MANNUAL ON LITERACY PROGRAMS FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES

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Introduction

It is probably a little-known fact that the public library
preceded the public school by a considerable number of
years. Benjamin Franklin had collected many books on diverse
subjects since his interests ranged over such a wide field.
He started loaning books to people from his collection so
that they could learn even if they could not afford to buy
books for themselves.

Public libraries have been offering alternative education
to adults since the 1960's. An American Library Association
study conducted in 1965 by Bernice McDonald found that
fifteen public libraries were offering services to adult
illiterates. In 1977 the ALA Office for Library Service to
the Disadvantaged (OLSD) published a guidebook "Literacy and
the Nation's Libraries," by Helen Hugenot Lyman, to encourage
libraries to start similar services. A directory of public
library literacy activities was published in 1978 by the
ALA. Included in this directory were eighty-eight local
library programs. Interest was growing and in 1979 the ALA
Office of Outreach Services conducted workshops to train
librarians in techniques of teaching basic literacy skills to
undereducated adults. By early 1981 participants in the

original workshops had trained almost 900 other librarians.

Library involvement in literacy programs is based on the premise that library service should be available to everybody. When people cannot read they are deprived of that service. However, the library can offer an alternative to the public school system as a learning environment and methodology. In fact, it represents a second chance to those who failed to learn basic reading, writing and coping skills in the public school system.

"Functional Literacy" was defined by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare in 1975 as: the skills to function effectively in the basic day-to-day struggle to make a living and maintain a home and family.

The definition was based on the Adult Performance Level study conducted by the University of Texas at Austin in 1973. The study covered basic skills and knowledge areas. This study determined that one adult in five lacks functional competency.

Literacy is the first step in lifelong learning. A person can enter a literacy program, progress from that to a pre-GED program, take a GED test, and then go on to college for further training.

The library is an excellent learning center because it can provide the learning environment and special collections needed by the new reader. It also gives the new readers access to regular collections, as well as information and reference materials. The library is identified as a permanent resource center in the community. Also, it is used by

many agencies as such a resource.

1. Establishing the Need

The first step is assessment of needs. The census figures give the current population in your area. Taking into account those who are of school age or below, you can say that one in eight is a functionally illiterate adult. It is important to realize that this is only an estimate of those who are educationally disadvantaged. State Adult Education studies may also yield figures, since they do similar needs assessment for continued federal and state funding. The Department of Labor through Job Service is also a source of statistics.

The Rand McNally Commercial Atlas gives population figures, the number of households, and those employed for many cities or towns, and also county information. This is a good way to cross check your estimate.

The next step is to contact the local Adult Basic Education director for your area to determine what programs are currently being offered and where. Look under "Human Services" in your telephone book to see what educational services are offered or for other literacy programs in nearby areas. This prevents duplication of effort. Directories are available listing all literacy programs. The most comprehensive one is "Reducing Functional Illiteracy: A National Guide to Facilities and Services" available from Contact Literacy.

2. Outreach to the Community

In order to ensure public support for the program it is

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necessary to do outreach in the community. A meeting should be called of representatives of social service agencies, educational agencies, human services, and church groups. A written invitation should follow the initial contact by telephone.

It is essential that the meeting place is centrally located, has parking, and is accessible to the handicapped.

Before the meeting it is necessary to prepare a hand-out which should include the statistics gathered in the needs assessment. Details of literacy programs which are in nearby areas and could give support to your proposed program should be listed. The speaker should be the person who will be identified with the project (at least in the initial stages) and will be the contact person for information. This person can be a staff member or a volunteer who spends time in the library daily.

It is important to have a definite identity for your literacy group at this point. A telephone number is essential so that prospective volunteers can contact you. Since prospective students may be hesitant about making contact, having only one person answering the telephone also helps. They can then identify with this person when they come to the library for tutoring. The hand-out should be widely distributed through contacts made at the meeting and should contain information on how to volunteer as a tutor and how to refer a student for tutoring. Contact should also be made with groups who traditionally provide volunteer community service. If your library has "Friends of the

Library," they should be contacted early to participate in the planning process. Many "Friends" groups have sponsored literacy programs. A follow-up meeting date should be set for the group to select committees to work on financial needs (including in-kind contributions), training, and the formation of a tutor support group.

