

Great American Bookmobile Conference II (1995)

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Bookmobiles in the Burbs

by Joyce Voss

The "burbs," in this case, are those around the city of Chicago. I will make reference to a number of programs that exist in that geographic location, but most particularly tell you of the Arlington Heights Memorial Library and its Community Services Department which is responsible for Bookmobile service in Arlington Heights, IL. The village is seven miles long and two miles wide, and has a population of about 77,000.

The Community Services Department handles the library's outreach activities. These include, besides the Bookmobile service, a satellite library at Park Place Senior Center, services to the six Senior residences, services to six Health Care facilities, the Library Visitor Program (home-bound), the Blind and Physically Handicapped Program (BPH), School services at all levels, a full time literacy effort, and programming in the community. The work is accomplished by a staff of ten: seven full time staff and three part time staff.

Deposit collections are kept current at five of the Health Care facilities and at the senior residences. Additionally at four of the Health Care facilities, staff make room-to-room visits with materials every other week. Besides offering monthly programs to these sites, we are very proactive in supporting the institutions activities directors with a variety of resources.

The library assists with the National Library Service to the Blind and Physically Handicapped (Talking Books) which is funded by the federal government, and administered in our area through "Voices of Vision," located at the DuPage Library System in Geneva, Illinois. Providing applications, helping with equipment, and offering reader advisory assistance are some of the department's BPH duties.

Through the Library Visitor program patrons who are unable to visit the library have materials delivered to them by volunteers. Community Service staff select materials for these individuals after phone conversations in which their reading, listening, and/or viewing taste is determined. On Monday morning and Thursday afternoon volunteers drop off the selections following a schedule set up by the staff for that day.

At the Park Place Senior Center there is a collection of several thousand items. The library room is available from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. The Assistant Manager of the Community Services Department is the liaison to the Senior Center. She arranges volunteers to man the library, sets up programs like book discussions, current events, travelogues, health lectures, and other presentations of interest. In recent months there have been National Issues Forums, and an eight week Memoirs Writing course. She also sits on the Board of Directors at the Center.

The Literacy Coordinator is a thirty-two hour per week position, with ten of those hours being paid by grant money. The local High School district seeks the grant from the state, and fortunately the grant has been renewed annually for the past ten years. The Library is a class site three times a week, and the Coordinator sets up study circles in between semesters. There are more English as a Second Language students, but both READ TO LEARN and ESL are presented. A large Adult Basic Reader collection and a number of literacy-related computer programs are also available. Big classes are held in the library's largest meeting room. Students of the formal program plus others whose schedules do not permit class attendance, visit the Literacy Office for one on one consultation with the Coordinator, and for computer instruction.

Schools Services staff provides support to schools in the Arlington Heights area. Those services include loans of Library materials, book-talks, storytimes, classroom visits and library tours. The Elementary School Specialist and the Secondary School Specialist are full time positions. The Preschool Outreach Specialist is a twenty hour per week position. A staff member in the Children's Department handles all preschool visits within the library. The two Preschool positions share the book bag program for this group, and it is available to the twenty-nine preschool sites within the village.

Besides the regular monthly Institutional programming, the Community Services staff provides book discussions, book reviews, and storytelling for adults and/or children. These are available to local groups and organizations.

The AHML Bookmobile has a regular two week schedule in which there are 29 stops at 26 locations. We evaluate our schedule once a year, and put out a new schedule which commences August 1. In years past, other approaches have been taken, but with its current demographics a single schedule seems to serve the most patrons. Regular stops are Monday through Friday from 3:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Our minimum

time at a stop is one hour, and accounts for most stops. A half dozen are one and a half or two hours. Nearby libraries have stops that range from twenty minutes to two hours; most revise schedules twice a year; one puts out schedules three times a year.

Additionally the Bookmobile makes regular visits to a few preschools that have requested them. It's in parades, visits block parties, and may, for number of weeks, visit a Summer school reading practicum, or serve workers at the local race course during the Racing Season.

With one exception, area libraries report that children comprise 50 to 75 percent of their clientele. One community puts their juvenile patrons at 25 percent. Most serve preschools; many take the bookmobile to senior residences; a few are very supportive to the elementary schools; and at least one does not visit elementary schools during school hours.

