
Moving on Up:

The Transition from Children's Librarian to Library Administrator

by Sylvia Sprinkle-Hamlin

The transition from children's librarian to administrator offers challenges and frustrations. Although this career path often has been seen as non-traditional, many children's librarians who have taken advantage of management opportunities now find themselves involved in decision-making roles. What should one consider in pursuing this career path? What experiences determine that this is the route to pursue? What new perspectives can a children's librarian bring to management? These and many other questions will be explored and answered as former children's librarians including myself who have taken the plunge into administration share their views on what is becoming an accepted career path to the top.

I had the opportunity to meet Diana Young when I returned to the public library as head of Forsyth County Public Library's Children's Outreach Department. Diana was the children's consultant for the State of North Carolina. I admired her enthusiasm for youth services and the wealth of knowledge and resources she shared. Of course, I was pleasantly surprised when she was appointed Director of Network Operations and Special Projects for the State Library in 1989. Diana felt that she was technically able to make the move due to the computer skills she gained as a children's librarian. She developed NCKIDS which was the first electronic bulletin board for children's librarians in the country. Rather than give up the youth services loose-leaf service because of budget restraints, she sought the opportunity to take a print loose-leaf service and translate it into the computer-based product for which funds were available. This initiative saved staff time as well as postage and printing funds and most importantly, it gave children's librarians an opportunity to take a leadership role in the new technological age. She affirms that the ability to use effectively the technology would determine the place that children's librarians would occupy in the high technology of the future. "I actively sought a way to prepare children's librarians for tomorrow by having them use the new technology not only to gain a new skill, but to use that skill to gain information vital to their relationship with the State Library." Diana attributes her successful transition from children's librarian to Director of Network Operations to two things: her willingness to seek new opportunities and, when she has excelled, a desire to foster them in others.

Young believes that her greatest obstacles have been convincing herself to accept a new role and convincing others that she could do the work required by the new discipline. She explains that being a children's librarian means having the skills

and ability to evaluate, plan, and forecast — and the willingness to evaluate and plan all over again. These skills and abilities have been transferrable to her new position.

Her impact on youth services continues to be astounding. As editor of *Tar Heel Libraries*, she makes sure that youth services librarians' voices are heard. She has served on the ALA Council, ALSC committee and currently serves on the ALSC Legislation Committee. Her latest challenge as a member of the ALSC Legislation Committee is to further the implementation and passage of legislation for the Omnibus Bill on Youth Services passed at the 1991 White House Conference on Library and Information Services. Diana emphasizes that while the implementation of NREN is essential for the telecommunications industry and something she ardently strives for, it is *equally* important to her that the Omnibus Bill on Youth Services provide the very best for the next generation of adults who will need to travel the Internet daily.

Helen Miller and I were children's librarians at the Free Library of Philadelphia. Miller has worked in children's services for twenty-six years. She asserts that when she was asked to assume the job as regional librarian for the Free Library's second regional library, she had reservations. "Children had been my therapy, my friends, and my soul mates. The idea of becoming an administrator left me with mixed emotions." She accepted the challenge and in less than one year was appointed to the position of Area Administrator where she was responsible for the management and supervision of eleven branches and one regional library in the western part of the city. Helen was Area Administrator for thirteen years until, 1990, when she was appointed Chief of the Extensions Division with the responsibility for the provision of library services for forty-nine branch libraries and three regional libraries.

Miller feels that she has been fortunate to progress up the administrative ladder with few obstacles. Since all promotions in the Free Library's system are through civil service examinations, she has been promoted directly from these promotional lists. As an administrator, Helen has had input into the Free Library's five-year plan which was adopted in 1990. This plan defines one of its primary goals as library services to preschoolers. Helen's philosophy has always been that the public library is essential to every child, and she feels that the library's mission reinforces her perspective of the importance of library services to children. Her position guarantees that services to children will continue to be a priority for the Free Library of Philadelphia.

