
Across Towns and Across Times: Library Service to Young People in Rural Libraries

RISTIINA WIGG

ABSTRACT

THIS ARTICLE EXAMINES LIBRARY SERVICE to young people in rural libraries in New York State with reference to services provided by rural libraries and librarians in other parts of the nation. The article addresses the efforts of rural libraries to meet the information needs of children and young adults. It explores the alignment of library programs with national concerns such as literacy and learning readiness. It also examines ways in which the characteristics of rural libraries affect traditional programs for youth. This article reviews methods of effective and innovative delivery of services; approaches to collection development and multicultural literature; use of computers, planning, and standards; as well as work with preschoolers, students, schools, and summer reading clubs.

INTRODUCTION

Rural library directors, often working part-time, have to be experts in everything. They may be the only staff member but, even with additional staff, the director has to know the adult as well as the children's collection, be able to recommend a good mystery, help students research topics, choose picture books for story time, publicize the library, work with elected officials, and raise funds. In many rural libraries, the director is responsible for all services to children. Even when a staff member is available to plan and conduct programs for children, the library director often selects the books and decides which additional formats the library will provide for children.

Library service to children is a major focus in many rural libraries. The Beekman Library, located in New York State's Hudson Valley, is a good example. Every child who enters the library gets a sticker. If there is time after story hour, children are allowed to stamp their hands with a rubber stamp from the stamp collection behind the circulation desk. There are toys and puppets for their use in the library and videocassettes, music audiotapes, and books on tape, as well as picture books, and fiction and nonfiction titles to check out.

Story hours, summer reading programs, and special events for children take up a large portion of Director Lee Eaton's thirty-hour week. She oversees adult volunteers who conduct programs, encourages teenage volunteers, and conducts some of the programs herself. In return, families make heavy use of the library. The circulation of children's materials constitutes 33 percent of the total circulation. In a 1,700 square foot building with total holdings of 14,244 items, creative arrangement of space allows for a small section of young adult titles, but there is not enough room for a toddler program. Beekman's long-range plan does not specifically address service to young people, but Eaton would eventually like to have a young adult room with computers as well as a much enlarged children's room, also with computers. Hiring a children's librarian would enable the library to offer much more to families and to focus on children's programs, with a story time every day (L. Eaton, personal communication, December 9, 1994).

Regardless of how much Eaton and other library directors enjoy children's work and value getting to know children and their families, if rural library directors across the country could have one wish, it could well be, "Send me a children's librarian. Send me a staffer to conduct story times, select books, answer questions, plan and conduct the summer reading program, and plan children's services. There is not time to do what needs to be done for children."

A national advertisement for children's librarians needed to work in rural libraries in every state might read:

Librarians Needed for Service to Children

Work in a rural community. Build a collection of quality materials. Select and provide culturally diverse materials. Work with preschoolers. Assist students. Work with schools. Conduct summer reading clubs. Be computer literate. Find time for planning. Incorporate standards.

The qualifications and skills stated in this hypothetical ad identify the many needs and challenges of rural libraries and rural librarianship. This discussion will examine library service to young people in rural libraries in New York State with reference to services provided by rural libraries and librarians in other parts of the nation.

WORK IN A RURAL COMMUNITY

Rural communities exist in every state and have made a major contribution to American society. As Stern (1994) explains: "Since the 1920s, and especially after World War II, millions of Americans born in rural areas have migrated to urban centers, directing their intelligence and energy to build the nation's cities, factories, and offices and to construct communication and transportation arteries. Their investment in the nation's strength and fortune is incalculable" (p. 1).

What is a rural community and how is it defined? An answer is provided by Stern (1994): "two sets of definitions are commonly used to analyze rural situations—one determined by *place* [a settlement with a population smaller than 2,500 or population density less than 1,000 residents per square mile] and one by *county*. The categories overlap so both urban and rural places may be found within both metropolitan and nonmetropolitan counties" (p. 13).

While some states which are thought of as mainly urban/suburban may have large numbers of rural residents, other large states thought of as rural may have the majority of their population concentrated in metropolitan areas. The following are characteristics of schools in rural areas as summarized by Stern (1994) in the U. S. Department of Education publication, *The Condition of Education in Rural Schools* :

- economic diversity among rural residents, with significant levels of poverty
- greater percentage of income spent for schooling
- limited fiscal resources
- teachers and principals in rural schools generally younger and less well-educated than nonrural peers
- student performance approximating the national mean
- isolation
- less opportunity for higher education. (p. 3)

Public services cost more per capita and are more difficult to deliver to smaller numbers of people spread over larger areas. At the same time, small schools offer students increased opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities and the opportunity to receive greater personal attention. Stern (1994) concludes, "student achievement in small schools equaled or exceeded that of students in large schools, suggesting that the climate in small schools may propel students to excel in spite of certain material disadvantages" (p. 57). Factors which affect students of rural schools also affect the public library services they receive. Just as the geographic isolation and inadequate budgets of rural schools result in fewer highly trained teachers, the same factors result in a smaller number of trained library directors working in rural libraries.

Lynch and Lance (1993) list eleven states in which more than 80 percent of public libraries reported no librarians with a Master's degree in library science. Children's librarians are fewer still. In a telephone conversation with Gaye Walters, children's consultant, Montana State Library, she reported that there are only six professional children's librarians in Montana (G. Walters, personal communication, September 30, 1994). New York State is characterized by a large urban/suburban population and by vast sparsely settled areas served by small public libraries. Over half of New York's 741 chartered public libraries serve populations with fewer than 5,000 people. Approximately 462 (62 percent) of the public libraries in New York State serve a population of fewer than 7,500. Of those, almost 90 percent report no librarians with a Master's degree in library science. No statistics exist for the number of children's librarians in rural New York State.

