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# Library Services and Construction Act: Testimonies (1994): Speech 09

Agnes M. Griffen

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Statement of  
Agnes M. Griffen, Director, Department of Public Libraries  
Montgomery County, Maryland  
Representing the American Library Association  
before the Subcommittee on Education, Arts and the Humanities  
of the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee  
April 19, 1994

Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I am Agnes Griffen, Director, Montgomery County Department of Public Libraries. I am also appearing on behalf of the American Library Association, a nonprofit, educational organization of nearly 60,000 librarians, educators, information specialists, trustees, and friends of libraries.

I will be focusing this morning on the vital role which public libraries can and do play in helping people make informed decisions about their health. Also, I will be describing how our library sites and services are implementing provisions of the **Americans with Disabilities Act** to make all libraries and services fully accessible. In each of these areas, funding through the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA), has made a major difference by enabling libraries to provide essential information and resources to those seeking support, often in critical and life-threatening situations.

Let me begin by asking if any of you ever had a health question and weren't quite sure where to find the answer? If so, you're not the only one--household surveys over the past ten years have shown that health information is the number one statewide information need. At the same time, surveys indicated that most people were not aware that their library even had health information!

Even among people who asked doctors and other health professionals for information, nearly half said they required more and better information than they received.

That's why Maryland's public libraries have spent the last three years updating and enhancing our health information materials -- and training our staffs -- in order to meet this number one need of our communities. Sponsored by the Division of Library Development and Services (DLDS), Maryland State Department of Education (DLDS), the Health Information Project (HIP), which includes twenty-one public library systems and three regional library resource centers was specifically designed to address this concern. As a statewide effort, the project encompasses most local libraries, many of which are working with groups and health agencies to provide the latest health information and resources to community members.

In particular, four libraries--Enoch Pratt Free Library--Pennsylvania Branch, Howard County Library--Savage Branch, Kent County Public Library and St. Mary's County Memorial Library--Lexington Park Branch were selected as pilot sites to represent the urban/suburban/rural, and large and small library systems in the state. Staff were assigned as liaisons to these libraries, who worked with a marketing consultant to test market strategies for providing health information to targeted populations, particularly infrequent or non-library users.

Title I LSCA money -- \$300,000 over a three-year period -- was used to support the project. Grants were noncompetitive and awarded annually. A total of \$18,375 was given to each pilot site and \$9,300 to each participating library; the remainder of the funds were spent on the regional library resource centers, the State Library Resource Center and on

marketing services. More than \$50,000 is being spent in FY94 for designing, implementing, and evaluating a public awareness campaign.

Staff specialists organized a two-day Health Reference Interview training package, and more than 650 library staff across the state received training on conducting health reference interviews. In addition, librarians worked with specialists to create a core list of reference sources for a model health reference collection. Updated health information is now widely available not only on video and audio tape and in pamphlets and other reference materials but also in the newest technologies--electronic databases and CD ROMs.

None of these efforts would have been possible without the support of LSCA funds. These precious dollars are responsible for providing the opportunity to institute training programs for staff, purchase specialized resources, and publicize the broad range of health-related materials that are available and easily accessible in our public libraries.

The public awareness campaign, entitled "Health Info to Go," formally runs only through May 31st. However, it establishes the foundation by which public libraries will be able to engage in collaborative efforts with local health providers, business leaders, schools, and government officials to promote their health information services, programs, and activities.

As a result of the efforts I have described, Maryland's public libraries have become a **key** source of health information for consumers!

Montgomery County's Department of Public Libraries, through its own Health Information Center (HIC), located in the Wheaton Regional Library, also is participating significantly in the statewide campaign.

The HIC, officially dedicated on May 17, 1989, was launched with LSCA grant support. A three-year LSCA grant (1988-1991) was obtained from the Maryland Department of Education, Division of Library Development and Services with matching funds being provided by Montgomery County. The grant was ultimately extended one year to focus on services for the senior population. Also, the collection was expanded in such areas as homecare, depression, and Alzheimer's Disease. A Senior Van (now no longer running because of budget cutbacks) was outfitted with HIC materials and directed to targeted senior centers in the County. Discussions were scheduled on health topics with follow-up consultation available from health care specialists including dentists, podiatrists, and insurance counselors. Glaucoma screening, testing of hearing, and blood pressure testing were among the services offered. A Senior infoline (still maintained) also was established, which enables seniors to call in and leave recorded messages at any time. Staff return these calls within twenty-four hours.

Although each of the twenty-three libraries in the County system contains general information on health issues, the HIC is unique in housing a specialized collection of approximately 7,500 circulating volumes and videotapes and more than 1,400 reference textbooks, directories, etc., over 100 journals and newsletters, government documents and an especially fine collection of pamphlets--all dealing with various health concerns. Electronic databases and information on CD-ROM further enhance the collection. Materials are pulled together in a unified way and arranged

in a comfortable area--easy for browsing, with tables available for research or reading.

Emphasis is placed upon consumer health needs. Among the topics covered are specific medical conditions and diseases, pre- and post-natal care, child health and development, exercise, diet, nutrition, men's and women's health issues, finding a doctor, nursing homes, prescription and non-prescription drugs, alternative medicine, health careers, and, of course, coping with the high cost of health care.

The HIC also features health-related programs such as blood pressure screenings, conducted by American Red Cross volunteers, every third Wednesday from 10 a.m. to noon; seminars, too, are regularly scheduled, covering subjects like asthma, high blood pressure, emphysema and menopause. Similar to its counterparts throughout Maryland, the HIC also is actively engaged in cooperative efforts with other County agencies such as the Health Department and Department of Family Resources, as well as businesses and other organizations to inform residents about the library's health information resources.

