Space to be an option for comfort in all need

By SARAH NEWMAN

A plush, fluffy fabric love seat sits at the Charles County Public Library’s La Plata branch, becoming guest to relax and unwind. As part of any public mission, the furniture is a step in the library to begin something first of its kind in the country: the public living room.

“Some people need a hug, or just want to cry, and they can come here,” said Tisha Tyler, executive director of Charles County Public Library. “We’re here to offer. The desire to have a communal space, to foster those connections. We want to give those who need a break a place to wait for loved ones in the hospital and having confidence from the very simple fact that nobody was trying to fix them but just giving them some good company, play a board game or drink tea with [them].”

Potts said of the space, “One woman who had been badly beaten by her husband came in one of our living rooms very upset. We gave her a cup of tea and asked her to talk to an old man who was very lonely that day. Within a short time they were laughing and by the end of the day she was running the living room.”

Seeing his idea spread to other countries makes Potts feel “very inspired,” he says, adding that he is meeting someone in Melbourne, Australia next week. “That’s what we do. We’re here to help people every day.”

Salazar said of the library’s mission, “I don’t know that the public really understand that’s what we do. We’re here to help you and we’re here to connect you to the world.”

The public living room space at the La Plata library features a donated couch, table and chairs, plants and activity pages for people to take their mind off their troubles. 

Bonita Adosh and Carmella Blum of STEAM Onward used the public living room space this week at the La Plata library to meet others.

“Whoever comes in, she may want to see the possibilities around them,” said Janie Salazar, executive director of Charles County Public Library. “We’re here just to offer. We’re here to help people every day,” Salazar said of the library’s mission. “I don’t know that the public really understand that’s what we do. We’re here to help you and we’re here to connect you to the world.”

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