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The Impact of Library Outreach Services on Elder Users in Rural Virginia: A Case Study of the Washington County Public Library

A Thesis Presented for the
Master of Science
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Everette Scott Sikes
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ABSTRACT

Outreach services provided by rural public libraries are crucial to fulfilling their mission to provide information access to the widest array of user groups. Particular socioeconomic and geographic factors in rural areas present challenges of access to information resources, yet there exists only a limited amount of published scholarly work examining outreach services provided specifically by rural public libraries. This case study of outreach services to elder users provided by the Washington County Public Library (WCPL), located in Washington County, Virginia, offers contextual evidence for the centrality of social equity and access to the larger work of rural public libraries. Primary data were collected through four semi-structured focus group meetings conducted with elder users of the agency's outreach services as well as through narrative interviews with six agency staff members. Secondary data were collected through content analysis of agency documents, such as internal reports and handouts, informational brochures and fliers, annual programming reports, strategic planning documents, and assessment and evaluation reports related to WCPL and the services it provides.

The case study of WCPL's outreach services answered three research questions: what are the particular information needs of the elder users served by WCPL; what impact do the WCPL outreach services have on the lives of elder users; and how might WCPL outreach services to elder users be improved? Principal findings showed that elder users had particular information needs related to entertainment and intellectual stimulation, challenges of transportation, and a limited access to technology and Internet service. WCPL outreach services were found to positively impact the lives and general well-being of elder users by providing vital social and community connections and serving as a key link for elder users to an institution understood to be central to the life of the community in general. Findings also indicated that outreach services to elder users could be improved by expanding the general reach and effectiveness of the services.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Outreach services provided by rural public libraries play a crucial role in fulfilling their charges to foster information access and to nurture strong, healthy, and vibrant communities (Pointon, 2009; Ford, 2009; Reid & Howard, 2016). Rural public libraries serve user populations that, in general, are widely spread over large and far-flung geographies (Boyce & Boyce, 1995; Mehra, 2017). Additionally, particular challenges exist in rural places related to lower educational levels, economic factors, a lack of access to digital technology, and a scarcity of infrastructure for the support of information access, among others (Hildreth, 2007; Mehra, Bishop, & Partee II, 2017; Real & Rose, 2017). However, Rhoden and Crumbley (2013) noted a limited amount of published work that examined outreach services provided specifically by rural public libraries.

This case study of outreach services provided to elder users by the Washington County Public Library (WCPL), located in Washington County, Virginia, offers contextual evidence for the centrality of social equity and access to the larger work of rural public libraries. The research identified particular information needs of elder users of the library's outreach service, explored the impact that the services had on the lives of the users, and sought input from users and library staff members regarding ways the outreach could be improved.

Case Study Context

The WCPL service area includes the entirety of Washington County, Virginia, which is located in the southwestern corner of the state, as shown in Figure 1.
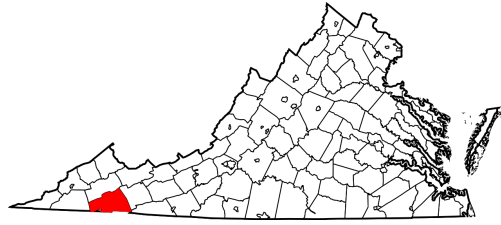
Figure 1. Map of Virginia highlighting Washington County, by D. Benbennic, 2006. Public domain.

Since its creation by the Virginia General Assembly in 1776, the predominate economic driver of Washington County has been agriculture, chiefly the cultivation of tobacco (Hagy, 2013). However, according to the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC), the largest number of jobs to be found today are in the retail, government, and manufacturing sectors (VEC, 2017). Semuels (2016) has pointed out that the dramatic decline of farming as an occupation over the 20th Century along with the further general economic decline of rural places since means that counties like Washington are becoming older, less diverse, and less populous. Furthermore, a study by the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service (2014) showed the southwestern region of Virginia as a whole to be lower in educational attainment, employment, median income, and population growth compared to all other regions of the state. Data from the United States Census Bureau (2016) showed that the WCPL operates in a county comprised of an older, less educated

population with a lower average level of income than the nation as a whole. According to estimates for 2016, 21.5% of county residents were over the age of 65 years, compared to 15.2% nationwide, 24.8% of residents held a Bachelor's Degree or higher, compared to 30.3% of the United States, and median household income was $43,835 versus $55,322 across the country. Finally, 16.3% of Washington County residents lived in poverty, compared to 12.7% of United States residents.

Washington County is located centrally in the Appalachian region, defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) as a vast stretch of 420 counties that extends over a thousand miles from northern Mississippi upward into southern New York, comprising all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. The population is largely rural and the region's economy has long been dependent on agriculture and resource extraction, including coal mining and other heavy industry (ARC, The Appalachian Region, n.d.). Historically, Appalachia has experienced high levels of poverty and, with a current median household income that is only 80% of the national average, it largely remains at-risk or distressed in terms of its economic outlook (ARC, Data Snapshot: Income and Poverty, 2015). Additionally, significant disparities in health outcomes and education exist in the region as a whole (ARC, Health Disparities in Appalachia, 2017; ARC, Data Snapshot: Education, 2015). The socioeconomic facts do not always reflect the diversity of people and perspectives of Appalachia, of course, but the realities are necessary to know and understand.

Figure 2 shows the full geographical scope of the Appalachian region and also indicates the most current economic status of each county as determined by the ARC.
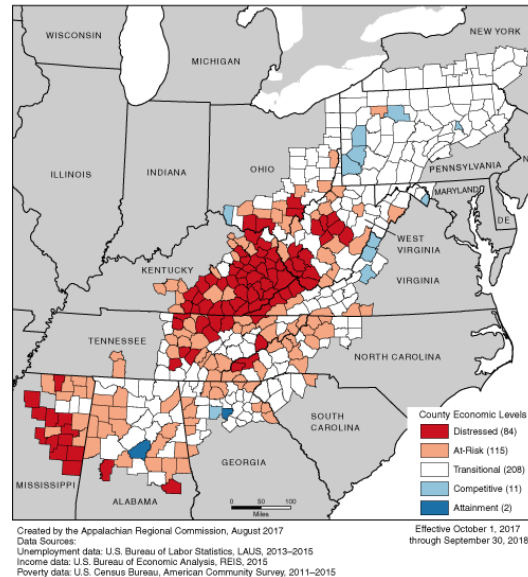
Figure 2. County Economic Status in Appalachia, FY 2018, by Appalachian Regional Commission, 2017. Retrieved from https://www.arc.gov/research/MapsofAppalachia.asp?MAP_ID=137

It is crucial to note that the ARC's definition of the Appalachian region, while useful for purposes of context, is a political construction that makes use of existing geographical boundaries. Created in 1965 in the midst of the War on Poverty, the ARC is focused on economic development (ARC, About, n.d.). Though Appalachia is geographically vast, the region cannot be presented as a single enormous cultural monolith. According to Catte (2018), "Defining Appalachian culture is often a top-down process, in which individuals with power or capital tell us who or what we are. These definitions tend to reduce people to pathologies, but can also include more clinical assessments" (p. 11). Therefore, while Washington County, Virginia is centrally located

in the Appalachian region, it is not necessarily representative in all ways of every other county within the political bounds of Appalachia.

Washington County, Virginia is a rural county (City-Data, 2017) and the WCPL was selected as the focus of the case study because it is one exemplar of the challenges most affecting rural public libraries (Hildreth, 2007; Real, Bertot, & Jaeger, 2014; Real & Rose, 2017). In addition to the economic and social challenges particular to residents of the Appalachian region, information access is a further challenge for the users within the WCPL service area because of the widespread unavailability of both broadband Internet connectivity (Federal Communications Commission, 2015) and public transportation. Through its outreach services, the WCPL seeks to provide information access to users who have the most need and who are otherwise unable to make use of the resources the agency offers (WCPL, Outreach, 2015). Finally, the outreach services provided by the WCPL are particularly focused on an elder and underserved user population (WCPL, Outreach, 2015). These reasons make the agency an ideal case for the study of the information needs of this population and of the impact of WCPL outreach services on their lives.

Research Questions

The case study examines the following research questions:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What are the particular information needs of the elder users served by WCPL outreach services?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): What is the impact of WCPL outreach services on the lives of the elder users being served?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): How can WCPL improve its current outreach services to elder users?

The principal problem expressed in the research questions is one of public library access for elder, underserved populations in a rural locale. This study presents an overview of the WCPL's outreach services that are focused on an elder population group in order to better understand how those services meet the information needs and impact the quality of life of the users and examines ways in which the services can be improved.

Definitions, Issues, and Challenges

Age-Related Terminology

The study focuses on a specific user group defined primarily by age or by an inability to access library materials and programming because of age-related mobility issues or other associated limitations. Consideration of ethics and social norms was taken in regard to the issue of terminology since a general descriptor related to age was needed in order to identify the user group as one with distinct information needs and specific challenges separate from those of other library users. For purposes of this research, the terms *elder*, *senior*, and, in limited cases, *older* are used to describe the subject user group and to delineate the population from all other WCPL users. These are terms recognized as most acceptable for use (Graham, 2012; Moyer, 2014). Furthermore, such

words suggest a higher level of veneration and respect than other terms that might have been selected. The elder users were served by a WCPL program called Reach Out and Read (ROAR), and the library specifically indicates on its website (2015, Outreach) that "ROAR serves nursing homes, rest homes, senior centers and assisted living facilities in Washington County" (para. 2). While it is not unusual for the term *elderly* to be used to describe such persons or, more generally, those over the age of sixty-five years, a shift in attitudes and perceptions surrounding the word not only render it less than useful, but also wholly objectionable as it connotes a certain feebleness and dependency (Orimo, et al., 2006; Lund & Engelsrud, 2008). This means that the term might very well be seen as impersonal, stigmatizing, and offensive.

Rural Public Libraries

There does not exist a single or straightforward definition of what makes a public library rural; the spectrum appears to be far too wide and the nuances far too subtle for clear distinctions to be made (Grimes, 2013; Real & Rose, 2017). The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) acknowledges this dilemma and, for purposes of its annual Public Libraries Survey (PLS), relies upon a classification structure used by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES). In this scheme, *rural* is used to describe any area outside of a U.S. Census-defined urban area. Further classification involves three ensuing sub-categories. Table 1 presents those sub-categories and their respective descriptions as expressed by Swan, Grimes, and Owens (2013).

Table 1. NCES Rural Classification Sub-Categories.

SUB-CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
Rural, Fringe	Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster (a town).
Rural, Distant	Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster.
Rural, Remote	Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster.

In the most recent PLS (2017), the WCPL was categorized as "not in a metropolitan area". The main WCPL branch was categorized as Suburb, Small, which is defined as an area outside a city and inside an urbanized area with a population less than 100,000. Yet, the four outlying branches of the system, which are located nearer to communities where most of the WCPL outreach services are provided, were categorized as Rural, Distant.

While there may be no single definition of what makes a place or a public library rural, there is assuredly agreement about the daunting challenges such organizations confront. Hildreth (2007) outlined the most pressing issues for rural areas in general as the outmigration of the young and most educated, a need for affordable and sufficient housing, individual transportation issues as well as a lack of publicly provided transportation, a likelihood of being medically underserved, and, compared to more urban areas of the country, lower wages, higher unemployment, and limited education. Among

the challenges faced by rural public libraries were a lack of funding coupled with technology needs related to infrastructure and hardware. Real, Bertot, and Jaeger (2014) also focused on the importance of broadband Internet access provided by rural public libraries and listed similar needs to those noted by Hildreth related to staffing, revenue, and inadequate facilities.

Real and Rose (2017), in an analysis produced by the American Library Association (ALA) of the data from the most recent PLS, offered language and results nearly identical to those above: "Rural America faces significant challenges. It has the lowest home broadband Internet adoption rates, the lowest employment and economic growth rates, the fewest physicians per capita, and the lowest educational attainment rates" (p. 1). The authors further noted the fact that rural libraries are often the sole source of free public computer and Internet access in a community, which offers users a wider range of information access, a chance to increase their technology skills, and crucial means to seek employment as well as economic and educational opportunities. Real and Rose also explored the kinds of solutions rural public libraries are able to offer within the domains of economic development and health and wellness. Nevertheless, the analysis showed that rural libraries face significant difficulties in their ability to provide information services and typically are limited in terms of buildings, staff, and budgets.

In light of these challenges and because rural public libraries must provide services to user populations scattered across expansive geographic regions, outreach services are fundamental to bringing information access to rural areas. This is particularly so when it comes to providing access to underserved and disadvantaged users in these

places. Boyce and Boyce (2000) noted that populations in urban locales, especially those with social and economic disadvantages, are able to make use of library services at fixed places, while rural populations are widely dispersed and generally far from a central service point. Further, the authors stated that, in the case of rural areas, transportation is a major problem and Internet technology is not necessarily a ready solution: "Americans living in rural areas are less likely to be connected by personal computers or the Internet, and low-income households in rural areas are the least connected of all" (p. 50). Therefore, outreach services are the primary means by which rural public libraries provide information access to their most underserved users.

