



# Public Library Services to Adults

## Working with Children

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CHILDREN ARRIVE into the world trailing clouds of glory and surrounded by attentive adults. Parents and other relatives, doctors and nurses stay in the child's circle; around him forms a nimbus of neighbors, teachers, crossing guards, and other officials concerned with his welfare. Associations are formed by adults for the child and for other adults whose attention is focused upon the child. Laws are passed to protect him; White House Conferences are held to discuss him and, if possible, to improve his lot.

Next to the lucky child stands the children's librarian, who by virtue of his relationship to the child should be able to see the adults in his world with unusual objectivity. It is within his power to offer to these adults materials and services that will enable them to work more effectively with the child and to improve the world of which he is the center.

Self-propelled adults who work with children find their way to all of the services of the public library as other people do. The teacher in the reference room may be seeking information on teaching the new arithmetic or on cruises to Bermuda, with Christmas vacation in mind. The parents, social workers, and all of the others in the library-sponsored discussion groups may attend to improve themselves as workers with children, or to forget for a time that they are. Those who approach the library through its children's services, or who are led to use these particular services, are the ones with whom this paper is concerned.

Thus, the children's librarian becomes the anchor man for the public library's services to adults working with children. In 1954 Helen Lyman Smith reported in *Adult Education Activities in Public*

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*Libraries*,<sup>1</sup> that 11.4 per cent of the persons engaged in providing services to adult education agencies were children's librarians, as were 11.2 per cent of the persons engaged in providing services to community groups. Although these frequently quoted statistics startled adult service librarians and even a few children's librarians, they present an incomplete picture. If one should add services to youth-serving groups and to individual adults concerned with children, the percentages would be much higher.

If the first time a children's librarian said to a mother, "I think Johnny would enjoy this," represents a bright star, the services of today are a constellation. At the center is the primary function of recommending children's books. It is all in the day's work to suggest a baseball story to the mother of the boy who will not read, folk tales to the teacher of the unit on Japan, a collection of easy hand-crafts to the den mother, or "reading together" stories for the father of five. When the same questions come too often, the librarians make the ubiquitous lists—"Under the Christmas Tree," "Let's Read Together," "Friends Across the Sea,"—not for the children, but for the guidance of adults.

Unwilling to wait until the parent or teacher or camp counselor comes into the library, the children's librarian has gone out, bearing books, to the places where such people gather. Charlemae Rollins,<sup>2</sup> in a list of her talks in one brief year, lists church groups, men's clubs, women's clubs, settlement house groups, and such organizations as the National Council of Christians and Jews. In her audiences were parents, civic leaders, ministers, teachers and school administrators, youth group leaders, church workers, and just interested people. A composite list made by the children's librarians of America would be endless, headed no doubt, by the various units of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers.

To the makers of books, the children's librarian has become the lady with the lamp (or her male counterpart), throwing light upon what children like and need. Children's librarians spread before children the best that has been written and drawn and encourage them to go and do even better.

To introduce a book is one thing, but to help people see what makes a good book, in itself, and for the particular child, is more difficult but in the long run more effective. Special collections, for study and comparison, have been gathered for the use of parents, teachers, social workers, authors, illustrators, and students of children's literature.

Elsie MacDonald describes three collections at the District of Columbia Public Library.<sup>3</sup> One, which is a circulating collection for parents, contains copies of the "cream of the children's collection." The non-circulating Illustrator's Collection represents the best of English and American illustrated books from the earliest examples to the present. Another noncirculating group of 2,000 books, called the Advisory Collection, is used, with the help of the children's specialist, by individuals or by groups such as curriculum committees or church school committees who are selecting books to buy for children.

A more direct approach to this kind of teaching than that of giving talks on the subject of what makes a good book or of individual counseling for specific purposes is the organized series of group meetings. Whether such series are planned for the mothers of children who are enjoying a story hour, for the members of organizations such as parent-teachers associations, or for the community at large, they represent the joint efforts of librarians from the adult and children's departments of the library, often in cooperation with other specialists from the community. The most ambitious of these are carefully planned to build an appreciation of many kinds of materials and their use. A Louisville (Ky.) Public Library program,<sup>4</sup> offering eight sessions for preschool mothers, dealt with the home and its relation to reading readiness, Mother Goose and other beginning books, and picture books; reading together; how to read or tell a story; poetry and rhythm; home libraries and encyclopedias; and films and filmstrips for children.