With limited time and many services to provide, most library directors must plunge into providing service to young people by figuring out how to buy books and conduct story times. Adequate library planning would ensure that services meet the needs of residents, connect young people to the wider world, make the best use of limited funds and staff time, and build a strong base of community support for the library if it was not all too often one of the last activities to be addressed.

FIND TIME FOR PLANNING

Planning is always difficult and is especially challenging for rural libraries. In an article describing a survey on role setting and planning for rural libraries, Vavrek (1989) concludes:

librarians in small and medium sized institutions are simply not planning for future library services. The mitigating, but not complete answer is that staff members are too busy delivering services. How much is to be expected of the one-person library manager... (p. 94)?

Without planning, local surveying, etc., the public library becomes an extension of the librarian's views rather than those of the community....

[N]ational library associations, and particularly those at the state level could have a profound effect by making planning, and its collateral aspects, as a sustaining goal. One of the weaknesses of American librarianship is that we fail to plan. . . . It should not be surprising that symptoms of the same deficiencies are seen throughout the countryside. (p. 95)

Planning consists of matching the needs of the community with library services. Knowing the community is the key to deciding which services will meet the needs of young people and how best to deliver these services. The community's general geographic, demographic, and economic factors have an effect on rural library services to children. The librarian must determine which factors are more important and precisely how they are to be weighted in the planning process.

The first step in planning is to look at community demographics and find the answers to questions such as: How many residents live in the library's service area? What proportion of children is under five years old? What proportion is under fourteen years of age? What is the library's annual budget? How much is spent on materials and programs for children and young adults? What percentage of the circulation is children's materials? Is there a school in town? Are there Head Start services? Do adults work in fields, farms, forests, factories, mines, or offices? Is the community within easy driving distance of a small city? Are there many latchkey children? Are families poor or well-off or both?

Susan Hill, a consultant in the Northwest Library District (serving twenty counties in northwest Ohio), addresses the importance of knowing how many low-income families are in the library's service area. In addition to census data, Hill suggests informal methods of observation which raise awareness of low-income families who might otherwise be invisible in the community. How many families are living in low-cost housing along the roadside or in trailer parks? What is the literacy level in the community? Are there many parents who do not read well (S. Hill, personal communication, December 6, 1994)?

Ruth Anne Mears (1989), extension agent, Family Living Program, Cooperative Extension Service, Clarion County, Pennsylvania, underscores the importance of recognizing the needs of low-income families:

Rural America has poverty, isolation, inadequate services and inequality. Thus, when problems do exist, they can remain hidden and private. Clarion County [PA] has many families living in cars or tents, but not many residents even know this exists. Because of the isolation, poverty, and lack of services, the need for information is great. . . . As providers of information to rural areas it is important that we understand what families are like. (p. 41)

Mears (1989) also emphasizes the difference between the information needs and wants of rural families and the importance of understanding their values in order to provide families with the information they need: "identifying needs may be the easy part; while making the delivery, reaching the people who need information, and helping them use information are the hard parts. Perhaps, first we need to examine the existing values and determine ways goals can be reach[ed] within the values or work to change the values" (p. 39).

Hill echoes these ideas in a concise description of the purpose of a rural library and the data needed as the basis for developing a viable service plan. She makes explicit the connection between gathering information and planning:

The purpose of a library is to serve the needs of a community or service area through a collection of materials organized for accessibility and programs and services targeting specific patron groups. Without knowledge of "who" lives in a community, the library is unable to adequately plan programs and services.

Community analysis is the key to effective collection development and library service. The more you know about the interests, education levels, values, and other characteristics of potential library users, the more likely it is that the library will be able to provide the information and services desired by the community it serves. (S. Hill, personal communication, December 6, 1994)

The librarian needs to collect and analyze community information and develop a library plan that meets the needs of the entire community. McClure et al. (1987) suggest a list of eight roles that may be used as a starting point. These include: community activities center, community information center, formal education support center, independent learning center, popular materials library, preschoolers' door to learning, reference library, research center (p. 28). The library should select two or three specific roles as the basis for a service plan that meets the needs of the community.

A library's service plan should not only integrate children's services but also demonstrate specific roles for meeting children's needs. Vavrek (1989) conducted a survey to ascertain the impressions of rural librarians in establishing roles for their libraries. Vavrek found high levels of agreement related to services to young people. There was, for example, 94 percent agreement among the librarians with the statement: "My library assists elementary and secondary students in meeting educational objectives established during formal courses of study. . ." (p. 87). Another 99 percent agreed that their library, "encourages young children to develop an interest in reading." Also, 96 percent agreed with the statement: "My library provides parents and other adult care-givers with materials on reading for children" (p. 88).

Slightly more than 75 percent of those responding to the survey indicated their agreement with the statement that a function of the library is "cooperating with child care agencies in the community on an ongoing basis" (p. 88).

Almost 75 percent of the rural libraries surveyed provide specialized services in the library such as story hours for children, literacy programs, and meeting rooms (p. 87). Naylor (1987) identified specific library services to children that key children's library professionals around the country reported as "traditional." These include:

- story hours
- preschool story hours
- reference and reader's advisory service
- summer reading clubs
- a quality book collection (p. 384).

