarians come to the schools. Teen librarians need to be where the kids are, to do outreach and build relationships.

- The Library provides customer service – which is something you don’t get from Google.

- Teen Center Advisors is a good leadership opportunity. Consider creating a teen advisor’s group at every branch to provide leadership opportunities.

**Suggestions for improvements to services**

**Make libraries more welcoming for teens**

- The Central Library is a great place for teens to meet, but it’s challenging to find a table where they can talk without being hushed. Teens also get hushed in some branch libraries.

- Create more study spaces along the lines of college library layouts, where a group could have the room to work together on a project.

- Cuts to Library hours impact teens, especially those who have no other access to broadband.

- Allow tweens (6th to 8th grade) to sign up for library cards without a parent signature so that the schools can more easily get them signed up when librarians visit.

**Develop more intergenerational programming**

- It would be helpful if the Library could provide more programming with a focus on the whole family, particularly for immigrants. Young people could interview parents or grandparents and write cultural pieces.

- Offer help sessions in the branch libraries designed for teens and their parents to jointly prepare the FAFSA application. This kind of “side-by-side” educational opportunity would be appreciated, especially if designed to include non-English speaking parents.

- Provide adults in the Library to be listeners for young people who don’t have families, and facilitate “useful writing.” Venues where kids can express themselves could include a bulletin board or online forum.
Continue to experiment with creative programming

- Provide opportunities for teens who have difficult home lives or other challenges to express themselves creatively.
- Provide more opportunities to involve teens in creating/designing programs, especially for kids who are younger than them. This will draw kids in, and provide an interesting way for them to complete volunteer requirements for high school. Invite school librarians to these events too.

Serve homeless youth more effectively

- The Central Library serves as an information portal for homeless youth. It is often the first place that they go to get information about available services. It would be an improvement if the Library could have ways they can access the information without having to interact with a person. Kids don’t want to ask for help, especially if they feel vulnerable.

Get the word out to teens

- There is a wealth of information on the Library’s website, but how many young people are actually aware of its existence? It’s especially important to do a better job of promoting the online homework help.
- Make sure announcements of opportunities for teens to get involved with Library activities “pop out” of the Teen ENews.
- Create a cool, state-of-the-art YouTube video made by teens to promote Library services and programs.
- Consider a different title for your Teen Librarians.
- Provide training to librarians so they understand how to work with teenagers.

Ideas for successful partnerships

- Being a good partner means that the Library should not duplicate services that are already available, but bolster those services and be willing to actively support them. Partnerships only work if both sides have something to offer. Examples:
  - Pongo has a website that features writing by and for young people who are in tough situations. Teen librarians could help more teens access the website.
  - 826 Seattle works with schools to help teens to write books, including some that tell their parents’ stories. The library branch closest to a participating school could feature the books that the kids write, and even have people at the branches write their own endings to stories.
  - Work with school art teachers to showcase teen art in the libraries.
- It is crucial to communicate constantly about shared goals. There should be a point person in charge of any partnership to keep everyone on track.
- Make the Central Library Level 4 meeting rooms available to youth groups at low/no cost.
- The Library could sponsor an annual forum where partner agencies could get together to share information and ideas.
- The Library should send representatives to the King County Youth Development Network, which hosts monthly meetings. That will help the Library to learn about what services are offered in the community and provide a way for the Library to keep agencies informed about Library resources.
Older Adults Service Providers Focus Group Summary

OVERVIEW

About The Focus Group

To inform its strategic planning process, The Seattle Public Library together with consultant Berk & Associates (BERK) conducted focus groups to solicit input from specific Library audiences. The objective of these focus groups was to learn how the Library can better serve specific populations, either directly or through collaboration with public-sector or community-based partners. The Library is engaged in an ongoing process of working to improve our services to older adults; the strategic planning process offered an opportunity to gather some of our current and future community partners and continue this conversation.

Julie Ann Oiye, Branch Regional Manager, facilitated a focus group with several community leaders from the public and nonprofit sector who work with older adults on June 29, 2010. Participants in the discussion are listed below.

