



Library Social Workers

Are you ready for any circumstance?

SOUTH CENTRAL LIBRARY SYSTEM

APRIL 28, 2021

Introductions

▶ **Libby:** Libby Richter MSW, APSW, holds a Master's Degree in Mental Health and Social Work from the University of Wisconsin- Madison. She is the community resource specialist for the public library in Eau Claire, WI. She works with customers to help them overcome challenges in their daily lives. She has led a team that focused on creating systemic change to end homelessness, co-chaired a committee that promotes healthy relationships to cultivate a stronger community, and continues to serve on various committees addressing mental health, housing, and food insecurities in the community. She has worked in libraries since she was 16, has jumped at the opportunity to combine her passions, and enjoys sharing this passion with others.

▶ **Pamela:** holds an MLIS from the University of North Texas – Denton and a B.S. in Organizational Leadership and Management. She is the director at the public library in Eau Claire and previously served as the director at the Middleton Public Library for 8 years. She believes libraries are more about the people they serve than anything else. Public libraries have an opportunity to help connect people with the services they need to address so they can not just live, but thrive. The library social worker program provides a community safety net for people facing difficult circumstances that often cannot wait.

The Public Library

“Libraries are an American **promise**, and through the library door a democracy shambles in; the poorest and the richest. **Everyone's** library card works the same.”

~NICKOLAS BUTLER, New York Times best-selling author

What factors led to hiring a social worker?

IN THE LIBRARY

- ▶ Library customer behaviors – unpredictable circumstances
- ▶ Customers complaints
- ▶ Visitors not feeling safe
- ▶ Staff leaving to work elsewhere
- ▶ Frequency & severity



Preparing to make the case:

- ▶ Scan the landscape
- ▶ Listen for themes
- ▶ Ask the right questions
- ▶ Evaluate the barriers
- ▶ Determine the library's ability to assist
- ▶ Assess staff awareness and training
- ▶ Consider staff self-care and support



Libby

Community indicators for a library/social worker program



AROUND THE COMMUNITY

- ▶ Parks and public parking ramp used as shelters and encampments
- ▶ Misunderstanding about people experiencing homelessness
- ▶ Numerous community efforts, but little or no coordination
- ▶ Demographic assessment – poverty level and the ALICE report

Access to Basic Needs

WHO IS ALICE?

ASSET LIMITED



**ALICE has no safety net
in times of crisis**

INCOME CONSTRAINED



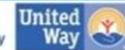
**ALICE's income falls
short of essentials**

