

Library Services Behind Bars

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Providing library services to those behind bars can be controversial, challenging, and ultimately beneficial to our society. The United States prison population is diverse and growing. This growth has resulted in a substantial increase in the incarceration rate of certain segments of the population. The information needs of inmates are similar to those of the general public, but the growth of these segments has made some needs even more critical. Until the 1930s, the prison libraries that did exist lacked support and professional standards. Currently, professional standards exist, but support for these institutions varies.

This article describes the prison population and its information needs, particularly of those growing segments. A brief history of prison libraries in the United States is followed by the results of a survey of prison librarians. This survey reveals some of the realities of the prison library environment, including both the challenges and rewards. Information on services being provided to local jails and prisons by some public libraries is also provided. Finally, two voices from behind bars briefly describe their thoughts on prison libraries.

At the end of 2005, there were 2,320,359 inmates in custody in the United States. This included people being held in all federal, state and territorial prisons; facilities operated by or for the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement; military facilities; jails in Native American territories; and local jails. Nearly 2.2 million inmates were held in state and federal prisons and county and municipal jails. One in every 136 United States residents was in a prison or jail as of December 31, 2005 (Harrison & Beck, 2006), and one in every 32 adults was either in jail or prison, or on probation or parole (Office of Justice Programs, 2006). These statistics place the United States in the number one position for the rate of incarceration in the world, with 714 per 100,000 residents imprisoned. Belarus, Bermuda, and Russia are tied for second place with 532 per 100,000. The rates of incarceration for other industrial nations are much lower; for example, in Australia, the rate per 100,000 is 126, in Canada 107, and in Japan 62 (Walmsley, 2005).

The United States is a diverse country, and this diversity is reflected in its prison population. However, some groups are more likely to be incarcerated than others. Forty percent of inmates serving more than one year are Black, 35% are White, and 20% are Hispanic (Harrison & Beck, 2006, p. 8). In fact, 8% of Black males between the ages of 25 and 29 were in a state or federal prison compared to 2.6% of Hispanic males and 1.1% of White males in the same age group (Harrison & Beck, 2006). Many of

these inmates are poor and uneducated. In fact, according to data gathered from the National Adult Literacy Survey, 70% of inmates scored at a below-fourth-grade literacy level, and other research states that 75% of inmates are below a twelfth-grade level of literacy. Nineteen percent are completely illiterate (Mentor & Wilkinson, n.d.). Sixty-eight percent of all state prisoners did not receive a high school diploma (Harlow, 2003).

De-institutionalization and the closings of state and local psychiatric facilities have resulted in an increase in mentally ill prisoners (Strickland, 2002; Doebler & Patton, 2003). According to the *Washington Post*, it is estimated that there are five times more mentally ill people in jails and prisons in the United States than in state mental hospitals (Strickland, 2002). Studies indicate that female inmates have higher rates of mental health problems than male inmates. In state prisons, 73% of women and 55% of men suffered from some type of mental health problem. Those percentages were even higher in local jails, with 75% of women and 63% of men suffering from some form of mental illness. A large percentage of these groups (74% of state prisoners and 76% of local jail inmates) also met the criteria for substance dependence or abuse (James & Glaze 2006).

A study by the National Center on Institutions and Alternatives published in 1998 found that there has been substantial growth in the elderly population of prisons over the last several decades. In 1979, there were 6,500 prisoners over the age of 55 in state and federal prisons, and by 1990, this number had increased to 20,000. In 1997, there were more than 50,000, and it is predicted that by the year 2010 this number will be around 200,000 (Hoelter, 2001). Elderly inmates often have the health status of a person up to ten years their senior (Enders, Paterniti & Meyers, 2005). There is also a group classified as "old" young offenders. Because of a history of drug use, multiple sexual partners, and lack of proper health care and diet, these prisoners under the age of 50 have health problems similar to those of the elderly (Anderson & Hillard, 2005).

About 15% of the inmate population in federal, state, and local jails is Hispanic, and Hispanics make up nearly one in three federal prisoners. They are the fastest growing group being imprisoned. In some states, the percentage of Hispanic inmates is much higher. In New Mexico, 53% of inmates are Hispanic, and in New York, the percentage is 32.6 (National Institute of Justice, 2000). Hispanics in the United States are more likely to be low-income and to report having poor health (The Sentencing Project, 2003).

As immigration trends change, other ethnic groups are growing within the inmate population. In Hawaii, 44.5% of the prisoners are Asian American. Koreans, Vietnamese, and Russian inmates are making up an increasingly higher percentage of prisoners. In some prisons, such

as the Mira Loma Facility in California, where inmates who are fighting deportation are held, the cells are filled with non-English speakers (National Institute of Justice, 2000).

In Washington state, a study was done to identify the needs of learners in order to improve English-as-a-second-language programs in correctional settings. About 15% of those incarcerated in Washington were from countries other than the United States. A majority of them were from Spanish-speaking countries. Many others were from Asian countries, mainly Vietnam (Gunn, 1999). The study found that ESL learners were concerned with their own low literacy levels and wanted to learn the rules of English. There were also frequent requests for Spanish lessons by English-speaking inmates and officers (Gunn, 1999).

