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LINKING NEW AND TRADITIONAL LIBRARY SERVICES

In some of our larger cities, public libraries are beginning to take on, are being asked to take on, or are considering taking on the functions of the neighborhood information center. To that fact we owe this volume and the institute on which it is based. The role assigned to this writer is that of providing a context, of posing and of trying to throw light on the question: How indeed do neighborhood information center functions relate to our public libraries?

This topic will be considered in two large segments, each of which can be stated as a question. The first question is the basic one: Is conducting a neighborhood information center the public library’s job? The second is contingent: If libraries accept the job, how do they accommodate the new function onto existing libraries?

IS THIS THE PUBLIC LIBRARY’S JOB?

In looking at the first question, “Is this the public library’s job?” and trying to arrive at some reasonable answer, one needs to know three things: (1) what the library’s “normal” job is, (2) what is involved in the new task it is considering, and (3) how the second relates to the first. It is here that one runs into difficulty. There are many variations among public librarians’ responses when asked to describe their role in society.

To some librarians reading this article, the entire inquiry will appear a sad waste of time. They will be impatient with what appears pedantic quibbling about roles. They might say: “Here is a job to do. It is important. A major need is not being adequately met. Let’s get on with it!” However, the acceptance of the new task by most of each library’s staff will be a necessary prerequisite to a successful operation. Surely such acceptance is not yet total. Since a moral imperative confers no obligation whatever on those who do not share the original commitment, it becomes necessary to turn to values and positions shared by all parties before agreement can be sought. In considering, then, whether this task of neighborhood information is
the library’s job, in terms of somewhat traditional values, committed librarians seek a common ground on which a majority of their staffs may be willing to stand.

Another reply to the objection is that many who would put aside tradition and claim “whatever is necessary and is not being done” as the library’s task would not, if pressed, be able to maintain that position. They do not really mean it. If, for example, there is inadequate garbage collection, it is highly unlikely that they would take on that task on library time and try to justify it as a proper library role. What is really meant by “whatever is needed” is “whatever is needed in terms of communication of knowledge.” This qualification provides a fragment of the answer to the librarian’s role—it involves the communication of knowledge. The information center, therefore, is at least akin to the public library’s function, since the communication of knowledge is its purpose.

Other statements of purpose with which librarians are all familiar are found in the public library standards. Here the common theme is materials; all purposes are geared to them. The kinds of uses to which the materials are to be put, as suggested in the statement of standards for materials, do not quite encompass the information center function, although a few come close, such as:

Educate themselves continually
Become better members of home and community
Discharge political and social obligations
Be more capable in their daily occupations.

The more recent statement of library rights of adults mentions “access to many outside sources of information,” but here also the stress is on recorded materials. The Adult Services Division statement also, as might be expected, highlights cooperation with other community agencies. Under “Services” one item notes commitment to “Participation with other agencies and community groups in cooperative planning for adults and in the provision of activities to stimulate and satisfy educational and cultural needs.” This standard approaches, but again does not quite cover, neighborhood information service. Even later statements, therefore, tend to be materials oriented, even though the library profession has long since expanded the term to include a variety of forms of recorded communication. While libraries have, in programs for example, concentrated on the knowledge of information itself, without regard for the package in which it is contained, it has so far failed explicitly to make this transition in its published official statements.

Perhaps this reluctance is understandable. The book—or the expanded concept of recorded knowledge in any form—has been the library’s raison d’être, even though we go to great lengths to make it
available. In this attachment to a material object, it differs from most other institutions providing public services. The health department's sphere is public health; it may utilize whatever techniques are necessary and obtainable, from physicians to X-ray trucks. Contrast this freedom (within an area of responsibility) with the library's role of acquiring, preserving and disseminating objects which contain recorded knowledge. If the library departs from the objectified record, it fears that it may be casting itself adrift in a world in which it will find no other safe resting place, no other function which is agreed to be its own.

The kind of ideological breakthrough in library goals that is implicit but not yet explicit in official library statements is suggested by Ervin Gaines in another context. Gaines proposes the new role of "informational switching yard," and declares:

What I am suggesting is a functional change which would free the librarian from the limitations of the collections surrounding him and cast him in the new role of informational specialist and consultant with a much wider sphere of influence than he presently enjoys. The staff of any large city library taken collectively has an astonishingly great ability to know where information exists. It is probably not too much to say that no professional group of comparable size has this ability . . . .

