



Library Services to Young People and Children in Correctional Facilities

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ON ANY GIVEN DAY there are approximately 46,000 persons under 17 years of age in about 800 correctional facilities for juveniles. These young people may be under six years, although most will be between ten and fifteen; a relatively small number of residents will be between seventeen and twenty-one. Less than 25 percent of the residents will be female. They will stay in the institution an average of nine months.¹

Not included in the above figures are youth who are court-committed to privately operated institutions, nonjuvenile institutions (such as local jails for lack of proper facilities), and special care units for addicts, alcoholics, the mentally ill, the mentally retarded, etc. For purposes of this paper, the term *youth* will be used regardless of age. Comments will concern chiefly those facilities planned exclusively for the housing of persons under twenty-one years of age who are under court jurisdiction or have been committed by court action. The number of such facilities rose from 722 in 1971 to 794 in 1973.²

Of the 794 facilities in 1973, 367 were operated by state governments and 427 by local governments. Of the 45,694 youth in the 794 facilities on June 30, 1973, 33,385 had been adjudicated delinquent; 4,551 had been declared in need of supervision; 6,397 were being held for court action. The remaining 1,361 youth were in categories such as neglected and dependent youth.³

Librarians planning services for youth in correctional facilities and/or planning to be librarians in such institutions face a variety of factors which are not usually considered in library school classes. This paper will attempt to identify some of those factors and their relevance to library services, as well as to provide a limited description of what is happening in this area of librarianship. It is to be hoped that

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the paper will assist and add to the perspective of librarians by providing a little more information for consideration.

Librarians may approach an institution with preconceptions about its programs and staff which are just as false as the stereotypes of librarians to which we object. Some of those horrible expectations may prove to be correct; many will not. A librarian with an open mind, not expecting the worst, but not playing Pollyanna either, is making a positive approach to the institution environment.

A library in an institution has several unique qualities which strengthen its role as a library. It is usually the only part of an institution which really resembles its community counterpart, and it is almost always the only correctional facility program or activity with direct carryover to the community. The library is also frequently the only activity which is involved with the total institution—or at least, which should be involved with the total institution.

Frequently, the institution is the first situation in which youth have felt that reading was an acceptable or even a desirable activity. "Reading" in this context refers to the use of library materials, not to the format of printed materials. Information, recreation and education can be acquired from records, cassettes, films, etc., as well as from books and magazines. Library materials may offer the only opportunity available to residents for a real exercise of independent choice. Using library materials may be the only privacy which residents have in the institution. From the library, youth can journey out of the facility to distant lands, to happier times with imaginary friends and entirely new personalities.

A good librarian will achieve strength in some or all of these unique features of the library. One girl at a Pennsylvania Institution commented, "The library is a place that you can read and be quiet for 40 minutes and think about anything."⁴ Any visitor to this library would agree, however, that the term *quiet* is relative. It is not a "shhh" kind of library at all.

The librarian who uses the library as a substitute for a nonexistent recreation center at an institution not only fails to use the library for its proper purpose, but also probably retards the development of adequate recreation facilities at the institution by providing an inadequate substitute. The librarian who personally attempts to meet the needs of youth for a friend and confidant, however badly needed, may find the relationship undermining the library's role in the institution as a library. The librarian who ignores institution rules

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with which he/she is not in agreement, instead of working to change them, may find big trouble.

The most difficult part of the librarian's job in an institution is the identification of both the library's role and the function of the librarian. The library's and the librarian's functions must relate to the institution's program and to the residents whom the library serves. These functions may be much more difficult to define than the statement indicates, particularly for the library in a facility where library services have previously been nonexistent and the librarian is starting from scratch. Institutions frequently show considerable divergence between the stated goals of activities and programs and the actual activities and operation, at least in the eye of the beholder. This credibility gap is both confusing and frustrating. For most librarians the special environment of the institution—its organization, restrictions, and other aspects affecting the library—is a rude awakening.

Finding ways to implement normal library procedures may be a constant problem. Deviating too much from normal library procedures as they will be experienced in public and school libraries can be a real disservice to the resident. Youth who are not introduced to the responsibilities of library use, but only to its pleasures, may through ignorance cause problems in school and public libraries later. In extreme cases, this has resulted in youth being recommitted to correctional facilities because of delinquent behavior committed on library premises.⁵

The first factor which the librarian in most institutions must confront is role identification. Staff, administration, residents, and the librarian may all have different views of the role of the librarian based on experience and stereotypes.

