

Interview with Hazel Onsrud

by Linda Silka

Over the past 20 years, *Library Journal's* Movers & Shakers awards provide a snapshot of the up and coming in the library world. Hazel Onsrud, an adult services librarian at Curtis Memorial Library in Brunswick, Maine, is a winner of the 2024 Movers and Shakers Award. For the past eight years, she has spent most of her time on community-focused programming and collection development. Together the Curtis Memorial Library team has facilitated hundreds of programs and curated thousands of objects to address their patron's needs and wants in more sustainable ways.

Six years ago, Onsrud helped create the library's *library of things*, a collection of more than 1,000 circulating items that meet residents' diverse needs. The collection ranges from an apple peeler to a Zen garden set. The library of things has something for everyone, enabling patrons to better engage or escape, as they desire. The collection grew strategically through its use in various sustainability programs ranging from scrap crafts to transforming lawns into gardens. Although the term sustainability was rarely mentioned, the collection was originally designed to support the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and actions that were socially just, economically feasible, and environmentally responsible. The Library of Things helped Curtis Memorial Library to become the country's first certified sustainable library (outside of New York State) through the Sustainable Libraries Initiative. Hazel is also part of what they call a "lotmutualaid" Google Group, which can be joined by anyone interested in libraries of things.

The library of things is an extension of a traditional library service: the help desk and library team provide resources for a patron, assisting them to find a solution to their wants or needs. In this case, instead of just books or space, the library also provides sustainability-focused programming and tools. Why have a book on gardening if one doesn't also share other tools to help one grow one?

How did you get started in this work?

Hazel: I have always been into equity and environmental issues. I've tried to find a fit for these interests and how to pursue them. Growing up in Maine provided interesting opportunities, and I am incredibly grateful for those and for the generous mentors who have helped and continue to help me learn how to be an effective helper. I think one of the hardest things I try to do is to be brave enough to make mistakes and learn from them. I originally thought I would become a professor, but I experienced serious health problems, which made me rethink what I would do.

How are other libraries learning from you?

Hazel: They are learning from us, and we are also learning from them. Librarians at other libraries are learning by looking at our website, joining the groups we are in, and sharing their knowledge within the Sustainable Libraries Initiative, MECollab, the LOT Mutual Aid Group and more. Together we can have a large impact; there is a library in thousands of communities across the nation!

Who do you work with?

Hazel: Everyone! Libraries are free and open to all. Please reach out if you have an idea for a program we should host or a problem we should tackle. We connect to a wide variety of organizations already working on improving folks' experiences, and together we design how we can work together. We look for opportunities to integrate real-life problems with academic problems and how we can act locally but do so in a globally responsible way.

Are there things about sustainability that should be taught in library science programs?

Hazel: I am probably the wrong one to ask about what should be taught in library school. I did not take the traditional path to becoming a librarian. I came to this work in indirect ways. I found libraries, but I did not approach being a librarian through traditional college training.

What do you see as the next steps in the work that you do?

Hazel: I see many next steps, and we need everyone's ideas. It is important to think about how libraries can be important actors in making things "better," where better is a highly subjective term. A library is a unique space that can be a space for this dialog and amplify our impacts. Yet, different approaches are needed for different communities; there is no doubt our library of things or sustainability programming will look different from those in another community. Yet, no matter where, sharing can make a difference...so start using your library! Sharing is caring and we will make the world better by doing more things together.