

# Anticipating Community Needs: A Model from Practice

Maria Souden and Dana Walker, University of Michigan School of Information

seramar@umich.edu, walkerdm@umich.edu

## Study Design & Background

### Research question

- How can librarians anticipate community information needs?

### Method

- Case study of a best-practice library
- Interviews, focus groups, observation; document analysis
- Data coded thematically; themes emerged from the data.

### Hartford and Hartford Public Library

- City beset by urban decay and poverty
- Cadre of community groups seek to solve problems
- Library recognized nationally for its community focused work & desire to respond to community needs
- Through the library's Neighborhood Team program, staff members represent HPL at some 600 community meetings per year

## Acknowledgements

Funded by an IMLS grant to the University of Washington and University of Michigan

Project Co-PI's: Karen Fisher (UW)  
Joan C. Durrance (UM)

## A MODEL FOR ANTICIPATING COMMUNITY NEEDS



## Model Components

### Philosophy and Ethic

- Active neighborhood participants with a deep understanding of challenges and assets

*"I have a little phrase—we weave ourselves into the fabric of neighborhood life."*

### Library Mechanisms & Staff Qualities

- Library structure supports neighborhood teams as a community of practice
- Community engagement supported by reflective practice and proactive staff commitment

## Model Components, cont'd

### Strategies for Anticipating and Responding to Needs

- Attend community meetings where problems are being addressed
- Anticipate needs in context through participation, networking, and partnership
- Proactively provide information and contribute to problem solving and reframing
- Specialized resources, access and information & referral in response to neighborhood needs
- Community partnerships for grant making and tailored programming

*"[Her approach is to be] at the table. Not sitting in the back row, not standing by the door, but a participant. Even when there's nothing there for the library ... She then looks for opportunities for the library to connect and make contributions. Rather than just hanging around and 'let me know if you need me' kind of thing."*