

# Report

## *Survey on Homelessness in Public Libraries*

Earlier in the summer, I created a survey to examine how the neighborhood resources surrounding a library may impact how many homeless patrons a library serves, as well as examine how the challenges libraries face in accommodating homeless individuals may differ depending on those resources. Ryan Dowd generously distributed this survey on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June, and responses were accepted until the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. In total, the survey received 3663 responses, 2986 of which provided their city and state location. I would like to sincerely thank all those who participated in my survey. Figure 1 below shows a map of all responses which gave their locations, and Figure 2 shows those responses as a percentage of public library branches in each state.

*Figure 1: Location of survey responses*

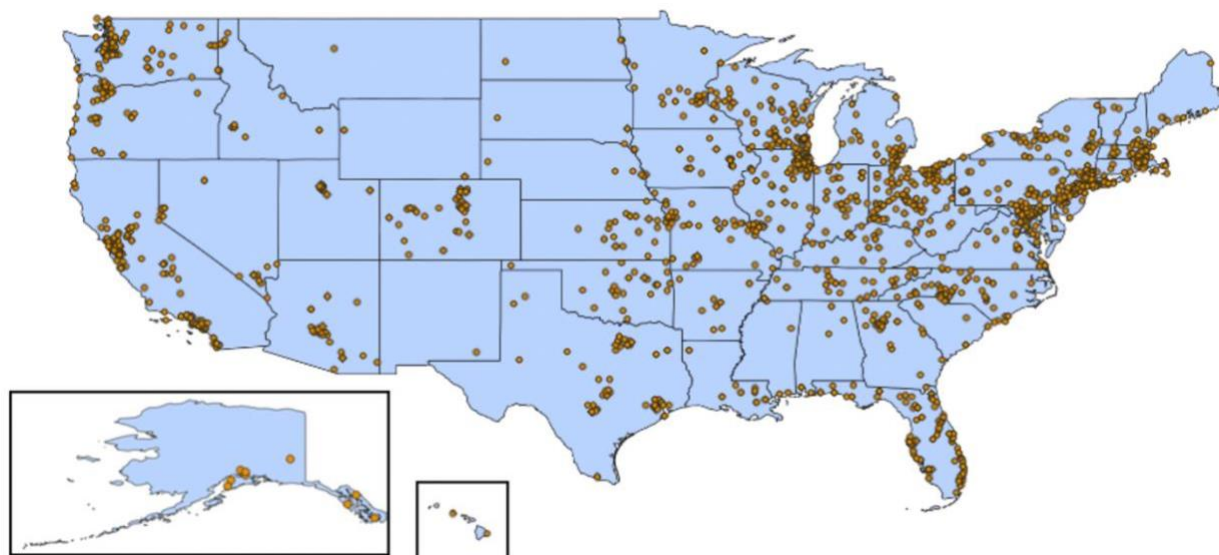
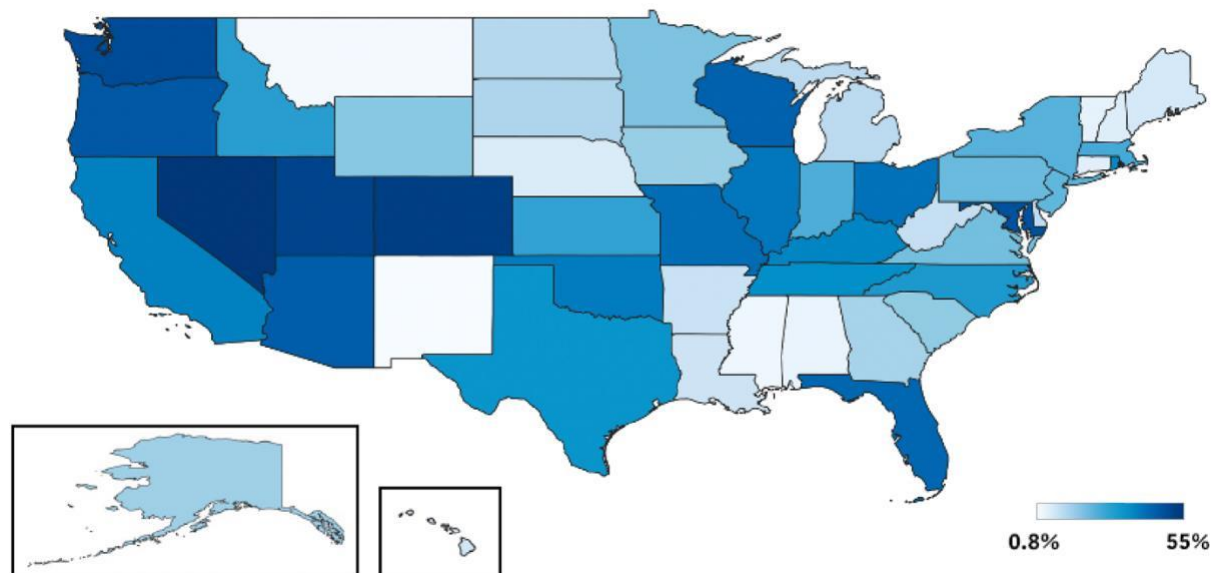


Figure 2: Survey responses as a percentage of library branches per state



While all responses were useful and appreciated ([an aggregated breakdown of responses can be found here](#)) those responses which included location data were especially useful in analyzing the data because they allowed state-based differences to be controlled for.

### Analysis

In analyzing this data, there were two main variables of interest which were measured. The first measured the number of calls to police or paramedics in the last thirty days, due to the actions of patrons perceived to be homeless, and will be called ‘number of calls’. The second measured the number of times library workers had to ask patrons perceived to be homeless to leave the library in the last thirty days, and can be called ‘number of expulsions’. In order for easier analysis of the data, responses were split into three groups, with low, medium, and high incident levels in each category according to the following table:

Table 1: Response distribution for number of calls and expulsions

| Number of Calls | Freq. | Percent | Number of Expulsions | Freq. | Percent |
|-----------------|-------|---------|----------------------|-------|---------|
| 0 (Low)         | 1,503 | 52.35   | 0 (Low)              | 1,286 | 45.22   |
| 1-2 (Medium)    | 883   | 30.76   | 1-2 (Medium)         | 868   | 30.52   |
| 3+ (High)       | 485   | 16.89   | 3+ (High)            | 690   | 24.26   |
| Total           | 2,871 | 100.00  | Total                | 2,844 | 100.00  |

### Police and Paramedic Calls

To determine the effects of various factors on these two variables, ordered probit regression was used. The table below shows how several factors impact the likelihood of a library falling into the low, medium, or high group in terms of number of calls. The numbers in bold are percentage point changes in likelihood based on the presence of each variable in the lefthand column.

Numbers with more asterisks beside them indicate higher levels of statistical significance, and therefore lower likelihoods of occurring due to chance.

Table 2: Marginal effect of each variable on number of calls

| Variables               | Low                         | Medium                     | High                       |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Locations</b>        |                             |                            |                            |
| Homeless Shelter        | <b>-0.143***</b><br>(0.022) | <b>0.049***</b><br>(0.007) | <b>0.094***</b><br>(0.015) |
| Hospital                | <b>-0.019</b><br>(0.017)    | <b>0.007</b><br>(0.006)    | <b>0.013</b><br>(0.011)    |
| Mental Health Resources | <b>-0.024</b><br>(0.017)    | <b>0.008</b><br>(0.006)    | <b>0.016</b><br>(0.011)    |
| Police Station          | <b>-0.032</b><br>(0.026)    | <b>0.011</b><br>(0.009)    | <b>0.021</b><br>(0.017)    |
| Rehab Centre            | <b>-0.007</b><br>(0.018)    | <b>0.002</b><br>(0.006)    | <b>0.005</b><br>(0.012)    |
| Homeless Encampment     | <b>-0.124***</b><br>(0.018) | <b>0.043***</b><br>(0.007) | <b>0.082***</b><br>(0.012) |
| Public Park             | <b>0.060*</b><br>(0.036)    | <b>-0.021*</b><br>(0.013)  | <b>-0.040*</b><br>(0.023)  |
| Vacant Building         | <b>-0.032</b><br>(0.020)    | <b>0.011</b><br>(0.007)    | <b>0.021</b><br>(0.013)    |

