# Emerging Trends in Community Library Services

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> It is not easy to be a professional, to lay claim to professional authority
> and esteem and side with ordinary folks, especially poor folks. It is not
> easy to be a bureaucrat, intent on rising within the bureaucracy, and side
> with the clients and victims of that bureaucracy.[1]

IF ONE REVIEWS THE developments of community library services since
the passage of the Library Services and Construction Act in 1964, one
can only conclude that there has been little systemic change.[2] A variety
of programs labeled "outreach" or "information and referral" have been
introduced in public libraries to create an external link with individuals
or organizations in the communities they serve.[3] With few exceptions,
support for these services has not been incorporated into regular budgets,
nor has it lasted for more than a few years in any one library. Why have
community library services failed to become integrated with traditional
public library services? How can such services be expected to develop
in the future?

Any examination of these issues exposes a notable lack of (1) suffi-
cient reporting, (2) program evaluation, and (3) established criteria
for success. First, although the library press regularly notes new programs,
there has been no systematic evaluative survey of community library pro-
grams. Becker conducted in 1974 one of the most carefully designed
studies to date,[4] but even it was incomplete and there was no follow-up.
Most recently, Seymour and Layne conducted an extensive review of
programs and services in public libraries,[5] but the published results are
essentially a public relations piece; they do not document failure nor

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provide more than brief descriptions of success. In terms of program evaluation, one finds that even the most liberally funded and ambitious project — the Neighborhood Information Centers in Cleveland, Detroit, Atlanta, Houston and Queens — was not critically evaluated by its outside monitors. One team admitted that their report was in large part "impressionistic";[6] another, "descriptive."[7] The third problem is that the criteria for success for community library services have not been specified. Thus, one can continue to debate the success of a program like TIP, the information and referral service at the Detroit Public Library which has been in operation with library funds for a number of years.

Given these problems, if one wishes to answer the questions raised above regarding trends in community library services, it is necessary to do more than review the available evidence in this area. In addition to summarizing patterns of service, it is necessary to identify those occupational and organizational factors that shape the direction of library services and to examine trends in the other human services with which libraries interact. In this way it may be possible to understand trends in library services designed for communities, as well as to suggest ways in which they may be expected to develop in the future.

## PATTERNS OF COMMUNITY LIBRARY SERVICE

The library profession's philosophical commitment to provide library service to all citizens has existed for over a century. Branch libraries, bookmobiles and special collections for immigrant populations are evidence of this long-standing commitment. The Public Library Inquiry conducted in 1949[8] presented evidence that only a minority of the population actually used public libraries and that users tended to be from a relatively advantaged, educationally elite group. In 1963, a study entitled *Access to Public Libraries*[9] examined more closely the factors that limited free and equal access to public libraries. Specific attention was given to usage restrictions on students, blacks and non-English speakers. Findings of this study, coupled with increased political pressure by groups that had experienced discrimination (not only in libraries but from a variety of social institutions), clearly influenced the development of community library services beginning in the mid-1960s. As Weibel so clearly pointed out in her review of library outreach services, the change that occurred at this time was not one of philosophy but rather one of technique.[10] The means for extending services to the community changed.

According to Weibel, four styles of community library services

emerged, the support for which came primarily from federal "war on poverty" funds. The first, which might be termed "relevant traditional," included the development of special collections either in the language of or related to the history and traditions of special groups within the community. In large part, this type of service closely paralleled services to ethnic groups which had been developed a number of years earlier in large urban communities. The second type related to library involvement in the life of the community. These services included the active participation of the library staff in community events, programming in the community directed toward specific target groups (e.g., Puerto Rican festivals), and the involvement of citizen groups in library decision-making. The third form of service was the establishment of storefront communication centers. These centers were designed to serve smaller areas than branch libraries, to avoid what was seen as the stigma of the label "library," and to provide services uniquely tailored to the needs of a target area. The fourth style included services designed to coordinate the library with other human service agencies to facilitate communication and cooperation between these agencies, as well as to satisfy the information needs perceived to be most important to those groups not responsive to traditional library services.