Although the incarceration rate for women is significantly lower than that for men in the United States, their numbers are growing. At the end of 2005, 107,518 women were in prison, a figure that represents a 57% increase since 1995 (Harrison & Beck, 2006). Golden (2005), citing the *The Real War on Crime: The Report of the National Criminal Justice Commission*, says that

two-thirds of the women in prison are minorities, about half ran away from home as youths, a quarter had attempted suicide, and a sizable number had serious drug problems. Over half had been victimized by physical abuse and a third reported sexual abuse. Most had never earned more than \$6.50 an hour (p. 5).

Many of these women have children. According to Mumola (as cited in Golden, 2005), 50% of the incarcerated mothers in a California study were unemployed in the month before they were arrested, and 70% did not have a high school diploma.

The exploding prison population has caused a huge increase in the number of children with incarcerated parents. In 2005, there were 1.5 million children under age 18 with a parent in prison (Shirley, 2006). About 65% of inmates have children under the age of 18, and 6% of women entering prison are pregnant (Kazura, 2001). Estimates show that 10% of children under 18, or 7 million children, have parents who are under some form of correctional supervision. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, approximately 75% of female inmates are mothers and two thirds have children under 18—and 72% of those inmates lived with those children before entering prison. From 1990 to 2000, there was an 87% increase in the number of mothers in jail, and a 61% increase in fathers in jail (Lee, 2005). Obstacles to visitation, such as lack of transportation and having no one to accompany the children to the correctional facility, result in many of these parents and children not seeing one another throughout the course of the parent's incarceration.

The information needs of prisoners are in many ways similar to the information needs of the general public. According to *Library Standards for Adult Correctional Institutions* (Association for Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies [ASCLA], 1992),

Library services shall address the basic needs of inmates for

- a) information on institution regulations and procedures
- b) information to maintain contact with the outside community
- c) information on vocational skills
- d) educational information
- e) support for rehabilitative programs (e.g. substance abuse)
- f) self-directed reading for lifelong learning and personal needs
- g) recreational reading
- h) information on reentry into the community (e.g. job skills, housing) (p. 11).

Various types of needs have emerged as a result of the growth of the previously mentioned groups within the prison population. Health information, information for non-English speakers, and parenting information are three of the most important emerging information needs within today's prisons. These information needs are not specified in the list of needs to be addressed in the 1992 ALA library standards, but these and other needs require the attention of prison library facilities.

Of course, providing medical reference material much like that which is found in a public library can be of great service to prisoners. As in any library, this information should be kept current. Enders, Paterniti, and Meyers (2005) found that in addition to disproportionately high incidences of cognitive deficits and learning disabilities among inmates, two thirds lack basic literacy skills. In response to their research, they developed *A Handbook for Choosing Healthcare Options through Information, Communication and Education (C.H.O.I.C.E.)*. The handbook uses simple language, graphics, and a picture glossary to provide health information and guidance in speaking with health care professionals.

Very accurate, easy-to-understand health information is plentiful on the Internet. Sites such as Medline Plus provide useful, comprehensible information which is also provided in Spanish. However, the digital divide is huge for the prison population. Because of cases where prisoners have used the Internet for criminal purposes, correctional officials see the Internet as a security issue and prisoners are not allowed direct access (Sullivan, 2000).

In the past decade, there has been an explosion of information sources available through the Internet, which is unavailable to most inmates. Inmates serving lengthy sentences may be greatly disadvantaged upon release because of their unfamiliarity with the Internet. In order to provide this useful information, librarians or others might make arrangements to search for information for the inmates.

The State Correctional Institution at Muncy, in Pennsylvania, has developed the Daily Adult Interactive Learning Experience (DAILE), one of the goals of which is to provide substance abuse, medical, psychological and psychiatric, social cognitive and educational, and vocational and pre-vocational information and programming to inmates (Doebler & Patton, 2003). Information on daily living skills, social services, and mental health treatment might make it easier for these prisoners to be successful once released. Libraries can help support programs such as this or provide programming to meet these needs.

Women in prison are more likely than men in prison or women outside of prison to suffer from illnesses, diseases, and injuries. They are also more likely to have been the victims of sexual or physical abuse. As a result, they are more likely to have participated in high-risk behaviors that result in an increased incidence of disease (Enders, Paterniti, & Meyers, 2005).

In order to make decisions and understand their health issues, it is important for these women to have health information. Responses from female inmates who participated in a focus group discussion conducted by Enders, Paterniti, and Meyers (2005) revealed that they had a limited understanding of medical terminology and normal and abnormal biological processes. It is important that health information be provided on the level at which the individual can understand it.