Properly conceived, a city library ought to be the informational switching yard for all except private and proprietary information. It could and should be the first, and perhaps sole, point of reference for any inquiry, and it should be constituted not only to direct an inquiry to its proper destination; it should be equipped to locate, retrieve and transmit the answer or document to the original inquirer."14

Gaines is not thinking chiefly of neighborhood information in this statement, but such service seems quite clearly to be covered by his description.

Despite their many and varied statements of purpose, public libraries have been accused, by more or less friendly critics, of having too vague a set of goals, of trying to be all things to all men. These critics might question the addition of still another function. Edward Banfield, for example, has accused the public library of lacking a purpose. "It is trying to do some things that it probably cannot do, and it is doing others that it probably should not do."15 Philip Ennis, in the same symposium, argues that the public library is dissipating its energies and resources: "It is simply impossible for the library to do everything at once. It cannot serve all the people in the community and do any of them justice."16 He urges, therefore, for the setting of priorities. Librarians cannot be sure whether these critics would deplore the exploration of still another
function, or applaud the acceptance of a clear-cut priority item close to the heart of contemporary society's needs.

From another direction, the public library is being urged, indeed required, to identify specific and measurable objectives. The budget-makers who follow the federal government in using Program Performance Budget System (PPBS) will probably force public librarians to clarify goals and measure results in the name of accountability. This revolution in budgeting is already upon us, especially in those larger and more complex governments represented in our larger cities, whose libraries are the very ones most seriously considering information center programs. This particular pressure would work in favor of the library's undertaking the new function. Program budgeting tends to reward agencies which show contributions toward the major goals of the jurisdiction as a whole. State library agencies have for some years been aware of the pressure of the overall national goals in connection with Library Services and Construction Act funding. In most cities the information center is closely related to a major public need and an inescapable public priority. Accepting it might move the library closer to the vital center of local affairs. While this exposed position might create some problems, it is one which most public library administrators have long desired.

In discussing the library's traditional statements of its role, one already moves somewhat toward the second question: What is involved in the proposed function? In considering that function, one also anticipates the third query: How does the function fit in with the traditional purposes and with library philosophies and patterns?

First, the information center function can be described very neatly in highly traditional library terms. It involves the familiar triad of acquisition of information, its organization, and its dissemination. What could be a more traditional library-like statement than that? Of the three parts, the acquisition and organization functions are familiar ones with which librarians find themselves quite comfortable. The dissemination function is also familiar, but it does—in this new context—contain elements which may create concern. As described in the Kahn report, the information center's possible activities may be divided into three: referral, counseling, and what might be called follow-through. Let us look at each of these in turn.

Referral is already a library activity. Surely every reference staff of every urban library has many times suggested recourse to the Legal Aid Society, the Better Business Bureau, or a consumer protection agency. Librarians have supplied addresses and telephone numbers of health and welfare services of all kinds. Whether the reference source checked is a printed directory, a homemade card file, or information stored in a computer, librarians will surely recognize this type of service. What is being suggested, insofar as
the simple referral part of the task is concerned, does not depart in
nature from library reference service—it merely involves a greater
volume of one type of reference inquiry.

Counseling, however, is a different realm. The information
services now given by such agencies as health and welfare councils
are frequently handled by professional social workers who offer
counseling as a major part of their program. While it may be true
that in some public libraries on some occasions personal counseling
and advice is given to users, this is not normally considered their
function, nor are librarians trained or competent to perform it
adequately. The question that arises here then is how to separate the
one function which libraries accept from that which they cannot, as
they are now constituted, accept.

A professional social worker may be able to spot a situation which
calls for counseling even though the client’s inquiry itself contains no
such request. The professional abilities, for example, to recognize
and deal with an emotionally disturbed person are outside the
librarian’s sphere. Even though librarians are by no means unac-
quainted with people with emotional problems, their posture has been
one of friendly aloofness. They accept without question all comers
who do not disturb others, but they do not currently permit individuals
with emotional problems, or in need of a listener, to preempt time
and attention for long periods. Most librarians have, however, met
such occasions and developed a few limited techniques to deal with
them.

