Programming: Guidelines for Social Service Topics

1. **Use your community experts.** Invite people from the community to come in and give programs. Most established community organizations devoted to social services would appreciate the forum that your library provides. Every community includes people who face unemployment, mental health, teen pregnancy, domestic violence, homelessness, and other personal problems. Most communities have some agencies, organizations, and/or individuals who try to help out. They can help raise awareness, encourage participation in support efforts, and educate community members. Using their expertise is the starting point for this kind of programming.

2. **Be prepared for people to be uncomfortable with the program.** Your staff, board, friends group, and some patrons may be uncomfortable with a program on, for example, homelessness or teen pregnancy. Holding open and honest discussions before launching program planning can create advocates for your work. Look for existing advocate. The high school guidance counselor knows about teen pregnancy; the police department's community liaison knows about women's safety planning. They can be your advocates for programs on their work. In all cases stress that this is a space that requires fair and thoughtful comments. Also let people know that the programs might be challenging but that is all the more reason to hold them.

3. **Several subtopics are useful.** Many social service populations need to learn life skills – and these kinds of programs reach into communities that already engage with specific life skills. Think about instituting some of the following programs in your library.
   a. Invite representatives from state and federal programs which serve families, such as The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, to give a panel presentation about their organizations.
   b. Invite school nutritionists and public health nurses to discuss children's obesity.
   c. Invite Chamber of Commerce leaders and Texas Workforce Commission representatives to explain unemployment trends in your community.
   d. Invite directors for community homeless and domestic violence shelters to discuss the situations faced by their clients.
   e. Invite a banker and college student services representative to discuss financial literacy for at-risk individuals dealing with credit card solicitations, banking account options, and simple debt.

4. **The format of the program can be as varied as the topics.** For example, you can have lecture-style programs, discussion groups, performances, craft-based programs, workshops, larger fairs with tables, or even carnival-style

programs for the whole family. Think about what works best in your space and with the patrons in your community.

5. **Advertise beyond the library.** Emailing or dropping off fliers at local schools, community organizations, parks, businesses, and city offices is a good way to get the word out. Use social media (such as Facebook, online forums, or Twitter) to reach specific audiences. Many newspapers or community newsletters will happily print or publish a small blurb. Within the library place fliers at the reference desk, put posters up on a bulletin board, have a small display at the circulation desk, set up a sandwich board, and put banners on outside the library. Use every avenue to build your advertising to a crescendo.

6. **Define "success" broadly.** *Success in planning* comes from the process you develop for advertising. Yes, it's very time consuming to reach both within and beyond the library. Keeping track of the effort and tools, however, will make any other advertising effort be more efficient and effective. What you do for this program will also work for your book sale. *Success in participation* comes from the number of people who show up but, perhaps more important, the number of people who have now heard of the library and recognize its role in supporting community work. How many organizations were reached? How many community leaders had conversations about the library's work?