

Programming in Rural and Small Libraries: An Overview and Discussion

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The original purpose of libraries subscription, parish, or rental was to make books available to readers, either at no cost or for a fee (McMullen, 2000). This straightforward function has changed considerably in the ensuing decades. Libraries continue to lend books and other materials (videos, compact disks, art), but increasingly, they seek to lure, edify, and encourage patrons with programs that extend beyond their traditional role.

This paper will define programming as activities conducted within the library that do not fall within its traditional purpose of lending materials to patrons. This definition includes such traditional programs as children's story hour, as well as more recent developments, such as ongoing book discussion groups for adults, presentations for the community on history, culture and crafts, computer and Internet use classes, and virtually anything else sponsored by the library. Programming may be regular, intermittent, or a one-shot presentation. What library programs have in common is their focus on activities that extend beyond loaning materials.

Although the library literature is well stocked with articles describing individual or system-wide programs, it lacks large-scale analyses of the effects of programming on library circulation, patron satisfaction, and other variables that would help libraries plan more effective programs. Absent these multivariate analyses, this paper will focus on descriptions of programs targeted at various groups. The descriptions are followed by discussions of whether these programs are viable for rural libraries, with the thesis that these small libraries could adapt many programs, but in doing so, will frequently need to modify them to allow for constraints of budget and staff numbers and training. I will also argue (as have others; see Vavrek, 1995) that rural libraries could provide more effective and successful programs if they surveyed patrons and analyzed their communities to identify topics that library users would find both enjoyable and useful. Such an analysis might use census data on occupations, education levels, and average ages.

A Brief and Incomplete History of Programming

If a written history of library programming exists, this author did not find it. The history of programming might arguably be traced to the time before the public library as such existed. Reading groups and reading clubs from the

eighteenth century met to agree on books to be purchased collectively that members would like to read (Manley, 1999). These groups apparently did not formally discuss the books that they chose, as contemporary patrons do in book discussion groups. Nevertheless, their focus on acquiring books that would interest all participants suggests that they were indeed precursors of programming.

In the ensuing decades and centuries, programming has assumed an increasingly important place in the role of public libraries. Story times for children have been followed by analogous activities-or some book-related activity-for toddlers and even infants. Adult programming now includes book discussion groups, speakers, hands-on crafts, and classes in genealogy. With the explosive growth of the Internet, many public libraries also offer patrons free Internet access, albeit sometimes with filters to screen out potentially objectionable sites. (The question of whether filters infringe on patrons' constitutional rights remains the subject of multiple court cases (Estabrook, 2000). With Internet access, many libraries also now offer classes and workshops on computer use, Internet searching, and related topics.

Adult Programming: An Overview

Although many public libraries do offer adult programming, it is far from universal in rural and small libraries (Vavrek, 1993). Vavrek cites several reasons for this:

- Adults frequently lack time to attend programs, and if they do have time, they use it for other activities.
- Librarians, aware that adults are less likely to attend library programs, often shy away from holding them at all.
- Staff in small and rural libraries frequently lack experience in organizing and publicizing programs.
- Insufficient funds discourage libraries from trying to set up programs.

The dearth of programming in small and rural libraries may be changing, according to Vavrek's informal survey of colleagues nationwide (Vavrek, 1995). Librarians reported holding book discussion groups, computer classes, programs related to particular events (National Poetry Month, for example), travel-related events, and others (Vavrek, 1995).

A survey of recent literature supports this "snapshot" of adult programming. As with the snapshot, the literature review yielded an unscientific view of adult programming, but does point to various directions that this programming is taking.

Perhaps the most visible trend in adult programming is the library-sponsored book discussion group. Multiple examples exist; several typical examples follow. In Old Town, Maine, the book discussion group meets monthly for a potluck supper and discussion of one short work a poem or story and one book. At the end of the year (which follows the academic calendar), the group meets to decide on the books for the following year; the library director selects the shorter works (Old Town Library, 2000).

