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HPL Cares: Leading by Taking Action

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HPL Cares:

Leading by Taking Action

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COURTNEY GILL began working at Hillsboro Public Library in 2009 after completing an internship at the Department of Human Services. She only intended to briefly work at the library while starting a career in social work, but the library stole her heart with the lure of books and shared community. Since then, she has held various positions at HPL. She currently works as a Library Supervisor based out of the Shute Park location where she works passionately to reduce barriers to library service and welcome all. When not at the library, Courtney enjoys traveling, hiking and sharing laughs with her family and friends.

Like many Oregon cities, Hillsboro is changing at a fast pace. Rapid growth has created many challenges for the City's most vulnerable community members. Two top challenges include housing instability and food insecurity. While the library serves as a vital community hub, the Hillsboro Public Library (HPL) continuously seeks to make a greater impact. The Hillsboro Public Library Leadership Team (LLT) approved the formation of the staff-led HPL Cares team. HPL Cares consists of six big-hearted library staff members who took the idea of a library-sponsored community service group and developed a community-focused inspiration team.

The HPL Cares team is staffed by HPL employees and supported by a supervisor liaison. Aside from the supervisor liaison, the team members do not hold official leadership positions within the library. As an entirely employee-run team, there is no hierarchy. Team members are directed by their passion for service. With each new project, team members rotate the responsibility of project lead. With the support of their fellow team members, the project lead has the opportunity to practice team management, communication, and organization skills. While these are invaluable skills in a leadership position, they are not the sum total of what it means to be a leader. Leaders set an example and inspire those around them to follow.

HPL Cares passionately pursues avenues for improving the community they work within while providing a path for their colleagues and library patrons to easily follow. Ask any team member and they will proudly share their mission: *We Partner. We Support. We Care.* HPL Cares capitalizes on the trust the library has built within the community to spearhead service-based projects that encourage staff and patron involvement while seeking to deepen empathy among the citizens of Hillsboro.





Betsy Romeo,
Salem Public Library

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HPL staff and patrons at an Oregon Food Bank food packing event.

We Partner

From inception, the HPL Cares team recognized that the route to successful community engagement is built on strong partnerships with local nonprofit agencies. Team members never attempt to solve the social issues facing our community but work to collaborate with service organizations addressing social needs. The team shares the incredible work that is being done by service organizations with the wider Hillsboro community to support their efforts. Once HPL Cares was formed in early 2017, the team was quickly inundated with requests for help. The team's first projects started by hosting food, clothing and supply drives in support of selected nonprofits. The collection drives allow the team to highlight specific challenges community members face and provide patrons with a low commitment platform to help. Memorable collection drives include:

- Washington County Project Homeless Connect Sock Drive—206 pairs of socks, 26 pairs of gloves, and seven hats were collected in support of Project Homeless Connect, a semiannual event bringing together local businesses and agencies to connect homeless citizens with resources. <http://www.phcwashco.org/>
- McKinney-Vento Clothing Drive—Clothing and personal hygiene products were collected in support of the Hillsboro School District's effort to help provide for homeless youth, grades K–12. <https://www.hsd.k12.or.us/Page/1968>
- Oregon Food Bank—Over the course of one month, patrons and staff donated 347 pounds of food to the Oregon Food Bank. <https://www.oregonfoodbank.org>





Aaron Novinger,
Oregon City Public Library

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- Washington County Project Homeless Connect School Supply Drive—HPL Cares answered a call for school supplies by gathering 32 backpacks along with dozens of boxes full of pencils, crayons, rulers, scissors, and a multitude of other school supplies.
- Astronomers Without Borders—Many remember the 2017 total eclipse. As excitement for the event waned, HPL Cares gave solar eclipse viewing glasses a second life. Instead of finding their way into trash cans around town, 1,714 glasses were collected at Hillsboro libraries and sent to Astronomers Without Borders to support students viewing the eclipses that will cross South America and Asia in 2019. <https://astronomerswithoutborders.org>
- Harkins House Holiday Gift Drive—HPL Cares helped collect dozens of holiday gifts, as well as a generous \$500 donation from the Friends of the Hillsboro Library, in support of Harkins House residents. Harkins House is a short-term residential shelter, providing care and evaluation for youth between the ages of 12 and 17 awaiting pending court cases. <https://www.co.washington.or.us/juvenile/harkinshouse/>
- NAMI Washington County Art Supply Drive—Library patrons donated an overwhelming number of art supplies in support of NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness). The supplies are used for art therapy programs open to individuals and families impacted by mental illness. <https://www.washconami.org/>

Based on the flood of requests to help, it became evident that vetting criteria were needed to narrow down the multiple agency requests to a manageable number. Starting in 2018, the team asked library staff members to nominate agencies for project consideration. Their goal for this calendar year is to make project selections based on the following requirements for each nomination: nonprofit agencies serving Washington County residents; organizations that share the HPL mission and vision; and groups library employees and patrons enthusiastically support. The vetting criteria helps the team to balance the types of help (service projects, collection efforts, youth or adult focus, etc.) and rotate the selected agencies from year-to-year. This has led to greater staff participation and excitement around selected service projects.