- Margaret Casey, Seattle Department of Human Services (DHS) Aging & Disability Services
- Dolly Castillo, International Drop-In Center
- Irene Chen, International Community Health Services
- Mary Dalzell, Seattle Department of Parks & Recreation Lifelong Recreation Program
- Timmie Faghin, Advisory Committee Chair, DHS Aging & Disability Services
- Robin Knudsen, Solid Ground Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP)
- Sara Ortner, DHS Aging & Disability Services Seattle Housing Authority (SHA) team
- Pam Piering, DHS Aging & Disability Services
- Irene Stewart, Mayor’s Office for Senior Citizens
- Waing Waing, Senior Services of Seattle/King County

About this Summary

This summary is not a verbatim record of the conversation, focusing instead on those points of discussion that will be useful in developing the Library’s Strategic Plan.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Understanding some of the needs and interests of Seattle’s older adults

Computers and technology

- Online access is an important tool for getting people engaged with everything from crafts and hobbies to current events and community events.
- One of the biggest challenges faced by older adults is the expense of buying a computer for home access to the internet.
- Homebound older adults need access not only to technology, but also to computer instruction where they live.
Caregivers

- Caregivers need attention and support – both adult children caring for older parents and grandparents/relatives providing “kinship care” for their grandchildren/younger relations.

Intergenerational activities

- There is a great desire among older adults for ways to connect with younger family and community members. This is particularly evident among immigrant seniors.
- Older adults tend to be very interested in “organizing their lives” to pass down to their families.

What the Library is doing well to serve older adults

- The Library is seen as a community hub by seniors – a “bumping place” for intergenerational contacts. This view of the Library was noted at the recent “Aging Your Way” sessions hosted by Senior Services. The Library is doing a good job of providing intergenerational opportunities and programs that appeal to people in different stages of life.
- Book clubs are very popular with older adults, especially those with librarians to facilitate. It is helpful that the Library provides books for book clubs.
- It is good that the Library hosts Worksource programs. Some older adults (and other people) find libraries to be a safer and less intimidating place to come for job resources than a State office or other resource.
- The day that Medicare Plan D came out, one senior center put together a group to meet at the Central Library so they could provide assistance with medical plan changes using online tools. This is an example of seniors without computer access at home obtaining access and assistance through a partner agency at the library.
- Scheduling programs that might appeal to older adults at midday helps retired people to pace their days and get some social contact during the day.
- Older adults respect the tradition of the Library as a free institution.
- Volunteer opportunities at the Library are attractive to many older adults.
- The bulletin boards at branch libraries are helpful to the community.

Suggestions for improvements to services

Library resources

- Neighborhood libraries could be the repositories of the living history of each neighborhood.
- Provide more large print books and books-on-tape.
- It would be helpful to seniors if the Library would keep older formats in the collection for people who have not adopted new technology [i.e. VHS tapes].
- Provide online resources geared specifically to the needs of older adults.
Programming

- Create intergenerational events, such as one sponsored by the Seattle Public Schools that brought teens to senior centers to talk to WWII veterans. The teens wrote booklets based on their conversations. Many grandparents are providing full- or part-time child care for their grandchildren. Pair story times with programming for older adults.

- Offer classes on genealogy, as well as on organizing and scanning photos. There may be certain programs that would be too costly for the Library to provide for free (such as providing materials for photo albums). In such cases, people might be willing to pay for materials, though this goes against the tradition of the Library as a free resource. Seek grants and corporate sponsors if possible.

- The Library is a logical place to help people develop the skill sets needed for life review and recording of personal histories.

- Look for opportunities for librarians to come out into the community and talk to groups.

- Offer programs to groups who organize a visit to the Library, such as tours or classes.

- Provide a lecture series that would be held over lunch at an off-site location. It’s important for older adults to have this kind of social activity. Senior centers could partner to put this together.

- Investigate the possibility of a public access TV channel just for The Seattle Public Library. Many people have televisions and could access this material without needing to acquire special equipment. Broadcast book talks and partner with Town Hall to broadcast some of their events.

