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LIS 445: Information for the Underserved Population

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Libraries Transform

Information accessibility only increases a community's collective success, specifically helping those who need it most, which are those who cannot afford access to that information on their own. In locations like Hawai'i, the increasing population of homeless residents is an example of how information accessibility and public assistance could benefit the community. Public libraries play a vital role in this awareness by providing preventative and recovery information, which could be vital in alleviating the increasing issues that surround such a large homeless population.

Some services libraries often offer the public is internet access. While most Americans have internet access at home there are still millions of American who cannot afford it, especially those from impoverished areas (Thomson, 2022). Services like these allow libraries to be "consistently viewed favorably," as research has shown libraries are viewed by many people (Thompson, 2022). There are also those who have a background in poverty, from a first person perspective, and work towards helping those in that situation. People like Lisa "Tiny" Gray-Garcia, co-founder of POOR Magazine, have purchased land and provided housing for many of the homeless population in Oakland, California (Kiley, 2021). If an initiative like this were implemented in Hawai'i, the homeless population would receive much needed assistance.

When considering that “about 10% of Hawaii’s homeless people have recently arrived, and 16% have been living in the state for less than 5 years” (Robbins, 2019), awareness is something the public library could assist with when it comes to directing this population to beneficial resources. This is one “economic benefit” public libraries provide, which offers access to information and social services made available in the area (Krysta, 2020). While islands like Maui have adopted a useful program where Police Officers work with social workers to reach out to their homeless population (Robbins, 2019), that might not be enough to alleviate the growing issues with homelessness.

In other Hawaiian islands like Oahu, the Police are less welcoming and implement a more “draconian response,” such as in Honolulu where Police “routinely break down encampments” of homeless communities, and where “in the last five years, nearly 400 homeless people have died” (Robbins, 2019). In Kuai, “the number of unsheltered people on the island has recently doubled,” but the governor is looking to implement “a mixture of temporary and permanent housing” (Robbins, 2019). Services like these could be communicated to the homeless population when libraries share it with them. This makes that information a valuable asset that could relieve some of the homelessness in Hawai’i.

In the state of Hawai’i, the relevancy of libraries is critical to the successful assistance for the Hawaiian community it serves. With homelessness remaining a growing issue throughout the state, libraries have the opportunity to assist this underserved population. Effectively sharing information about the resources the state offers the homeless population is something that would help those in need and unaware of the services available to them, services that could be specific to the island they live on. Internet access also helps those who cannot afford it, providing access to several services and websites they would otherwise not have access to. As libraries continue to

offer cost effective and free of charge assistance, impoverished people have a chance at improving their circumstances, helping those who need it most.

References

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