The Role of the Library

Essentially a literacy program is dependent on its volunteer tutors who work with the volunteer students. Therefore, it is basically an outreach service of the library. The library support can be maintained through the "Friends" group if this is appropriate or by assigning of a staff person, say the adult services or extension librarian, to oversee the operation of the program on a part-time basis. The library can also offer many resources such as space for workshops and tutoring, telephone and copying service, and space for the instructional materials to be displayed. As previously mentioned, it is important to have a contact person for the program, both for community outreach and referral for students and tutors. If a volunteer is used as a contact person, there should be specific hours when the volunteer is available and a definite location within the library. All of the above services provided by the library will count as "in-kind" when the financial support for maintaining the program is planned.

The Advisory Committee

This will consist of those persons who attend the second meeting. The library contact person should encourage the

group to elect a chairman and a recorder for the minutes.
This meeting is to set up committees responsible for special
tasks in the program. These will be:

Training and recruitment

Finance

Publicity

1. The Training and Recruitment Committee will be responsible
for contacting trainers from nearby areas and setting a
workshop date, also appointing a student-tutor coordinator.
They will accumulate a list of prospective workshop partici-
pants and make the room and materials arrangements for the
workshop. All members of the advisory committee should be
encouraged to take the workshop training together with
members of the library staff.

2. The Finance Committee will be responsible for soliciting
funds from local organizations to cover the cost of the
workshop materials. It should be ascertained what the guest
trainers will provide or loan for the workshop. Instruct-
ional materials for the tutors' use will need to be consid-
ered. It is usual for the tutors to pay for their
materials. A small registration fee for the workshop should
be considered if this would be appropriate. This can be a
deterrant in low-income neighborhoods and/or where there is
high unemployment. The finance committee will also be
responsible for the short and long term financing of the
program. This can range from postage to proposal writing!

3. The Publicity Committee will be responsible for radio and
TV public service announcements (PSA's) and newspaper

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articles to make the community aware of the program and to recruit tutors and students. Some other ways of doing local publicity are inserts in church bulletins and the free newpapers which are distributed weekly, especially in urban areas.

Considering the responsibilities of these committees, it is desirable to have members of the community who have some expertise in the various areas sit on the committees.

After the first group of tutors is trained, the Advisory Committee will help form the tutor support group.

Recruitment of Students

The recruitment of students may well be the most difficult part of the whole program. Unfortunately, adults who are functionally illiterate are still stigmatized in the community as being dumb or even retarded. They have had to contend with ridicule and failure, not only in their school lives, but also in their adult lives. Since these people are unable to comprehend the written word, other methods of reaching them have to be used. Radio and TV spots have been used successfully in many areas.

Once the students have made contact with the program, it is important to have them come into the library for an interview with the student-tutor coordinator.

Orientation for Training

The first session, lasting about 1-2 hours, should include information about the goals and objectives of the program including the formation of the tutor support group and the role of the library. The definition of volunteer commitment

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and the job description for a volunteer tutor should also be discussed. An overview of the tutoring method and materials should be given, too. This helps potential tutors make a decision to attend the workshop. It also lets them know what their commitment involves.

It is desirable to continue to have these orientation sessions from time to time so that people are prepared for the actual training workshop.

Methods for Recruiting Students

Recruiting should be begun before the workshop. Once the student-tutor coordinator has been appointed, a recruitment campaign for students should be started. When recruiting students for this kind of program it is necessary to ensure the student's confidentiality. Often students do not want members of their family or their friends to know that they are receiving tutoring help. The first contact with the student before the matching is very important. It is essential that the student is assured that this time he can succeed in learning to read and write.

Your local radio station or TV station should be aware of your campaign. Working with the publicity committee, make contact with them and find out the name of the talk-show host and the program manager. Talk-shows give an excellent opportunity to outline the program and appeal for students. But, be sure you have statistics of estimated non-readers in your area and a clear idea of what constitutes a "functional illiterate," as well as what causes illiteracy. Be very positive about the program.

