
Young Adult Service in the State, Regional or County System

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IT IS 1940. A girl walks into a public library. It is a dark, musty place in a Carnegie-type building. She is fifteen. A librarian approaches her and asks "Can I help you?" She wants *Gone with the Wind*. "I'm sorry," the librarian replies, "it is not available."

Almost thirty years later, a girl walks into a public library. It is a shiny, modern building, built with the help of Title II funds of the Library Services and Construction Act. She is thirteen. Approaching the modern formica-topped desk, she is intercepted by a librarian who offers help. The book the young girl requests is *Gone with the Wind*. The book is still not available, and library policy decrees that fiction requested by students of high school age will not be honored as an inter-library loan request. The reason the book is not available is unimportant; that the reader's need remains unfulfilled, is. In the end, it is the same story; a girl with the same need for the same book is not being served.

How far have we come in thirty years? We have perfected techniques, we have accepted the world of the computer, we have expanded our concepts of the library's function, we have recognized other media, we have established procedures for type-of-library cooperation, we are transmitting research information, we are establishing communication networks, and we are changing our image. Yet, discrepancies exist throughout the nation, and even among areas within one state or between states, as to the quality, quantity, and type of service available and the extent to which this service will be given. Some services are not available at all; other services are available to adults, but not to young adults.

As professionals, we establish standards—and so we should—but only if the implementation of standards is not discriminatory, and

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Young Adult Service in State, Regional or County System

provided that standards do not fall into the error of categorizing and standardizing library users, judging the value of a person's needs by the type of request, or on the basis of our own criteria. Who are we to say that a copy of *Gone with the Wind* is less important to a particular adolescent at a particular time than the research paper requested by the Cornell University professor who, having many other recourses, will soon get the material he needs even if there are temporary delays?

Perhaps the single most important mission of young adult service at both the state and system levels is to eliminate present dichotomies that exist in the services—or degrees of services—given the public, while at the same time providing exemplary and accessible services meeting the needs of all users.

State library agency service gained strength with the enactment of the Federal Library Services Act of 1956, which was designed to develop public library services in rural areas. Subsequently, the Library Services and Construction Act (1964) added further strength and recognition of state service by including funds for construction and widening the use of Federal funds to include non-rural areas.

With the financial support granted state programs through Federal funds, New York state has been able to add to its extension program a full complement of consultant staff—to date it is the only state employing a full-time young adult consultant—to develop services in the age level specialities. This was at a time when, with the exception of the metropolitan areas, system development throughout the state was in its infancy. Very few systems had enough personnel, or personnel with sufficiently specialized training and experience, to assume responsibility for developing a program of service to young adults.

One of the first specialist programs launched by the state agency, with the "rural area" clause still the determining factor, was designed to do for systems what they could not then do for themselves. It was to teach member librarians, who for the most part were not professional librarians, the fundamentals of specialist service, to help them realize the need and the potential, and, hopefully, to inspire them into action. This program, known as the Community Librarian's Training Course, was set up as a five year plan. Courses consisting of four 2½ hour sessions were conducted throughout the state in the areas of library management; reference; and children's, young adult and adult services. Participants were given assignments, and each subject

taught was particularly geared to promoting service in the small community library.

The staffs of the system headquarters were encouraged to attend the courses to observe techniques, to assure that state and system objectives were compatible, and in order that follow-up activity could more successfully be effected. Though the state-level specialist consultants were on call to advise libraries individually—a role that would appropriately and eventually fall to system level staff—this was virtually impossible to do with any frequency, consistency, or measurable long range effectiveness.

While the Community Librarian's Training Course was one part of a total program, it was a deliberate effort to develop sophistication and talent at the system and local levels so that certain jobs would not have to be done again by the state. It further provided a focal point for other related activity such as consultant visits in the regions where courses were being planned and conducted.

Other supporting help to systems in this early period of growth included a book acquisition program. Funds were available to purchase books for long-term loan to newly established libraries and a round-up of titles recommended for purchase was published once or twice a year.

All of this is history, significant in perspective, indicative of needs expressed and fulfilled, and the mark of an end as well as a beginning of a cycle. Help from the state level ends when systems or other agencies can assume successfully the job that is needed at the time. As young adult consultants are added to the staffs of more systems, the program of the state consultant necessarily shifts.

As state library agencies assumed a more important role and greater responsibility, it became evident that standards were needed. In 1963 the American Library Association's *Standards for Library Functions at the State Level* was published. Standard 32 reads:

State library consultant service should extend to guidance in special aspects of library service, and be strong enough to help those libraries meeting standards and thus able to move on to more advanced programs.¹

The explanatory paragraph includes young adult service among the special aspects of library service and further finds that "advanced field work becomes increasingly necessary as small libraries are incorporated into groups or systems of libraries, and the systems face

Young Adult Service in State, Regional or County System

opportunities for service of greater scope or depth. Thus the state library consultant program becomes a means to guide service over the state to higher levels."¹

An informal survey of consultant responsibilities within the state library agencies, conducted in 1964, disclosed that only one-fourth of the states could report measurable consultant activity devoted to work dealing with young adult service. Further inquiry revealed that among those states reporting consultant assignments to phases of young adult work, about one-fifth reported they spent less than one-half of their time, and another fifth stated they spent less than one-fourth of their time on young adult activities.

