

PLANNING FOR JAIL SERVICE IN FREDERICK COUNTY, VIRGINIA:  
A STUDY

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Background

Early in August 1983, the Handley Library in Winchester, Virginia was asked to provide library services to the jails within its service area. There are two jails within the service area--a women's facility in Clarke County, and a men's facility in Frederick County. Both of the jails are maximum security facilities. Most of the inmates stay for less than six months.

In answer to this request, a meeting was held with the Board of the Library at which they consented to the service. A meeting was then called with the wardens of the two jails. Plans were made to begin service with book van visits every other week. This service could only be provided to the Frederick County jail due to problems of security at the women's jail. It was decided to plan service for the men's jail and postpone service to the women's jail.

Proposal for Service

The proposed plan is to place a core collection in the Frederick County jail. This core collection will consist of about two hundred books which will include a basic reference collection. (See Appendix) The rest of this core collection

will consist of fiction and non-fiction materials in paperback. A list of this core collection will be made and distributed to the inmates. The existing collection in the jail will be weeded by the library staff and proper shelving placed in the jail.

The library will also supply reference service by phone and through the mail. Reference questions will be answered in writing (except phone questions) and sent with the book van librarian.

The dates of the library service, as well as the library's phone number will be given to each inmate as he enters the facility. A survey of the inmate's reading interests was conducted, so meaningful items will be selected. The resources of the Handley Library (i.e. the circulating collection) will be available to the inmates. All materials will be checked out to the jail and not to the inmates themselves, but the inmates will be held responsible for the materials given to them and may forfeit use of materials at the discretion of the book van librarian.

#### Review of the Literature

The need for a survey of the reading interests and information needs of the inmates is well documented in the literature. The populations of jails do not have the same characteristics as the population in general. These people can generally be described as poor, ethnic minorities. Their education level is lower than the general population, and many are mentally disturbed. Due to the circumstances of the

penal system in this country, this population is housed in single-sex institutions with adverse living conditions.<sup>1</sup>

Overall, people in prisons are the most information poor people in our society.<sup>2</sup> Vogel found that inmates have important information needs due to their isolation.<sup>3</sup> But, some of these needs can be met if good library service is provided. One of the major stumbling blocks to providing good library service is that service has been based on the educated guesses of librarians and the personal experiences of administrators at these institutions.<sup>4</sup> This trend has been changing during the last decade. More research is now being done to assess the needs of inmates.

The recent literature points to inmate involvement in the selection of library materials. Souza found that the successful prison library has a basic collection that is in tune with the abilities and needs of the inmate population.<sup>5</sup> Rhea Rubin, who overcame many difficulties in establishing service to the Cooke County Illinois Jail System, believes that book selection must be based on the needs and wishes of the inmates.<sup>6</sup> Richard Barclay, head of Bristol Virginia Jail Services, has found that the best selection policy is to "give them what they want."<sup>7</sup>

There is wide agreement on the fact that inmate needs must be considered in the selection of materials. But, there are several methods of finding out what the inmates want and need. Several librarians have used inmate advisory committees.<sup>8</sup> This is not a good approach if the population is in constant change as it is in local jail populations.

The American Library Association's, Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies offers suggestions. They list three methods of determining inmate needs: 1) informal personal contact with the inmates, 2) use of existing institutional data, 3) a written survey of inmate needs.<sup>9</sup>

The survey method seems to be the most widely reported in the literature. One of the more comprehensive and often cited surveys was conducted by the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services. The Library Coordinator, Brenda Vogel, suggests an information needs survey and not a reading interest survey, because a large number of inmates are illiterate and will not be served by a reading interest survey.<sup>10</sup> Her staff developed an open ended response survey that was administered personally. This method allowed them to discover the true needs as the inmates expressed them. Coding schemes were developed to quantify responses. Overall, the group concluded that the survey did provide guidance in upgrading library services.<sup>11</sup>