Numerous examples exist of the application of these four techniques to community library services, such as the North Manhattan Project of New York Public Library, outreach programs in Brooklyn and Los Angeles public libraries, the New Haven Library Neighborhood Center, and the CAP program at Enoch Pratt Free Library.[11] Throughout the country, public libraries have applied one or more of these techniques to a variety of services to reach previously unserved clients. Most programs were begun in optimism and hope — and most were eviscerated within a few years.

A review of new services reported in *Library Journal* for the period 1965-78 reveals the pattern of change. From 1965 through the early 1970s, many programs were initiated under the headings "service to the disadvantaged," "outreach" or "community programs." Examples of each of the four techniques of service could be found. In 1972, however, there was a marked shift. Programs of community participation and storefront communication centers disappeared and were replaced by an emphasis on information and referral services. Specialized services to target groups, such as the aged, the handicapped, the business community, and citizen groups, replaced the earlier, more general programs. At present there are

few indications that experiments with new service technologies have had any lasting impact on traditional patterns of library service.[12]

In light of current statements by the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science and the American Library Association regarding the continued philosophical commitment to total community library service,[13] it is important to examine the apparent rationale for the abandonment of more innovative technologies. Three reasons emerge from the scattered literature analyzing the failure of recent attempts to extend community services. Foremost is the assumption that curtailment of these services is a function of financial hardship. Childers argues that "economic exigencies may cause the profession to maintain traditional limitations on the form (print documents) and whereabouts (very local) of the resources made available to the client and the process (professional person consulting local printed documents) that leads to reference and information service."[14] A second reason, somewhat less directly articulated, is that the intended users of community information services have been unresponsive to library offerings. In another analysis, Childers states: "Disadvantaged groups. ... are often locked into their own subculture. ... In effect they live in an information ghetto. Their information universe is a closed system, harboring an inordinate amount of unawareness and misinformation (myth, rumor, folk lore)."[15] Finally, one also finds instances of staff resistance to the institution of new types of services, and lack of administrative support for nontraditional community services.

Each of these explanations for failure contains a measure of truth, and yet none seems adequate to answer the question of why community library services appear to be returning to the mold of the last century. Some consideration has been given to the effect of various public policies on resource allocation and priorities of service in libraries.[16] Generally undeveloped, however, have been the investigations into the internal library dynamics that affect the acceptance or rejection of certain technologies in community library services. Yes, there has been staff and administrative resistance to the implementation of nontraditional service technologies, but the question of why this occurs has not been fully addressed. To answer this it is necessary to do other than blame individual malfeasance. It is necessary to investigate the occupational and organizational factors that affect the ways in which various programs or services are seen to contribute to the goals and operation of both the professionals within libraries and the organization itself.

SERVICES

The decision to initiate a new form of service within a library cannot be understood in simple stimulus/response terms. One cannot argue that librarians need only recognize that a group of individuals has an information need in order to develop services to satisfy it. A variety of forces determine not only whether a library will want to or be able to develop a specific service, but also whether the information needs as expressed by a client group are even deemed legitimate. Two dimensions of this phenomenon will be examined: (1) the personal and professional goals of librarians as members of an occupational group, and (2) the dynamics of organizational and interorganizational behavior.

*Professionalism*

As members of a professional group, librarians are affected by the goals and values of that group. The formal goals of the profession, as stated in the Code of Ethics for librarians, commit its members to conduct which is nondiscriminatory and consistent with the goals of total community library service. The behavior of professionals is directed, however, by more than the philosophical goals of its group. The process of professionalization also influences members' conduct because the dynamics of occupational development involve striving to achieve autonomy, assertion of professional expertise, and maintenance of status vis-à-vis other occupational groups. The results of this process are often inimical to the formal, professional goals of total community library service. This fact can be understood more clearly if one examines the technologies for community library service in light of the effect on library professionals.

