

CASE STUDY: WICHITA PUBLIC LIBRARY, MAKING SPACE FOR CIVIC COURAGE

Overview

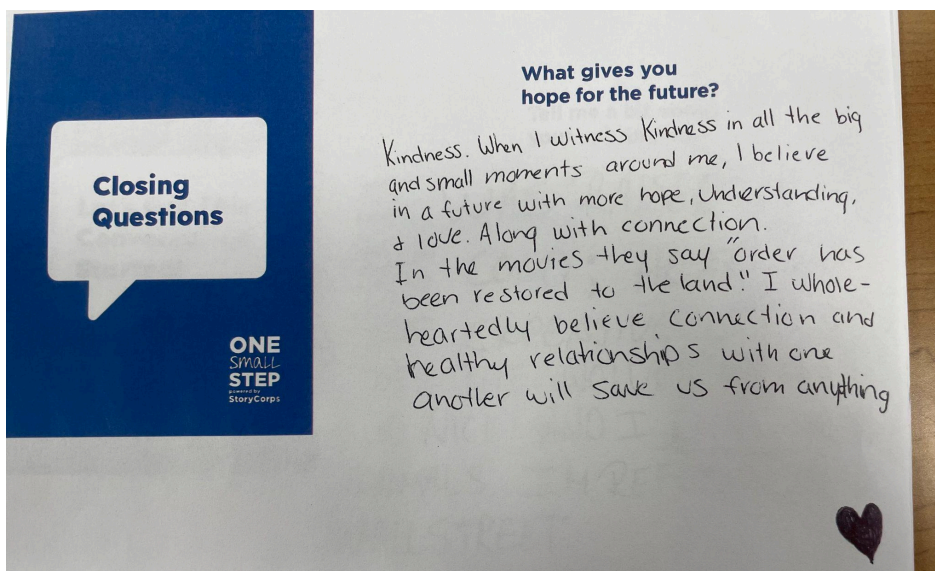
Led by Director of Libraries Jaime Nix and a civic-minded library team, Wichita Public Library (WPL) integrated One Small Step into existing library services, public events, and partnerships, using conversation and storytelling as tools for community connection.



Over several years, the library hosted and supported both passive and recorded OSS activities, reaching residents across political, generational, and social differences. For WPL, One Small Step aligned closely with the library's role as a public institution committed to access, learning, and civic life.

Approach

WPL incorporated One Small Step into a range of library-based and community-facing activities rather than treating it as a standalone program. OSS conversation prompts were made available at library tables, events, and public gatherings, allowing residents to engage informally and at their own pace.



The library also hosted recorded one-on-one OSS conversations in its AV studio, working in partnership with StoryCorps and local facilitators. These recordings provided an option for deeper engagement for participants who wanted to share

their stories more fully.

Recruitment often happened through trusted community partnerships and large civic events, including Riverfest and a volunteer fair co-hosted with the Chamber of Commerce. In these settings, OSS materials were used as conversation starters rather than formal workshops, helping lower barriers to participation.



Key Insights & Lessons Learned

WPL learned that making OSS easy to access was essential. By integrating it into existing events, spaces, and partnerships, the library reduced the pressure associated with formal dialogue programming.

The conversation card decks proved especially useful as a flexible tool. They supported informal engagement while still encouraging reflection and

listening. Recorded conversations offered a deeper option for those ready for it, without requiring everyone to participate at the same level.

Staff also noted that initial hesitation was common, particularly among first-time participants. However, many people reported positive experiences once they began, and some went on to initiate their own dialogue efforts in the community. Jaime Nix noted that participants frequently left conversations saying some version of “we need more of this,” reflecting a desire for additional opportunities to talk and listen across difference.

Notable Outcomes and Key Takeaways



Over time, One Small Step became a familiar presence in Wichita’s civic landscape, supported by the library’s consistent involvement and partnerships. Survey research conducted locally found that residents who were aware of OSS reported greater hope, less perceived division, and more mutual respect across political lines.

For WPL, the value of the work was not always immediately visible. As Jaime described it, the effects often felt subtle at first, like “invisible dominoes,” but meaningful in the long run.

Looking ahead, WPL plans to continue integrating OSS into civic engagement efforts, including a Civic Action Passport launching in 2025 that will feature OSS as a suggested activity. With strong staff support and public interest, the library sees OSS as an ongoing part of its role in supporting community dialogue.

“This project expands horizons and cools the fever brought on by toxic polarization.”
— Jaime Nix



This case study highlights programs adapted from One Small Step toolkits. Visit diy.takeonesmallstep.org to explore the tools.