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Lee is reading *The House of Mirth* by Edith Wharton and *Dry Storerroom No. 1: The Secret Life of the Natural History Museum* by Richard Fortey.

Special thanks to Lisa Kavanagh, program manager at the H.O.M.E. Page Café, and Kathleen Dougherty, assistant vice president for communications and development at the Free Library of Philadelphia Foundation, for graciously providing lengthy interviews in order to share the story of the development of the H.O.M.E. Page Café project.

“Bringing in the Money” presents fund-raising strategies for public libraries. Many librarians are turning to alternative funding sources to supplement shrinking budgets. Fund-raising efforts not only boost finances, but also leverage community support and build collaborative strategies.

# The Story of the H.O.M.E. Page Café

*The more complex societies get . . . the more people are forced in their own interests to find non-zero-sum solutions. That is, win-win solutions instead of win-lose solutions. . . . Because we find as our interdependence increases that, on the whole, we do better when other people do better as well—so we have to find ways that we can all win.—Former U.S. President Bill Clinton<sup>1</sup>*

**A**t its worst, fund-raising is a zero-sum game. If a library gets a grant, it means that another non-profit agency doesn't. The quest for money devolves into a Darwinian struggle for survival of the fittest. Conversely, at its best, fund-raising is all about finding win-win solutions.

## Homelessness and the Library

This column is about the development of creative solutions to disturbing, seemingly intractable problems. The story of the H.O.M.E. Page Café demonstrates the surprising benefits of facing difficult issues head-on, as well as the remarkable potential of interagency collaborations.

It begins on the streets of Philadelphia, although it could just as easily have begun in any one of thousands of other towns and cities throughout the country. Homelessness is not limited to Philadelphia. Not by a long shot. But it is certainly an ongoing problem in Philadelphia, including along the Benjamin Franklin Parkway and Vine Street area where the Parkway Central Branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia (FLP) is located.

Like many libraries, the Parkway Central Branch of FLP has struggled with the problem of homelessness for many years. It's the mission of public libraries to serve the entire community, and this includes the existing homeless population by nearly any definition. But, realistically, it's not that easy to be welcoming to a segment that often makes other patrons . . . uncomfortable.

Homeless people come to the library for shelter, to rest, use the restrooms, and to clean themselves. They come to visit with others in a safe environment. In some cases, they come to read and to learn. And sometimes they come simply to escape from the street.

Patrons make assumptions about who is homeless and who is not, based on stereotypes. The assumptions might not be true, but the perceptions are undeniable and can affect whether a patron returns or even whether the patron will allow their children to visit the library. If families feel the library is a dangerous place, they won't return.

Several years ago, FLP staff and board members fearlessly confronted this problem. Their goal was to make the library experience as comfortable as possible for all patrons, but without abandoning the homeless population that is a genuine, undeniable component of the Philadelphia community. The library needed affordable, creative ideas.

Problems related to homelessness resided throughout the entire library building, but it's rarely practical to look for large-scale solutions to broad problems. Instead, FLP wisely chose to engage the issue by looking at the component parts and choosing to initially address one seemingly small aspect of it. They started by focusing on the bathrooms.

## The Restroom Attendant Solution

Word naturally spreads through homeless populations regarding the available bathroom facilities in their area. Public libraries are, by definition, open to the public. Once you're in, you're a patron and allowed to use the restrooms. Libraries aren't like restaurants, which can legally

refuse restroom use to non-patrons. Patrons are all the people in the library, and not just those with money and homes. Homeless people know they can't be denied access to these bathrooms.

The main restrooms at the Parkway Central Branch are located on the basement level. The FLP board and staff realized that the homeless had a right to use their restrooms, but also that this right could be abused. The library restrooms were never intended for bathing, but a number of homeless people had started to use the facilities to serve their bathing needs. Other patrons were complaining. There was widespread agreement within the library that this was inappropriate, but any solutions had to be legal, ethical, and in line with the library's mission to serve the entire community.

If FLP had continued to endlessly wrestle with these tricky homeless questions on their own, they probably never would have moved forward. The staff members were very knowledgeable about library management, but had little first-hand knowledge about strategies to deal with homelessness. However, being librarians, they had some ideas about where to find answers. And board members brought their knowledge of other city nonprofit organizations to the table.

FLP called in outside experts, and a first-rate collaboration was born.

## Collaboration and Fund-raising

FLP enlisted the guidance of staff at Project H.O.M.E., a nonprofit organization dedicated to ending homelessness in Philadelphia.

