

Library Services to People with Special Needs Section

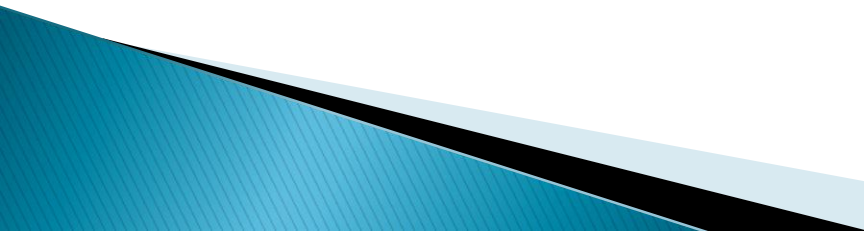
Theme:

The Homeless and the Libraries: the Right to Information and Knowledge for All



- ▶ The “problem” of homelessness goes unnoticed in most public libraries in Botswana.

Brief History

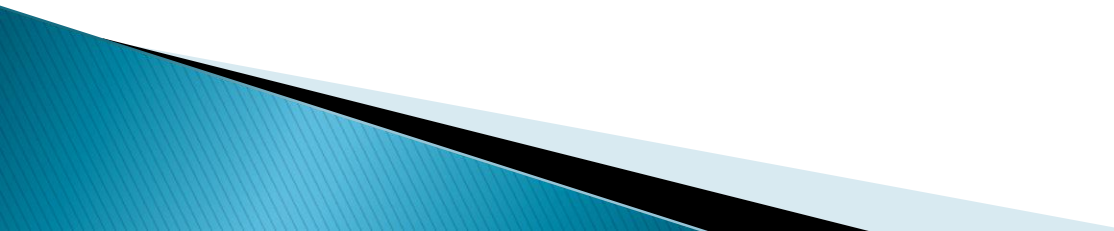
- ▶ Library services in Botswana are provided by the government.
 - ▶ Two types of public libraries, the Branch Libraries
 - ▶ Village Reading Rooms (VRRs).
 - ▶ Branch libraries are the traditional public libraries built in all the major villages.
 - ▶ The VRRs are located in schools and others in Village Development Committee (VDC) houses.
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Who are the homeless

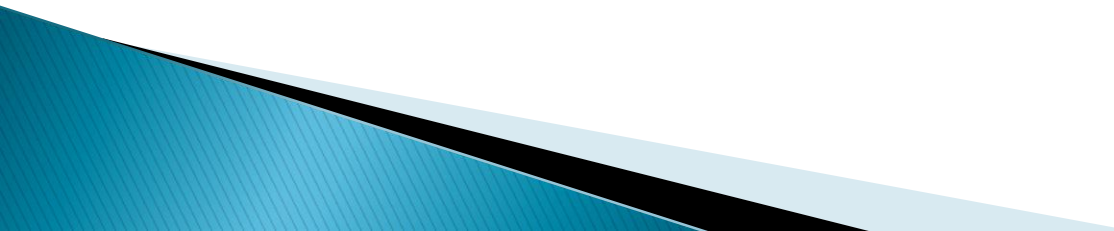
Holt (2010) describes a homeless person as

- ▶ Someone who has no regular residential address
- ▶ Someone who has no regular residential address does not really tell us much about the homeless, why they are homeless and so forth.

How did they get to be homeless?