Specially trained and expert staff at the Center not only help patrons locate the correct information but also respond to about 700 questions each month from telephone callers and visitors.

For example, of the thousands of questions asked at Wheaton's HIC, allow me a moment, if you will, to share just one...

A young man, age 27, was referred to the Center from the National Library of Medicine. He was calling from New Jersey. He had been diagnosed with Testicular Cancer by one urologist from Sloan Kettering in New York, and another urologist from Johns Hopkins said that there was a strong probability that it was cancerous; but,

because of the medical history, there was a slight chance that it might not be cancerous.

The patron asked for help in finding information on the contraindications of Testicular Cancer and on this kind of cancer in general. A staff member provided him with suggestions of good questions to ask a physician. Most importantly, the staff person performed a Medline search for information on new techniques and research on this cancer. The staff member also looked for studies that focused on cases that were not cancerous. Furthermore, it was suggested that the patron take this information to a medical librarian and review the search as well as discuss the results with him.

The staff member noted that most of the techniques were being written about in European literature, and that this type of cancer research was predominantly European but could not focus on this with the patron--he had to reach his own conclusions. The staff person also provided the young man with a list of organizations and strongly recommended that he find a support group.

The patron followed up on this information, and, a month later called to let the staff member know that he had talked to seven other urologists and found someone that would consider doing a lumpectomy for a biopsy, instead of completely removing everything as is the standard recommended treatment. Another month passed, and, again the young man called to let the staff person know that the mass was not malignant, that the one in a million miracle had happened.

When the staff member initially had talked to the patron, he had sounded confused and bewildered with all the information he was getting. He was able to sort it all out with help from many professionals, but he became an **informed** consumer and made an informed decision that dramatically contributed to his well-being for the remainder of his life.

Let me add to this that a recent article in "Consumer Reports in Health" (November, 1993) states that a "good patient," not wanting to bother the doctor, is sicker longer and dies sooner than the aggressive patient who finds information from outside sources and asks good questions.

Clearly, the well-informed individual not only becomes empowered to make the right choices and decisions conducive

to lowering health risks but also benefits from cost reductions and fewer health care expenses.

In Montgomery County, we also are fortunate to have the online Public Access Catalog (PAC) in each of our public libraries, which contains a lot of information to help anyone begin searching a health topic. You could, for example, determine which branch might have items on the shelf for the subject you need. A simple call to the branch will ensure that the librarian can check the shelf for availability and hold it, or, transfer the material to a more convenient location. Another option would be to call a branch and place a computer hold on the item if it is currently unavailable.

And, bear in mind, that if you have a PC with modem, you can always dial up and access the PAC. Beyond basic materials and books on health, the PAC also offers several significant opportunities for those interested in searching for health information: Magazine Index, UNCOVER, and Business Index (maybe more for health care reform issues). Equally important is the Montgomery County Community Information database (MCCI) on the PAC, which includes organizations, foundations, local agencies and support groups related to health or to a specific disease. MCCI actually includes much more, but health information remains an essential component. To cite several examples, a parent with a child having attention deficit disorder can key in those words as a search strategy and find groups listed that might be helpful as an information source or support group, etc. In a similar manner, one could find information on groups or foundations or programs dealing with breast cancer, smoking cessation, etc.



A little later on, I will be demonstrating the use of the PAC to seek health and health-related information. I also have brought copies of our brochures, which illustrate how you can access the PAC from home, office, or school, and provide details about the excellent resources available at Wheaton's HIC.

Access to information resources, particularly health information is obviously vital for all library users. Our public libraries are dedicated to making all library sites and services fully accessible.

In fact, Montgomery County Government and the Department of Public Libraries have had a long-standing and major commitment to providing access to individuals with disabilities. Over the last few years, our building renovation projects, as well as new facilities, have met relevant standards at the time of their renovation or construction. And, now, with revised standards, as defined by the ADA, the County is targeting major funding once again. For the Library Department, retrofitting our libraries over the next three years, will total \$649,750.

While overall building compliance is viewed on a Countywide basis, programmatic compliance to the ADA is the responsibility of each department within County government. We are making considerable progress toward this end, but with diminished budgets, we are moving less quickly than is desirable.

LSCA funding, however, can and already has made a very positive impact. Through LSCA support, we are moving rapidly toward achieving the goal of full ADA compliance and meeting the information needs of people with disabilities.

Many of our public libraries, for example, are equipped with the following enhancements: audio loops in meeting rooms, closed caption videos (regular and rental collections), closed circuit TV (CCTV) for print enlargement, copy machines with enlargement capability, homebound services (books mailed to patron's home or delivered by volunteers to qualifying patrons), study carrels at wheelchair height, telecommunications devices for the deaf (TDD/TTY), and wheelchair accessibility (parking, curb cuts, aisles, rest rooms, automatic door openers).

Most recently, a combination of five LSCA grants, totaling \$108,000, was awarded to our Library System. These funds will enable us to plan for the installation of new and enhanced technologies that are in full compliance with ADA requirements: purchase PCs and a Fax machine for the Special Needs Library, specially equipped PCs for 10 of our other public libraries, and microcomputer enhancements for CD-ROM workstations, the latter of which will extend the Rockville Regional Library's Local Area Network (LAN), itself funded in large measure by LSCA monies. Public Service Desks, both Information and Circulation, also will receive much needed modifications as a result of this funding.

In conclusion, I want to say that I am extremely proud of the leadership role which our public libraries have assumed in providing so many opportunities to access the information we need -- information that, as we have heard today, can help us make the right choices as informed consumers to promote and ensure our own continuing health and that of our families and friends -- indeed, of all those who bring and add meaning to our lives.

Thank you very much.