INCORPORATE STANDARDS

While planning for library service is based on the needs of individual communities, library standards can provide measures to evaluate communities' needs for services and can serve as benchmarks. The

relationship between planning and standards was highlighted by the Standards Revision Committee of the Youth Services Section/New York Library Association (1994) in the very first statement of its standards document, each library, regardless of size, requires:

- information to help design services for its community
- assistance in the endless struggle for better funding
- measures to evaluate its performance
- tools to analyze and solve its problems. (p. 1)

Nancy Rubery, chair, Standards Revision Committee, reports that the committee wrestled with the question: "Are we being sensitive enough to the needs of small libraries? The standards are very valid and relevant. The first step for any library going through the planning process is to plan responsibly. If library staff do not know the community and (fail to) plan library services accordingly, they cannot serve their communities. The Standards are a tool" (N. Rubery, personal communication, November 7, 1994).

Using standards as a tool requires that measurement and evaluation of existing library services be included as part of the planning process. Walter (1992) presents standardized procedures for use in measuring a library's effectiveness in reaching young people. Bracy (1993) discusses the use of output measures and the responsibility of youth librarians to use measures as part of planning. Franklin and Hamil (1992) describe the process used by the youth services librarians in a small suburban library to evaluate service to young people. Rural librarians would benefit from guidelines, publications, and journal articles discussing ways in which methods for evaluating youth services may be adapted for use in one-person libraries.

BUILD A COLLECTION OF QUALITY MATERIALS

"The foundations from which children's services are created are carefully selected materials..." (New York Library Association, 1994, p. 17). Working with a limited budget and with the goal of meeting a particular library's unique needs, the rural librarian must invest careful thought in the purchase of materials which will best fill the roles selected for the library's service plan.

A tiny rural library cannot afford to let its collection become stagnant. It is a lifeline to the wonderful world of literature, for readers of all ages. And, in this time of "format neutral" collection development, I should rephrase that and say...the rural library is a lifeline to the world!...libraries...will become the connect point to Internet, and they are already the source of all sorts of data via interlibrary loan, wonderful CDs, videos.... (N. Rubery, FAX communication with author, November 7, 1994)

While discussions with rural librarians indicate that books are the most important component of the collection provided to children, some libraries also provide other formats—e.g., videotapes, book/cassette sets, and CD-ROMs.

Some of the questions that may arise during the selection process include: whether to purchase a print encyclopedia or a CD-ROM version? How many picture books? What percentage of fiction or nonfiction books for elementary school students? Paperbacks or hardcover titles for young adults? Low-reading-level materials as well as advanced materials for gifted students? These questions are even more difficult to answer when many rural library staffs may lack in-depth knowledge of children's literature and the developmental needs of children, or lack access to journals reviewing the literature.

Answers to these questions may assume the form of different kinds of services and varying approaches to collection development. Recognizing the importance of collection development, Grace Greene, Vermont Children's Services consultant, participates several times a year in day-long book review sessions that review or display approximately 300 books. The Washington State Library includes a course in children's literature in its continuing education program for directors of rural libraries. Many of the public library systems in New York State regularly publish annotated lists that help librarians decide which materials to purchase. However, such selection and assistance for nonprint formats is less readily available. More help is needed to build the multimedia collections for rural children which will transcend existing boundaries and open vast new worlds of information and literature.

SELECT AND PROVIDE CULTURALLY DIVERSE MATERIALS

Children living in rural communities comprised of homogeneous populations lack contact with people of other backgrounds. These children will be especially affected if librarians do not make multicultural materials available and encourage children to read books about children from other cultures.

Miller-Lachmann (1993) states: "As librarians, we make assumptions about who will read what, and one of our most destructive assumptions is that white teenagers won't read about people of color unless the story is presented in the most universal of terms. As a result of this type of thinking, we have a nation of people who know very little about each other" (p. 164).

Librarians need to integrate songs, rhymes, folktales, stories, and biographies which illustrate the richness of the world into library collections and programs. In a speech, Harrington (1993) spoke passionately, saying: "Children's librarians need to take leadership....For us, cultural

diversity is day-to-day library business. It does not depend on the size of our collections, the size of our staffs, or the size of our budgets. It depends on the size of our commitments" (p. 176).

Opening new access routes to insight, imagination, and diversity includes providing materials that portray a multitude of cultures and wide-ranging ideas. Harrington (1993) emphasizes the need to help children "develop an affirming understanding of other cultures and to appreciate their own heritage" (p. 176).

Kruse (1992) defines multicultural literature as books by and about people of color and divides such literature into three types. The first type includes books by authors like Shirley Hughes¹ and Vera B. Williams,² which include characters of various ethnic backgrounds going about their daily activities. The second type—written by authors of one race or culture about people of another race or culture—includes books like *Abuela* by Arthur Dorros³ or the controversial *The Education of Little Tree* by Forrest Carter.⁴ A third type are books written about ethnic or cultural groups by members of that group. Virginia Hamilton⁵ successfully incorporates African-American life and values into fiction; Laurence Yep⁶ bases many anecdotes in his young-adult fiction on episodes from his own childhood (Kruse, 1992, pp. 30-32).

Kruse (1992) also discusses the importance of including all types of multicultural literature in the library in order to dispel myths, establish the value of diversity, and provide children with information about, and validation of, their own culture.

There is no single season for multicultural literature. Books about American Indians are books for all times, not only Thanksgiving. Books about African and African-American themes and topics are books for all bibliographies, displays and readers' advisory opportunities. Books about Latinos are books for all children. Books about Asians and Asian-Americans are books for everyone, not only for new immigrant families or recent refugees or white parents with Asian family members. (pp. 33, 122)

Librarians in rural communities have a unique opportunity to help rural youth travel beyond the isolation of their communities. Librarians need to consult available information on providing balanced multicultural collections that will expose youth to multicultural experiences beyond their community.

WORK WITH PRESCHOOLERS

Wiggly, curious, noisy preschoolers are among the most consistent recipients of public library resources. Parents, looking for educational activities to get their children off to a good start, find that libraries are the only community institution that has a free collection of materials tailor made for preschoolers for use either in the library or at home.

