

Student ID: 300317199

Socialisation for the older homebound person,
through the Homebound Service.

INFO580: Research Project

Victoria University of Wellington

Faculty of Commerce and Administration

School of Information Management

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1. Abstract

1.1 Research problem

Libraries have an ethical requirement to offer their services for all in the community. Those confined to their home and unable to physically make it in to the library, while they are able to still obtain information and reading material through the homebound services, miss out on the social aspect a trip to the library provides. Feelings of isolation can cause mental and physical health to rapidly deteriorate. This study hopes to find out ways that homebound patrons are still able to experience the critical aspect of socialisation through the public library system.

1.2 Methodology

The research followed an exploratory mixed methods design. A survey was issued on a number of international and local listservs questioning staff in charge of public libraries homebound services, on how their homebound services were run and ways they found to include the homebound patron socially.

1.3 Results

Many libraries found budgets and staffing levels a barrier. However, it was found that socialisation didn't just involve bussing the homebound person in for events, or use of the Internet. Importance was also placed on the value of social contact gained through the use of volunteer delivery.

1.4 Implications

Libraries need to find ways to socially include the homebound patron. This means where possible, ways around barriers such as budget and geographical constraints to still socially include the homebound person, so that they are able to more fully participate in the library experience and ease their social isolation and feelings of loneliness.

1.5 Key words

- Housebound/homebound
- Social isolation
- Loneliness
- Older person

2. Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor Anne Goulding for her guidance and support whilst undertaking my research. I would also like to acknowledge participants of my research who so willingly gave me insights into their services and their tireless work to improve the lives of the homebound person. I would also like to thank my family and friends who supported and encouraged me throughout my studies.

3. Introduction – Research problem and study objective

The research objective of this study is to find out whether there were ways that libraries could make their homebound programme models more socially inclusive. The focus was to find ways that could be socially and informatively inclusive which would be both affordable and realistic for both libraries and homebound patrons.

For the older person who has no family near by or limited social contact, a trip to the library can be a lifeline. The homebound delivery service model is a regular service which brings books to patrons who are too incapacitated to make it into the library on their own on a regular basis and provide social contact in the form of the volunteer visit.

There are a range of services currently in place by various agencies that provide social contact for the older homebound person, however, these are limited and the homebound person often spends hours with limited contact from the outside world. Libraries have the opportunity to ease isolation through their homebound service and contribute to the professional ongoing care of the homebound person and assist in slowing their decline in health and mental faculties. This may be done through a range of social activities, through volunteer visits, assisted trips to the library and by distance through the Internet. This will also help the homebound patron foster and maintain new friendships.

This study sought to find ways that libraries were able to engage homebound older persons in a social context.

The research focused on four main questions:

1. How have public libraries attempted to socially connect home bound users?
2. To what extent have these methods been successful?
3. What value have these methods added to the homebound older person's life?
4. How can libraries overcome barriers, in order to provide social connections through the homebound service?

4. Definitions of key terms

Older person

The United Nations defines this as people who are over 60, in western nations (World Health Organization, 2016)

Homebound

See housebound

Homebound services

See housebound services

Housebound

The US National library of medicine defines Housebound, as varying degrees of confinement to ones own home. This may vary from being unable to leave the house on ones own, to being able to leave the house for short periods a couple of times a week (Qui et al., 2010).

Housebound services

Housebound services as defined by the Auckland Libraries, is a home delivery service for those who cannot physically visit the library (Auckland Libraries, 2016).

Loneliness

The feelings of being alone despite any others that may surround you and feeling that those relationships aren't meaningful to you. (Griffiths, 2017).

Social isolation

Having a small social circle and infrequently engaging in social activities (Griffiths, 2017).

Sequential exploratory design

This involves starting with qualitative research, to gain the views of the participants and the social contexts, before gathering quantitative data (Creswell, 2014).

5. Literature review

Libraries can help prevent feelings of isolation through various modes of socialisation in the homebound programme. This can have a positive impact in the lives of seniors confined to their home. Loneliness increases as age increases and income decreases. The following literature used in this report backs up the theory for the need for socialisation in the homebound service.

5.1 Loneliness

Loneliness is a subjective emotion and one can be surrounded by social contacts, yet feel lonely, if the relationships are not meaningful and fulfilling. Auckland Council (2012) suggests that research tells us, severe loneliness is uncommon in the older population, however Campaign to End Loneliness (2016) places low income as a high risk factor in becoming lonely. With living costs rapidly rising in Auckland and elsewhere, the number of older people who feel severely lonely is likely to increase. Conversely, Stephens et. Al (2016) say that mental health issues are already prevalent amongst the senior population in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries and the evidence overwhelmingly suggests that feelings of loneliness are a contributing factor to mental health issues. This suggests

that even feeling lonely only some of the time can be enough to cause a serious decline in health. Stephens et. al (2016) says that research shows that low-income earners are more likely to become lonely and develop mental health issues and this tends to happen once people stop working (Stephens, Alpass, & Towers, 2010). Research by Bolton (2012) showed that 81% ranked quality social relationships as the key to a good life (Bolton, 2012). Sibley et. al (2016) furthers this, by saying, while in Canada, seniors are more likely to retire economically comfortable than their predecessors, and they are still at a high risk of mental illness and disability stemming from loneliness. Hossen (2012) points out that senior immigrants who have joined their families are at an increased risk of isolation from feeling alienated due to unfamiliarity, cultural, language and financial barriers (Hossen, 2012).

5.2 Loneliness and Health

Preventing feelings of loneliness in the homebound population can help keep the homebound senior healthier for longer. Studies in human geography have demonstrated the efficacy of this approach. Smith (2015) stating that loneliness contributes to declining health. Health impacts according to Smith (2015) include heart disease and depression (Smith, 2015). The Social Care Institute for Excellence, United Kingdom (2012) noted a similar finding, that isolation is one of the biggest causes of declining health in seniors (Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2012). Smith (2015) also noted that loneliness is subjective and one can feel lonely when surrounded by people, if the relationships are not meaningful. Qui et al. (2010) stated that psychiatric illnesses such as dementia and depression are prevalent in the homebound senior community and that losing social contact has been proven to progressively worsen these illnesses.

Social Finance UK (2015), has identified that the older person over 75 is more likely to feel loneliness often. Social Finance differentiates between social isolation and loneliness. Social Finance UK (2015) states that social isolation can be having no one around, while loneliness can occur whilst surrounded by people (Social Finance, 2015). However, Campaign to End Loneliness (2016) points out that those who have the most social connections can often feel the loneliest, but also point out that isolation can also lead to feelings of loneliness (Campaign to End Loneliness, 2016).