- Look for ways to help people create “intentional community.” For example, provide a way for people who want to learn how to knit to connect with people who want to teach or hold knitting circles, potentially using Library meeting rooms.

- Arts and older adults are a natural combination. The libraries are houses for art, and are also works of art themselves. Create and promote art-related dialogues and tours.

- Consider renting out space when the buildings are closed.

Technology

- It would be helpful, especially to homebound older adults, if the Library could enable people to check out technology.

- Simplify use of the online catalog and other resources by allowing people to log in using a screen name and password rather than barcode number and pin.

- The Library could stock power strips so more people could plug their devices in.

- Provide opportunities for older adults to learn about new technology such as e-readers, especially in terms of how they can use the technology to access Library materials.

Get the word out to older adults

- Older adults would benefit from targeted marketing using multiple avenues to deliver the information, with the goal of increasing their awareness of materials available online and events sponsored by the Library.

- Many seniors listen to KUOW, so the Library should use that as an outreach resource.
• Elders look at coupons, so consider using the ValPak ad system to reach older adults.

• Consider organizing promotional publications by activity type (like the Department of Parks and Recreation Lifelong Recreation Program publications).

• Seattle already has an amazing network for aging adults. The Library should take advantage of this resource by providing information on resources and programming to organizations that have newsletters that go out to older adults.

Ideas for successful partnerships

• The Library can help to reinforce messages on subjects like healthy aging by providing links to the best websites and hosting lectures. It might be possible to address monthly themes using multiple agencies.

• Improve the distribution system among Library facilities for agency newsletters. Agencies now have to deliver newsletters to each site and work with the staff at that location to make their newsletter available. KCLS has a system that is easier for agencies to use and some branches also have a bulletin board dedicated to information for seniors.

• Lifelong learning is so important. The Library should investigate partnering with university extension programs and community colleges, which are already tailoring their options for older adults. Could the Library figure out a way to share what is available through these entities more widely?

• Partnering with the City’s Department of Parks and Recreation could be a way to bring older adults to Library programs as DPR has vehicles that could be used.

• Consider partnering with the Seattle Art Museum or Benaroya Hall for art or music talks. The symphony could bring visiting performers into the Library. Look for ways to make these programs intergenerational.

• The Library should make a connection with the AARP’s Title 5 program which provides older adults with subsidized employment and volunteer opportunities.

• Regarding partnerships in general, agencies are looking for clarity about roles. A memorandum of understanding can help achieve that. There needs to be time for the relationship to build, as well as dedicated, consistent interactions.

• It would be helpful if the Library had a single contact person for partnership agencies to reach out to for programming, events, and resources related to older adults.
Immigrant and Refugee Service Providers Focus Group Summary

OVERVIEW

About The Focus Group

To inform its strategic planning process, The Seattle Public Library together with consultant Berk & Associates (BERK) conducted focus groups to solicit input from specific Library audiences. The objective of these focus groups was to learn how the Library can better serve specific populations, either directly or through collaboration with public-sector or community-based partners. The Library is engaged in an ongoing process of working to improve our services to Seattle’s immigrant and refugee populations; the strategic planning process offered an opportunity to gather some of our current and future community partners and continue this conversation.

Brian Murphy of BERK facilitated a focus group with participation by community leaders who work with immigrants and refugees on June 29, 2010. Theresa Mayer, Library Outreach Services Manager, assembled the group and helped to facilitate. Participants in the discussion are listed below.

- Javier Amaya, Public Health – Seattle & King County
- Pang Chang, School’s Out Washington
- Boliver Choi, Chinese Information and Service Center
- Sara Elefson, Literacy Council of Seattle
- John Forsyth, Seattle Housing Authority
- Emily Gaggia, Casa Latina
- S. James Kessler, El Centro de la Raza
- Yong Lim Oshie, Asian Counseling and Referral Service
- Jorge M. Gonzalez, El Centro de la Raza
- Jenny McIntosh, Literacy Source
- Asha Mohamed, Seattle Housing Authority
- Phung Nguyen, Vietnamese Friendship Association
- Shukri Olow, Neighborhood House
- Julie Pham, Northwest Vietnamese News
- Katie Pickard, Literacy Source
- Sue Siegenthaler, Atlantic Street Center
- Tsege Tsegay, Refugee Women’s Alliance
- Sharon Victor, Literacy Council of Seattle