A collection for preschoolers may include simply written board and picture books just right for babies and toddlers, classic story books that parents remember from their own childhood, and new nonfiction dramatically illustrated with photographs on a wide variety of appealing subjects. Some libraries may include toys—to use in the library or to check out—videocassettes, or audiocassettes, but books are the mainstay.

In rural communities, the public library provides preschoolers with an opportunity for social interaction. With few commercial providers of gymnastic activities or classes for “mommy and me,” the library may be the only place that includes preschoolers. When homes are far apart, preschool children have little chance to meet other children. At the library and during story times, children have an opportunity to develop social skills by interacting with other preschoolers.

The importance of the public library to the development of preschoolers directly supports the first of the National Goals for Education: “By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn” (ALA, 1991). In 1990, President George Bush, in his second State of the Union message, announced six ambitious goals for the nation’s schools. These priorities were quickly and unanimously endorsed by the governors from all fifty states. President Bill Clinton continues to support these six goals. Several divisions of the American Library Association prepared a paper on “Implementing the National Goals for Education through Library Services” as a companion to the American Association of School Librarians’ statement on “Implementing the National Goals for Education Through School Library Media Programs.”

ALA sent both responses to the national goals to the 1991 Second White House Conference on Library and Information Services attendees. The ALA paper outlines the services that libraries provide in support of the National Goals. Library services that support the first National Education Goal include:

- Programs for toddlers and preschoolers
- A positive environment for developing the social skills needed in formal education
- Support and materials for parents and adult caregivers
- Literacy programs for parents
- Help for parents in preparing their children for reading.

Boyer (1993) emphasizes the value of language in the learning process:

Lewis Thomas wrote on one occasion that childhood is for language. It’s in the first years of life that children are curious about language and become empowered in the use of words. It’s absolutely ludicrous to expect children to be “ready to learn” if they grow up in an environment that is linguistically impoverished or if they fail to get thoughtful responses to their questions. I’m suggesting that parents are the first and most essential teachers, and this means helping their children discover the miracle and the majesty of words. (p. 55)

Boyer, speaking as the president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, discussed the Carnegie report on school readiness, including a proposal for helping children enter school "ready to learn." One of the proposals emphasized the need for community resources to promote learning. The report called for libraries, museums, and zoos to establish school readiness programs for preschoolers and for shopping malls to have centers where children can play and learn (p. 55).

In rural communities, libraries often provide the only public space and collection of learning materials available for preschool children and the adults who care for them. What are some of these learning materials? Books like Bruce MacMillan's⁷ *Counting Wildflowers* and Donald Crews's⁸ *The Bicycle Race*—which introduce mathematical concepts such as recognizing numerals and whole number operations—help parents to weave mathematics into everyday life. Books like *Miss Rumphius* by Barbara Cooney⁹ and Eric Carle's¹⁰ *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* make the natural world come alive for young children. Titles like *Madeline* by Ludwig Bemelmans¹¹ and *Goodnight Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown¹² demonstrate the "majesty of words."

The federally funded Head Start program provides enrichment and learning experiences to preschool children in low-income families in many rural communities. The Library-Head Start Partnership Project is currently administered through a joint agreement between the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress and the Head Start Bureau of the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services. The project is being carried out in collaboration with the Association for Library Services to Children, an ALA division. The project is designed to demonstrate how libraries can work with Head Start agencies to strengthen children's learning and parent involvement in children's literacy and language development. The videotape, *The Library-Head Start Partnership* (Center for the Book, 1993), presents information about the project. The video discusses the scope of the potential relationship between local libraries and Head Start agencies; a variety of library program formats and techniques, such as reading aloud, puppets, dramatic play; criteria for deciding what makes a good book; and a discussion of the potential for library staff and materials to enhance the education of children, help parents educate their children, and link library resources to all Head Start activities.

In Vermont, where isolated rural families receive Head Start services in their homes rather than attending a central Head Start program, librarians need to develop different ways to cooperate with and supplement Head Start programs. Vermont librarians are just starting to work with Head Start agencies. In the spring of 1995, the Vermont Library Conference will include a workshop on Head Start and parent involvement. The State Library received a grant to assemble story hour packets to circulate to Head Start home visitors (G. Greene, personal communication, November 18, 1994).

"Beginning with Mother Goose" is an existing Vermont program that connects parents and caregivers to library resources and literature for preschoolers. Grace Greene, Children's Services consultant, Vermont Department of Libraries, worked with colleagues from the Vermont Center for the Book, the Department of Education, the Vermont Council on the Humanities, and an independent consultant to create the original "Beginning with Mother Goose" program. The program was so successful that the team developed a second series, "Growing with Mother Goose," for parents of children ages three to five. Now, a third program, "Mother Goose Asks Why?" introduces picture books that parents can use to teach science concepts to preschoolers (G. Greene, personal communication, November 18, 1994).

"Beginning with Mother Goose," a three-part series, presents parents with information about excellent books that are attractive and developmentally appropriate. The series also offers information on the why and how of reading to babies and toddlers. Parents of children from birth to three years of age are given eleven books and, during the sessions, discuss the titles, learn about songs, fingerplays, information on how to select books appropriate for each developmental stage, and what makes a book effective. Sharon Bartram, director of the Brown Library, Vermont, which serves a population of 5,600, reports that the programs were so well-received that there was not enough room for all the families who wanted to attend (S. Bartram, personal communication, November 22, 1994).

Professionals have been trained to lead the Mother Goose programs. The programs have been presented to day care providers, teen parents, parents of children in remedial education programs, and Head Start parents. Groups as varied as the Department of Education, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and private foundations provide funding. The National Science Foundation awarded a grant for over \$500,000 to the Vermont Center for the Book to organize the three-year program series of "Mother Goose Asks Why?"

