

PLANNING FOR DIVERSITY AT MONROE COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

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The American Library Association's Bill of Rights and its call for equitable access to all has long guided Monroe County Public Library (MCPL) and its mission. These broad statements of purpose guide MCPL in the creation and implementation of a Strategic Plan that will tend to the needs of our constituents. Libraries with current work plans or those writing new three to five year plans may consider access initiatives similar to those that currently guide MCPL. The following are results of initiatives that have directed the maintenance of useful collections, relevant programming, and helpful outreach services.

A current initiative at MCPL, "*To Provide Responsive Service that Meets the Community's Needs and Interests*," and its goal to "*provide services and collections to address emerging demographic trends*" have generated many service results. The growth of the collection can do much that the work plan requires.

Specifically, an objective of the goal is to "*Establish a foreign language materials budget line*." This line item has gone primarily to the establishment of a Spanish Language collection with an eye toward an Asian collection in the near future. The development of this area has been overseen by librarian Bobby Overman. She has helped with the purchase of adult books, magazines, newspapers, fotonovelas, and ESL materials targeted toward Spanish speakers. She has purchased children's and adult materials, such as CDs, DVDs, videos, and has acquired a computer with a Spanish interface.

Overman describes the efforts to alert current and future patrons to this new collection. "We have Espanol signs above the collection as well as end of shelf signs showing patrons where the Spanish materials are. We also came up with the slogan "Bienvenidos". We wanted patrons to associate this slogan with the Spanish collection so we make sure to display this slogan on the library materials that we have translated into Spanish, including brochures, hand-outs, Web pages and fliers. We also have a bilingual library card application."

"We have PSAs (Public Service Announcements) in Spanish on local radio stations and on the local Spanish language program 'Hola Bloomington'; we have a column in the *Boletín Comunitario (Community Bulletin)* and we highlight the Spanish collection on our website," according to Overman.

Knowing that publicity and marketing this new collection is crucial, Overman continues, "Every year we try and have a presence at local Latino events such as the Festival Latino and the Latino Summer Festival. We also highlight the Spanish collection at the County Fair and the Meadowood Health Fair as well as speaking to local ESL groups and presenting at library conferences. Every month we attend meetings of community leaders who are serving the Latino community. This helps us network with other community organizations and allows us to keep them apprised of what services and materials the library has to offer to the Spanish-speaking community. It also helps us find out what their needs are and how we can help meet those needs."

Beyond collection dollars, efforts have included a community kiosk with information from local and state agencies written in Spanish. The kiosk materials are free for patrons to take and include information on housing, employment, soccer clubs, health, education and legal issues.

Realizing that people make the difference, Overman explains recent staffing decisions. "Recently the library has hired bilingual staff. Many of our bilingual staff are well known in the community, which helps our Spanish-speaking patrons feel a bit more comfortable when coming to the library. Seeing a familiar face can make all the difference to patrons who don't speak English. It also helps us to get the word out about our collection since these staff members go out into the Spanish community and talk about what MCPL has to offer."

As to getting the word out, Outreach Manager Chris Jackson, has had a full plate reaching goals set out by the current MCPL work plan. The Outreach Services department has a history of innovative service and Jackson observes, "As the manager of an Outreach department, I tend to focus primarily on two categories

of users: those that use one of our library buildings, and everyone else. We concern ourselves with the latter, and then place special emphasis on groups for whom we perceive barriers in regards to the buildings: seniors, financially disadvantaged, the geographically remote, the incarcerated, preschoolers, the disabled, etc."

Currently, under the same initiative that drives the new Spanish language collection, there is the further objective *"Increase proportional levels of service (materials, programs, etc.) to the growing, 65+ population."*

Jackson and his department often serve seniors on the Bookmobile and he and his staff have observed usage patterns of this demographic, "When talking about seniors there's a tendency to think the relevant collections are large print and audiobooks, with an emphasis on inspirational fiction and cozy mysteries. But when I think of the senior patrons we work with every week, most don't fit that stereotype. Yes, a much greater percentage of seniors read large print when compared to other user groups. But we've got some seniors who hate large print. And their reading, viewing and listening interests are as varied as any other demographic."

With knowledge about the diversity among seniors, another initiative involving Outreach will help Jackson reach the seniors and the very youngest residents as well. The initiative, "Expand Access to the Library" has as one goal, *"Monroe County residents will have excellent access to library facilities and services,"* and an objective of this goal is to *"Add a van-based outreach vehicle for homebound service and deposit collection delivery."*

Jackson has been directing the purchase and use of a new van for this objective. "For us, it's a matter of making sure we provide library services to as much of the community as we can. We like to think of our library buildings as open, inviting places, but you have to have the time and the means to get to them. So who would use our buildings, but doesn't because of barriers? The obvious group is those with limited mobility, e.g., both ends of the age spectrum, as well as individuals with certain disabilities. We will try to serve these groups with our deposit collections to daycares and nursing homes."

"Previously we met the needs of some seniors who could not easily visit the branches through Bookmobile stops and our homebound service. However, many older patrons were unable to navigate the vehicle's steps, and the one-to-one nature of homebound deliveries is both inefficient and limited to items we've pre-selected. We decided to establish service inside senior living facilities. We now provide a browsing

collection to area seniors for whom the Bookmobile is not a good option."