Public Library Outreach

The idea of extending or lengthening the reach of public library services to unserved and underserved users found in the rural-most hinterlands is longstanding. According to McGraw (2017), as early as 1913 efforts were made to deliver library materials to far-flung residents of deepest Appalachia. These efforts led eventually to the implementation by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) of a program termed the Pack Horse Library Project, so-called because librarians utilized horses and mules to travel throughout the mountains on their rounds (Boyd, 2007). This initiative was created to provide books to rural, isolated residents of eastern Kentucky who did not have access to public libraries. Such programs were not unique. As noted by Stanford (1944), WPA programs that centered around bookmobiles for the provision of library service to rural,

underserved areas were abundant throughout the southern United States during the years of the Great Depression and World War Two.

The ALA Committee on Library Extension sought in the early part of the 20th Century to extend public library services to unserved areas in the United States, particularly to rural areas, in order to address the inequality of access to such services across the country (Committee on Library Extension, 1930; Nix, 2014). With the passage of the Library Services Act in 1956, the government of the United States provided funding for and directed states to develop plans toward the extension of public library service to rural areas that lacked or had only inadequate services (Fyan, 1957). The law resulted in a significant expansion of library collections and facilities as well as the creation of hundreds of bookmobiles for reaching users in remote parts of the country (Fry, 1975).

The concept of public library outreach and, more specifically rural library outreach, seems inextricably linked to bookmobiles or other mobile library services. Yet, in current terms, public library outreach may be considered more broadly than those conceptions related foremost to the direct delivery of library services solely through bookmobiles. While for decades bookmobiles were understood as the primary conceptual frontispiece for library outreach as well as the primary means of extending library service beyond the walls of a physical branch location, particularly in rural areas, they are no longer as familiar as perhaps they once were. Bookmobile services are increasingly being curtailed both by changing community needs and by budgetary constraints related to

higher fuel and maintenance costs ("Farewell to," 2012; "New Brunswick," 2015; Zsiray, 2017).

Rural public library outreach today is viewed in more general functional, managerial, and operational terms and the concept of public library outreach has moved beyond the traditional notion of a bookmobile as the primary means of considering and structuring rural library outreach. Germain (2006) equated library outreach to marketing and promotional efforts. In the same way that a business might advertise a unique product in an attempt to increase its customer base, outreach efforts can be key to getting more users into the library. Others consider the term even more broadly. According to Pointon (2009), "Draw a circle around the central or main library building—every library service, program, or library-related endeavor taking place outside that circle is outreach" (pp. 5-6). Using this perspective, outreach is anything the public library may do beyond the physical walls of the building. If it takes place away from the library, it is outreach.

Ford (2009) believed that the term *outreach* itself should be cast aside, arguing that it is not something separate and distinct from the most basic and fundamental mission of public libraries. Rather than being simply one more service or department of the library for which funding must be continually found or justified, outreach is central to the library's ability to engage with the community.

Finally, the ALA Office for Diversity, Literacy, and Outreach Services (2017), using a social justice framework, casts a wide net when it comes to library outreach in an effort to support access to all manner of resources for a broad list of underrepresented groups, such as those that have been historically disadvantaged because of race and

ethnicity, those discriminated against because of gender or sexual identities, those from protected classes based on age, religion and disability, those with socioeconomic or geographic barriers to access, and those experiencing hunger, homelessness, or poverty.

It is notable, too, that the Public Library Association (PLA) presents the term *outreach* synonymously with the term *community engagement* (2017). The issue of terminology -- that of *outreach* versus *community engagement* -- is informed also by contemporary trends in library and information sciences education and research. Mehra and Robinson (2009) noted a movement toward engagement as opposed to outreach, and pointed out that community engagement "draws attention to the progressive, collaborative, and participatory elements" and "captures a deeper library-community spirit based on democratic ideals and humanistic notions of equality, social equity, and justice" (p.16).

It is in this particular spirit that the WCPL itself defines the purposes of outreach. The services exist to meet the needs of Washington County citizens who face certain obstacles to accessing a physical library branch, particularly a lack of transportation, an inability to travel, a certain level of social isolation, or an awareness of the services available to them (WCPL, Outreach, 2015). The central function is to provide library materials to senior citizens and to preschool age children by partnering with nursing homes, rest homes, assisted living facilities and with licensed daycare, preschool, and childcare providers throughout the local service area. WCPL outreach services are fundamentally about making information more fully accessible to the underserved users within the library's service area.

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Research Methodology

The researcher utilized the approach of a case study in order to collect and analyze qualitative data related to the WCPL and its outreach services. Primary data were collected in two ways: first, from adult users of WCPL outreach services in four separate focus groups of six participants each, totaling twenty-four respondents; and second, from six WCPL staff members through semi-structured narrative interviews. Secondary data were analyzed from the content of agency documents, such as internal reports and handouts, informational brochures and fliers, annual programming reports, strategic planning documents, and assessment and evaluation reports related to WCPL and the services it provides to its users.

Question guides were used as data collection instruments during both the focus groups and narrative interviews. The researcher made use of a field note template to record responses. Audio recordings of the focus groups and narrative interviews were created and transcribed in order to supplement field notes made by the researcher. The focus groups conducted with users provided data related to their particular information needs and how those needs are met through WCPL outreach programs, general perceptions and feelings about the quality of the services and in what ways the services may be improved, as well as the overall impact of the services. The narrative interviews with WCPL administrators and staff provided information about the organization and structure, development and implementation, and purpose and goals of outreach services as related to the larger organizational mission, and further viewpoints about the impact of

the agency's outreach efforts. Secondary data analysis of the documentary materials provided institutional perspective and important context and background related to WCPL outreach programming.

Data analysis utilized grounded theory principles and open, axial, and selective coding in order to generate categories and themes from the participant feedback (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2013). As developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), grounded theory implies that the data speak for themselves and that theory grows from the data (Charmaz, 2014). Beginning not with a theoretical framework or hypothesis, grounded theory takes an inductive approach to analysis in order to formulate theory on the basis of experience and observation in the field; the data serve as the starting point and generalizations follow from there (Carr et al., 2018).

In order to pilot the data collection methods and explore data analysis strategies, a narrative interview was conducted with the supervisor of outreach services of a neighboring public library system in a nearby county. This agency was chosen as a pilot for its proximity to the WCPL as well as for its similar approach to outreach services. The pilot study tested the interview process, the interview question guide, and the field note template in addition to providing comparative data. Additionally, as part of ongoing assessment and evaluation of rural library services over the past year, the researcher has utilized select elements of research that are employed as part of this case study. The research methods of focus groups and narrative interviews were conducted with WCPL users in a course project in the spring of 2017 to assess the services of a public library (URL: http://heramac.cci.utk.edu/INSC554Sp17/StudentProjects.html). Data were

collected and analyzed using similar strategies employed in this case research. These provided a foundation of pilot experience for the researcher in regard to the elements of setting, methods, users, data collection instruments, and data analysis.

Research Significance and Limitations

The WCPL exemplifies the most recognized challenges affecting rural public libraries (Hildreth, 2007; Real, Bertot, & Jaeger, 2014; Real & Rose, 2017). Further, through its outreach services, the library seeks to provide information access to users who have the most need and who are otherwise unable to make use of the resources the agency offers (WCPL, Outreach, 2015). These include older, less educated residents with lower average incomes than the national level. Access to information services for these users within the WCPL service area are also limited by a widespread unavailability of both broadband Internet connectivity (Federal Communications Commission, 2015) and public transportation. The case study provides an in-depth, qualitative assessment of outreach services from the perspective of a rural public library and from an underserved user group that faces multiple challenges of limited information access. The approach helps to extend the limited work on the subject of rural public library outreach.

The research design, however, has certain limitations, namely the restriction solely to one case study and the relatively small number of participants in the focus groups and interviews. The use of only one case organization stems primarily from the

limitations of scope and time presented by the nature of the Master's thesis project, though it provides for a more intensive scrutiny and analysis of the single case environment. Additionally, the choice of WCPL as the focus of the study serves as an example of purposive sampling, described by Carr et al. (2018) as the selection of cases based on particular aspects that set them apart from other cases, a method also advocated for by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in their development of the grounded theory approach.

The number of participants involved in the qualitative assessment was determined simply by the number of available users. The focus groups were conducted with participants who gather for weekly social groups for senior citizens and that are hosted by a state-designated Area Agency on Aging, the District Three Governmental Cooperative. These users were selected because they are not homebound or in a healthcare or assisted care facility. The number of focus group participants was dependent on the limited number of attendees at these weekly meetings. Furthermore, though the WCPL does provide outreach services to partnering childcare agencies, the focus of this research is on elder adult users. These participants were chosen as the primary subject group for purposes of scope. The researcher wished to focus the work of this project on older adult users and considered the exploration of outreach services to children a separate phenomenon to be set aside for future study. Finally, while the WCPL employs a total of twenty full-time staff members (WCPL, Annual Report, 2016), the six identified for narrative interviews have primary involvement in or administrative responsibility for outreach programs or oversee branches in the outlying communities where the largest portion of outreach services take place.

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The thesis as it follows is structured into five remaining chapters. Chapter Two offers a review of scholarly literature on rural public library outreach. Chapter Three then presents an overview of the case study agency, first outlining demographic and related information about the WCPL service area and then providing an overview of the WCPL and its outreach services. Chapter Four provides an in-depth discussion of the research methods and study design. Chapter Five presents a synopsis of findings from both the focus groups conducted with WCPL users and the narrative interviews conducted with WCPL staff members. Finally, Chapter Six concludes with an analysis and discussion of the study findings.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter Two presents an overview of published scholarship on rural public library outreach, identifying developments, trends, gaps, and issues that provide context and offer possible directions for research and practice. The chapter is divided into four respective sections that review significant published literature on the topic of public library outreach, public library bookmobiles, rural public libraries, and public library services to older adults.

Public Library Outreach

The work of Boyce and Boyce (1995) serves as a foundation for any comprehensive exploration of rural public library outreach (Mainka, 2013; Wei, 2013; Adkins & Bala, 2004). The central issue for the researchers was that the geographic constraints of rural areas meant that libraries had to serve a population dispersed over a large area and so widely distributed as to render any central, physical library location impractical and less than cost-effective. Boyce and Boyce provided an overview of various modes of delivery of library materials and services to outlying rural areas with low populations, stating that "the backbone of library service to rural areas is still the public library" and that "traditional delivery systems—bookmobiles, books-by-mail, and

deposit collections—remain of prime importance" (p. 127). However, given that more than two decades have passed since the initial publication of their findings, it is understandable that the nature and scope of outreach services offered by rural public libraries has changed enormously. In a subsequent analysis, Boyce and Boyce (2000) concluded that, while traditional modes of rural outreach continued to provide needed library services to the rural poor, new and varied approaches to outreach were emerging. They presented examples of rural public library outreach services focused on youth as well as services that made use of growing digital technologies, including freestanding electronic library branches, Internet kiosks, and mobile electronic libraries.

Hyatt and Craig (2009) focused on library outreach services specifically for users who, for a variety of reasons related to time, transportation, and awareness, among others, were not able to come to a physical library location. While their case study centered on the Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County (PLCMC), which is centrally based in an urban setting, their understanding of the mission of outreach services as well as the reasons for the necessity of those services was markedly similar to those in past analyses (Boyce and Boyce, 1995; 2000). According to Hyatt and Craig, "Because even though the branches serve thousands of patrons, there are still many more unable to come to library locations. The barriers are as varied as the patrons themselves: time restrictions, lack of transportation, lack of awareness, language differences. This directly aligns with the outreach department's goal of serving the underserved" (p. 36). Further, the work evaluated and assessed an outreach service that was based on expanding access to and use of technology and, additionally, sought to offer best practices and actionable steps for the

development of outreach programs that were not book-based, as in the case of bookmobiles.

Alexander (2008) conducted a study of library services offered specifically for the poor and unemployed by Virginia public libraries. Data gathered through surveys of Virginia librarians about specific library services for poor populations showed that very few such targeted programs existed as did little in the way of funding sources designated expressly for them. While the analysis did not categorically define such services as outreach, it nevertheless described services developed by the Danville Public Library (DPL) for underserved users in an economically distressed area. The community in which DPL was located, while not rural, experienced similar socioeconomic challenges faced by that of the Washington County Public Library (WCPL), the case organization studied in this research. Alexander provided an overview of the collapse of the tobacco and manufacturing industries to illustrate the economic challenges, particularly a disproportionate number of poor and unemployed, found within the community served by the DPL. Nearly the same story may be told about the region in which the case study library is located. Both libraries are found in areas that fall within the purview of the Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission (VTRRC), created to promote economic growth and development in communities once dependent on tobacco cultivation (VTRRC Homepage, n.d.). Also, according to a demographic profile compiled by the University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service (2014), both regions of the state, Southside Virginia in the case of the DPL and

Southwest Virginia in the case of the WCPL, continued to rank lowest statewide in terms of employment, education levels, and income.