The RSA Library at the Virginia State Penitentiary conducted a library users survey. This written questionnaire was sent to inmates. The response rate was only 16.4%. The low response rate was attributed to a number of factors. These were: 1) the survey was too long; 2) many inmates are borderline illiterates and possibly were not able to read the survey; 3) there were only a few days to complete the survey; 4) the inmates were apathetic about the project. It was also noted that some responses were not in line with daily library

use observations.<sup>12</sup>

In Texas, Connie House conducted a survey of discussion groups at two correctional facilities. This was a printed questionnaire which measured the respondent's reading habits and general characteristics. House warned that no subjective speculations or interpretations of the data were made. There was only a very small sample selected.<sup>13</sup>

Sandra Scott conducted an information needs and reading interest survey of the adult prisoners in New Mexico. Noting the importance of information needs analysis, Scott took a mixed approach. Some questions were geared towards the information needs of the inmates, while others asked about the reading interests and library use habits of the inmates. In this study, the interview was the preferred setting, but due to cost, it was not feasible. A written questionnaire was developed with only a few open-ended questions. The survey was administered to 314 inmates by correctional administrators and staff. There was a 100% response rate.<sup>14</sup>

The literature dealing with library service to correctional facilities is quite extensive. There are many examples of surveys used in state or regional prisons. These institutions do have fairly static populations. Stays are long, and therefore, the population has members who will be there for some time. Often these institutions have established in-house libraries.

The local jails, on the other hand, have constantly changing populations. This makes the survey method for determining inmate needs more difficult. There is little

literature dealing with surveys in local jails. It seems the needs of this group are determined in a more casual manner, if at all.

### The Survey

There were forty-two inmates included in the population. Due to a problem with arranging individual meetings with each inmate, the questionnaire was handed to each inmate who wished to participate. All inmates were asked to participate. Twenty-two inmates responded for a 52% response rate.

HANDLEY LIBRARY SURVEY

1. What kinds of things do you think it important to know about? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What kinds of information were important to you on the outside that are not available to you now? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Which of the following is the most important for you to know about? (What is the most important one?)
- A. Legal information, information about your case, or about your rights.
- B. Information about getting yourself together, or educated.
- C. Information to help people on the outside, like help for your family.
- D. Medical information.
- E. Information about jobs, working, money, benefits.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Give letter.
4. When you have free time what do you prefer to do?
- |                               |                                 |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| ___ Study                     | ___ Watch TV or listen to radio |
| ___ Read a book or magazine   | ___ Sleep                       |
| ___ Talk to friends           | ___ Other _____                 |
| ___ Write letters             | _____                           |
| ___ Play cards or other games | _____                           |
5. Do you read? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No  
If so, which of the following is a reason you read?
- |                         |                                   |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| ___ For information     | ___ To learn to do something      |
| ___ For employment      | ___ To get your mind off problems |
| ___ For enjoyment       | ___ Other _____                   |
| ___ To help with school | _____                             |
6. There are different types of things to read. Which type of things do you like to read?
- |                     |                  |
|---------------------|------------------|
| ___ Paperback books | ___ Newspapers   |
| ___ Hardback books  | ___ Magazines    |
| ___ Comic books     | ___ Others _____ |

7. Do you read a newspaper?  Yes  No

If yes, how often?  Every day  Sundays only  
 Few times a week  Less than any  
 About once a week  of the above

8. What magazines do you like to read? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. What kinds of information are important to you in papers and magazines? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. Here is a list of books. Please check those that you like to read.

- Best Sellers
- Classics
- Westerns
- Mysteries or detective stories
- Thrillers
- Science fiction
- Romances
- Adventure stories
- Poetry
- Beliefs: Religion, philosophy, the occult
- Understanding yourself and others
- People and places: History, travel, biography
- Books about America: Politics, society, culture
- Science and Technology: How things work
- Outdoors: Plants, animals, the environment
- Arts and crafts
- Hobbies and do-it-yourself
- Sports, games, sports players
- Books about: minorities, women, other groups
- Humor
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

11. What was the last grade you completed in school? \_\_\_\_\_

12. What age were you when you left school? \_\_\_\_\_

13. How old are you now? \_\_\_\_\_



## Results

### Question One

The inmates were asked to list those kinds of things they thought it important to know about. Seventy-seven percent responded to the questionnaire. The responses included: drug and alcohol rehabilitation, environment, family, God, law/rights, living a normal life, the occult, philosophy, sports, staying out of trouble, war, work, and world events.

