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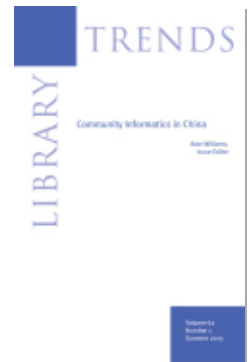
## Challenges and Accomplishments in U.S. Prison Libraries

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Library Trends, Volume 59, Number 3, Winter 2011, pp. 490-508 (Article)

Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: 10.1353/lib.2011.0001



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# Challenges and Accomplishments in U.S. Prison Libraries

VIBEKE LEHMANN

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## ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the evolution of prison library services in the United States and the changes in the roles and purposes of prison libraries over the last two centuries. The development of standards and guidelines for prison libraries under the leadership of the American Library Association and the American Correctional Association is discussed. The characteristics of the offender population are described as well as how prison libraries have responded to the specific needs of this special user group. The challenges of the unique prison environment are highlighted, especially as they relate to the delivery of library services. Examples of successful library services and programs are included, with descriptions of technology projects, resources for prison library staff, collection development policies, law library services, literacy programs, and resources to assist inmates with the transition back to society.

## DEVELOPMENT OF PRISON LIBRARIES

Access to reading materials and information is provided in practically all federal and state correctional institutions in the United States. Such access is also provided in most local jails, although the level and quality of these services are not easily ascertained. Library facilities, library collections, and library services in the federal prison system fall under the jurisdiction of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, U.S. Department of Justice. Each of the fifty states has its own department of corrections (or similarly named agency) with responsibility for the state correctional facilities and their libraries. Counties and municipalities administer jails and detention centers and often have agreements with local public libraries and/or community volunteer groups to provide reading materials and other library

LIBRARY TRENDS, Vol. 59, No. 3, 2011 ("Library and Information Services to Incarcerated Persons: Global Perspectives" edited by Vibeke Lehmann), pp. 490–508. © 2011 The Board of Trustees, University of Illinois

services to inmates. Larger jails often have designated library spaces but may not have professional librarians on staff.

Offenders convicted of a federal crime serve their sentence in federal institutions; offenders convicted of state crimes serve their sentence in a state facility; defendants awaiting trial are incarcerated in local jails, and some convicted offenders with short sentences (mainly less than one year) may also serve their sentence in a jail. As of December 31, 2009, more than 1.6 million prisoners were under the jurisdiction or legal authority of state and federal correctional officials. At midyear 2009, about 1 in every 198 U.S. residents was imprisoned with a sentence of more than one year, a rate of 504 prisoners per 100,000 U.S. residents (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2010b). At midyear 2009, 767,620 inmates were held in custody in local jails (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2010a). The number of inmates in state and federal prisons has increased nearly sevenfold from less than 200,000 in 1970 to 1,518,559 by 2008 (The Sentencing Project, <http://www.sentencingproject.org>).

The United States experienced a major prison construction boom over the last twenty-five years that, however, appears to have slowed down somewhat over the last five years. Most of these new facilities include a library with general interest materials and legal collections. Hundreds of new prison librarian and support staff positions have been created but, due to the economic downturn over the last couple of years, most states have seen it necessary to eliminate or freeze many state positions, including prison librarians and teachers. The *Directory of State Prison Librarians*, maintained by the Maryland Correctional Education Libraries, shows the total number of prison libraries in all states to be about 950 (June 2010), with about two-thirds of these having designated library staff, not all librarians, however. Approximately twenty-five states employ a central prison library or institution services coordinator/consultant, either within the department of corrections or on the state library staff. A few states have regional correctional library coordinators (Maryland, 2009, November 10).

Early prisons (aptly named “penitentiaries”) from the beginning of the nineteenth century had some collections of books for the moral and religious education of the prisoners. The “librarians” were almost all members of the clergy. The main purpose of reading was believed to be strengthening of character, religious devotion, and what we today would call behavior modification. By the mid-nineteenth century, penology (the study, theory, and practice of prison management and criminal rehabilitation) had become more scientific, and criminologists claimed that they knew the reasons for criminal behavior and, consequently, how to reform criminals. The Prison Congress in 1870 beckoned in the Progressive Period and the Prison Reform Movement, which advocated for rehabilitation instead of retribution, and for education and rewards for good behavior. The prison library was seen as one of these incentives. The content of

the prisoners' reading would be determined by the prison administration, and only materials that furthered the reformatory goals of the institution were allowed.

