CITY OF SANTA BARBARA

LIBRARY BOARD REPORT

AGENDA DATE: September 1, 2022

TO: Library Board

FROM: Jessica Cadiente, Library Director
                            Molly Wetta, Library Services Manager

SUBJECT: Welcome Card Update

SUMMARY:

In May 2021, the Santa Barbara Public Library introduced a policy for a new type of Library card called a Welcome Card. This new card type provides the ability to check out physical materials, including Library of Things items such as laptops and hotspots, and is available to anyone over the age of 18 who can provide an approved photo ID (no verification of address required). This is an innovative approach to providing access to materials to people who are unhoused and not a common practice among libraries across the country. The policy and new card type were approved at the May 2021 Library Board meeting and it was requested that staff report back on the program after 1 year of implementation.

REPORT:

Santa Barbara Public Library has issued 219 Welcome Cards over the past year. 169 cards were issued at the Central Library, 24 at the Eastside Library, 7 at the Montecito Library, and 20 at Library on the Go van stops. In total, 1,233 items have circulated (this statistic includes checkouts and renewals as Polaris was unable to differentiate between the two, but our new Koha integrated library system (ILS) can and since transitioning to Koha in March, there have been 56 checkouts and 120 renewals). It is worth noting that unlike traditional All Access Library Cards, which allow a patron to check out up to 99 items at a time, Welcome Cards only allow up to 3 items to be checked out at a time.

One of the main reasons that the Library requires a patron to share their mailing address when getting an All Access Library Card is so that the Library can mail a notice in the event an item is not returned within 30 days of the due date and a bill for a lost item if it is not returned within 60 days of the due date. The inability to recover lost items checked out to patrons without a verified address was a concern.

City Council approved the elimination of all outstanding fees and fines for patrons when the Library transitioned from Polaris to the new Koha ILS. Since this change in March

2022, only six items checked out on Welcome Cards have changed to a lost status for a total of $180 in outstanding lost item charges.

Staff report that the Welcome Card is providing access to appreciative patrons who would otherwise not be able to obtain a Library card. Adult Education staff provide weekly outreach at the Santa Barbara Rescue Mission as part of the Neighborhood Navigation Centers and a patron who had an internet only card expressed frustration about not being able to access computers at the Central Library during construction and long wait times for access at the Eastside Library. When staff let them know they could obtain a Welcome Card without a permanent address as long as they had a picture ID and then could borrow a hotspot and laptop for one week at a time, they were thrilled.

It is worth noting that many people who are unhoused still elect not to borrow a laptop and hotspot. This is not because they fear they will lose or damage it but rather because they do not have a way to secure it and fear it will be stolen. People who are unhoused are the victims of theft and related crimes at a much higher rate than those with housing.

Unhoused patrons also appreciate being able to place items on hold for pickup at different branches. One resident of a local shelter prefers to use the Eastside Library because it is a longer walk to the Central Library. Sometimes the books they want to read are only available at the Central Library but with a Welcome Card, they can now place items on hold to be delivered to the Eastside Library, check them out, and read them at the Eastside Library, leaving the items on the hold shelf between visits so they can be sure the item will not be lost or damaged.

Library staff feel the program has been a success in providing access to our most vulnerable community members and that the lost items are not drastically higher than those who are able to obtain regular All Access Library cards. Staff will continue to monitor the program and circulation use relative to lost items.

PREPARED BY: Molly Wetta, Library Services Manager

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APPROVED BY: Jessica Cadiente, Library Director