Libraries could tackle the task of providing materials and services to the growing elderly population in prisons with information on health issues common in the elderly. Offenders with special health needs, including the elderly, are kept in the general prison population for as long as possible for cost-efficiency and self-sufficiency (Anderson & Hillard, 2005). This strategy makes it important that this segment of the prison population have access to medical information. Information should be provided in a variety of formats, so that it is accessible for those with varying needs and disabilities.

Access to legal information is another critical need of those in correctional institutions. In fact, in the last few decades, the courts have become involved in issues concerning this information need. In 1971, the Law Enforcement Administration Act was passed by Congress. This act funded prison law libraries and provided budgets for other reading materials (Sullivan, 2000). In 1977, the Supreme Court ruled in *Bounds v. Smith* that

state prisons had to provide "meaningful access" to courts either through legal counsel or through law library collections. However, the state of legal information availability to prisoners is in limbo as a result of the 1996 Prison Litigation Reform Act, which limits prisoner access to civil courts, and the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act, which limits federal habeas corpus appeals. Also in 1996, the Supreme Court declared in *Lewis v. Casey* that the incarcerated do not necessarily have a right to a law library (Sullivan, 2000). According to the courts, the inmates must prove actual injury from the lack of access to legal materials in order to file suit (Westwood, 1998).

In Alaska, the department of corrections has recently contracted with Lexis-Nexis to provide a digital law library for inmate use. The inmates use the Internet to access the legal information, but the computers only route to Lexis-Nexis. The department of corrections has been very satisfied with this service, which has saved the department money, improved security, and helped the department avoid suits by inmates who might not have access to court-mandated legal information. Lexis-Nexis and other vendors offer a variety of products, both online and off, to meet the varying needs of correctional facilities (Etter, 2006). This type of set-up might also be useful for providing current health information.

A study of the needs perceived by incarcerated parents concerning their children showed a great deal of interest in obtaining information on parenting topics. The group of inmates in the study seemed very willing and motivated to improve their parenting skills. These parents wanted information on the effects of their incarceration on their children. They wanted to know how to deal with their children's stress and fear. They also wanted basic parenting information concerning discipline and caring for their children. They expressed concern about finances. They were worried about how to provide for themselves and their children upon release. Women seemed particularly interested in information on visitation, social support services, and the effects of their incarceration on their children (Kazura, 2001).

Other information needs of incarcerated parents revealed in the study include information on children's growth and development, parenting alone or parenting from a distance, child-care issues, and parental rights issues. Financial information needs included affordable housing, public assistance, educational opportunities, budgeting, and job training (Kazura, 2001). Some of the parents said that they needed help writing to their children's other parent. Low literacy rates among prisoners can make a task like writing a letter difficult.

Meeting the information needs of these parents can help support their relationship with their children, which is good for the children, the inmates, and the community (Lee, 2005). The existing literature suggests that "children of incarcerated parents suffer from both emotional and behavioral difficulties which often lead to problems such as academic failure, gang involvement, anxiety, drug abuse, and early pregnancy" (Kazura, 2001 p. 69).

Many public libraries have parenting collections which might serve as models for the types of collections that would be useful to incarcerated parents. Directories of social service agencies might also be helpful to parents who are incarcerated. A collection of children's books might give the inmates a chance to familiarize themselves with quality children's literature and practice reading such books. The children's material might also be useful to inmates with cognitive disabilities.

English-as-a-second-language instruction needs to be provided along with other basic adult education classes in prisons. The library can provide materials to support non-English speaking inmates in their efforts to learn English. Materials in Spanish or other languages predominant in the prison would also be helpful. Unfortunately, in today's political climate, there is a lack of support for providing resources for this group. In an informal survey conducted via an online prison library listserv, Shirley (2006) found that "collections and services are limited or almost non-existent for non-English speaking prisoners."

Other ways to aid the non-English speaking inmate include providing written translations and interpretation (on-site, telephonic, and videoconferencing). Spoken language technology is beginning to be used in correctional facilities. With this technology, a computer translates speech from one language to another (Heilman & Lawson, 2000). Voice Response Translators (VRTs) may also be used, though they are not as sophisticated. VRTs "sound out preprogrammed phrases in various languages to elicit desired responses in both routine and emergency situations involving non-English-speaking people" (Heilman & Lawson, 2000, p. 86). Spanish-as-a-second-language programming and materials should not be overlooked. Prisoners and prison employees may benefit from taking advantage of these opportunities and resources.

Collection development and intellectual freedom issues can be complicated in the prison environment. Recreational reading is an important way to keep inmates occupied and give them an escape from the boredom that can result from living in an institutional setting. Sometimes the most popular materials can also be the most controversial. In 1995, an article in *American Libraries* described a situation in South Carolina in which books from Holloway House publishers, who supply many of

the so-called "prison classics," sometimes known as "urban fiction," were removed after the media caused a stir about the fact that these materials were being purchased for prison libraries. Dick Coolidge, then director of library services for the state department of corrections, opposed the removal of the books despite the fact that they contained violence and explicit sex because they were some of the most popular materials in the library and the only books some inmates read. He felt that they played an important role in keeping the inmates occupied (Gaughan, 1995).