While most librarians would agree that the counseling task is not
theirs, and that referral should include referral to qualified counse-
lors, there is still this troublesome diagnostic problem. If the
librarian’s chief role is that of intermediary, how can he or she
function as a discriminating intermediary in the best interests of the
new users? Is this a skill which might be learned, at least in part?
Should there be a professional counselor on the library staff who
might train those who give the referral service to be at least aware
of possible problems, and to whom the staff might refer some of the
problem cases which appear to need in-depth interviewing before
referral can be made? Librarians do not know the answers to these
questions but they must ask them. Librarians do not wish to enter
the sphere of another profession, nor are they expected to, but the
function in itself does call for a new type of expertise. There may be
an analogy here to the paraprofessional in the library world, who
needs to be trained to do his or her own work well, but who must also
recognize the boundaries of this sphere, and know when to call on a
professional.

The third segment of information center service involving follow-
through is also unfamiliar to librarians, but may be an essential part
of the whole. It is not sufficient in work of this sort merely to
provide information, either in print or by word of mouth. While information and referral service is by no means necessarily confined to the poor, it does and must reach that group. Here the library may be dealing with people of limited education who cannot read, write, or perhaps understand the printed page or form. No doubt in poor neighborhoods librarians have helped people fill out applications for welfare or other necessary forms. Perhaps a considerate librarian has on occasion called an agency on behalf of a person in need of help, or even accompanied one on a first visit to an unfamiliar building and service. But this type of help has not been thought of as "library work." It has constituted assistance on an individual basis, and probably on a librarian's own time in the case of the escort service.

The reference function of the library does at least give lip-service to the proposition that a question is not answered unless the answer is intelligible to the inquirer. Traditionally, librarians have searched for material in a simpler form rather than interpreting in their own simpler words the unintelligible printed page. Traditionally, too, from library school on through inservice training and supervisory admonitions, experienced librarians have drummed into younger staff the precept that they are not the authorities but that the authors are, and that it is no part of their business to tell the reader the answer, but rather to find it for him and give it to him from a recorded source. I suspect that not all librarians have adhered rigidly to these rules. They have, on occasion, explained to the child what the book means, or to the perplexed reader what the complex and specialized language implies. On the other hand they have, by and large, refused to interpret the law for users. Even in departures from strict observance, librarians have adhered to the spirit behind the unwritten law; that is, they have perhaps tried to explain what the author or text says, but they have not taken upon themselves the responsibility of giving the advice or the answer.

If libraries undertake the new service, they may have to relax some of these precepts. Neighborhood information service of the type envisaged must reach the user in understandable form, and the staff must be sure not only that the user understands but that he or she knows where to go, how to get there, and for whom to ask. These functions may require an interpretation, a translation, an encouragement, or an introductory phone call. There may well be occasions on which it is necessary to accompany someone to a service agency. An even more sensitive problem will arise when an inquirer returns and reports failure. Does the information center's function include follow-up to assure success? These questions involve relationships with the agencies whose services are listed and to whom referral is made. In many—perhaps all—cases, the decision here may be the agencies', not the library's.
In considering the elements of information service in the context of accepted library roles, I have stressed the dissemination aspect over those of acquisition and organization, because the latter two seem to pose fewer, if any, comparable problems. Acquiring datum from a human source rather than receiving it in a book or other recorded form may give pause to some who see the library's role as tied inextricably to recorded knowledge. In the new pattern, the library itself will do the recording, as part of the organizing process. While in some academic circles the idea of receiving and recording previously unrecorded knowledge may appear revolutionary, it can stand scrutiny and emerge as acceptable. Here, information is being sought from experts—the agencies describing their own services; it is the same information that has previously been included in printed directories which the new service has superseded. In organizing it, especially when coordinate indexing techniques are used, the library facilitates the information transfer and keeps it up to date in a far more efficient manner than was possible formerly. Nevertheless, a good case can be made for the proposition that the library is performing precisely the same function as before when it purchased, cataloged, and disseminated information from its directories of health and welfare agencies.