Lee and Price (2013) profiled one version of library outreach services developed by the Seattle Public Library (SPL) and offered a glimpse of current and forward-thinking possibilities to come about in more recent years. The "Books on Bikes" program sent librarians out into the community on bicycles equipped with specially built trailers containing books and other materials. The traveling librarians were able to host book talks and readings in addition to providing essential information services for community members who might otherwise be disengaged from the physical library. Expanding access at such stops as a homeless shelter and through a story time at a Boys and Girls Club, the "Books on Bikes" program also served as roving Wi-Fi hotspots, allowing librarians to provide digital services and to register users for library cards.

Williams (2013) further pushed the bounds of possibility in regard to what public library outreach services could become in the face of technological change, challenging finances, and staffing limitations. Encouraging libraries to push forward despite these difficulties, Williams wrote that, "Being limited does not mean being ineffective, however. Some well-placed efforts can go a very long way to connecting with your local community" (p. 19). Citing the efforts of the Winnipeg Public Library, Williams further offered key steps that could help public libraries move beyond a traditional view of outreach, revitalizing their understanding of what it means to be engaged with the community. Specifically, these steps included a more intensive exploration of community needs and an undertaking of initiatives built directly upon input from users and potential

users as well as the seeking out of community partners who could provide important links to particular groups that may have been previously unconsidered.

Peterson (2013) profiled a librarian in Colorado who personified a similar sense of rethinking and retooling the meaning of outreach by public libraries. Viewing outreach as an expansion of access to underserved community members and as a critical function of the public library not to be overlooked, the librarian used a systematic approach to zero in on areas of most potential need in an effort to try new strategies and to amplify the impact of the library's services.

Gustina and Guinnee (2017) argued that libraries can do even more, that they can and should, in fact, adopt a "radical inclusivity" that "focuses on empowering the less powerful and amplifying the voices of the unheard" (para. 2). The authors argued that public libraries have over the years shown a "low tolerance for risk and a strong tendency to allocate limited resources of time, money, and energy in areas that yield the greatest results (or, at least, the highest numbers in areas that are easy to measure) and perhaps the least potential for problems" (para. 1). In this view, a library that takes a more radical approach to engagement helps to bring about solutions that are community-based. Furthermore, Gustina and Guinnee voiced a hope for public libraries to evaluate worth and value less on the basis of pure numerical matrices – such as circulation statistics or other system-centric measurements meaningless to everyone but the library staff – and more on the basis of social equity and more meaningful social outcomes. The authors indicated that, in this way, the public library would not so much reach outward from a place of inherent privilege, but, rather, seek to engage with the community via *in-reach*,

an approach that would take into account the importance and worth of every voice in the community.

Public Library Bookmobiles

As bookmobiles are generally seen to go hand-in-hand with public library outreach and have often been identified as one of the more effective means of providing such services, the following section provides a review of scholarship related to bookmobile services provided by public libraries.

Strachan (1986) offered a description of the development of library outreach services as provided by a rural public library in Virginia. In spite of having been written some three decades ago, the article referred even then to bookmobiles as a "dying breed" (p. 65). Nevertheless, Strachan concluded that outreach or *extension* seemingly by default meant the creation of a bookmobile program. In other words, library outreach and bookmobiles appeared to be synonymous. The author further indicated that, in spite of the cost and extensive work involved in getting such a program up and running, the decision to proceed stemmed from an understanding that a bookmobile was the best way to provide successful outreach service to a widespread and sparsely populated rural county.

Some fifteen years later, McShane (2001) sought an answer to the still ongoing question of the viability of bookmobiles for libraries serving rural populations. Describing bookmobiles and other mobile outreach programs as the traditional means of providing information services in rural communities, the author profiled two projects that

made use of strategic partnerships and coalitions between libraries and other information literacy stakeholders, such as school districts and childcare centers, to pilot bookmobile initiatives in Vermont, which was indicated to be the nation's most rural state. McShane concluded that, when properly scaled and when involving such key partnerships, outreach services through bookmobiles were not only cost effective, but offered one way for rural communities to keep pace with 21st Century literacy.

Moving forward another fifteen years, Pyatetsky (2015), offered one example of how the idea of a bookmobile might be updated to reflect new realities in both user needs and technology, thus "narrowing the digital divide for underserved communities" (para. 1). Positing that it is time for public libraries to reconsider bookmobiles and their place in the digital world, examples were described of veritable mobile labs that provided free Wi-Fi connections, computers, classes, and access to other technologies. While the cases of these so-called "techmobiles" were located in urban centers, useful implications can be drawn for rural public libraries seeking to provide crucial services in areas that lack widespread access to broadband Internet and digital technologies. Pyatetsky, in fact, drew heavily upon a report from Berdik (2015) that discussed the opportunity for libraries, through outreach, to move beyond books in order to mitigate inequality in access to educational technology. Pointing out the existence of "technology deserts" in lower-income areas, Berdik further detailed the importance of broadband access, calling it the lifeblood of educational technology and cited the fact that millions of American school children do not have access to broadband Internet nor do nearly half of households earning less than $25,000 annually.

In conclusion, an analysis of the work presented in this chapter raises a number of issues that are important to this study, namely a limited amount of research around outreach services and the specific needs of rural public libraries (Rhoden & Crumbley, 2013; Swan, Grimes, & Owens, 2013; Reid & Howard, 2015), the critical role that public libraries play in providing broadband Internet access in places where it does not exist (Swan, Grimes, & Owens, 2013; Pyatetsky, 2015; Berdik, 2015), the formation of strategic partnerships between libraries and other community organizations and groups in order to provide relevant information services to users outside of the physical library (McShane, 2001), the value of conducting systematic assessment of user and community needs in order to better identify the types and kinds of outreach services to offer (Peterson, 2013; Williams, 2013), the need to measure the impact of the public library within a framework of social equity and in terms of meaningful social outcomes (Griffis & Johnson, 2014; Gustina & Guinnee, 2017), and, finally, the idea of moving beyond the bookmobile as the sole means of conducting outreach (Lee & Price, 2013; Peterson, 2013; Pyatetsky, 2015).

This research seeks to illustrate some of these issues through a case study of one rural public library that, as a response to limitations of staffing and budget, was forced to abandon the idea of a bookmobile as the primary focus of its outreach services. It might serve as a useful contribution as a guide and overview of best practices for professionals in other rural libraries who seek to offer effective and evolving kinds of information outreach to their rural communities.

Rural Public Libraries

This section presents a review of literature related specifically to challenges faced by rural public libraries and information services such agencies provide.

Rhoden and Crumbley (2013) examined the strengths and weaknesses of outreach services provided by Calvert Library, a rural public library in Maryland. The authors found that, "Despite the inherent value that Outreach can offer to a library's community, there are not sufficient studies done to examine these services. A search of peer and professional journals yielded few studies treating the subject of Outreach services in public libraries" (p. 380). The study analyzed data gathered by library staff members through surveys distributed to users of outreach services. The data reflected the number of people served, the amount of materials and time needed to provide the services, as well as the amount of time required to deliver them. The resulting information provided a cost-benefit analysis related to staffing and to future funding needs. Comparing the operating standards of the Calvert Library outreach services with guidelines provided by the Association of Bookmobiles and Outreach Services, the authors concluded that the outreach services were effectual.

Reid and Howard (2016) identified the importance of community engagement for rural public libraries, but noted that the largest portion of research had been conducted around outreach in urban public libraries. Interviews were completed with librarians across the largely rural Canadian province of Nova Scotia about community engagement efforts and subsequent impacts on users. The results showed a unique set of challenges

faced by rural library systems in particular. Specifically citing community isolation and sparse populations, respondents "maintained that getting to know each community and understanding the differences between communities can be very challenging and presents a major barrier to engagement. This is especially true when the necessary staff and financial resources are lacking. The challenge of engaging small, isolated communities is faced by every rural library system" (p. 201). Despite the challenges, however, librarians showed a clear passion for the work of community engagement and made the case that it was crucial to the library's role in helping to create and sustain stronger and healthier communities in rural places.

Swan, Grimes, and Owens (2013), in a research brief on the most recent Public Library Survey (PLS), provided a report and overview of rural library services for policymakers, managers, and researchers that recognized the critical roles that such libraries play in their local communities. The analysis found that most public libraries in the United States can be categorized as small, based on the population size of the library service area, and that nearly half of all public libraries are rural. The authors further found that, while revenue for rural public libraries has steadily decreased in the years since the recession of 2008-09, based on visitation and circulation statistics, demand for services provided by public libraries has increased. Swan, Grimes, and Owens further pointed out issues of staffing as a specific challenge faced by rural public libraries, and concluded that staffing levels had also decreased in those libraries in the same time period. Of particular importance, the analysis noted the continued lack of access to broadband Internet services in rural areas and found that electronic resources offered by

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rural public libraries, such as the number of public access computer terminals, had increased. The report determined this to be a clear illustration that rural public libraries were providing more services with fewer financial resources. More so, as the analysis indicated, these libraries were providing certain services, such as Internet access, that are increasingly crucial to quality of life in any community, be it urban or rural.

Griffis and Johnson (2014), identified the vital role rural public libraries play in building social capital and social cohesion in their communities: "For example, socialization among staff members and users can lead to informational activity and exchange; conversely, informational activity often leads to interpersonal exchange and the formation of beneficial social connections. Still, for those who choose not to interact directly with others, visiting the library remains a form of participation" (p. 102). The study demonstrated the importance of public libraries to rural communities as centers of gravity for both community building and for the development of important social networks among citizens. The worth of social exchange and interpersonal connections, of which libraries are a channel in rural areas, was clear and provided important implications for the ways in which outreach services not only offer information access, but also essential social benefits to those users who cannot visit the physical library.

Library Services to Older Adults

The following section presents an overview of research related to library services for older adult users offered by public libraries and provides a broad summarization of

the related concerns that exist within the larger body of scholarly work related to this topic.

The American Library Association (2008), in its Guidelines for Library and Information Services to Older Adults, highlighted the primary factors related to the provision of services to older users. The guidelines directed public libraries to develop information services and programming aimed at helping older adults maintain a high level of physical, mental, and social health. Hildreth (2006) also argued that public libraries should offer aging adults and retirees both lifelong learning resources and opportunities for meaningful engagement in their communities, both of which were deemed critical to both brain health and to the delay and prevention of a decline in cognitive function in aging adults. Additionally, McCrae, et. al. (2005) showed that participation in a variety of social and cultural activities of the kind provided by public libraries helped older people maintain self-esteem and remain engaged in their communities through the fostering of friendships and vital social connections.

Landgraf (2016) discussed a need for the expansion of public library services to older adults and cited projections of a continued increase in the number of people in the United States over the age of sixty years. The author pointed to the importance of identifying the specific information needs of this growing user group in the development of effective services by public libraries. Furthermore, the researcher noted the efficacy of providing such services beyond the physical walls of the library building by means of outreach, which was deemed crucial to mitigating the numerous challenges faced by older adults in getting to a central library location.

However, Bennett-Kapusniak (2013) found little in the way of public library programming or services geared specifically toward older adults and their particular information needs. While libraries did offer services related to the promotion of access to information resources and technology as well as adult literacy programs, these were not generally targeted to older adults. Further, the author indicated the need for research focused on the specific information needs of elder users from the perspective of both the users themselves and of library staff.

Hughes (2017) recognized that rural libraries were committed to providing services for older adult users in spite of the many complications and limitations faced by these agencies. The author noted the importance of more personalized services as well as the vital role partnerships and collaborations with other community groups played in effectively meeting the needs of older users in rural areas. Moreover, the need was highlighted for more guidance and assistance for rural libraries in the development of better quality services for elder residents and also for more in-depth research on rural libraries in general because of the limited scholarship available.

CHAPTER THREE
CASE STUDY ENVIRONMENT

Chapter Three presents an overview of the case study environment, first introducing the geographic setting of the agency, which includes key environmental and demographic factors that impact its users and influence the nature of the information services it provides. A subsequent overview of the Washington County Public Library (WCPL) is provided with details about the outreach services offered by the agency and the significance of those services.