Griffiths (2017) states that research shows that feelings of loneliness are comparable to smoking 15 cigarettes a day and increased the likelihood of death by 26%.

Campaign to End Loneliness (2016) corroborates this by saying that Loneliness has been linked with blood pressure issues, insomnia and an increase of stress response with the immune system and that it contributes to depression and distress. Bolton (2012) further says that loneliness can increase the risk of unsafe behaviours such as alcohol abuse, smoking and over eating. Loneliness can strike anyone at any age.

Declining health, both physical and mental is the fastest accelerant to life in a nursing home. Libraries, through the use of socialisation techniques have the opportunity to make a positive impact on the health of the homebound patron.

5.3 The role of libraries

McGaskill and Goulding (2002) state that libraries play a key part in providing access to information regardless of a person's circumstances. The Social Care Institute of Excellence (2012), emphasises that isolation greatly affects health, pointing out that the older person is more vulnerable to feelings of isolation, due to loss of loved ones, income and lack of mobility . While formal access to library programmes may not be

possible, according to the The Social Care Institute of Excellence (2012), data shows that even a simple social visit by a library volunteer while delivering books can be beneficial and have a significant, positive impact on feelings of loneliness and symptoms of depression. The library's responsibility to help increase the social connections of homebound patrons is outlined in The IFLA guidelines for services to patrons with dementia. The authors of these guidelines, Mortensen and Nielsen (2007) state that homebound patrons have a basic right to access the same social connectiveness that others may experience in libraries. While the approach suggested by Mortensen and Nielsen may not look the same as the library experiences of the general category of patrons, there are other ways it can be achieved.

In a democratic society, the right of access to culture, literature and information extends to all, including persons with disabilities. Quality of life is an important factor, and everybody is entitled to participate fully in society as long as possible (Mortensen & Nielsen, 2007).

Mortensen & Nielsen (2007) emphasise that libraries are required to meet the information and reading needs of all sections of society. For the homebound person, that not only means having their reading and information needs met, but the important social connections that come through visits to the library (Mortensen & Nielsen, 2007).

Loneliness in homebound older persons is one of the biggest accelerants towards life in a nursing home. Perceived loneliness as a subjective emotion, has been proven to

cause a range of health problems, not least, heart disease and the accelerated decline of mental faculties (Cornwell & Waite, 2009).

With globalization on the rise, it is not unusual for families to be spread across the country, or even the globe. Not having family nearby can compound feelings of isolation. According to Cornwell and Waite (2009), adjusting programmes where possible to accommodate the homebound patrons will allow for home services to offer greater opportunities for helping patrons to overcome social disconnectedness and perceived isolation, so that they may continue to have access to information and socialisation, despite their homebound status. These services may include anything from being able to engage in and share their favourite hobby, share ideas, have access to medical information or having the ability to make and keep in contact with new friends.

5.4 The role of volunteers

According to Jones (2006), socialisation in the homebound service is often considered by the homebound patrons as being more important than the material they receive to read. Libraries surveyed in metropolitan and regional Adelaide, recognised the value of the social contact they provided in their service, through volunteers and established social contact as the underlying philosophy of the service. The research of Jones (2006) found that it was felt that those libraries that used volunteers were able to provide much more of a social service, because paid staff felt they had too much else to do.

According to Pennington and Knight (2008), it has been found that volunteer and homebound senior relationships are often warmer and more meaningful than those that are formed through professional contact. Professionals surveyed often felt that they had to distance themselves emotionally in order to remain professional, whereas volunteers did not feel that they had that kind of psychological distance to maintain.

5.5 Use of the Internet to ease isolation and the digital divide

With an increasing move to e-books, libraries have the opportunity to provide homebound seniors with the ability to have access to a wider range of reading materials and to connect them to the outside world, keep them up to date and enable them to socially connect, despite being confined to their home due to ill health or lack of mobility. While in theory the increased use of information technologies and access to the internet may improve the socialisation of homebound seniors, the issue of cost remains. The cost of basic necessities, such as food, heating, medical bills and rising rents, is a struggle for those existing on pensions. The Internet is an added cost that many are not able to afford. It has been suggested in at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly of 2013, that prolonged disconnection from the internet, is a breach of human rights (La Rue, 2011). Throughout many cities in New Zealand, free Wi-Fi can be found, both in the central business district [CBD] and places such as cafés, bars and public libraries. However, this ubiquitous public access to the Internet does not help those who are confined to their own homes, to connect with the outside world.

Internet usage has been shown to help overcome isolation, which in turn prevents decline in health and mental faculties caused by mental health issues stemming from

isolation (Choi & DiNitto, 2013). The digital divide, however, can prevent the older homebound adult from experiencing the positive benefits that Internet usage can offer (Kwong, 2015).

While Internet access may be a barrier for those who have limited economic resources, within the older homebound persons, usage is growing and will one day be common place in the homes of homebound persons as digital natives come into retirement age. According to Statistics New Zealand (2013), the 2013 census showed that of citizens of 85+ years, 33.0 percent lived in households with access to the Internet. 75.3 percent lived in households with access to the Internet, aged 65-74 years. This means that in the not too distant future, libraries will increasingly be able to offer programmes, by distance through the web, to help ease isolation.

Kiel (2005), found that senior participants in the study on accessing email to keep in contact with loved ones, placed a high value on being able to regularly contact those who were some distance from them. It was found that regular, and almost instantaneous contact with loved ones, which email allowed for, staved off feelings of loneliness and isolation. Access to communications using the Internet helped research participants remain more positive, happy, and therefore mentally functional for a longer period.

However, despite rising numbers of seniors that have access to the internet at home, Wu et al. (2015), pointed out that declining motor-skills was also one of the main issues faced by the senior homebound community. The implications of this study imply that, while offering socialisation through the internet is a good working option, other means of socialisation, such as connections through volunteer visits need to be established as well.