In Orange City, Iowa, participants meet three times a year to hear a guest speaker talk about a particular book then discuss it with the attendees (Orange City Library, 2000). At the Adams County Library in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, the library holds a monthly Book Talk in which a speaker discusses a particular book, author, or theme; most recently, a staff member who is also an artist spoke and led a discussion on novels about art (personal communication, Rebecca Brown, selection coordinator, ACLS, November, 2000).

Some libraries have also pioneered other forms of discussion. In a pilot program entitled "The Way We Work," organized by the American Library Association's Public Programs Office and funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, participants met at twenty libraries to discuss their values and beliefs about work. (Goodes, 1997). The program offered five possible themes on which to focus: the attitudes of different generations toward work, the issues based on differences in gender, the multicultural workplace of the twentieth century, immigration, and technology and the American workplace. Libraries often collaborated with local scholars in selecting the best theme for their communities. Noted the librarian Joyce A. Dunkelberger in Jackson, Wyoming, "Valley residents became aware of the history of work in our region. They understood that people's jobs were not their whole persona and began to relate their own migrations to those of immigrants. Participants enjoyed the discussion so much they stayed at least two and a half hour." (Goodes, 1997). History programs, if designed with the local population in mind, can also draw patrons. In 1999, Adams County Library in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, held a five-session program in co-operation with Gettysburg College. The program, "Home Front," described life in the United States during World War II. History professor Michael Birkner of the college both gave talks and led discussions. The topic worked well in Gettysburg, a town with many military history buffs and a substantial number of World War II veterans. The program was filled to capacity, according to Carl Heidenblad, the library director (Heidenblad, personal communication, November, 1999).

In another history program funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, rural librarians at thirty libraries in Colorado, Kansas, and Oklahoma were enlisted to sponsor a program on the heritage of that region. The programs, which included "Women of the Plains and Mountains,"

“Heritage of the Plains and Mountains,” and “Literature of the Plains and Mountains,” were designed to use books, speakers, and films to acquaint participants with aspects of the region (Nesmith, 1982).

Other libraries opt for a more eclectic approach to programming, one that does not necessarily focus on a book but that generally could have a book tie-in. Frances Morrison Branch Library in Saskatoon, Canada, sponsors several programs monthly. For example, in one flier of their programs in 2000 included, they had a geology professor from Oklahoma speak on “The Wichita Mountains Oklahoma’s Oldest Mountains.” In November of that same year, the program was by Westside R/C Fliers, a Yukon-based group dedicated to flying radio-controlled aircraft. The library also sponsors a monthly book discussion group (Frances Morrison Branch Library, 2000).

The “hands-on” program has also gained some currency. In the New Durham Public Library (state not included in web site), the library held workshops on scrapbook making that incorporated instruction in photo cropping, layout, mounting, and journal keeping (New Durham Public Library, 1999).

Genealogy’s recent popularity has not gone unnoticed by libraries, and the author found multiple examples of genealogy workshops. Some, such as the Olathe, Kansas, public library, offer courses that rely primarily on print resources (Olathe Public Library, 2000). More often, however, these were part of a larger program found in an increasing number of libraries: computer instruction. Web sites on genealogy abound, including the largest of all, that of the Church of the Latter-Day Saints, more often known as Mormons. In these computer-based genealogy workshops, participants are taught how to use the Internet to fill out their family tree, a process that can require some fairly sophisticated search techniques.

Senior citizen programming is essentially a subcategory of adult programming, and few articles in the literature address it specifically. It might reasonably be inferred that programs held during the day would attract a disproportionate number of retired people.

One interesting example of a pilot program for senior citizens, funded by the National Council on Aging, is “Silver Editions II,” self-described as “advancing the concept of library-centered humanities programs for older adults.” The program was offered in seven diverse locations; each involved twenty to twenty-five participants, with discussions led by a local scholar. The program’s themes were “The Remembered Past: 1914-1945,” and “The Search for Meaning: Insights through Literature, History, and Art” (Van Fleet, 1991). One of the program’s stated goals was to encourage older adults who were not library users to begin coming to the library. No further references to this program appear in the literature.