During the first decades of the twentieth century, a number of studies on prison libraries were published by both prison reformers and the American Library Association (ALA), and in 1930, the American Correctional Association (ACA) issued a manual for prison libraries. The following year, Austin MacCormick, the distinguished prison educator, published *The Education of Adult Prisoners*, which states that "The possible values of directed reading are almost limitless, especially in the field of adult education. Reading must be moral and 'directed'" (Maryland, November 10, 2009).<sup>1</sup>

The following four decades saw an unprecedented growth in prison libraries, mainly in the federal prison system. The rationale for the federal prison library development was stated by MacCormick in the 1950 American Prison Association's *Library Manual for Correctional Institutions*: "The proper function and true value of an institution library are clear-cut and incontestable. It is not merely a time-killing recreational device. . . . Properly organized, directed, and utilized, the institution library is an instrument of wholesome recreation, of direct and indirect education, and of mental health. Books are for many prisoners a bridge to the free world; over that bridge they can pass to a better world with a broader horizon than they ever knew before" (p. 4). Unfortunately, it was not until the 1970s that this impetus for prison libraries took hold at the state level.

A major factor contributing to the development of libraries in state correctional facilities was the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA), authorized by Congress in 1966. LSCA set aside money for institutional library services (correctional and mental health facilities). The federal funds would be administered by state library agencies that were given a certain flexibility in developing eligibility criteria. Funding for institutional library services had maintenance-of-effort requirements, which contributed to a minimum level of local funding also being allocated. A considerable number of prison libraries and some librarian positions were established with LSCA money. When LSCA was replaced by the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) in 1997, the new act no longer included designated funds for institutions.

Another very important factor, leading to the development of law library collections in prisons was the 1977 U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Bounds v. Smith*, 430 U.S. 817 (1977). After decades of litigation by prisoners to obtain venues for appealing their sentences and challenging conditions of their confinement, *Bounds* stipulated that all prisons must provide "meaningful access to the courts through people trained in the law or through law library collections." The Federal Bureau of Prisons and most states chose the library option, and over the next two decades large

sums of money were spent to purchase legal collections and to keep them updated. The mandate for legal materials always took precedence over the development and maintenance of the general library collections. In 1996, the U.S. Supreme Court, in its *Lewis v. Casey* decision (518 U.S. 804), narrowed the interpretation of *Bounds* and limited the parameters under which state correctional agencies were obligated to provide inmates with legal assistance and resources. Some states eliminated their legal collections and replaced them with access to paralegals; other states reduced existing prison legal collections, while maintaining the primary case law, federal and state codes, and administrative rules. Around the year 2000, some state correctional agencies began to convert their print-based legal collections to electronic collections and made them available on CD-ROM and DVD. Today, the CD-ROM/DVD collections are rapidly being replaced by Web-based "correctional" legal information products, developed by the major legal publishers. Access to these Web-based resources, of course, presupposes that a secure network infrastructure is in place and that inmates are permitted to use computers.

To guide the development of general prison library collections (as opposed to legal collections), the American Library Association in 1981 issued *Library Standards for Adult Correctional Institutions*, a publication endorsed by the American Correctional Association (ACA). These standards emphasized building collections according to the needs and interests of the prison population and developing community connections.

A new and greatly expanded edition of the ALA *Standards* was published in 1992, *Library Standards for Adult Correctional Institutions*, and the *Library Standards for Juvenile Correctional Facilities* came out in 1999. Both are tools for the planning, implementation, and evaluation of library services and define acceptable levels of service. Working groups with broad knowledge and experience in the field—professional librarians and correctional administrators—developed these documents. The standards for adult institutions emulate the public library model and subscribe to the philosophy that library services "shall ensure the inmates' right to read and their free access to information." Further, services shall encompass "the same variety of material, formats, and programs as available in the outside community. . . ." The document covers all aspects of library operation, including the integration of new information technology. The sections on technology and certain other parts of the standards for adult institutions are now dated, and a new edition of this pivotal document is currently under preparation. The quantitative standards are based on data collected in a 1990 national survey of prison libraries. Both documents include such fundamental documents as the *Library Bill of Rights* and the *Freedom to Read Statement*. Although no research has been conducted to ascertain to what extent individual state correctional agencies and the Federal Bureau of Prisons have made use of the ALA standards as

a reference tool during the planning process for new prison facilities, the author used this document while working with the planning team for each new correctional facility built in the state of Wisconsin during the 1990s and early 2000s. As a result of this cooperation, all the newer correctional institutions in Wisconsin have library facilities planned specifically for library functions and also received a fairly adequate start-up budget for collections and technology.