Since this research was undertaken, tablets have emerged as popular digital devices, They are cheaper and easier to use than personal computers, and in 2017 Internet access is much more affordable. While there might still be a digital divide for older adults generally, it might possibly decline over the next ten years due to increased affordability and accessibility of newer and more portable mobile technologies. However, these speculations do not account for the aged demographic that are unable to afford or access such technology, due to lack of income or pension resources to support such use. Other public service programmes may be needed to truly bridge the digital divide. Public libraries (2015) acknowledge that the literature available is clear evidence that the lower socio-economic section of society rely on libraries solely for their Internet access and that portable WiFi hotspots have the possibility to transform lives. Public libraries (2015) also outline ways various libraries have found to fund the expense of providing the portable WiFi hotspots and how the libraries involved have felt obligated to help people bridge the digital divide.

5.6 Summary

The literature shows that while loneliness can strike at any age, the older homebound person is particularly vulnerable to it, because they do not have the same ability to leave their home when they wish to and engage in social activities outside of the home. This means they have much fewer opportunities to make meaningful connections. Health issues can make them feel isolated from those they once may have felt connection to, as the other person may not understand their problems and may become impatient with their focus on their ailing health. This means that interventions by the library can become important to the homebound person.

6. Methodology

To obtain statistics and information on homebound services around the world, a survey was distributed to various libraries around the world by using listservs asking questions about the homebound service and inviting libraries to think of ways that the homebound service could be expanded to include their homebound patrons in social library activities. 179 responses in total were received, but not all respondents answered each question. This has led to discrepancies in each question's response rate.

6.1 Aims and Objectives

The aim of this research was to explore ways libraries could be more socially inclusive of the homebound patron and in doing so, uphold their right to more fully access the library experience, despite being largely confined to their homes. The objective of the survey was to find the various ways that libraries found were successful in the social inclusion of the homebound patron so that other libraries could address ways that they could change their service within their own context.

6.2 Population and sample

Libraries are in a range of demographic and geographical areas so it was useful to get as wide and varied responses as possible. The survey was issued on a number of listservs in the UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the US. It was also issued on an international listserv through IFLA. This ensured samples were able to be obtained of libraries facing a range of issues related to their homebound service. The survey targeted services for homebound users over the age of 65. However, some libraries, particularly in the US operate homebound services for all ages, including children, isolated geographically and economically from the library. Some

of these libraries answered regarding their services for this demographic, too. This information is still relevant because it is about libraries being inclusive for all and helping overcome social isolation, which can occur at any age.

6.3 Data collection

An email was sent on each listserv, inviting coordinators of homebound services to complete the survey, which had an attached information and consent sheet, using the survey platform, qualtrics. Participants were given an information sheet (see Appendix a) to read before deciding to go any further and were informed that the information they left was anonymous and would not be passed on to a third party. They were also informed that the data would be destroyed after a period of time.

The survey asked a series of questions related to the homebound services operated by libraries and was designed to get an overall view of the kinds of ways libraries operate their homebound services. Respondents had a mixture of multi choice and long answer questions, with the chance to leave extra comments on many of the questions (see Appendix a) . Respondents were then offered the chance to leave their contact details for a copy of the report at the end.

The data collected through the survey was both qualitative and quantitative.

7. Results

7.1 Summary

The survey results showed that socialisation in the homebound service was largely successful, while few libraries said that they had attempted to implement socialisation programmes and there was no interest.

7.1.1 Survey sample

The survey was anonymous. Because of this, for the most part, locations were not identifiable. However, the survey was issued across North America, the UK, Australia, New Zealand and internationally, through the IFLA listserv. Libraries that identified themselves were from UK, Canada, USA, Finland, Australia and New Zealand. Some of the libraries served large rural and coastal areas, others were metropolitan and others were located in smaller, rural centres and served not only the metropolitan area, but semi-rural areas as well.

7.1.2 Main issues faced

Overwhelmingly, libraries cited financial issues and staffing levels as reasons they were unable to socially include the homebound community to the extent that they would like. Other issues that made it difficult, included:

- Lack of staffing
- Geographical distance
- Lack of funding
- Lack of available facilities
- Lack of time and to a lesser extent, lack of interest on the behalf of the homebound patrons.
- One respondent cited concerns regarding the personal safety of the staff and volunteers as the reason they did not operate a homebound service.

7.1.3 Socially including homebound patrons

74.57% of respondents that said they did not offer a way for homebound patrons to be socially included.

There were also a number of respondents that didn't know how their library could make socialisation within their homebound service better as they were time, staff and budget poor.

A number of libraries, however, despite funding cuts managed to find ways to still socially include the homebound patron. These methods included:

- Encouraging volunteers to stay long enough for a conversation
- Encouraging volunteers to get to know the homebound patrons and build up a rapport
- Telephone calls asking about books wanted for the next delivery, including a brief social chat.

Some of the other ways libraries who offered social inclusion for patrons included:

- Book club kits for those living in senior communities
- Book clubs with telephone, Skype and online participation
- Providing transportation, through library or charity funding, in to the library for events
- Offering transport to monthly talks and specific events
- Online services through the website
- Inviting aged care services to bring clients to library events
- Homebound patrons able to request books online or by phone, rather than have them chosen for them

- Bus collection for events
- Referring customers to other community events that provide transportation for homebound clients

Some survey participants elaborated further on what services they provided for homebound patrons. Some of the programmes that various libraries ran included:

“Brain Training” programmes, designed to stimulate the brain . These included:

- Book discussion groups, craft such as knitting and puzzles such as crosswords or soduku, reminisce kits were also mentioned.
- “Book chat bags” which were able to be checked out for book clubs. Also book clubs via the Internet or by telephone
- Mobile “Web on Wheels” bus, so that homebound patrons were able to get access to the Internet and assistance with technology as well as books and the occasional programme.
- Book group newsletters, book kits were sent to homes and homebound patrons were able to telephone the librarian so that their comments could be put in the next newsletter. Another library put a notebook in the pack, so that patrons could write notes about the book and pass it on to the next reader.
- A “Bus-to-Library” programme was run by one library in conjunction with the local transport agency. It enabled homebound patrons to come into the library once a month for a morning tea with staff and other patrons. They also encouraged homebound patrons to contribute knitting for a “Wrap with Love”

project, which could be collected when books were delivered. This fostered feelings of worth and contribution to the community.