Staff may view the librarian as a person with nothing to do but stamp out books, an obvious babysitter for problem children or for classes when a teacher wants a free hour. Yet, on the other side of the coin, staff may expect miracles from limited resources and librarian's time. Neither convincing the staff of the library's value nor performing miracles is an easy task, especially in the average library where the librarian must perform clerical tasks without assistance, as well as try to provide library services with a very inadequate collection. Both can be done.

An Arkansas librarian has developed the kind of rapport which results in staff support. One visible aspect of that library program is the depositing of books in cottages and at the hospital, so that they are

available to the residents when summer work on the farm, grounds, dairy, laundry and cafeteria makes it difficult for them to get to the library. A sure sign of success of that service is the number of unsolicited comments of appreciation for the books by the residents.⁶ The cooperation of the staff in the cottages can make or break this type of service. Materials must be out in sight, and their use must be encouraged. The librarian must also rotate the small collections regularly to ensure variety. Many librarians have successfully developed services of this kind. Where this kind of service is not successful, it is frequently a symptom of a poor relationship between staff and librarian.

Librarians may anticipate that because they are working with school-age persons, they will receive support for library development from the educators working with the clientele. This may or may not be the case. Education staff members are frequently new graduates without experience, and thus may not know how to use library materials in classroom teaching. Other education staff may have worked in the situation so long that they have become totally pessimistic about the institution, the residents, and probably about education in general. This frustration must be met with persistence and imagination. The librarian may suggest titles which appear to be relevant to a particular teacher and frequently not only the titles, but ways in which the titles may be used in the classroom. This kind of assistance to teachers, which is normally expected of a school librarian, is not the normal experience of teachers in a correctional institution.

An Ohio librarian both supported curriculum and was successful in removing the stigma of "baby books" from the children's titles selected for easy reading by involving the books in home economics and family-related studies.⁷ Most of the girls would have children if they did not already have them. A Pennsylvania librarian had a similar experience using materials with girls who were working at a local nursery school.⁸

Administration may view the library as an adjunct of the classroom with no relevance to the rest of the facility, as a decorative feature to be kept clean and tidy for tourists, as an available babysitter, or as a meeting room. On the other hand, the administrator may anticipate unrealistic immediate benefits from a new library or librarian commensurate with the efforts made to budget and find space for the library. The librarian must communicate to the administration in a positive manner what the library is in relationship to the institution's

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purpose—and that, of course, is much easier said than done. It is important, however, that communication be established both to gain library support and to give the administrator the ammunition needed to justify that support. At one Pennsylvania facility, three legislators were shocked during a surprise inspection visit when a large number of the young men in the institution were found to be reading library books in the cottage units. A librarian's visit once every two weeks and a small collection supplemented from the public library resulted in a great deal of reading at the location.

A regular schedule of reports with basic data on use is one way to communicate to administration and staff. Such a report should be succinct. Reports should include anecdotal notes on library use, comments by readers, what teachers are using, what kind of material is needed, efforts to identify appropriate material, etc. One librarian regretted not having a camera with her when some boys took their books outside during her biweekly library session. She reported seeing two boys leaning against a wall, surrounded by books and reading to each other. A third boy lay with his head against a tree, reading a book propped on his chest; and a fourth young man worked at a picnic table, practicing from his borrowed book, *How to Draw*.⁹

Reports should be fairly formal, but not so repetitive that they become boring. The number and length of reports depends on many circumstances, but should never be less than two per year. Reports should be distributed to as many of the staff members as possible and sometimes to residents. Writing such a report should not be put off because the facilities are not available for a really professional job. Reports should be typed and spaced for readability (a little paper may be wasted in the interests of communication).

The relationship of the librarian to the youth in the institution is a difficult one for many librarians to identify and to maintain. The librarian faces the emotional pull of working with youth who need affection and guidance; the temptation to try to be parent, pal and God is great. Maintaining one's composure when faced by youth whose only behavior pattern is aggression, however, may present personal problems to a librarian who is, after all, a human being with feelings, temper and temperament. Finding a good balance is not easy, and what constitutes a good balance will vary with every situation. At the same time, youth needs a stable environment, so the librarian must establish rules and maintain them.