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Posters are another way to recruit. This is an indirect method. It depends on another caring person giving the information to the non-reader. Then, it is up to that person to call the number given.

Agencies will also be willing to refer people when they know about the program. This is where the hand-out is necessary. It should be distributed to all the human service agencies in your area. Check the human services pages in the telephone directory. If you have a Volunteer Action Center in your area, please list your phone number with them. They will refer both potential students and tutors.

Training Workshop and Follow-Up

Although the first workshop should include the Advisory Committee and members of the library staff who will be attending for informational purposes, volunteers who wish to become tutors should be encouraged to attend this training session as well. These newly trained tutors will want to be matched with new students as soon as possible. The student-tutor coordinator will be responsible for matching tutors and students and keeping records of tutoring hours.

It is essential to protect the confidentiality of the student. Records of prospective students should not be passed to the tutor until a match is certain.

It is important to keep good records of which tutor and student are working together. Students who remain unmatched for more than two or three weeks become discouraged. Even if they cannot be matched quickly, contact should be main-tained. Many students, due to poor circumstances, move

around frequently, so it is necessary to keep their records updated.

The volunteer hours donated by tutors and others in the program are needed when further funding is being sought.

Tutor Support Group

After the first training workshop the Advisory Committee should meet to plan the tutor support group. This will consist of an executive committee, and other committees and will be responsible for the financing and continuation of the program. It will draw its members from trained tutors and members of the Advisory Committee.

The first action should be to consider by-laws for the tutor group which define the purpose and the function of the various officers and committees. Members of the Advisory Committee will make up the Board of the Tutor Support Group. It is best to consider the long-term goals of the group at an early stage. Affiliation with a national literacy group is necessary to continue training and in-service for tutors. Networking with other groups also needs to be maintained. This avoids duplication of effort and gives free access to information.

Successful administration of the program depends on the library staff and the tutor support group understanding their roles and responsibilities towards each other and towards the students.

Training for Program Administrators

Using the proposed by-laws as a guideline, officers should be made aware of their responsibilities. Job descriptions

will be contained in the proposed by-laws. A budget, fundraising activities, tutor training, and in-service for tutors should be decided upon. Developing a training team who will be able to give workshops is an important activity during the first year. Each national organization has written procedures for trainers to obtain certification which are available to develop the training team.

Record-keeping activities need to be defined and specifically assigned. Statistics for the program will be needed for fund raising and informational purposes, so good records can be of great benefit.

Orientation and development of a speaker's bureau should be undertaken by the publicity committee at this time.

Evaluation of Program

In order to measure the success of the program, a system of evaluation should be set up. This can either be formal or informal. The formal evaluation can be developed from formulas suggested for library evaluation programs and should be done independently. The informal method could be the use of volunteers to ask tutors and (through them) students, certain questions.

The evaluation will help formulate goals for the second year of the program as well as meet needs of the tutors and students. It may be found that certain trends have been established or that areas of need have not been addressed by the program. It may be done after six months or one year, if the program had a slow start.

grants will only be for instructional materials, others can pay for staff and support services. Here are some of the more usual ways of program finance:

LSCA through the library commission in your state--they will usually fund for one or two years.

ABE--this is state and/or federal money available through the Department of Education in your state.

Both of these may provide quite large amounts.

Two sources of small grants on a national basis are B. Dalton Bookseller and the Gannett Foundation, publisher of USA Today. Both have to be in your area for you to be considered.

On a local basis, United Way, local foundations, Kiwanis, Lions, Jaycees and other service groups may make substantial donations.

The speaker's bureau can also ask for donations when speaking to local groups.

Proposal writing should be done by somebody who has experience. This can be either a library staff member or a volunteer. It is ideal to have a person who can attend a seminar in grantsmanship. These are offered by colleges and universities as part of their community education programs.

Development of New Reader Collections

There are many excellent bibliographies of books for low level readers. There is also a free book available from New Readers Press called Opening Doors for Adult New Readers: How Libraries Can Select Materials. Many of the educational publishers have books for adult new readers, too.