Whether programs are held in libraries, schools, or parent/child centers, a basic component is the link between the public library and the participants. This link is especially important in rural communities where public libraries are often the only source of materials that can help start the youngest children on the path to lifelong learning.

Concern about literacy in rural communities has attracted national sponsors for a project in rural libraries administered by the American Library Association. A December 1994 American Library Association (1994a) press release, "\$3,000 awarded for second Viburnum/ALA Rural Family Literacy Project grants," describes a three-year program to develop or enhance family literacy programs. During the third year, beginning September 1994, six public libraries in rural Louisiana are receiving \$3,000 grants. The project joins librarians with education and literacy specialists to improve the reading skills of families. A "literacy team," which

includes the librarian, Head Start coordinator, and school board members, attends a training seminar in order to learn creative strategies for developing library based family literacy programs and providing reading assistance for parents who do not read well.

A second family literacy project administered by the American Library Association (1994b) uses funds granted by Cargill to donate small family literacy collections to each of 250 local partnerships established since 1992. Collection sites include libraries, schools, and other sites participating in literacy partnerships in small towns, farm communities, and urban areas nationwide.

ASSIST STUDENTS

"And how!" states a librarian responding to a survey of rural librarians conducted by Vavrek (1989) which found 94 percent agreement with the statement: "My library assists elementary and secondary students in meeting educational objectives established during formal courses of study..." (p. 87).

Reference and reader's advisory service may be the service most clearly connected in the public mind with libraries. D'Elia and Rodger (1994) report on surveys of library users conducted by three large urban libraries. They conclude that the users surveyed appear to value three fundamental roles of the library in the community: (1) educational support; (2) provision of information; and (3) recreation (p. 143).

A survey of young rural library patrons might show similar results. Librarians develop numerous programs to provide educational support and information to young people. For example, what has made homework easier and more fun in five rural New York libraries? The use of multimedia computers. "BLAST—Books, Libraries, and Students Team-up"—a federal Library Services and Construction Act Homework Center Grant awarded to the Mohawk Valley Library Association (NY), provided the funds to establish up to five pilot rural library homework centers designed for youth in grades four through eight. The centers were equipped with multimedia computers, computerized information resources, and one-on-one assistance through a volunteer homework helper program. The centers were able to purchase five multimedia computers with CD-ROM minichangers and software. The Mohawk Valley Library Association used funding to publicize the program using fluorescent pencils printed with the slogan "Homework is a BLAST," and by printing homework and research aids booklets for individual use by students. The centers printed posters, bookmarks, sign-up forms for recruiting volunteers to work with young people, and survey forms for evaluating the use of multimedia computers and the homework center.

The centers recruited thirty-six homework helpers—from teenagers to senior citizens—to work in the centers to help young people use the CD-ROM programs for their homework. The libraries used the computers to create homework centers in easily accessible locations, purchasing additional “homework helper” materials for the centers. They effectively promoted the project through class visits, letters to teachers, and other cooperative efforts with the schools. A young person browsing through CD-ROM programs over the summer remarked: “Hey, I bet this would be good for research projects when school starts again.” Ronald McDonald Childrens’ Charities has provided funds to establish homework centers in two more libraries (Rokos, 1994).

Some librarians also see homework centers as resources for latchkey children, young people at risk, and as a way to promote lifelong learning. “A homework center in your public library...will provide your library with visibility and help parents and educators understand more fully the role of the public library in promoting learning, not only in support of the education of their children, but also as an avenue for lifelong learning opportunities” (Brewer, 1992, p. 212).

“As more families find that both parents must work, children find that after-school hours are more enjoyable and productive—and usually safer—in a library atmosphere than at home alone . . .” according to the National Association for Towns and Townships (“Consider This...,” 1994, p. 10).

Brewer (1992) discusses the Seaside Homework Center developed at the Seaside Branch, Monterey County (CA) Free Libraries, which includes four programs: (1) drop-in homework assistance; (2) library skills instruction; (3) one-on-one tutoring; and (4) Reading Partners. Reading Partners pairs a tutor with a child who needs help in reading. The tutor and the child take turns reading aloud to each other and together select books for the child to borrow.

Although homework programs help latchkey children, Brewer comments that: “It is ironic that with the continuing ‘problem’ of latchkey children, so many libraries have reference policies that discriminate against homework questions” (p. 208). Brewer challenges more librarians to provide the help to younger students that would enable them to succeed at school.

Latchkey kids are active users of the library. Another group of active library users are families educating their children at home. *CQ Quarterly* documents the increase in the number of families keeping children home to learn at their own pace. Thousands of families concerned about religious or family values, overcrowded classrooms, violence in the schools, or low academic performance are creating home classrooms tailored to

meet the needs of their children. Statistics provided by the National Home Education Research Institute indicate that estimates of the number of children being home schooled have risen from 12,500 in 1978 to 500,000 in 1994, approximately one percent of school-age children ("Home Schooling," 1994, p. 772). A large percentage of the children being educated at home are K-5 school age, but frequently older children are also being schooled at home.

Parents who educate their children at home use public libraries heavily and may have a significant impact on rural libraries. Walters cites the Parmly Billings Library (MT), which serves 300 home-schooling families, many with two or three children. Up to 300 people may attend library programs, many of them home schoolers (G. Walter, personal communication, September 30, 1994).

Because parents who teach their children at home often use the library as a learning center, they are especially aware of service barriers. Limited library hours are a barrier when libraries are closed mornings or open in late afternoon, closed during the dinner hours then open again for a few hours in the evening. Another barrier is the failure to have up-to-date materials, especially in areas such as science and technology. Home schoolers may create learning units based on a child's current interest in a subject. Delays in receiving information through interlibrary loan, however, may result in the child losing interest in the topic by the time the material is received.