About this Summary

This summary is not a verbatim record of the conversation, focusing instead on those points of discussion that will be useful in developing the Library’s Strategic Plan.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Understanding the needs and interests of Seattle’s immigrant and refugee communities

Education and literacy – for all age levels

- ESL classes for adults are very important to immigrant communities. More than in the past, basic English is needed to get a job. Community college ESL classes always have long waiting lists.
- Tutoring and mentorship for older youth, and early learning opportunities are important.
- There is a great desire for literacy in native languages in the community, but few resources to support it.
Immigrant communities would value parent education classes, including how to bridge the generation gap and how to read to children.

**Employment needs and practical skills**
- Employment is much more difficult now than in the past, especially for limited English-speakers.
- Computer skills, vocational training, resume writing, job seeking for entry-level and day labor jobs are all needs.
- More job applications are now done online. People need help learning how to do this. They also need enough time on a computer to complete the applications.

**Preserving and celebrating cultural heritage – intergenerational relationships**
- Immigrants want to pass on their language and culture on to their children.
- There is a disconnect between immigrant youth and their parents. Youth are not in touch with their roots. Adults often aren’t fluent in English, and know less about American systems.

**Basic needs and navigating systems**
- Many immigrants need help in navigating social service, health care, housing and employment systems, as well as resources related to legal issues and immigration.
- Recent immigrants need to learn how to navigate transportation: how to take the bus, how to get around town.

**Understanding and awareness from staff or service providers**
- “Refugees” are different from “immigrants,” and within each of these broad categories there are many groups and a wide range of individual life experiences. We need to be aware of the commonalities and differences.
- Immigrants and refugees alike are sometimes uncomfortable about being asked for identification.

**Communication presents a barrier to library use by immigrants**
- Immigrant adults and ESL students simply don’t know what is available at the Library. “If I didn’t speak English and I wanted to learn, the Library is not the first place I would look.”
- Those who do enter the library are often unsure about how to get help or what to do. They look for staff who speak their language or with whom they have a trust relationship.
- Service providers want assurance that if they refer their clients to the library, they will receive patient, thoughtful, friendly, culturally-appropriate service. Is there, “some sort of script to give people so they know what to ask for if they go to the library and can’t find someone who speaks their language?” Not all service providers are aware of the Language Line service at the Library.
- Communicating over the phone is challenging for people with limited English proficiency. People are very hesitant to call the library for fear of reaching an automated recording or an English speaker who will not understand them.
- The lack of bilingual staff is one reason older adults don’t frequent the Library.
- Suggestions for enhancements and improvements to services
- Be able to provide the information that immigrants need
Ensure staff can give appropriate referrals. “How many library staff know what resources are available for people who don’t speak English? If you go to the wrong desk will people be helpful?”

Finding practical resources can be challenging for immigrants. Libraries could host regular resource fairs with agencies, and maintain up-to-date information/about local resources to provide to patrons.

Another idea was to have a resource room where, on a set schedule, people could meet with agency representatives.

Approach new and non-library users

Get out from behind the desk. “When you come to the Library, you always have to come to the desk to ask for help. It would be good to have staff greet people, not just sit behind the desk.”

Get out into the communities. “What about vans that go out with books to areas of town with low Library use?” Offer smaller satellites or mobile library collections where people live or congregate.

Put fliers in local ethnic newspapers.

Respond to the needs of individual neighborhoods

Allocate resources based on the needs of each neighborhood. Give branches the freedom to respond to local community needs. For example, put library computer labs in neighborhoods that don’t have them—fill the gap.

Material in other languages is important, and should be appropriate to changing demographics. For example, one branch has English and Spanish collections, but the population has become more Somali and Vietnamese. (In this case, the branch being referenced was the King County Library System’s Greenbridge Branch in White Center.)