The need to establish autonomy is one of the driving forces of professional groups,[17] and the extent to which an occupational group has autonomy is usually considered the major determinant of how professional that group is. Prescinding from the question of whether librarianship can ever achieve the goal of independently defining its role in society and how it should be performed, it must be recognized that the techniques for delivering community library services developed in the 1960s were antithetical to professional autonomy. The involvement of community members on library advisory boards establishes a situation in which the desires of the community are set against the professional judgment of librarians. While the two groups may not always be in conflict, community advisory boards by their very existence diminish professional autonomy;

it is not surprising that one finds such a low level of professional commitment to such boards.[18]

The autonomy of professional librarians is similarly threatened when nonprofessional community members are hired as community service workers or when social workers are hired in information and referral centers.[19] Decision-making is extended to members outside the established professional group. Again, this is not a situation in which conflict must necessarily persist; but if one realizes that community and social workers have normative reference points of their own, one can recognize the inherent problems in trying to achieve the goals of total community library service. Librarians in these situations can find themselves pushed from a number of directions. They may feel the loss of autonomy when giving to nonprofessionals what they see to be professional tasks. They may similarly be threatened when social workers challenge the librarian's authority to become involved in information and referral — a task social workers may believe is their domain.[20]

Examples of reactions to the use of nonlibrarians to perform community library services can be extended to illuminate the problems attendant with professionals desiring to assert their expertise. The hiring of nonlibrarians to provide community library services is an admission that librarians lack the expertise to perform these services themselves. There were formal attempts to prepare librarians in the special skills necessary to perform community work. The Community Information Specialist Program at the University of Toledo and the COMLIP Program at Columbia University School of Library Service are two examples of structured attempts to train librarians to perform competently in the community.[21] The facts that the Toledo program was never able to achieve ALA accreditation and was recently dissolved, and that there was no support for the Columbia experiment after federal money ran out, are evidence that the profession never accepted this type of program as legitimate. Thus, if librarians are uncomfortable with the idea of nonlibrarians becoming involved with community library services, but are uncertain about whether the technologies involved in performing such services are appropriate to the profession, it is understandable that services employing these technologies may be discarded.

There is another aspect of community library services in the 1960s and 1970s that challenged the expertise of library professionals: the services were designed to reach clients who were not traditional library users. In urban areas, these individuals were often poor and uneducated, with multiple problems resulting from the social, economic and political cir-

cumstances of their lives. Librarians involved in service to emerging community groups were brought into contact with individuals who were unfamiliar with library use, who did not know what questions to ask, and whose information needs could not be handled easily. In circumstances like these, professional expertise is continually challenged.

The librarian can restructure his or her work in several ways in order to assert professional competence. Responsibility for the problems can be transferred from the professional to the client with the argument that it is not the professional who is inexpert, but rather the client who does not know how to use the services. The professional can also claim that the client has turned to the wrong place for information and can refer him or her to other agencies outside the library.[22]

The changing clientele brought into libraries through different technologies of community service has also created problems with regard to professional concern for status. There is a large body of literature indicating that the status of a professional group is very much bound to the status of that group's clients.[23] Thus, it may be argued that while the development of techniques to extend service to the "disadvantaged" was consistent with the philosophical goals of the library profession, it was inimical to the instrumental goals of the professional group.

It is important to note that the effects of professionalization on the direction of community library services should not be regarded as the result of individual malevolence. It is not because librarians dislike lower-class persons or hate being out in the community (although in some individual cases this may be true) that the extension of community library services has failed. Instead, one must understand these events in terms of the social and economic forces that shape the behavior of all occupational groups. Society rewards such groups with higher status and greater autonomy based on the way each group directs resources toward the areas in which it is involved. As members of a profession, librarians become caught up in a movement to establish a place within society where what they do will be recognized as valuable, and where they will be given the authority to carry out their duties effectively.