### Question Two

There were 15 responses (68%) to the question dealing with the kinds of information important to know about on the outside that are not available on the inside. The responses included: astronomy, family problems, future goals, geography, girls, government, jobs, law, outdoor life, sports, and weather reports.

### Question Three

Those answering the survey were asked to indicate which of five different areas of information it was important for them to know about. Table 1 shows the results.

### Question Four

Participants were asked to indicate what they preferred to do during their free time. The responses are shown in Table 2.

Table 1  
Most Important Type of Information

Response	Frequency	Percent
Legal information, information about your case, or about your rights	12	54.0
Information about getting yourself together, or educated	11	50.0
Information to help people on the outside, like help for your family	1	4.5
Medical information	0	0.0
Information about jobs, working, money, benefits	6	27.2

Table 2  
Use of Free Time

Response	Frequency	Percent
Study	5	22.7
Read a book or magazine	14	63.6
Talk to friends	8	36.3
Write letters	13	59.0
Play cards or other games	10	45.4
Watch TV or listen to radio	8	36.3
Sleep	4	18.0
Other (painting)	1	4.5

#### Question Five

When asked if they read, twenty respondents (91%) indicated that they do, while only 2 (9%) answered no. Those surveyed were also asked to indicate the reasons that they read. The results can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3  
Reasons for Reading

Response	Frequency	Percent
For information	11	50.0
For employment	3	13.6
For enjoyment	13	59.0
To help with school	1	4.5
To learn to do something	7	31.0
To get your mind off problems	12	54.5
Other (Pass the time, exercise the mind, like to read)	3	13.6

Question Six

The population was asked to mark a list of reading material types to indicate their preferences. These are shown in Table 4.

Table 4  
Types of Materials

Response	Frequency	Percent
Paperback Books	14	63.6
Hardback Books	9	40.9
Comic Books	6	27.2
Newspapers	15	68.1
Magazines	15	68.1
Other	0	0.0

#### Question Seven

When asked if they read a newspaper, 21 (95%) said yes, while only 1 (4.5%) said no. Respondents were also asked to indicate how often they read the paper. This is shown in Table 5.

Table 5  
Newspaper Reading

<u>Response</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Every day	18	81.8
A few times a week	1	4.5
About once a week	0	0.0
Sundays only	0	0.0
Less than any of the above	1	4.5

#### Question Eight

All those responding to the questionnaire listed magazines they like to read. Those periodicals were: Easy Rider (four responses), Penthouse (four responses), Playboy (four responses), American Law Review, Arts and Crafts, Cycle Guide, Field and Stream, Guns and Ammo, Heavy Metal, Hot Rod, Life, Mechanics Illustrated, Omni, Outdoor Life, Popular Mechanics, Science Digest, Smithsonian, Sports Illustrated, Time, and nine other publications.

#### Question Nine

When asked about important information in the papers and magazines, twenty respondents (91%) listed the following: comics, hunting issues, information about people in trouble,

jobs, law, local events, medicine, news and sports, science, styles of dress, want ads, and world events.

#### Question Ten

Table 6 shows the responses to the question dealing with the types of books the respondents like to read.

#### Question Eleven

The median response for highest grade completed was the eleventh grade. The range ran from grade six to college.

#### Question Twelve

The respondents reported ages ranging from thirteen to twenty-three at the time they left school. This corresponds to a median age of seventeen.

#### Question Thirteen

The median age of the respondents was twenty-one with a range of eighteen to fifty.