- ▶ They don't have a family to support them
 - ▶ They are poor (poverty)
 - ▶ They lack coping skills
 - ▶ Runaway kids (street kids)
 - ▶ Immigration issues
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The Homeless and Information Needs and Services

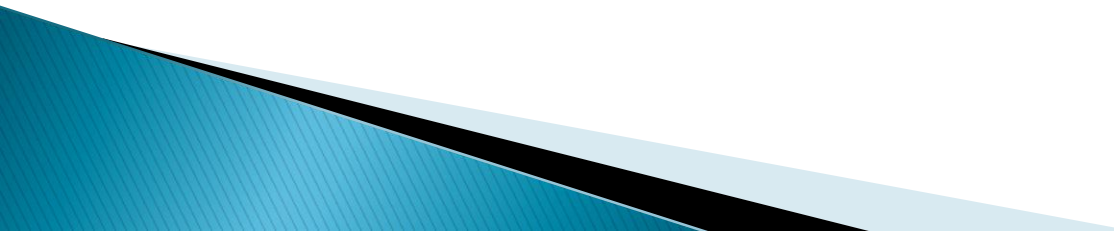
- ▶ Are the information needs of the homeless met in Botswana?
 - ▶ Botswana National Library Policy (BNLP) 2012 (unpublished) goal is
 - ▶ “To foster the growth of an informed and educated nation through facilitating access to information for Botswana.”
 - ▶ It further states that everyone, including people with disabilities, the homeless has the right to visit and use the libraries.
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Is what the BNLP stating happening in the provision of library services?

If the answer is no, what can be done?

- ▶ Integrate Library Services into the lives of the homeless but
- ▶ How well do public Librarians know their community?

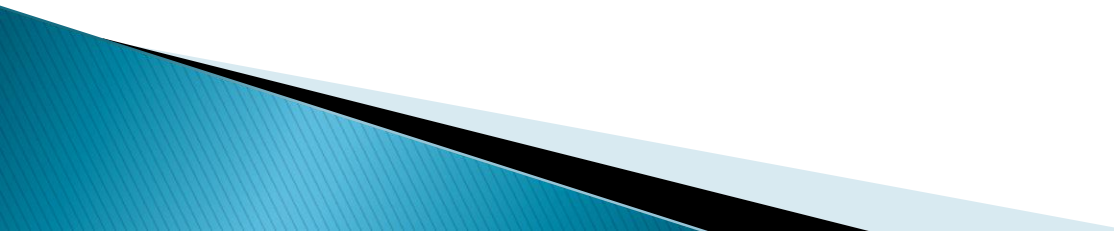
What can Librarians do?

- ▶ This is the purpose of this study!
 - ▶ Interviewing potential and existing homeless users about their information needs such as
 - ▶ Finances
 - ▶ Employment
 - ▶ Government programmes to alleviate poverty
 - ▶ Housing
 - ▶ Childcare
 - ▶ Educations (for self and others)
 - ▶ Liaise with Governmental and Non- governmental organizations
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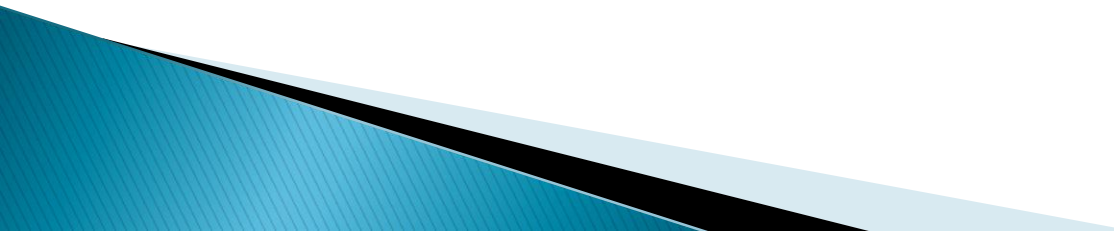
Evaluation/Assessment

