

A Special Outreach

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Approximately nine hundred students in Tippecanoe County public schools receive special education services. These are children whose disabilities range from mild communication disorders to those with severe and profound physical disabilities.

Four years ago, as youth librarian in a public library, I was frustrated by the knowledge that we served only a small number of these youngsters. We searched for a way that we could reach more of these youth and signal to them, their parents, their teachers, the schools, and the community that we were eager and able to meet their library-related needs.

Due to the enthusiastic help given us by the special education teachers at Murdock Elementary school in Lafayette, for the last four years a librarian from the Tippecanoe County Public Library's Youth Department has been able to visit their classrooms once a month during the last semester of the school year. At each visit she:

1. brings each child specially selected materials
2. shares a book, flannel board story or fingerplay
3. takes time to listen to the student's requests for other subjects they

would like to read about.

The classes visited include rooms where the children are hearing impaired, one whose students have communication disorders, another of physically disabled students, a class of physically and mentally disabled children, and a group with severe and profound disabilities.

In order to have this program work efficiently for the special education teachers and for the public library, the following guidelines and responsibilities were worked out. In January each special education teacher at Murdock sends the Youth Department the names of her students, each child's interests, reading level, and needs in regards to material format ("Preschool level - simple preprimer reading level with noun verb sentence structure. Cardboard pages with just a few items per page. Interests are domestic animals, cooking, activities at home. Likes to be read to.") The public library keeps a loose-leaf notebook with a separate sheet for each youngster listing the child's name, teacher, and the information that the teacher has given us. Each month we enter the title and call numbers of the items we bring the child. In this way we

keep track of materials and do not duplicate items selected for the student.

A week before our visit, the librarians gather books and cassettes for the children. Each student's items are marked with his/her name and rubber banded together. We then list each child's materials in our notebook. A sheet is also prepared for every classroom we visit, giving the students' names and the titles and call numbers of the materials we are lending them. When we visit the class we give the teacher this sheet so that she knows what materials are to be returned to us on our next visit.

The day before we go to Murdock School the materials are checked out for a four week loan. (Before computerization of our circulation system, the book and date due cards were removed from the books and kept in the Youth Department. The cards were replaced in the items before they were given to the circulation department to be checked in. This was done because the children often lost or destroyed the cards.) All items for a class are put in a bag and marked with the teacher's name.

The morning of our visit the Youth Librarian collects the bags of materi-

als for each classroom and the books or other materials she will share with the classes and sets off to spend an enjoyable and satisfying fifteen to twenty minutes in each class. When she returns she brings back with her the items that were loaned the previous month and enters any new subject requests on the student's sheet in the special education project notebook.

What has this program accomplished? The teachers of and the students in the classes we visit feel that the public library's Youth Department is interested in them and has materials that they can use and enjoy. Some special education teachers from other schools have requested library materials or a class visit by our staff. A number of special education students enroll in our summer reading club and occasionally come to our library programs, borrow materials or used the computer. Mention of Youth Department services, collections and programs have appeared in the newsletter published by and sent to parents of special education students throughout the country. Finally, the Youth Librarians have a better understanding of the needs that these children have and a knowledge of how our collection can meet these needs.