To sum up, the elements of information center work as described contain many similarities with established library roles and activities. Much of what is new is different not in nature but in peripheral characteristics. Clearly, however, there is one segment of the work which is different in kind—the personal counseling function. Problems to be met by libraries which undertake the information service will include the following: (1) identifying at the operating level those inquiries which require professional counseling and developing methods of meeting this need; (2) relating to other public and private service agencies in a new type of partnership, one which may abridge some of the library's autonomy with regard to this particular service; and (3) adapting traditional rules, practices, and organizational patterns to serve a new type of need in considerable volume.

Before leaving the question of the appropriateness of the service for the public library, however, two more facts should be mentioned. The first is that, critics to the contrary, the American public library has proved flexible in the past, adapting to new needs as they have arisen. Libraries in general have moved into new areas of activity: for example, it is so habitual to give reference service that librarians forget that there was a time when it was a controversial innovation! Rothstein tells us that "No such conception of organized reference work had been formulated before the third quarter of the nineteenth century," and remarks that "Speculation as to why the idea of reference work, which now seems so obvious, took so little hold on the library thought of the day finds its best answer in an analysis of
the prevailing library context."8 What he appears to be saying is that despite the apparent refusal of late nineteenth century librarianship to admit the strange and radical innovation, the change was adopted. He is also saying that today's commonplace is yesterday's controversial proposal. Margaret Monroe's almost blow-by-blow account of the early struggles of library adult education for general acceptance is more recent.9 Many librarians can remember this battle, but now, as Monroe shows, the scars are healed and the concept is so deeply integrated into adult service that younger members of the profession are unaware that there was ever a question, much less a major controversy.

In the past, public libraries have shifted gears to meet the needs of immigrants, of the unemployed during the Great Depression, of a nation at war during World War II. Perhaps today's younger librarians do not realize that libraries operated as special information centers during that war and sent out collections of materials to factories engaged in war work. More recently, as everyone knows, experimental programs have been developed to attempt to reach the poor in meaningful ways. It is by no means uncommon to find public libraries today operating as drug information centers. While these instances do not perhaps place the library in the vanguard as earth-shaking innovators, they do acquit it of the charge of complete inertia in the face of changing needs. They show that it can and does adapt.

In closing this first section on the question of appropriateness, a second fact which may not be known to all American librarians that some British public libraries were giving neighborhood information center service as early as the 1950s. In 1953, for example, we find Louis Shores addressing an English audience:

I am particularly struck by the fact that in so many localities the public library is accepted as the official information agency and the public librarian is designated by the government as the Public Information Officer.

It so happens that I first met the confidential citizens advisory service in the Luton Public Library.... There I found a most advanced type of reference service dealing with many of the confidential and personal problems that some of our professional literature insists is not the province of reference.

Since I use no names I hope I break no confidence by reading from my notes some of the questions handled in that reference service:

1. Where can I get my deaf aid repaired?
2. Can landlady turn out daughter if mother dies?
3. How can I get a housekeeper's job?
4. Where is there a home for an old man?
5. How can I get someone to do contract ploughing. ¹⁰

Yet almost twenty years later, some librarians consider this an innovative service. Yet except for the counseling aspect, this service differs chiefly in degree and in peripheral concerns not in essentials from service we all accept as a public library function. Librarians should remember that some of the library’s most cherished services were once questioned as inappropriate; and that the neighborhood information center concept that they now hail (or question) as an innovation is one assumed by their English colleagues in the 1950s. Perhaps, then, the appeal for this function to become the library’s should be made not only to the members of the library profession who seek to break with tradition and move into new and revolutionary spheres, but also to the old-style demon reference librarian who knows all the answers or takes delight in finding them, and who might welcome neighborhood information service with delight and argue fiercely that it is basically traditional and only superficially revolutionary.

ASSIMILATING THE NEW SERVICE INTO THE LIBRARY

Having agreed to undertake information center responsibilities, how can the library best accommodate them? Here the major considerations ought to be the convenience and satisfaction of the users, on the one hand, and the assurance of maximum protection for existing services, on the other. While undoubtedly every administrator and supervisor involved in the planning and decisionmaking process will wish to place these two criteria in the forefront, there may be other considerations of a specialized local nature which will have a bearing on plans. Political and community pressures; board viewpoints and concerns; the inevitable constraints of space, time and budget, along with the geography; service philosophy; and existing neighborhood-to-neighborhood library-community relationships are some of the factors which, differing among communities, may necessarily lend a special coloring to each library’s decisions. Since these are local and individual concerns, we can only note their existence. What follows is commentary on the general options apart from these local matters.