|                             |                             |                             |                             |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Community Centre            | <b>0.029*</b><br>(0.015)    | <b>-0.010*</b><br>(0.005)   | <b>-0.019*</b><br>(0.010)   |
| Food Program                | <b>-0.041***</b><br>(0.015) | <b>0.014***</b><br>(0.005)  | <b>0.027***</b><br>(0.010)  |
| <b>Reasons for Visiting</b> |                             |                             |                             |
| Bathrooms                   | <b>-0.079***</b><br>(0.025) | <b>0.027***</b><br>(0.009)  | <b>0.052***</b><br>(0.017)  |
| Internet/Materials          | <b>0.043*</b><br>(0.023)    | <b>-0.015*</b><br>(0.008)   | <b>-0.028*</b><br>(0.015)   |
| Only Place                  | <b>-0.049**</b><br>(0.024)  | <b>0.017**</b><br>(0.008)   | <b>0.032**</b><br>(0.016)   |
| Community                   | <b>0.019</b><br>(0.024)     | <b>-0.006</b><br>(0.008)    | <b>-0.012</b><br>(0.016)    |
| Programs/Assistance         | <b>0.093***</b><br>(0.020)  | <b>-0.032***</b><br>(0.007) | <b>-0.061***</b><br>(0.013) |
| <b>Control Variables</b>    |                             |                             |                             |
| Log of Population           | <b>-0.028***</b><br>(0.007) | <b>0.010***</b><br>(0.002)  | <b>0.018***</b><br>(0.005)  |
| Size of library             |                             |                             |                             |
| Somewhat smaller            | <b>-0.095*</b><br>(0.054)   | <b>0.051*</b><br>(0.030)    | <b>0.044*</b><br>(0.024)    |
| About the same              | <b>-0.104**</b><br>(0.050)  | <b>0.056**</b><br>(0.028)   | <b>0.048**</b><br>(0.022)   |
| Somewhat larger             | <b>-0.158***</b><br>(0.042) | <b>0.079***</b><br>(0.024)  | <b>0.079***</b><br>(0.018)  |
| Significantly larger        | <b>-0.317***</b><br>(0.039) | <b>0.120***</b><br>(0.023)  | <b>0.197***</b><br>(0.022)  |
| Only library in town        | <b>-0.190***</b><br>(0.042) | <b>0.091***</b><br>(0.023)  | <b>0.099***</b><br>(0.020)  |
| Urban/ Suburban/ Rural      |                             |                             |                             |
| Suburban                    | <b>-0.108***</b><br>(0.032) | <b>0.054***</b><br>(0.018)  | <b>0.054***</b><br>(0.015)  |
| Urban                       | <b>-0.208***</b><br>(0.040) | <b>0.091***</b><br>(0.021)  | <b>0.118***</b><br>(0.020)  |

As shown above, the presence of homeless shelters in a library's neighborhood was related most strongly to higher numbers of police/ paramedic calls, with the presence of homeless shelters being associated with 14 percentage point lower likelihood of falling in the low group (0 police/ambulance calls) and 9 percentage point higher likelihood of falling in the high group (3+ calls). The presence of homeless encampments had a similar, though slightly weaker effect. The presence of food programs/ soup kitchens also had a weak but significant association with higher incident levels. The presence of public parks and community centers seemed to have a weak

negative effect on the number of calls (possibly because they function as alternative places to go besides the library).

The ‘Reasons for Visiting’ variables were created from the survey question which asked which reasons were important in homeless individuals deciding to come to the library. Responses were converted into binary variables, with a value of 1 if they said a reason was ‘very important’ in explaining why homeless individuals visit their library, and 0 if they said a reason was ‘not important’ or only ‘somewhat important’. In terms of their relationships towards police and paramedic calls, ‘to use the bathroom’ and ‘because the library is the only available place to go’ were related to higher call numbers, while ‘to use the internet/ library material’, as well as ‘to participate in library programs/ get help from staff’ were associated with lower numbers. More abstractly, those activities associated with visiting the library out of necessity are associated with higher call numbers, and those associated with visiting by choice are associated with lower numbers.

The final noteworthy thing about these variables is how strong of an effect being located in an urban area has on call numbers. Relative to libraries in rural areas, urban libraries are 20 percentage points less likely to be in the low group, even controlling for the fact that there are more homeless shelters and encampments in urban areas.

## Number of Expulsions

The effect of each variable on the likelihood of falling into each ‘number of expulsions’ group is very similar, as shown in the below table. Homeless shelters and encampments continue to be strongly associated with higher incident levels, and community centers and parks associated with slightly lower levels. The presence of both hospitals and vacant buildings also had a statistically significant relationship associated with higher expulsion numbers. The ‘reasons for visiting’ variables also had similar effects, however the ‘to use the internet/ library materials’ variable did not have a statistically significant effect in this case.

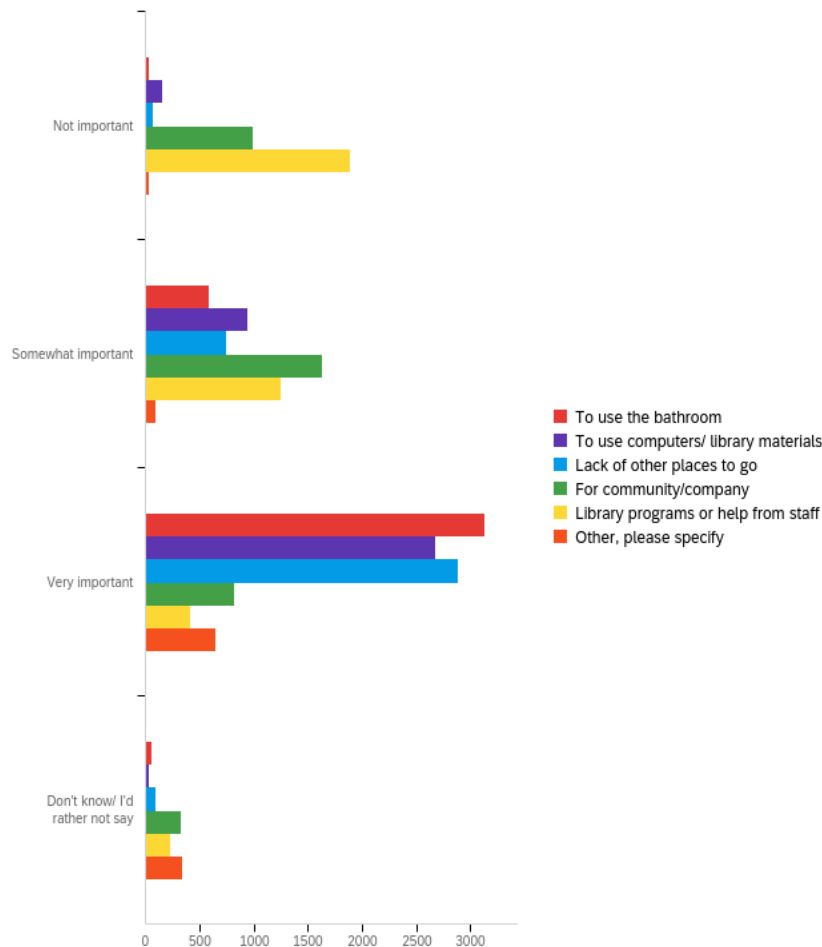
*Table 3: Marginal effect of each variable on number of expulsions*

| Variables        | Low                         | Medium                     | High                       |
|------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Locations</b> |                             |                            |                            |
| Homeless Shelter | <b>-0.154***</b><br>(0.015) | <b>0.026***</b><br>(0.003) | <b>0.127***</b><br>(0.013) |

