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LIS 490 CE Fall 2008

Executive Summary for Books To Prisoners Project

What?

How are the needs of the Illinois' prison population met? How can we contribute to the overall mission of Books to Prisoners?

Books to Prisoners Mission:

to provide books to inmates in Illinois by recycling donated books
to facilitate a quality volunteer experience
to offer a venue for inmates to tell their own stories
to educate ourselves and our community about prisons

We were regular volunteers at Books To Prisoners. We also created a zine of inmates' poetry and artwork, entitled nothing at all will be left unsaid, 500 copies of which were created and given to BTP to send to prisoners and to be used at future BTP events.

Schedule:

Recurring weekly:

- Tuesday 7-9pm work sessions
- Saturday 2-4pm work sessions

Recurring bi-weekly:

- Monday 6-9pm Jail library

Linear:

- By October 1st: schedule a meeting with all interested in editing the Zine, meet weekly thereafter to edit Zine
- Oct. 11th: 12pm B2P business meeting
- Weekend of October 17-19: volunteer at the Pages for Pennies book sale fundraiser
- By October 24th: meet with B2P to report Zine progress, discuss publishing methods & budget
- By Last week of November: produce and distribute copies of the Zine
- Second week of December: reflect, compile class presentation

So what?

Consulted resources:

Books to Prisoners
<http://www.books2prisoners.org/>

Institutional Library Services - Washington State
<http://blogs.secstate.wa.gov/ils>

Live people = Current/past volunteers and librarians

Gulker, Virgil: Books behind bars. Metuchen, N.J., Scarecrow Press, 1973.

Dunham, Colleen. Behind Prison Walls, a Considerable Indexing Project is Underway Key Words, Oct2007, Vol. 15 Issue 4, p116-119

Bierman, James. Library Services for the Incarcerated: Applying the Public Library Model in Correctional Facility Libraries. Reference & User Services Quarterly, Fall2007, Vol. 47 Issue 1, p94-95

Burt, L. N., et. al. 1977. Information needs of inmates. Library Trends 26: 27-38

Lemon, M. 1997. Prison libraries change lives. Information Outlook 1(11): 36-38

Sullivan, L. 2000. The Least of Our Brethren: Library Service to Prisoners. American Libraries 31(5): 56-58.

We learned the following lessons about community engagement:

Communication is the foundation

In order to coordinate our activities as partners in the project as well as with our community partners, classmates, and Ann

Think outside the box

We had to reach beyond our comfort zone of expertise and experience, and in the process we have grown and changed

Tap into local resources

We coordinated our efforts with other student volunteers
We used office equipment loaned by GSLIS

You need to be flexible

We originally planned for a zine with more pages but a lack of material and a small budget reigned us in

Time management is of the essence

Being confined to the semester schedule to work on the project forced us to establish deadlines to complete the zine on time

Now What?

Books To Prisoners is a mature organization, and it is very easy to become involved. There are three regularly scheduled volunteer sessions each week, and drop-ins are welcome. From there, one's participation is limited only to the amount of time and effort one wishes to contribute. Because BTP is an entirely-volunteer operation, they can benefit from many kinds of volunteer work.

The zine work may be continued by future volunteers as well. BTP maintains a collection of inmates' writings and artwork; periodically examining that collection and contact prison arts programs to solicit contributions seem to be the best avenues for gathering content. We priced several printing options for the cover, ultimately choosing Campus Printing through the University of Illinois. We purchased 500 80lb. covers for one hundred and five dollars.

If someone were to work on the next zine for their community engagement project, they would need to follow these steps:

1. Meet with interested parties
2. Gather content and materials: BTP maintains a collection of inmates' unsolicited artwork and writings. Additionally, we suggest contacting the arts program administrator of a local prison to inquire about soliciting further work.
3. Price printing options at local stores like Kinko's, Office Depot, and campus printing
4. Organize labor to bind the zine
5. Manage time line of events and return the finish product to Books to Prisoners