

## Library Social Work: Making a Difference in my Hometown

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is not to do the work for the patrons, but rather support them and assist when necessary. I have even been privileged to watch some of my patrons move from the shelter to stable housing of their own. Seeing this happen brings me a sense of accomplishment, but also pushes me to work harder and advocate for change within these systems.

**M**y name is Emily Dalton and I am born and raised in Hoboken, New Jersey. I have lived my entire life (with the exception of my time as an undergrad at Rutgers University) in Hudson County. I am currently in my final year at the Rutgers School of Social Work (RUSSW) pursuing my MSW, focusing on Management and Policy. This past semester, my field placement through the RUSSW has been at the Hoboken Public Library. Having the opportunity to work at my childhood library has been life changing. It has enriched my experience as a social worker by allowing me to engage with my community on both the macro and micro level. Moreover, being able to work in this specific environment has allowed me to grow as an individual and understand the way systems impact communities.

A typical workday consists of case management, advocacy, and policy work. I meet with patrons during designated drop-in hours, both in the library and outside the library at local shelters and lunchtime ministries. I work primarily with unhoused folks, some of whom are residents at the local shelter. These patrons are often looking for assistance with SNAP applications, health insurance enrollment, and getting their state identification cards. My goal as the community service worker



My biggest challenge so far, and where most of my advocacy work has been focused, is helping patrons obtain identification cards (ID's). Prior to

this internship, I truly did not understand how vital an ID was to an individual, particularly to someone who is experiencing homelessness. With the help of the library's Community Engagement Team, we host a monthly program called "Project ID." During this program, patrons come to the library for assistance with making an appointment at the Motor Vehicle Commission (MVC). They can apply for ID renewals or recover birth certificates or Social Security cards in order to get their ID's. When I meet with patrons, I listen to their past experiences with navigating these social systems. Listening to these stories is critical to my advocacy work. Their feedback and input help me better understand the barriers to ID access unhoused people are experiencing so we can better advocate for system improvement and change.

Through this work I have been able to meet with the elected members to the Assembly in my district to discuss these challenges. I have also been able to create a relationship with

the Department of Constituent Affairs in Hoboken City Hall and share directly the challenges I see my patrons experiencing. Even though I am just one person, I believe shining light on these issues is critical to making a change. Being able to advocate with these officials on behalf of my patrons is what makes me a stronger social worker.

The Hoboken Library is a free public space. People are allowed to spend their time inside reading, using laptops, or simply seeking comfort. Any person with a residency in Hoboken is entitled to a library card, including shelter residents. I hope that my time at the library allows more people to feel a sense of comfort and acceptance through the social services we provide. As social workers we need to make ourselves visible in these spaces. The beauty of working in a library is that patrons can come and go as they wish. This gives social workers the ability to be creative in the way we provide services, and how we advocate for our communities. Working in the library I grew up in has been such an immense privilege, and I hope that others get to one day experience a job as fulfilling as this.

