The National Library of South Africa servicing people experiencing homelessness

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Our Vision

A world-class African National Library and information hub

Our Mission

We build, record, preserve, conserve, and make available a complete South African documentary heritage fostering a reading nation towards an informed citizenry.
The National Library operates on three sites which complement each other.

The main site is the Pretoria Campus which is the largest and also functions as the NLSA Head Office.

The Cape Town campus houses the Special and Rare Collections and functions as the research hub used daily by scholars, researchers, and the general public.

The third site is the Centre for the Book which functions as NLSA outreach unit for the promotion of reading, writing, and publishing in South Africa.
Access to the NLSA Collections and Services

THREE SITES

Pretoria campus,

Centre for the Book

Cape Town
The primary role of the Information access Services is to facilitate access to the unique heritage knowledge resources and collections held in the National library of South Africa.

This programme is the public face of the National Library, providing direct on-site access to our collections and services.

The following services are on offer as part of our public engagement initiatives; Reference Services, Reader Services, Special Collections, Internet Services
Strategic Objectives

- To provide universal access to information and promotion of the culture of reading, writing, and publishing in South Africa
- Our performance indicators are number of users accessing library and information services
- Number of users accessing internet facilities on site
- Number of reading promotional events organized
Homelessness

• An individual without permanent housing who may live in the streets, stay in a shelter, single room occupancy facilities, abandoned buildings or vehicles, or any other non-permanent situation
• An individual may also be considered if doubled up, forced to stay with a series of friends or family members
• Homelessness has become one of the symbols of urban blight in South Africa
• Social development estimates that over 1 million nationwide are homeless, the list includes chronic homelessness, transitional homeless, and episodic homelessness
The main causes of homelessness

- Structural factors, systems failures, individual and relational factors
- Lack of affordable housing and limited scale of housing assistance programs, Poverty, unable to pay for housing, and rapid urbanization
- Domestic violence, battered women often forced to chose between abusive relationship and homelessness, eviction, economic difficulties, unemployment
- Mental illness, approximately 50% of homeless population suffers some sort of severe mental illness, bipolar, including post-traumatic stress disorder or depression
- Addiction, many people who are poor and addicts are at a high risk
NLSA has embraced the idea of library use to the poor and marginalized
We encourage library access to the marginalized group, the people experiencing homelessness, refugees, and the disabled
Our mandate stresses free access to the services, and bridging the information divide
The number one popular service offered is free access to internet and free Wi-Fi,
We are cognizant of the fact that for refugees, it is the only means of communicating with their families back home,
The space to sit and read,
• The complicated relationship between the Librarians and people experiencing homelessness
• What they did not teach us in Library School, the library as an asylum for the homeless
• Libraries struggle to find balance since Librarians have neither the time, nor training, to play social work, psychologist, psychiatrist
• The staff’s attitude vs the homelessness’s attitude
Recommendations

- Remove barriers to accessing services, improve services to the poor, and train staff about the needs of the poor
- The number one barrier to access to the library facilities is the idea of being a member of the library, that requires positive identification, some form of address etc.
- Raise awareness of poverty issues and treat your homeless patrons no better or worse than any other patrons
- Library policies to be modified and consider the definition of community, and that if homeless people are part of our community, we have the responsibility to serve them
Thank you

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