- One respondent spoke about a “Maker bus” which could be taken out to care facilities so that patrons could experience various technologies available in the library. At present, they stated they could not visit private homes.
- Adult summer reading programme where participants were eligible to enter in the draw for weekly prizes, an entry for each book they read.
- A few respondents stated their libraries recorded their various programmes and broadcast them, some via the local cable station, some through the website. One said that they also had the ability to stream music events live. It was not clear whether these were events held in the library, or elsewhere.
- One respondent stated they held evenings in senior housing complexes where their library serves the homebound community. Evening events included, movie nights, trivia nights and live music events. This has meant that others living in those complex who aren’t homebound have realised how much more the library has to offer than book and visitors to their library have increased.
- Another respondent stated as well as transporting patrons in for a “cuppa” and book readings, they also ran “History Pin Connections” and “Music Mirrors”. These are both programmes designed to engage and stimulate the memory of the older person, to help prevent a decline in mental faculties .

7.1.4 Number of homebound patrons libraries served

The number of patrons that were able to be served from the libraries, represented by the respondents surveyed, were based on four factors

- Those in need
- Geographical location
- Staffing levels
- Funding

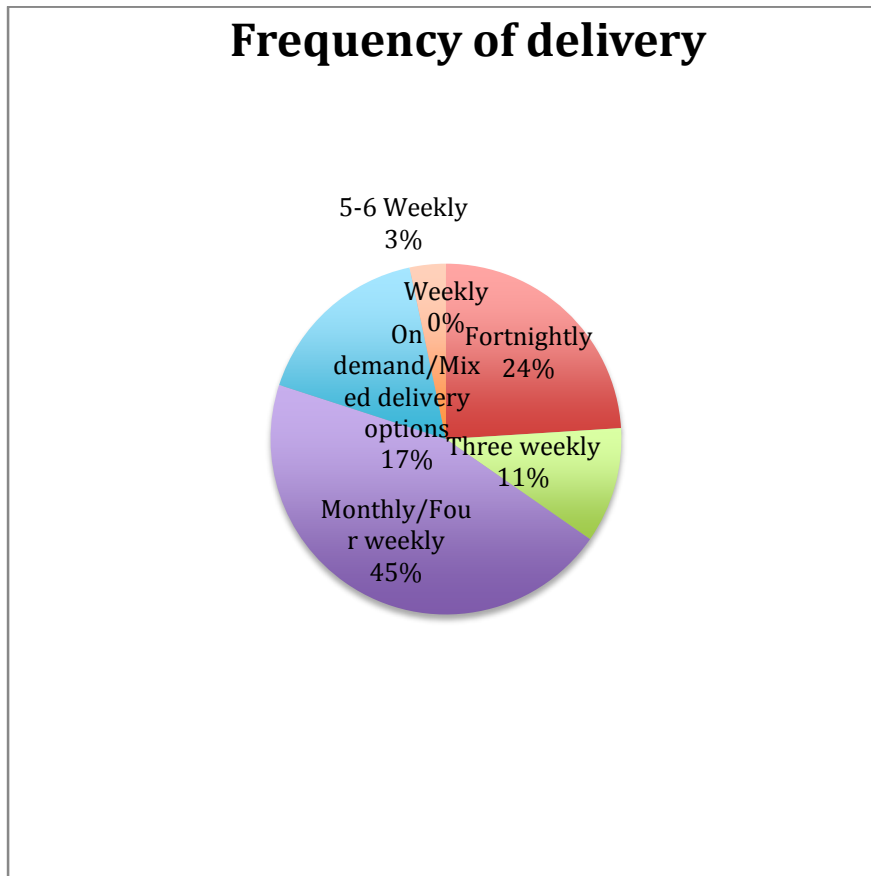
The number of homebound patrons that libraries served ranged from 1 – 2200.

7.1.5 Ages of homebound patrons

The age ranged from 1 – 105. While the survey specified the older homebound person, some libraries, particularly in the US, specified that they also had a number of homebound persons of a younger age, who were homebound for geographical and economic reason.

7.1.6 Frequency of book delivery

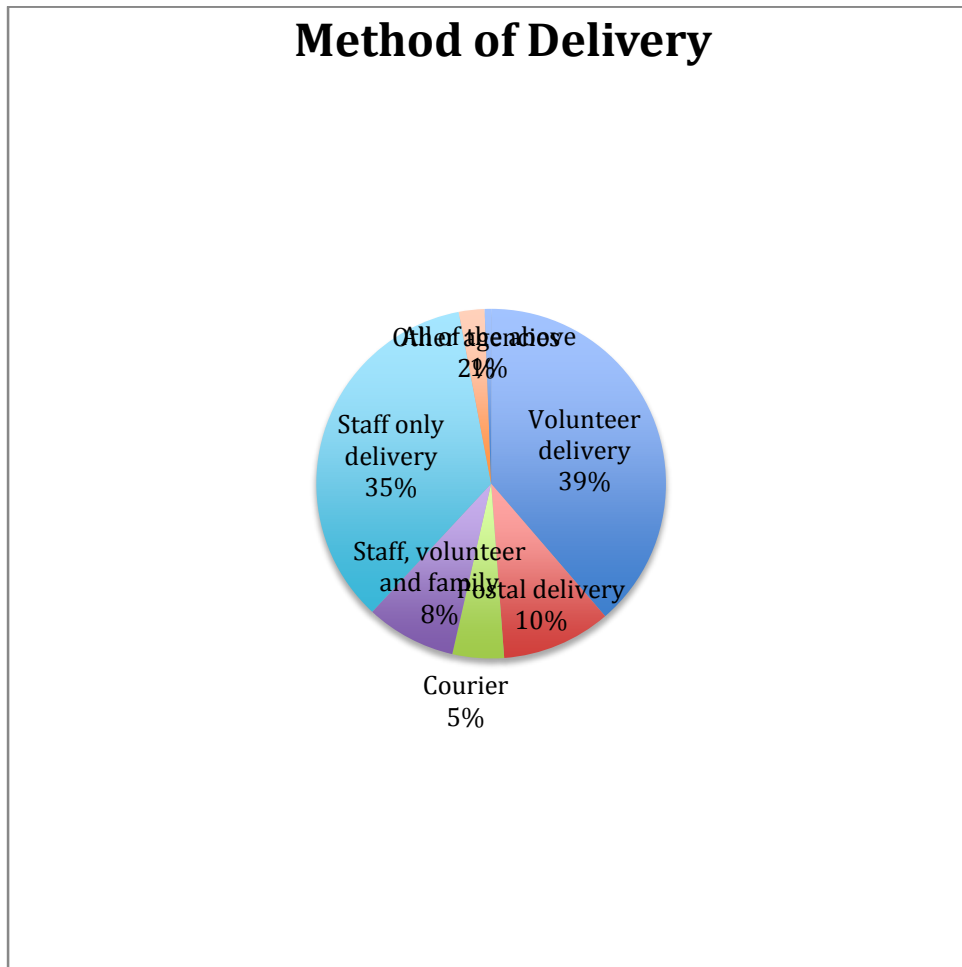
Books were mostly delivered monthly/four weekly, with some libraries delivering bi-weekly and even weekly.



