



**Lia Hillman**  
**San Francisco Public Library - Main Library**  
**San Francisco, California**

**Nominator: Carolyn Federman**

**1. Please tell us in 2-3 sentences why your nominee should win this award.**

**What sets them apart?**

Lia Hillman is an outstanding librarian because of the extra effort she puts into her community and her job. Lia has started many programs that extend the role of the library to provide social supports for the community, and each of these programs is now an on-going part of library services thanks to her solo effort. She has established garden and food education programs in library branches across San Francisco, from starting one of the first seed lending libraries at the Potrero Hill Branch to building a learning garden at the Mission branch. Now she is at SFPL's main branch, where she introduced the first "Biblio Bistro", a mobile kitchen cart on wheels, to teach the community how to cook the freshest ingredients at the Heart of the City Farmers Market- her commitment to her work and her community is truly extraordinary.

**2. Please list a few ways in which the nominee has helped you and made your experience of the library a positive one. For instance, did the nominee inspire in you a love for literature; assist you in a project or finding other information?**

Before becoming a librarian, Lia Hillman was a chef. She has brought that love of food and interest in nutrition to her work at SFPL. I run a nonprofit, The Charlie Cart Project, which provides tools and resources to help children make healthy food choices. Lia Hillman was one of the first people to contact us when we launched, to sign up to beta test our program. Lia applied for a grant to purchase our cart and curriculum, (a mobile kitchen equipped with a sink, oven, stove top, and kitchen tools) renamed her cart the "Biblio Bistro" - and set out to teach library patrons how to cook fresh, healthy produce.

Today, Lia rolls the Biblio Bistro out to the Heart of the City Farmer's Market once a month, provides trainings for her staff, and has arranged to transport the cart across the city so that all branches can provide hands-on cooking lessons to their clients. She has gone above and beyond to teach people in the community how to simply and deliciously prepare fresh produce, a skill that is especially critical for children and families living in poverty.

Lia believes that our partnership could be a national model for other libraries, and so she jumped through countless hours of permit and compliance hoops, presenting her program and vision to internal committees, the health department, and the fire department in order to get approval to use a mobile kitchen classroom in a public library. By setting a precedent at one of the most respected libraries in the country, she has created a replicable model for other libraries to easily integrate nutrition education and hands-on learning into their programming. Lia has been a true advocate and partner, and she has always worked tirelessly to make learning come alive for the communities she serves.

**3. How has the librarian made a difference in the community? Please be specific.**

Lia has made a difference in the community by always going the extra mile for her clients. She listens to her patrons and builds programming that is responsive to their needs. When she started working at the Mission Branch in 2009, Garden for the Environment was teaching children's classes inside the library, and the Children's Room looked out onto an empty patio. She quickly took action and spent countless hours of her own time building a garden on the patio so that the classes could be more interactive, and the children could learn about gardening... well, in an actual garden. She approached community businesses for in-kind donations to start the garden, and volunteered her time at a seedling company to get the first plant starts. With the community support that Lia rallies everywhere she works, she got approval to build a children's garden on the patio and it was installed within a month. By the fall, Garden For the Environment was teaching their classes in their new garden.

When it came time for their first harvest, Lia made a salad dressing and the kids washed and dressed greens they picked from the garden (did I forget to mention that she was a restaurant chef for 15 years before becoming a librarian? She is truly incredible!) She said when she saw their eyes pop and their enthusiasm for veggies, she decided "okay, we need to figure out how to get cooking involved." As soon as the first mobile kitchen classroom became available for purchase, she brought one into the library and has used it in her programming for teenagers, children, and adults.

As Lia says, "It's really empowering knowing how to feed yourself and prepare food. It connects you to where food comes from, and shows how we are rooted to this earth and what keeps us going. I want to help people feel more secure about food preparation so they know it's really not that hard."

**4. How has the library, and the nominee, improved the quality of your life?**

Our partnership with Lia and the San Francisco Public Library has helped me improve the program that I offer, by giving me insight in to the community I am trying to serve. Lia has been communicative, responsive and proactive. She has given me ideas about things I can add to improve our program, asked questions frequently, invited me to observe her food-related programming, and kept me

informed about all the many ways she is using our tools, equipment and curriculum. By providing me with critical feedback, both positive and negative, Lia is helping The Charlie Cart Project develop a model that libraries across the country can use. What Lia has created is an incredibly accessible model for any educator in any setting. As Lia put it, “this is a diving board to jump off and help all sorts of people.” Since Lia started her program, educators and administrators who have heard about her work have begun to reach out to me for more information. Many have asked to be put in touch with Lia directly. So she is not only helping me but creating a network of librarians nationwide that are interested in providing food education as part of their work. I’ve been extremely fortunate to work with Lia.

**5. How does the nominee make the library a better place? Please be specific.**

Lia has made each library she’s worked at a better place. She added a seed lending library to the Potrero Hill branch, built a learning garden and established programming around it at the Mission branch, and most recently has created an entire nutrition education program at the main branch. The children that come to her cooking classes are often learning how to cook for the very first time. Recently Lia told me a story about one of the children who has been coming to the library for a very long time. The little girl comes alone to the library as early and as often as she can, and stays until closing. Lia said ever since she started participating in the cooking classes, the little girl “can’t stop talking about how proud she is of herself for making this food.”

Lia doesn’t just make the library a better place, she makes the entire community a better place. On the third Wednesday of every month she rolls the Charlie Cart out to the Heart of the City Farmer’s Market, where she reaches over 250 people per day by cooking easy, healthy recipes using fresh ingredients from the market. She creates brochures to go with the tastings she hands out, highlighting 1 vegetable each month along with the (very simple) recipe she is demonstrating. She is working with the market to go into low-income housing areas to reach even more people with her project. As of today, she has reached over 1200 members of the community with her nutrition education program.

All of this is secondary, however, to Lia’s incredibly positive attitude. Lia is so clearly in love with books and learning, and she constantly strives to extend that joy to the people she serves at the library. Her attitude is infectious. When I visited her the first time at Main Branch, she got me so excited about the cookbook collection that I left there several hours later with a new library card, and weighed down by at least 10 cookbooks. Lia works tirelessly to expand the library’s offerings, always on her own steam, finding and writing her own grants, identifying and securing her own program sponsors. She is a force! Lia Hillman has dedicated herself to her work, and she is an inspiration to her team and everyone who has the honor of collaborating with her.