### OFFENDER POPULATIONS AND THEIR NEEDS

Today, professional and paraprofessional staff work in both adult and juvenile institutions and their patrons range in age from school children to older adults. The fastest growing inmate group is the elderly, primarily due to increasingly longer sentences, less frequent use of parole, and the higher percentage of the incarcerated population being violent offenders. Many facilities are overcrowded, so nonviolent offenders are more likely to be supervised in less restrictive community settings. The incarceration rate of racial/ethnic minorities is disproportionately high, and the percentage of non- or limited English-speaking inmates is growing, primarily Hispanics and Southeast Asians. In some states, the percentage of inmates with drug and alcohol treatment needs is as high as 60 or 70 percent. A large number of inmates (between 50 and 60 percent) have not completed high school, and many adults and juveniles associate the traditional school system with a long string of academic and personal failures (U.S. Department of Education, 2001, pp. 15–16). This fact is, of course, related to the offenders' lack of vocational skills and their inability to find and maintain gainful employment in today's technology dominated job market. The next logical step in this vicious circle is often the commitment of a crime.

One can safely say that incarcerated persons have a large number of unmet needs, which translate into a high demand for information, learning materials, and self-improvement resources; the library, in cooperation with other prison programs, can play a vital role in meeting these needs. An inmate who wants to use his/her time constructively is likely to become an avid library user, and when time comes to prepare for release, the prison library can provide a wealth of job and career related materials, as well as useful community information.

### CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

In the following sections, the author will highlight some of the main challenges facing all prison library staff and will describe how some librarians and prison administrators have developed creative solutions to inherent problems and have even managed to create some exceptional services and resources. In doing so, the author will draw upon her personal knowledge of the prison library situation in Wisconsin, as well as information

obtained through contacts with prison librarians in a couple of other states (mainly Colorado and Maryland).

### *The Prison Environment*

The prison library does not function independently but operates within the larger correctional environment, whose mission and security policies often conflict with the library profession's code of ethics and its belief in free access to information. The prison environment is an untraditional and inhospitable territory with priorities that challenge "traditional" librarianship and philosophies. Consequently, the most important challenge to librarians who work in prison is how to provide information freely in a tightly controlled environment with rules and regulations governing almost all aspects of daily life. How does one encourage library patrons to make choices about their reading matter and the pursuit of individual interests, when in almost all other aspects of their lives they have no autonomy? How does one meet the information and diverse reading needs of a large multicultural community whose members have involuntarily been forced to live together?

In a major 1974 U.S. study of prison libraries, Marjorie LeDonne observed: "I have come to realize that while space, time, money, training, and adequate support staff are all important, the key to quality correctional library service is the turn of mind, the energy and the sense of dedication which the librarian . . . brings to the job" (LeDonne, 1977, p. 69). In other words, it takes a very special person with not only a sound educational background, but also a great number of specific human qualities, including assertiveness, flexibility, patience, emotional stability, helpfulness, sincerity, high tolerance for stress, and a sense of humor. Librarians are service providers, no matter where they work. In the prison milieu, the antagonistic mentality of the "powerful against the powerless" is pervasive. By being responsive to needs and interests, librarians can have much impact on the inmates' lives, while exemplifying the exception to the hostility rule. Library staff can provide one of the few places in the prison where the inmate can feel at ease and be confident that his requests will be attended to. Responsiveness to user needs goes a long way to create credibility and appreciation; and over time, the positive impact of the library will be recognized by both the inmates and the prison administration.

Since most correctional libraries in the United States are one-person operations and are not all managed by a professional librarian on-site, having access to training and professional resources, as well as the opportunity to communicate with other correctional library staff, is of paramount importance.

To support prison library staff who work in the Colorado correctional institutions, the Colorado State Library's Institutional Library Services unit worked with the Department of Corrections (DOC) to create an

intranet with three primary objectives: (1) to facilitate the dissemination and exchange of information and to archive that information for future access; (2) to provide a platform for the delivery of online training; and (3) to allow staff spread throughout the state to build a community online. The collaboration between the two agencies is known as Colorado Correctional Libraries (CCL). The CCL network consists of twenty-three site libraries, supervised by three regional librarians (consultants). Content on the CCL's intranet is varied and includes:

- an online procedures manual;
- collections of Web resources related to reference, readers' advisory, collection development, public relations, marketing, professional development, and more;
- short news items with information that would have formerly been sent out on e-mail;
- a repository of program information and materials that allows staff to learn about programs and resources held at other libraries;
- digital images of staff at various events, a staff directory, and schedules for the regional librarians and all DOC libraries;
- an interactive discussion board with various forums, including one for posting questions to the regional librarians, one to conduct personal discussions, one to trade extra supplies or books, one to share reference stumpers, one to discuss work-related issues (e.g., intellectual freedom), and more;
- a Web log to place and respond to inter-facility loans;
- an online training area to upload static and dynamic web-based tutorials.

