Mental health conditions, such as bipolar disorder and depression, can often cause lasting issues in the lives of the people who suffer from them. Thankfully, libraries have begun to offer services to those who struggle with mental illness. Many library systems now offer onsite counseling and social workers, as well as resources for self-help, such as book selections on mental health.

According to the National Institute of Health (NIH), an estimated 1 in 5 adults suffers from mental illness in the United States. Mental illness can be mild or severe, but often homelessness and mental illness go hand in hand. In 2019, Colorado Coalition for the Homeless estimated that 71 percent of homeless people suffer from either PTSD, another mental illness, or both consecutively.

 Because public libraries are a welcoming environment for everyone, whether housed or unhoused, this creates a situation in which mentally ill individuals are left to find shelter anywhere possible, including at the library. By coordinating mental health plans along with social workers at the local library, those in mental health crisis can more easily get access to the services they so desperately need.

 Additionally, many illnesses can be exacerbated by overlapping conditions. Autism, ADHD, and other common mental illnesses frequently intersect. Often, mental illness can also be further exacerbated by trauma, causing other pre-existing conditions to become worse. Therefore, having a trauma-informed library staff can help, as well as having sensory events for those with autism, which may also benefit the mentally ill depending on what condition(s) they suffer from.

 Ultimately, the best recipe for dealing with mental illnesses is patience and empathy, which public libraries are increasingly adept at offering. By providing a more compassionate and understanding library experience, we can enrich the lives of all types of people, regardless of their abilities or disabilities.

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