EMPLOYED



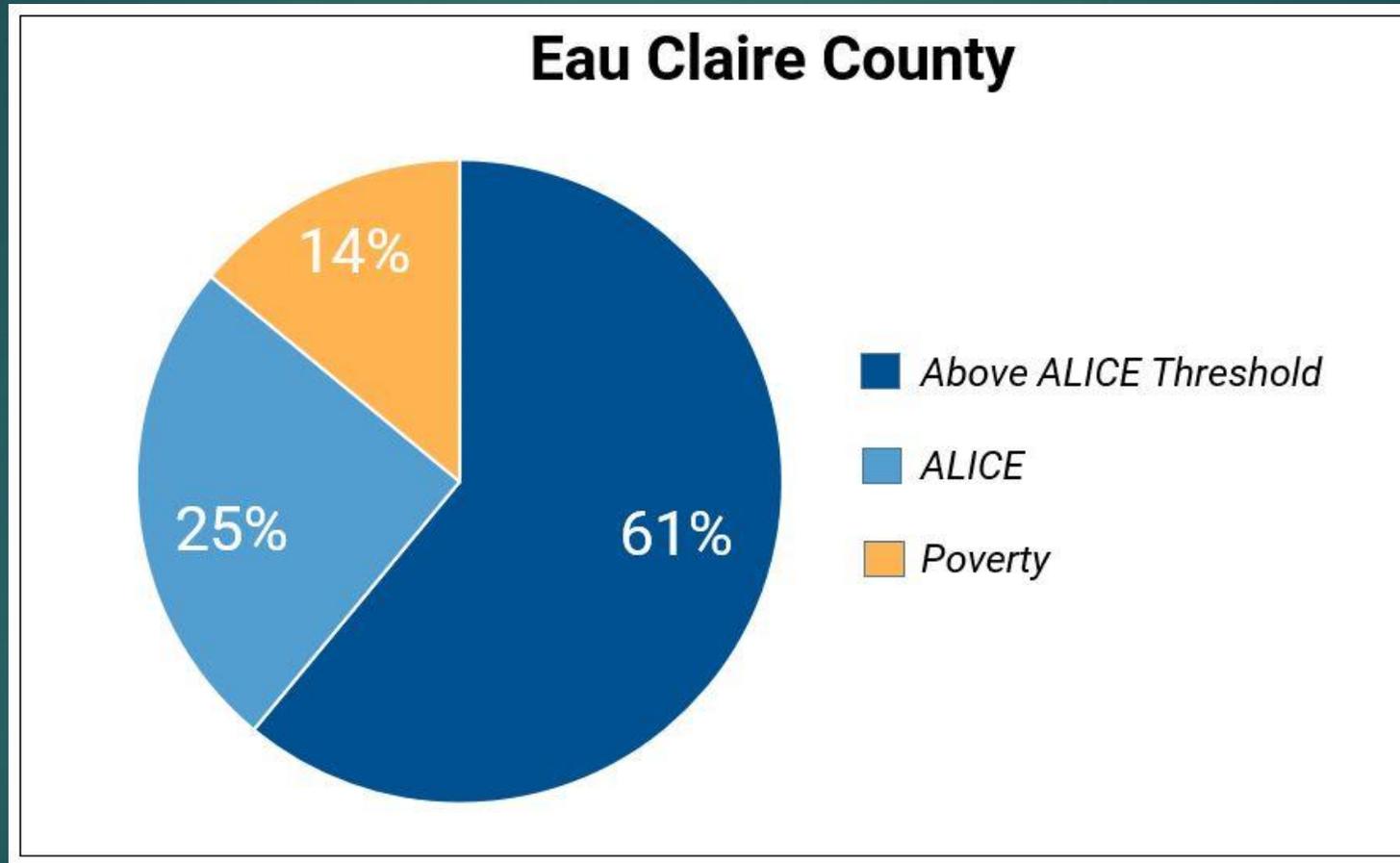
**ALICE is working, yet
not earning enough**

United Way of the
Greater Chippewa Valley



ALICE is important measurement because people are striving for financial stability but facing complex barriers.

* <https://www.uwgcw.org/meet-alice>



How to get started?

Do your research: on SW If you want, involve key support staff, volunteers with SW background and other interested experts:

- ▶ County Human Services/Social Services Department
- ▶ University Social Work or Human Services Department
- ▶ School District Counselor
- ▶ Assisted care facilities

Is a social services collaboration worth the effort?



- ▶ Every community has needs and social work covers a wide spectrum of problem solving
- ▶ Community assessment
- ▶ Surveys
- ▶ Track incidents and severity

What you will need:

- ▶ Goals and priorities – be specific, but not detailed – what division is SW?
- ▶ Credentials and a position description
- ▶ Benefits and additional expenses
- ▶ Workspace
- ▶ Access to technology
- ▶ SUPPORT



Two possible approaches if hiring is not feasible:

- ▶ County Human Services/Social Services Department
- ▶ University Social Work or Human Services Department
- ▶ School District Counselor
- ▶ Regional Library System
- ▶ **Contract for services on a per visit rate**
- ▶ **Seek recovery grant funds to hire social worker**
- ▶ **Apply for United Way Grant**
- ▶ **Apply to medical provider's foundation**

Questions?

Contact info

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Opportunity to take a deeper dive into library/social worker program: **iSchool at UW-Madison**

Social Workers In The Library

How can social services reduce barriers, build bridges, and create inclusive library environments?

In this course, you will compare the core values of librarians and social workers and learn how they can be applied to overcome barriers our library customers encounter when experiencing life challenges. You will examine educational opportunities that empower customers and staff through role modeling, collection development, and program suggestions to shift the community culture towards inclusivity. At the conclusion of the course, you will have a vision of how your library could expand its ability to serve the community through intentional and strategic practices, as well as ways to build a case for support to meet your community's unique needs.

<https://ischool.wisc.edu/continuing-education/social-workers>

Thank you so much!