Adult Programming and Rural Libraries

The substantial variety of adult programs holds one principal message for library staff members who plan adult programming: know your community, your potential audience, and issues of importance and interest to them. The simplest, if not the easiest, way to get this information is to survey patrons. Other clues, though, lie in readily available statistics such as census data. What occupations predominate? What aspect of local culture gives the community an identity?

These are all factors that may well spell success or failure for a library's programming efforts. Although not a recommendation found in the published literature, the author would suggest that library workers pay attention to what the people ahead of them in the line at Wal-Mart say, what parents of children's friends say they wish were available for their child, and other informal participant-observation survey tools.

For senior citizen programming, the same principle obtains. Does the library get a lot of requests for reference help in genealogy from older people, or computer use, or Internet searching? Do older patrons using the Internet computers ask for help from library staff more frequently than do younger patrons? A formal survey of senior citizens would undoubtedly yield more specific answers to the question of what kinds of programs they would use. Many rural or small libraries, however, lack the time, resources, or trained staff to conduct such surveys. Absent formal responses, the staff of a small library can probably rely on patron input.

Computers as a Programming Tool and Target

Literature on computers in libraries published as recently as 1995 is already outdated one indicator that the Internet has indeed become integral to the lives of librarians and patrons alike. A survey published in September 2000 found that of 1,297 libraries surveyed by the University of Illinois/Urbana-Champaign under contract to the American Library Association, 96.3 percent provided public access to the Internet (Estabrook, 2000). Considering that only two years earlier, the library literature described libraries' struggles to provide any sort of computerized service at all, this number is truly astonishing. It is also, however, somewhat misleading: a survey by Clarion University found that twelve percent of library users used the computers to connect to the Internet and fifty-seven percent of Internet users prefer to use the Internet from their homes (Vavrek, 2000)

Given this near-universal access, computer instruction has become a basic form of programming for public libraries. The one basic requirement is that the library has enough computers for participants to use. In terms of course offer-

ings, an informal survey by the author of libraries in and around Adams County, Pennsylvania, provides anecdotal evidence that small libraries generally focus on the basics. Introduction to Microcomputers is one common offering; another is Searching the Internet, which has a follow-up course on more advanced search techniques. Adams County also offers an on-line genealogy course. These courses are free and generally filled; the local community college offers more advanced courses in computer use and programming (Robin Leshner, head reference librarian and computer co-coordinator, ACLS, personal communication, October, 2000).

Computers, Rural Libraries, and Programming

Successful programming in computer use has two basic requirements: sufficient computers, and a space in which to put them for a class. This, for rural libraries, which tend to be underfunded and small, can pose a genuine barrier. At the same time, a library that does not offer something in the way of computer instruction is likely to lose patrons to competing agencies, such as community colleges. Thus, it becomes a matter of how to allocate scarce resources or, alternatively, how to find alternative sources for computer equipment grants, donations, and the like. These are decisions that small and rural libraries must make based on their specific situations.

Literacy Programs in Public Libraries

Illiteracy remains a significant problem in the United States. A survey published in 1993 by the Educational Testing Service stated that twenty-one to twenty-three percent of Americans performed at the lowest prose level; a this percentage represents forty to forty-four million people (Ellingson, 1998).

Libraries have long been involved in literacy programs. A report from the National Institute for Literacy states that “hundreds of thousands” of adults who want to improve their literacy participate in such programs in 7,000 public libraries nationwide. The populations served in this program, however, represent the tip of the proverbial iceberg: according to the National Institute for Literacy, fewer than ten percent of adults who could benefit from these services are using them (Ellingson, 1998). Beyond the general and pervasive issues of funding, staff, and the like, libraries that want to start literacy programs face the problem that “many adults do not realize they have a problem. They are functionally illiterate, i.e., they can perform a variety of tasks but are disadvantaged because they do not have the economic, social, and personal options available to those with higher-level skill.” (Ellingson, 1998).