|                             |                             |                             |                             |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Hospital                    | <b>-0.039**</b><br>(0.016)  | <b>0.007**</b><br>(0.003)   | <b>0.032**</b><br>(0.013)   |
| Mental Health Resources     | <b>-0.002</b><br>(0.015)    | <b>0.000</b><br>(0.003)     | <b>0.002</b><br>(0.012)     |
| Police Station              | <b>-0.017</b><br>(0.020)    | <b>0.003</b><br>(0.003)     | <b>0.014</b><br>(0.016)     |
| Rehab Centre                | <b>0.001</b><br>(0.019)     | <b>-0.000</b><br>(0.003)    | <b>-0.001</b><br>(0.016)    |
| Homeless Encampment         | <b>-0.112***</b><br>(0.017) | <b>0.019***</b><br>(0.003)  | <b>0.093***</b><br>(0.014)  |
| Public Park                 | <b>0.063**</b><br>(0.027)   | <b>-0.011**</b><br>(0.005)  | <b>-0.052**</b><br>(0.022)  |
| Vacant Building             | <b>-0.060***</b><br>(0.020) | <b>0.010***</b><br>(0.003)  | <b>0.050***</b><br>(0.017)  |
| Community Centre            | <b>0.031**</b><br>(0.014)   | <b>-0.005**</b><br>(0.002)  | <b>-0.026**</b><br>(0.012)  |
| Food Program                | <b>-0.038**</b><br>(0.019)  | <b>0.007**</b><br>(0.003)   | <b>0.032**</b><br>(0.016)   |
| <b>Reasons for Visiting</b> |                             |                             |                             |
| Bathrooms                   | <b>-0.057***</b><br>(0.018) | <b>0.010***</b><br>(0.003)  | <b>0.047***</b><br>(0.015)  |
| Internet/Materials          | <b>0.011</b><br>(0.018)     | <b>-0.002</b><br>(0.003)    | <b>-0.009</b><br>(0.015)    |
| Only Place                  | <b>-0.063***</b><br>(0.021) | <b>0.011***</b><br>(0.004)  | <b>0.052***</b><br>(0.017)  |
| Community                   | <b>0.034</b><br>(0.023)     | <b>-0.006</b><br>(0.004)    | <b>-0.028</b><br>(0.019)    |
| Programs/Assistance         | <b>0.113***</b><br>(0.019)  | <b>-0.019***</b><br>(0.004) | <b>-0.093***</b><br>(0.015) |
| <b>Controls</b>             |                             |                             |                             |
| Log of Population           | <b>-0.033***</b><br>(0.007) | <b>0.006***</b><br>(0.001)  | <b>0.027***</b><br>(0.005)  |
| Size of Library             |                             |                             |                             |
| Somewhat smaller            | <b>-0.088**</b><br>(0.040)  | <b>0.031**</b><br>(0.014)   | <b>0.056**</b><br>(0.027)   |
| About the same              | <b>-0.116***</b><br>(0.031) | <b>0.039***</b><br>(0.011)  | <b>0.077***</b><br>(0.021)  |
| Somewhat larger             | <b>-0.162***</b><br>(0.033) | <b>0.048***</b><br>(0.011)  | <b>0.114***</b><br>(0.023)  |
| Significantly larger        | <b>-0.267***</b><br>(0.030) | <b>0.055***</b><br>(0.010)  | <b>0.212***</b><br>(0.023)  |
| Only library in town        | <b>-0.151***</b><br>(0.031) | <b>0.046***</b><br>(0.011)  | <b>0.105***</b><br>(0.022)  |
| Urban/ Suburban/ Rural      |                             |                             |                             |
| Suburban                    | <b>-0.155***</b><br>(0.026) | <b>0.060***</b><br>(0.012)  | <b>0.096***</b><br>(0.015)  |
| Urban                       | <b>-0.258***</b><br>(0.033) | <b>0.078***</b><br>(0.013)  | <b>0.180***</b><br>(0.021)  |

## Other Useful Observations

Finally, there are two survey questions I would like to highlight, which are interesting in themselves though they were not used for statistical analysis. First, there is the question asking participants to rank the importance of reasons why homeless people come to their library:



There were 704 responses which wrote something for 'other, please specify'. I grouped similar answers together into the following categories:

Table 4: Other reasons for visiting the library

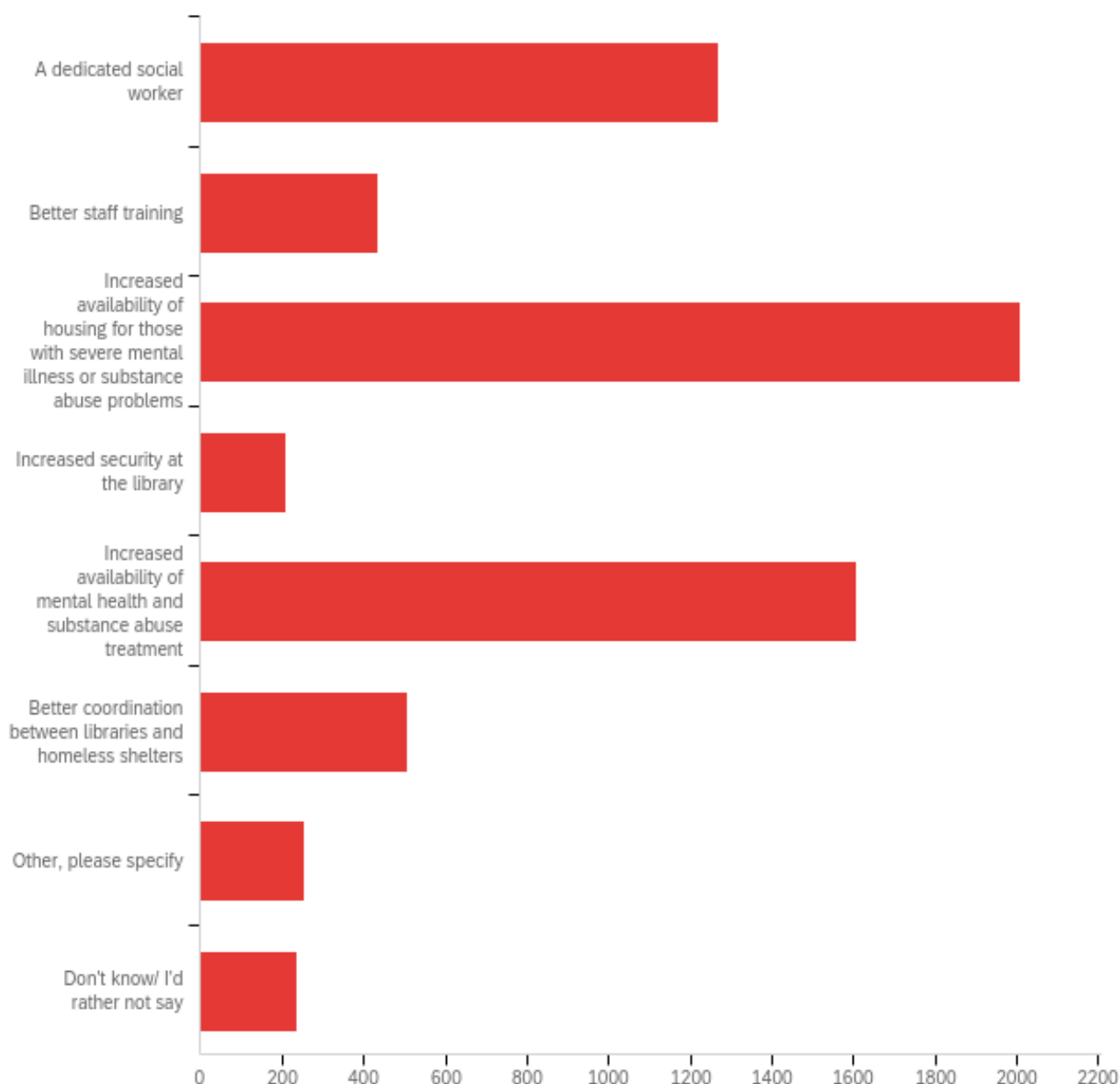
| Reasons for Visiting                 | Freq. | Percent |
|--------------------------------------|-------|---------|
| To avoid bad weather/ temperature    | 375   | 53.27   |
| To access wi-fi / charge their phone | 85    | 12.07   |
| Safety or comfort                    | 50    | 7.1     |

|  |     |      |
|--|-----|------|
| Sleep  | 49  | 6.96 |
| Food/water                                     | 38  | 5.4  |
| To access social services/ community resources | 37  | 5.26 |
| A place for rest or leisure                    | 16  | 2.27 |
| To do drugs, illegal things, or panhandle      | 12  | 1.7  |
| Use library's phone                            | 10  | 1.42 |
| Community                                      | 6   | 0.85 |
| Location encourages them to visit              | 6   | 0.85 |
| Shelter  | 6   | 0.85 |
| Use meeting/study rooms                        | 3   | 0.43 |
| An outlet to speak                             | 2   | 0.28 |
| Hygiene  | 2   | 0.28 |
| Sharps disposal                                | 2   | 0.28 |
| Quiet  | 2   | 0.28 |
| Because it is suitable for children            | 1   | 0.14 |
| To print things                                | 1   | 0.14 |
| To receive care bags                           | 1   | 0.14 |
| Total  | 704 | 100  |

Some responses were stated very frequently, with half of the responses say that bad weather or temperature is an important reason homeless individuals visit their library. Other responses such as 'to access wi-fi/ charge phone', 'safety or comfort', and 'sleep' also being very common.