Project H.O.M.E. saw opportunities for doing real outreach through

the FLP situation. Their occupational services program staff members—who assist formerly homeless people by providing employment and educational opportunities—proposed to train a team of formerly homeless people, currently living in supportive housing through Project H.O.M.E., to work as restroom attendants at FLP. The restroom attendant responsibilities would be to report any illegal activity to library security, perform light cleaning, and serve as a friendly referral service to homeless people in need of outreach services.

FLP reaped the benefits from this work at virtually no expense. Project H.O.M.E. ran the funding through an existing channel of municipal support for homeless training programs. The restroom attendant program benefited the homeless, the City of Philadelphia, and Project H.O.M.E., as well as the library. The library's problem had flipped from being an internal weakness to a community strength, all because of the willingness to collaborate.

The restroom attendant program was launched near the end of 2006. It is still going strong. Nine part-time attendants are currently employed through the program. Success is evaluated through employment retention, personal growth as measured through performance reviews, and successful movement to employment outside the Project H.O.M.E. system.

Based on the immediate success of this program, FLP and Project H.O.M.E. embarked on another, more ambitious, collaboration.

## The Café Solution

In recent years, many libraries have experimented with the addition of in-house cafés, usually launched in the hope of bringing new rev-

enue into the library system. In some cases, libraries lease space to an outside firm that assumes full responsibility for management of the café space. In other cases, the library designs the café and manages it through volunteer or staff time. With both approaches, the financial results have been mixed. Some library cafés have been great successes while others have been disappointing drains on limited resources.

The FLP's Parkway Central Branch had planned for a café that would be a key element in an upcoming major architectural expansion. But that would mean waiting around five years, and an alternative proposal was floated to move ahead with a café prior to the ambitious expansion.

Project H.O.M.E. offered to develop a new program where the primary purpose of the library's café would not be to raise money for the library, but rather to provide on-the-job training for formerly homeless people. Project H.O.M.E. agreed to raise funding for the project, and the library committed to using their

architect and staff to create a suitable space for the café within the library.

In 2007, Project H.O.M.E. staff wrote a grant request to the Bank of America for \$200,000 and it was swiftly approved. The grant covered design costs and all materials. The library committed to donating the cost of labor to build the space.

Two more important collaborators were recruited at an early stage. Starbucks committed to providing the coffee equipment and espresso machine, as well as an initial sixteen-hour training session for the employees. Metropolitan Bakery, an acclaimed Philadelphia business specializing in old-world-style breads and known for their commitment to social causes, supplied the baked goods and ongoing retail training.

The H.O.M.E. Page Café officially opened in early spring 2008, quickly establishing a following among library staff, patrons looking for good food and coffee, and socially minded patrons who are proud to support a good cause. In one recent month,

the café served more than three thousand customers. Revenue generated through the café goes to Project H.O.M.E., which has set a goal of having the café self-sufficient within four years. But the real purpose, of course, is to help the employees as they learn marketable skills and move ahead with the task of putting their lives back together.

## Lessons to be Learned

Most libraries look at cafés as potential revenue generators. Often, they are disappointed. FLP avoided this pitfall by emphasizing the social service aspect of this business venture.

Through collaboration, FLP was able to design and build a handsome new café for their patrons for only the cost of the labor of in-house library staff. Then they reaped the benefits of all the publicity that the innovative project generated.

In nonprofit agencies, the fundraising arm usually goes by the fancier name of "development department." This is because fundraising is really just one tool within the arsenal of strategies that can develop programs and grow healthy organizations. With the development of the H.O.M.E. Page Café project, FLP offers an apt demonstration of how creative thinking and collaboration can be just as important as the actual task of "bringing in the money." ■

## References

1. Karen Breslau and Katrina Heron Wired, "The Debriefing: Bill Clinton," *Wired* 8, no. 12 (Dec. 2000), [www.wired.com/wired/archive/8.12/clinton.html](http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/8.12/clinton.html) (accessed Nov. 10, 2008).

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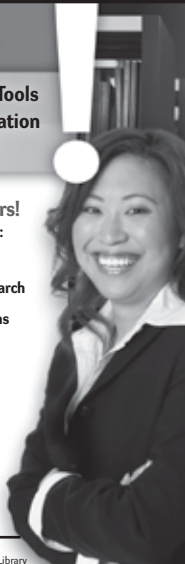
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