Various initiatives suggest wider recognition of the role of rural libraries in providing literacy service. In 1998, the Viburnum Foundation gave \$100,000

to thirty small libraries in seven southern states (Library of Congress Information Bulletin, 1998) At a workshop convened by the Library of Congress Center for the Book, participants discussed such issues as publicity, outreach, materials, and partnering with other agencies. In Missouri, a state survey reported that in 1996, libraries offered literacy services such as intensive training in literacy services, tutoring space, special “adult new reader” collections, and referral points to other agencies (Quinn, 1996.)

Nevertheless, although rural and small libraries are initiating literacy programs, the majority of examples in the literature come from large urban systems.

The most prominent finding in reviewing this literature is a trend away from the traditional one-on-one, structured method (for example, the Laubach method). This new method is variously known as family literacy or family-centered literacy, although some libraries follow the same principles without the name. The fundamental premise is that adult literacy learners themselves identify why they want to improve their literacy skills and choose materials to work with that match those goals (Talan, 1998).

In California, twenty-five libraries selected as field development sites have been following a program called “Equipped for the Future (EFF),” which begins by identifying the goals of each participant. “The philosophy behind EFF is that adult learners themselves are best able to determine their own learning needs” (Talan, 1998). In a survey conducted by the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), learners were asked their needs and goals. The survey yielded four basic “purposes for improving literacy skills: to have access, to have voice, to take action, and to provide a bridge to the future.” (Talan, 1998). One direct link to family, Talan notes, is that many people join the program because they want to be able to read to young children.

The Chicago Public Library Initiative is an innovative program started in the mid-1980s that departs from the traditional tutor-student model of most literacy programs (DeArrudah, 1995). An example of what is now more generally known as family literacy or family-based literacy, the program focuses on meeting readers’ perceived needs, rather than imposing a canned curriculum on them:

“Instead of a very structured learning environment with a rather well-defined curriculum, as it is usually the case with [literacy initiatives], the literacy staff avail themselves to impart a wide range of basic academic skills. While some students come in every day, others come every now and then. While some bring traffic-related materials, others bring their bibles to use as some sort of primer. . . . Anyhow, the community residents are in charge of their learning experiences here; the literacy staff are merely incidental to the participants’ learning which is definitely a life-long process” (DeArrudah, 1995).

The Chicago system chose this model because a substantial number of the target population are young, low-income people who have lost any faith they ever had in “the system” and formal education (DeArrudah, 1995). The advantage of the program style is that it bypasses the stigma of acknowledging illiteracy and instead improves their basic skills by working with materials that they deem important.

In *The Library as Literacy Classroom* (1992), Marguerite Crowley Weibel echoes this belief:

“Just as increased participation leads to increased productivity in business, so active involvement in learning activities increases students’ chances for success. Therefore, give your adult literacy students the opportunity to make decisions regarding their own learning. Discuss their long-range goals, and help them set intermediate goals that will advance them toward their individual objectives. . . . Encourage them to bring reading materials to class from their work or home environment. . . . Talk openly with them about learning, and what they think they should be learning” (Weibel, 1992).

In the Queens Public Library, New York City, the program identifies new adult learners enrolled in a library basic education or English as a Second Language (ESL) program as the primary learners, and their preschool or young children as secondary learners (Cerny, 2000). The program’s goal is to incorporate the adults’ learning into their home life—thus, they hope, fostering families that recognize the importance of reading and put the program to use in their homes. To affect this, they established a program in which librarians tried to reinforce three basic concepts through the use of hands-on materials, lectures, and participation to involve those in attendance. These included:

- The importance of reading to young children regularly;
- Commonplace or inexpensive activities that encouraged the learning of science and math; and
- A party for participants that included a picture book session to encourage them to practice the ideas presented in the workshops.

Rural Libraries and Literacy Programs

Although a considerable number of libraries (7,000 see above) do participate in literacy programs in some way, rural libraries face various obstacles specific to small towns. One is the generally conservative outlook of small-town residents, who view the library as a place to get books rather than take part in other activities (Vavrek, 2000). Another, not noted in the literature but nevertheless quite familiar to any small-town resident, is turf

battles. Small towns are places where positions matter and give people identity and status (this writer, for example, found life much easier when she began to work in the library and could use that as an identifier rather than freelance editor, which is not a job familiar to many people here). Thus, the local Literacy Council and those who run it would cede their status to the public library. Although willing to use library resources-tutoring space and the like, they would be firm in their desire to retain control of the program.