If home educators encounter hostility from school administrators and other parents and adults in the community, they may be hesitant to identify themselves to the librarian. Therefore, parents do not learn about specific services unless the library routinely informs patrons about library services. Parents who teach at home may or may not belong to an organized group, so publicizing library programs and services may be difficult. The librarian may make it clear that home schoolers are welcome with signs and brochures.

Home-schooling families may contribute to a library in a number of ways. Parents seeking programs for their children may be available to conduct story times. Community service is often part of the home-schooling curriculum, allowing children taught at home to perform their own plays or puppet shows at the library. Parents may suggest books and other materials recommended for purchase and may be willing to help raise funds or to apply for grants to purchase library materials.

WORK WITH SCHOOLS

When libraries serve children and families scattered over a wide geographic area, librarians need to find ways to inform families about library services. Schools provide a very effective way to reach children. Children's

Services Consultant, Sue Rokos, Mohawk Valley Library Association (NY), reports that cooperation with local schools continues to be the single best way to promote projects aimed at school-age children. Public librarians in the Mohawk Valley region publicize their CD-ROM-based homework centers through visits to classrooms. Teachers and other school contacts are very positive and supportive (Rokos, S., 1994).

In West Virginia, the public library takes a step further in cooperation with schools. One-third of all public libraries are located on or near school properties, and the public library acts as a school library. School districts actually donate land to encourage public libraries to locate near schools.

Some school and public libraries combine efforts to better serve the community. "Faced with providing more services to your community while dealing with an uncertain budget? An old idea has found new life across the country..." (Kinsey & Honig-Bear, 1994, p. 37). Kinsey and Honig-Bear (1994) discuss joint-use libraries developed in partnership between the Washoe County Library (Reno, Nevada) and the Washoe County School District. These libraries are operated by school librarians for the students during the school day; the libraries are operated by public library staff for the general public after the school day ends and on weekends. The Washoe County Library and the School District make special arrangements to keep the libraries open during school holidays, conference days, and vacation periods. Advantages include enhanced services for students, teachers, and the public. Students have immediate access to the public library's online database which includes community information as well as information about books in the collection and access to up-to-date computer technology. Reserves can be made for materials throughout the system. When teachers enhance class assignments by assigning research in the joint-use library, students do not need to make special trips to a public library outside of the school building. The Washoe County Library extension librarian provides training to personnel in storytelling, book talks, collection development, and management issues.

The success of the Washoe County joint-use libraries—one of which serves Gerlach, Nevada, a community of approximately 500 people isolated from educational and cultural opportunities—depends on: (1) support from top administration; (2) joint-use committees which include representatives from the community, the school, and the public library; (3) contractual agreements; and (4) annual review and modification of agreements (p. 38).

Not all combined library efforts are successful. New York State Youth Consultant, Anne Simon, comments that school/public library consolidations in school buildings have not worked out well over time, partly because school populations grow larger, or schools need more classrooms

to provide special services. School needs take precedence over public library needs, so when school populations expand, the schools may take back the library space (A. Simon, personal communication, November 25, 1994).

Benne (1991) discusses the relationship between school and public libraries in rural communities in great detail, pointing out that "there is no evidence that combining libraries results in savings; on the contrary, the reverse is the more likely to result if service is maintained at an adequate level for all age groups" (p. 230). Benne contrasts the responsibility of the school library to support the curriculum and the educational goals of the school with the public library's responsibility to serve the library needs of all age groups in its service area.

Barriers to combining school and public libraries mean that many schools and communities are not candidates for combined facilities. However, merging small budgets may make a difference. The Washoe County experience demonstrates that extensive planning, under the right circumstances, can lead to successful combined school/public libraries.

CONDUCT SUMMER READING CLUBS

For many children, a summer of reading can mean voyages across towns or across time—depending on the books. For children in many communities across the country, summer reading can have structure through library reading clubs. Children may sign up on their own or because their parents encourage them. Parents report that: "This program makes reading fun," or "My boys have enjoyed the reading program for three years and look forward to it every summer." The program requires each child to read for a certain number of minutes each day or read a certain number of books and report on the books read. The one-on-one attention that the children receive is an integral part of a program involving interesting themes, summer activities, recognition for reading, special programs, speakers, crafts, dramatics, and displays. Children receive charts on which to record the number of books that they read and certificates for meeting the program requirements. Children may read fiction or nonfiction, and they do not have to limit themselves to the minimum requirement. Voracious readers have been known to devour 100 books, but in most communities, the program is not competitive.

Parents recognize that summer reading is important in maintaining learning readiness when they say things such as: "Reading moves to the back burner in the summer. The library program gives it [learning] priority over play" (Wigg, 1994). Research has shown that reading during the summer is the best way to maintain vocabulary and comprehension skills during the months when a child is not in school (Locke, 1988, p. 82). Summer reading also expands a child's knowledge. The summer

reading programs provide a structured way to encourage children to read during the summer, introduce children to the wide range of available literature, provide a focus for publicity about library services, and help children maintain reading skills.

Vermont, Montana, Louisiana, and New York are just a few of the states organizing statewide programs which make it possible for rural libraries to participate in statewide summer reading programs. In Montana, the state children's consultant works closely with state level reading specialists and education department staff to conduct a joint presentation on the family reading program at the state reading association conference. Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota cooperate to develop a summer reading program; in 1994 these states cosponsored "Go Wild for Libraries" with art work by children's book illustrator Lynne Cherry. Experience in New York State, which just completed its fourth annual summer reading program, indicates that libraries participate with more sophisticated programs when themes are developed and supported at the state level.