Offer small classes in all locations “because the local Library is a place where people feel comfortable.”

Increase accessibility for older generations

There is a perception that the Library is a place for youth. Young people come to do their homework or meet with their friends. Parents and older individuals tend not to use the Library as much, but that is because they need help understanding their roles and becoming aware of what the library offers. “If they can’t read or write, they step back. But being present in the Library with their children would make a difference for their children. The Library needs to help adults find a meaningful role.”

Outreach is needed to make adults more aware of relevant resources, raising parents’ awareness, for example, of the children’s world languages collections.

Provide information in many languages

The Library should keep working on diversifying staff, supporting bi-lingual staff, and encouraging staff language learning. Being functional in a second language will be important for the staff in the next 10-15 years.

Maintain strong language collections to promote literacy in home languages and connection to ethnic heritage.
Develop liaisons who can help immigrants connect with the library

- Have “volunteer navigators,” bilingual staff, or community partners who can help orient people to the library and raise awareness about services.
- Develop a conduit for the community to provide feedback and suggestions to the Library.
- Provide Library volunteer opportunities for community members (for example, storytelling, mentoring, offering bilingual orientations).

Offer programming that responds to immigrants’ needs and interests

- Provide convenient locations and times for classes. Determine the best time that works for immigrant adults.
- Story time would draw more people if it had some diversity in who is leading the sessions. To help children keep their language the Library could have a story time with Somali elders reading to their kids. This would create a sense of respect for elders. It could be appropriate for Vietnamese, Ethiopian, and other groups too.
- There is an opportunity to use peer mentors with youth. “When I go to the public library there are a bunch of East African kids hanging outside. These kids are feeling lost. They don’t have anyone who knows what they are going through. If there were mentors [from their own community] in the Library who would build relationships with the kids inside the Library, that would help.”
- Host discussions on topics of interest and current issues.
- Provide more technology resources, for example, more computer labs and free classes, and Amharic fonts for patrons and partners.

Other

- Citizenship resources are really popular.
- Cuts to hours have resulted in reduced programming or changes to class times. Inconsistent scheduling reduces attendance.

Ideas for successful partnerships between the Library and community-based organizations

Augment existing services with library services

- In same way that homework help augments what youth learn in school, resume workshops can supplement what is offered through more traditional job training channels or through community-based organizations. This is not competition but collaboration. Still, it is important for the Library to be aware of what other groups are offering, as well as when and where it is available.
- Be more proactive about showing people how to use the resources in the Library. Initiate ‘train the trainer’ programs. For example staff could come to agencies and help ESL teachers find materials they can use.
- Distribute more up-to-date information on services available at the Library, and do more outreach to agencies.

Offer Library space for programming by partners

- The Library should give space priority to community partners that are teaching language, citizenship, or other high-need subjects. When hours are cut, do not cut into these programs.
Use community organizations to provide services to library users

- Contract with community organizations to offer skills workshops at the Library.
- Until individuals have a certain comfort level in English, they need someone to intercede for them. The ethnic community-based organizations groups can play this role.
- Provide access to our agencies’ resources — for example, basic health information

Be sure that staff can provide good referrals, know the language

- The Library staff should have deep knowledge of outside resources and provide referrals to appropriate organizations that can help patrons in their own languages.

Work and plan collaboratively with community organizations

- At some local branches the Library staff are at the table as collaborators, they go into the community and know what is happening. (The staff at NewHolly and High Point Branches were specifically mentioned.) That model should be supported system wide.
- If the Library could be an advocate for organizations we could accomplish something more holistic.
- Partnership takes more than meeting once a year. We need to meet regularly to talk about needs in the community. We all have common goals to create vibrant, safe and friendly community for our clients, and we need to turn that interest into action.
Service Providers for People who are Homeless
Focus Group Summary

OVERVIEW

About The Focus Group

To inform its strategic planning process, The Seattle Public Library together with consultant Berk & Associates (BERK) conducted focus groups to solicit input from specific Library audiences. The objective of these focus groups was to learn how the Library can better serve specific populations, either directly or through collaboration with public-sector or community-based partners. The Library is engaged in an ongoing process of working to improve our services for all users; the strategic planning process offered an opportunity to gather some of our current and future community partners and continue this conversation.