Second, there is the question which asks about which solutions library workers believe would best reduce the number of adverse incidents (police/ambulance calls, or having to ask people to leave) involving homeless individuals in the library:



The 'other, please specify' options are listed below in grouped options. A few options tend to reoccur more frequently, generally surrounding societal solutions located outside the library, like creating more affordable housing, more social services resources, and more day shelters and other places homeless individuals can go besides the library.

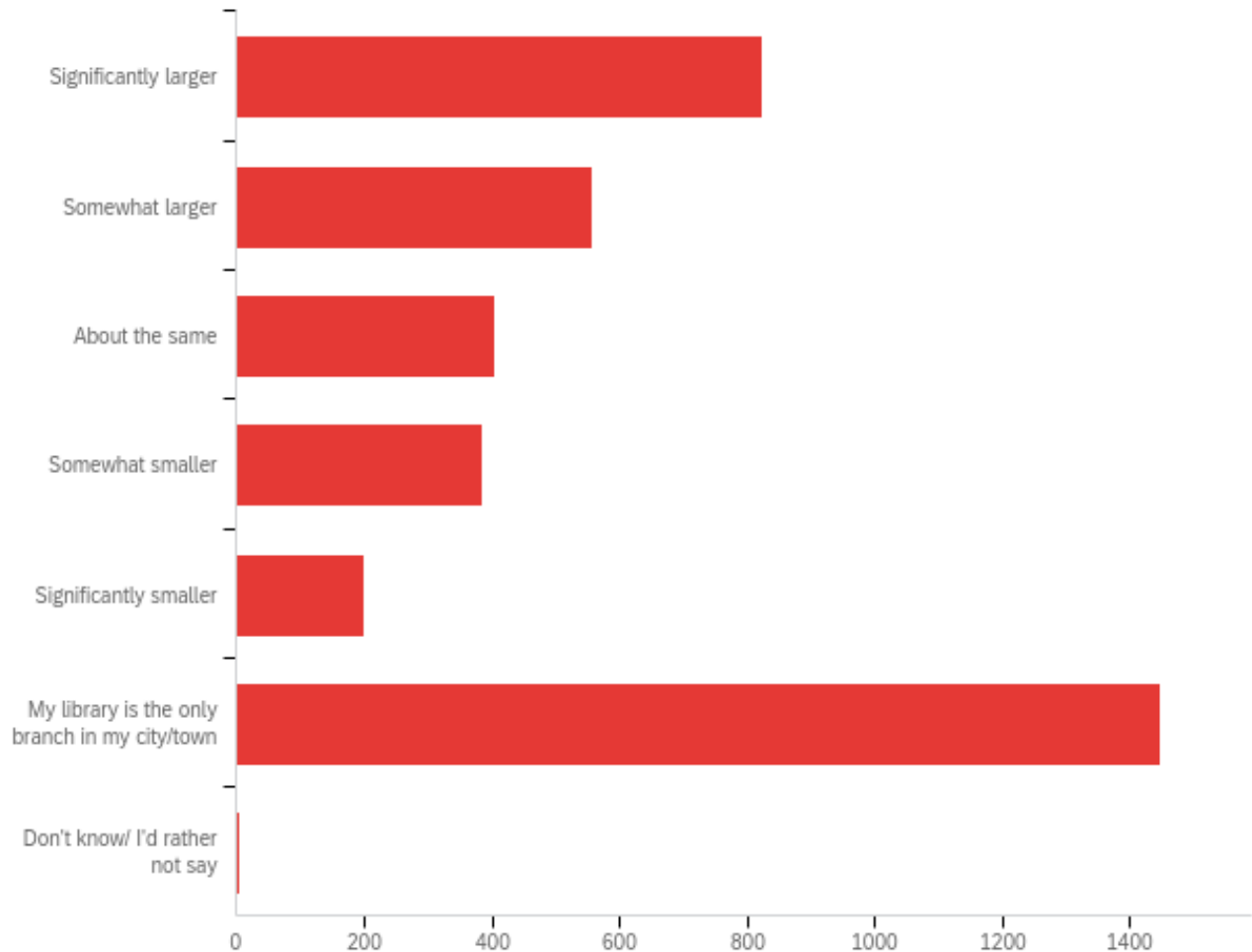
Table 5: Other potential solutions

| Potential solutions                                      | Freq. | Percent |
|--|-------|---------|
| Increased social services/ resources                     | 21    | 15.68   |
| Day shelter/ other places to go                          | 21    | 15.68   |
| More housing/ more affordable housing                    | 15    | 11.19   |
| More homeless shelters                                   | 13    | 9.70    |
| Empathy/ good attitude from staff                        | 8     | 5.97    |
| Reduce poverty/ societal issues                          | 8     | 5.97    |
| Transportation to and collaboration with social services | 8     | 5.97    |
| More staff/ library resources                            | 7     | 5.22    |
| Homeless individuals themselves need to want to change   | 6     | 4.48    |
| Better trained security                                  | 5     | 3.73    |
| Better housing/shelters                                  | 3     | 2.24    |
| More police collaboration                                | 3     | 2.24    |
| Training/ information for librarians                     | 3     | 2.24    |
| More library programs for the homeless                   | 2     | 1.49    |
| Change to library rules                                  | 2     | 1.49    |
| Options other than police                                | 2     | 1.49    |
| A way to deal with 'bad apples'                          | 1     | 0.75    |
| Collaboration with other libraries                       | 1     | 0.75    |
| Education for the homeless                               | 1     | 0.75    |
| Homeless shelters in other locations                     | 1     | 0.75    |
| Mandatory addiction /mental illness treatment in society | 1     | 0.75    |
| Total  | 134   | 100     |

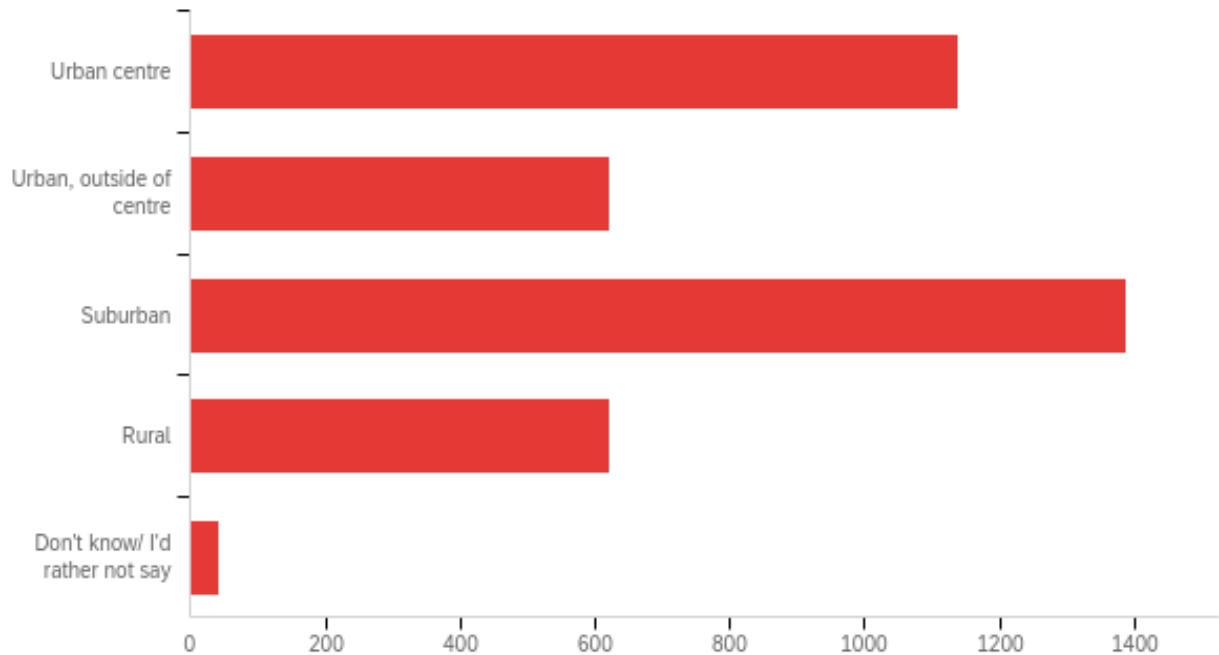
I hope this information is useful to you, and once again I would like to thank everyone who participated in the survey. If you have any questions or comments please email me at [confortidavid@hotmail.ca](mailto:confortidavid@hotmail.ca). On the next page you will find an aggregated breakdown of all survey responses.