The Locale: Washington County, Virginia

The main branch of the WCPL is located in Abingdon, Virginia, an historic town in the southwestern region of the state, and four additional branches are located throughout the library's service area. Washington County, Virginia has a population of 54,214 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016) and, according to a City-Data profile (2017), encompasses a land area of 563 square miles and has a population that is 72% rural. In addition to being a geographically large county, its terrain presents travel issues related to distance and winding roads. There is no public transportation available, which Criden (2008) recognized as a common issue in rural counties that impedes access to employment, health care, and other essential services for the most vulnerable populations.

Further, 59% of Washington County residents do not have access to fixed broadband Internet service (Federal Communications Commission, 2015).

According to the United States Census Bureau (2016), the WCPL serves a population that is generally older, less educated, and that has a lower level of income than the nationwide population. Furthermore, a Virginia Employment Commission (2017) community profile of Washington County indicated that the unemployment rate was 4.5%, or slightly higher than the statewide rate of 4%. It is important to note as well that the county finds itself positioned in a larger region that includes a significantly higher number of residents living in poverty. According to the Census Bureau (2016), compared to 16.3% in Washington County, the percentage of residents living in poverty in the surrounding border counties include Smyth at 18.1%, Russell at 21.2%, Scott at 19.5%, and Grayson at 20.1%.

Located in the very heart of the central Appalachian region, as defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission (n.d.), Washington County is positioned on the edge of the coalfields of Virginia. Given this proximity, Washington County includes in its populations many residents with personal and economic ties to the coal industry and whose lives have been impacted by its boom and bust cycles and, more recently, the steady downward turn of its market. The importance of the industry to the area is evidenced in the 2015 bankruptcy of Alpha Natural Resources, at the time one of the largest American coal companies, which was headquartered in the county (Vardi, 2015). As cited by a state legislator in a recent opinion article, the region as a whole has been losing population steadily and is predicted to continue doing so in the coming years, a

trend directly attributed to the decline of the coal industry and to the outmigration of young people for the purposes of seeking education and work opportunities (Pillion, 2017).

According to the Claritas Segmentation System (2017), which offers snapshots of predominant consumer groups in specific communities, the central zip code of Washington County (24210), in which the main WCPL branch is located, includes a large portion of people who are older retirees described as downscale, meaning they live on less than $30,000 per year, and who do not typically have children. In addition to having below average incomes, people in this segment also tend to own less household technology and spend their time mostly in sedentary activities such as reading or watching television. One other large consumer segment found in this zip code is people who are middle-aged with kids and who usually live in rural areas. They tend to have a high-school education, live upper-middle class lifestyles, and enjoy team sports and outdoor activities.

While it is a largely rural county in an economically distressed region (ARC, n.d.), a major interstate highway cuts a path directly through the center of Washington County as does a heavily trafficked railway corridor (Norfolk Southern, 2017). Moreover, the United States Census Bureau includes Washington County in a combined statistical area with an estimated population of over 500,000 people. Thus, while a rural county, it is not isolated or inaccessible. As noted by Stoll (2017), neither the benefits nor the ills of global commerce and extractive industry have ever been prevented from leaving their marks on the region at-large: "Isolation, as it is used in this sense, doesn't really describe

location. It describes an unholy remove from civil society, an outlier status (p. 22)." Isolation, then, denotes a kind of *other* and an implication that a place exists outside of a larger national story.

Washington County is most certainly geographically fixed within the bounds of a place defined by a rugged, torn, and dramatic topography. There are serpentine roads and swaths of wild. It is in many ways a place set apart, but it is in equal measure a place like many other places. According to the Washington County, VA Chamber of Commerce (2017), the Barter Theatre, the state theatre of Virginia, is located here as is the William King Regional Arts Center. A private, liberal arts college, Emory & Henry College, located north of Abingdon, is also a regional hub of cultural opportunities and is the home of the McGlothlin Center for the Arts (Emory & Henry College, McGlothlin Center for the Arts, 2017). Artisan crafts and traditional music are central features of a thriving tourism industry within the region as a whole and numerous opportunities for outdoor recreation are nearby, including the Appalachian Trail and the Mt. Rogers National Recreation Area (Chamber of Commerce, 2017; Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Commission, 2017). As exemplified in a current local debate about the proposed location of a large shopping center on an historic property, interest in and appreciation for the area's history and heritage are evident, though they often conflict with economic development efforts (Brickey, 2015).

Nevertheless, the economic and demographic portrait of Washington County brings to the fore significant issues of information access, especially in the face of challenges related to a lack of public transportation, a lack of broadband Internet service,

and an aging population that is lower in income and educational levels (Hildreth, 2007; Real & Rose, 2017).

The Case Study Agency: Washington County Public Library

The WCPL seeks to be a community resource center serving as a primary source of information and information services for the residents of Washington County, Virginia. Its stated mission is "to provide the community with current resources for life-long learning, social exchange, pleasure, and entertainment" (WCPL, 2010, p. 3). The WCPL builds upon this mission through its commitment to a number of broad goals that seek to increase its value for the citizens it exists to serve. According to its most recent strategic plan (2010), these include making continuous improvements in the services provided, meeting the challenges that have arisen through a proliferation of information in the forms of digital technology and social media, making certain that everyone has access to information that will entertain and promote personal and professional growth, and, finally, instilling values of learning and education in its youngest users.

The WCPL is a small public library system comprised of a main location in Abingdon, Virginia along with four outlying branch libraries: one in the incorporated town of Damascus, one in the incorporated town of Glade Spring, and the remaining two in the unincorporated communities of Hayters Gap and Mendota, respectively. According to statistical data provided by the Library of Virginia (2016), total system circulation for 2016, was 387,430 items and total holdings were 200,218 items. Operational expenses for

the 2016 fiscal year totaled slightly less than $1.8 million. Total visits for FY15 was 154,275. A seven-member board governs the WCPL system. Each board member is appointed by the Washington County Board of Supervisors to represent a respective county magisterial district and serves a four-year term (WCPL, About, 2015). According to its annual report, the library currently has a total of 20,107 users and the largest group of library cardholders, as recorded in the circulation system, are users aged 50 years and over who are mostly female. The WCPL currently employs twenty full-time staff and twenty part-time staff. Of those employees, eight have a Master's Degree in Library or Information Sciences (WCPL, 2016).

The WCPL offers numerous services across the branches in its system (WCPL, Services, 2015). Public-use computers are available at each branch, in addition to free Wi-Fi access. A variety of technology classes are offered regularly, as is the provision of one-on-one assistance with general technology and personal devices. Printing, copying, scanning, faxing, and notary services are available at all branches. Furthermore, the library is a member of Holston Associated Libraries (HAL), a consortium of two academic libraries and two public libraries in Southwest Virginia and Northeast Tennessee, which affords WCPL patrons access to materials across all of these libraries and to the online public access catalog shared by the consortium members (HAL, n.d.). In addition to individual help with research, the WCPL conducts regular classes in research and makes available access to eighteen research databases. Special collections have been developed that focus on local history and on genealogy. In partnership with the Washington County Bar Association, the WCPL has established a law library that

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provides a variety of legal resources to the general public, county and federal courthouse staff, law students, and to practicing attorneys. Programming specifically for children and for young adults includes Story Time and book clubs, in addition to a variety of special events that are held regularly (WCPL, Kids & Teens, 2015).

As evidenced by the wide variety of services the WCPL offers, the library is able to provide a large number of resources to users in its service area who have an array of information needs. Even in the face of funding challenges evidenced by a proposed budget reduction (Washington County Virginia, 2016), the WCPL has been able to meet a number of the goals listed in its most recent strategic plan. A recent newspaper article (Mathews, 2017) underscored a continued growth in circulation as well as the organization's ability to adjust and adapt to the changing nature of public libraries. The vision of the WCPL is "to establish and maintain—through courteous, qualified staff— accessible facilities, programs, and quality services" (WCPL, Long Range Plan, 2010, p. 3). Specifically, the library system seeks to provide access to a variety of reference collections, programs for children, public events, and technology.

In these ways, the WCPL serves as a central source of a wide range of information for the people living within its service area. For a county with limited access to fixed broadband Internet service (FCC, 2015), the library and its branches offer free and ready access to Wi-Fi and to web-connected computer terminals, effectively bringing the universe of information to its users. All of the branches, including the satellite branches in the far-flung areas of the county, offer community meeting space and a place to gather for public events, celebrations, and forums (WCPL, Services, 2015). As a

county resident and WCPL user since 1995, the author has experienced the WCPL branch libraries as vibrant places where families come to hear stories, to see movies, and to find books to read. Users have access to a wide variety of newspapers and magazines and are able to attend lectures, readings, and similar cultural events. Finally, for residents who are unable to come to a library branch either because of issues of mobility, long-term illness, or other deterrents, the library provides outreach services that bring information and items of interest and of use to them (WCPL, Outreach, 2015).

Overview of WCPL Outreach Services

The WCPL provides outreach services that center around three primary programs: Reach Out and Read (ROAR), Box O' Books, and Homebound Books by Mail (WCPL, Outreach, 2015).

ROAR Program

Serving nursing homes, rest homes, assisted living facilities, and senior centers across Washington County, the ROAR program regularly provides materials to those users who are otherwise unable to come to either the main library or to one of its four branch locations. Once each month, partnering facilities receive a customized, pre-selected box of library materials, including books, DVD's, audiobooks, and puzzle books pulled from materials in a special collection separate and apart from the regular circulating collection maintained by the WCPL system. These resources are mostly

donated or are items that have been weeded from the regular collection. Materials in this special outreach collection are specifically targeted to meet the diverse and special needs of the population segment served by the ROAR program. For instance, books are mostly large-print, and care is taken to select materials related to subjects of particular interest to this population (WCPL, Outreach Services, 2016).

The ROAR program serves ten adult care sites; two community centers that provide a monthly meeting for seniors hosted by the District Three Governmental Cooperative[1], a government agency that provides services to senior citizens; one all male halfway house; and a monthly Social Club event for mentally challenged adults hosted by Highlands Community Services[2], a community agency that provides a variety of mental health and developmental services. In addition to the boxes of materials rotated through each site, special programming and activities, such as arts and crafts as well as special readings, are also organized at these various sites by the WCPL's Outreach Coordinator (WCPL, Outreach Services, 2016).

Box O' Books Program

Organized in similar fashion to the ROAR program, Box O' Books delivers selected materials to licensed daycare, preschool, and childcare facilities throughout the WCPL service area. Participating sites receive each month a box of approximately fifty items, including DVD's, music CD's, and fiction and nonfiction print books geared

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[1] District III Governmental Cooperative URL: http://district-three.org/
[2] Highlands Community Services URL: http://highlandscsb.org/

specifically to children who are at preschool and lower primary grade reading levels. The Box O' Books program currently serves twenty-six sites, with a total enrollment of over 500 children (WCPL, Box O' Books, 2014).

Homebound Books by Mail

The Books by Mail service is provided for users who have either short or long-term medical or physical disabilities or a lack of transportation and who are subsequently unable to visit a library branch. As the program name indicates, books or other materials are provided to qualified users via the United States Postal Service (WCPL, Outreach, 2015).

Significance of WCPL Outreach Services

The outreach services provided by the WCPL are of substantial interest to the community at-large and a significant need exists for these services, especially as they relate to information access in rural areas and its impact on the overall quality of life of the citizens of Washington County. Indeed, outreach services can be considered to be at the very crux of a public library's essential role in the community it serves (Pointon, 2009; Ford, 2009). Public libraries are in the business of providing information access to the largest user groups possible and of meeting the information needs of the most underrepresented populations, making outreach services vital part of their work (ALA, 2017).

Such services are no less vital, then, to the WCPL. Outreach is important to the library's efforts to bring resources and provide information access to underserved population segments, especially in light of its dedication to serve the entire community and to provide access to all citizens. In this way, outreach could be said to be one of the most effective ways the WCPL puts its mission into practice. Especially for senior users of these services, interaction with the library is often one of the primary means of both intellectual stimulation and interaction with the outside world (Griffis and Johnson, 2013). Additionally, given that fully 59% of Washington County residents do not have access to fixed broadband Internet service (FCC, 2015), access to information resources is an issue for a significant portion of Washington County residents. It would appear that one way this issue might be mitigated is in large measure through the efforts of the WCPL by way of its outreach services.

Further, the ROAR program is provided by the WCPL in partnership with nursing homes, rest homes, assisted living facilities, and senior centers across Washington County. Thus, it is primarily focused on a population segment made up of mostly older adults or senior citizens, a group that is increasing in numbers in the county. The Virginia Employment Commission's Labor Market Information tool (2017), indicated that the projected percentage of people in Washington County over the age of 65 years by the year 2040 will be 25.8%, or even higher than it currently stands, according to the United States Census Bureau (2016).[3] Given that the ROAR program serves primarily residents

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[3] This percentage figure was arrived at by the author's own calculations of total projected population for every age group listed over the age of 65 years, the sum of which was then divided by the total projected population.

of the county in this age segment, it can be extrapolated from this data that need for outreach services is quite likely to increase.