Decisions must be made on a number of basic questions: Where shall the service be given? If at more than one point, how should it be articulated? Who will staff it, and what training will be necessary? Will the existing supervisory structure suffice, or is a new unit needed? In either case, where on the organization chart will the neighborhood information center service find its place? These questions cannot be answered separately; decisions about each necessarily affect the options open in the others.
If convenience to users is a major criterion, the place where the service will be given, to which the potential user will turn, may be the first question to be considered. Options appear to include: a centralized service, accessible by telephone, or service at branches and perhaps other outlets. While some services may be given satisfactorily over the phone, the confidential nature of the inquiries and explanations involved seems to require personal contacts. Perhaps one reason why the social agencies have thought of the library as an appropriate location for the service is the existence of a multiplicity of neighborhood branches. Here is a ready-made group of publicly operated service points, familiar to the communities served, staffed by people acquainted with the neighborhoods. These characteristics give a great advantage to the library branch system as a natural location for the service, aside from any inherent kinship with the library's normal information function. They are the same reasons why library branches are frequently used as polling places, and seem quite valid on these grounds.

Branch locations then seem desirable. Whether all branches will be equally involved, or whether the service will be confined to those in poorer neighborhoods where the need will be greatest, will depend on the extent and nature of the information service itself. Some types of referral service are needed in every neighborhood; some in England are not especially characteristic of poor sections. It would seem necessary that every branch should have access to the recorded information, although the nature of the hook-up and the staffing of the service at the branch itself, might well differ according to an estimate of expected use.

In addition to branches, most urban libraries now have a variety of informal outlets or contacts with inner-city neighborhoods where unconventional service patterns are being tested. In some way, these service points too will need to be connected with the information reservoir, even though some of them will consist of individual community workers operating completely outside the walls of any library building.

Underlying this discussion of location has been the assumption that somewhere, perhaps at the main library, there will be a central source of information to which all the outlets will have access. To duplicate the information in each outlet would be expensive, and keeping the data current would be next to impossible. That the information should be up to date is a prime necessity; the service which libraries now give through printed directories and homemade card files is weakest in its inevitable lack of currency. Another assumption is that the data will be organized through some type of modern coordinate indexing device, automated or otherwise, which will provide not only directory type information, but also combinations of factors to meet the needs of the individual. For example, an
inquirer lives in a particular jurisdiction, needs training in reading Braille, would like a guidedog, can pay some but not all the cost of the service, can make appointments only in the evenings, is a Catholic, is collecting social security benefits, etc. Only coordinate indexing can quickly find not only the agencies which give the services, but also those from which the inquirer is eligible to receive help because of residence, religion, and so forth.

In larger libraries expecting a sizable amount of business, a computerized data bank with on-line connections for at least those branches most expected to use the service seems a good arrangement. Some branches might telephone in, calling those staff members who have direct access to the data at the main library. The informal outlets’ connections might vary according to their locations and characteristics. A storefront library room in a general neighborhood center might be on-line. A community worker would naturally have to call in. If the telephone is decided on, either as the communication medium from branches to the data, or as the chief means whereby users inquiere, a separate line and telephone number are probably necessary. Library switchboards are often overloaded, and operators busy handling a variety of inquiries. A hesitant inquirer should surely not have to explain his need twice—a problem shared with most libraries’ regular telephone information service.

The question of the service’s location is not fully answered by locating it geographically in the branches. There remains the need to find a place for it inside. Here is one of the points at which existing circumstances will often dictate the only possible answer. If, however, there are choices, which would be ideal? Specifically, should this service be separated physically from other branch library operations, or not? In favor of at least a measure of separation are the following considerations:

1. Privacy is important, in view of the confidential nature of some interviews.
2. A relaxed atmosphere and comfortable setting are desirable.
3. Time for a protracted interview may be needed on many occasions.
4. The staff member giving the service should be available on a priority basis, not subject to interruption by casual requests for directions in the library or for help with a traditional reference problem.