A free content management system was chosen to keep the content updated and timely. The CCL site has been operational since August 2005. It has been very successful and has built a close, although virtual, community of correctional library staff who are working toward a common goal.<sup>2</sup>

In the state of Maryland, a central correctional library consultant coordinates library services at twenty-four sites, twelve of which employ full-time professional librarians. In Maryland, the prison libraries are called "correctional education libraries," even though the administrative placement of these libraries has recently been changed from the Maryland Department of Education to the Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation (DLLR). The central library coordinator has developed a very useful website for both the institution staff and the general public. The site includes information about all the libraries, including statistics on their collections, circulation activity, and reference inquiries. Other resources include lists of mandated reference and legal materials, as well as basic resources to help inmates with reentry into the community. In addition, the site is linked to a directory of prison libraries/librarians in all fifty



states, maintained by the central library coordinator. The same person also writes a very lively blog for prison librarians that receives comments from prison librarians all around the country (<http://prisonlibrarian.blogspot.com/>).

Twenty-two correctional institutions in Wisconsin have full-time professional library staff, with one site having two librarian positions, and several sites having paraprofessional staff as well. Sixteen smaller correctional centers have general reading collections and online access to legal resources but have no fulltime library staff. A central consultant position, located in the Department of Corrections, coordinates all institution library services as well as library and education applications on the inmate education network (EdNet). In order to better focus on the most important functions of each institution library, the librarians in 1997 were required to develop long-range plans for their libraries, based on mission statements and appropriate goals and objectives. They all received training in the library planning process developed for prison libraries by Rhea Joyce Rubin in 1992. The process involved a thorough needs assessment and the selection of primary and secondary roles. The possible roles for prison libraries were determined to be:

- popular reading materials center (i.e., circulation of recreational reading materials);
- independent learning center (e.g., assistance in self-directed reading for lifelong learning and personal needs, information on careers and vocational skills, reference services, and assistance with correspondence courses);
- formal education support center (i.e., information on educational opportunities, and materials and services supporting adult basic education, English for non-native speakers, vocational education, and post-secondary education);
- leisure and recreation activities center (e.g., book discussions, film showings, cultural programs, chess club);
- legal information center (e.g., legal research tools, case materials, legal forms);
- treatment program support center (e.g., resources to support substance abuse and anger control programs);
- information center on outside community (e.g., reentry information, contact information, social service agency referrals);
- personal retreat center (i.e., place for patrons to find privacy, quiet, and independent choice);
- staff research center (i.e., resource provider or clearinghouse for work-related materials and information);
- school curriculum support center (in juvenile facilities, provide materials that supplement textbooks and enhance classroom activities and study).

An analysis of functions associated with each role followed, and the participants then developed realistic goals and objectives as well as an action plan for each objective. Rubin had developed a workbook, *The Planning Process for Wisconsin Institution Libraries*, which guided the participants through every step of the planning process (1997). The final product was an actual long-range plan for each library, approved by the warden and the DOC administrators for adult and juvenile correctional institutions. Having such a plan in place, including a process for evaluation of outcomes, contributed significantly to the credibility and heightened importance of the prison libraries throughout the state. The local plans were also used to justify budget requests for collection enhancement, program development, and a variety of grant projects.

At the national level, the American Library Association's Division of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies (ASCLA) maintains a very popular discussion list, PRISON-L. This list has become an active forum for prison and jail librarians and others interested in library services to incarcerated persons. Recent discussions have focused on collection development and censorship, organizing book clubs and other types of literary events in prison, how to handle donations from outside groups and inmates, providing literacy and tutoring programs, and dealing with security issues (including devastating "shakedowns" of the library). The members of PRISON-L share success stories and laments, as well as useful title lists and information about publications relevant to correctional librarianship.

The Library Services to Prisoners Forum (LSPF) is an ASCLA unit. This group meets at the ALA Annual Conference and at the ALA Mid-year Meeting. Recently, LSPF established its presence on ALA-Connect, an interactive forum for groups to work on cooperative projects and proposals. LSPF has organized ambitious conference programs, dealing with topics on how to be a successful prison librarian (Schneider, 2003), how to develop reentry collections for inmates who are about to be released, outreach services from public libraries to prisons, and access to and use of technology in prison libraries. LSPF has also arranged many visits to prison libraries around the country, most recently to the Jessup Correctional Institution in Maryland during the 2010 ALA Conference (<http://prisonlibrarian.blogspot.com/>).

ALA's Office for Literacy and Outreach Services (OLOS) also maintains a webpage with a large number of useful links for prison librarians. The OLOS webpage includes many documents and statistical tables about offenders, criminal justice facts, as well as helpful materials for the families of offenders (n.d.).