Ron Jones has seen his career at Wake County Public Library

soar. He began his career in a temporary position in the library's shipping department. One day while observing a children's program, Ron asked the children's librarian if he could assist her since he had experience touring with children's theater companies. This experience led Ron to apply for another temporary position within the system which allowed him to develop and present programs that would encourage children to visit the public library. Within a year, Jones decided to pursue a degree in Library Science. Upon completing his degree, he was employed as a full-time children's librarian. After eight years as a children's librarian, he was promoted to Children's Coordinator. Ron ascribes his success to his assertiveness in being involved in all aspects of library services. "I participated in statewide committees and worked on projects that were broad-based to serve the library as a whole, not just children's services. I was very fortunate and I guess I have been in the right place at the right time at Wake County. I became the Coordinator of Children's Services just as the library system began a period of rapid growth." Ron has seen his job responsibilities increase, offering challenge and growth. He states that he has not had any major obstacles in his career. He points out that there aren't many males involved in children's services especially at the administrative level. Ron feels that the same kind of energy and confidence required for work with children is necessary for successful work in all aspects of library services. By example, Ron hopes to inspire youth services librarians and staff throughout the state to work for excellence.

Mary R. Somerville's career encompasses eighteen years in children's services in Nebraska, Kentucky, and Florida. Her first job as a library clerk in children's services inspired her to pursue a degree in library science. Mary relates that her friends and family were upset about her choice because she had previously been a doctoral candidate in English. Later as children's librarian at the Louisville Public Library, Mary gradually took on extra duties such as project director for automation, grant writing, and personnel management. When she was project director for automation, a consultant/vendor expressed concern that a children's librarian would not understand the technology. Even though this was the perception of the consultant/vendor, library administration had the confidence that Mary could do the job and demanded that he be removed from the project.

In her present position, Mary has the distinction of being the only woman on the top management team of the Miami-Dade Public Library in Florida. As Assistant Director of Branches and Special Services, her responsibilities include overseeing the overall public

services to a multicultural and international clientele in the 9th largest public library system in the United States. During the 1992 hurricane disaster in Miami, library administration had to make a decision about which areas of the collection to save first. With her input, the children's and reference collections took top priority. She feels that children can be saved with early literacy programs provided by the public library. Mary states, "I am happy to see that President Clinton's Administration emphasizes the importance of children". Having served on the ALA Council

since 1991, Mary was recently elected to the American Library Association Executive Board. Her promotion of library services through marketing campaigns, customer relations, and fund raising has contributed to Mary's success as a highly respected library leader.

Indeed, my career path has been somewhat similar to the preceding ones. I began my professional career in children's services at the Free Library in Philadelphia. In this position, I had the opportunity to work with a multicultural population and was recognized for my community outreach programs. As a result of my ability to relate to special populations

and my record of innovative programming, I was loaned to the Benjamin Banneker Urban Center as a special young adult librarian to work with teenage gang members. To this group of young people, I served as the librarian, reading teacher, and mentor. When that program ended, I took a position as an elementary school librarian with the Philadelphia School system.

After spending ten years in Philadelphia, I returned to North Carolina to serve as Assistant Director/Public Services at Winston-Salem State University. Within a year, I accepted the position as Head of Forsyth County Public Library's Children's Outreach Department. As the Head of Children's Outreach, I had the opportunity to



Pictured Top: Helen Miller, Chief of Extensions, Free Library of Philadelphia.

Middle: Mary R. Somerville, Assistant Director of Branches & Special Services, Miami-Dade Public Library.

Bottom: Sylvia Sprinkle-Hamlin, Deputy Library Director, Forsyth County Public Library, Winston-Salem.

restructure the department so that it functioned more efficiently. Staff productivity increased and its outreach services to the community broadened. I was promoted to Head of the Extensions Division nine months later where my responsibilities were expanded to include the management of the branches and outreach departments. After working four years as Extensions Head, I was appointed Deputy Library Director.

Having been a children's librarian, my expertise and knowledge are valued in decisions related to children's services. In the planning of new facilities, my advice is sought in the physical layout of the children's area and the size and makeup of the collection. I also play a key role in developing the philosophy of children's services in the Forsyth County Public Library system.

The obstacles I experienced in these career moves have been minimal. My willingness to explore other career options has helped to pave the way for advancement in my career. When I encounter situations which require more expertise, I seek out mentor support, attend workshops and network with my peers. My involvement in state and national library organizations has helped me in developing a vast network of references.

From the collective experiences of five librarians, one can draw some valuable insights on career development.

Be prepared when opportunities arise. Miller stresses that children's librarians should be prepared and cognizant of trends in the library field. One should seek out workshops, training sessions, and presentations on supervision and management.

Don't be one dimensional. Be knowledgeable of all aspects

of library services. Somerville's successes in automation, grant writing, and personnel management can be attributed to her being multifaceted.