On the other hand, there are arguments in favor of shared space:

1. Users of the service may prefer not to be too clearly identified as such, but may feel more comfortable mingling with others using the library.
2. During slack or peak periods, the staff giving the information service may either help with other library tasks or receive help from other library desks; such reciprocity requires a common area of operation.
3. During emergencies or slack periods, it may even be possible to operate both services from one desk.

4. Physical proximity of the service to other library offerings may attract new users to books, pamphlets, periodicals, story hours, film showings, and so forth. This advantage, although given last, may well be the first in the minds of library personnel.

Probably the ideal arrangement would be a separate desk somewhat apart from but still in the general area of usual library materials and services. Surely it does not seem necessary to make available a separate entrance, such as that of a meeting room. Whether, when no other space is available, meeting room space and functions will be yielded to make room for neighborhood information, is a policy decision which may unhappily face boards and administrators in some locations.

The separate desk with a chair for the inquirer and a comfortable nearby place for others to wait seems essential. To be asked to sit down for an interview immediately makes the occasion more personal and gives the inquirer assurance that his or her need will not be brushed off. (Such arrangements are much needed in the library as a whole for the complex reference inquiry or reader guidance interview.) If the information and referral service is in the general service area, its comfortable chairs will be attractive to the general public, some of whom will assert their inalienable rights as citizens and taxpayers to make use of them. These and kindred problems will be anticipated by any experienced branch staff, and some arrangement must be made to deal with them. Difficulties of this nature, while apparently minor, should be expected and prepared for; failure to deal with these problems could be most serious, even to the extent of jeopardizing the entire program.

A consideration related to the space problem, which should not be overlooked, is that of the library as one of the agencies to which the information center may refer its inquirers. Some questions will best be handled through the use of library materials, either at the branch itself or in the main library’s collection. We have already noted Gaines’s opinion of the library staff’s excellent knowledge of information sources, without as well as within the library. Some questions then will be answered from within. How to handle such questions involves still another decision. The staff member attached to the neighborhood information desk may change roles and give information directly from a pamphlet or a reference book, or may refer the questioner to another service desk. This is a different matter from the “helping out” during slack periods mentioned earlier, and requires a good deal of thought. The user gains by not having to repeat his story to another person, but the library should be alert to the probability that he or she will approach the same staff member the next time, even if the need is purely and clearly a library one.
What is behind this problem is the whole matter of assimilation of the new service. How far should assimilation and interchangeability go? To some extent, the answer will be related to staffing and to structure.

When the matter of staffing is discussed, one often hears the comment: "Let's not use librarians. We need friendly, approachable, patient people to staff these new service points." This is a sad commentary, no doubt a indictment in many cases on librarians as a whole. In determining the staffing pattern of the information service desks, there seem to be three possibilities—librarians, social workers and paraprofessionals.

There has been some tendency for libraries to add professional social workers to their staffs, but not in the numbers which would be required for information center work. A moment's reflection should make one realize that this use of a professional social worker is inappropriate. First, there are probably not enough social workers available. Second, most of referral work is just that and would constitute poor utilization of professional skill. Third, it seems quite likely that the volume of information service use will at first be small. It does take time for word to get around, for new habits to be formed, and for a new service to be utilized by large numbers of people. While regular caseworkers may help by sending clients to the library, heavy use of the facility should not be expected initially.

Some of the same considerations which apply to social workers apply to librarians. There are not enough persons of appropriate qualifications and personality to fill all the posts which would become open in our large city libraries. Nor is the special training of a librarian needed for the simple referral aspect of the work. We have already noted a disadvantage vis-à-vis the social worker, that the librarian is not qualified to do counseling. While the personality charge that librarians are unfriendly and unapproachable may not be true in all cases, it is true in some. Even without these invidious comparisons, however, the service pattern of the reference librarian aims at a cordial but impersonal tone, and the work at a busy desk sometimes takes on the aspect of a juggling act, with two or three users and a telephone call all being dealt with at once. It would be hard, though not impossible, for a librarian accustomed to this pattern to shift to one in which full attention is given to the person seated at the desk, without regard for the others waiting their turn. A change of pace would be necessary, and difficult to achieve. The giver of information service must be like the doctor or dentist in the office, seemingly oblivious of the patients in the waiting room. While the library staff—both professional and paraprofessional—will probably have to fill in at the neighborhood information desk from time to time, the scheduled personnel need not and probably should not be librarians.
There remains the paraprofessional. He or she can be recruited and trained for this one service only, will have no habit patterns to break, will look on the work as the heart of the job, and feel no sense of failure to do only this one job. From the viewpoint of the recruiter, it would be easier to find young paraprofessionals with the necessary personal and educational characteristics, and easier to find them in the branch neighborhoods where the service is being given. For, in common with the innovative inner-city services, this service would be better received, especially by poor neighborhoods, if the staff giving it is neighborhood staff—minority if the community is minority, Spanish-speaking if that is the community’s chief language, aware of and understanding about problems which will be brought to the information center desk. This point is one we are all aware of, and we all know that there are not enough librarians with such backgrounds, even if the work were otherwise felt to be a librarian’s job. If more minority and Spanish-speaking librarians were miraculously available, libraries would want to use them elsewhere in most of their systems. Regardless of the decision, the new staff should be thought of as full-fledged members of the library and branch families.