The physical format of library materials can sometimes pose a security risk to the institution. In 2006, the Michigan Department of Corrections discovered and prevented a plot to smuggle drugs into a correctional facility via interlibrary loan books. Someone planned to check out a book from the public library, cut the bindings, insert drugs, and then reseal and return the book. A prisoner would then request the book through interlibrary loan and retrieve the drugs once the book was delivered to them at the correctional facility (Prison Scam, 2006). Despite the risks and controversies surrounding the provision of library materials to prisoners, there are laws in place to ensure their access. California's Penal Code [Section 2601(c)], passed in 1975, states very clearly that prisoners have the civil right to

purchase, receive, read, and permit other inmates to read any and all legal materials, newspapers, periodicals, and books accepted by the U.S. Post Office, except those which describe the making of any weapon, explosive, poison, or destructive device. Nothing in this section shall be construed as limiting the right of the prison authorities (1) to open and inspect any and all packages received by an inmate, and (2) to establish reasonable restrictions as to the number of newspapers, magazines, and books that the inmate may have in his cell or elsewhere in the prison at one time (Rubin & Souza, 1989).

In some measure, books were always available in prisons in the United States, but conditions within the prison (such as inadequate lighting and cramped cells), were not conducive to reading. Most of the reading material that was provided was of a religious nature. According to Sutton (as cited in Geary, 2003), New York City's first prison library was established by local newspaper editor Edward Z. C. Judson, better known as "Ned Buntline." Buntline was imprisoned in 1849 for leading a riot at a New York opera house. While serving his sentence, he set up a library in the prison using his own money.

In the early 1900s, librarian Miriam E. Carey started organizing prison libraries in Minnesota, and soon after, the American Library Association began taking an interest. A national survey of prison libraries began

in 1927. The survey indicated that many prison libraries had large collections, but because they contained mostly discards and donations, many volumes needed weeding. Many prison libraries also had quite a few magazine subscriptions. Circulation figures were hard to decipher because of inconsistencies in tracking. None of the prison libraries at the time had librarians with professional library school training, though some got help from professional librarians. Some were run by people with undergraduate or even graduate degrees in other areas or by chaplains. Many were run entirely by inmates. Although some of the inmates used the library as a racket, many were very dedicated. In fact, three of the best prison libraries were run by inmates, two by inmates serving life sentences (one White and one African American), and one by a professional confidence man. The confidence man ran the McNeil Island Federal Penitentiary. He did such a good job that up until trained librarians were introduced into the system, his was the best prison library in the federal system (MacCormick, 1970).

From the 1930s to 1950, several publications were released to help guide prison librarians. These included *The Education of Adult Prisoners, a Survey and a Program*; *Prison Library Handbook*; *The Library Manual for Adult Correctional Institutions*; and two book lists. In 1956 and 1957, when the American Library Association was reorganized, the Association of Hospital and Institutional Libraries was established as a division of the ALA (MacCormick, 1970).

Another survey, conducted in 1965, indicated poor staffing, inadequate space, and inadequate collections as some of the problems that continued to be prevalent in prison libraries. In many cases, established standards were not being met (MacCormick, 1970). In 1966, *A Manual of Correctional Standards* was published jointly by the American Correctional Association and the American Library Association. In 1981, *Library Standards for Adult Correctional Institutions* was published by the same organizations. A 1990 survey of prison libraries helped provide information for the publication of the 1992 revision of the *Library Standards for Adult Correctional Institutions*. These standards are not for law libraries in prisons; it is recommended that they be funded and staffed separately from the general prison library. The American Association of Law Libraries publishes separate guidelines for law libraries in correctional institutions (ASCLA, 1992). As of today, no revised standards have been published by the ALA, but the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions published the third edition of its *Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners* in 2005. This document includes guidelines pertaining to information technology, marketing, and communication (Lehmann and Locke, 2005).

Changes in prison libraries are often based on changes in the political climate and the economy. There seems to be a constant shift between theories of punishment and theories of rehabilitation. For example, the

South Carolina state prison library system, once applauded for its excellence and innovative programs, including a pet therapy program proven to reduce violence, was vitiated when newly-elected governor David Beasley took office in 1995. Beasley's political agenda included a move to "get tough on crime." The pet therapy program was discontinued, most of the staff was dismissed—including the seventeen trustees who worked in the prison libraries—and a cumbersome approval system for purchasing library materials was put into place (Chepesiuk, 1995).

As the prison population continues to grow in the United States, crowding becomes a problem. The impact on rural areas is significant because of the high rate of prison construction in these areas. Two hundred forty-five new prisons were built in rural areas between 1990 and 1999, which amounts to a new prison opening every 15 days. Prisons, along with gambling casinos and large animal processing operations, make up the current top three economic industries in rural areas (Huling, 2002).

In order to better understand the prison library environment, I conducted a survey of prison librarians on the Prison-L listserv. The survey consisted of 26 questions. I received 14 responses. One was from a librarian in a juvenile correctional facility, one was from a jail librarian, and the others were from prison librarians. Eleven respondents reported that their libraries were located in rural areas. I also conducted brief interviews with two inmates serving time in a prison in a rural location.