Subsequently, follow-up information was gathered from a selective sampling of state agencies. While the over-all picture of state young adult service has not changed to any appreciable extent between 1964 and 1967, there are, nevertheless, greater expressions of need for such service as well as for more effort expended toward achieving goals. The major reasons cited for being unable to provide young adult consultant service are lack of personnel, lack of understanding, lack of funds and, from a sympathetic consultant with at least dual responsibilities, lack of "time." Despite the obstacles, new or expanded programs are evident throughout the country. Noteworthy among these are liaisons with school libraries, library schools and state universities; demonstration projects on services to the "disadvantaged"; and increased participation in state conferences and in state professional associations.

What heights can state consultant service reach? And to what end? What can consultant service at the state level contribute to the development of exemplary library service to young adults? When we realize that everything affecting the young adult in our society is the concern of the librarian at every level of library activity, then the potential for achieving optimum service in each community throughout the nation is limitless.

A state consultant has the added advantage of seeing the total program not only in the specific area of the specialty but in the broad spectrum of library service. The needs of young adults can only be fulfilled by the library if all of its materials and services are available and supplemented with those of other types of libraries, other agencies and through all media. Indeed, meaningful service can only be achieved when the "special" becomes an integral part of the whole. The observations made by Marshall McLuhan in the field of educa-

tion have particular relevance to librarianship: "Specialization won't work any more as a means of learning. The only technique today for obtaining depth is by interrelating knowledge, whether it be in physics or anthropology or anything else. When a man attempts to study anything, he crosses the boundaries of that field almost as soon as he begins to look into it."²

The boundary lines that touch young adult service are innumerable. From the planning of a functional public library building to the sophistication of facsimile transmission, from the service provided the child to that provided the adult, from the simple personal need or interest to the highly complex need or interest, from the school—related activity to the activities of every other agency serving youth—these and all the other in-betweens are within the legitimate and necessary scope of library service.

The goal of state level service can be simply stated as helping and encouraging the public libraries in the state, via the regional, county and system complex, to achieve both technically and inspirationally a program of service that builds on existing strengths, that avoids duplication of effort and that coordinates activity within and without the public library agency in order to fulfill the personal and intellectual needs of young adults. Whatever can contribute to development of such services in the state has priority.

The role of the state consultant therefore has many facets. Areas of responsibility that rightfully belong to the consultant include:

- (1) orientation of new young adult system consultants to the programs and activities in the state, while assessing the needs and priorities of the particular system;
- (2) planning of meetings and conferences, both large and small, for system staff within a geographic area on problems common to all or for the promotion of statewide young adult service as a whole;
- (3) encouraging and participating in system-planned workshops on special topics or areas of service;
- (4) coordination of system activities and programs to bring systems or, where there are no systems, individual libraries into closer relationship; acquainting them with plans and activities under way so that duplication of effort can be kept to a minimum and the expertise of personnel and newly-developed programs and materials can profitably be shared;
- (5) initiating programs or experimental projects, drawing on co-operative efforts from several or all systems;

Young Adult Service in State, Regional or County System

- (6) establishing liaison with all agencies, both state and Federal, that are concerned with youth;
- (7) establishing liaison with other departments within the state agency such as school library bureaus, and other public library consultant staff, both specialist and generalist;
- (8) establishing a pattern of communication with schools of library service and teachers colleges;
- (9) participating in the activities and programs of professional library and related organizations, both state and national (statewide needs can often best be met through association effort); and
- (10) planning for the centralization of those activities that most feasibly fit into a state level program.

This, of course, is a broad interpretation of state level functions. While state agencies have been strongly influential in the establishment and development of systems per se and in specialist service within the system, the role of young adult consultant service at the state level not only parallels that of system young adult service but functions within the framework of system growth and development. In a sense, regional or system service is the foundation for state level activity. The state consultant program is continually changing; it must stretch and bend in harmony with system patterns, with the social milieu and with the increasing support and recognition of libraries.

In New York state the dominant pattern of regional service is the cooperative library system. These systems are made up of independent libraries with separate boards of trustees who elect to affiliate with a central agency for various technical and consultant services. Because member libraries are autonomous they have the prerogative of electing to participate in system programs or not, as they see fit. The role of the system young adult consultant, then, is truly special. The activity or program that does not meet a need or provoke interest will be ignored or at best given low priority and only token acceptance.

The effective consultant must possess a number of qualities quite distinct from factual knowledge and experience. The ability to be a pupil as well as a teacher, to listen as well as expound, to persuade, instigate, organize, coordinate, and communicate are some of these essential qualities. These remain constant; only the methods and priorities change.

