A HEART FOR THE HOMELESS
An Interview with Sharon Rodriguez

Some Johnson Countians think the homeless don’t exist here. But Sharon Rodriguez’s exhibit at Central Resource Library in February aimed to show that the homeless exist even in the middle- to upper-income suburbs.

They live in parks, in woods, on streets and anywhere else a person without a home could camp or shelter from rain, snow and heat.

Sharon says suburbanites often have a “not in my backyard” attitude toward the homeless. But she tells them, “They’re already in your backyard. They’re everywhere.”

One day on a walking trail, Sharon saw a homeless man and woman she sensed were having a problem. She approached and asked if she could help. The woman began to cry. She said no one else had spoken with them in all the time they had been there.

“The homeless are human beings just like anyone else,” she said. “They have the same needs and emotions. I don’t give them money, but sometimes I give them food or clothing. I ask them to tell me their stories.”

Sharon records the stories in handwriting and makes black-and-white photographs of the storytellers. She has featured them in two books, “Homeless Not Invisible” in 2017 and “Homeless, With Honor” in 2018. You can also see her work on her website, sharonrodriguezphotography.com

Sharon feels passionate about her work and can get up in anyone’s face who talks disparagingly about poor or homeless people. At a civic club meeting, a man said he was renovating an apartment complex “to get rid of the unsavory.” She spoke to him so forcefully about his lack of respect that he ended up giving her a donation for her work. She used the money to buy digital cameras for homeless people to use to record their lives and plans to feature their photos in a future exhibition.

The work Sharon does now is a world away from her previous jobs as an IT consultant. Her artistry evolved after 2007, when she was unable to find work in the crippled economy. A mother of three, grandmother of 10 and great-grandmother of 10, she is happy to spend time with her family and to continue her heartfelt work with the homeless.

Through Sharon’s stories and photos, viewers have a window into the experiences of homeless people. Other people may shy away from the conversations Sharon has, but she feels no fear, only compassion and a desire to make visible the “invisible” homeless in all their humanity.
Patrons of Corinth Library know the process of returning books very well. You pull open the deposit drawer on the outside of the building, place your book inside and close the drawer. From there, your book falls into a pile of other returned books inside. Then library employees sort and replace the books on the shelves.

That's the way it's always been. But now, modern technology is making the process much more efficient.

A sleek-looking return slot replaces the pull-down drawer by the entrance. When you feed in a book, it lands on a conveyor belt inside that starts moving when it detects a book. The book is checked in and quickly removed from the patron's account before it is deposited in one of several bins, depending on its type. On the conveyor belt, each book's RFID tag is scanned. The tag links the item with a record that says what the item is and where it goes. For example, when an RFID tag tells the computer it's an Adult Fiction book, it goes to bin number two. Finally, library employees return the sorted books to the shelves.

With more than 100,000 books in Corinth's collection, automated sorting saves a great deal of employees' time. The sorter swiftly processes a volume of books that would take employees hours to sort by hand. That also means the books can be back on the shelves more quickly.

Amy Barclay, Corinth Branch Manager, said the sorter frees up employees to do more patron-focused activities: helping patrons find a new book, use the computers or locate useful resources.

The library acquired the Tech Logic sorter to better serve Corinth's large community of patrons. The machinery was delivered on a flatbed truck, and clearing space to install the large, complex machine was a challenge.

Amy Barclay, Branch Manager, is an experienced manager who's new to Corinth as of January 7, 2019. She previously was a Branch Manager at the Mid-Continent library system. She began her new job just as the sorter installation was being planned. The library was closed from February 6 through February 11 while the work was completed. Staff was trained and the sorter was ready for use on February 14. Amy said Corinth's community of readers was patient and supportive, knowing the change would improve the library's quality of service to patrons.

Corinth Library provides services and activities for patrons of all ages. There are storytimes for babies, toddlers and preschoolers. For older kids, there's Read to a Dog, which allows kids to practice their reading-out-loud skills with a well-trained therapy dog as the audience.

The library's lower level is a large children's space where there are books, DVDs, computers and well-lit study areas. Glass cases hold children's personal collections of toys, dolls, colorful erasers or whatever else they like to collect.

For adults, Corinth Library hosts many different kinds of programs. One is legislative coffees, where patrons can get to know their local elected officials. Another is An Edible Discussion, where attendees share a potluck meal while they learn from community chefs and experts about various food genres and how to use them in recipes.

With its emphasis on serving all types of patrons, Corinth Library is a vital part of the Prairie Village community – and it's clear that the community loves and appreciates all the ways it touches their lives.
When Oli Ray was a junior at Olathe High School, Kate McNair, the Teen Services Coordinating Librarian, came to speak there. She spoke about *elementia*, the library’s creative magazine published by teens. It’s described as “a literary arts magazine published to represent and uplift young adults.” As a budding writer, Oli was intrigued.