A majority of the respondents were from facilities that housed minimum- and medium-security level inmates. Several housed inmates from more than one security level. The number of inmates housed in each facility ranged from 250 to 3,834. Three housed 250-500 prisoners, four housed 500-750, three housed 750-1,000, and three had more than 1,000. The percentage of inmates using the library in each facility varied between 25-30% and 90%. One respondent reported that 32% used it each day. Most reported that at least 60% or more of the inmates used the library regularly. The library with the greatest square footage and one of the largest collections was the one in which only 25-30% of the inmates used the library.

Of the 14 prison libraries from the Prison-L listserv survey, eight had at least one staff member with a master's degree in library science. Others were run by people with a variety of educational backgrounds. The lowest level of education obtained by the person running the library was a high school diploma. Quite a few had a master's degree in an area other than library science. All but two of them worked at least 40 hours per week. Their time on the job ranged from two months to 17.5 years. Half of them had been in their current position from four to eight years.

Few of the libraries represented in the study had more than one regular full-time staff member. Most used inmate assistants in the library. The inmate assistants come and go, and their educational backgrounds vary. One respondent said that over the years, he had had an inmate assistant who was a Yale graduate attending Columbia Medical School when convicted, a practicing lawyer, and several persons convicted of theft or murder. He also had one inmate, a member of a biker gang, who earned his Library Technical Assistant degree while working in the prison library for nine years. Most of the libraries had minimal educational requirements for inmate workers. Often they required them to at least have a GED. One of the respondents commented that the inmate clerks who were hired could be very loyal to their jobs and to the library and that their help was invaluable.

Another question on the Prison-L survey was What types of materials are most popular in your library. Every respondent mentioned fiction. Popular genres and authors outside of prison seemed to be equally popular inside. Fantasy and/or science fiction were specifically mentioned by almost all of the respondents that mentioned specific genres. Thrillers, horror, and suspense were popular genres, and westerns were mentioned more than once. One librarian mentioned Native American novels, and several mentioned African American fiction and urban fiction. One respondent reported that Stephen King, James Patterson, R. A. Salvatore, Walter Mosley, Sister Souljah, Carl Webber, Anne Rice, and Tim LeHaye were popular. True crime came up quite a few times in the survey responses and other readings. Newspapers and magazines were also reported as being read often. Graphic novels were popular in the juvenile facility. Books about animals and with pictures of animals were mentioned, as were books about art. One of the respondents mentioned that cookbooks were curiously popular with his patrons despite the fact that they had no facilities in which to actually use the recipes.

Half of the libraries surveyed on the Prison-L listserv reported that legal information was handled in a separate law library or by staff in another department. Of the ones that offered legal information in the library, few had staff with very much formal training. Most reported having small legal collections, some being described as dated, and a couple had access to legal databases such as Lexis-Nexis. One of the libraries offered a Law Clerk Training class once a year to teach inmates about legal research. Those who completed the class were eligible to work in the law library.

All respondents to the Prison-L survey indicated restrictions on certain types of materials. Some facilities had restrictions as to the types of formats they could provide, but most restrictions had to do with content. Materials that might cause a threat to the security of the facility were usually mentioned as being restricted. Almost universally, materials that would aid in escape or criminal behavior; materials with instructions on making

explosives, weapons, or alcohol; materials containing explicit or deviant sex; and materials promoting hatred or violence against certain groups were restricted. Some of the libraries reported receiving material restriction lists. One of the respondents provided examples of higher authorities being consulted if an inmate's request for material was questionable. One was poetry by Tu Pac Shakur. Would it be considered gang material? Another was material on the history of dog fighting. Would this be historical and informative or would it encourage criminal behavior? For a librarian who has been taught the importance of access and intellectual freedom, adhering to facility-imposed restrictions can be a challenge.

Most of the respondents to the Prison-L survey reported offering programming in their libraries, although time restraints prevented some from providing any. The libraries often offer support for inmates' educational pursuits. Programs include GED instruction, literacy classes, college-curriculum support, typing instruction, vocational education, English-as-a-second-language instruction, and instruction in using the library itself. One library sponsored an activity called 'reference bingo' in which inmates are taught how to use the library in hopes that they will continue using libraries once they leave prison. Some offered support for drug and alcohol treatment programs, and one offered anger management programs. Life skills classes were mentioned by another respondent. Creative writing and poetry classes, workshops, and contests were frequently offered. A few of the respondents mentioned offering or hoping to offer speakers and author visits.

Several of the libraries offered programs that helped prepare the inmates for life after prison. Several of the libraries offered a program called Read to a Child. This program allows inmates to read up to three children's books a month onto tape. The tapes and books, along with a coloring book and crayons, are sent to their child or children. The inmate only has to pay for the postage cost. One of the libraries had a book discussion group called Able Minds, which attempts to alter behavior through literature and discussion. Another library had a creative writing workshop which was conducted by professors from a local university.

