

# Library Services for the Blind, Handicapped, and Institutionalized

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IN ASSESSING THE DEVELOPMENT of library services for the institutionalized and for the blind and physically handicapped as administered by state library agencies, it is important to consider several elements. These include state library organization for such services, legislation, funding, the development of standards, and networking.

Major developments in the field of services to institutionalized and to the blind and physically handicapped began with the enactment of Title IV-A and Title IV-B of the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) in 1966. Under this title, state library agencies began planning for extending library service to the institutionalized in state-supported mental health, mental retardation and correctional facilities, and for further extending services to the blind and physically handicapped. Plans for implementation were developed, and in a majority of state library agencies, a special consultant was employed. From these meager beginnings, institutional library services have developed during the 1970s.

A review of the current position of institutional library services in state library agencies indicates that as of 1977, all but nine state library agencies employed an individual to coordinate institutional library services.<sup>1</sup> This person, with secretarial support, has generally been the entire complement of staff. In some of the smaller states, the program is administered by a state library agency head. In others, the institutional library program has two or more consultants and is a separate section of

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the library development unit within the state library agency. The existence of a position at the state library agency level, when filled by a dedicated person, has led to numerous tangible results, particularly in focusing attention on institutional library services. Numerous seminars, workshops and programs have been successfully implemented by these consultants, and the quality of the library program has thereby been improved.

Within the American Library Association, the traditional home for institutional consultants has been the Health and Rehabilitative Library Services Division (HRLSD, formerly Association of Hospital and Institutional Libraries). Numerous committees addressing the needs of the institutionalized and of the blind and physically handicapped have been formed, and much work has been accomplished in publication of standards, bibliographies and guides.<sup>2</sup> In 1971, a decision was made to form an institutional library discussion group within the Association of State Library Agencies (ASLA). This discussion group, limited to those individuals in state agencies having responsibilities for institutionalized services statewide or an aspect of institutionalized services, has provided a forum for exchange of ideas.

Because institutional library consultants are the focus of statewide developments in institutional library services, they have become the leaders in many of the activities of HRLSD. Because an ALA division may speak for the American Library Association in that division's area of special responsibility, the state institutional library consultants have provided considerable direction in the development of library services for the institutionalized through the association. Perhaps the most significant area in which state library agency consultants have influenced institutional services is in the development of library standards. Many of these standards have been developed in conjunction with other national associations. Some recent examples include: "Library Standards for Adult Correctional Institutions,"<sup>3</sup> completed in February 1976, and approved by the American Correctional Association (ACA) and ALA in 1977; "Standards for Library Services in Juvenile Correctional Institutions," published in 1975 by ACA and ALA;<sup>4</sup> Library Service Standards for Jails, completed in 1977 and approved by ALA in 1978; Standards for Library Services in Mental Health Institutions, initiated in 1977; Standards for Library Services for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, also initiated in 1977; Standards for Library Services for the Deaf, initiated in 1978; and Standards for Library Services in Institutions for the Mentally Retarded, completed in 1978. Many of these standards will be utilized in national accreditation programs. For instance, elements of the correctional library

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standards are being utilized in the ACA Accreditation Program of Institutional Services, and the standards for the blind and physically handicapped are being developed under the aegis of the Library of Congress.<sup>5</sup>

While there are a number of service delivery patterns among states for institutional services, most can be categorized as: (1) state library agencies contracting with local public libraries to provide services to the institutionalized, (2) state library agencies contracting to supplement library services with other state departments having primary responsibility for institutions, or (3) state library agencies providing direct service to institutions.<sup>6</sup> It is very difficult to determine any trends in service delivery patterns since the states are so diverse. Consequently, what works in one state does not necessarily work in another. In past years, there has been some weakening of the service delivery patterns in which the state library agency contracts with local public libraries to provide institutional services. This pattern has been replaced by centralized administration and delivery of service from the state library agency itself.

It is too early to determine the effects of the changes in LSCA funding which revised the floor of minimum support from the basic \$39,500 which was established in 1971 to a floor determined by expenditures for the second preceding year. Those states spending far in excess of the \$39,500 may now continue with the amount expended in FY 1977 for the FY 1979 appropriation.<sup>7</sup> There is a probability that these mandated higher expenditures will improve institutional library service programs. From institutional reports, however, there appears to be a trend toward lessening state support, which considerably inhibits institutional libraries.

Service patterns in institutions are changing. For example, library services in institutions for the mentally retarded are becoming less traditional. As educable residents leave the institutions, libraries must meet the needs of a more profoundly retarded population. As educable mentally retarded persons enter their communities, it becomes the responsibility of public libraries to address their library needs. To date, public libraries have been slow in assuming this responsibility,

In the field of mental health, large state hospitals are closing in favor of smaller community-based facilities. At least one state is encouraging public libraries to purchase TTYs (teletypewriters) for hearing-impaired users. Perhaps one of the most striking trends in library services for the handicapped is in the development of new equipment, such as braille cassettes, talking calculators, equipment which reads inkprint audibly, and the further development of braille reproducers.

The development of new services and the deinstitutionalization of

people formerly confined to institutions have led to the importance of networking among libraries. For instance, library service to the institutionalized is part of the total service program of system libraries in Illinois. Texas and New Jersey school districts which serve correctional facilities are linked with public libraries and their respective state library agencies. Multistate centers and subregional libraries for the blind and physically handicapped are developing connections between the Library of Congress, state library agencies and local public libraries. Although this sophisticated network for the delivery of library services to the blind and physically handicapped exists, it has not been duplicated for library services to the institutionalized.

It is expected that the growing importance of implementing the National Commission on Library and Information Science's *Goals for Action*,<sup>8</sup> the concomitant emphasis on equal access for all citizens, and the development of local, state and national network delivery systems will focus attention on the inclusion of institutional libraries in the national program. It is also expected that, as state library agencies implement the *Goals for Action* and as the library community searches for new initiatives and directions for federal funding, attention will need to be given to seeking more local and state funding for such services.

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