

## Small Public Libraries Can Cooperate Too!

---

**Ann Herold-Short,  
Librarian,  
Rushville Public Library,  
Rushville, IN**

---

Rushville Public Library is a small library. Even though we are the largest library in the county and feel we must serve as a county library in some respects, technically speaking we are a city library serving a population of about 6,000 people. Our school system, however, is a county-wide, consolidated system, and, as we have no county library system, a major goal for us is establishing and maintaining contact with county schools.

Cooperation with local organizations, especially the school system, is probably the most important form of outreach for our library, as it is for most small libraries. We don't have a bookmobile for our rural patrons, and we can't afford many other methods of outreach.

I have always believed that among the most important programs and services offered by public libraries are those offered to children. The world of books is new and fresh enough to be exciting to small children. This enthusiasm is contagious, making the programming fun to plan and execute. I feel we owe it to children to keep the library an exciting, vital place. Once a child and his or her parents become familiar with the services offered by libraries, they will be hooked.

### **Cooperative Programming**

As the Children's Librarian at Shelbyville-Shelby County Public Library, I was encouraged to constantly experiment with programming. Programs for toddlers and puppetry for all ages were introduced. A major problem was how to inform parents that such services were offered. I found that introducing the programs to visiting preschool groups quickly passed the word in our community.

As the children's librarian my personal involvement with public schools was minimal. The library staff visited schools to give puppet shows and workshops. We encouraged visits from public and private schools, day care centers, and nursery schools. We provided brochures and posters to schools to promote reading clubs and other programs. To encourage local media specialists to use and promote our library's services, joint yearly meetings were arranged. Our biggest venture was an annual Science Fair Workshop which drew large crowds. We simply provided a science bibliography, information about other science resources, and a how-to workshop on designing attractive displays.

## Cooperative Planning

As Library Director of Rushville Public Library, more from habit than from insight, one of the first meetings I arranged was with the media specialists in the surrounding school system. The junior high school media specialist served as a library board member, and this involvement undoubtedly contributed to the success of that first meeting and to subsequent ventures. For the most part the librarians were enthusiastic about public library service and were more than willing to offer suggestions.

Another means of furthering cooperation is our recently formed library planning committee. Although this committee consists of board members, library personnel, and local citizens, county residents who have purchased non-resident cards are encouraged to attend. We also offer all county students a discounted user fee.

## Cooperating by Communicating

We try to remain flexible and open to most suggestions of ways we can improve our services. Recently, with this in mind, we sent packets of postcards to the schools with the hope that they will alert us whenever students will be in need of special reference materials. Interestingly, although we have asked nicely each year for the teachers to warn us in advance, we have had little response. The postcards apparently showed we were serious. Few teachers have filled out the form, but they have told us about upcoming assignments.

Because "Classics" are assigned each year to students, we make available a list of those we have. Our list does not always match the teachers' lists, but it gives students some assistance in selecting books.

As previously mentioned we do

provide several services for teachers in addition to those offered to students. Among services offered to schools and teachers are:

**1) Resource Kits.** The kits may include art reproductions (prints and sculptures), identification labels, books, slides, audiocassettes and videocassettes. We have a list of suggested topics, but teachers are encouraged to suggest **new** topics.

**2) Displays.** Displays are available for classroom or media center use. Displays include art reproductions from various cultures or on subjects, with informative labels. In addition, the library, along with three local schools, borrows materials from the Resource Center at the Indianapolis Children's Museum. We share the responsibility of picking up and returning materials.

**3) Educational Collections.** Collections are offered to schools and community groups. The materials may be borrowed for an extended loan by teachers with valid cards. Materials are used in the classroom or at a meeting.

**4) Lists of Library Holdings.** We frequently update our lists of audio-visual materials, such as slides, filmstrips, and art reproductions, which might be of interest to teachers. In addition, we provide bibliographies on many subjects.

**5) Library Instruction.** Tours of the library are available for all grades, from nursery school to senior high school. Our children's coordinator, Pam Vogel, recently suggested that we encourage more visits and show that we feel visits are newsworthy, by including them in our monthly calendar of events.

In addition, since the resource kits are proving to be so popular, we are planning to provide lists of suggested

readings about each topic. Teachers can photocopy these to give to students.

### Summary

To summarize, there are many services that even a small public library can offer the local school system. Cooperation with schools and community groups and organizations such as nursing homes is our most important outreach service. I hasten to add that such cooperation is not one-sided. The schools are almost always willing to help us with projects. Teachers provide us with "free" advertising, by making it known to students and parents that the library has much to offer. Showing the community that the library is willing to cooperate and asking for suggestions whenever possible may be as important in fostering community support as initiating cooperative ventures.

Establishing contact with the schools made our programs more visible. Teachers and students have spread the word about our extra services, making it easier for community groups to approach us with ideas for cooperation. When library employ-

ees speak at community groups, teachers are often the first to mention the types of programs we offer.

I would **not** recommend that libraries purchase extra materials for cooperative ventures until it is seen how successful the service will be. Instead, I would encourage librarians to make use of all the untapped resources they have on hand. In our case, we had **many** sculpture reproductions for patrons to borrow. Some had not circulated for several years, but they were perfect for displays and resources kits.

The benefits of outreach to the schools far outweigh the small investment of time and effort. Teachers encourage students to join our reading clubs and to use the public library during the summer. In addition, they point out that we offer services and materials that are not duplicated by the media center. Media specialists inform teachers about our interlibrary loan services. Teachers' collections insure that some books, which might otherwise not be checked out, are seen by students. Lastly, being involved with teachers and students can often be FUN.