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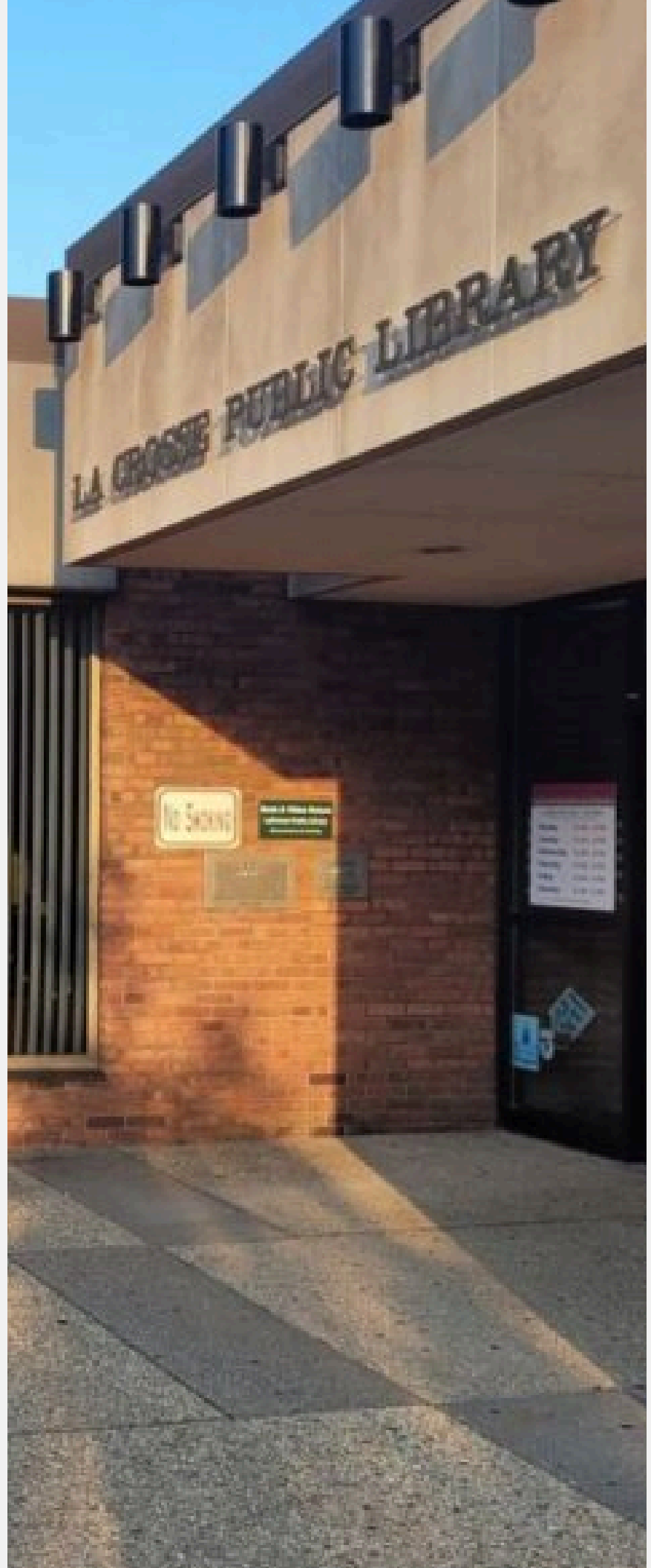
DEI NEWSLETTER

**HOUSING INSECURITY &
HOUSING JUSTICE**

APRIL 2024

what's in this newsletter?

