According to Althea Warren in a 1939 report, a "medium-sized" public library is a library in a town with a population of 35,000 to 100,000. A more contemporary statistical definition by Leon Carnovsky and Howard Winger, in an introduction to a 1962 conference on the medium-sized public library, termed it an agency "arbitrarily defined as one serving a local population of between 25,000 and 150,000." The general idea in both cases remains the same. The medium-sized library is one that services a community larger than a small town or most single unincorporated suburban areas, and smaller than a metropolitan area.

The medium-sized library, usually housed in one building, is described by Winger as a "locally autonomous unit serving a single community." However, the Harrison (New York) Public Library serves a population of almost 22,000 with a main building and a branch, and the Hayward (California) Public Library, serving a population of 98,000, also has a branch. Whether having one branch or two, the medium-sized library is a local unit loyal to its community and, provided that it is doing a good job, receives the community's support in return. These statistics translate into human terms. They define a community that is large enough to require and support a variety of services, but small enough to receive them in a personal way.

The staff in the medium-sized library is large enough to provide the expertise needed in special areas, such as technical services and work with children, but small enough so that the members know each other
well and work together with a minimum of protocol and a maximum of effectiveness. The library staff and borrowers know each other by sight, if not by name. It is this personal relationship with the community that is a source of strength for the medium-sized library. The "children's services" serve both children and adults. Moreover, these adults have needs that may or may not be related to children.

Library services that have impact and visibility grow out of the community's needs. Some of these needs are readily articulated for the professional who is willing to listen. Others can be discerned by the observant librarian who becomes part of the community. The need expressed most directly by all ages is the desire for information—be it for a school assignment, a Cub Scout project, or a personal venture. The desire for recreation or entertainment is the next most visible need. The role library services play which is the most elusive and difficult to express is one of contributing to a better quality of life. Whether the community perceives the library as an agency that can enhance the quality of their lives, or even feels the need for it, is doubtful. Yet much of what librarians do, acknowledged or not, expands the mind and lifts the spirit.

Meeting these spoken and unspoken needs defines library services. The library materials certainly serve these needs. Traditional print materials are a rich source of information, recreation and inspiration. The librarian who knows his or her community and collection skillfully matches the two in the time-honored tradition of selecting the right book for the right patron at the right time. In addition, at the librarian's disposal is the richness of audiovisual media that reach people in ways that provide a different, but equally valid, experience. In order to exploit the strengths of audiovisual materials thoroughly, one needs the hardware to preview and use it. The medium-sized library should have the physical conditions necessary to show a film or listen to a cassette. Most libraries circulate the materials; whether the hardware can circulate is a budgetary item that librarians would do well to advocate.

In-house materials are a valuable and unique resource for the community. In an ideal medium-sized library (one having all the strengths outlined above), librarians are in a particularly good position to compile for borrowers a file of community agencies and organizations that work with children in any way. Whether patrons are looking for a counseling service or a crafts class, the library should be able to direct them. Indeed, a resource file can be of invaluable help to the library staff in combining program ideas and names of people with special talents who are willing to share them with children. Perhaps the community has a special landmark that needs to be interpreted for the children. A filmstrip or slide-tape
presentation may be produced for in-house use and circulated to individuals and organizations.

As interpreters of the collection, librarians make it easy or difficult for patrons to use the resources librarians know are available. Whether called reference work or reader guidance, the librarian's obligation is to see that the child who wants a "good book" or information on a particular subject, and the adult from the television station who is looking for a story to dramatize, each get what they are looking for in the most effective form.

This point raises the question of access to adult materials by children. In a medium-sized library, where the staff members understand each other's goals, the problems should be minimal. However, unless the library uses a one-card system and/or has an official library policy, service to this age group is restricted. The desirability or artificiality of limited access to the adult collection, whether this is a good control or a cumbersome nuisance, are only two of the questions to be addressed.