Not content with sharing their knowledge of selection, children's librarians have developed workshops for storytellers. If some of these are for the express purpose of developing a core of volunteers to extend the activities of the library staff, others are designed for people who work with children in many situations. Here the library, as in its other similar activities, considers the personal development of adults, and the ultimate enrichment through them of the lives of many children. Thus, Frances Rees states the objectives of one such workshop: "to offer to persons in other areas of work with children an opportunity to improve their knowledge and techniques by sharing in discussion, listening to stories told by expert story-tellers, and listening to talks on various aspects of storytelling."<sup>5</sup>

Among the 50 people who shared this experience were representatives of a crippled children's clinic, one from a nursery school sponsored by the YWCA, five from kindergartens, eight from churches,

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10 from elementary schools, and a number of interested individuals, including a grandmother.

The children's librarian has recognized that his collection and abilities are not sufficient to meet the needs of all the adults whom he meets as a fellow-worker with children. For the sake of convenience, a collection of books and pamphlets on child development may be housed in the children's department, but the total resources of the library must be used for effective service. When E. Preston Sharp,<sup>6</sup> director of the Philadelphia Youth Study Center, sought the cooperation of the Philadelphia Free Library in the work of the Center, he and his staff met first with the coordinator of work with children and the head of the deposit library collections. Their concern was to provide books for the troubled children housed at the Center. Soon the Center staff was calling upon the library for materials for staff development courses and for aids in group counseling, ranging from handbooks on role-playing to films depicting discussable situations. Just as the children's librarian works with the adult services staff members in developing group programs, he works with them, by referral or consultation, in providing for adults concerned with children the full use of the adult collections and services.

As part of the job, the children's librarian confers with many adults to whom he is not explicitly offering service. Some of these conferences fall under the heading of arrangements, as when the librarian visits the principal of the school to arrange a class visit or to clear the date for his appearance at a school assembly. Others are casual contacts. He meets the county agricultural agents at the 4-H Achievement Day program. He talks to the mother, newly arrived in town, who brings her child to be registered at the library. In these situations, he is the public relations specialist, according to Anne Izard,<sup>7</sup> performing an important library function. In what he says—in the impression of professional enthusiasm that he gives—he conveys the importance of the library in the community and the value of its work. In what he hears, he finds evidence of community needs and interests to add to the total upon which planning for services may be based.

Of greater complexity are the situations in which the children's librarian cooperates with other adults for the welfare of children. He may participate as a member of the board of a social agency or as a member of the social welfare council. Frequently he plans activities with representatives of schools, children's hospitals, or any number of organizations and agencies serving children or adults. When the

activity is library-based, the children's librarian may consider that he is receiving more service than he is giving. When the activity is part of the program of another group or institution, or a joint and continuing effort community-wide in scope, he knows that his is a free-will offering and recognizes the opportunity which it gives him to further the library's total purposes.

Although the emphasis in cooperative situations is upon an end product, the planning conferences themselves may be learning experiences for all concerned, with the children's librarian and the other participants alternately teaching and learning. Here the librarian may serve as the public relations specialist, as the source of knowledge of books and other materials, as the analyst of materials in terms of quality and relation to children's needs, as an experienced planner of children's activities. Because of the strong motivation of planners, the informal setting, and the equality of the roles of all concerned, the children's librarian may find in these cooperative situations some of his best opportunities for serving adults.