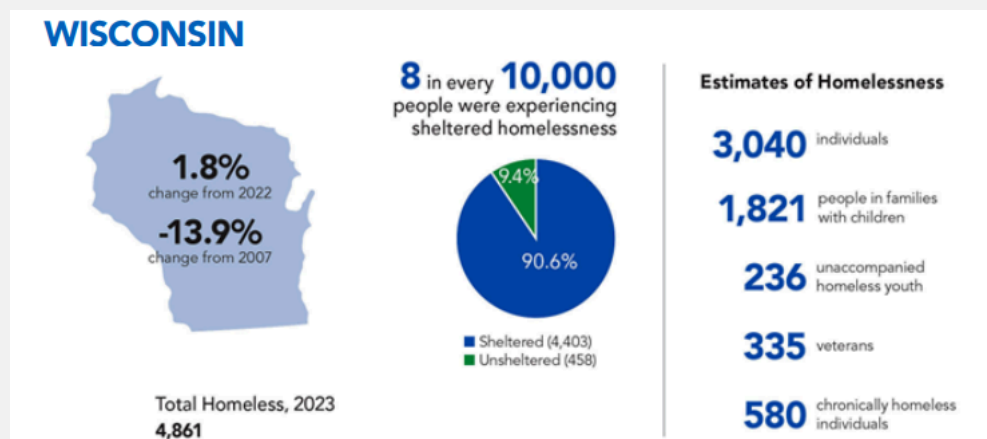
- An educational segment on housing insecurity & justice
- Staff & Patron Spotlight
- Resources to check out.
- A question for you to ponder/respond to!



Housing Insecurity & Housing Justice

According to the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, “‘housing insecurity’ is an umbrella term that encompasses several dimensions of housing problems people may experience, including affordability, safety, quality, insecurity, and loss of housing.”* Housing insecurity is and continues to be a pressing issue individuals face both nationally and here in our own community.

In a report released in December 2023, and completed by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, it is stated that over 650,000 people experienced homelessness in January of 2023. The same report states that in Wisconsin alone 4,861 individuals experienced homelessness in January of 2023. This amounts to nearly eight of every 10,000 people.** However, new reports released in March 2024 by the Wisconsin Policy Forum state that after years of decline, housing insecurity within the state is, once again, increasing.



*[Measuring Housing Insecurity in the American Housing Survey | HUD USER](#)

** [The 2023 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report \(AHAR to Congress\) Part 1: Point-In-Time Estimates of Homelessness, December 2023 \(huduser.gov\)](#)

These jaunting statistics aids in illustrating the national housing crisis many are facing today and demonstrates the importance of housing justice. Housing justice in itself refers to an individual's inherent human right to safe, affordable and quality housing. Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights helps to clarify this right stating, "everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of [their] family including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services."



There are many ways to address the national housing crisis plaguing America today through housing justice. Organizations such as the Alliance for Housing Justice and the National Coalition for Housing Justice are working to address issues regarding fair housing, evictions, social housing, and equitable zoning amongst others. Locally, groups such as the Tenant Resource Center and other organizations are focusing on these issues within the State of Wisconsin and ensuring Wisconsin residents know their rights and maintain housing.



Furthermore, La Crosse County's "Pathways Home" is another way officials in the local government are trying to address the issue. As noted in the County's detailed report of the plan, the goal of Pathways Home is to achieve what they refer to as Functional Zero. This would mean that "any instances of homelessness are rare and brief, and the availability of services and resources matches or exceeds demand within our community." As of this moment, the dashboard for individuals experiencing homelessness to utilize this service and start the process to find housing will be available as early as July.



Individuals looking to aid in the housing justice movement can do so by joining and/or supporting a local or state wide organization addressing these matters, joining or facilitating a neighborhood tenant group, or by contacting local and state representatives demanding they address such issues.



Community Resource Highlight:

Total Navigation Team

Are you familiar with the Total Navigation Team, or TNT for short? TNT is a network of social agencies that maps immediate housing solutions for families. The network gains its leverages from not only the number of agencies it's comprised of but the *type* of agencies—from veterans services, domestic violence advocates and children's centers to health systems, disability-empowerment organizations and street medics. This month, I surveyed TNT's history, mission, and successes with two of its members. *story next page*

TNT “started with raw, organic conversations on what we could do. [We said] let’s get to the table and make something happen,” explained Abbi Jeffers, one of TNT’s founding members and the Coordinated Entry Administrative Manager for Couleecap. In the winter of 2022, local housing advocates discovered with alarm that families facing homelessness had no where to turn for emergency shelter. Urgently united by an objective of assisting all housing-insecure families in the region, the advocates convened to draw a plan that would cohesively link their agencies’ services. During those organic discussions, the advocates envisioned a team of case managers, intake and financial specialists, and a school district liaison that would station itself bi-weekly at the REACH Center to coordinate emergency housing options. The team came to fruition and realized immediate success: of the eighty-six housing-insecure families who sought the team’s assistance that winter, fifty-nine were provided with emergency shelter, seven with rental assistance, and twenty-seven with a referral.