It is an oversimplification to suggest that services rendered by the activities of the young adult system consultant fall into two broad

categories: those relating to materials and those relating to programs and services. Nevertheless, these categories encompass the larger areas of responsibility today.

Activities relating to materials are manifold, for in addition to the selection of printed matter which increases in number each year, "non-book" materials are becoming more and more important to the library function. The time needed for the selection of films, recordings, and slides pertinent to young adult service should be allocated on a basis commensurate with output and accorded the same careful deliberations given printed materials. This is not to imply that each system should spend the same amount of time doing the same thing; on the contrary, the trend towards combining expertise and the sharing of responsibility is not only obvious but necessary.

The qualities of a young adult consultant calling for his or her abilities as educator, organizer and communicator come into play here. Educating the member librarians of the system—who in turn educate others—to select the materials and to understand their relevance to young adults is a continuing process. Though techniques of communication will undoubtedly change in the near future, the ideas generated through group discussion and dialogue will continue to be important. It is more than likely that discussion groups will be expanded to include several systems as well as the member libraries within a system, through media now available such as closed circuit TV, video tapes, and telephone conferences, to mention a few. There is no reason why all systems could not "tune in" on a materials selection meeting conducted in one system, for example. Then libraries throughout the state will truly be building on existing strengths, sharing expertise, and eliminating duplication. Other activities relating to materials, such as the preparation of bibliographies, could become inter-system efforts. This has been done on a small scale with the help of Federal funds; it can be done on a more sophisticated level as the tools of communication become universally available at less prohibitive cost.

Most important to the role of the system young adult consultant are the activities which promote the utilization of materials; the programs and services planned for and made available to young adults. The kinds of programs initiated, directed or supported by the system consultant to meet local needs are described in another chapter and need not be enumerated in this one. It is more pertinent to point out the parallels that exist between the roles of state and

Young Adult Service in State, Regional or County System

system consultants. The goals are the same; the areas of responsibility are the same; but the scope and emphasis differ. In addition to working with other members of the system staff, the system consultant trains and orients new librarians, visits member libraries in an advisory and teaching capacity, coordinates programs wherever and whenever feasible, initiates projects, participates in professional activities, and establishes working liaisons with other types of libraries, with library schools and with youth-serving agencies within the county or system area.

What the system consultant should not do is equally important. In an article by Dorothy Broderick on "The Role of a Consultant in a Cooperative System Headquarters," the dangers that face consultants who become "doers instead of educators" are stressed. The statement that suggests "the first lesson a consultant learns is to not do for one library what he could not do if all libraries were to ask for the same service"³ is an important guiding principle. It is interesting to note, parenthetically, that the tendency "to do" rather than "to teach" is a weakness shared by state level consultants, according to a national research study conducted by Marie Long.⁴ Consultants can be effective only if they do the job implicit in the title "consultant."

Just as functions relating to the selection of materials have potential for greater depth, inter-system relatedness and centralization, so also do activities relating to services and programs; the techniques, the know-how, the patterns of communication are all applicable. I would add to this a potential function for libraries that would close the gap between what is needed to keep pace with the social milieu, and the programs of allied agencies, and what is available. This idea was explored by a keynote speaker at a young adult services conference held in Albany in October 1967. The point raised was that while libraries have traditionally selected materials produced by other agencies, with few exceptions they have not assumed any responsibility for identifying specific needs and for subsequently producing the materials or "stimulating the production" of materials that answer those needs. "Yet as a barometer of informational needs of a community, who is in a better position to identify the kinds of information people need at various times?"⁵

Also explored by this same speaker at the conference was the idea of sharing personnel, especially specialists who are not necessarily librarians but whose knowledge and experience would be invaluable

to a program for young adults that takes into account everything that affects a young adult in our society today or in the future. Again, a prediction made by Marshall McLuhan is applicable: "When video tape becomes available to the ordinary household as it will shortly, . . . then anybody can have top-level surgeons, biologists, physicists, philosophers, poets—anything for his own private use on all subjects and at his own time, his own leisure and in his own space."⁶

We can make educated speculations about how things will look in the next thirty years. Certainly more people will be going to college. Certainly the minors in our society will be the majors. Certainly cooperative agreements among systems alone will not accomplish our goals. Perhaps when public library standards are once again revised they will state that "only by having library systems and states working together, sharing their services and materials can we ever meet the full needs of users."

Whatever his chronological age, the adolescent thirty years hence will have the same basic and human needs as those expressed by the teenager of today. The adolescent's total experience, level of maturity and capabilities determine the priorities of his needs in his own mind. The goal of young adult consultantship is to inculcate in those involved with librarianship the ultimate importance of the young adult's expressed interests, latent aspirations, and potentials. In the year 2000 there will be no discrimination by age. *Gone with the Wind* will be available to the right person, for his own right use and in his own time and space.

References

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