Other options had more flexible, varying times, 2 or 4 weekly, by arrangement and two respondents stated they delivered daily, in some cases. One survey participant stated:

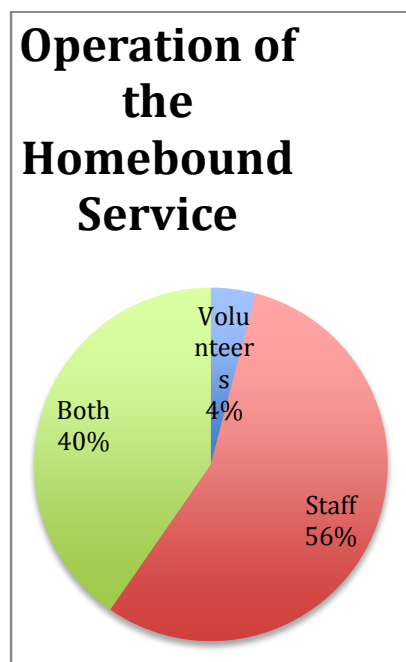
“Our programme is based on convenience for staff member and patron. They converse, setting up deliveries on their own schedule. A few see their visits as a social visit as well, inviting the employee to stay and chat for a few minutes.”

7.1.7 Method of delivery



Staff and volunteer delivery was most the most common method of delivering books. 39% used volunteer delivery, 35% delivered using staff only, 8% using a mixture of staff, volunteer and families, 10% delivered books through the post, while another 5% used couriers to deliver their homebound books to the homebound patron.

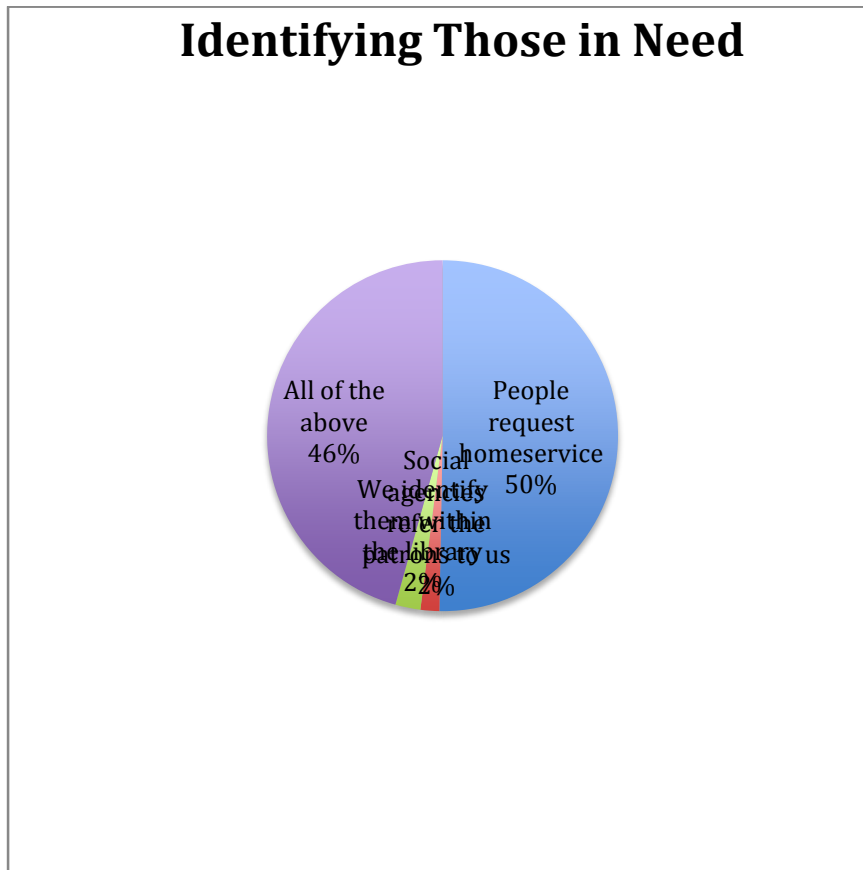
7.1.8 Operation of the homebound service



The Homebound/homebound service was mostly run by paid staff, with volunteers being the next most popular choice. 56% of survey respondents said the service was operated solely by staff, 40% used a mixture of staff and volunteers, while 4% said that it was run by volunteers only.

7.1.9 Identifying those in need of the service

Homebound patrons were largely self referred to the library. Other methods included referral by social agencies, referral by library staff and advertising of the home service. 50% of respondents stated that their service was requested by the older person who felt they were no longer able to regularly come into the library, 46% said there was a range of ways that people came to be on the homebound service, including staff identification, self referral and social agency referral. 2% said that their patrons were solely identified by staff and another 2% said that their homebound patrons were only referred through social agencies.



In the free text comments, it was noted that most libraries advertised the homebound service through a range of ways. These methods included the library website, social media and brochures in doctors offices and social agency offices. Some of the other ways it was possible to gain access to the programme, included family requests, doctors referrals and charitable agency referrals.

7.1.10 Reasons for not being able to provide a homebound service to all in need.

77.46% of libraries stated that they were able to cater for all who request the service.

For those libraries that were unable to provide this service, reasons given, included:

- People requesting the service outside of the council area
- Limited resources
- People needing to supply medical certificates because of a small minority taking advantage
- Waiting lists
- Inability to cater for those who require braille
- Lack of staffing
- Uncertainty if those who need it, know about it
- Lack of funding
- Privacy laws preventing those in need being identified
- No homebound patrons in the area
- Lack of correct equipment or enough materials
- Concerns over staff safety

7.1.11 Funding of homebound services

Homebound services were largely funded through library funds, with 88.5% of respondents stating their homebound service was funded either through an allocated library budget, or local government funding. To a lesser extent, homebound services in libraries were supplemented by

- additional funding
- assistance with transportation, or
- donation of materials,

11.5% of survey participants stating this was how their libraries operated their homebound services.

7.2 Ideas on what could be done to improve the homebound service

Respondents to the survey were asked to think of ways they could include homebound persons in socialisation aspects of the library experience, if they did not already. The following were some of the suggestions survey respondents came up with that were not already in place by other libraries.