The AHML Bookmobile nonfiction collection is interfiled and grouped by large subject categories rather than the Dewey decimal system. A color dot system is used. The category approach enables us to shelve by size, making a neater looking bus and an effective use of space. One other area library uses a category approach. This fall we will be conducting a survey to evaluate the category arrangement and foresee reducing/changing/eliminating some groups. For the most part the Bookmobile owns only titles carried by the main library. Bookmobile items are found in the main library catalog, and even though there are general subject categories on the bus, materials are fully cataloged and carry said number on their spines.

We have one terminal on the Bookmobile and anticipate a second. Our main library uses the Innovative system and the bus is linked to it for circulation files and for the online card catalog. Our packet radio comes from Electronic Systems Technology in Kennewick, Washington. An additional aerial is soon to be added in our northern region, and is necessitated by our inability to pull up information at two to four of our stops. We monitor our stops daily and report monthly the percent of activity at each stop. It will be interesting to note if the time of the year or other conditions consistently affect our hook up.

Besides having access to circulation and catalog information on their Bookmobiles, some area libraries carry CD ROM products. Currently these are encyclopedias, an atlas, Family Physician, a visual dictionary, Way Things Work, etc. A number of questions arise when considering products for a vehicle. For example, are time restrictions necessary? If a Bookmobile carries Magazine Index, would this lead to frustration on the users part if the actual magazines could not be immediately avail-

able? Deciding what is appropriate technology for a specific Bookmobile is a real challenge. How do the many types of technology fit into the MISSION of your Bookmobile?

The AHML Bookmobile collection is a POPULAR materials collection. That is our mission. We carry almost all of the same kind of popular materials that the main library does: compact discs, audio cassettes, books on cassette, videos, large print, books, sights and sounds, etc. Our circulation represents about 5% of AHML's total circulation which is near one million. Most area bookmobiles have circulations ranging from five to ten percent.

Of course the staff working on the Bookmobile has to handle many questions from Readers' Advisory to Reference. At AHML everyone in Community Services works on the Bookmobile. There are four drivers. Only the Bookmobile Coordinator's position is exclusively connected with the Bookmobile. The other three drivers have other Community Service duties. The twenty-five hour per week clerk goes out with a driver three times a week and spends the remaining work time on department projects. The Literacy Coordinator accompanies a driver to the Backstretch during racing season, usually May through September. Two stops per week for two hours each and it serves a group of patrons that are 75% Hispanic. The school services personnel are used as needed. We feel that Continuing Education of the staff is very important, especially their readers advisory skills. Each will attend several workshops a year to hone her skills.

The current Bookmobile services in the suburbs go back to the 1950s. Arlington Heights did not begin using a Bookmobile until 1973, and then it was a service especially to children. In interviewing area-wide bookmobile managers in preparation for this talk, a number of similarities and differences emerged. I have mentioned a few. Many talked of the importance of staff in influencing the satisfaction of bookmobile users. A few use the McNaughton or a similar program to help deal with having enough copies of the current titles. A few do not carry videos. Some see the existence of their Bookmobile as a substitute for building branches which are more expensive to maintain. Many use a different summer schedule to test an area before making it a regular stop. Most encourage telephone calls for materials that could then be brought out to a stop. In the suburbs 50 percent or more of the Bookmobile users also regularly use the main library.

During the past year a Bookmobile Mangers' group in Northern Illinois, who regularly meet, put together a survey for the purpose of gathering pertinent information. The final writing of the survey and the

compilation of data was done by Noreen Reese of the annual Round-Up in the Spring. Bookmobiles are on display, workshop sessions are offered and speakers are invited to enrich the day.

Although some of our methods and purposes may vary, there is a lot more common ground shared by rural, urban and suburban bookmobiles. We are primarily concerned with our patron. We endeavor to do what we can to bring the best service possible and fill reasonable needs. We offer a smaller universe of materials, which marketing people tell us is very appealing. We are intergenerational, and we offer a certain security. Bookmobiles should have a promising future as long as we remember to define what we are doing, to collect the hard facts that support the need for our service, to maintain a trained and friendly staff, and to focus on our primary concern, the patron.

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