### *Use of Technology*

One of the most challenging issues facing prison libraries is how to access computer technology and networks, not only for internal operational

tasks, but also for learning and information purposes. Security regulations present major obstacles for access to the Internet and, in some states, even prohibit inmates from using standalone computers. Technology use normally taken for granted in other types of libraries (online access to union catalogs and bibliographic utilities, shared library management systems, access to web resources, network participation, and even email for staff), must first be explored from the unique prison perspective, and each technology proposal and software application must be examined for potential security risks before it is approved for staff and/or inmate use.

Library staff understand that unauthorized inmate access to the Internet, unregulated email, security related databases, and network infrastructure could cause major disasters and could threaten both prison staff and crime victims. On the other hand, it makes no sense to prevent inmates from accessing information that is useful for their education, treatment, and personal development. And with careful planning and certain control measures in place, it is indeed possible to provide access to a wide range of information resources in prison without compromising security. It is also possible to install an integrated library management system (ILS), either on a local area network (LAN) or a secure wide area network (WAN)—or even as a web-hosted application. In the following, the author will briefly describe the ILS models implemented by the correctional agencies in Wisconsin and Colorado.

All new Wisconsin state correctional institutions built since 1985 have included a functional library space as well as a LAN infrastructure that made it possible for inmates to access educational programs on computers in the classrooms and to install an automated library circulation and online catalog system. These institution LANs had no connection to the DOC administrative network, and inmate library workers were trained to perform a wide range of circulation and copy cataloging tasks. The inmates were not permitted to access system utilities and certain functions that might jeopardize the integrity of the bibliographic database. Initially the Winnebago Software Company's CIRC/CAT software was used throughout the Wisconsin DOC; later all the libraries migrated to the Spectrum System, when the Sagebrush Corporation bought Winnebago's applications. When the DOC's Bureau of Technology Management (BTM) in 2004 began to develop a WAN structure (EdNet) for inmate learning and library specific applications, the DOC's Coordinator of Library Services and Education Technology began to research options for a shared integrated correctional library system. Bid specifications were developed jointly with a team of BTM technology experts, and in early 2006, DOC selected the Accent System by Sagebrush. Shortly afterwards, the Accent System was acquired by the Follett Company. For the next nine months, a small committee of librarians and BTM experts worked with an Accent System project manager to define all the operational

parameters of the system, and to determine access levels for each function that would be performed by an inmate worker. Another major task was to merge the databases from each of the twenty-two participating libraries. Fortunately, each library already had a unique barcode range for its holdings, so duplication was not a big problem. Also, most of the libraries had standard MARC records. Some libraries were already using the inmate's DOC number as a patron barcode, but this now became the standard at all sites. Even with the most meticulous planning, however, there was still a certain amount of database cleanup to perform. The Accent System was loaded on the WAN server at the end of 2006, after which a series of security tests were performed. The DOC Accent System was officially launched in January 2007. Unfortunately, no funding was available for a system administrator position, so two librarians would share administrative tasks (central cataloging, technical support, and vendor liaison). Training of system administrators and all library staff took place during most of January 2007. No commercial ILS system has been developed specifically for correctional facilities, so the Wisconsin DOC had to select a system that could be adapted to existing security specifications and the EdNet structure. It also had to be reasonably priced. The author believes that Wisconsin is the first state to implement a shared correctional library system. Inmate networks similar to the Wisconsin EdNet may not be available in other states, and other library system options must be explored.

The Colorado Department of Corrections has taken a different path and, after almost four years of planning, is in the final stages of implementing a web-hosted library system for its twenty-two libraries. The vendor is EOS International ([www.eosintl.com](http://www.eosintl.com)), and the application is EOSweb Express. Purchase of this product required approval by the cyber-security unit of the Governor's Office of Information Technology. This is not a shared system with a single database, but the vendor/host maintains all circulation records and keeps the bibliographic databases and holdings current. The EOSweb Express provides many options for customization of the OPAC page, and library staff may add book reviews, pathfinders, community resource guides, and links to other resources. EOS International provides customized online tutorials and 24/7 customer support (Diana Reese, personal communication, June 10, 2010).

Other state correctional agencies have not advanced beyond standalone PCs for OPACs and circulation functions. The reasons for this "backwardness" may be related to both security concerns and financial constraints. A few years ago, many correctional librarians still had no access to email, and in institutions where library staff do not have a lockable office, access to email and the Internet is still provided elsewhere in the facility. This makes it very cumbersome to communicate with others and to use the Internet for reference inquiries.

*Law Library Services*

In the United States, inmates in both state and federal prisons are guaranteed certain constitutional and civil rights. They include freedom from cruel and unusual punishment, the right to due process, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, the right to adequate medical care, freedom from racial discrimination, and the right of access to the courts. Only in unusual circumstances and for the sake of safety and security may limitations be imposed on these rights. The existence of constitutional rights for any individual, however, is dependent upon mechanisms to uphold these rights and to protect them from violation or denial. Consequently, access to the courts is a pivotal right upon which the vindication of prisoners' other constitutional protections depends. It is important to understand that, with the exception of the U.S. Constitution, federal and state statutes do not guarantee any significant rights for convicted prisoners. Most of the rights guaranteed for prisoners, including the civil rights extended to all other U.S. citizens, are the result of judicial rulings rather than legislative or administrative action.

