

*Question D: What are some relationships that a public library can pursue with nonlibrary organizations? Use your imagination here.*

### **Introduction**

The public library has long been seen as an integral part of society. Given their established role in the community, the library has a great opportunity to partner with other organizations to further aid and assist the public. The text lists different a variety of non-library groups that a public library can communicate with (Wagner, 1998): library users; charitable groups and donors and friends; government bodies; civic groups; educational institutions; professional associations; staff associations and unions; and vendors. Other authors in the text mention nursing homes (Carlson, 1998) and the police (Lembeck, 1998). In addition, numerous web sites show a variety of partnering relationships. Examples of these are: prisons (Brooklyn, 2002); museums (New York State Library, 2002); archives (New York State Library, 2002); schools (Sweeney, 2002); and botanical gardens (Brooklyn, 2002). This list only begins to cover the areas that public libraries can involve themselves. Below we explore several more areas in greater detail.

### **Nursing Homes and Daycare**

A large number of libraries appear to have relationships with nursing homes that include deposit collections and librarian visits; a Google yielded about 3000 hits. The first five were Lakeland, FL; St. Charles, IL; Orion, MI; Pasadena, CA; and Tippecanoe County, IN. Lakeland Public Library in Florida has a comprehensive outreach program for elderly patients. Lakeland Public Library provides rotating deposit collections for nursing homes. There are homebound services for the elderly living at home; visits are made to the homes with reading materials. The benefit of these visits must go beyond simply the transfer of reading materials, but also play an important social function. In addition, the bookmobile travels to hospital and church sites (Lakeland, 2002). Some

libraries have additional services; for example, Pasadena Public Library schedules weekly discussion programs in nursing homes as well as monthly activity packets to nursing home directors (Pasadena, 2002). Nelsonville (2002), Arapahoe (2002), and others maintain a relationship with BiFolkal Productions ([www.bifolkal.com](http://www.bifolkal.com)), an organization that has reminiscing kits available for seniors; it appears that libraries obtain these kits and circulate them to nursing home directors.

On the other end of the age scale, many libraries have relationships with daycare centers. For example, Charles County Public Library (2000) in Maryland has outreach to daycare centers. Librarians travel to eligible daycare centers and read stories to the children. It also has deposit libraries with the daycare centers. This is similar to services offered at many, many other libraries, based on a Google search. (See, for example, Birchard, 2002; Nelsonville, 2002; and Santa Anna, 2002).

### **Homeless Families/Shelters**

In keeping with a librarian's role as educator, the school and public librarian can, and often do, play a large role in the education and growth of the homeless child and their family. Their influence can come from volunteering in a family shelter during a reading hour, to establishing small libraries in the shelter, to creating larger outreach programs to educate, and often introduce libraries to the homeless parents and children. They can also work with the shelters to introduce technology to residents, whether by holding workshops in the library or in the shelter if a computer is available. Working with homeless children and their families is made more complex given their situation. When working with homeless children, one must be aware of possible developmental delays, literacy development, issues regarding multiculturalism, and developing the child's self-esteem. Parents in the shelters are generally mothers, who are young and single. Librarians can set up programs to let mothers know the resources the library has for them, such as information on completing the GED, job and career information, parenting advice, ESL materials, and fiction books. If a child's parents get excited about reading, a child is much more likely to as well.

Librarians can also play a roll in the education of the general public on issues of homelessness. They can do this through book displays, or partnering with local homeless organizations to plan programs to educate the public to the issues the homeless face. Many people have only one stereotypical view of the homeless person, which is that of the old drunken panhandler on the corner. However, if a public library has a working relationship with their local shelter(s), as well as training for their staff, these stereotypes could hopefully be lessened.

### **Education and Digital Resource Sharing**

Public libraries also serve educational institutions by providing access to catalogs and databases, especially in economically and geographically isolated areas. Libraries serve as the information network for students if schools are under funded and cannot supply such resources. The organization, *Libraries for the Future* [<http://www.llf.org>] has developed a network of access centers for learning and communication in low-income areas. Below are a few participating libraries:

**Enoch Pratt Free Library** - Baltimore, MD (<http://www.pratt.lib.md.us>)  
**State Library of New Mexico** – El Rito, NM (<http://www.stlib.state.nm.us>)  
**El Rito Public Library** -- (<http://www.elritolibrary.org>)  
**Flint Public Library** -- (<http://www.flint.lib.mi.us>)  
**Harlem Partnership Center** -- (<http://harlem-online.com>)  
**Bright Futures Initiative** -- (<http://www.brightfutures.org>)  
**Los Angeles Education Partnership** – Los Angeles, CA (<http://www.lalc.k12.ca.us>)

Another example of resource sharing is the Digital Information for South Carolina Users or DISCUS [<http://www.state.sc.us>]. DISCUS is a partnership between participating libraries and educational institutions throughout the state. The public can gain access from home, the office, or school, as well as from the college or public library and its branches. Similarly, the Lapeer County Information Depot works together with the Lapeer County Public Library [<http://www.laper.org>] to give access to the information network to their public users. The Depot is housed at the public library twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week. A similar connection is made with the New Orleans Free Net and the New Orleans Public Library. The website is run on

contributions from the public library to serve the people. The Eugene Free Community Network [<http://www.efn.org>] and the Eugene Public Library also work together to bring access to the information network to all its citizens. These types of partnership exist all over the country to better supply the people with the information that is relevant and factual in today's fast changing world.

### **Civic Groups**

The public library can also pursue a relationship with civic groups. According to Nancy Kranich in her letter to ALA members, libraries are the "Cornerstone of Democracy"; they (libraries) "serve as space where public can find all sorts of voting information, speak freely, share similar interests and concerns and pursue what they believe is their interest". At the National Library of Singapore [<http://www.lib.gov.sg/nlb.html>], they gathered feedback from civic groups on kinds of services and facilities that the public would like to have before they completed a new library. The groups that were contacted for this survey were the disabled, older persons, youth, self-help groups, business groups, arts groups, and researchers. Not only did they have the surveys, but they also held discussions about the gathered information. Another example of a libraries working with civic groups is at Wright State University Library [<http://www.libraries.wright.edu>] in Ohio. This library houses collections for the civic organizations. They house records, ledgers, cashbooks, and rolls of members and minutes of meetings. Some of the groups are Sons of Veterans (1891-1893), Women's Relief Corps (1902-1941), Child Guidance Center (1929-1977), and Community Research (1957-1976).

### **Conclusion**

We have only begun to explore all the branches of the community a public library may touch. Everyone should think creatively to determine what there own library can do within their community. Hopefully some of the examples above will give you some good ideas.

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