With the exception of the juvenile facility, all of the respondents to the Prison-L survey reported having inmates who spoke English as a second language. Most of them reported those inmates as being Spanish speakers, but one mentioned having inmates at some time who spoke French, Dutch, Polish, Russian, Vietnamese, Moroccan Arabic, and some African dialects. Eight offered Spanish language materials, though several thought these collections were inadequate. One offered a limited amount of materials in Korean, Vietnamese, and Chinese. Three of the respondents reported having at least one bilingual (English and Spanish) inmate library worker.

Another had one Spanish-speaking adult education teacher and also a high percentage of bilingual correctional officers. ESL classes were offered by some of the libraries, and one offered GED instruction for Spanish speakers.

Ten of the Prison-L survey respondents reported offering interlibrary loan services at their libraries. Several mentioned that this service was heavily used by the inmates. The jail library did not offer this service because of the nature of their program. One of the respondents stated that interlibrary loan services were not being offered at the time because there had been no staff training in the process. Another facility had to quit offering interlibrary loan services because the state would not keep paying for books lost by inmates and because the state-wide interlibrary system changed to an Internet-based system. These factors made the price of interlibrary loan service considerably higher, and it was too inconvenient to use when the Internet-capable computer was not in the library. (Possible security problems associated with having an Internet-capable computer located in the library were deemed too high to justify its use for this purpose.)

The survey respondents were asked to describe the challenges of running a prison library. Some of the challenges, like inadequate space and funding, were similar to those in other libraries, particularly rural ones. Other challenges involved issues unique to the prison environment. These included security issues, dealing with other prison staff, and manipulation by inmates.

Lack of physical space was mentioned as an issue at several of the libraries in the survey. Ten of the respondents to the survey were able to provide square footage estimates for their facilities. The smallest library had only 400 square feet and the largest had 18,000 square feet. One of the libraries had 5,000 square feet and the rest had less than 1,600 square feet each. The jail library was a service provided by the local public library, and their books were housed off-site. Of the four respondents who did not know the square footage of their library, one mentioned that their facility was small, and another said that it was half the size it should be. Library square footage did not correlate with the amount of inmates in the facility. The library with the least square footage per inmate had 400 square feet in a facility that housed 1,056 inmates. Some of the respondents reported that their facilities were accessible to people with physical disabilities. One responded that they tried to accommodate those with physical disabilities in any way they could. One reported access to the library being tricky for a person who is using a wheelchair and another could not accommodate anyone with hearing problems or who was unable to climb stairs in the facility. Most of the libraries provided some types of services to inmates in isolation.

Funding was mentioned by almost all of the survey respondents as a challenge. It was often cited that budget cuts had decreased money for collections and made it challenging, if not impossible, to maintain a collection with up-to-date materials. One respondent reported having no real materials budget and barely scraping up enough for office materials (paper, ink cartridges, etc.). Another said that although the facility was run by a multi-million-dollar corporation, there was no budget, and they had to rely on charity for materials. Budget restrictions had prevented another facility from having a computer for cataloging. The juvenile facility reported budget constraints as being a particular challenge because their items do not last long due to heavy usage.

Like many rural librarians, the respondents to the survey felt that not having enough time was a problem. One said that as library technicians, they played the role of director, circulation librarian, ILL librarian, reference librarian, cataloging librarian, and any other roles as needed. One mentioned often being short-handed, as there was quite a high turnover with staff. Getting the inmates to come to work was cited as a problem for one of those surveyed. Another mentioned that being so far from any other prison required learning almost everything independently. One was really bogged down with work some days and could not be in the library as much as was desired. A respondent complained of trying to provide access to materials and getting no help from anyone. Another said that he made a lot of photocopies, though he thought he had given that up a long time ago when he got his MLIS. One of the respondents looked at the challenges in a more positive light and said that being in the prison library had allowed for gains in confidence and self-esteem from working in a library that allowed the utilization of many skills not previously utilized.

Dealing with correctional officers within the institution was expressed as a particularly challenging area by some of the respondents. One cited being misunderstood by the guards, who thought library staff were just an annoyance because they were providing a service to inmates. One respondent said that some officers are helpful, others are lazy. Following procedures that are set by the facility and establishing a respectful atmosphere were also cited as challenges. One respondent mentioned feeling that there was not enough training for working in a correctional environment. Others said that being a librarian in a prison was like being a guest in another's house and that as non-custody staff, library staff must realize that they do not run the show. Another respondent complained of having absolutely no communication with anyone in the facility because the library isn't located in a good spot and doesn't really fit with the mission of the facility. The respondent from the jail library described access to the inmates when the service is scheduled as being a challenge because deputy shortages can cause disruption of services.