Table 6  
Subject Preference

Response	Frequency	Percent
Best Sellers	9	40.9
Classics	5	22.7
Westerns	6	27.2
Mysteries or detective stories	7	31.8
Thrillers	9	40.9
Science fiction	6	27.2
Romances	4	18.1
Adventure stories	11	50.0
Poetry	7	31.8
Beliefs: Religion, philosophy, the occult	8	36.3
Understanding yourself and others	6	27.2
People and places: History, travel, biography	9	40.9
Books about America: Politics, society, culture	5	22.7
Science and technology: How things work	5	22.7
Outdoors: Plants, animals, environment	15	68.1
Arts and crafts	6	27.2
Hobbies and do-it-yourself	9	40.9
Sports, games, sports players	13	59.0
Books about: Minorities, women, other groups	6	27.2
Humor	7	31.8
Other (Historical fiction, classics, magazines, law, yoga)	4	18.1

## Conclusions

Though the survey method had to be changed due to the problems with interviewing the inmates, it is believed that the results will be valuable in providing service to the jail. At this stage of the service, the library can only provide reading materials and reference services. The non-readers who could not complete the survey can still be served by the reference services. The librarian will have to make a point of telling the inmates at each visit of the availability of reference service.

The results of the survey indicate that the core collection placed in the jail should contain materials that include legal reference and psychological self-help books. There should also be light reading materials covering a broad range of subjects, including materials about sports and the outdoors. Adventure stories, thrillers, and best sellers should also be represented.

The respondents indicated a great demand for newspapers and magazines. Any magazines, but especially those dealing with sports, motorcycles and women should be obtained by donation. The problem of equal access for all inmates precludes the library from purchasing magazines. Newspapers are purchased by the inmates, and for the same reason as magazines, will not be purchased by the library.

The materials supplied should, above all, provide entertainment, but there should also be informative materials. Paperbacks are preferred and are the least costly type of material. As much material in paperback as possible

should be obtained.

There is some question as to the correctness of the grade completed response. The personnel feel the grade level is somewhat lower. Therefore, it seems the materials obtained for the inmates use should mostly be written for a second-year high school student, but there should be some range of reading levels among the materials.

### Evaluation

In an effort to evaluate the service provided to the Frederick County Jail, some measurement methods must be implemented. Circulation statistics would be one of the best tools to measure effectiveness. It will be the responsibility of the book van librarian to maintain a rough record of the types of books circulated. This can be done using the simple tally sheet used by the library for its regular circulation. It was decided that books will not be charged out to individual inmates, but rather to the jail service. Paperback books will not be controlled in any way. Paperbacks will just be distributed upon demand.

After six months of service, the inmates will be surveyed again. The same survey should be used, to determine whether the needs of the population have changed. The six month survey will be used by the librarian to make adjustments to the core collection. After nine months of service, another survey should be made. This can be a simple survey in which inmates are asked to evaluate the service. The six month survey, the nine month survey, and circulation statistics



will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the service in meeting the needs of the inmates.

Due to the nature of the population (i.e. one in a constant state of change), it will be very important for the librarian to be aware of special needs and of dissatisfaction within the population with regard to the service. The librarian, the Director of the Handley Library, and the reference librarian will meet quarterly to discuss the general level of service and any problems. After one year, these people, along with the warden of the jail and the Jail Project Coordinator, will meet to evaluate the service and plan future service.

Appendix

REFERENCE WORKS FOR CORE COLLECTION

Bartlett's Familiar Quotations

Black's Law Dictionary

Guinness Book of World Records

Occupational Outlook Handbook

Random House Encyclopedia

Secretary's Handbook

U.S. Government Organization Manual

Webster's Third Unabridged Dictionary

What Color Is Your Parachute? (job hunting materials)

World Almanac

World Book Encyclopedia

Source: Library Development Branch, Virginia State Library

## NOTES

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5. Sandra J. Souza, "Providing for Prisoners in Massachusetts," Wilson Library Bulletin 51 (February 1977), p. 526.
6. Rhea Joyce Rubin, "Libraries in the Cooke County Jails," Illinois Libraries 56 (September 1974), p. 538.
7. Richard Barclay, "Jail Service by a Small Public Library," Wilson Library Bulletin 53 (September 1978), p. 32.
8. Peter Losi, "Institution Library Service at Buffalo and Erie County; or, Yol Library Man," Bookmark 38 (Winter 1979), p. 81.
9. Bayley, Greenfield, and Nogueira, p. 24.
10. Brenda Vogel, Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, personal interview, Baltimore, April 4, 1984.
11. Vogel, Final Report, passim.
12. Elizabeth M. Lewis, Institutional Library Consultant, Library Development Branch, Virginia State Library, personal letter, April 4, 1984.
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