- Reading to homebound patrons by volunteers
- Social media discussions
- Technology classes run through Skype or similar online apps.
- Distribution of brochures in community centre activities and transport organised if interest is there.

Many spoke about the possibility of telephone based book groups or live streaming of events and programmes.

7.3 Extra comments:

One respondent commented that they had been noticing an “increased demand for digital training”. This is evidence that use of the Internet in the homebound persons home is on the rise. Although many other respondents spoke of their homebound community’s reluctance to engage with technology. At the same time they also confirmed the value of the socialisation aspect of the classes to the homebound person.

“We are noticing an increased demand for digital training. And a large part of our service is more about the social aspect, we have a bus that collects clients that are still able and brings them into the library once a month. This is more about the social outing, as they sit with friends and have a coffee while they are here. If we have a volunteer deliver to clients in their home they really appreciated the regular catch as much as they enjoy the books etc”

Another survey participant mentioned a pilot programme aimed at involving homebound patrons in cultural activities from home, through the use of Internet capable devices. Yet another respondent, spoke about a singing group that had been set up for homebound patrons and how it was successful and well received while it lasted.

A number of respondents spoke of the financial difficulties faced by their libraries in continuing to provide what was already a rewarding and important homebound service. One survey participant spoke about how their homebound service was very well used and valued and they were wanting to expand it, but were struggling to keep the existing programme running due to financial constraints. They said:

“our programming to home-bound clients may be limited, although the provision of library materials is very well received, and treasured. The phone conversations that our staff members in Books-by-Mail have with each of our clients, to follow-up on the satisfaction of books read and customize their selections for them, is priceless. And also the volunteers who greet them on their doorstep. Unfortunately, due to chronic provincial government under funding, over the last decade - as much as we'd like to increase our home-bound service, in recognition of our aging population - at the moment, we cannot. We are struggling to still keep & provide the limited service that we do to Home-bound clients ... in addition to Books -by- Mail, and those in Residential Care/Nursing Care Homes.”

Another survey participant organised teen groups to visit the homebound patrons and either “bring them treats”, read to them, or just visit. The respondent said that this “really makes their day” and was a rewarding experience for both the teens and the homebound patrons alike. This allowed for both the homebound patrons to feel like they were still a valued member of the community by all and for the teenager, in turn to learn the value that the homebound person has to give to the community and also learn about the knowledge that comes with their age and life experiences.

While volunteers were highly regarded, one respondent however, talked about the necessity of volunteers receiving proper training. While socialising with the homebound patron was rewarding, the conversations could also be very difficult with situations such as mental health, hoarding, family problems etc. Several respondents talked about how their volunteers often acted as informal social workers in this respect.

8. Discussion

8.1 The importance of socialisation in the homebound service

The homebound service is an important part of the care and socialisation of the homebound person and many libraries do this, not just through extending their homebound programmes to include homebound patrons, but through the use of volunteers. There are a range of ways libraries can engage with the homebound person on a social level and can have a huge impact on both mental and physical wellbeing (Jessica Sibley, Thompson, & Edward, 2016). As one survey participant pointed out:

“From our experience, the social contact of a library delivery is more important than the library materials.”

While some libraries may face limitations when it comes to providing social aspects of the homebound service, there are other ways as outlined in this report, to individually socialise with homebound patrons. One respondent emphasised the value of the homebound service and how much of a difference it made in the homebound person's life, they said:

“We find that we are semi-social workers and develop a warm relationship with our patrons over the phone. It's a very rewarding job.”

Financial constraints were a big issue when it came to expanding any homebound programmes that existed, but some libraries liaised with local care facilities and local charities such as Lions, to organise trips into the library for the homebound patron to engage in various programmes and events. This meant that homebound patrons were still able to access programmes and events they would otherwise have had difficulty

accessing due to no longer having the ability to drive, or easily walk to public transport. In a democratic society, the right of access to culture, literature and information extends to all, including persons with disabilities. Quality of life is an important factor, and everybody is entitled to participate fully in society as long as possible (Mortensen & Nielsen, 2007).

8.2 Library programmes by distance

Many libraries have pointed out that Internet access or lack of digital literacy is one of the barriers to providing programmes from a distance, however research has shown that Internet usage amongst the elderly will become more widely available (Stats NZ, 2013). Another issue cited by survey respondents was that lack of knowledge about using computers and the Internet, was also a barrier faced in providing programmes from a distance. With Internet usage becoming more common, declining motor skills will become the main barrier to people accessing this technology they would otherwise have to hand (Kiel, 2005). Mobile devices, however are becoming increasingly more accessible with those who have disabilities. The increase in usability and accessibility will make providing socialisation from a distance easier for libraries. Technology such as instant video messaging, has been shown to have positive impacts on the older persons mental well-being and reduce feelings of loneliness (Griffiths, 2017). This means that offering live streaming to events and programmes would allow the homebound person to continue to participate in society to an extent. This means they would still be able to participate in events they would otherwise miss out on. The literature used in this report shows that not only will this become easier for libraries in the future, but that it will have positive impacts in the homebound community and will help homebound patrons feel like they are still part

of the wider community, reduce their feelings of insignificance and increase their sense of belonging.

Some respondents spoke of bussing patrons in several times a year for events, just for the homebound community, including morning tea and bingo. Ways to get homebound patrons to those events, included family, library owned vehicles and vehicles owned and operated by charities such as Lions. Other libraries spoke of structural and practical difficulties such as the need for use of the bathroom while the homebound patron was at the library. In this case, it would be likely necessary for the homebound patron to either have a family member or for the library to liaise with local care agencies to have care professionals on hand. This could also be extended to some programmes and events offered by the library that may be of interest to the older homebound person such as craft groups or book launches. This of course, depends on the individuals level of health.

Survey respondents who employ socialisation aspects of their library have overwhelmingly reported positive results, including new friendships, improved communication, help with mental health issues, with one respondent citing being able to help a woman take more control of her mental health issues, open up more about her life and make new and meaningful social connections.

“ Homebound Socially isolated older woman with a history of mental health difficulties has been attending library writing group monthly. She was asked by her granddaughter to fill in a booklet about her memories and didn’t know where to start. By attending the group she has made friends and feels valued and has been able to write about her life. Writing thoughts down and shaping

them has enabled her to manage her sometimes overwhelming feelings and take more control of her life. She said she would not have been able to do this without the supportive group.”

