

MEDIA RELEASE

ERIE COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY



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Erie County Public Library offers social worker services to patrons

Erie, PA – The Erie County Public Library will follow a growing library trend to place certified peer specialists and interns in-house, providing services to patrons. The program will launch Tuesday, Oct. 1.

Two peer navigators – certified peer specialists with a combination of training and firsthand experience that provide supportive services – will be stationed at Blasco Library, six days per week, offering services 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Thursday, and 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Friday and Saturday.

The peer navigators are well versed in mental health and social resources, and will serve to connect patrons with service providers that can assist with their needs (education, food insecurity, housing needs, substance abuse, finances, mental health). Certified peer specialists are already serving the Erie community in a number of organizations, such as Stairways, Safe Harbor, and the Mental Health Association of NWPA.

“We are excited to provide peer navigator services at the Blasco Memorial Library,” said Patricia Stucke, CEO of Mental Health Association of Northwestern Pennsylvania. “This new service will connect library patrons with resources, which will provide opportunities to improve quality of life.”

Stucke confirms that library patrons will have the opportunity to learn about community resources and develop Wellness Recovery Action Plans (WRAP) if interested. Library patrons will receive help navigating the physical and mental health systems.

In addition, the Department of Social Work at Edinboro University has opened an internship opportunity for students pursuing their bachelor’s or master’s degree in social work. This internship grants an informal opportunity for patrons to seek guidance and for students to gain valuable field experience.

“Field experience is the signature pedagogy of a social work program,” said Edinboro University Bachelor of Social Work Field Coordinator Jessica Hippely. “We know community libraries serve as a haven for those in need of support. I am thrilled with the opportunity to partner with the Erie County Public Library this year as we strive to meet community needs through social work.”

Together, the peer navigators and social work interns will provide one-on-one chats, group sessions and training classes to the public (grief, availability of resources, mental health first aid, et al.), helping to provide an empathetic approach to patrons in various states of need.

Developed through Erie County government's Ice House training program, this cooperation between Erie County Public Library, the Erie County Office of Mental Health & Intellectual Disabilities, the Mental Health Association of NWPA and Edinboro University of Pennsylvania leverages available resources without incurring additional costs.

The placement of peer navigators was made possible through an existing grant in the Office of Mental Health & Intellectual Disabilities, with Erie County Public Library selected as its service location.

More information about other libraries utilizing social workers as a patron service is available at the following links:

- Long Branch Free Public Library (New Jersey) <https://www.longbranchlib.org/social-work-and-divesity>
- Richland Library (South Carolina) <https://www.richlandlibrary.com/social-work>
- Denver Public Library (Colorado) <https://www.denverlibrary.org/blog/chrish/peer-navigators-help-demystify-social-service-system>
- San Francisco Public (California) <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/library-social-worker-helps-homeless-seeking-quiet-refuge>
- Georgetown Public (Texas) <https://library.georgetown.org/library-creates-community-resources-coordinator-position/>

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