Dealing with inmates could also be a challenge. The survey revealed that inmates respect straight-forwardness, firmness, fairness, and most of all consistency. Inmates often express satisfaction, but the jail or prison environment breeds negativity, occasionally directed at library staff. The inmate population can be demanding because they don't have anything else to do in their lives and expect the library to provide them with everything. One respondent also noted that having a naturally gregarious nature and being soft-hearted has been a challenge because this behavior is not good in a prison setting. Learning new ways of relating and toughening up a bit were required in order to succeed at that particular job. One of the respondents said that the prison where he worked was for sex-offenders and was located in a rural area and run by a private company with a history of human rights abuses, which made him feel like a "fascist" some days.

Security was cited as being very important in the prison setting. One respondent said that security is number one and that there was always a potential for violence in the library. Another mentioned feeling like a guard for up to thirty inmates at a time because they were all in the library and in need of supervision. He also mentioned that he sometimes had to make copies of legal materials on a copier that was located in a separate room down the hall which required his having to leave the library and hope the inmates didn't destroy it. Being expected to know how to operate a two-way radio and all the radio codes without the benefit of the six-week guard training course was also mentioned as an issue. If the choice comes down to a security issue, security will almost always win.

Some of the librarians said that they were the security for the library. Others were not allowed to open without a correctional officer present. Four said that correctional officers came in to check on the library every hour or so or that correctional officers were stationed near the library. Other security measures included handheld radios, panic buttons, phones, and cameras. One reported having been trained in self-defense.

Extreme damage to materials and theft of books were mentioned as problems at more than one library. One had problems with inmates giving magazines to their friends. Another respondent said that they had a section of popular books on art, poetry, and weightlifting that required a signed withdrawal slip against an inmate's account before being taken from the library. These books had to go through the time-consuming process of being checked page by page each and every time they were checked out and any damage documented and charged to the inmates.

One of the survey respondents said that the prison library could be a very stressful environment that requires one to be on his toes at all times to make sure that patrons are not being manipulative. In fact, the risk of manipulation by offenders was cited as an issue by several other respondents.

One mentioned that inmates would try to pull mind games on staff and that staying one step ahead of the inmates was another challenge, since inmates sometimes lie. Another said that some inmates were kind and respectful, while others were angry and filled with attitude, and from day one a warning was issued to new library staff not to trust anyone, which was a hard thing to do and caused a longing for a regular working environment where there was more closeness and camaraderie.

Several survey respondents elaborated on the rewards of their jobs. Here are some of their thoughts.

I have found that some inmates are pleasant to be around and can be moderately trusted[,] and the same goes for officers[,] and by focusing on improving the library within the restraint of corrections, headway is being made.

I spent most of my career as a rare book librarian in universities and a private research library. Prison librarianship is not something I ever thought I would be involved in, but I find it extremely rewarding. I would highly recommend it to anyone who wants to genuinely make a difference to an underserved population.

Working in a prison library is very rewarding. Our patrons appreciate us more than any others I have worked with. They have no other options for reading materials and information unless they have family that can send it to them. We have to have a good rapport with the offenders as we don't have a lot of security[,] and we are usually alone with quite a few offenders at one time. It isn't for everybody, but I would recommend it for those who think they might like it.

You can provide a human face to inmates. You can provide a great service to men in difficult circumstances. Almost all of these folks will get out of prison someday. You could be the one that provided that opportunity for the inmate to see their future differently.

It is enjoyable to work in this setting[,] and the inmates are super appreciative of any help they receive[,] and it's satisfying to start with an inmate with an attitude and bring him around to see that not all staff are cops, and that if he will make an effort to be cooperative and pleasant, his time in the library can also be pleasant.

I have worked in both a public and prison library. I find that prison library most rewarding. Many offenders were street kids who never entered a library and certainly never got an education while on the streets. I have the extreme pleasure of introducing offender to the joys of the library and encouraging a lifelong love of reading. I believe that reading is the key to education[,] which is the key to reintegration. I know that the materials I use with the offender

population have the potential to show them a different route than prison. These include books on careers, resumes, and cover letters, business and self improvement. I have seen offenders with very little reading skills progress to reading large books with ease. These are offenders who started out with the toddler level books. I have seen offenders who never set foot in a library beam with joy at the varied books and other items available to them in a library.

The prison library and other libraries can also serve as important sources of information for personnel who work with the prison population. Just as in a public library, where materials are selected to meet the information needs of the diverse population being served, so the prison library should strive to meet the diverse needs of the population within its confines. At some point, 95% of state prisoners will return to the community (Shirley, 2006). Providing information they will need upon release is important to them, their families, and society as a whole.

Libraries outside of prison may also play a role in providing services to the prison population. The successful Books without Barriers program implemented by the Multnomah County Library in Portland, Oregon, teaches incarcerated parents to reach out to their children through shared reading. In a series of three weekly classes, the participants learn about brain development, the lifelong benefits of early literacy, using the library as a valuable resource, and how to choose and read books to their children. At the end of the classes, parents are videotaped reading a book to their children. The parents in these classes express guilt and regret over their past actions and loss of connection with their children. Though sometimes emotionally taxing, this activity provides a way for parents to connect to their children (Arnold, 2006). Similar programs exist in other libraries.