Strangely enough, when one considers their accomplishments in work with adults, children's librarians have proceeded largely without any formal education in this area. Elizabeth Burr<sup>8</sup> reports that an adult services librarian, at the Wisconsin Free Library Commission's Institute on "Informal Education through Libraries,"<sup>9</sup> asked, "Why is it that children's librarians are not considered part of the adult education program of public libraries?" and added, "It seems to me they do as much, or more, than any of us as adult educators." The participants agreed with him, and drafted a statement, "The adult education function of the library permeates all aspects of its services and involves all library staff."<sup>9</sup>

Many children's librarians have sought opportunities to learn more about working with adults from the adult services specialists in their libraries, from reading, and from attendance at meetings. Some, among them Eleanor Burgess, children's librarian at the Grand Rapids (Michigan) Public Library, dreamed of a special conference on work with adults for school and children's librarians.

In June 1957, as part of the Michigan Library-Community Project, Miss Burgess' dream came true. A workshop, "The Librarian Reaches Out to Children Through Adults,"<sup>10</sup> was held at Higgins Lake, Michigan. The staff of the American Library Association Library-Community Project and of the Children's Services Division of ALA cooperated, and Mrs. Charlemae Rollins, then president of CSD, served as

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a special consultant. Thirty-five people from five states participated.

The "Areas of Concern" of the workshop were listed as follows: (1) what the librarian who works with children needs to know in order to work with adults; (2) the adults we work with and how we communicate with them; (3) knowledge and skills we should like these adults to have; (4) knowledge of resources and how to use them.

Each session was based upon a specified topic, such as "The Adult as a Learner" or "The Resources of the Community." Various methods of presentation, such as lecture, panel, role-playing, and discussion, were used, and their appropriateness for the situation was analyzed.

Although the immediate enthusiasm of the participants in any activity is little indication of its value, in this instance a follow-up questionnaire indicated that many of the participants are now working with adults to a greater degree or in new ways—a more valid evidence of the workshop's effectiveness. The startling result of the workshop, however, was the reaction of many children's librarians who had not attended. As word spread of what had happened at Higgins Lake, others wanted similar experiences.

A few library meetings here and there reflected some part of the workshop programs, but the chance to build a bigger and better workshop came through the joint efforts of the Adult Services Division and the Children's Services Division of the ALA. With the School of Library Science at Western Reserve University, these divisions co-sponsored an institute preceding the Cleveland annual conference in July 1961, "The Adult and the Child's World: The Library's Potential for Service."

The children's librarians did not hold this conference for their participation alone. School librarians, supervisors of school libraries, public library administrators, and adult services librarians joined with them. To the planners of the pre-conference institute it seemed obvious that if cooperation were to be demonstrated, the cooperators must be present. However, the focus stayed upon the librarians who work with children and who are the guides to the adults in the child's world.

Not all of the 221 participants felt that the learning experience of the institute was needed or effective, but as reported in "Experiment in Evaluation,"<sup>11</sup> many were responsive and enthusiastic. The significance of the institute is that it brought national recognition of the possibility of providing for librarians who work with children an

opportunity to learn to do even better what many of them already do very well in their work with adults.

In "The Child in a Changing Society: Implications for Librarians," Jacob W. Getzels observes that, "In order to understand the child in our changing society, we must understand the nature of the adult values to which he must react and which he must at least in part learn to assimilate."<sup>12</sup> Librarians concerned with the development of children must therefore go to the adult community—not only to teach but also to learn; not only to help others serve children well, but also to learn from others in order to understand the child. As in most aspects of library work, the process comes full circle: when one sows, he also reaps.

Public library service to adults who work with children is necessarily incomplete if the children's librarian does not play a full and vital role in this aspect of the library's activities. Orilla Blackshear<sup>13</sup> describes the plan of the Madison (Wisconsin) Public Library for service to children and young people through work with adults, a plan involving the entire staff of the library and eventually reaching into many areas of the community. Beginning appropriately with in-service training for local library personnel, the first activity brought together public and school librarians in the county to focus upon groups working with youth. Other activities followed, such as a one-day storytelling institute, staff participation in the Mayor's Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Study, the development of a Family Living Collection (with one-third of the 1,200 titles for children or family reading), a meeting with representatives of agencies to share programs and purposes, and the preparation of reading lists for the city health department.

In activities such as these the line between the adult and children's departments fades; the entire library works together. Certainly the resources of any library cannot be used more fruitfully than in service to those who mold and change the child's world.

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