## Survey Response Breakdown

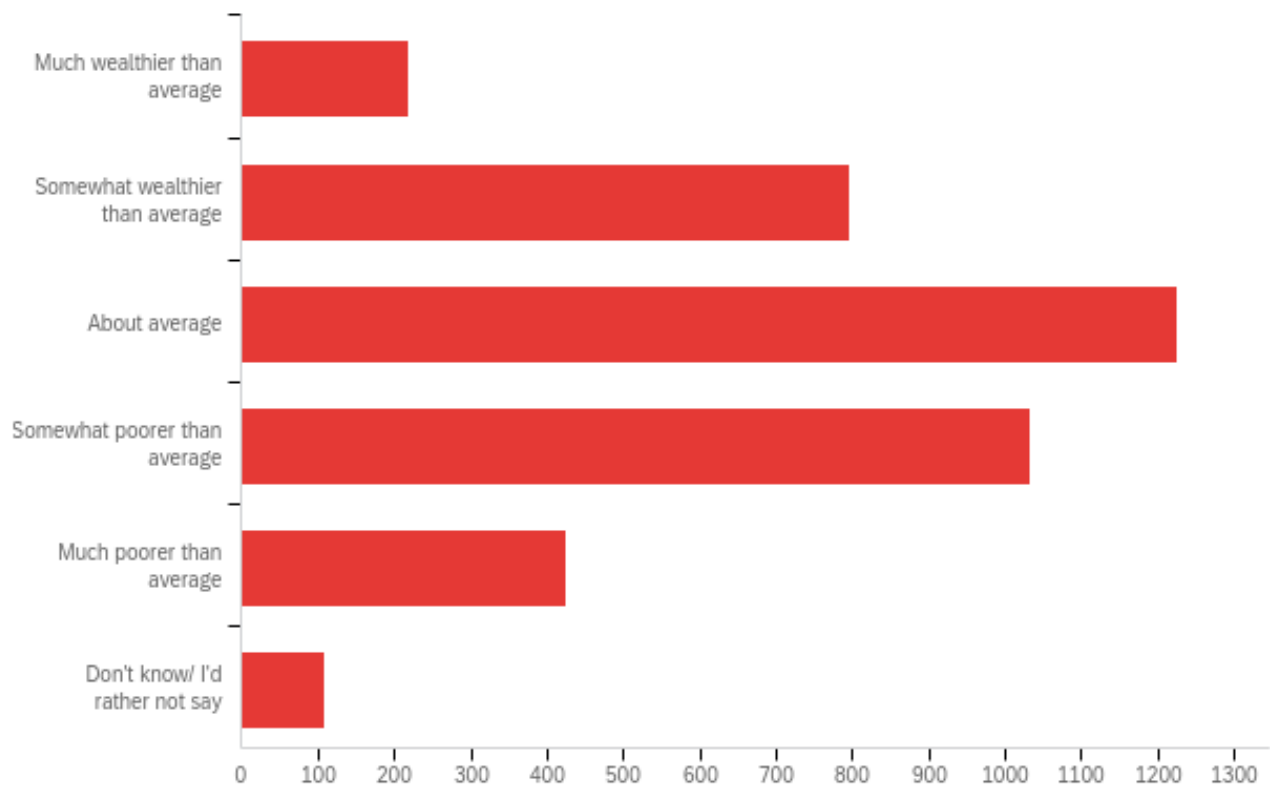
How large is your library branch in comparison to others in your city/town?



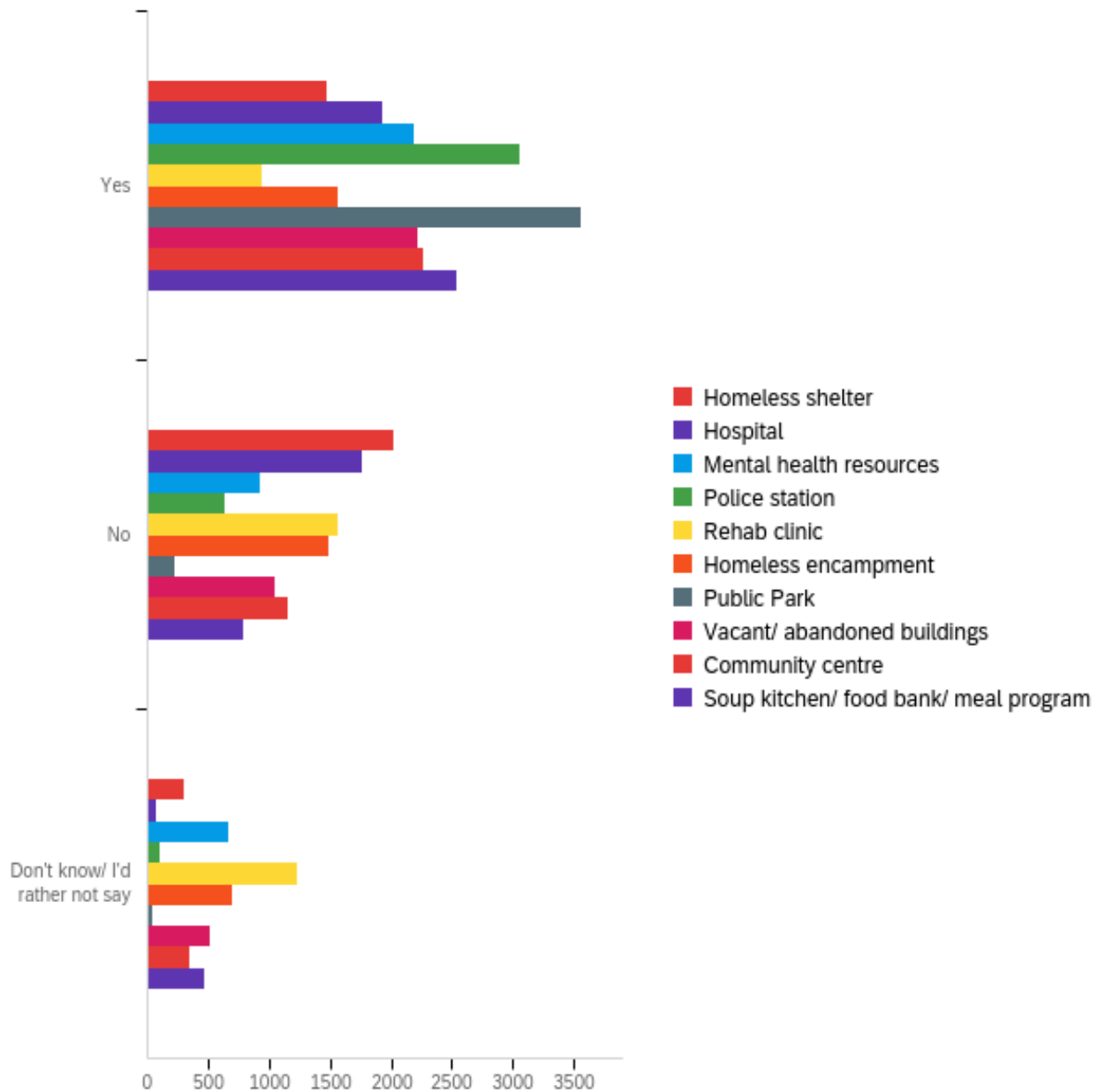
Which best describes the area in which your library is located?