Adjusting the way the homebound service is delivered to increase social contact for the homebound patron will help the patron overcome feelings of loneliness and reduce health issues stemming from that loneliness (Cornwell & Waite, 2009). It has been shown that feelings of loneliness steadily increase past retirement age (Griffiths, 2017).

While the definition of homebound does not necessarily include people in residential homes, it may be possible for coordinators and volunteers of homebound services to liaise with social services that also provide services for the well being of the homebound person, including assistance with attendance at library events.

Some respondents to the survey stated that they didn't know whether they reached all of those who needed the homebound service. The homebound service should be widely advertised, this means not just in the library, but also brochures should be distributed to all those involved in the care of the homebound older person. This includes medical practices, home care agencies, social workers, information centres such as the citizens advice. It should also be advertised in an easy to find place on the library website and on other websites that the elderly and their families may access regarding their homebound status (*Mortensen & Nielsen, 2007*).

8.3 The use of volunteers

Respondents to the survey often found themselves time poor and said that they'd like to spend more with the homebound patron, but didn't feel that they had the time to do so. Others spoke about the rapport that their volunteers were often able to and encouraged to, with the homebound patron.

“My Home Library Service volunteers are encouraged to spend 10-15 minutes in social conversation when delivering library items. Often this grows into a deep friendship and I believe this is as important to my clients as the books are. One volunteer even ended up doing a eulogy at her clients funeral .. and the family still keep in touch”

Research shows that friendships built with volunteers are often rewarding and meaningful, for both the volunteer and the homebound patron (Jones, 2006) . This clarifies both the literature that talks about the relationships of volunteers and homebound patrons and the survey results which indicated the value of volunteer time.

- *“I talk to the patrons once or twice every 3 weeks. I allow time for chat, if they wish, so I know about illnesses, grandkids, children's jobs,...Many of my volunteer drivers develop a relationship with their patrons. I know of visits to patrons when in rehab or nursing homes. One volunteer brought a patron to the vet so her cat could be put to sleep and then, a few days later, brought her to the animal shelter to find a new kitten. Another volunteer didn't like the ancient walker her patron was using and was too frugal/stubborn to replace, so she bought her a new one from Amazon. She now has tea and cookies with that patron, who calls a neighbor to join them for a little visit every 3 weeks.*

That volunteer's husband is losing his battle with cancer. A new patron for her lost her husband 10 years ago to colon cancer. The volunteer told me just yesterday that she's sure she can develop a friendship with this new patron who will tell her how she coped with this horrible situation. Another patron is also a Eucharistic Minister, so he ended up bringing Communion on Sundays to one of his elderly couples until they both died. I know of birthday cards/gifts and Christmas cards/gifts going in both directions from the patrons and volunteers.”

8.4 The use of the Internet

Many respondents said that they thought they would be able to extend the socialisation through the homebound programme, by using the Internet. Many also pointed out, that this posed issues with those who were not able to afford to access the Internet, or able to afford an Internet capable device. Another common issue was the library not having the funding to provide access to the Internet.

Ownership of Internet capable devices and Internet in the home is rising, but the lower socioeconomic end of society is still largely reliant on libraries for Internet access (Public Libraries Connect, 2015). Many libraries in the US and also now Australia are beginning to issue portable WiFi spots to help their patrons overcome the digital divide (Public Libraries Connect, 2015). As it has been shown that Internet connectivity for the older person helps ward off feelings of loneliness, by being instantly connected to loved ones far away (Griffiths, 2017), this may be an option that can be explored for the older, homebound person.

9. Conclusion

Public libraries have an ethical obligation to provide the same level of service for all of society, no matter what their circumstances. While loneliness can strike at any age, the older, homebound person is more vulnerable than any other demographic. They no longer have the ability to leave their homes on a regular basis to make meaningful connections and are reliant on both the people that come to visit them, and those that take the time out to help them leave the house, to make social connections. Even with this assistance, they may continue to feel lonely. The people surrounding them may, for whatever reason, personal and professional, feel it is better to keep their emotional distance from the homebound person and then in turn, the person becomes more isolated and feelings of loneliness compound as the older person may begin to feel like they are a burden.

Loneliness has a huge cost to the community. Many respondents recognised this, but many found themselves lacking in funds.

“I love the idea of developing our Home Delivery service into something more than just dropping off books every three weeks. Social exclusion is an issue in the community, and Home Delivery could provide a great vehicle for staff to get out of the library more often and provide additional services directly to housebound patrons. However, with our current staffing, we do not currently have the time that would be needed to develop these kind of activities in a meaningful and sustainable way”

Libraries may have the opportunity to work with other service providers to allow the homebound person as much as possible to participate in the library experience

available to able bodied patrons. While funds may be lacking, libraries may engage with social agencies and work in conjunction with them, to ensure that homebound patrons are able to experience the library, not just for reading, but on a social level, too.

Libraries should offer people the same level of service no matter what their background or abilities. This means that people confined to their own home, should still have access to a range of activities and experiences that able bodied people may have access to. While their experiences may not look the same, they should be as rewarding, given the circumstances.

Volunteers have been identified as a valuable way to connect with the homebound patron on a social level and ensure that they are not feeling isolated and still gaining the social experiences that a trip to the library could otherwise offer.

Wherever possible, programmes and events might be adjusted and assisted to allow the homebound person to attend in person. This would give the homebound person a much needed break from the confines of their own home, if their health allowed for it.

There are varying stages of being homebound and many reasons that one can be homebound. Some may be able to leave the home with assistance to join events and programmes, while others might be prevented by health. For those who are confined to their homes and unable to make it to events and programmes, the Internet, where possible, can be used to assist those patrons in joining events from the comfort of their own homes. As time goes on, it will likely become more common to have the Internet and Internet capable devices in one's home.

Respondents to the survey and the literature available all spoke about the value of volunteers and how they were able to connect on a personal level with homebound patrons. They didn't feel they needed to maintain the same level of professional

distance. Volunteers were spoken about in terms of enriching the homebound patrons' lives and were able to give the homebound patron someone they felt that they were able to connect with and who understood them.

Issuing public WiFi spots is relatively new in the US and elsewhere and there is not much data in existence on the extent of how it has benefitted the communities it is available in. The availability of public WiFi, however, would give homebound patrons the opportunity to participate in online programmes, access online library resources and socially connect with like minded people through the internet, or through online support groups and should be explored for future use in the homebound service.