When he was a senior, Oli interned at the Central Resource Library as an editor and designer for issue 15. In that role, he was pleased to discover what a wide array of resources the library offered. He especially appreciated the Maker Space, where patrons can use digital design software, a recording studio, video hardware and software, 3D printers, laser cutters and more. That’s where Oli created *elementia* videos that he posted on the library’s YouTube channel.

“The Maker Space enabled me to create higher-quality film projects,” says Oli. “The library is an undervalued resource I’d encourage everyone to learn about and appreciate.”

Kate McNair says, “Oli brought his experience in spoken word poetry and videography to the table to help us best represent our performances online. He jumped at every opportunity to make *elementia* bigger and better, contributing his time and talents to select writing for publication and design the issue.”

She adds, “Oli’s energy, enthusiasm and respect for the work of others was contagious and has left a lasting impact on our editorial committee and the *elementia* community.”

Since the magazine’s debut in 2005, *elementia* has published 1,000 pieces of writing and art from 730 creative young adults in 15 issues. Young adults from all over the Kansas City Metro area, several states, England, Malaysia, and Africa have been featured in its pages.

“I was fortunate to intern at the library and meet the *elementia* staff and the library personnel,” Oli says. “I learned a lot and made a lot of friends. It opened a lot of opportunities for me.”

When Oli came out as transgender in high school in Olathe, he faced difficulties with some students. But when he came to the library, he found support and acceptance. And, of course, the chance to learn new creative skills.

Now, Oli is majoring in writing and minoring in film at the Pratt Institute in New York, which has a diversity policy and extensive LGBTQ resources for students.

“Most everything is much better at Pratt,” Oli says.
Dylan Reiter is a man of many facets. A bass player with three bands who has traveled nationally and internationally. A trombone and tuba player. Mr. Fixit for issues with Mac and PC tablets and laptops. Instructor in the use of Android and Apple cellphones. And there’s more. But his official title at Antioch Library is Information Specialist, or IS.

"Dylan works to make the library a community resource for area residents"
EVENT SPOTLIGHT

Homeschool Meetup: Nature and Art Inspire

On a gray and rainy February day, bright colors and lively imaginations were at play at Cedar Roe Library’s Homeschool Meetup, “Nature and Art,” presented by Karen Gerety-Foulks, curator of the Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art.

Karen brought Magic Clay and markers to use for sculpting and sparked the children’s creative imaginations with photos and art featuring plants and animals. As they pushed, patted and pulled the clay, their ideas took form. Finally, they added vivid colors with markers.

Two young patrons create with clay.

The unique artworks included multi-colored snails, an orange-striped cat, a turtle and a tropical island with a palm tree.

As an Olathe mom’s third- and fourth-grade sons eagerly joined the group of children in the meetup room, she said, “I like this because it’s a chance for them to see that there are other homeschooled kids like them. And it gives them a chance to learn independently and ask questions.”

A colorful creation.

Story Slam

On the third Tuesday evening of each month, Central Resource Library hosts Now Presenting, a series of arts and culture related events. On February 20, the event was a “Story Slam,” where several storytellers told true-life tales to an audience of about 20.

Mike told of a co-worker’s comical obsession with coming Y2K disasters. Though skeptical at first, he eventually purchased mass quantities of bottled water and fruit cocktail. After Y2K came without incident, he was stuck with a two-year supply, wondering, why fruit cocktail?

A teacher shared a funny, very animated description of the machinery in a hot dog factory where she worked during high school and how she once got her arm stuck in a machine.

The March 19 Now Presenting event is “Arts in Prison,” featuring poetry of Lansing inmates and former inmates. On April 16, it will be “Veterans Reader Theater,” readings of veterans’ and their families’ accounts of military life from boot camp to service to life afterward.
We are just a couple of weeks away from hitting 10k page likes on Facebook!

We had a little fun with one of the snowstorm forecasts and how many books you should check out.

Our web content team capitalized on the Marie Kondo trend with this post, that received almost 100k reactions.

Our Lenexa City Center Library opening announcement received lots of love.

Race Project KC has been generating lots of great content from students and teachers. Learn more about Race Project KC, raceprojectkc.com.
Month in Review
February 2019

Patrons recently visited Antioch Library for the Renovate Your Resume program where members of the Society for Human Resource Management of Johnson County shared tips on how to write a resume that will stand out.

A book display at Corinth Library celebrating Black History month.

Corinth Library recently asked patrons to describe their generation in their own words.

Next Issue

- Top 10 Holds: March 2019
- Staff Spotlight: Lacie Griffin, Collection Development Manager
- Event: Meet the author Leanne Brown
- Patron Focus: Julie Steiner
- Branching Out: Blue Valley Library