Another obstacle to rural library literacy programs is staff numbers and training. Many rural or small libraries operate with minimal paid staff, who would simply lack the time to put together an effective literacy program. Compounding this, as has been noted, many staff members at local libraries lack formal training in library science (Vavrek, 1997). Although this does not mean that people without training cannot be effective library workers, it does suggest that they would be unfamiliar with the literature that could guide them toward an effective program, and might also lack research skills in library science.

Young Adult Programming

Young adults make up a substantial percentage of library users, although statistical counts of them generally bundle these statistics with those for children's library use. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), sixty percent of the eighteen million people who "entered" public libraries in fall 1993 were children or young adults (Heaveside, 1995).

Nevertheless, although their numbers are large, young adults are often left behind with respect to public libraries. According to a survey by the National Center for Educational Statistics, eleven percent of public libraries have neither a young adult collection nor a young adult section.

The striking thing about the literature on young adult programming is its near-total absence. If present at all, it is generally bundled with children's programming under "Services to Young People." Homework assistance programs are one example. NCES reports that about one in seven libraries have such programs: fifty-eight percent of young adults are "moderate to heavy" users of these program (Heaveside, 1995).

Libraries, like parents, schools, and most of the rest of society, seem not to know what to do with this group that consists of not-quite children who are also not-quite adults. Indeed, anyone who has spent substantial time around young adults quickly realizes that they don't really know what to do with themselves. Notes Pitman:

“If the truth be told, libraries and young adults have, at best, an uneasy relationship. Yes, we want them to frequent the library (sort of), but we don’t want them to act like young adults, and we’re not going to particularly go out of our way to build a bridge toward reaching them.... No wonder young adults stay away in droves; the gap between what we offer and what they want can be a fairly grand canyon” (Pitman, 1995).

Several programs described in the literature suggest that one form young adult programming a typical programming but programming nonetheless involving young adults as volunteers in other library programs. For example, in Nashville, Tennessee, the public library enlisted the help of teenagers in running its summer reading program for grade-school children. The teen-age participants worked in the children’s program and, in their down time, helped with shelving, processing, and other necessary but let us be frank tedious tasks (Baldwin, 1996).

Reading programs designed specifically for young adults/teenagers also have been tried in some libraries. In Virginia’s “Read Around the World” program for teens, library staff used state-provided materials on serving underserved teenage populations, reading lists, lists of multicultural videos, and other activities. They also gave booktalks, had outside speakers, and displays (Virginia State Library, 1999).

Regrettably, the articles that describe these programs tend not to follow up with outcome reports. It seems likely that many library staff who have worked with teenagers would agree that people in this age group are casting about for their identities; thus, a program that involved them with helping children or doing useful tasks around the library would give at least some young adults a sense of purpose and of being needed.

One novel program that turned up is the “Teen Talent Show” sponsored annually by the Kitsap Regional Library in Bremerton, Washington. The talent show grew out of staff realization that they were doing little for young adults that really interested them. The show was something of a compromise, as Pitman says: “We needn’t turn our libraries into an MTV stage show in order to attract them, but it’s surely in our better interests to try to meet them halfway” (Pitman, 1995).

The show is held each summer and features up to twenty solo and group acts. The acts include monologues, songs, dances, readings, and the like. Pitman cites one personal favorite: A brother-sister act in which the young man played the theme from “*The Pink Panther*” on the saxophone while his sister “scurried back and forth with one lone tree behind a painted landscape depicting a clear-cut.” The piece was entitled “Logger in Search of a Virgin Forest.”

The logistics of organizing such a show are formidable, but not impossible to achieve. Pitman notes that the key aspect is finding several staff members who are very interested in the program.