Marilynne Gardner, Administrative Services Director, facilitated a focus group with several community leaders who work with people who are homeless, mentally ill and/or chemically dependent in the Seattle area on June 30, 2010. Participants in the discussion are listed below

- **Margo Burnison**, Homeless Outreach Stabilization and Transition (HOST) Program, Downtown Emergency Service Center
- **Ronni Gilboa**, Urban Rest Stop
- **Jim Miller**, The Millionair Club
- **Chloe Gale**, REACH Project, Evergreen Treatment Services

About this Summary

This summary is not a verbatim record of the conversation, focusing instead on those points of discussion that will be useful in developing the Library’s Strategic Plan. An invitation was extended to a larger group, but scheduling conflicts prevented others from attending this session. A draft of this summary was sent to a wider group of service providers. Their feedback indicated a general agreement with the points that were raised, and recognition of the importance of the Library to many of the people they serve.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

What role does the Library play in your clients’ lives?

- The Library serves a variety of needs: shelter during bad weather; a place to have some quiet; a place to read and be safe; resource for computers and books; access to information; and restrooms. There is always something to do. Free paperback exchange is also a valued program.
- SPL could look to the Vancouver Public Library, which is playing a new civic role in the community. Some VPL branches are co-located with service providers, including day shelters, and some branches arrange for case managers to be present in the libraries as a resource for patrons. VPL emphasizes service to patrons who are homeless.
- There is “a great hunger” for books and reading materials among patrons who are homeless. If the Library has extra books to donate, Urban Rest Stop would welcome them. URS provides periodicals, paperbacks, and children’s materials reflecting a range of interests, many of which are donated by Half-Price Books. The materials are made available in their waiting area.
What trends have you noticed in the communities you serve?

- The number of war veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan is increasing. Providers are seeing soldiers returning with many different types of traumatic injuries, and seeing younger veterans.

- Service providers are seeing more families traveling year-round, rather than just in the milder weather and non-school months. Ten years ago it was relatively rare to see homeless families in the winter time.

- More people are charging their cell phones at the library and other public spaces. The Library should be sure to have consistent rules to ensure that patrons are treated fairly and equally. Shelters don’t always allow people to charge cell phones.

What are barriers that can affect your clients’ use of the Library?

Behavioral/Conduct Barriers

- Participants have not heard from their clients that the Library is unwelcoming, and voiced appreciation that the Library security manager attended a Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness meeting to discuss the revised rules of conduct.

- The bag rule acts as a barrier to access for those whose backpacks/bags contain all their possessions, and “the library is closed off” to people who have nowhere to store their belongings.
  - The personal articles rule from the Rules of Conduct prohibits “bringing in items excluding personal items (purse, laptop, briefcase) that occupy floor space in excess of 14”W x17” H x 20”. Items are measured in totality and must be placed and fit easily into a measuring box of the above dimensions.”

- Patrons with mental illness or with a low tolerance for crowds of people may be responding to internal stimuli, and exhibit behaviors that disrupt the library environment.

- Patrons who are homeless are unlikely to use the exclusion appeals process, and have little trust that such a process will be fair to them. Between police sweeps of homeless camps and the new rules imposed by King County Metro and the Parks Department, people who are homeless do not feel welcomed or valued by agencies. Patrons experiencing homelessness may also believe that certain rules are particularly directed at homeless Library users.

Other Barriers to Access

- The Millionair Club has seen an increase in requests for appointments at their eye clinic, and noted that uncorrected vision is another potential barrier to use of Library materials among patrons who are low-income and/or homeless.

- Fines are a major barrier to use of the Library. Agencies could assist patrons in setting up a payment plan or appealing for fine forgiveness. [Note: Staff pointed out that online resources are still available to patrons whose fines are too high to checkout materials.]
Suggestions for improvements to services

Make libraries more welcoming and train staff to engage

- The people enforcing the rules should resemble the patronage as much as possible. Bilingual security staff would be very helpful.

