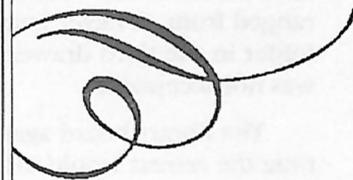


## MISSION STATEMENT--DO WE HAVE ONE?

*by Jenny Draper*



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library's mission statement typically seems to be several paragraphs long and in a nutshell states that this public library does everything for everyone using your tax dollars. And the Kendallville Public Library was no exception.

I started as director of the Kendallville Library in January 1998. As I sorted through drawers and file folders, I did run across the mission statement. I read it quickly (as quickly as I could read two paragraphs full of run-on sentences); didn't digest any of it and just as quickly stuck it back in the folder where it had been residing for who knows how many years. No one on the staff or board ever referred to the mission statement and it was not visible anywhere in the library. In other words, even though the library had a mission statement, it was virtually meaningless and was simply a bunch of words on a piece of paper that most people didn't even know existed (Figure 1).

### Figure 1: Kendallville Public Library Mission Statement (original)

The Kendallville Public Library is a tax supported service organization available to all people of the community and committed to acquiring, organizing, and providing access to information; serving as a source for self-education and personal enrichment; developing programs and services for people of all ages with a special emphasis on programs and services for children and others entering the world of reading; providing a center for recreational reading, listening, and viewing; furnishing supplementary resources for use by students, parents, and educators; making available facilities and resources for group interaction and community participation; and extending outreach services to special groups.

While formulating this statement, the Library is guided by professional standards. The Kendallville Public Library consciously supports and is supported by the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights and Freedom to Read statements which affirm that free and convenient access to ideas, information, and the creative experience is of vital importance to every citizen today.

Library board members felt that the mission of the library should be part of all decisions made and used in the daily operation of the library. A facilitator was hired and the board planned an all-day retreat to work on the Constancy of Purpose Statement. The day was productive; participants produced a document and promptly filed it away, never to be seen again. Even though this mission statement was considerably shorter than the previous one, it still had no real meaning to anyone working at the library. It was not a part of the day-to-day operations and was not referred to when making decisions about library services (Figure 2).

In 2001, the Kendallville Library was invited to take part in a series of Continuous Improvement workshops. Three staff members participated and began to implement many of the things they learned. It became clear early in this process that we needed serious

### Figure 2: Kendallville Public Library's Second Constancy of Purpose Statement

#### Mission Statement

The library is an educational, cultural, and social resource center that supports a community of learners. Equal access to services is provided to all in a safe, inviting environment, and the personal needs of individual patrons are met.

#### Vision statement

The library is committed to acquiring, organizing and providing current information materials, and services in a friendly inviting environment. This organization offers our community a place to access information and technology, meet, socialize and enjoy programs.

#### Value statement

The public library is the cultural heart of the community where people connect with one another, and where they receive quality access to their personal, informational, educational and recreational needs. A strong public library provides resources that enrich the lives of members of the community.

changes in the mission, vision, and values of this library. I was hard pressed to find a staff member who even knew there was a mission statement, let alone one who could tell me what the mission was. The answers ranged from, "I never heard of it" to "I think it is in a folder in the third drawer at the circulation desk." This was not acceptable.

The library board again hired a facilitator, but this time the retreat would include all staff as well as board members. The entire morning was spent drafting the library's values (Figure 3). Don't think this was easy with that many people in one room. When the draft document was finished, all participants were given a sticky note (using lots of colors makes this more fun). The sticky notes were to be used, without names, in a consensogram, to express agreement with the values as drafted. Each person was to rank their satisfaction using a range from 0 to 100 (in increments of 10) with 0 meaning total disagreement and 100 being complete agreement. Scores ranged from 75 to 100 with about half of the participants close to the 100 mark and the rest ranging from 75 to 90.

After lunch, the group tackled the mission statement. The first item of business was to determine just what a mission statement does and how it should be used by the organization. The library's mission statement is actually the library's promise to the community as to why the library exists and what the library is committed to providing for its customers. I was also convinced the mission should be short and easily remembered. With these things in mind we started brainstorming. At times it was truly a storm. The end result was as follows:

The Kendallville Public Library provides access to information.....for life.

It doesn't get much shorter than that. Using the sticky notes, we again did a consensogram to measure everyone's buy-in to the statement. This time the scores ranged from 70 percent to 100 percent agreement. The majority of participants were below the 100 percent level, with equal numbers at 70, 80, and 90 percent.

The next item we tackled was a vision statement. Even though we ran out of time before anyone felt we were completely finished, most participants were comfortable with the work we had produced (Figure 3).

The staff acknowledged that all of these documents were drafts and they wanted to "live" with them awhile before making a final decision. Copies of the Mission, Vision and Values were posted in the staff room, and staff was encouraged to continue to think about and discuss what had been accomplished. The consensogram charts were posted along with the draft documents. Staff members were allowed to move their

**Figure 3: Kendallville Public Library's Current Constancy of Purpose**



sticky notes if at some time their degree of satisfaction changed. During the three weeks the documents were posted, the sticky notes continued to move up. At the end of the three weeks almost all of the notes were at 90 percent or higher. The staff just needed time to think about our Mission, Vision, and Values—our Constancy of Purpose. This extra time allowed everyone to be more comfortable with the Constancy of Purpose statement.

The library's Mission statement is now on our newsletter, letterhead, program flyers, brochures, and

any other document we prepare for the public. The Mission statement is used in making decisions by staff members and board members. In fact, I would bet every person working at the Kendallville Public Library can tell you what our mission statement is without looking in the third drawer of the circulation desk. Even more importantly, they understand the mission and strongly endorse providing access to information for this community.

In June 2007, the Library moved into a new 42,000 square foot facility overlooking Bixler Lake and surrounded by park land. Employees come to work with smiles on their faces. The new facility incorporates several things that were in the Vision portion of the Constancy of Purpose statement.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Jenny Draper has been director of the Kendallville Public Library since January 1998. She received her MLS from IUPUI in 1996 and has been a member of ILF since 1993. She is very passionate about providing the very best public library service in Indiana.