Young Adult Programming and Rural Libraries

Young adults in libraries present a multifaceted challenge to library staff. If the library has troublemakers, they are more than likely to be young adults. As a result, library staff may be reluctant to spend time on programming for what they perceive as ungrateful patrons. At the same time, many young adults are casting about for a sense of identity and a feeling of having a place in society. These are things that library-directed activities can help provide.

Here too, though, as in literacy programs, a kind of turf battle can erupt. Library staff members are used to working with older volunteers and may be unwilling to train the less predictable young adults. Children's librarians who prefer to retain strong control over their programs may be uncomfortable with having inexperienced teenagers involved.

Rural or small libraries could conceivably adapt the Teen Talent Show in Washington, but it would be difficult at many libraries. Performance space would be necessary; the "few interested staff members" might have to be the entire staff; and such a show would face competition from local talent shows sponsored by schools and civic organizations.

For rural libraries, the primary impediment to young adult programming is probably staff shortages and training. Few small or rural libraries have young adult librarians, and other staff members are unlikely to have training or expertise with this population, even what would seem basic: a working knowledge of young adult literature (Heaveside, 1995). The author believes that in failing to enlist young adults in some form of programming, whether it be reading or structured volunteer or internship programs, libraries are losing a tremendous resource. The author would also note that the young adult collection of the library where she is employed is an excellent metaphor for the position of young adults; it is shelved in a hallway, a passageway between the children's room and the adult fiction section.

Children's Programming

It hardly takes a literature search to conclude that in children's programming, story time is the most common offering. An NCES report states that eighty-six percent of libraries surveyed had group programs for preschool and kindergarten children; this figure included not only story time, but also craft, booktalks, and other activities (Heaveside, 1995). According to the same source, forty-nine percent of libraries also have programs for infants and toddlers.

An apparent trend in children's story hour program is that of expanding it beyond its traditional audience. In the Yellowknife Public Library, for example, in addition to preschool story time, the library also has "Babies Need Books" for one-to three year olds; special family story hours; Literacy Week, which has special programs and speakers; and a parent forum with the theme "How can parents help their children succeed in school?" (Yellowknife Public Library, 2000). Other libraries hold story time in Spanish as well as in English.

Summer reading programs are another very common form of children's programming. Many states select a statewide theme and provide libraries with some materials; the library itself, however, depending on how the program is structured and what "reward" system it uses (if any), may also have to invest some money in a summer program. One such theme is "Click on Adventure," used in Pennsylvania in 1999.

A less common form of children's programming is the year-round reading club, designed both to increase library use and family involvement in reading and the library. "Readers on the Prowl," a 1998 Florida program, provided librarians with seven annotated bibliographies in packets that also included material on games and crafts, music, films and videos, and games (Johnson, 1998).

In Texas, a 1995 reading club used the theme "Once Upon a Planet." The program's goals were:

- To use "book-based media" to help children and their caretakers understand the importance of reading and "gain a love of stories, information, and language; and
- To show older siblings and caretakers how they can encourage and take part in children's reading.

The library staff was given a manual that both suggested material for programming and included lists of books, topics for booktalks, interactive play, and, for younger children, finger play, flannel-board activities, and action rhymes (Travis, 1995). The literature yielded no national survey on the prevalence of these programs.

Another interesting children's program in Phoenix, Arizona, used children to help recommend books to other children. The library sponsored a contest in which children submitted written answers to the question, "Tell us why we should read your favorite book. Tell us in twenty-five words or less." More than 1,600 entries were submitted; winners were honored at a banquet (Meyers, 1999).

Children's Programming: The Latch-Key Programs

Virtually any children's librarian will tell you that whether a formal latch-key program exists or not, their children's room functions as a de facto after-school childcare facility. Some libraries, although certainly not all, welcome this ("Better here than out on the streets or home alone"). Some, such as the Philadelphia Free Library (as described in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*), embrace this role and go out of their way to create an environment suitable for these children.

Regardless of their informal practices, however, few libraries have official policies about these children. A 1997 study in Ohio found that although that a majority of the responding libraries have latchkey, unattended children present, less than one-half of those libraries have written policies. Staff members are not trained to deal with them, and few have official programs for them (Brass, 1997).