"The fundamental constitutional right of access to the courts requires prison authorities to assist inmates in the preparation and filing of meaningful legal papers by providing prisoners with adequate law libraries or adequate assistance from persons trained in the law." This quote is taken from *Bounds v. Smith* (430 U.S. 817), the 1977 landmark Supreme Court decision, which led to the establishment of law libraries in most U.S. prisons. As mentioned previously, the 1996 *Lewis v. Casey* decision (518 U.S. 804) narrowed the parameters under which correctional agencies are obligated to provide the access mandated in *Bounds*. But even though some states have reduced or almost eliminated their prison legal collections, more have chosen to maintain access to primary law resources (state and federal codes, state and federal constitutions, state and federal case law, administrative rules), as well as legal reference materials (legal directories, dictionaries, treatises on prisoners' rights, practice manuals, citation tools).

The initial purchase and continued upkeep of legal collections, whether in print or electronic format, is extremely expensive. The upkeep of print collections is also very cumbersome (inserting pocket parts and other updates, purging dated items, etc.) and, since these resources are heavily used, they are often subject to loss and damage. Staff is also obligated to make photocopies of requested cases for inmates who are in segregated status. Inadequate access or delayed access may be cause for inmate law suits.

Today, almost all nonprison law libraries have converted their print collections to electronic format, which comes with the advantages of lower costs, easier upkeep, currency of content, and multiple search options. Converting prison law library collections to electronic format has

presented the technology-phobic correctional agencies with a major challenge, even when this step involved only CD-ROMs or DVDs on standalone PCs or local area networks with no Internet connection. Over the last four to five years, however, as the major legal publishers began to develop customized corrections-specific online products, many states began to realize that they could save a considerable amount of money by subscribing to these solutions. From the author's recent research, it appears that the LexisNexis company has statewide contracts with twenty-two state correctional agencies, plus the Federal Bureau of Prisons and the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and that Thomson Reuters (West Publishing) has statewide contracts with eighteen state correctional agencies for their customized online solutions. Six states have contracts with both vendors for certain selected products. Some large city jails have also purchased the online product. The use of CDs and DVDs has seen a sharp decline, and the majority of states install these applications on external hard drives (EHD) "offline" and receive quarterly updates. A handful of other states, including Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, and Wisconsin, have been able to provide secure Web-based access to the LexisNexis correctional product (N. Woolworth, personal communication, May 2010).

This author directed the planning process for the LexisNexis electronic law library project in Wisconsin. This involved changing the few remaining print-based legal collection to the web-based product and converting the existing CD-ROM collections on existing LANs to the LexisNexis web product. The new legal information system was named EILLS (electronic inmate law library system) and would be accessible on a total of 249 workstations at nineteen institution libraries and sixteen correctional centers. The author believes that this installation is the largest of its kind in the United States. Since the EdNet infrastructure was already in place, as well as the required number of computers, the conversion to the EILLS system was able to realize the Wisconsin Department of Corrections a savings of about \$250,000 annually.

EILLS was launched in July 2007 after almost two years of planning that involved, among other things, a lengthy pilot project and numerous presentations to DOC wardens, security directors, librarians, and many other members of the DOC administration. Initial training was provided to about eighty staff members, including security staff and librarians. Training materials were developed for inmates, and selected inmate law library workers were trained to help other inmates use the law library computers. The transition to the online legal product was much easier for the inmate users than expected, and very few complaints were received. The conversion, of course, involved rearranging the library space, new wiring, computer installation, disposal of many legal books, and the general confusion inherent in such a major change. All stakeholders, however, cooperated in solving problems, and the end result has been very successful.

*Collection Development*

Incarcerated persons have the same reading interests as individuals in the free world. They do, however, constitute a user group with special needs because of their generally low educational level, their mostly disadvantaged social and economic background, and their high rate of substance abuse and mental illness. This means that their information needs may be slightly different but, at the same time, more urgent. These factors, as well as the inmates' diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, are all issues that must be considered when building library collections in correctional facilities.