## Organizations

The arguments regarding the effects of organizational factors on developments in community library services are similar to those made about the effects of professionalization on such services. They are not, however, the same. The organizational processes that affect the direction of community library services include the maintenance and development

of interorganizational relationships, the competition for resources to support the institution, the assertion of authority and control within the organization, and the increased importance of the evaluation of services provided by the organization.

The interrelationship of the library and other human service organizations is important to the development of community library services in a number of ways. With the technologies of service developed in the 1960s, one of the major issues to arise was that of domain. In many communities the functions of information centers were seen to be the province of community-organizing groups or "specialists" (e.g., draft counselors). Information and referral has very clearly been within the domain of the United Way. It is instructive to note that one of the most successful information and referral centers in a library — that of Memphis-Shelby County, Tennessee — obtained its major funding at a time when the United Way in that community was in some difficulty.[24] Moreover, libraries appear to have difficulty conceptualizing the types of information desired by the human service community and in establishing strong linkages with these organizations.[25]

Competition for resources to support libraries also has a major impact on the types of services offered, particularly when resources are scarce. Traditional library users, because of their power and status in society, can be much more influential in garnering support for library services than clients to whom community services are directed. As such, even if a library were willing to curtail certain of its cultural activities or the development of a respected research collection in order to maintain community information services or storefront libraries, it could not afford to do so. Except in extreme circumstances in which broadly based popular support for community library services exists, the library is forced to place first priority on its services valued by those with the greatest influence within its community.

The problem faced by library administrators of establishing authority and control within their organizations is related to the issue of professional autonomy and expertise raised earlier. While for the professional the question is one of asserting his or her expertise in a particular area of service, for the administrator the problem is to assert his or her official authority over those subordinate in the hierarchy. The employment of nonprofessionals creates a problem of control in that these individuals do not have the same stake in the success of the institution as do members of the library profession. Moreover, even the librarians involved in

community services may present problems to the administrator in that those who voluntarily choose to work with lower-class clients in nontraditional services may be seen as not fully imbued with the professional norms. The fact that many of these librarians are young and that many see community library service as a means to help achieve social change also is a challenge to administrative control of the organization.

Finally, the increased importance of evaluation of library services creates problems in the acceptance of new technologies. As noted above, there are barriers to the success of these new community services irrespective of how they were evaluated. The added fact that most programs were funded by relatively short-term grants meant that there was little time to prove the utility of a program. Perhaps the central problem of evaluation is that success within any of the human services has not really been defined. At a time when librarians seek to break the tie with circulation statistics or program attendance as a means of demonstrating usefulness, other organizations find themselves increasingly evaluated in terms of the number of people processed.[26] Community services may have a profound impact on the quality of life for the individuals served, but except for information and referral, few can be expected to achieve a high number of transactions. The extent of their success is problematic.

The evidence suggests that both occupational and organizational factors affect the direction of community library service, and that the types of service developed in the past fifteen years were in many respects incompatible with those forces. The processes that have been identified are not unique to librarianship. They are in fact a function of political and economic forces that affect all professional service organizations. To understand the trends in community library services, it is therefore necessary also to examine briefly the way human services in general are responding to these forces.

## TRENDS IN HUMAN SERVICES

Several years ago Owens and Braverman argued that the library must be viewed as a "subsystem within a larger overall service delivery system."[27] While the question of whether libraries can ever be integrated into the service delivery system will be discussed later, it seems important to consider briefly the current trends in human services before discussing how community library services may be expected to develop. The four trends important to the analysis of community library services are: (1) decentralization, (2) population parity, (3) universalism, and (4) service integration.