- Train staff in self-protection and de-escalation techniques so that staff will feel comfortable and confident engaging with all patrons.

Create programming that is tailored to the needs of patrons who are homeless

- Provide information and services for patrons who are homeless or low income. An example of helpful programming would be tabling by pro-bono attorneys explaining how to apply for social security, especially important now with limits imposed upon the Disability Lifeline program (formerly General Assistance- Unemployable).

Get the word out about how to use Library services

- Participants estimated that many clients don’t have online access or familiarity with online tools. If the Library created an email list of homeless and emergency service providers and sent the providers updates about upcoming events, the agencies could post information on bulletin boards and include it in calendars they distribute.

- Work with the providers to educate their clients about Library services. Agencies regularly meet with their clients, and the Library could send presenters to explain processes like getting Library cards and accessing other Library resources.
  
  o Join the outreach/provider meetings to communicate with a large group of providers all together, rather than individual agencies.

- Educate about the wide variety of services offered by the Library and reach out, because “people forget they can use the Library as a resource.” Highlight relevant resources: Talk Time, employment center, computer classes, programming related to health information, housing and tenants’ rights, other free events.

Ideas for successful partnerships

- Create a referral service center where people can ask about resources they need.
  
  o Set up a computer kiosk where patrons can make appointments with service providers. Provide bilingual/multilingual staff support to guide patrons in how to connect with services and use service provider directories such as the Crisis Clinic. Advertise this service in Real Change.

  o Create a dedicated, centralized space where patrons could access social services print materials.

- Invite social workers to come in and work with patrons. Develop a relationship between security officers and outreach staff from the agencies, who could engage with patrons in a different direction.
  
  o Some agencies already come into libraries on their own as a form of outreach, often without alerting Library staff to their presence.

  o A few years ago, one of the focus group participants trained Library security officers on working with patrons who are mentally ill.
• Publish a “How to Use the Library” print guide and distribute it through the agencies, as well as at the Library.

• Use “Start Here” messaging to move beyond the “book as the brand” and inform people of the many services provided by the Library. Change the perception - - be seen as a “connector hub” in the community.

• At the neighborhood branches, make public services staff aware of the resources in the community, and create resource lists for staff. Ask agency outreach workers to drop in, introduce themselves and discuss services offered.
  o Outreach workers may be coming in to branches to work with patrons already, but may not be contacting staff.

• Use the Mobile Services van to bring book donations to Tent City or elsewhere.

**Other Feedback**

• The Library could provide a very helpful service to the agencies by developing a grant resource center for nonprofits, similar to what KCLS (Redmond) has created. The key components of that service are access to databases, excellent search functionality, and a staff person guiding use of the databases.
Children’s Service Providers Focus Group Summary

OVERVIEW

About The Focus Group

To inform its strategic planning process, The Seattle Public Library together with consultant Berk & Associates (BERK) conducted focus groups to solicit input from specific Library audiences. The objective of these focus groups was to learn how the Library can better serve specific populations, either directly or through collaboration with public-sector or community-based partners. The Library is engaged in an ongoing process of working to improve our services to children; the strategic planning process offered an opportunity to gather some of our current and future community partners and continue this conversation.

Julie Ann Oiye, Branch Regional Manager, facilitated a focus group with several community leaders from the public and nonprofit sector who work with children on June 30, 2010. Participants in the discussion are listed below.

- **Analia Castanos**, Southwest Youth and Family Services
- **Linda Morgan**, ParentMap
- **Glen Osborn**, School’s Out Washington
- **Mohamed Roble**, Seattle Public Schools
- **Monica Wort**, Seattle Parks and Recreation Department

About this Summary

This summary is not a verbatim record of the conversation, focusing instead on those points of discussion that will be useful in developing the Library’s Strategic Plan.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Understanding some of the needs and interests of Seattle’s children

- There is a lot of pressure for kids to succeed coming from parents and schools. The schools have more and more testing. There is also pressure for children to participate in more and more activities.
- Many children are living in multiple families. There are many single mothers and grandparents raising their grandchildren.
- Many children do not have a key to their home, so they come to community centers and libraries to hang out because they have no place else to go.
- The streets are not a playground like they used to be. Children need a place where they can get together to socialize and play. The lack of places to play leads to health and emotional problems.
- Seattle has significant immigrant and refugee populations. The children in these families need to have their perspective and heritage represented in institutions like the library.
- Some children do not have access to technology at home.
- Many parents are too busy or stressed to focus on parenting. As a result, young teenagers are not getting the basic parenting they need. That affects how they interact with other people, and can
lead to behavioral issues.