74.57% of libraries said they did not offer a way for homebound patrons to socially include patrons. However, while this number is high, many libraries did not take into consideration the value of the social aspect of volunteer and staff visits to the patrons home. The use of trained volunteers is an affordable way for libraries to expand their programmes and a good way for homebound patrons to gain social experiences from volunteer visits.

Volunteers should be trained in how to speak to a person who may be suffering from various stages of Dementia and what they may expect when visiting the home of and speaking to a homebound person.

The literature and respondents identified useful strategies for staving off feelings of loneliness and providing mental stimulation. These strategies which would be useful for expanding homebound programmes included:

- The use of volunteers to make social connections

- Reminiscence kits to help the patron regain feelings of familiarity related to better times in their lives
- Bookclubs – online, via telephone and newsletters (patrons thoughts recorded by volunteers and printed)
- Transport into the libraries for events and programmes
- Access to mobile WiFi hotspots
- The ability to watch library programmes by distance

9.1 Limitations of the research

There was some confusion in my survey between terms used in different English speaking countries, of which I was not aware when I issued the survey.

These terms included “fortnight” and “housebound”.

The word “fortnight” confused people who were based in North America and I also put “Monthly” as an option, instead of “four weekly”. This led to my questionnaire results being heavily biased to the “other” option, in question number 4 when it should have been more heavily based in number 2 and 3. This meant I had to manually count the statistical results and there may be some slight discrepancies in the accuracy. A better option would have been to use the term “bi-weekly” or “in two week periods.” and “monthly/four week periods”.

Another issue faced was the use of the term “housebound”. While this word is in common usage in New Zealand and Australia, where seniors are dwelling in a house during their retirement years is more common, the term is not so common overseas where houses are not necessarily the usual dwelling for the older, homebound person. This caused some confusion during the survey with a couple of respondents asking

me if the survey applied to people in other kinds of dwellings, such as apartment blocks or condos. Because of this, I have chosen to use the term “homebound” rather than “housebound” for the purposes of this report.

The questionnaire was also answered by some libraries for homebound users of all ages, including children living rurally. This may have skewed the results in some of the questions. However, these results can still be relevant as social isolation can hit anyone at any age and those living rurally with limited financial means, do not have the same access to transport that those living in an urban environment may.

Socialisation programmes, may also be able to be extended to those who find themselves isolated due to geographical location, lack of transport, ill health and financial hardship. This can ensure that everyone has a chance to participate in all the library has to offer, no matter what their circumstances or financial means. Future research could include how the wider homebound community, not just the older person, was able to receive critical social aspects that trips to libraries would otherwise provide, through their local library’s homebound service. Social isolation, loneliness and the health effects, both physical and mental can occur at any age.

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11. Appendix a.



SCHOOL OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT
 TE KURA TIAKI, WHAKAWHITI KŌRERO
 LEVEL 5, RUTHERFORD HOUSE, PIPITEA CAMPUS, 23 LAMBTON QUAY, WELLINGTON
 PO Box 600, Wellington 6140, New Zealand
 Phone +64-4-463 5103 Fax +64-4-463 5446 Email sim@vuw.ac.nz Website www.victoria.ac.nz/sim

Participant Information Sheet

Research Project Title: Socialisation through the Housebound Service

Researcher: Karen Spencer, School of Information Management, Victoria University of Wellington

Who is this survey for?

I am inviting those involved in housebound services run by public libraries, to participate in this research. Participants will be asked to take part in an online survey. Permission is sought to gather and use the data from the responses.

What is the purpose of the project?

As part of the completion of my Masters of Information Studies, this study is designed to explore ways the traditional housebound service can expand to help ease isolation in housebound patrons. Victoria University requires, and has granted, approval from the School's Human Ethics Committee.

What will participation involve?

I invite you to fill in a short survey that should take around 15 - 20 minutes to complete.

Will the information I give be confidential?

No one, including the researcher, will be able to identify anyone who has participated, unless specific identifying information is given. You or the library you work for, will not be identified in any written report produced as a result of this research, including possible publication in academic conferences and journals. All material collected will be kept confidential, and will be viewed only by myself and my supervisor Professor Anne Goulding. The research will be submitted for marking to the School of Information Management, and subsequently deposited in the University Library.

What if I do not wish to complete the survey?

Completing the survey is voluntary. If at any time you do not wish to finish the survey, you may close the browser window.

What will happen with the information I provide?

The data provided will be written up as part of my report and will go into the Research Archives at Victoria University of Wellington.

Who do I talk to if I have questions about the survey?

If you have any questions or would like to receive further information about the project, please contact me at spencekare@myvuw.ac.nz, or you may contact my supervisor Professor Anne Goulding at anne.goulding@vuw.ac.nz, or telephone 04 4635887.

Karen Spencer

The survey questions were as followed:

Q1 How many housebound patrons (living in their own homes) does your library provide for?

Q2 What is their age range?

Q3 What kind of area does the housebound service cover? e.g. rural, urban, city centre only

Q4 How often do books get delivered to housebound patrons?

- Weekly
- Fortnightly
- Monthly
- Other (please specify)

Q5 How are the books delivered?

- Volunteer delivery
- Postal delivery
- Courier
- Other (please specify)

Q6 How is the housebound service operated?

- Volunteers

Staff

Both

Q7 How do you identify those in the community in need of a housebound delivery service?

People request home service

Social agencies refer the patrons to us

We identify them within the library

Other (please explain)

Q8 How can the older person and their families find out about your service? (more than one option can be selected)

Through word of mouth

It's advertised (please specify where)

We identify patrons in the library who we think might need the service and let them know

Social agencies

Other (please explain)

Q9 Are you able to cater for all of those who request the service?

Yes

No (please explain why)

Q10 How is your library's housebound service funded? e.g. library budget only, government, charity, benefactor, other

Q11 Does your library offer a way for housebound patrons to join in with social activities and programmes run by the library e.g. book groups?

- Yes
- No

Q12 If yes, what kinds of activities/programmes can housebound patrons access from home?

Q13 If your library doesn't currently run activities/programmes inclusive of housebound patrons, are there any that could be possibly be modified to include housebound patrons, from home?

Q14 What obstacles might the library face to the inclusion of housebound patrons in library activities/programmes?

Q15 What obstacles might the housebound patrons face in accessing library activities/programmes, from home?

Q16 Please use the free text box below to make any further comments about housebound patrons and library service programming.

Q21 Do you wish to obtain a copy of the results of the report?

Yes

No