There should be no question here of the library’s offering hospitality to a service from outside, thought of as different and apart. Branch libraries, especially in poor neighborhoods, frequently do offer such hospitality to baby clinics or literacy classes which are not a part of the library’s regular service. This is right and proper, but the staffs of the visiting service do not attend library staff meetings. If they use library staff rooms, share the cakes and cookies brought from home for coffee break, it is as invited guests rather than members of the in-group. Any tendency on the part of branch staffs to think of their new information center staff as visitors rather than colleagues must be detected and stopped.

This point leads to the second question about staffing having to do with the leadership of the service. New tasks which must be undertaken include: first, the preparation of the coordinate indexing system, or whatever other organization the information file requires, from classification numbers to subject headings; second, the establishing of relationships with the social agencies, public and private, from which information is received. This liaison will be vital and must be entrusted to someone with judgment and authority. A third function at the supervisory level will be that of training those giving the service.

A first question might be whether one supervisor or group needs to perform all three functions. The preparation of the materials for coordinate indexing and computer could perhaps be contracted for outside the library, if no staff member is familiar with what is required. Most libraries of the size likely to undertake the service, however, have someone on the staff with the expertise needed. This
skill may be found in technical processes; and technical processes is an appropriate place for the organizing function if the skill needed is there. While the complex part of organization will occur at the beginning of the operation, and although added input will not be complicated nor require special skill, there is a need for someone to review the indexing in the light of use—to determine whether the terms used are sufficient, or too elaborate, and so forth. This review will require communication between the operators and the indexers if they differ. There is a strong possibility that both these functions-operation and input after the original scheme has been set up—could best be performed by the same staff under supervision.

If the technical aspect or organization of materials calls for skills which may be found in processing, existing liaison with other agencies will also be found on the staff, perhaps in the adult services division. Since this part of the job is not a one-shot activity, as the organization is to a degree, it seems unlikely that anyone on the existing staff will be able to take it on without additional assistance. But the question remains whether adult services with more staff should handle the interagency relationships. If the existing relationship is good, it would stand. If the library gives a great deal of information service to the agencies and their staffs, if there are co-sponsored programs, shared committee work, common memberships on adult education councils, etc., mutual understanding and respect will exist; preliminaries would be less formal and explanations simpler. Each side would understand the other's professional concerns.

On the negative side is the fact that this new relationship will be different. If the agencies or their organizations are paying for the service, the agencies will have a large say about how it is carried out. If the service supersedes one formerly carried on by the welfare department or similar agency, the cooperating agencies will have norms and criteria based on the old service. They may be critical of the library's performance, especially during early stages. There is not necessarily a problem here; such difficulties must be worked out. But if the same agency represents the library in this connection and in the other of more established community relationships, a strain may begin to be felt. And if, as we mentioned above, there should develop any kind of follow-up service, with the library serving as the point to which users bring complaints of dissatisfaction and the point from which these messages flow back to the agencies, the relationship will require tremendous maturity and tolerance on both sides. While adult services may help with introductions and beginnings, it may be better not to have adult services responsible for the liaison.