Since the U.S. prison libraries in recent times have been developed mainly along the public library model, they should ideally provide their patrons with the materials they want—subject to available funds, of course. A dichotomy exists, however, between the professional librarian's philosophical and ethical commitment to free access to information and the very real constraints that are or may be imposed on access to reading materials in the prison environment. Censorship is a touchy subject with prison librarians, which is clearly evidenced by the ongoing discussion of this topic on ALA's LSPF discussion list. Forbidden content almost always includes certain materials that may pose a threat to institution security, e.g., information on bomb making, prison escapes, martial arts, how to undermine prison rules, as well as materials that advocate violence and hate or contains pornography. Being able to accept that certain restrictions are imposed on the selection of materials can make the difference on whether or not the librarian survives on the job. Often these limits on access to certain reading materials are dictated by state law and administrative regulations. Somehow it is easier to live with these restrictions if one is assured that they are not imposed in an arbitrary manner. The solution to avoid arbitrariness, ambiguity, and prejudice is to have a solid library materials selection policy in place that is fully supported by the correctional administration and security staff. Such policies are by no means in place in all states, and where they are, they are sometimes ignored.

In late 2009, a small workgroup of ALA's Library Services to Prisoners Forum took on the difficult task of drafting a new statement on Prisoners' Right to Read (PRTR). An older ALA resolution existed dating from July 1982, but it was narrowly focused on the need for other states to pass legislation similar to a provision in the California Penal Code that dealt with prisoners' free access to information. The purpose of the new PRTR document would be to have it adopted by ALA Council as an official interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights. The workgroup received wide input from prison librarians and other interested parties, and several revisions were incorporated before the statement was submitted to the Intellectual Freedom Committee (IFC) for endorsement. The IFC made a few more revisions, and the final statement was adopted by ALA Council on



June 29, 2010, during the annual conference. This forceful and concise statement will be immensely useful for prison librarians and correctional administrators as they develop collection development and materials selection policies.

The Colorado Department of Corrections several years ago developed policies for most aspects of its prison library operations, including the selection of library materials. These policies are posted on the CCL intranet. The Colorado policies served as a model when the Wisconsin Department of Corrections' Division of Adult Institutions (DAI) developed its new Selection of Library Materials Policy during 2007–8. An older policy, implemented in 1985, had become obsolete and was rescinded. The new Wisconsin DOC policy went into effect January 30, 2009. The purpose of the policy is to “establish uniform guidelines for the selection, acquisition and removal of library materials in institution libraries. These guidelines will be based on the principles of inclusiveness, diversity, and relevance of the materials to needs and interests of the inmates, balanced with the security needs of the institution.”

The Wisconsin DOC Library Services Coordinator worked closely with a small group of librarians and security staff to develop this policy, which was strongly supported by the DOC/DAI Chief of Security. The policy outlines in great detail the criteria for inclusion and exclusion of materials, always referencing relevant code and administrative rule language. A process for challenging specific materials is included, along with mandatory forms and check lists. The policy establishes a central Library Materials Review Committee, composed of librarians and security staff, which has final decision power over challenged materials. This provision takes decisions away from local institutions in order to ensure uniformity of application. The Library Materials Review Committee also maintains a central list of reviewed materials with indication of “allowed” or “not allowed” for each item, as well as the reason for each exclusion. The policy also requires each institution library to develop a collection development plan geared to the individual facility (maximum, medium, or minimum security), the local inmate population profile, and the type of treatment, education, and other inmate programs offered. All the correctional librarians were trained in how to develop such a plan. The new Selection of Library Materials Policy has been extremely helpful and has significantly reduced the number of frivolous challenges to existing and new materials.

### *Library Programs*

Prison libraries are generally short on staff, although there may be no shortage of inmate workers. The professional staff must perform a broad range of tasks since inmate workers are not allowed to perform tasks that could give them access to privileged information or enable them to manipulate other inmates or staff. The inmate workers require a lot of



training, an ongoing process, since the turnover rate is high. Library staff work in a very demanding and stressful environment, where it is difficult to find time to develop user programs and activities beyond the very basic services. Even so, an impressive range of prison library programs and activities exist, many related to literacy enhancement and the preparation for release into the community. Such programs fit right in with the roles of the prison library as independent learning center and community information center.

Family literacy programs have become very popular in many correctional institutions and jails throughout the country, as well as one-on-one literacy tutoring, where one inmate tutors another inmate or tutors from the community volunteer their services. The role of the library is these activities may consist of providing the learning materials, providing activity space, tutor training, or supervision of the entire program.

A very successful family literacy program with a fourteen year track record is the "Breaking Barriers with Books" (BBWB) program at the Oshkosh Correctional Institution (OSCI) in Wisconsin. The theoretical framework for BBWB was developed in 1995 by Dr. Margaret Genisio, a University of Wisconsin reading professor. A limited 1996 pilot project was so successful that the BBWB project received generous funding the following year from the Barbara Bush Literacy Foundation, enabling the program to reach a much larger number of inmate fathers and their children and to develop a sizable collection of quality children's books. The BBWB program is still going strong and has served as a model for similar programs in other prisons in Wisconsin and other states. The goals of the BBWB program are:

- to provide the child with the opportunity to enjoy literature with his/her father in a setting as similar to the home setting as possible;
- to provide the child with the opportunity to strengthen bonds with his/her father and build positive memories;
- to enhance paternal empowerment by providing fathers with a strong information base and the skills needed for positive book sharing and storytelling;
- to provide the incarcerated fathers with a support group which can be replicated outside prison;
- to increase the literacy skills of both fathers and children, leading to greater reading enjoyment.