Librarians frequently discover that the youth in the facility have

values, vocabulary and behavior patterns which are at considerable variance from the librarian's personal concepts. Youth from urban areas may have somewhat more sophisticated—or at least different—experiences than do youth from rural and suburban areas. There are, then, two cultural shocks to be weathered: (1) the shock of the institution environment, and (2) the secondhand contact with the resident's former environment. Unfortunately, in an effort to approach the residents with an open mind or as a result of a biased interpretation of the institution situation, the new librarian may have personal expectations about residents which color the relationship in advance and result in reactions from both resident and librarian which are based on stereotypes, not reality.

There are very few generalizations which can be made about youth in correctional facilities, although there are many generalizations which "everyone knows" about those youth. Some common understandings may be true of most residents, but there are exceptions to every rule. The youth in juvenile institutions are individuals and, despite common characteristics, should be seen by the librarian as persons, not stereotypes. There are several of these stereotyped ideas which a librarian will hear as "common knowledge" about the resident and the library.

Aside from the age ranges and percentage of male/female residents given earlier, it is true that residents are more likely to come from urban environments than from rural settings. Urban areas have a larger proportion of the population in most states than do rural or suburban areas; on percentage alone, therefore, the number is potentially greater. In addition, the proximity of persons in urban areas tends to create situations which lead to crime and antisocial behavior. Another common factor among residents is likely to be a negative attitude toward society and adults. Youth in institutions have often never had a satisfactory relationship with an adult. Generally, society's representatives, i.e. teachers, police, social workers, and librarians, are viewed as enemies to be outwitted. School performance is likely to have been poor and skill levels are usually low in relation to age. Residents may, however, tackle and read books which appear to be far above their tested skill level. As one California librarian said, "Perhaps the most enlightening observation is that "slow readers CAN and DO read when they are sufficiently motivated with materials relevant to their experiences." She describes a young woman with a fourth-grade reading ability who worked for two months to read *Down These Mean Streets* because she found it relevant to her past experience.¹⁰ It

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is not true that youth in correctional facilities will not read or will only read pornography. It is true that the experience of reading for pleasure may be a new one. Furthermore, it is true that youth may have a stereotyped and false picture of the library and the librarian.

A common attitude toward libraries was expressed in Seattle: "I've seen libraries before. You got nothing I want to read." The girl who made this comment was surprised to discover a book to read when *Pimp* was pointed out on the library shelf. The novel *Pimp*, with its realistic picture of street life, is a popular title at the Seattle institution. One girl who had been a frequent resident of the institution over a five-year period told the librarian that the book led to her decision never to join a stable and to curb her own prostitution activities.¹¹

Another misconception about popular titles has been proven false by many librarians. One New Jersey librarian has commented that nonfiction is generally more popular than fiction because youth can more easily relate to real-life situations. Her identification of the most popular subject areas differs somewhat from "poetry, psychology and philosophy," the three *p*'s which are usually cited by institution librarians. In this New Jersey institution for boys, the most popular topics are science, philosophy and self-understanding.¹²

Stereotypes of correctional institutions may lead to a concern about the danger of working in such facilities. It is not true that the librarian in a correctional institution is in constant physical danger; however, the librarian must be aware of potential security problems. Behavior standards for the library must be established and maintained. Part of the librarian's responsibility is to create a situation which supports acceptable behavior and to require persons in the library to conform to acceptable behavior patterns. The librarian does not want to revert to the stereotype of the person who frowns and hushes, but neither can he or she permit the library to become the site of daily riots and/or a mere nursery.