As for the preschool children impacted by the Box O' Books program, this service may be seen as an important supplement to the overall instruction provided by the partner childcare facilities, particularly for those children whose parents or guardians do not have the time or the skill sets to help them develop reading readiness skills in preparation for entering school. The United States Census Bureau (2016) placed the rate of residents living in poverty in Washington County at 16.3%. Moreover, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2003), 11% of people over the age of 16 years in the county lack basic literacy skills. These data illustrate a need for such services, especially as they relate to both the economic interest of the community and to the educational success of its youngest citizens.

Since the WCPL is the only public library in Washington County, Virginia, there are no other agencies actually located within its service area that provide materials directly from a public library to residents of the county in such a manner. While there are two academic libraries in the county, one at Emory & Henry College, a private, four-year college, and one on the campus of Virginia Highlands Community College, neither agency provides outreach services (Emory & Henry College, Kelly Library, 2017; Virginia Highlands Community College, Library, n.d.). Thus, the WCPL's outreach services address particular and narrowly defined information needs that are likely to be effectively met only by a public library.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODS

Qualitative data were gathered in three ways: through focus groups conducted with users of WCPL outreach services, through semi-structured narrative interviews conducted with WCPL staff and administrators, and through the gathering of documents from the case study organization related to the development of outreach services.

Case Study as Methodology

A case study seeks to understand as much as possible a particular individual, group, or organization in full detail and in its complete context (Punch, 2014). As defined by Stake (1995), the case study approach in social research allows for a thorough analysis of a particular bounded system and explores all relevant factors and circumstances, be they environmental, cultural, or otherwise. Yin's (2013) characterization likewise focused on the importance of context in regard to the case study and especially emphasized the nature of the approach as empirical in that it relies upon multiple sources and involves the observation of real-world phenomena. In advocating for the case study as an important and valid social research methodology, Feagin, Orum, and Sjoberg (1991), while also noting the need for an empirical understanding of reality, argued too that human nature and social constructs are apt to change. As the authors stated, "The social order has been constructed by human agents, and although social patterns emerge, these patterns can,

within broad limits, be revised. Human nature and the social order are processual and not necessarily consistent. They may be rent by contradictions" (p. 35). The case study method, in particular, allows for a more meaningful exploration of these contradictions and complexities.

Social scientists have addressed a number of notable limitations to the case study as methodology, particularly the suppositions that generalizations cannot be made from a single case, that case studies are mostly useful for building hypotheses, not testing them, and that greater opportunity exists for biased interpretation in the researcher's analysis by virtue of his or her deep immersion in the case. Flyvbjerg (2006) disputed these objections, among others, pointing out the critical and central role that cases and experience have played in the development of enormously important general theories in the realms of both the natural and social sciences, arguing that "formal generalization is overvalued as a source of scientific development, whereas 'the force of example' is underestimated" (p. 228). Cases, even in the absence of hypotheses, present value in and of themselves as exemplars of real, lived experiences. Additionally, questions of subjectivism and bias are crucial, but are applicable to all research methods, not case studies alone, which are no less rigorous in their design than any other method. More importantly, Flyvbjerg contended that the case study approach opens the way for the growth of a kind of context-dependent knowledge that has been proven to be not only valuable, but necessary for the development of expertise in a particular discipline or subject area. The building of this knowledge and expertise was considered to be a key product of the case study for both research and teaching; more importantly, the author

extolled the approach as an integral tool for higher learning. Flyvbjerg argued, "Phenomenological studies of the learning process therefore emphasize the importance of this and similar methods: It is only because of experience with cases that one can at all move from being a beginner to being an expert" (p. 222). This means the method is specifically applicable to the purposes of a thesis, as case studies can fulfill a vital role in the learning process of the researcher and in the development of the skills necessary for conducting quality research.

Research Design and Implementation

This case study examined research questions in the context of relevant social, economic, and environmental factors, and the resulting data allowed for an in-depth analysis of the impact of the outreach services provided by one rural public library on the lives of elder users.

Population & Sampling

The first part of the study entailed four separate focus groups conducted with users of the WCPL ROAR program. The population of each group was comprised of Washington County residents who attend a weekly meeting at a community senior center hosted by the District Three Governmental Cooperative. This is an agency operated jointly by the governments of six counties and two cities in Southwest Virginia in order to provide various social services and transportation to elder citizens. Two focus groups

of six people were conducted at the Benhams Community Center in the southwestern area of Washington County and two focus groups of six people at the Clinchburg Community Center in the northern area of the county. Each group receives monthly visits from the WCPL Coordinator of Outreach Services for the purpose of providing library materials as part of the ROAR program. The groups were made up of residents of Washington County who are over the age of 60 years, who are not homebound, and who live in a private residence and not in an adult care facility, assisted living facility, or nursing home. The number of focus groups and respondents was arrived at by the number of available users in attendance at the weekly meetings who were willing to participate.

The second part of the study consisted of narrative interviews conducted with six WCPL staff members. Names and professional titles of staff members were kept confidential; however, narrative interview participants all were employed in roles that incorporate administration and oversight of WCPL programming or management responsibilities for either a branch or a particular arm of library services. The purpose of the interviews was to ascertain the history and development of outreach services, the nature and scope of such services, the organization and structure of outreach programming as offered by WCPL, and individual perspectives on the effectiveness of those services. These particular staff members were chosen based on their in-depth knowledge of WCPL outreach services, including both the development and implementation of such services, as well as based on their administrative and managerial roles related to the services.

Finally, in conjunction with the interviews and focus groups, the researcher analyzed secondary documentary datasets, including internal reports and handouts, informational brochures and fliers, annual programming reports, strategic planning documents, and assessment and evaluation reports related to outreach services that were collected from the case study agency.

Data Collection

Prior to each focus group, consent forms (Appendix IV) were read and paper copies were distributed to participants to be signed as acknowledgement of their willingness to participate in the study and of their understanding that their participation was voluntary, that all responses were to remain anonymous, and that they could cease participation at any point. Data from the focus groups were collected using the Focus Group Question Guide, included in Appendix I, which consists of sixteen semi-structured questions. The researcher posed the questions verbally to each group. Since the interview questions were semi-structured, the question guide was not necessarily followed sequentially and the researcher minimally altered some questions or reworded them as to continue the natural flow of the conversation. The researcher recorded his observations in field notes using the Field Note Template found in Appendix III. The researcher also made audio recordings of the focus groups, which were transcribed for reference purposes and as a supplement to the field notes.

Data from the narrative interviews were gathered using the Narrative Interview Guide found in Appendix II. The researcher took notes during the interactions using the

Field Note Template. As with the focus groups, audio recordings and transcriptions of the interviews were made for reference purposes and as a supplement to the field notes. The object of the interviews was to investigate the interpretations and perspectives of WCPL staff members. While the interviews were focused on outreach services, no other pre-imposed limits were placed upon the conversations and additional questions were formulated as needed so as to allow for multiple or unexpected lines of inquiry.

The researcher gathered relevant documents as necessary through requests to WCPL staff members.

Data Analysis

According to Charmaz (2006), grounded theory consists of "systematic yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories 'grounded' in the data themselves" (p. 2). A grounded theory approach, then, begins with a question or questions and with the collection of the data itself as opposed to starting from an existing theoretical framework. As data are gathered and reviewed, recurring ideas or themes are identified and subsequently linked to codes. As the research process continues, the codes continue to be grouped into larger concepts and categories in order to formulate an analysis and draw conclusions (Allan, 2003).

For this research, the collected qualitative data were analyzed using a structure presented by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014). This model is made up of three broad and interwoven components which occur simultaneously: a condensing or focusing of the data, display of the data, and the drawing and verifying of conclusions. The authors

make clear that, along with data collection, the components of this model comprise a process of analysis that is cyclical, not linear: "In this view, qualitative data analysis is a continuous, iterative enterprise. Issues of data condensation, display, and conclusion drawing/verification come into play successively as analysis episodes follow each other" (p. 14). Using this framework, data collected through focus groups, interviews, and from documents were analyzed in an effort to identify the themes that clarify and illustrate the nature and impact of one rural public library's outreach services.

Field notes from the two focus groups, notes from the six narrative interviews, and notes from documentary analysis allowed the researcher to make an initial summary of the data and to note emerging broad themes. This summarization, according to Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), is one way of data display and provided context for further analysis of major themes. Subsequent synthetization and display of the data through transcription of audio recordings of the focus groups and narrative interviews utilized inferential codes to identify essential topics or themes. Given the case study design of the research, prescriptive codes were not used; rather, codes were developed as data were gathered and analyzed. This analysis provided structure for a thorough examination of the links and relationships between the observations of the researcher, the perspectives of users of outreach services, and the responses of WCPL staff members. As the data were condensed into an ordered group of major concepts, conclusions were drawn to provide a coherent and valid response to the questions explored in the study surrounding the particular needs of the users of outreach services that the WCPL

provides, the impact of these services on the lives of the users, and the ways the services might be improved upon.

The following quote from a focus group participant provides an example of the coding and identification of primary themes as a result of the data analysis. For ease of identification, quotes by all study participants are italicized in the presentation of the study findings. Individual responses are notated to indicate the focus group and specific question from the Focus Group Question Guide to which the response corresponds. The example below, as notated in brackets, indicates that the quotation was collected in Focus Group 2 and is a response to Question 7 on the Focus Group Question Guide. Primary themes are coded as they occur and marked parenthetically as T1, T2, etc. The quotation shown is a clear expression of the theme of entertainment and intellectual stimulation (T1) as one specific information need of elder users. At the same time, the response also indicates a particular socioeconomic challenge and the user's feeling that without WCPL outreach services, such forms of entertainment would be otherwise inaccessible. The quotation is therefore also illustrative of the impact of the services on the quality of life of the user group (T2).

> *"I like to watch the movies and things on the DVD's (T1) and I can't afford to get them anywhere else. (T2)"* [FG2.q7]

The following quote provides an example of the analysis as applied to data collected from the narrative interviews with WCPL staff members and is illustrative of the theme of user transportation issues (T3) as the respondent pointed out the significant challenge of transportation for many elder users of outreach services.

"Most of these users are either going to have difficulty driving or just aren't going to have any transportation options at all. (T3)" [I4.q2]

Individual responses collected in the narrative interviews include a notation in brackets to indicate the randomly assigned numeric identifier of the interviewee as well as the specific question from the Narrative Interview Guide to which the response corresponds. The above quotation, then, is from staff member 4 (I4) and is a portion of a response to Question 2 (q2) in the Narrative Interview Guide. The example statement is clearly an illustration of the major theme of the challenge of transportation (T3) as an issue for users of WCPL outreach services.

While the two examples above each offer relatively unambiguous illustrations of specific themes that emerged from the study findings, the researcher acknowledges that portions of the data might be considered more indefinite or problematic in terms of identifying the concepts being presented. The following quote from a narrative interview offers an example.

"It's very simple. Somebody out there cares. (T4)" [I4.q6]

With an awareness of the full context of this particular response as it was shared in the course of the interview, the researcher considered it to be an illustration of the idea that the outreach services provided by WCPL help to forge and cultivate social connections for users (T4). Separation from its full context or analysis of the data performed by another researcher could lead to a different conclusion regarding themes that might be identified.

Pilot Study

As a pilot study, a narrative interview was conducted with the supervisor of outreach services in a neighboring public library system in a nearby county. The agency was selected for its corresponding approach to outreach services for elder users as well as for its proximity to the WCPL and its location within the same rural region of the state. The purpose of the interview was twofold: primarily to test the personal interview process ahead of the formal study and also to gather information and explore perspectives on rural public library outreach services to older adults that might provide contextual information. As a result of the pilot interview, the Narrative Interview Guide was condensed and the questions reorganized into more focused thematic clusters that emerged through the conversation. A number of repetitive and unnecessary questions were identified and removed from the final draft that was submitted and approved by the University of Tennessee Institutional Review Board. This process further prepared the researcher to become better aware of time, leading to implementation of a more structured interview process in an effort to minimize the risk of circular and disjointed conversations.

While the Focus Group Question Guide was not pretested with potential subjects through a pilot study, the researcher accompanied the WCPL Coordinator of Outreach Services on preliminary visits to each community center. The purpose of the visits was to familiarize the researcher with the senior group meetings and to make introductions and contact with the group director and participants. These visits included informal conversations with users about their overall experiences with WCPL outreach services.