Since 1970, when the Nixon administration changed the formulae on which distribution of federal funds are based, there has been a move from centralization to decentralization within the human services.[28] Money is allocated to community groups to be spent according to their local priorities. On the surface, decentralization would seem to lead to greater power for community groups. In fact, the result is often decreased power for members of minority groups. Nationwide, an ethnic or racial minority might be able to amass enough power to affect public policy. When funds are dispersed to communities, however, minority group members are less able to influence the decision-making process.

The trend toward population parity[29] means that funds are being allocated based on the number of people within a community rather than the conditions of those residents. Thus, an affluent suburb of 50,000 would receive the same amount in funds as a very poor, urban community of the same size. The effect of this policy is that those communities in which there are lower levels of service do not receive a greater share of resources to compensate for their "disadvantage."

Related to the trend toward population parity is the move toward universalism in the human services. Instead of being restricted on the basis of age, economic circumstances, or problem, services are now more likely to be offered without limitation. This does not preclude a sliding scale for fees, but it does signal the opening of services to middle-class individuals, many of whom were excluded previously. Again, this means that resources are not targeted to groups in greatest need.

The push toward service integration[30] has been spurred by action at all levels of government. It involves the coordination of political officials, professionals and human service administrators to effect decision-making for the human services. It also relates to the development of a general systems concept: "The systems perspective emphasizes the need to remove the bastion-like domain boundaries surrounding organizations and professional disciplines, so that clients and services can move more easily across them."[31] Whether such service integration can be accomplished given the various organizational factors discussed above remains questionable, but federal funding patterns continue to reward programs that foster greater coordination.

## EMERGING TRENDS IN COMMUNITY LIBRARY SERVICES

On the basis of the preceding analysis, it is possible to identify two major trends emerging in community library services. The first is a move

away from services directed toward "disadvantaged" client groups. Second, there is a change from direct to indirect services.[32]

The trend toward universalism in library services parallels trends in other human services. Storefront libraries and street work are techniques of the 1960s. More recently, bookmobile and branch services are also being curtailed in communities experiencing economic problems. Philadelphia Free Library has curtailed all extension services to individuals who do not or cannot use branch libraries. The sacrifice of these services directed toward special groups, it may be argued, is the most equitable policy when choices between services must be made; but the effect of universalism in public library policy is similar to that in other human service organizations: certain categories of people are systematically denied service because of barriers of language, financial resources, or other conditions of life.

The major trend in community information services appears to be a move from direct to indirect service. Seymour and Layne have stated that fully 50 percent of the requests to information and referral centers come from agencies rather than individual clients.[33] This trend can be seen in a number of current services. The Urban Information Center of Monroe County, New York, has as its primary function to supply information to social service agencies about the services offered in other agencies. The Mt. Auburn Hospital library is linked with several public libraries in the Boston area to develop a health information network.[34] In a federally funded project, Marta Dosa at Syracuse University developed the Health Information Sharing Project — again, a system which links agencies to one another. LINC at Memphis-Shelby County Public Library has as one of its main functions to provide information to other agencies.[35]

The development of information services linking community agencies to one another contributes to the goals of total community library service insofar as other human service agencies reach all individuals who need service. The difficulty with that assumption is that other agencies are subject to the same pressures as libraries with regard to distribution of services.

This type of service has the advantage of encountering less resistance from the forces of occupational and organizational development. Professional librarians can deal with professional social workers on a relatively equal basis. They gain visibility in the community through work with other public agencies and thus are in a stronger position to assert their

utility. In their work with other agencies, librarians are able to use their expertise in manipulating informational resources without being forced into the position of counselor.

Questions remain, however, of whether this type of information and referral will become incorporated into traditional library services. Its success depends in some measure on the acceptance by other agencies of the library's assuming this function. As noted above, such acceptance is not always forthcoming. Moreover, even though this type of service is consistent with many of the organizational and occupational concerns discussed above, it is at odds with others.

Finally, it is important to state that this analysis of community library services is not intended to be deterministic, but to identify the ways in which such services are shaped. It is intended to identify those processes whereby the intentions to provide total library services are subverted.

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