If one can be found, the best liaison person would be a librarian with a social work background, or vice versa. There is an analogy
here with the position of school liaison librarian, recommended by Lowell Martin in the first Deiches Study report, and adopted by a few libraries as a new position. The individual, to function effectively in the liaison role, must speak both languages and understand both of the institutions to serve as an effective bridge. If a librarian is chosen, it seems desirable that the library subsidize at least some training in social work, and vice versa. This same person seems appropriate as the supervisor and trainer of the direct service staff. We have already noted that such staff will need to learn to spot problems which require counseling before referral, training which would best be given by a professional social worker. If none is available for full-time employment on the staff, perhaps contract arrangements could make one available for formal instruction and continuing counseling of the staff itself.

Since the questions of "where" and "who" are so closely interrelated, the questions of the relationship of the service to the total library structure have been partially discussed. If the decision is to place it in the branches, the new staff will be directly supervised by their respective branch librarians. The combination of local supervision with centralized leadership should not create great problems, since the pattern will be a familiar one to large libraries. As a children's librarian in a branch is supervised directly by a branch librarian, but given inservice training, guidance and special assistance by a system-wide children's supervisor or coordinator, the new staff will be supervised vertically and trained and guided horizontally.

Moving up the organization chart we come to another problem—the place of the service vis-à-vis the director. In some libraries, new services such as those to the inner city are felt to be so sensitive and innovative that they must be placed immediately under the director's supervision and form a new unit totally divorced from the rest of the library's operations. One can understand this decision, and if it has been made in connection with inner-city services, perhaps the information unit should also have the special attention of the director, at least initially. This bypassing of the heads of branches, however, would be poor management from a theoretical viewpoint and would create foreseeable confusion and concern. Perhaps a compromise could be reached which would leave the service in the branch department so far as the line supervision is concerned, but retain the coordinator's function for the immediate supervision of the director.

The problem as can be seen from these examples is that of involvement and participation by the existing staff and supervisors, so that the new service will be truly accepted as part of the library as a whole, on the one hand, and assurance that it will be given consistently and adequately, on the other. Ideally, branch librarians and heads of branches should be readily capable of handling the new service, especially if they have been consulted in initial decision-
making and involved in planning. Realistically, however, there is bound to be a variation among responses and attitudes of branch librarians at first. Even the heads of branches may not be immune to problems of this nature. This dilemma will be resolved differently in different libraries depending on individual situations. Regardless of the initial decisions, the result should be assimilation into the total service, with the goal of total acceptance as a library function on the part of the whole staff.

Monroe has described for us the progression of the idea and function of library adult education, from special and separate to integrated and accepted, identifying three stages: (1) identification of the area of service and justification of the library’s participation in it; (2) intensive development of the area under a specialized leadership, including development of techniques and training of a specialized staff; and (3) diffusion of responsibility for this area among the professional staff. 12 While the analogy is not exact, something approaching these three stages may occur in the neighborhood information service.

Having discussed “where” and “who,” let us consider for a moment the problem of “when.” If branch library hours are curtailed, for example, if they are closed in the morning, some arrangement may need to be made. Partial opening will be confusing and expensive if regular library business is light. Signs on the door giving a telephone number to call, or referral to the nearest open branch may be all that is necessary, or further change may be required. This one consideration might reverse the earlier tentative decision and place the neighborhood information desk in the meeting room with a separate entrance. For telephone service when the library is closed, the special number may require a taped message giving hours of service. If emergency twenty-four hour service of some sort is contemplated, the recording should at least give the number of whatever agency offers generalized emergency service.

In reviewing what has been said, we find that many more questions have been raised than answered. The answers suggested are highly tentative. If this article has helped identify alternatives with the pro’s and con’s of each, it will have served its chief purpose. However, the problems of a practical nature which we have raised here lead to one firm conclusion: the service should not be embarked upon without careful planning. Planning among units of the library and planning in concert with the social agencies are essential elements of a successful operation. The fact that difficulties and complexities will arise should not deter libraries from taking on the task if other circumstances are right, and if they believe it is a job worth doing and a job that libraries can reasonably claim as their own. If they succeed, they shall have pioneered, as the earliest reference librarians and adult education librarians pioneered, in
adding a new facet to their function, a new usefulness to their service, a new group of users to their clientele, and a new visibility to libraries as even more closely identified with the information needs of the communities they serve.

REFERENCES


3. Ibid., p. 3.