Further, the researcher used the Field Note Template for collecting and recording data from these interactions as a method of pretesting the template. The visits allowed the researcher opportunity to observe outreach programming in practice, prepare for what to expect during the focus group activities, and to make a request with the site director for conducting the focus groups at an agreed upon future date.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS

The following chapter presents a summary of the qualitative data collected through focus groups conducted with twenty-four users of the Washington County Public Library (WCPL) Reach Out and Read (ROAR) program and through narrative interviews conducted with six WCPL staff members. Data from each method are presented in separate sections and are organized according to respective responses to the Focus Group Question Guide (Appendix I) and the Narrative Interview Question Guide (Appendix II), respectively.

Focus Groups

The author conducted four individual focus group interviews with WCPL users of the ROAR outreach program for senior adults. Each focus group conversation lasted approximately thirty minutes. A total of 24 users participated, consisting of 20 females and 4 males. The average age across all groups was 73.8 years. Results from the focus groups are reported below and are grouped according to question type following the structure of the Focus Group Question Guide (Appendix I). All questions in the Focus Group Question Guide corresponded broadly to the research question related to understanding the overall impact of WCPL outreach services on the lives of the users while other question sets related more specifically to remaining research questions regarding user needs and how services might be improved. A synthesis of notes made by

the interviewer during each focus group is provided in addition to a selection of individual representative responses from the participants.

General Questions

The first question set [q1-q2] consisted of two purposefully broad and open-ended questions that were used to begin each focus group conversation. The questions prompted users to share a wide range of thoughts and responses related to their experiences with the WCPL and with the outreach services provided through the ROAR program. The overwhelming response to these initial questions was positive. In addition to their verbal responses, the researcher noted that the body language of participants included numerous smiles and nods of approval. There were no negative responses to these questions. Users across each focus group responded predominantly to the first two questions by noting in some form that their experiences with the program had been good and continued by pointing out specific things about the library and the service that they liked or considered positive. Specific examples of responses to these questions included, *"I love it. They get me anything I want or need; all I have to do is ask." [FG2.q2]* and *"I really like all the movies and books they bring; there is good variety." [FG3.q2]*

Questions Related to Library Use

The second question set [q3-q6] consisted of four total questions related specifically to how often and for what reasons participants utilized or visited physical WCPL branches and locations, including the main branch and any outlying branches

nearest to their place of residence, and what, if any, services they used at the branch locations. The purpose of these questions was to gather data to determine if users patronized physical library locations or relied primarily on outreach services as means of accessing resources and information they need or desire.

Overwhelmingly, users responded that they rarely, if ever, visited the main WCPL branch, located in the town of Abingdon. Many reasons were given for this, but it seemed to be primarily a matter of distance, convenience, and inability to travel. About an equal number of respondents indicated either that they had infrequently visited the main branch, though generally not in recent years, or that they had never been there at all.

"I've never been there; I'm not even sure where it is." [FG1.q3]

"Oh, I haven't been to the Abingdon library for years." [FG3.q3]

"Abingdon is out of my way unless I'm going to pay my taxes." [FG3.q3]

"I've been there, but only occasionally." [FG4.q3]

It was clear from responses that some participants did regularly visit a nearby outlying branch location instead of the main library branch. As in the case of the main WCPL branch, though, about half of the users indicated that they had not or had only infrequently visited another branch. Users in the two focus groups held in the southernmost portion of the county, if they did regularly travel to a physical library location, cited the Bristol Public Library, a separate agency from the WCPL located in a neighboring locality, as their preferred option.

"I sometimes go to the special events they have." [FG1.q4]

"I go to some of the regular meetings and events and things they have at the Glade branch." [FG2.q4]

"Once or twice a week, I do go to the Hayters library." [FG3.q4]

"Occasionally." [FG3.q4]

Responses to this question group made especially clear that users are generally unable because of physical or other age-related reasons to travel either to the main WCPL branch or to outlying branches. Either an inability to drive oneself or an aversion to traveling was assuredly the most noted reason that participants offered for not visiting a physical library location.

It's just too far to go. [FG1.q5]

You know, I'm just not able to drive myself; my granddaughter sometimes drives me places though. [FG2.q5]

I am not able to get out much. [FG2.q5]

I just don't make many unnecessary trips. [FG4.q5]

While there were some affirmative responses in each focus group to the question about attending special events or programming at any WCPL branch, once more, it was noted by the researcher that respondents generally indicated that they had not attended an event in recent years.

"If I had someone to go with me, I think I would go more." [FG1.q6]

"Let's see, I believe I went to a genealogy program years ago." [FG3.q6]

"I took my daughter once, but that was a long time ago." [FG3.q6]

"I went there once for a speaker they had." [FG4.q6]

Questions Related to Needs and Access

The third group of questions [q7-q11], corresponded directly to the first research question (RQ1) seeking to identify specific information resources needed or preferred by the users, but in less direct ways helped also to formulate a response to the research question (RQ2) regarding the impact of the WCPL outreach services on the lives of users. Responses were meant to identify specific information materials and tools most used by participants both at home and through the outreach services provided by WCPL as well as materials and tools that were needed by users but not readily available to them. Information was also sought regarding how any such materials might be obtained by users if not for the services provided by the library.

Far and away participants across all four focus groups indicated a need and preference for large print books as well as for movies and music. There were many enthusiastic comments from users about the importance of the large print format to their ability to enjoy reading for both pleasure and information. This question group elicited the most discussion and the largest number of responses. Users identified their chief information need to be materials for leisure reading and entertainment.

"I need a good mixture of books and movies." [FG1.q7]

"I do sometimes use my Kindle at home for reading books I like." [FG2.q7]

"Oh, I have to read the large print books and those are [hard to find]." [FG1.q8]

"The CDs and magazines." [FG3.q9]

"She knows what I like to read and always brings me my favorite authors." [FG4.q9]

In each focus group, Question 10 in this set, which asked how such materials might be obtained if they were not sent by the library via the ROAR program, spurred a resurgence of energy in the conversations. As the discussions progressed, responses made clear that the participants viewed the outreach services as their primary interaction with the library. Overwhelmingly, users indicated that the ROAR program provided a primary avenue for obtaining materials for reading and entertainment and that, if the service was not offered, they would not otherwise have the means or desire to seek out materials on their own. Based on responses, this appeared to be related primarily to an inability or lack of interest in venturing far from home or to limited discretionary income.

> *"Well, I wouldn't, I don't guess." [FG1.q10]*

> *"You know, some people just can't drive to the library." [FG1.q10]*

> *"I might could go to the Glade branch or to the main branch, but probably not." [FG2.q10]*

> *"I might could get them at some stores, but I would look for yard sales and giveaways." [FG2.q10]*

> *"I might could go to Bristol, but that's far." [FG3.q10]*

> *"I'm just not able go to town that often." [FG4.q10]*

Questions Related to Service

Questions in this group [q11-q14] corresponded directly to the third research question (RQ3), which sought to identify ways in which the agency can improve its current outreach services to elder users. The questions were asked to gather perspectives, thoughts, and opinions directly form users about the overall quality and effectiveness of

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the WCPL outreach services. Participants were also asked about any needed materials that were not being provided as well as about any other services from the WCPL they wished to see offered either through the ROAR program or at physical library locations.

While responses to these questions across all four groups were short and provided little detail, user responses made clear a high level of satisfaction with and appreciation for the ROAR program, including the overall structure and schedule, the work of the WCPL Coordinator of Outreach Services, and the materials provided. One participant voiced strong appreciation for the Coordinator's willingness to make an extra, unscheduled trip to the group meetings in order to bring a requested item or to deliver an item likely to be enjoyed by particular users or to make arrangements to have requested materials sent outside of the regular monthly meeting. Discussion in each group indicated that a number of users particularly valued the work of the Coordinator, including her willingness to get to know them and their preferences and the care she took to bring materials they would want and enjoy.

"The program is great." [FG1.q11]

"She's good about letting us keep things longer if we need them." [FG2.q11]

"I am glad I do not have to drive or travel to get the things she brings us." [FG4.q11]

"I like the schedule; having her come once a month is good." [FG3.q12]

"She makes extra trips if she finds something or sends it through someone else." [FG4.q12]

Users indicated an overall satisfaction with the selection and amount of materials delivered through the ROAR program as well as with the level of flexibility offered and

an ability to request specific materials. It was clear that users appreciated the inclusion of

current titles from their favorite authors.

"If we ask for something, she brings it to us." [FG1.q13]

"She's able to find the titles and authors we want." [FG2.q13]

"She tries to find things and bring things that we ask for." [FG3.q13]

"I really like the books by local authors; I would like more of those." [FG4.q13]

Most users indicated satisfaction with the service as it is currently provided and

offered little in the way of suggestions for improvement or other types of services that

might be offered, although lively discussion did occur in one focus group around the

possibility of the library arranging for special speakers or presentations as part of the

outreach visits.

"I might do the GED classes if they still had those." [FG1.q14]

"Maybe we could have special presentations like about history or something, or they could have a professor from the college or a writer come speak to us." [FG3.q14]

"I think they've got us pretty well covered." [FG4.q14]

"I don't have any suggestions. I think it's nice the way it is." [FG4.q14]

Final Questions

Finally, two broad and open-ended questions [q15-q16] were asked to conclude

each focus group and allowed users an opportunity to share any remaining and general

thoughts or opinions about the WCPL and its services or about the ROAR program.

There were many expressions of general appreciation for the outreach services provided

as well as gratitude voiced specifically for the work of the Coordinator of Outreach Services.

> *"I'm glad we have this and that they do this for us."* [FG2.q16]

> *"I like her very much and the books and things she brings to us."* [FG3.q15]

> *"I think it's good we have this. I want them to keep doing it."* [FG4.q16]

Narrative Interviews

Narrative interviews were conducted with six WCPL staff members individually at either the main WCPL branch or at an outlying branch location. Three staff members were managers of outlying branches, two were system-wide administrators, and one had specific responsibilities for WCPL Outreach Services. Three of the narrative interview participants had a Master's level degree in Library or Information Sciences. All subjects were female and ranged in age from 24 years to 61 years. Two participants had less than five years of experience with WCPL, three had between five and ten years of experience, and one had more than ten.

Data from the narrative interviews are reported below and are grouped according to general topic areas covered by the questions in the Narrative Interview Guide (Appendix II). The data are not presented according to the precise structure of the questions. While the general order and wording of the questions were adhered to, the interviews were semi-structured. The presentation of the selected responses reflects the fact that the interactions were natural and free-flowing conversations. A synthesis of

notes made by the interviewer during each conversation is provided in addition to a selection of individual responses from the participants.

General Questions

To begin the conversation, interviewees were prompted to talk about their careers as information professionals and about their experiences working at the WCPL over the course of their tenure at the library. Subjects were also asked to share their general thoughts about the WCPL, about the overall programming provided by the agency, and to share their perspectives regarding, more specifically, the outreach services provided by WCPL. A number of responses reflected the wide range of services offered by the library and also indicated an understanding of the agency as a kind of hub in the community that fulfills otherwise unmet information needs as well as needs related to social interaction and civic engagement.

> *"The Library coordinates a lot of activities . . . to provide outlets for community activities, education, meeting space and socializing. These things keep the community intact and thriving. [My] branch is the only place in town that provides computers for use, Wi-Fi, copying, and printing services. Patrons would have to travel 30 minutes for these services if the library wasn't here." [I1.q1]*

Multiple respondents spoke of the significance of the library to the personal well-being of its users and indicated a feeling that, for some users, the library played an especially crucial role in their overall quality of life. For more than one interviewee, this understanding correlated with a perception of the work as a deeply personal commitment as opposed to simply a professional obligation.

"That's my goal. I try to think of it as, what would I want? What would I want for my family? . . . That's happiness. That's not just about the book. It's a personal interaction that they might not otherwise have." [I4.q6]

"I care about my patrons and this is something I do because I want to, not because I have to. I don't usually even tell anyone about it because I'll just do it on my own time. I do it because I know these people, and I want to help them and keep them healthy and happy, and I would hope someone would do the same for me." [I2.q3]

Questions Related to Development and Structure of Services

Participants were asked to share any knowledge they had of the development of WCPL outreach services over the years, how the services had changed or improved, and anything that might be considered unique or innovative about WCPL outreach in its current structure. Some respondents remarked on the longstanding commitment of the WCPL system to providing such services, especially compared to similar libraries nearby that did not or could not provide outreach.

> *"From what I gather, WCPL has consistently provided outreach services for a number of years unlike other libraries in the region."* [I3.q5]

One interviewee who had worked at other libraries in the region considered it unusual for a library to commit a full-time staff position to outreach services and felt this to be an indicator of the value and importance of outreach to the work of the WCPL.