Contributing greatly to TNT’s success, Abbi attested, is their principle of “not sending people around.” Rather, they strive to problem solve with families at a singular location and in a team-oriented manner. “We need all the players and pieces, or it’s not going to be successful,” she added. A coordinated approach optimizes their services—the team can strategize options for families within thirty minutes—and renders them trauma-informed. Consistency establishes trust with community members who’ve been systematically bullied to the margins and told, indirectly or directly, that they don’t belong.

I asked Abbi to speak on barriers to housing implemented and reinforced by racism, ableism, and other oppressive ideologies. In return, she emphasized the significance of affirming each individual who steps into the REACH Center as a neighbor by welcoming their distinct identifies and struggles. *cont. next page*

She elaborated, "We say, let's take some time to figure out how to navigate those barriers." Abbi identified instances of TNT's advocacy for individuals who were undocumented, learning English, and suffering or healing from past and enduring traumas. To fulfill the needs of those individuals, TNT developed partnerships with Spanish translators and immigration law specialists.

Of all TNT's partnerships Abbi listed, her energy was most palpable when she brought up the Tenant-Landlord Resource Center, whose defense of tenants she affectionately described as "ruthless." The Resource Center facilitates a "Rent-Ready Station" each month, where housing navigators eagerly assist current and prospective tenants. Phone calls to property management companies are made, statements of change are drafted, and strong rental histories that can be duplicated across applications are developed—all in an afternoon's work. Renting is an area where unhoused families face sharp discrimination—and so the team keeps the Tenant-Landlord Resource Center on call.

TNT was scraping together funding from WERA (Wisconsin Emergency Rental Assistance) and the county, but as can be the case in the hustling and ever-changing topography of nonprofit work, TNT ran out of funds last year. Yet, the team was adamant they continue homeless prevention services, with or without an official budget. Nancy Parcher, the Community Health Worker Supervisor of YMCA and leader of TNT, told me that strong bonds between her team members sustain their work in the absence of funds. "There is more to TNT than helping those who come for help," she explained. "The members of TNT keep showing up because they find support from each other that is unprecedented. Burn-out in this difficult work is very real, but locking arms together with others who understand is invaluable to the TNT members." In my conversation with Abbi, she vehemently repeated the practice of hope as a driving force. "How can we put hope in people's corner? The hope you can give people—you can't tag that with a dollar bill."

-Kam

Jenny DeRocher | Archives



Our library supports people experiencing housing insecurity in every department, including the Archives! This month we're spotlighting Jenny, who has partnered with community members to bring awareness to the history of housing insecurity in our community.

Favorite thing about working at LPL:

I love working with La Crosse history. Whether I'm researching something for outreach or programming, or with patrons doing their own research, I learn something new about our history every day.

Check out Jenny's History Club program on Housing Insecurity [here](#).

Jenny says:

I am working with a group of folks who were all brought together by Habitat for Humanity to create an educational workshop on the history of housing insecurity in the U.S. and La Crosse. This workshop will highlight the housing crisis we are in today, and what brought us here. My role was to gather sources that show how La Crosse has responded to housing insecurity in the past. During the workshop, participants will look at records from the Police Department and the Home for the Friendless Women and Children (all held in the LPL Archives), as well as newspaper articles showing the story of the La Crosse Housing Authority. In the end, we hope people attending the workshop understand that housing insecurity is not a new issue, and that it is our responsibility as a community to make sure that public and private funding are allocated to these issues.