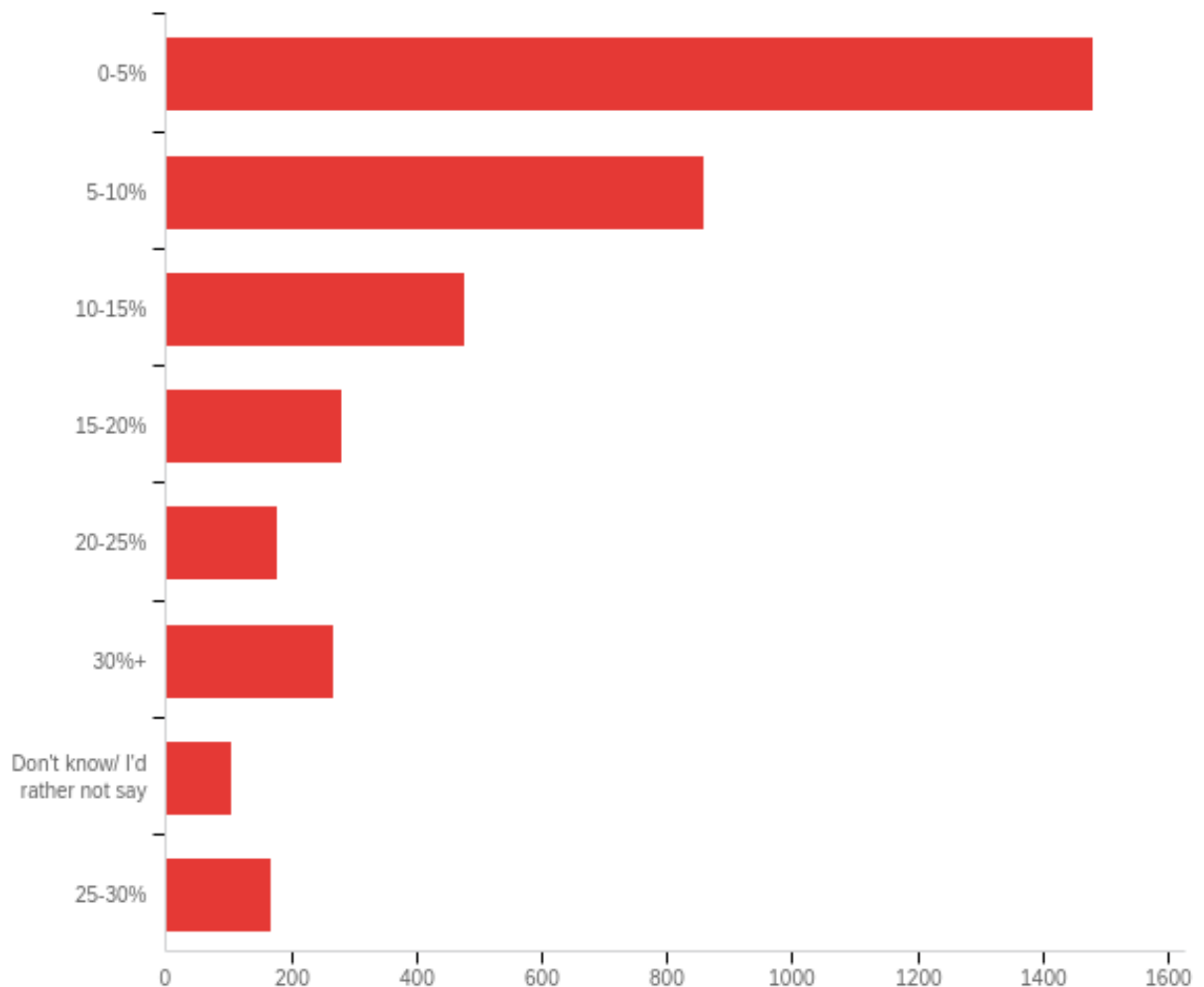
**Which best describes the socioeconomic status of your library's neighborhood compared to other neighborhoods in your city/town?**



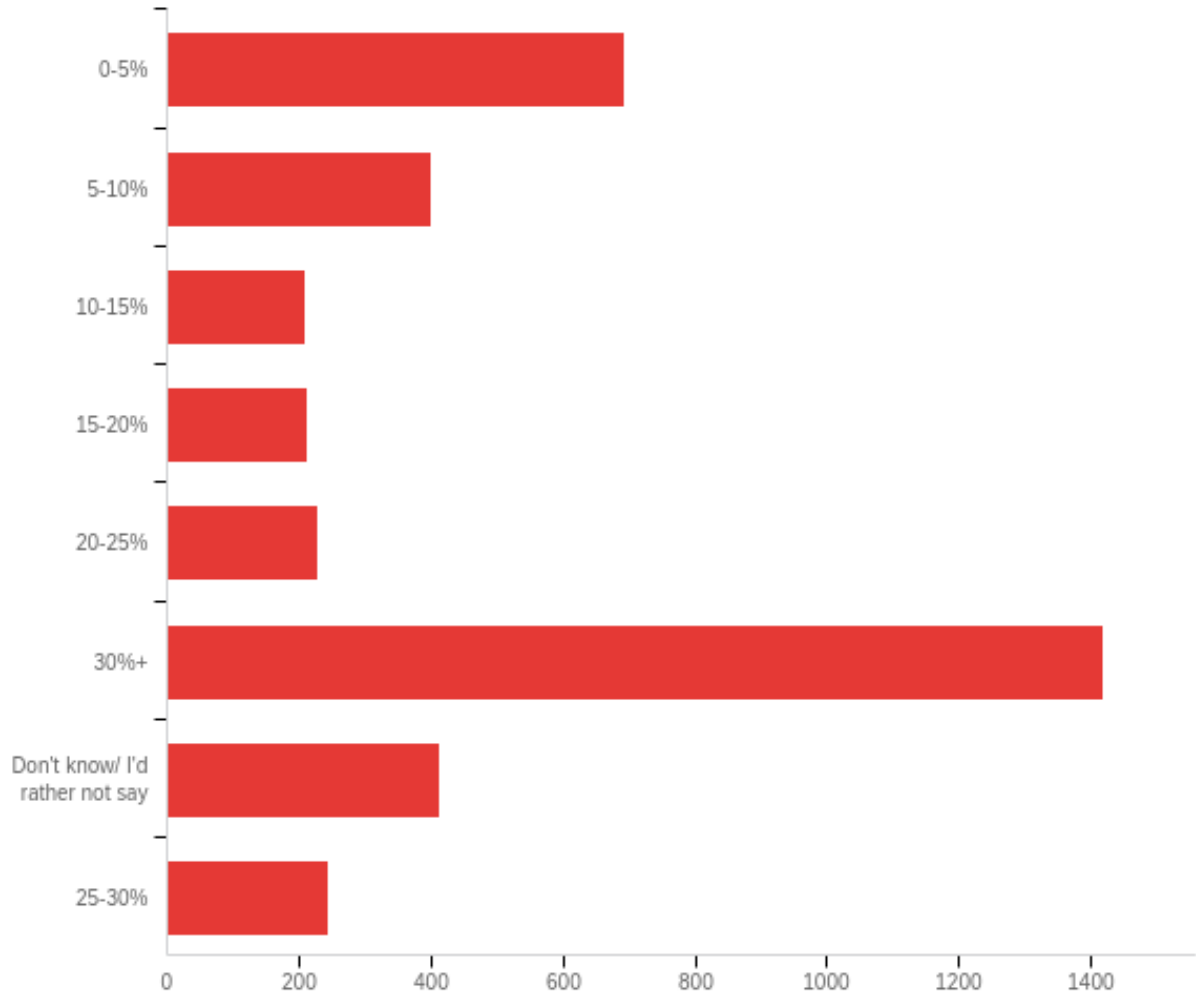
Are there any of the following in your library's neighborhood? Check all that apply:



**In the past 30 days, what percentage of patrons using your library do you believe were homeless? It is acknowledged that it is often not possible to know which patrons in a library are homeless, or to know other personal details about their lives. With this and the following questions, please simply provide your best estimate.**