> *"WCPL is the first library that I have worked with that has that. I think it's very important and says something about the importance of outreach to our library that we have a full-time position devoted to it, and that outreach services isn't just something that other people try to take care of in their spare or volunteer time. The fact that we have this position shows me that it's important to our library and our community."* [I2.q5]

Of the branch librarians interviewed, the researcher noted some indication of a limited knowledge of the specific details regarding system-wide outreach services. These participants in particular tended to see outreach in large measure as an understood part of their overall responsibilities to the communities in which the branch was located.

> *"But, I also make a personal effort as a branch manager/librarian to bring books to my patrons that are sick, in the hospital, in rehab, or can't get out for whatever reason." [I2.q3]*

> *"Honestly, I do not know a lot about the history and evolution of outreach services at WCPL. I have been working here for almost 8 years and since I've been employed with WCPL, there has always been an Outreach Services department." [I2.q7]*

Questions Related to the Information Needs of Users

Participants were asked to share their overall perceptions of the users served by the WCPL and to identify what was considered to be the most important information needs of the community in general. Additionally, participants were asked to distinguish the specific needs of the users of outreach services and any particular challenges existent in meeting those needs. All respondents readily identified a lack of access to technology and to the Internet as the most important need of all users, pointing out the resulting limitations of both personal entertainment options and of educational and economic opportunities.

> *"So many of them are rural residents who don't have Internet and television available to them. The library computers are necessary so they can apply for jobs and communicate with loved ones on the Internet." [I1q.2]*

"Most of their information needs come from a technological sense—they want to know how to use the computer. They need to apply for a job or update their resume and lots of these residents don't even own a computer. The library has become vital to these residents for their assistance with technology—in all areas of life." [I2q.2]

"So many [users] face barriers like a lack of transportation or a lack of technology in their homes or any number of other circumstances that really limit their desires and ability to use the library services." [I3.q2]

Access to technology and Internet as well as challenges presented by both the rural geography of the county and other transportation issues were predominant among all responses. However, most interviewees also discussed user needs within broader contexts of significant socioeconomic and cultural factors.

"This is a rural community. Most are living below or just above the poverty level and lots of people are struggling to make ends meet. But, it's also a community of hard workers doing their best to survive and fighting the stereotype of what it means to be a poor Appalachian. This community is smart and they will fight for what they have and love. [I2.q2]

Questions Related to the WCPL Mission

Participants were asked to discuss the ways in which outreach services provided by the library related to the larger mission and purpose of the WCPL. All of the interviewees viewed outreach not only as directly related to the mission of the agency, but at the very core of what the library exists to do within the local community. The researcher noted a clear sense from all participants of outreach as a crucial means of meeting the overarching goal for the library to serve all residents in its service area regardless of age or ability or any other considerations.

"Well, they go hand-in hand, I think." [I1.q9]

"It's pretty simple—if we don't meet the needs of those people within our community that cannot physically make it to the library, but would be and are interested in the materials and resources that we provide, then we aren't meeting our library mission or our goals. Our library's mission is to serve everyone and that includes all races, classes, gender, and most certainly those who are elderly, handicap, or simply not able to come in. Outreach services is as important as any other service we provide and as necessary." [I2.q9]

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The following chapter presents a discussion and analysis of the research findings within the framework of the following research questions:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What are the particular information needs of the elder users served by WCPL outreach services?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): What is the impact of WCPL outreach services on the lives of the elder users being served?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): How can WCPL improve its current outreach services to elder users?

Information Needs of Users [RQ1]

The data collected from the focus groups conducted with users and from the narrative interviews of WCPL staff members pointed to three primary information needs of the elder users served by WCPL outreach services: needs related to Internet access and related technologies, needs related to transportation issues, and needs related to entertainment and intellectual stimulation.

Access to Internet and Other Technology

According to the Federal Communications Commission (2015), 59% of Washington County residents do not have access to fixed broadband Internet service. Thus, ready and easy access to web-based and digital information resources is a challenge

for a significant portion of all Washington County residents, both elder and otherwise.

This issue was identified clearly and collectively by WCPL staff members who also

considered it to be equally central to the information needs of both the elder users of the

library's outreach services as well as to those of all residents within the agency's service

area. However, it is notable that the responses of focus group participants revealed a

general aversion to and lack of awareness of technological tools that might increase the

availability of information to them. None of the elder users mentioned Internet service as

a specific and unmet information need. Compared to library staff members, who

mentioned Internet and technology needs fourteen times, these needs were only addressed

three times in the focus groups conducted with users. One focus group participant

discussed a preference for reading books on a Kindle e-reader device while two others

made only general or passing comments about possible technology needs.

> *"I guess maybe they could have some computer classes for old, senile people."*
> *[FG1.q14]*

In other words, it did not seem clear that, even if the focus group participants had

reliable Internet access, they would be likely to have the equipment, skills, or desire to

make use of it. The need seemed far more pressing for WCPL librarians than for users. A

report of data collected by the Pew Research Center (Smith, 2014) addressed this lack of

clarity regarding older adults and the use of technology. A large survey of Americans

over the age of 65 years found that, with regard to technology use, two distinct groups

emerged: a younger, more educated and more affluent group who made wider use of and

had a more positive view of technology and an older, less affluent group marked by

health issues and physical challenges and who had very little connection to digital tools

and technologies (p. 1). Such findings are affirmed by the respondents in the focus groups who are users more likely to be less educated with lower incomes and with health and other physical concerns.

Issues and Needs Related to Transportation

A far more pressing need recognized by users and also identified as significant by WCPL staff was that of a lack of transportation and resultant implications for access to information services and physical library locations. In terms of information access in general for users of the library outreach services, lack of transportation was acknowledged as a limiting factor. Focus group participants expressed these challenges clearly and in multiple ways. Representative responses to the question [q5] that prompted participants to share reasons for not visiting either the main library location or one of the outlying branch locations included,

> *"It's too far" [FG1.q5], "I can't drive" [FG3.q5],* and *"I'm not able to get out that much" [FG3.q5].*

Likewise, WCPL staff members all pointed to either an inability to travel or to drive as well as to the physical geography of the county as particular barriers to user access of library and information services.

> *"Well, so many of them just can't drive or don't even have a car and, you know, there's not anything like public transportation here." [I4.q5]*

> *"The biggest challenge, I feel, is the distance they [the users] must travel since Washington County is so large and there are so many very rural roads." [I1.q5]*

There was a general sense expressed by WCPL staff that, while transportation needs in particular affected elder users, through its outreach services the library acted upon a comprehensive obligation to provide information and library materials to any users who, for whatever reason, simply could not get to a branch location. Staff recognized that many factors applied to this need, including physical and age-related mobility issues, socioeconomic factors, and geography. The details did not matter; the commitment existed as part of a broader understanding of the role of the library in the community.

> *"We are in the business of access and if they can't come to us, we'll come to them" [I5.q8].*

Entertainment and Intellectual Stimulation

There was no other information need expressed as fully by users as crucial as that of an ordinary desire for entertainment and intellectual stimulation. More than as a response to one particular question, this need was conveyed in multiple ways by nearly all participants throughout the course of each focus group conversation. Users wanted books and other reading materials, movies, music, games and puzzles. Participants discussed the importance of having access to a variety of books, particularly fiction, but especially to books in a large print format.

> *"I like my large print books; they're easier to read." [FG3.q9]*
>
> *"I really enjoy the puzzles and games." [FG3.q8]*
>
> *"I like those Amish books she brings me." [FG2.q9]*

Respondents in the focus groups cited favorite authors, novels, and magazines and also discussed the pleasure they took in exploring books about favorite crafts and hobbies. Users likewise expressed a desire for current fiction and a wish to stay knowledgeable about new writers and local authors. More importantly, participants spoke specifically about a limited ability to access such materials if not for the outreach services provided by the library. Coupled with the financial cost, access to books and magazines along with movies, music and other items, was impeded for these users because of the challenges and needs addressed previously of mobility and transportation. Participants also voiced that few worthwhile alternatives existed for them outside of the library as sources of the kinds of materials that simply provided enjoyment and opportunities to exercise the mind and intellect. Discussing the specific question of how these materials might be obtained if not for the WCPL outreach services, one user's response encapsulated the issue.

> *"Well, I just wouldn't be able. Really, I'm not sure what I'd do." [FG2.q10]*

The particular need for entertainment and intellectual stimulation was also one recognized by WCPL staff, though, notably, not in as substantial a way as it was by users. However, perspectives shared by staff through narrative interviews did emphasize that the library serves as the primary source of these types of entertainment resources for the user group and that such materials would not otherwise be available to them.

> *"It's my understanding that most of what Outreach [users] desires are books to read that they just don't have access to." [I2.q7]*

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"Many of the Outreach patrons enjoy entertainment in many forms. If there is a specific interest by anyone, like in local or Virginia history or something like that, the Outreach Department really works hard to get those things." [I1.q7]

Impact on Lives of Users [RQ2]

Findings from the collection of data from the users and from WCPL staff pointed to a multitude of positive impacts on the lives of elder users of outreach services. Most importantly, these services added dramatically to the overall quality of life for seniors. Furthermore, the outreach services offered the senior users an important means of social connection that would otherwise not occur or that would be less available. And, finally, the data reflected an understanding of the library as a central hub within the surrounding community for education, entertainment, and civic and social engagement.

Quality of Life

The importance of access to a variety of reading materials and other sources of entertainment and intellectual stimulation provided by WCPL to the general health and well-being of elder users of the library's outreach services cannot be overstated. Wilson (2013) concluded that those who, as they aged, more frequently engaged in mentally stimulating activities like reading exhibited a lower rate of cognitive decline compared to those who did not. Further, Rizkalla (2015) showed that older adults who participated in cognitive training that included both reading and word puzzles were able to improve their mental and functional abilities. Additionally, Rizkalla also addressed the potential role of

such activities in the prevention of cognitive decline in old age. Intellectual stimulation, then, is obviously important for cognitive health in older adults. Considered along with other findings that showed reading to promote overall cognitive function and to even increase the human capacity for empathy (Stine-Morrow, Hussey, & Ng, 2015; Bal & Veltkamp, 2013), access to books and reading materials and other forms of intellectual engagement have a significant impact on the quality of life of elder users. Moreover, the data collected from participants in the study indicated that an ability to more easily access books and other such forms of entertainment that might not otherwise be available simply made respondents happy.

> *"I'm glad she brings us such a good selection of books to read. I'm just happy to have them."* [FG2.q13]

Social Connections

The specific aspect of WCPL outreach services addressed by this study involved users who met weekly as part of a larger social gathering for senior adults. The distribution of library materials and interaction with the WCPL Coordinator of Outreach Services is but one component of these meetings, which are also organized to include a meal, games, music, crafts, programming related to health and other concerns, and a host of further opportunities for social interaction among participants. The focus group subjects viewed the WCPL services as a crucial element of the meetings and also expressed an appreciation for the library's role, particularly the social interaction with library staff and the personal connections users had developed with the Coordinator.

"She always stays and eats and brags on our cooking." [FG2.q1]

"She really takes time to get to know us and what all we like." [FG3.q2]

Library staff members who were interviewed also voiced the importance of the

opportunities offered directly by the library for social connections among elder users as

well as all users in the agency's service area.

> *"The library to me has changed from the time when I was small. Then, you know, you went in the library, you didn't say anything. And now, it has become a social outlet . . . it's a social thing; they love it." [I4.q3]*

An analysis conducted by Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Laton (2010) showed that

people with a wide network of friends and more significant social ties had a significantly

lower mortality risk compared to those with fewer such connections. More importantly,

Chopik (2017) found that as adults reach older ages, friendships become more and more

essential to mental health and overall well-being. In fact, for older adults, relationships

with friends were a better predictor of health and happiness than were relationships with

family members. Based on the data shared by users and staff as well as on what is known

of the significance of social connections to the health of older adults, WCPL outreach

services further impact the lives of users by providing a chance to forge social

connections with peers as well as within the community at-large.

Library as Community Hub

WCPL staff, more so than the users of library services, expressed an

understanding of the library as a central hub of community life, particularly when

discussing the outlying branch locations. While users did not use the same type of direct

language as staff to articulate such a viewpoint, subjects were nevertheless apt to talk about the physical locations of the library as places where the community comes together to participate in programs, to learn new things, and to engage with neighbors. One respondent in the user focus groups, for instance, spoke of donating used books as a contribution to the library's collection as well as canned food items being accepted by the branch on behalf of a community food pantry in exchange for the forgiveness of fines for overdue items.

WCPL staff members, however, conveyed time and again in terms very straightforward an understanding of the library's role as a center of influence in the local community.