Programming is another method by which librarians serve their community's needs. Children's librarians are incredibly good at it. Within the literature can be found a variety of imaginative programs to delight, inform and expand a child's world. For example, children tended a vegetable garden as part of the Vacation Reading Club of the Free Library of Philadelphia. The Wichita Public Library sponsored a Children's Dinner Theater featuring skits and improvisations based on stories and folk material. In Manhasset, New York, the children's librarian trained teenagers with drug problems to help with the library's scheduled story times.

In planning programs, children's librarians should take advantage of the special place they have in the community to recruit the best human resources available both inside and outside the library to serve their borrowers of all ages.

Why do programs at all? Programs involve a lot of work. If they are to be successful, they must be well planned. I feel librarians do programs for the following three reasons:

1. Programs give the library visibility. They receive publicity in the newspaper, on television and the radio which puts the library in front of the community in a way that is hard to ignore. Programs bring people into the library; they are a means of reaching nonusers. Whether the nonuser returns or not, the library is no longer totally unfamiliar; it has been seen. Programs also allow regular patrons to view the library in a new light.

2. Programs stimulate the use of materials in the library. A puppet show can mean circulation of books on puppetry as well as of the story which was presented. A film on animals means circulation of books,
pamphlets and perhaps pictures of animals. To oversimplify, programs lead children to the materials. This goal is reinforced with displays and lists of related materials. The program serves as incentive to explore a topic further or delve into a new one.

3. The third reason is one which defies evaluation; if this is romantic, unscientific and unbusinesslike, so be it. Librarians do not know if the dancer brought in to move and talk to children in the intimate and comfortable setting of the library will touch the individual child or not. They do know that they are providing an experience the child might not have had otherwise. Expanding a child’s world contributes positively to the quality of his or her life. It may be years before the impact of that program is felt. However, there is enough testimonial literature from successful adults about the effects of seeing an artist, hearing someone speak or reading a book as a young child to know that such programming is worth pursuing.

The case for programming has been stated succinctly by Margaret M. Kimmel: “If children’s service goes beyond housing materials, if, indeed, it is to provide an opportunity for an individual child to go beyond what he thinks he wants to what he might want, stimulating, effective programs should be developed as a basic part of a library’s service. And the program must be regularly evaluated and revised, because the program itself is a service, not an end.”

The medium-sized library exists in a community which is large enough to need a variety of services and to have a number of agencies which provide them, as well as small enough to allow the agencies to work well together. The library is in an advantageous position to cooperate with these agencies for everyone’s benefit. Schools, medical facilities, social and recreational agencies, arts and special interest groups need the library’s resources and the library in turn must ensure that its patrons know about their community’s resources. One striking example of cooperative resource-sharing occurred in Woodbridge, New Jersey, where every Saturday afternoon the public library brings children’s materials to the visiting area of the Rahway State Prison. This project is funded by a joint grant from the Department of Institutions and Agencies and the New Jersey State Library Development Bureau. The possibilities for this kind of cooperation are endless and the prospects exciting.

Obviously, much of this is true of all libraries, regardless of size. Branch libraries in large cities can experience this same sense of community even without the freedom of the autonomous medium-sized public library. Everyone also has similar problems with evaluating present services and planning for the future. Librarians know circulation and know how to count heads and keep track of reference questions. If a program
attracts a specific number of people, it can be deemed a success. What is more difficult to measure is the impact of library services. What is to be done about materials that circulate less than once every two years? Should they be swept off the shelf, or granted house space because when they are used, they are truly needed? Is too much staff time spent working with a social agency so that the library is not adequately covered? However the evaluation and planning are accomplished, the medium-sized library because of its size has a flexibility that is to be envied. If something does not work one way, it can be quickly changed. Word of that change can also be quickly circulated within the community.

There are other questions about the goals of library services. Are all librarians’ efforts aimed at promoting the use of print material? Do they ultimately go back to the book? Are libraries moving in the direction of serving as a community center with a variety of activities? With all the options available to today’s child, what role should the library play? Libraries are supported by tax money — how can they serve everyone? How can libraries reach everyone? Even if an instrument has not been perfected, methods of evaluation can be developed using techniques such as behavioral objectives and program-based budgeting. It is the library’s goals, which once seemed so clear-cut, that still need examination and much thought.

REFERENCES