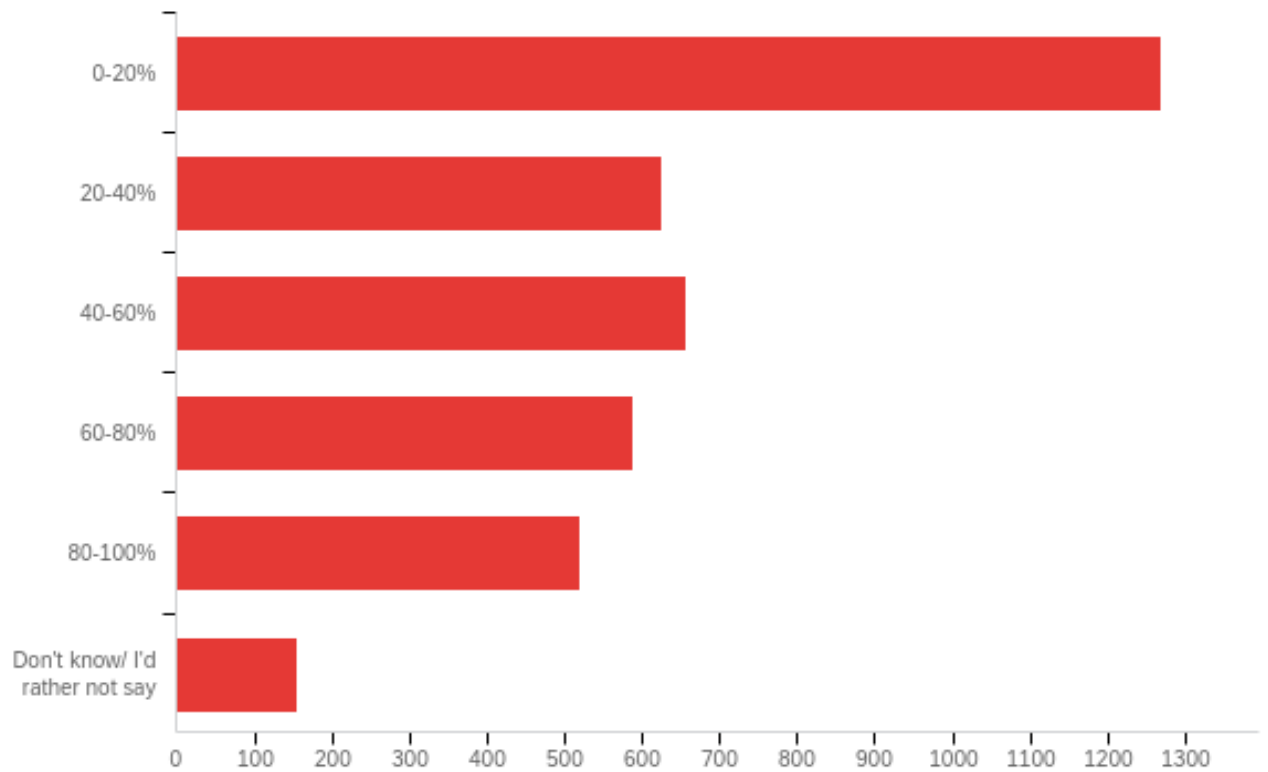


**Of the patrons in your library who you believe to be homeless, what percentage do you believe also suffer from severe mental illness or substance abuse problems?**

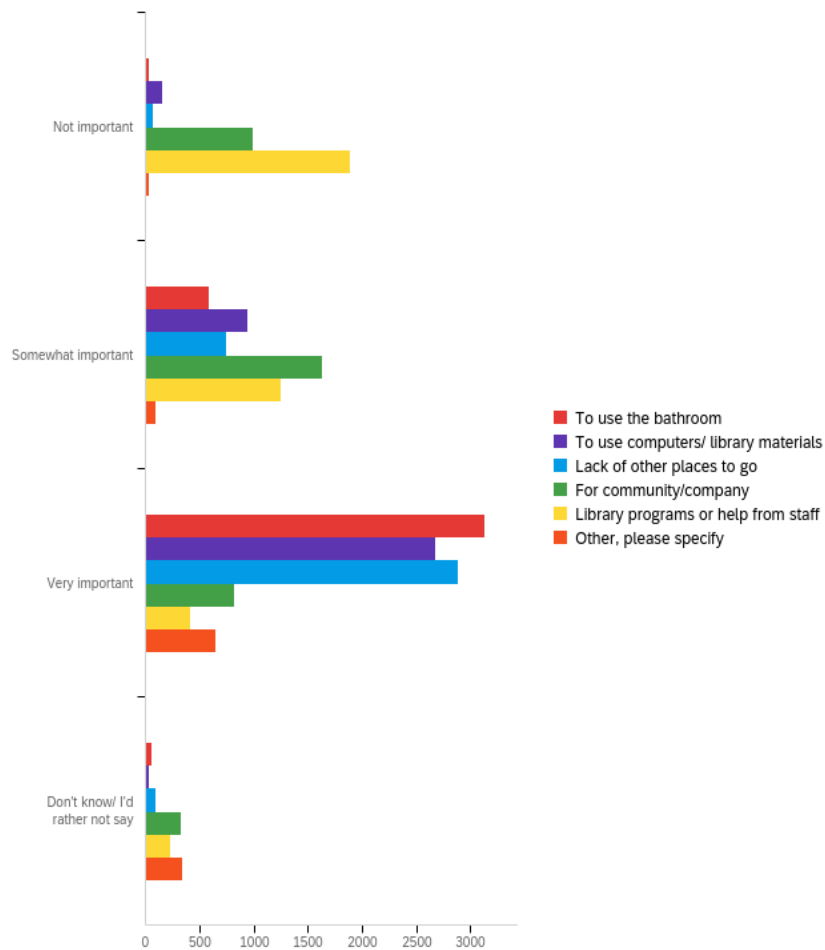




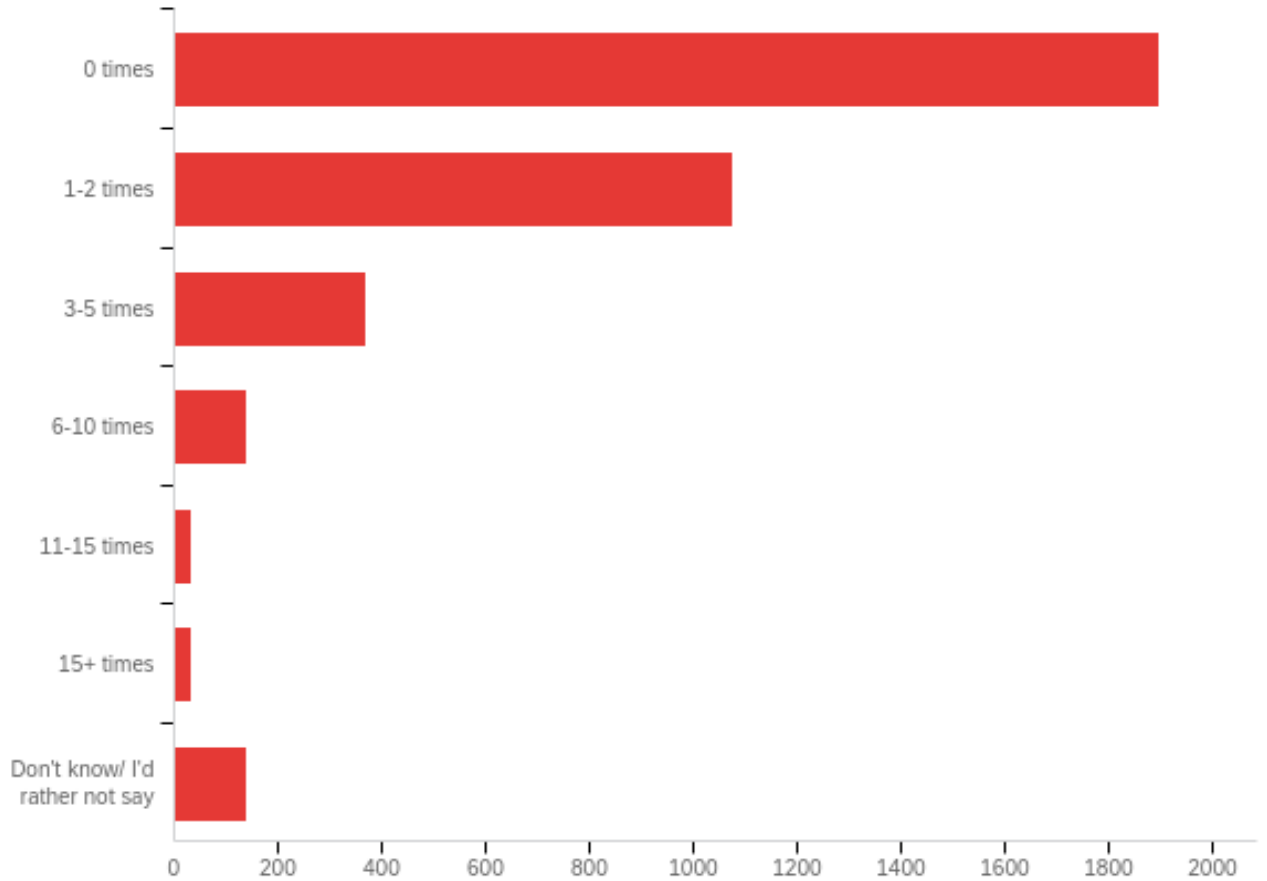
**Of the patrons in your library who you believe to be homeless, what percentage do you believe spend the whole day (or most of the day) at the library?**



