Reading for Recovery: 
Public Libraries and Bibliotherapy

**Background**

Few public libraries in the United States have devoted resources specifically to bibliotherapy. However, many offer unique programming to meet the library’s mission of providing services for the educational, personal, and professional needs of their community.

**Programming**

Two different ways of reaching your patrons:

1. Virtual and Informal: in-house displays, suggested reading bookmarks, hand-selected book recommendations, bibliographies, social media
2. Formal: books clubs, coloring programs, open mic nights, poetry readings

Many libraries today are offering new and innovative programming, changing the way public libraries are involved in their communities. A few examples include:

- Read to a therapy dog
- Stress relief coloring programs
- On-Site Library Nurse (Pima County Public, AZ)
- Library Social Worker (San Francisco Public)
- Next Chapter Book Club
- Homeless outreach
- Computer training
- Library community gardens

**How Book Club Kits Work**

Book club kits are intended to provide ready access to a number (often 10) of copies of a title for discussion groups. Kits contain additional material such as suggested discussion questions, an author biography, appropriate historical or background information, and other relevant material.

**Book Club Kit Collection Criteria**

1. Suitability to community needs and appeal to a variety of readers
2. Reviews
3. Format (paperback-cheaper and lighter)
4. Price
5. Prizes, honors and awards received
6. Availability of book (out of print, self-published, etc.)
7. Availability of discussion questions
8. Relation to existing collection and material on the subject

**Virtual Book Clubs**

As an alternative to the traditional face to face book group, libraries can offer free, virtual book clubs using sites such as Good Reads.

**Benefits to Public Libraries**

- Outreach to new patrons
- Development of relationships with community organizations
- Partnerships with local colleges
- Grants
- Promotion of collections
- Ready reference tool

Molly Stewart, MLIS
Franklin Township Public Library
New Jersey