We Support

As partnerships and community participation increased due to the popularity of the collection drives, HPL Cares sought to more actively engage patrons and staff. The City of Hillsboro sponsors HillsDOer Day every October. The citywide service projects encourage Hillsboro citizens to gather their friends, family, and neighbors and spend the day volunteering. Inspired by the annual event's motto—"Do Good! Feel Good!"—HPL Cares set forth to organize a food packing event at the Oregon Food Bank to help library staff and patrons join in HillsDOer Day. Twenty-five library patrons and staff members joined together and packed over 8,000 pounds of food, enough to make 6,793 meals. As library staff members and their families worked side by side with patrons, new friendships and connections were formed.

Encouraged by the success of the HillsDOer Day project, HPL Cares now plans quarterly staff volunteer projects throughout the city. Projects are chosen based on staff input from the annual nomination process. Because the library is a seven-day-a-week





Jennifer Costley,
Pendleton Public Library

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operation and library staff tends to work nontraditional hours, HPL Cares team members work with the chosen agencies to schedule multiple volunteer shifts and coordinate staff signups. As City of Hillsboro employees, library staff are encouraged to volunteer and asked to log their hours through the Hillsboro Helps initiative. Hillsboro Helps is a City-sponsored program that supports City employees as they volunteer throughout the community. Employees are eligible to log up to eight hours annually during scheduled work time. HPL Cares helps to schedule staff, assist with Hillsboro Helps paperwork, and organize ride sharing options in order to ease staff participation in volunteer events.

We Care

As the HPL Cares team continues to expand the supportive reach of the library throughout Hillsboro, the team also pursues ways to assist staff as they serve the many diverse groups of people converging within the library. As the population continues to grow and rental costs quickly increase, Hillsboro has experienced an uptick in citizens struggling with housing insecurity. As a welcome space for everyone, Hillsboro Public Library invites all people to utilize library services. Library staff members find themselves spending an increased amount of time helping connect houseless patrons with support services located throughout the city. At times, staff struggle to connect patrons with agencies that are stretched beyond their capacity. Staff members have expressed not only their frustration, but also their desire to do more for library visitors. In response, the HPL Cares team devised a plan to solicit donations from patrons and staff to help create Care Kits. Care Kits include small snacks,



HPL staff at the Adelante Mujeres veggie packing night in support of local CSA programs.





Cindy York,
Crook County Library



A giving tree near the library entrance with gift suggestions to support the Harkins House holiday gift drive.

personal hygiene products, socks and information about available Washington County social services. As staff interacts with or assists a patron who openly shares their struggle to find housing, wash their clothes, take a shower, find a hot meal, etc., staff are able to offer minor relief with a Care Kit prepared by the HPL Cares team. The Care Kits have become a tool, assisting staff as they navigate tough patron interactions. The scope of library work does not always allow us to assist patrons to the extent that we would like, but the Care Kits provide staff the opportunity to build trusted relationships with patrons and discreetly say “We Care.”

This team of compassion-driven leaders has mobilized hundreds of Hillsboro residents to donate their time and money to causes that directly give back to their community. As they work to spread their mission, the potential for growth is limitless. Through coordinated acts of civic engagement, HPL Cares has helped Hillsboro residents recognize the library as an even more involved presence in the community. Going forward, the team plans to create a community involvement corner at both library locations where patrons can easily find

information about Hillsboro-based community service organizations, as well as volunteer opportunities throughout the city. The community involvement corner will take over a section of the community information bulletin board providing easy access to community service information for patrons. The team is working to expand patron participation in the quarterly staff service projects through targeted advertisements (social media, library website, event calendars, and in-library displays). The team would also like to partner with HPL’s Teen Library Council to generate ideas for future service projects and mentor teen counselors as they develop service leadership skills. HPL Cares is privileged to continue cultivating a culture of community involvement within the library and beyond. This team embodies the true spirit of leadership: partnering, supporting and caring. 🐾