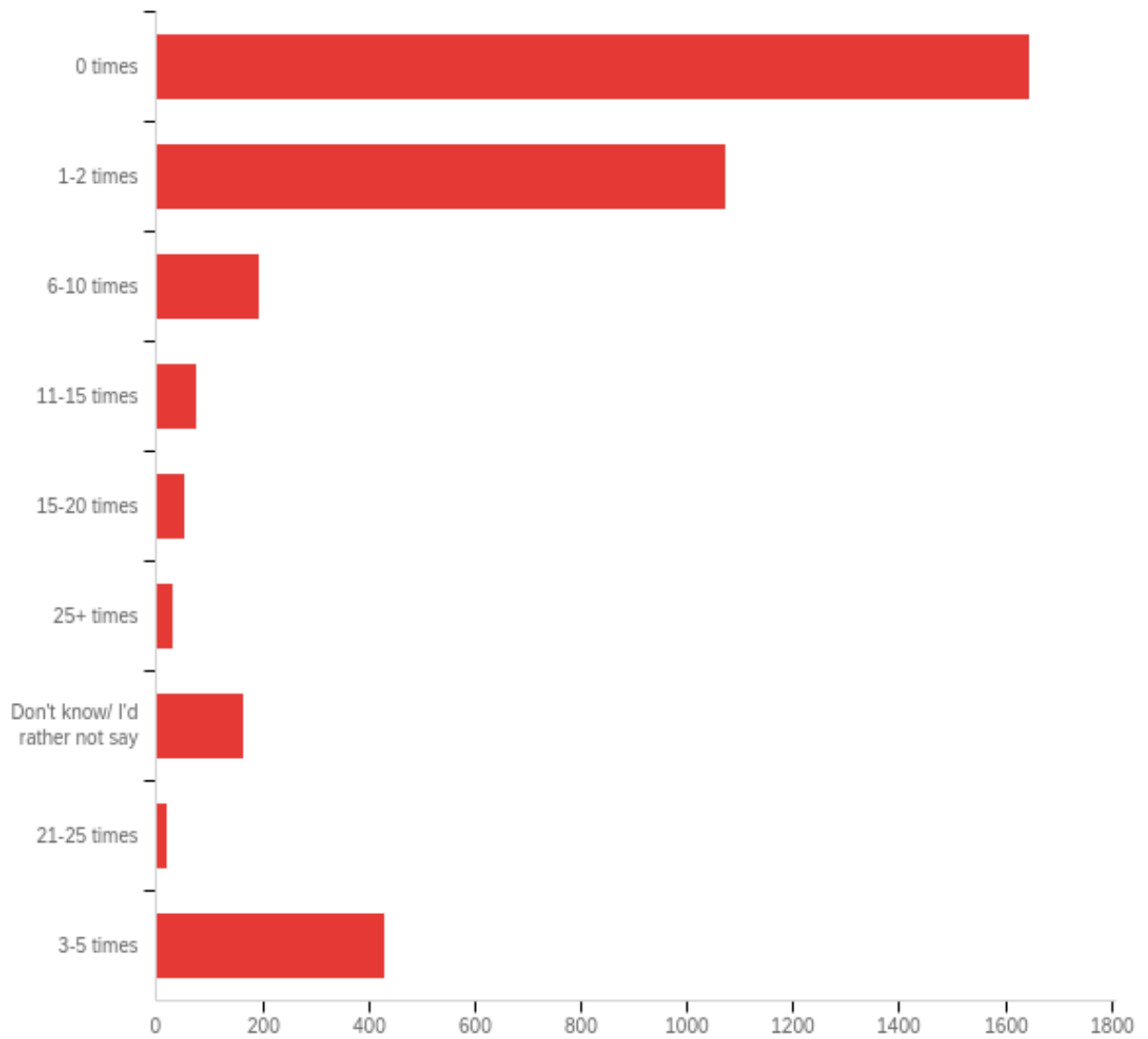
## How important do you believe each of the following are as reasons homeless patrons visit your library branch?



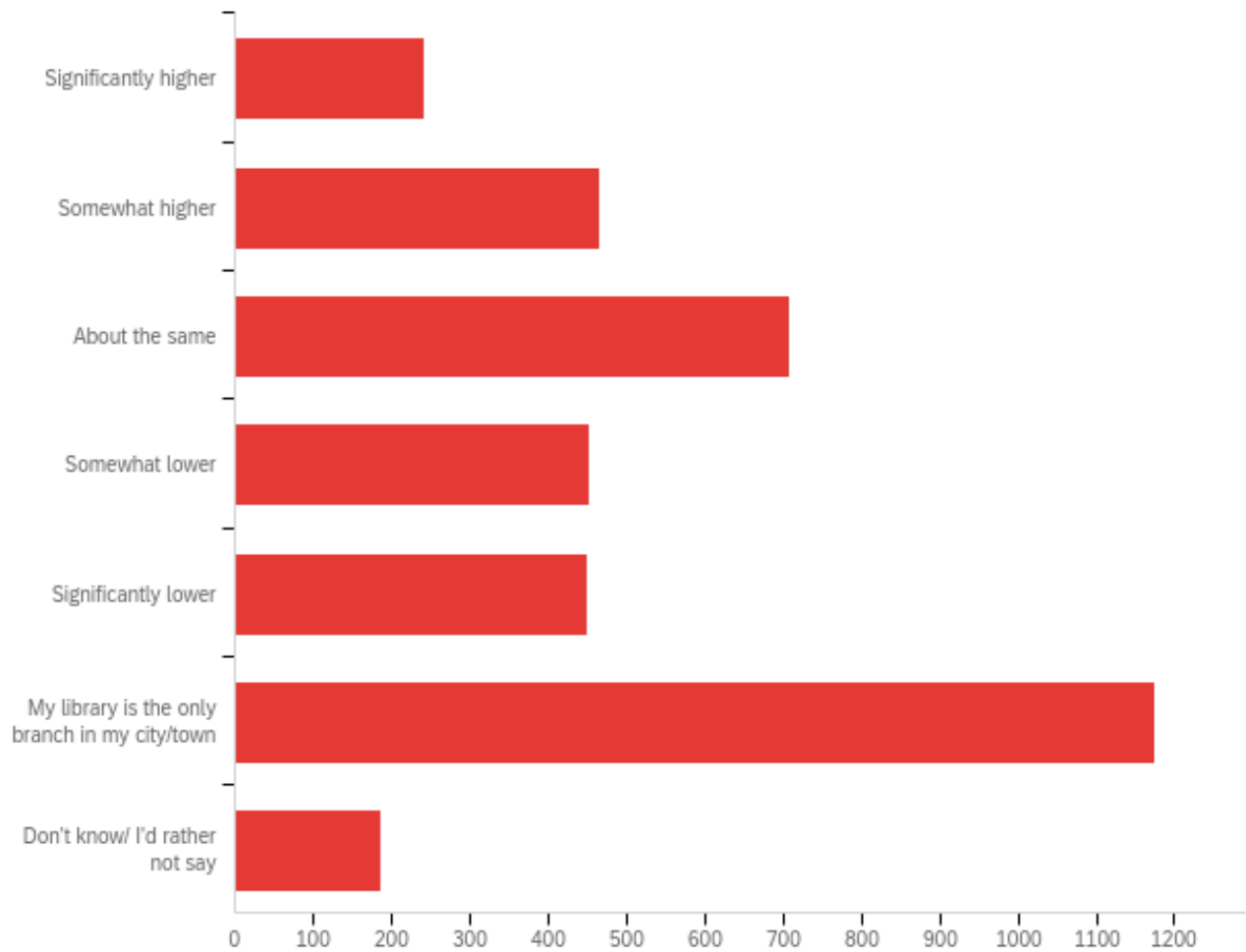
**Approximately how many times in the past 30 days were police or paramedics called to your library because of the actions of patrons you believe to be homeless?**



**Approximately how many times in the past 30 days were patrons you believe to be homeless asked by staff to leave the library?**



**Do you believe the numbers of these incidents are higher or lower than those of other similarly sized library branches in your city/town?**



**What resources do you believe would most reduce the number of these incidents in your library? Please select up to two.**