> *"The library itself is the central location to its community. It's the community living room, the hub of activity that's providing education, entertainment, and social engagement." [I2.q1]*

> *"So many of these users simply love their library, even if they aren't ever able to come in. I really think they recognize the value of public libraries to each of our communities and they take great pride in their library." [I3.q2]*

Scott (2011) described this feeling of warmth for public libraries as indicative of the venerated space they occupy within the social fabric of communities and called public libraries a "democratic equalizer, open to all and providing access to information that helps people improve their individual, family, and community lives" (p. 191). Likewise, Willingham (2007) pointed to public libraries as civic agents vital to democracy and to the development of communities. In this way, libraries not only provide access to information, but are integral in facilitating civic discourse, fostering valuable partnerships and collaborations, directing the flow of important resources, and increasing

opportunities for citizens to grow and thrive; in short, making their communities better places to live. Such an understanding of the important role public libraries play in all places, and especially in rural ones, is evidenced by the data collected from both WCPL users and staff.

Improvement of Services [RQ3]

Users who offered feedback through the focus groups had very little to add regarding how WCPL outreach services might be improved. Participants consistently voiced a general sense of satisfaction with and clear appreciation for the outreach programming. Nevertheless, one suggestion was made regarding the possibility of expanding the outreach service by inviting guests and speakers to present and discuss topics of interest. This idea seemed to resonate with other participants who enthusiastically signaled their support and offered recommendations of known local experts who might be invited.

WCPL staff members were more focused on the need to expand the reach and general effectiveness of outreach services. Staff members cited limited budgetary and human resources as deterrents to extending the outreach programing offered by WCPL. The need, it seemed, was greater than the agency's capacity to meet it. Further, a number of interviewees noted the increasing age of the county's population as well as the particular challenges of elder users with limited transportation and access in expressing an understanding that the need could only be expected to increase in the future.

We are meeting needs, but unfortunately, it's just a small percentage of the user set." [I3.q2]

Conclusions

The data provided strong evidence that WCPL outreach services meet very specific information needs of the elder user group for whom they are intended. These needs are of entertainment and intellectual stimulation, services that mitigate the challenges presented by a lack of mobility and transportation, and, to a lesser extent, access by users to resources otherwise limited by a lack of technology and high-speed Internet. Furthermore, WCPL outreach services were shown to have a significant and undeniable impact on the lives of elder users. The overall quality of life of the user group was made better by the information resources provided by the WCPL through outreach programs. Without such efforts on the part of the library, these resources would not otherwise be as readily available to elder users. For all intents and purposes, WCPL outreach services serve as the chief means of access to the library for these users. Outreach services account for the strong sense of connection to the library felt by users unable to otherwise avail themselves of the information resources the WCPL works to make available to the entire community. Finally, while users offered little in the way of how such services might be improved, WCPL staff members expressed that the services can be made more effective by both expansion and further collaboration with other community groups.

In addition to presenting clear answers to the research questions posed, the study also makes apparent several ramifications for future research. Specifically, subsequent studies should offer multiple case examples for comparative purposes as well as for purposes of collecting additional data from a broader group of users. The researcher believes that it would also be useful to conduct personal interviews with individual users in order to facilitate a deeper examination of the particular information needs of the user group and to bolster resultant understandings of the impact of outreach services on the lives of the users. Additionally, the study findings reveal a variance in the importance of Internet and information technology needs between users of WCPL outreach services and WCPL staff members. Future research would benefit from the collection of additional data from a larger sample size in order to further analyze such divergences.

Furthermore, future research would also be made comparatively stronger through the collection of data from non-users. As the study collected data from users and staff members regularly involved with and deeply connected to the outreach services provided from WCPL, significant understanding might be gained from the viewpoints and perspectives of community members who do not have personal or professional connections to the agency and its programs.

Finally, a larger sample of librarians and staff from multiple agencies would also provide richer data and a more robust exploration of both the historical evolution of rural library outreach as well as possibilities for innovation and possibilities for more effective extension of library services to elder populations. Given the overwhelmingly positive responses regarding the agency's outreach services shared by WCPL users and staff

members, it is important to note that the study represents a single case and the contextual reasons for its success should be considered in subsequent research. For example, a key component of WCPL's outreach service programming involves partnerships and collaborative efforts with multiple community agencies, as in the case of the District Three Governmental Cooperative. Through such examples, the data gathered in the case study, then, may also serve as groundwork for future compilations of best practices from which other public library professionals might benefit. Additionally, data collected from multiple or several cases would provide for comparative analysis of differing structures and delivery methods of outreach services to elder users as well as allow for further exploration of the impact of relevant partnerships such outside stakeholders, or the lack thereof, on the effectiveness of public library services.

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APPENDIX

Focus Group Question Guide

Part I -- Introduction

Researcher offers welcome and brief introduction followed by explanation of the procedures for the focus group.

Researcher distributes consent forms, reads the form aloud, then asks if there are any questions or need for clarification. Participants sign and return consent form if they wish to participate.

Part II -- Warm-up

[Throughout focus group, the researcher should continually be aware of body language and need for eye contact in an effort to engage each participant and to encourage their involvement in the discussion. The researcher should take care to prompt individuals as needed and to facilitate input and discussion from all participants.]

Ask each participant to briefly introduce themselves and to share how long they have been attending the meetings at the senior center and what they enjoy most about them.

Part III -- Questions

A. General Questions

1. What have been some of your experiences with the Washington County Public Library?

2. What do you think about the library service that is provided to your group here at the senior center?

B. Questions Related to Library Use

3. How often do you visit the main library branch and for what reasons do you visit?

4. How often do you visit the library branch nearest you [either Mendota or Hayters Gap or Glade Spring] and for what reasons?

5. If you do not visit either the main branch library or one of the outlying branches, what are some reasons why?

6. Tell me about any special events or programming you have attended at the main library or at one of the library branches.

C. Questions Related to Access

7. What kinds of information tools, such as books, newspapers and magazines, and the Internet, do you mostly use at home?

8. What sorts of materials or information tools do you feel like you most want or need but are not able to find?

9. Of the materials the Outreach Coordinator brings with her, what do you like the most and how do you use those?

10. How would you obtain such materials if the library did not send them to the meeting?

11. Tell me about some things you wish the Outreach Coordinator would bring to the meeting that she does not.

D. Questions Related to Service

11. What do you think of the outreach services provided here at the senior center?

12. Would you prefer more or fewer visits from the library Outreach Coordinator? Why?

13. Do you think the library sends enough materials?

14. Are there any other services you think the library could provide either at a branch location or here at your meeting that might be helpful to you?

E. Final Questions

15. How do the visits from the Outreach Coordinator affect the time you spend here at the senior center?

16. Is there anything else at all you would like to share about the library or about the library services that are offered here?

Part IV -- Conclusion

Researcher explains that this is the end of the focus group and thanks everyone for participating and for their responses.

Narrative Interview Guide

Part I -- Introduction

Researcher offers appreciation to participant followed by an introduction and a brief discussion of the thesis project.

Part II -- Questions

[The interview will be semi-structured and the conversation is intended to be free-flowing and engaging. The questions below will serve as a guide and as prompts for facilitating the gathering of important information, but are not necessarily meant to be followed precisely or in order.]

A. General Questions

1. Tell me a little about your career as an information professional and your experience here at WCPL.

2. What are your thoughts about WCPL in general and the services and programming it provides?

3. What do you see as the primary mission and purpose of the library? What is its role in the community?

B. Questions Related to the Information Needs of Users

4. Share your perceptions of the user community. What are their particular information needs and how does the library meet them?

5. What are the particular information needs of the users of outreach services and how effective do you think the library is in meeting those needs? What are the biggest challenges?

C. Questions Related to Development and Structure of Services

6. What are your thoughts about the outreach services that WCPL provides?

7. What do you know about the history and evolution of those services over time here at WCPL? How have they changed? Have they improved?

8. In what ways do you see outreach as provided at WCPL as innovative or unique from what you know of other similar libraries do?

D. Questions Related to the WCPL Mission

9. How do outreach services in particular relate to the mission of WCPL?

10. What else would you care to share about outreach or WCPL in general?

Appendix III

Field Note Template

[Field Note Title]

[Date]

[Description of Activity]
Section to include snapshot of the focus group exercise, noting vital details such as where the activity took place, length of the activity, number of participants, observations about the interaction, summary notes about responses to the questions, and direct quotes from the conversation.

[Reflections]

Section to include personal observations and notes about the focus group activity, including assessment of what worked and what did not, what could have been improved, and researcher's reflections on the overall process.

[Questions and Analysis]

Section to include emerging questions from the focus group and particular lines of inquiry, theories, or frameworks that might be helpful.

[Follow-up]

Section to include any follow-up items or actions to be noted and completed, including timeline for completion.

Appendix IV

Informed Consent Statement: Focus Group

INTRODUCTION: You are invited to participate in a research study focus group. The study is investigating outreach services provided by the Washington County Public Library. You will be asked general questions about your experience with and opinions of the services.

INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY: The focus group will consist of 16 open-ended questions regarding your experiences and opinions about WCPL outreach services. The focus group should take approximately 1 hour to complete. An audio recording of the focus group will be made only for use by the researcher for purposes of checking the accuracy of handwritten notes. The recording file will be stored on a secure device accessible only to the researcher and will be destroyed after one year.

RISKS: This research will be of minimal risk to you. The subject matter is focused on WCPL outreach services and is a non-intrusive topic.

BENEFITS: You will receive no direct benefits or compensation for your participation in the focus group. Your participation in this study will benefit society by adding to the body of knowledge related to rural public library outreach. A potential benefit of this study is to extend the body of knowledge to other researchers and practitioners through publication. By participating in this study, you acknowledge that findings may be published.

CONFIDENTIALITY: While most research involves some risk to confidentiality and the possibility exists that someone could find out you participated in this study or see your study information, the researcher believes this risk is unlikely because of the procedures that will be used to protect your information. Inasmuch as possible, the information you share will be kept confidential. All data from the study will be stored securely and will be available only to the researcher. No reference will be made in oral or written reports and publications which could link individual participants to the research. Your research information will not be used or shared with other researchers for future research, even if identifiers are removed. Although participants are instructed to maintain the confidentiality of other focus group members, the researcher cannot guarantee they will do so.

CONTACT INFORMATION: If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures you may contact the researcher, Scott Sikes, at (276) 492-6444 or via e-mail: esikes@utk.edu. You may also contact the Faculty Advisor, Bharat Mehra, at (865) 974-5917 or via email: bmehra@utk.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the University of Tennessee's Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-7697 or via email at utkirb@utk.edu.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation is completely voluntary. You may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, notes from your responses will not be kept and will be disposed of in a secure location.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Name (printed)

_____

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix V

Informed Consent Statement: Narrative Interview

INTRODUCTION: You are invited to participate in a narrative interview as part of a research study that is investigating outreach services provided by the Washington County Public Library. You will be asked general questions about your experience with and opinions of the services.

INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY: The interview will consist of 10-15 open-ended questions regarding your experiences and opinions about WCPL outreach services and should take approximately 1 hour to complete. An audio recording of the interview will be made only for use by the researcher for purposes of checking the accuracy of handwritten notes. The recording file will be stored on a secure device accessible only to the researcher and will be destroyed after one year.

RISKS: This research will be of minimal risk to you. The subject matter is focused on WCPL outreach services and is a non-intrusive topic.

BENEFITS: You will receive no direct benefits or compensation for your participation in the study. Your participation in this study will benefit society by adding to the body of knowledge related to rural public library outreach. A potential benefit of this study is to extend the body of knowledge to other researchers and practitioners through publication. By participating in this study, you acknowledge that findings may be published.

CONFIDENTIALITY: While most research involves some risk to confidentiality and the possibility exists that someone could find out you participated in this study or see your study information, the researcher believes this risk is unlikely because of the procedures that will be used to protect your information. Inasmuch as possible, the information you share will be kept confidential. All data from the study will be stored securely and will be available only to the researcher. Though direct quotes from the interview may be used in written reports of the study, your name and other identifying information will be kept anonymous and your actual identity will not be revealed. Any direct quotes will be attributed instead to a randomly assigned numerical code. Your research information will not be used or shared with other researchers for future research, even though personal identifiers will be removed.

CONTACT INFORMATION: If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures you may contact the researcher, Scott Sikes, at (276) 492-6444 or via e-mail: esikes@utk.edu. You may also contact the Faculty Advisor, Bharat Mehra, at (865) 974-5917 or via email: bmehra@utk.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the University of Tennessee's Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-7697 or via email at utkirb@utk.edu.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation is completely voluntary. You may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, notes from your responses will not be kept and will be disposed of in a secure location.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Name (printed)

_____

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

VITA

Everette Scott Sikes is a native of southwest Virginia and lives in Abingdon with his wife and daughter. He received his B.A. from Emory & Henry College and has spent many years in the publishing industry. He has been accepted as a candidate in the Ph.D. program in the College of Communication and Information at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville where he plans to continue to pursue his research interest in the role of public libraries in rural communities.