Who has patrons who need help with
Navigating the public housing system?
Finding low cost health care?
Finding a place to sleep tonight?

Oakland does too. In Oakland, like the rest of the Bay Area, we have a housing crisis.
Homelessness has increased 25% in the last two years. (and of course it’s not a equitable
crisis - 49% of Alameda County’s homeless folks are African American) * Stats from
http://everyonehome.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/ALAEMDA_7-1.pdf and
http://everyonehome.org/everyone-counts/

Who has
A full time social worker as part of your library staff?
A full time public health nurse as part of your library staff?
Formerly homeless staff members who can help patrons find services and housing?

Yeah, Oakland doesn't have any of those either
What we do have, is a flat budget! And of course a healthy bureaucratic system to complicate creating new positions - that complicates adding new positions that are for traditional library roles, let alone justifying adding something non-traditional like a social worker, or a public health nurse, or creating positions that value lived experience with homelessness over other qualifications.
What we also have, is a Veterans Resource Center. Are any of you part of the Veterans Connect at the Library project? So we are - my boss Mana Tominaga applied in 2014. So because of that, we had a little corner in our lobby that had a table and chairs, some books and literature, and was staffed for about 8 hours a week with someone who could help veterans benefits. Incidentally, 21% of our veterans in the Bay Area are homeless.

We also have a program of small “innovation grants” from our Friends Group. Once a year, library staff can fill out a short form to apply for about $1500 of money to do something cool.

So, we have this population of folks who need services - help that requires more time and expertise than we can provide, we have this drop-in space in our lobby, and we have the opportunity to get a little bit of money to spruce it up.

So about a year and a half ago we created this program called the Community Kiosk, and moved it into our Veterans Resource Center.

Basically, we invite organizations that provide free services to do drop-in hours.
This is our calendar for May. We have about ten hours a week of Veterans Services (provided by staff and volunteers). The EDD comes in for two hours a week to provide job help - primarily for veterans. Someone from the Alameda County Food Bank comes for three hours a month to help people sign up for Calfresh. The Homeless Action Center comes in for an hour a week to help folks with social security benefits. The HIV Education and Prevention Project of Alameda County comes in for two hours a month to provide harm reduction services and education - they actually do needle exchange and hand out narcan - that’s part of the harm reduction part. The Oakland Tenants Union comes in for two hours twice a month to help tenants. And we actually also have a Social Workers in the library program for about three hours once a month - staffed by volunteer social workers through the Social Workers’ Association.

This month for the first time we have the East Bay SPCA coming in to do two hours. They aren’t bringing animals - they’re passing out info on free and low cost vet care, their pet food pantry, and upcoming free vaccine clinics.

We’ve had other one-off or regular partners in the past. For example, the county human services department has done flu shots and hep A vaccines, we’ve had Operation Dignity, which helps homeless veterans, and we’ve had an organization called Miracle Messages come in - they help people get back in contact with family members. The guy they sent was
actually a volunteer who was a private investigator for his day job.

I have a Word template to create a postable/printable calendar each month, but I manage scheduling with an outlook calendar. I’ve learned that I do need to send reminder emails to some of our organizations that only come once a month.

There are a few ways I’ve found new partners. Sometimes they recommend each other - people doing social services work in our city do tend to know each other. We also have done outreach at homeless resource fairs or Care Villages - is this something that happens in your city? You know what that is? We seem to have an increasing amount in Oakland - sometimes there are more providers than clients. And then I look at resource lists periodically. Right now I’d love to add someone who can help people who need to clear criminal records, and I’ve been looking for awhile for someone who can do help for immigrants. In fact, when I thought of doing this, it was post-election and I was basically looking for a way I could just put a big sign in the library that said HELP FOR IMMIGRANTS, YOU ARE WELCOME HERE

Why would organizations want to do this? I sell it a few ways. Number one is just finding more clients - but also I tell folks that it’s a good way to just generally spread the word about what they do. We all know that all kinds of people come to the library - potential donors, volunteers and clients, as well as people who need services. And there is also an increasing push by funders for organizations to do outreach and community engagement, so this is something organizations can do to fulfill that.

I think this is something that is fairly easy to replicate. You basically need a table and two chairs - maybe even one chair - in a high traffic section of your library. Also, I am really focusing on social services, because that’s the need in my community, but you could focus on other things - for example, you could invite the master gardeners to table once a week to do plant identification or gardening help.
This center has allowed us to form closer relationships with a number of organizations. We’re invited to more outreach events and we’re asked to attend meetings of providers. While services are provided only at certain times, closer relationships mean we have more people we can call if we need help.

For example, we had a man come into the library who was in crisis. He was out of his psych medication, he didn’t have a place to stay, and he told us he was feeling suicidal. We tried calling 211 and a few other things. Finally he told us he needed to be taken to Jean Georges, which is our psych hospital. So we called 911. We were told that the police needed to come and do an evaluation, and then he could be taken in an ambulance.

We waited an hour for the police to arrive, with this patron sitting at the ref desk with tears streaming down his face.

This was around 6 or 7 on a weeknight, so many of our contacts were not in the office, but I had a cell phone number for someone who I had tried to recruit to do outreach in the center. I spoke to her, and she pointed out that actually the police did NOT need to come, because he was voluntary, and we could just send him in a cab. So we did that and he arrived safely.

I think that’s it. Any questions?