- On average, children spend five hours per day in front of the television.

**What the Library is doing well to serve children**

- The Library is a place where children can work on their technology literacy and learn safe practices for use of the internet.
- The Library is an equalizer across differences.
- The Library provides opportunities for kids to explore books that provide an alternative to gazing at T.V. and computer screens. It is a counterbalance to the high speed of children’s lives.
- Students get help from the Library.
- The Library provides a safe place where children can get together to socialize and play (as long as there isn’t too much emphasis on keeping quiet).
- People come to the Library for the resources, but also to connect with other people.

**Suggestions for improvements to services**

- Some parents have not taken their children to the Library because they don’t understand what to do there. Monthly orientations in various languages at each library would be helpful. (One focus group participant took a group of Latina mothers to the Central Library, showed them books in Spanish and other resources. The mothers were excited once they understood what was available.)

- Greater consistency and predictability of Library programming would help service providers to take advantage of the Library. Agency staff who are trying to plan activities find it difficult when programs come and go. For example, a few years ago as part of summer reading there was bilingual theatrical story-telling. It lasted for awhile, then disappeared. The same thing happened with ESL classes and tutoring sessions at certain branches. The Library could build the population who take advantage of a program by providing greater predictability.

- Repetition of events is a good idea. By providing alternative times for people to attend, you benefit from word-of-mouth and have a better chance of fitting into the program schedules of groups that might incorporate Library programming into their activities.

- The Library should work with immigrant and refugee parents. Most do not have library cards. Classes such as ESL, citizenship and job search assistance can bring parents in, who will bring their children along.

- Provide opportunities for immigrant parents to teach their own culture. Many come from cultures where there is a tradition of storytelling.

- Be more proactive in making connections with staff at the City’s Community Centers. The Assistant Coordinators organize activities. There could be opportunities to enhance community center programming with Library resources. If a community center sponsors a hip hop class, they might want to help kids research the history of hip hop or learn about how it’s good for your body.

- Children are always looking for new electronic games to play. That would be a good way to reach them, and even to teach them.

- There is a need for more material in world languages and children’s books from different cultures.
(African in particular). Some branches have it, others don’t.

- Consider race and social justice in determining Library priorities.
- Provide parenting education.

**Get the word out to children, their parents, and service providers**

- The Library needs to build better connections with neighborhood schools, so that both sides promote each others’ programs.
- The Library could start a service provider update email service, with information particularly tailored for agencies that serve youth, organized so that it’s easy to scan what might be relevant to a program director. Busy people do not want to wade through a lot of information. Facebook and Twitter could also be used, but again should be broken out by specific age groups.
- The Library should blog and invite kids to blog back.
- Ideally find staff who speak the language of immigrant communities to serve as liaisons with those communities. The School district has four outreach staffers who speak a variety of languages.
- Be sure that ParentMap hears about Library activities and programs.

**Ideas for successful partnerships**

- Outreach with diverse communities tends to be driven by relationships. Librarians need to get out to community centers and neighborhood events in a “real” way, like helping to host the event or presenting a portion of the program.
- Find ways to take advantage of the assets of each party to a partnership. For example, the Northgate Community Center has a bigger meeting space than the Library, so the Library uses the Community Center for its very large reading program. On the other hand, in some neighborhoods the Library has meeting space that is needed by the community. Each group in the partnership needs to have something significant to bring to the table.
- Clear communication is essential to successful partnerships.
- Provide ongoing opportunities for groups like this focus group to communicate with the Library.