The inmate parent must complete a class on child development and the selection of age-appropriate children's books; they learn how to read aloud, write letters and poems for their children, and play games that relate to the themes of the books. They also create an illustrated book for their children. After completion of the class, they are allowed extra visiting time with their children where they engage in interactive reading

activities. Those fathers whose children are unable to visit are allowed to tape themselves reading to the children, and a DVD is sent to the family. The OSCI librarian was instrumental in the success of the program during the early years, teaching the BBWB class, acquiring the children's books, and working with security staff to develop program policies and procedures. When the OSCI librarian retired, prison teachers took over these responsibilities. The author is familiar with similar prison programs in Maryland, Minnesota, Alabama, and Colorado. They all promote family literacy, connect absent parents with their children, and teach parents and children about the many resources and services of libraries. The Maryland "Family Literacy @ Your Library" program is a great example of cooperation between correctional and public libraries: The correctional library staff received help from the children's staff at the Howard County and Enoch Pratt libraries, who trained inmate program coordinators on book selection and storytelling techniques. The inmate participants rehearsed by reading to each other and planning activities for the children. Enoch Pratt Library provided a deposit collection of children's books to supplement the collection of donated materials (OLOS Columns, 2004).

Over the last few years, most state and federal correctional agencies has been focusing on programs and resources that prepare inmates for successful reentry into society. These "reentry initiatives" are broad multifaceted programs, designed to remedy some of the many offender deficits and needs and to hold offenders accountable for their actions, while giving them the opportunity to become law-abiding and successful members of the community after they are released. Some states have introduced actual reentry curricula that include classroom instruction and the development of personal portfolios in conjunction with assignments to obtain information related to such areas as:

- education opportunities
- employment opportunities
- family support system
- financial literacy
- health and wellness
- housing
- personal development
- transportation.

The prison libraries can play an important role in these reentry initiatives, and many institution libraries have developed substantial collections in the areas listed above. In Wisconsin, the correctional libraries have built substantial career and employment collections, and these materials have been expanded and enhanced over several years through LSTA grants and funding from the U.S. Department of Education (approximately \$50,000). Some sites have established career and employment centers

within or connected to the libraries. These centers contain not merely print and multimedia resources but staff also help inmates with resumes, cover letters, job applications, and referral to appropriate community agencies and services. The inmates have access to resume-writing software, career interest and aptitude software, and can practice interview skills. Library staff help the inmates assemble all the needed documents and information for their portfolios. When offenders are close to release, they can search the Job Center of Wisconsin website from the library's computers.

The Colorado State Library's Institutional Library Development unit has created some very useful reentry resources for offenders and their families, including referrals to public libraries who will serve them in the community. LSTA money was used to develop the "Out for Life" project that purchased library materials on job seeking, affordable housing, budgeting, addiction recovery, mental health, and recreation. In 2008 the same team cooperated with the Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition to produce a presentation aimed at public libraries titled "Life after 20-to-Life: Library Resources for Successful Transition from Prison to Community" and a video aimed at offenders and ex-offenders called "Out for Life: How Your Library Can Help" (Colorado State Library, n.d.). The video is posted on YouTube.

## CONCLUSION

The author has discussed only a few examples of the many innovative and varied programs that have been created by resourceful and enthusiastic correctional librarians and others who care about library and information library services to incarcerated persons. As more attention is focused on the needs of offenders—a significant segment of our population—it becomes increasingly clear that prison libraries can play a very important role in the rehabilitation of these individuals. Enabling these libraries and their staff to develop their full potential, however, requires both more practical and moral support from correctional agencies and the general public. The purpose of providing services and assistance to offenders and ex-offenders is not generally understood and appreciated by the public. The high incarceration rate in the United States is immensely costly to society, both in real economic terms and as damage to the social fabric. Services and resources that can diminish these costs and reduce offender recidivism deserve full support by government and citizens alike.

## NOTES

1. For a detailed discussion of prison library development in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see chapter 1, "Reaching Behind Bars: Library Outreach to Prisoners, 1798–2000" in Vogel (2009).
2. For more information on the CCL intranet, see Reese & Faccioli (2006).

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Vibeke Lehmann's biography can be found at the end of her introduction to this issue.