Keep abreast of the latest technology and develop skills that are necessary to use it. Diana Young underscores the importance of the technological leaps libraries and librarians must make in order to remain current.

Be willing to accept new challenges and additional responsibilities. Mary and Ron have seen their assets as administrators grow as they sought new challenges and volunteered for additional responsibilities.

Aspire to be the best in whatever position you are in, using that position as a stepping stone to the next level. My effectiveness in the Children's Outreach Department influenced administration to consider my potential in upper management.

All agree that a **mentor is an asset** in career advancement.

Networking has served each one of them well in their development as administrators. Being involved or affiliated with professional organizations on a local, state, and national level has helped three of us to be elected to ALA Council and appointed to other national committees.

Armed with these insights, children's librarianship is an excellent path for a librarian to gain valuable experiences offer transfer to more comprehensive library administration.

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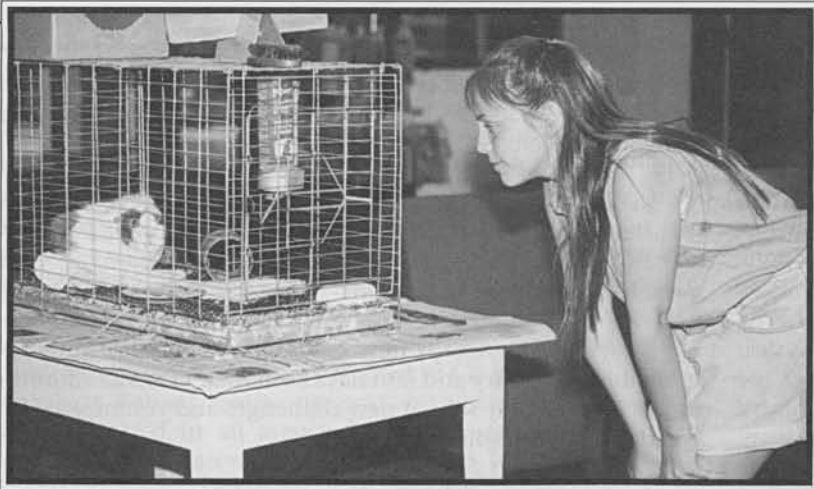
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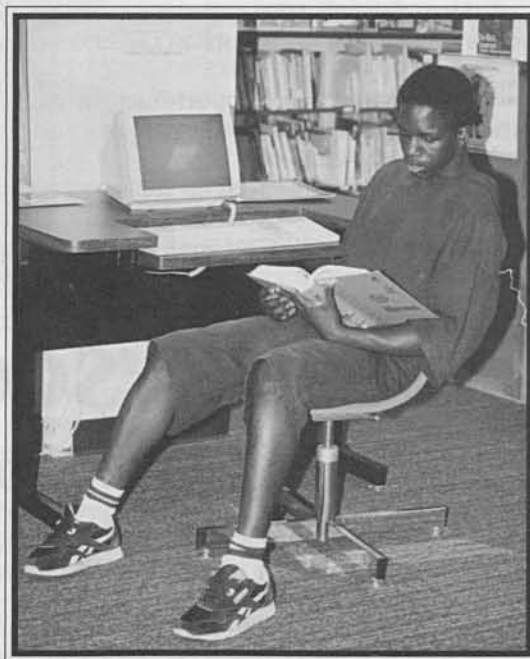
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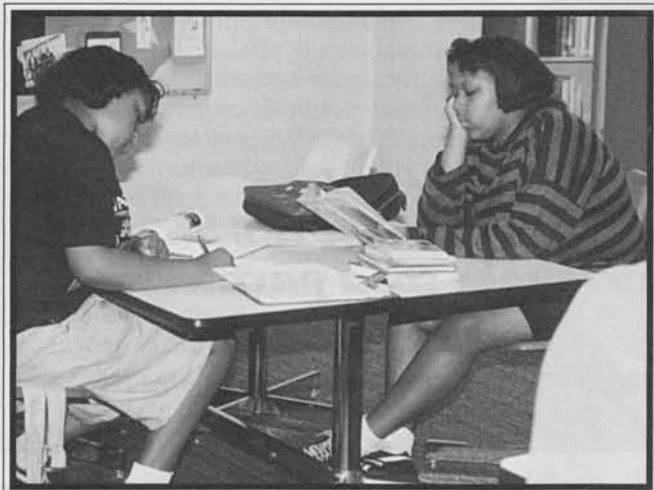
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