- ▶ Impact of library services to the homeless

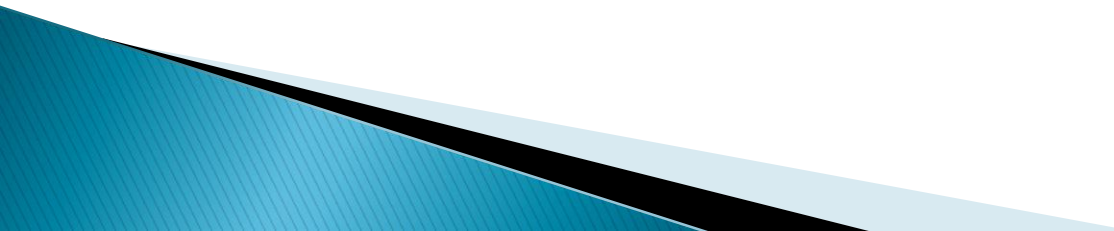
For example, description should include

- ▶ estimates of how many homeless there are in the library service area
 - ▶ some demographic information (gender, age, etc) and what other agencies other than the library provide services for the homeless
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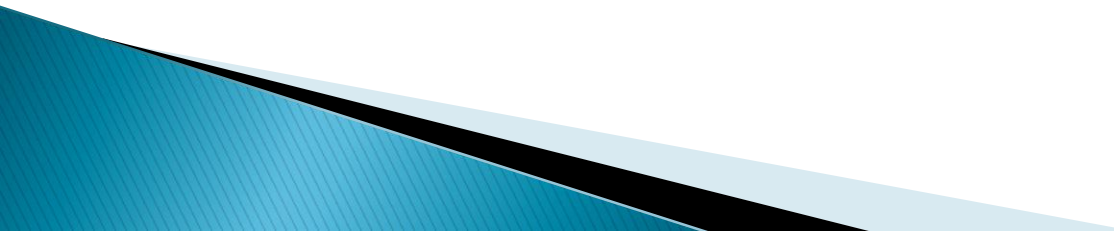
How to measure impact and demonstrate value

- ▶ Opinion surveys and program evaluations
 - ▶ Qualitative evaluation e.g “ what did you learn about the effects of Foot and Mouth disease (FMD)in the economy of Botswana”
 - ▶ To find out if the library’s activities were useful or well received by the user, community or funder (Botswana government)
 - ▶ It is also helpful and important to find out if the users **benefited** from their use of the library.
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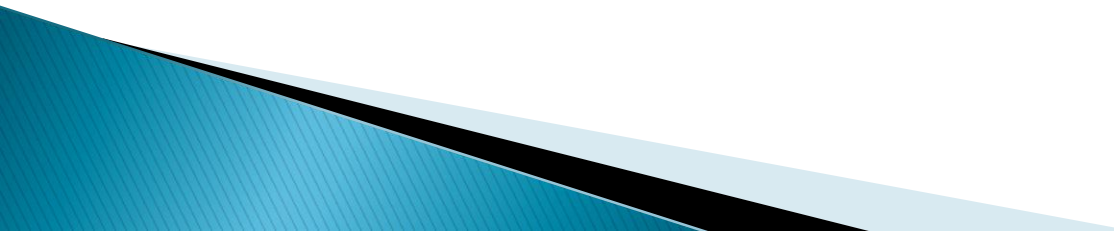
What next?

- ▶ It is important to understand the user experience when considering the success or failure of the library or an individual library program.
 - ▶ Real accountability comes from finding out how users feel about the experiences they have at the library.
 - ▶ Gone are the days when libraries claimed that users learn, enjoy, or change, unless they get that information from the users themselves
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Are our Librarians aware of the needs of the underserved?

- ▶ The fact that the National Library Policy Document (NLP) is silent on the needs of the poor and the underserved in Botswana is an indication that there is still a lot to be done to make the Librarians in Botswana aware of the needs of the poor and underserved.
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Conclusion

- ▶ In Botswana public libraries, there is no comprehensive and enforceable policy regulating access and client behaviour.
 - ▶ Beginning 2012, Botswana started drafting a National Library Policy. I hope the team has solicited ideas from the underserved and the general public so that no one is left behind.
 - ▶ I will initiate a workshop for Botswana National Library Services (BNLS) and the theme will be homelessness in public libraries in Botswana.
 - ▶ I think doing a workshop will make a strong statement about the importance of this topic more so that not much has been written on it.
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▶ Thank you for your time.