Most youth are not placed in institutions as a result of their violent behavior. More than one-third of the youth in juvenile institutions are held for offenses such as truancy and curfew violations. Approximately 6 percent are committed for drug-related offenses. Reports on the offenses leading to commitment were made for approximately 65 percent of the youth in custody June 30, 1971. Of those reports, approximately 20 percent of the youth were committed because of misdemeanors, and only 40 percent because of felonies.¹³ In 1971, the greatest number of commitments at one western institution resulted from burglary/unlawful entry. Liquor use/possession, auto theft, and

shoplifting followed in that order. Only liquor use/possession is truly a juvenile crime, i.e. one for which an adult would not be charged.¹⁴

Librarians are familiar with the misconception which most members of the public have that anyone who works in a library is a librarian. Most librarians, however, have not experienced the misconception that any collection of old, torn, outdated and inappropriate materials constitutes a library. The first librarian in a correctional institution frequently finds that the "library" is a collection of titles more than ten years old, with an encyclopedia dated 1940 or earlier as the respected focal point of the reference collection. The librarian who condemns such a collection in the terms it deserves may alienate persons who have worked very hard to create what they feel is a library. Similarly, the librarian who constantly lobbies for the much-needed clerical assistant may alienate both the staff who feel a major achievement was made when a librarian was hired and the staff who see the librarian's job as an easy way to earn an exorbitant salary.

The institution librarian, having identified his/her role and how that role will be related to the function of the library as a school, public and special library within the particular institution, will be hampered by a variety of rules, regulations, and other factors which are part of institution life. The realities of institution life almost always result in a library staff of one librarian, perhaps augmented by some residents. If residents work in the library for training, the librarian must plan and supervise a training program, which is time-consuming. If successful, the program will result in a frequent turnover of the aides—which reduces the aide's usefulness to library operations. Institution residents are at best a poor answer to the staff needs of juvenile correctional facilities.

Institution rules and regulations impose many restrictions. One problem which is frequently encountered is purchasing library materials within the regulations developed for purchasing large quantities of materials by government units. Another problem may be the retrieval of material from youth who are released. Still another difficulty may be determining how to get youth to the library in groups small enough to communicate and browse, and at the same time to comply with security restrictions.

Facilities for a library in a correctional institution for youth are almost always too small for adequate service. The collection in the library must frequently be disproportionate to the size of the population, because it must serve a wider age range than the average

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school library and does not have the resources of a public library with children, young adult and adult collections to draw on. One-third of the facilities in the 1971 report had fewer than 25 residents; approximately 70 percent house fewer than 100 persons.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the library must be prepared to serve youth in an age range from six or younger to seventeen or older. The minimum collection of 4,000 volumes recommended by "Library Standards for Juvenile Correctional Institutions"¹⁶ must indeed be well chosen to meet the needs of that variety of individuals for recreation, information and education materials. Almost none of the juvenile facilities has space for a collection of that size even if the collection is totally print-oriented.

In terms of facilities, an even greater problem than size is that of location. If the library is located internally in a school building, it may be inaccessible to residents who are in vocational classes outside the building and to all residents outside of school hours. Many residents need the library most during evenings, weekends and holidays when their television programs are not shown, they have no visitors, or they just want to be alone and quiet. If the library is not located in the building where classes are held, however, much greater effort is needed to get teachers actively to use library materials in their teaching. The library advisory committee of one institution which has had major renovation and expansion identified its biggest mistake as the failure to assign responsibility to one committee member to monitor the detail work done after approval had been given for library space. Problems which could have been avoided included a large office and small workroom, too many windows, and shelving which did not meet library specifications.¹⁷

There is a very real problem for the librarian planning the content of a collection. No library that I have used had all the materials the librarian thought were needed. This is certainly true in the library serving youth in a correctional setting. Furthermore, it should go without saying that the library is not just a "book place." Selection of materials in this situation may present some new problems for the librarian—not selecting the best of several titles, but finding a single good title. For instance, participation in sexual activity does not necessarily mean that the individual has any knowledge of the biology of sex. What is appropriate information? What format is most effective? How much money can be used for the material? Will the material offend staff to the extent that it will not be used, and may even cause serious adverse effects for the library? Is material available

which has the level of interest needed by the population, with an appropriate level of reading and vocabulary? Is any material, however unsatisfactory, better than nothing?