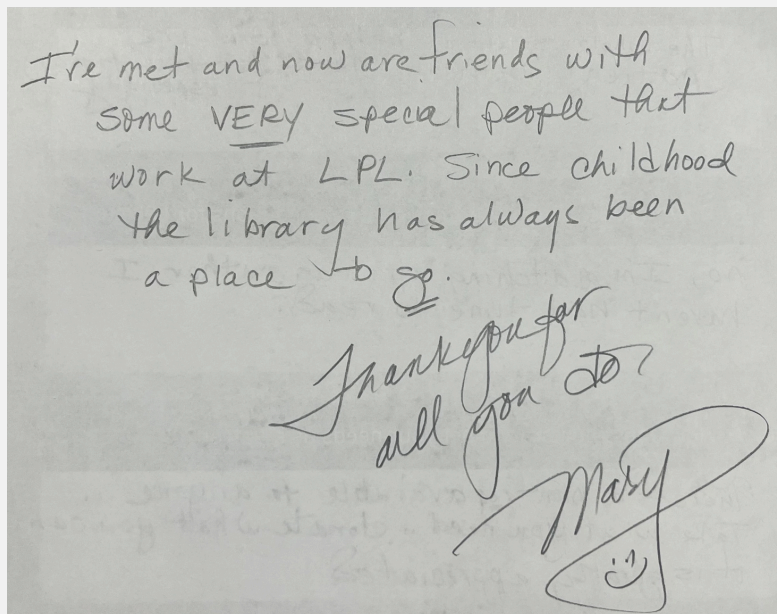
Personally, I felt more grounded when I first saw these primary sources. When we study history, it reminds us that we live in a world that was built by every day humans—people like me and you—and we have the power to make change. Just five people created the La Crosse Housing Authority, wrote a lot of big grants, and housed thousands of people over the course of the next 80 years. What can just five people living in our community today do?

Mary Mills

Meet Mary Mills! She is an (almost) everyday regular here at the LPL and can often be found cozied up with a James Patterson novel or completing a Crossword Puzzle over by the Magazines!

Fun Facts about Mary!

- Mary enjoys reading, working and watching TV! She likes all primary colors, but her favorite is blue!!
- Reading: James Patterson or Vampire Cowboy Romances (seriously though, share any recommendations with her please. She LOVES them!)
- Work: Part Time @ a church in La Crosse where she helps to keep the space safe and clean
- TV: Chicago PD, Law & Order, Friends, Game Shows



Mary has been a resident of La Crosse her whole life. She was born and raised in La Crosse and grew up coming to the library, often during the Summer as a kiddo.

What are your main reasons for using the library? What services do you use? How do you learn about library services and events?

What brings Mary to the library is that it is a safe, central location between work and the warming center. Kate is also another reason Mary comes to the library. Mary is very thankful for the help that Kate has provided regarding housing, community resources, and Social Security Disability Resources. In fact, Mary recently obtained housing!

What is your favorite thing about the LPL?

Mary's favorite thing about the LPL is the staff!! The staff at the library are "helpful and patient with our needs (especially at this time)." The library also helps meet Mary's needs through the pantry, which she greatly appreciates! "The LPL is always updating and accommodating to their Patrons. Thank you for all you do!"

I also asked Mary if she had a favorite memory that involved the library, and this is what she shared: "A special friend of mine had a birthday recently and the whole staff came over to him and wished (sang 😊) him a "Happy Birthday." Priceless!!"

STAFF FEEDBACK:

Last month, we asked what you would like to see re-designed in our library using the principles of universal design. Here's what you said!

"Preferably, signage within the library be placed at a much lower height so that it is easily read by all patrons. For example, having signs hang from our tall ceilings may not aid the public in finding where they desire to go if they have limited neck mobility."

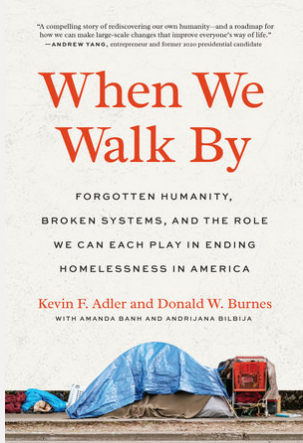
THIS MONTH'S QUESTION:

What is something you've learned about housing insecurity that you didn't know before working in the public library?