COMPUTER LITERACY

New information technologies enable rural libraries to connect young people with information across the state, country, and world. McClure et al. (1994) describe a grant-funded project, Project GAIN (Global Access Information Network), which in New York State provided Internet access and training to five rural public libraries and one Indian Nation school. The project emphasized training for public librarians and promoting the project to the community by publicizing information available through the Internet. Although no specific effort was made to involve children, teachers found multiple uses for Internet information in the classroom. Teachers discovered lesson plans, pathfinders to network resources, bibliographies, digests, and topic-specific mini-searches on AskERIC, an Internet-based program run by Syracuse University as part of the ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center) system managed by the U. S. Department of Education. Staff at AskERIC answer e-mail questions using the ERIC database and by referring the patron to both Internet- and print-based resources.

In one school, seventh-grade students used the Internet to locate information on current events for a project called "Clash of Issues." In another, a teacher organized a keypal (pen pal on the Internet) project for her students with children in New Zealand. The students needed to convert kilos and meters into pounds and feet in order to exchange information about their height and weight. "Thus, the exchange provided the opportunity to apply math skills in real-time and in a real problem-solving context that was relevant and interesting to the children" (McClure et al., 1994, p. 21).

Students, as enthusiastic users of technology, are impressed when the library is able to provide electronic access to information. According to one teacher: "The kids now say, 'The library is awesome!'" This view of libraries "is important for stimulating and nurturing children's development and for laying the foundation for lifelong learning at an early stage of their lives" (McClure et al., 1994, pp. 21-22).

The five Project GAIN libraries received hardware, software, equipment, training, user services, and technical support. Many rural libraries need technical support and encouragement to integrate computers and telecommunications into library services. In a conversation with Joan F. Cooke, Children's Services librarian, Finger Lakes Library System (NY), she said: "This is like a third world country, jumping from the 19th century to the 21st century. Funding is still too scarce for libraries in the Finger Lakes Library System. . . . Libraries have not had enough training to use the Internet yet. You're talking about Internet, we're still talking about automating" (J. F. Cooke, personal communication, November 11, 1994). Rural libraries need technical assistance in integrating computer technology into library services, in assessing the value of new services to children, and in creating community support for information technology.

LIBRARY ASSOCIATIONS AND THE STATE LIBRARY

The New York State Library Development Team consists of seven state-level consultants with regional responsibilities for seventy-four library systems. Anne Simon, a state-level consultant, spends 25 percent of her time on youth services in addition to serving on the team as regional consultant and consultant to school library systems. The Library Development Team relies on library systems to provide support to member libraries based on the needs in each region. Of the twenty-three public library systems authorized by law, all but 2 of the 741 public libraries in the state are members. Library systems provide support, continuing education, and consultation to rural library staffs. In addition, the Youth Services Section of the New York Library Association provides workshops and publications for its members. Simon maintains contact with youth services leaders by serving as the official liaison to the Youth Services Section (A. Simon, personal communication, November 25, 1994).

Feehan (1992) reports on the status of youth services consultants in other states, summarizing the results of a 1988 survey sent to fifty state library agencies to compile information about state-level youth consultants (p. 24):

- Number of states with full-time youth services positions 12 (25%)
- Number of states with part-time youth services positions 24 (47%)
- Number of states with no youth services positions 10 (20%)
- Number of states with youth services position vacancies 4 (8%)

The survey shows that the majority of state-level youth services consultants work part time on library service. Rollock (1988) describes the work of Faith Hektoen, a longtime state agency consultant in Connecticut with a strong background in children's library work, who no longer devotes full time to youth services. Hektoen suggests that providing across-the-board consultant services gets the consultant "out of isolation" and forces attention to the overall program of the public library in which children's services play an important role. "In this way, she can bring to children's librarians with whom she works increased awareness of some of the external factors that have an impact on the entire library program, and can . . . reinforce concern for children's services in directors and other staff members with whom she works" (p. 29).

A number of states provide children's services grants that assist rural libraries to initiate new services. The New York State legislature funds up to a total of \$300,000 grants which foster services to children and their parents. The program requires that the project director is a professional librarian, but this requirement is not an impediment to small rural libraries because library system staff can act as project coordinator. The state awards grants to small libraries to provide support to families with children with learning disabilities; to work with literacy volunteers to offer Saturday parent/child programs having a strong literacy component for parents; and to develop parenting and preschool readiness activities which will bring isolated, rural families to the library (Shubert, 1994).

The Vermont Department of Libraries awards mini-grants to public libraries to carry out special projects for young people. The 1994 grants were for: (1) turning a storage room into a young adult room, decorating it with tiles which the kids will make, and instituting the "Blueberry Medal" for a young adult book; (2) sponsoring an eight-week parent/child project to create cloth books; (3) establishing a "Read to Me" area with carpet, rocking chair, and books for babies and toddlers; (4) sponsoring programs for parents and children on growing up, and developing circulating kits of videos and books on the subject. In 1995, libraries are being encouraged to apply for funds to develop programs for preschool children and toddlers, and to increase work with community organizations.

Working with the state legislature, the Oregon State Library instituted a promising program to encourage the development of library programs for children. The State of Oregon established "Oregon Benchmarks: Standards for Measuring Statewide Progress and Government Performance." The benchmarks program measures progress toward specific goals rather than by the program cost or the staff size. Mary Ginnane, library development administrator at the Oregon State Library, states the library goal is directed at ensuring that, by the year 2000, 100 percent of Oregon residents will be served by libraries meeting minimum criteria.