Reading patterns of youth in institutions are often very interesting, reflecting their home background, current interests of the public and titles available in the library. For instance, one girl went through the following material in roughly the order given: animal stories; series of stories about a family in which the father had died; stories about coping with alcoholics; titles by Cavanna, du Jardin, and Mary Stolz; filmstrips on family living and sex education; books on sex; and books on nursing. Another girl read books from the professional library; titles by Rod McKuen, Ferlinghetti, Camus and Gibran; drug books; *The Hobbit*; *Wind in the Willows*; and *Charlotte's Web*— in no particular order.¹⁸

The very normal desire to find a better approach has led many librarians to develop library service to institution residents, particularly youth, with exclusively nonprint materials. An overemphasis on nonprint software can result in the materials being used as an opportunity to play with the equipment. Selection for a facility must take into account the available hardware, available materials, depth of coverage needed, and the proportion of expenditures among various formats. Print is not an inferior medium, nor is it the only medium. Identifying the perfect proportion of subjects and formats in terms of needs, budget and facilities could use all the capabilities of an IBM computer.

Most institutions do not have library budgets. Institution libraries are supported by gifts (old books and magazines), federal funds (ESEA, LSCA and LEAA grants), and odd amounts which the business office finds unused in some category. Real planning for library development seems impossible at times—and *is* impossible at others.

Many institutions are not located within easy reach of a good public or school library; moreover, many librarians in public and school libraries resist lending materials to correctional institutions. This situation naturally reduces the interlibrary loan resources of the librarian. The attitude that the institution will lose or destroy all interlibrary loan books is based on a false premise. Institution libraries probably have more control and less loss than noninstitution libraries. The institution librarian may have to develop statistics to prove this to librarians in the institution's local area.

What are the positive aspects of library services to youth in correctional facilities? Librarians working with youth report that the satis-

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faction of achievement is an outstanding strength of this aspect of librarianship. Susan Madden reports the ultimate compliment by one resident to the collection of a youth institution: "Far out. Even the reference books are far out." A teacher at the same institution, the King County, Youth Service Center in Seattle, reported that one girl's repeated comment, "I hate to read," seemed perfectly logical to the girl, despite the fact that she had been at the center for only five days and had read two books. Those books didn't count: "But that's different. You let me read what I want to read."¹⁹

Marjorie Foley reported similar experiences with many older youthful offenders at a youth forestry camp in western Pennsylvania. One memorable experience was a young man who, although initially negative toward the library and reading, eventually read a wide variety of titles as different enthusiasms took hold. For a time he identified with Hercule Poirot, Agatha Christie's dapper Belgian detective with a carefully waxed mustache, which is surely not a predictable identification for a center city youth.²⁰

One public librarian who provides a weekly library program at a youth forestry camp for older male offenders noted a very gratifying improvement in the manners and behavior of her patrons as they found her programs responsive to their interests.²¹ Furthermore, she has seen the attitudes of staff at that institution change from pessimistic to very supportive of the library services.

Where can the librarian in a correctional facility get help? Most state library agencies have an institutional consultant who may be able to assist with some problems. The amount and type of assistance will depend upon the structure of government in the state and the number of responsibilities which the consultant has. The Health and Rehabilitative Library Services Division of ALA is the most active professional group concerned in this area. In addition, there are library units in both the American Correctional Association and the Correctional Education Association. To obtain information about membership and activities of these groups, the executive secretary of the ALA, ACA or CEA should be contacted.

Many school and public librarians are willing and able to provide some kinds of aid. The two kinds of aid most often available from these resources are interlibrary loan and the opportunity to preview materials before purchase. Some consultant aid and program help may also be available.

There is a very limited literature to provide assistance. Some titles related to general library services in institutional settings have value

for librarians in every kind of institution. There are some articles concerned only with library services to youth in correctional institutions. A review of the literature in that specific area since 1974 resulted in the bibliography at the end of this article, which is limited to titles identified as having content of value for practical application. There is considerable literature on the correctional facility, case studies of residents, and theory and practice.

In using the literature, there are two factors which must be considered even more carefully in this subject area than in most. Evaluation of literature describing institutions and residents indicates too frequently a subliminal bias based on the particular author's experience which can result in total false inferences by the inexperienced. Literature describing the libraries in institutions is frequently highly philosophical and theoretical, announcing projects not yet implemented with no additional reports of actual experiences to prevent duplication of error. Many efforts like this issue of *Library Trends* are being made to correct this situation. Library service to the youth in correctional facilities is very much needed. It is a very rewarding service to offer. Librarians must, however, expect aggravation and frustration, as well as a sense of achievement, for their efforts.

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