We'd LOVE to hear your thoughts! Click [here](#) to answer!

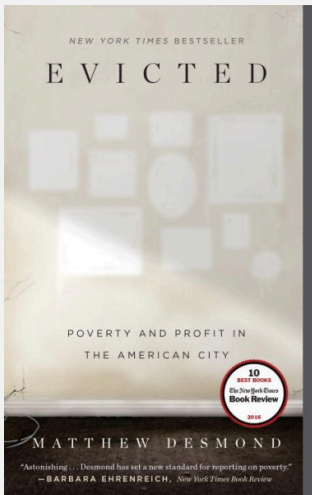
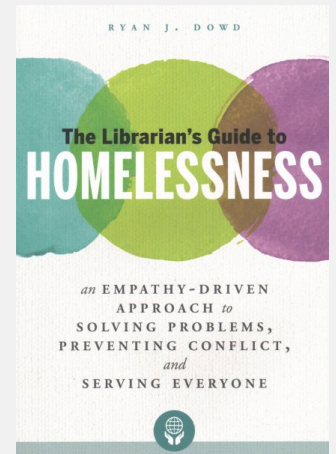
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES:

Books:



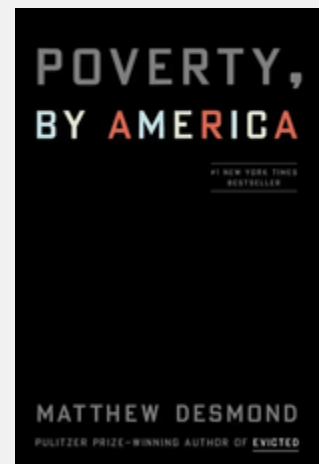
When We Walk By
by Kevin Adler

The Librarian's Guide to Homelessness
by Ryan Dowd

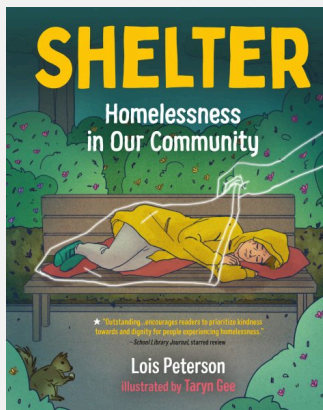
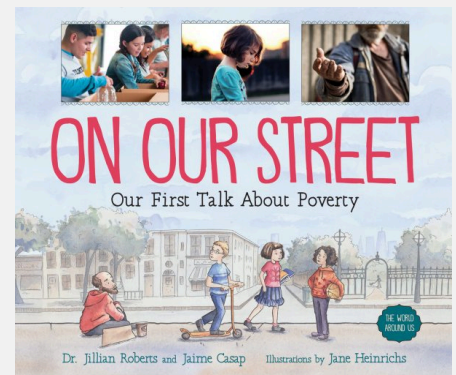


Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City
by Matthew Desmond

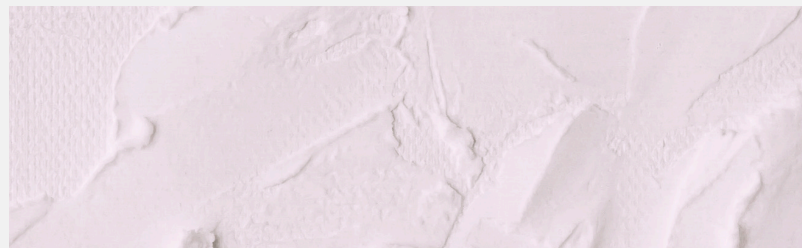
Poverty, By America
by Matthew Desmond



On Our Street: Our First Talk About Poverty
by Dr. Jillian Roberts and Jaime Casap



Shelter: Homelessness In Our Community
by Lois Peterson



EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES:

Videos:



“A Librarian’s Guide to Homelessness”
by Brian Louie

Podcasts:



The Invisible Americans Podcast

THE INVISIBLE AMERICANS PODCAST

We The Unhoused



Alchemy of Housing Justice

Understanding Homelessness