The program identified five minimum criteria that must be completed to accomplish this goal—including one which focuses on service to children. In support of this benchmark, since 1993, the state targeted all aid for local public libraries toward improving services for children from birth through age fourteen. The Oregon State Library added a Children's Services Consultant position to help implement the program (M. Ginnane, personal communication, October 5, 1994).

Each library is eligible to apply for a grant in an amount determined by a formula which allocates 80 percent of the funds by population of children from birth to age fourteen and 20 percent by square mileage. The funds must be used to establish, develop, or improve public library service to children, with an emphasis on providing services to preschool children. In order to measure progress toward goals, applications must include measurable activities (Scheppke, 1994). Grants to individual libraries funded in 1993-94 include the provision for Spanish language children's books and bilingual story hours, the creation of "Books for Babies" packets, the implementation of holiday story hours, and eight additional hours. The director is expected to spend a minimum of eight hours interviewing students and faculty to learn how the library can begin to develop and improve services to the junior high age group.

In addition to state-funded programs, state libraries administer federal Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) grants for service to residents with special needs resulting from such factors as geographic isolation. New York State awarded LSCA funds to library systems to create programming kits, implement computer programs, develop services for parents, and institute methods to extend summer reading programs to children at risk. Federal LSCA grants fund many creative approaches for extending library service to young people in rural communities. Librarians need more information to adapt to such services for local use.

State associations provide continuing education and support to librarians in rural communities and provide opportunities for statewide networking. In addition to workshops and conferences, they also publish recommended standards and idea exchange manuals, such as the New York Library Association's (1993) "Programming on \$1.98 a Day: A Packet of Ideas for Use with School-Age Children. . .".

CONCLUSION

"We are very child friendly," says Lee Eaton, director of the Beekman Library. The staff are like grandparents to the children" (L. Eaton, personal communication, December 10, 1994). Librarians in rural communities are often passionate about services to children, proud of their ability to furnish individualized service to young people and their families—at their best, rural libraries provide an opportunity for young people to receive personal attention like that they receive in rural schools. It is this

personal attention in school that seems to help students in small schools achieve at equal or higher levels than their counterparts in large schools, despite material disadvantages (Stern, 1994, p. 57).

At the same time, some untrained, inexperienced directors of isolated one-person libraries may falter under the need to do it all. Intimidated by the mystique of working with children, they may be reluctant to weed old books and inexperienced at selecting a story to read aloud during story time. They may feel inadequate to the task of helping parents find ways to encourage their children to read and be unaware of new programs and services being instituted for children in rural communities across the country.

What is needed? A rural library action plan is needed in order to overcome the barriers which prevent rural librarians from making use of existing resources. The plan, based on cooperation among rural librarians, system staff, state-level consultants, and national organizations, would foster:

- more attention to specific needs of rural children;
- analysis of the impact of poverty on children using libraries in rural communities;
- the creation of national networks which allow rural librarians across the country to learn from each other;
- effective ways to provide professional knowledge about new developments in library service to rural librarians;
- development of methods which achieve better documentation of service to children in rural communities;
- adaptation of planning methods for use in one-person libraries;
- the creation of clear, simple manuals which outline services to young people;
- publicity about resources that already exist;
- national grant projects which enhance and highlight service in rural areas; and
- increased attention for rural libraries in national publications, forums, etc.

By strengthening the support system for rural librarians, children in rural communities will benefit greatly from the library service they receive, becoming library users and beginning lifelong learning at an early age. As Eaton fiercely believes: "Whatever you give to a child comes back."

NOTES

- ¹ A few of Ms. Hughes's more recent titles include:
Hughes, S. (1992). *The girl with the green ear: Stories about magic in nature*. New York: A. A. Knopf.

- Hughes, S. (1993). *Giving*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.
- Hughes, S. (1993). *Stories by firelight*. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard.
- Hughes, S. (1994). *Hiding*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.
- 2 A few of Ms. Williams's more recent titles include:
- Williams, V. B. (1982). *A chair for my mother*. New York: Greenwillow Books.
- Williams, V. B. (1987). *Stringbean's trip to the shining sea*. New York: Greenwillow Books.
- Williams, V. B. (1990). "*More more more*" *said the baby: 3 love stories*. New York: Greenwillow Books.
- Williams, V.B. (1993). *Scooter*. New York: Greenwillow Books.
- 3 Dorros, A. (1991). *Abuela*. New York: Dutton Children's Books.
- 4 Carter, F. (1976). *The education of Little Tree*. New York: Delacorte.
- 5 A few of Ms. Hamilton's more recent titles include:
- Hamilton, V. (1990). *The dark way: Stories from the spirit world*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich.
- Hamilton, V. (1992). *Drylongso*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich.
- Hamilton, V. (1993). *Many thousand gone: African-Americans from slavery to freedom*. New York: A. A. Knopf.
- Hamilton, V. (1993). *Plain city*. New York: Blue Sky Press.
- 6 A few of Mr. Yep's more recent titles include:
- Yep, L. (1985). *Dragon steel*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Yep, L. (1991). *The star fisher*. New York: Morrow Junior Books.
- Yep, L. (1991). *Tongues of jade*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Yep L. (1994). *The junior thunder lord*. Mahwah, NJ: Bridge Water Books.
- 7 McMillan, B. (1986). *Counting wildflowers*. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard.
- 8 Crews, D. (1985). *Bicycle race*. New York: Greenwillow Books.
- 9 Cooney, B. (1982). *Miss Rumphius*. New York: Viking Press.
- 10 Carle, E. (1969). *The very hungry caterpillar*. New York: World Publishing Company.
- 11 Bemelmans, L. (1939). *Madeline*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- 12 Brown, M.W. (1947). *Goodnight moon*. New York: Harper.

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