I requested information on public libraries in South Carolina that were providing services to prison libraries from Dr. Curtis Rogers, Interim Director of the South Carolina State Library. In response to my request, he sent a message to the public library directors' listserv asking if any of the library systems in the state were providing such services. Ten of the 12 respondents reported providing some type of service to a local correctional facility.

Both Marion County and Marlboro County reported having bookmobile stops to the local prisons (S. Davidson, personal communication, March 15, 2007; Marlboro County, personal communication, March 15, 2007). In the past, Fairfield County provided a bookmobile service to the local detention center in which inmates were able to actually come onboard the

bookmobile to select materials and request materials be brought to them on the next stop. A new warden was hired for the facility and changed the policy so that the inmates were no longer able to enter the bookmobile. The library continues to provide deposit books on request, but the service has diminished due to changes in detention center policies (S. McMaster, personal communication, March 15, 2007).

The Aiken-Barnwell-Bamberg-Edgefield Regional Library System provides materials to the Federal Correction Institute in Edgefield County through their outreach van (M. Dawson, personal communication, March 15, 2007). Clarendon County, Oconee County, and Anderson County Libraries give donated books to the local prison and/or jail (M. Tsigotis, personal communication, March 15, 2007; M. Bailey, personal communication, March 15, 2007; C. Stone, personal communication, March 15, 2007). The director of the Anderson County Library added that the Friends of the Anderson County Library donated a booktruck for the detention center and planned to provide donated books and other materials to the center (C. Stone, personal communication, March 16, 2007). The Pickens County Library also sends donations to the local prison and Law Enforcement Center and has plans to try to start providing some additional services (M. Keenan, personal communication, March 15, 2007).

Norris Wooten, director of the Williamsburg County Library, said that he toured the new federal prison in his county when it opened a couple of years ago and let them know that he would be interested in discussing the possibility of providing services. The prison did recently send one of their new librarians to the Williamsburg County Library for some training, but they had not expressed interest in having the public library provide any services (N. Wooten, personal communication, March 15, 2007). The Chesterfield County friends of the library group received a grant to do literacy work with the local prison, but the group has since become defunct; the hope is that the friends group will soon revive so that the project can be implemented (J. Carter, personal communication, March 15, 2007).

The Orangeburg County Library provided donated paperbacks to the Law Enforcement Center in the past, but the service ended because some inmates were flushing them down the toilets (P. Paul, personal communication, March 19, 2007). With the exception of Anderson and Pickens counties (Pickens is not considered rural because it is a bedroom community to a major metropolitan area), all of the library systems providing services to correctional facilities are located in rural areas (Office of Research and Statistics: SC State Budget and Control Board, n.d.).

In order to gain a better understanding of the impact of libraries on prisoners' lives, I conducted brief interviews with two prison inmates. Both of these men are currently being held in a prison in a rural town in South Carolina. The first inmate I interviewed had not used libraries before being sent to prison. He had been in a total of four different correctional facilities and was able to use the library in most of them. The libraries he used were only accessible at certain times and on certain days. He thought that services were pretty good, but the materials and books were limited, as most were donated. He said that his use of the prison libraries had "helped him gain knowledge and occupy his time through reading" and added that "most of the libraries in prison had air-conditioning and a very calm and quiet atmosphere" (Anonymous, personal communication, April 19, 2007). He planned to use libraries after he got out of prison.

The second inmate reported not really using libraries before prison. He had been in four correctional facilities and two county jails. He was able to use the libraries in the correctional facilities. The libraries he used were inmate-run for the most part and selection was sometimes limited because many of the books were donations. He found the law library helpful, but saw time and space as limited. He also reported that depending on the facility, it may take up to a month to get an appointment to use the law library. He added that the inmates who work in the libraries were very serious about the work, as were the librarians. He saw lack of funding as a major problem in prison libraries. He had worked in a prison library at one time. He described his duties as "stocking shelves, checking books out, and sometimes hunting down books" (Anonymous, personal communication, April 19, 2007). Both of these men expressed a positive attitude towards prison libraries and thought they were important and worthy of more support. They said that the facility they were currently in had no library, just a shelf of books for inmate use.

If rates of incarceration in the United States continue to grow at the current rate, services to prisoners will become increasingly important. This growing and underserved group, many of whom were unfamiliar with libraries outside of prison, provides an excellent audience for life-changing programming. New guidelines for libraries in correctional facilities are critical because of the rapid changes in technology and the exploding prison population. Information needs for the rapidly growing groups including women, the elderly, non-English speakers, and parents should be addressed. Technology needs to be present in more prison libraries. Recruitment and training of prison librarians is also important. Libraries both inside and outside of prisons should work together to meet the needs of this underserved group. This will be a challenge, especially in rural areas; however, it is necessary because quality library services are essential to promoting self-improvement in the lives of these inmates and their families.

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TITLE: Library Services Behind Bars
SOURCE: Bookmobile Outreach Serv 10 no2 2007

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