As a trend in children's programming, it is, if not growing, certainly present. In the Queens Public Library, New York City, adults were hired to help children with homework, supervise recreation, and offer general support services to librarians (Cerny, 2000). Homework support programs do exist (though hard numbers are not available). This is an issue that libraries, and children's librarians in particular, may have to address on a less ad hoc basis.

Children's Programming: Homeschoolers

Homeschooling is becoming an increasingly popular option for many families. Their reasons for bypassing the public or private school systems range from academic quality (or lack thereof) to religious concerns (Masters, 1996). Homeschoolers are in general heavy users of public libraries. At least one study has found a significant correlation between homeschoolers' achievement test scores and the number of visits they made to the public library (Ray, 1999).

The characteristics of homeschooling families have been described (Masters, 1996). More than fifty percent have annual incomes of \$25,000-\$55,000; parents have attended or graduated from college; more than ninety percent are white; more than seventy-five percent attend religious services; the mother is the teacher.

Although the literature yielded no statistics on the geographical dispersal of homeschoolers, they are a definite presence in small towns. Librarians who work in small and rural libraries are likely to be familiar with these families. The inherent conservatism of small towns frequently means that many of their residents are churchgoers; some are fundamentalist Christians who home-school for religious reasons.

Working with these families presents various challenges. Masters cites several: patrons' objections to material; subject wipe-out, a particularly accurate term for the situation in which one family borrows all materials on a given subject; time-energy demands; and negative staff attitudes toward homeschoolers. (Masters, 1996)

These challenges notwithstanding, public libraries have much to offer homeschoolers. Librarians can help children-often more self-disciplined than those who attend school-how to do their own searches for materials; they can help parents collect a reasonable number of books on a given subject. Time and staff numbers permitting, they can also offer tours of the library and perhaps specific programs.

Librarians can also point homeschooling patrons toward other sources. Lorson, addressing the question of teaching science in the home, notes that public libraries are also very useful to homeschoolers in providing periodicals and suggestions for useful Internet sites (Lorson, 1999).

Children's Programming and Rural Libraries

The overview of children's programs described above do, in some cases, seem adaptable for small or rural libraries. Story hour, for example, is a program that even a one-staff library can generally manage. In other cases, as with adult programming, it seems likely that the staff would have neither the time nor the training to manage large-scale contests such as "Readers Talking to Readers" or "Parent Forum." Many, too, would have to take time from their core responsibilities collection development and patron assistance if they were to try to organize a year-round multifaceted book club.

Children's librarians also need to be aware that they have more competition than in the past for programs such as story times. Local bookstores have story hours open to the public. During the summer, some newspapers sponsor reading clubs through the Newspapers in Education program. Local crafts shops may hold workshops for children with nominal fees. Libraries, in short, must make every attempt to make their programs as attractive as those of the competition.

Rural Libraries and Programming General Analysis and Conclusions

The overview of library programs and how feasible it is for rural libraries to try to adapt them suggests several conclusions. First, attractive though many of these programs must be, small and rural libraries cannot have them all. Rather, they must choose where they are going to focus their programming and

stick to that focus. They cannot be all things to all patrons, and they often lack the critical mass of patrons necessary to ensure a program's success. Distance, too, is a factor: many rural library patrons live relatively far from the library, and once home for the day, are unlikely to venture out again for a library program.

If at all feasible, small and rural libraries that are interested in increasing or improving their program should undertake a patron survey and conduct a community analysis. Many library staff members in these institutions may have lived in the community for many years, and so find it hard to take a dispassionate view of life there; however if they can do so, they are likely be rewarded with a broader and more sympathetic view of what patrons might need and enjoy.

The principal rule for rural and small libraries, then, is straightforward if not simple: "Know thyself (and thy community)." Only then can a library put together a slate of programs that are useful, attractive to patrons, and, one hopes, substantive enough to make those who attend them think a little further than they otherwise might have done.

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