Jackson is using two models for this service: lobby stops and deposit collections. Lobby stops involve transporting carts inside nursing homes and senior housing, often setting up in a lobby. Jackson explains, "We typically bring one cart of large print fiction, one cart of regular print fiction, one cart of print non-fiction, one cart of audiobooks, and one cart of videos and DVDs. We use a sixth cart as a portable circulation desk, employing a laptop with wireless Internet access to connect to our integrated library system. Patrons may browse the carts, which we tailor to their interests, and/or place holds for specific items out of the larger library collections."

"Deposit collections, on the other hand, are items that we drop off at nursing homes, but don't directly circulate to the end users. Instead, nursing home staff will make the items available to their residents. Each facility decides which service will work best for them, and several have chosen to have both a lobby stop and a deposit collection," says Jackson.

"Having established deposit collections for seniors, we realized the same model could be used at daycares. We used to have several Bookmobile stops at local daycares, and they were quite successful," explains Jackson. "However, there are far too many daycares for us to visit them all with the Bookmobile, and we were not able to justify why we provided the service at some daycares and not others. The deposit collections are much more efficient from a staffing perspective, and we are able to visit all daycares that fall under the "Licensed Child Care Facility" designation as established by the state, including local Head Start facilities."

Bringing books to children and interpreting the collection through programming has always been a role of Children's Services. Children's Services Manager Patty Callison has been leading her team as they consider the goal, *"The library will provide services and collections to address emerging demographic trends"* and the specific work plan objective, *"Increase the number of multicultural program offerings by 25%."*

The department has always had a great deal of diversity in their collection, in the audience attending programs and in the content of programs. The measurable objective to increase multicultural offerings helps keep diversity a part of every planning discussion. For Callison, the discussion begins with defining the objective. "The question posed by this objective is "What is multicultural programming?" Is it programming for an ethnic or cultural group in the community, is it programming for the greater community which features different cultures in the community, or is it

exposing *all patrons* to cultures which may not even exist in great quantity in the community? Children's Services decided that it was all of these perspectives and with approval from the library administration, we sought various programming partners and opportunities."

With the help of partners in the community, Children's Services has exceeded expectations of the initiative, "*To Provide Responsive Service that Meets the Community's Needs and Interests*", and Callison points to a few colorful examples.

"A recurring event," says Callison, "Say It in Spanish," is a cooperative program with the Templeton Elementary/Shalom Family Resource Center. With money from the Lilly Endowment CAPE grants (Community Alliances to Promote Education), the Family Resource Center has partnered with the library to provide once-a-week programming in the Preschool Exploration Center housed in Children's Services. The Resource Center has provided a bilingual educator, Nancy Armstrong, who has established strong ties to the Monroe County Latino community. With her connections, Armstrong has attracted preschoolers and their parents to this program of stories, songs and activities. Most of the activities are carried out in Spanish but the program is also open to non-Spanish speakers.

Children's Services has used its part of the Spanish collection money from a 2004 LSTA (Library Services and Technology Act) Mini Grant to buy print materials supportive of preschool programming."

"The next step is to look for sustainability for the program when the CAPE grant money is gone. In the meantime, this program has set a model for a new program at MCPL titled "Arabic Immersion," says Callison. "The program is conducted by native Arabic speakers with an interest in providing a language and cultural immersion for children of Arab descent and interested community members."

Callison points to one further example of programming that helps achieve the objective. "A program called 'Lunar New Year' started as an outreach program of Indiana University's Asian Culture Center. It was initially a small program of crafts and food provided by the center and storytelling provided by the Children's librarians; the first event attracted about fifty people. In surveying participants, we found that participants wanted more of a cultural experience. In later years, an entire performance segment was added. It included Chinese Sword Dancing, Korean Mask Dancing, instrumental and vocal musical performances by adults and children in the community and such attractions as Chinese Yo-Yo demonstrations and a storytelling segment still presented by Children's Services staff. The crafts and food still follow the performance and the program now attracts about 300 participants, many of whom are Asian and look at our celebration as a way of

celebrating their own holiday with their children. Korean, Chinese, and Vietnamese patrons mix with families from the United States, Sweden, Germany and other populations represented in the community. The program is now in its tenth year and the entire community looks forward to this time."

Callison states that Children's Services has looked for other opportunities to provide multicultural programming that also highlights the collections. "The department has partnered with the fall Lotus World Music and Arts Festival to provide music and storytelling in the library and at other venues and at the Lotus Blossoms spring event, which this year will feature Ladysmith Black Mambazo. The entire library is working with the Hispanic Culture Festival which occurs in the fall and will feature music, stories, and tours of the library. In this way, adults and children in the community are brought in to the library for events which also expose them to the many special services and programs of the library."

As library staff members develop service to non-English speakers, continue to reach out to patrons and share culture with children and families, other library efforts are in motion as well. CATS (Community Access Television Station) provides public access to governmental meetings, the SCOLA International News station and provides equipment and training for the community to produce their own programming. The Information Systems department made advances in email notification and online room reservation for nonprofit groups. VITAL (Volunteers in Tutoring Adult Learners) staff contributes with one-on-one tutoring and with expanding ESL classes. The Administration is continually proactive in gathering and responding to all comment forms and input from users and has informational materials available in Spanish.

Our community is changing, and we find ourselves having to develop new initiatives to ensure access to all. Programs and services that met local needs in the past are still worthwhile, but unless modified they may well exclude new members of the community, or members whose lifestyles are now different. Like all libraries in the state, Monroe County remains dedicated to assessing and responding to the needs of the county it serves with equitable access always in mind.

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