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# Introduction

## Institutional Libraries in North Carolina

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The North Carolina State Library focuses its institutional consultative services on the institutions found in the Department of Human Resources and the Department of Correction. There are currently 107 such institutions that include schools for the deaf or blind, centers for the mentally retarded, mental hospitals, alcoholic rehabilitation centers, prisons, special schools and special hospitals. Collectively, these institutions serve a resident population of approximately 24,000. As there is no central library authority in the Department of Human Resources and since the library consultant in the Department of Correction is responsible principally for the prison law libraries, the administration of each institution is left to determine, independently, its commitment to library service. Continuity in public library types of services to residents of state institutions has come from the state library, in the Department of Cultural Resources, due to its administration of federal and state grants and its consultative services.

The state library awarded its first grants to institutional libraries in 1968, via the availability of funds allocated to Title I of the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA). Its plan was to use federal funds to buy books and other library materials, purchase library equipment and to train staff or residents of the institutions to operate the library. The expectation was that the institutions would continue to support the library at the expiration of the grant period. Since 1968, the General Assembly also has appropriated limited funds to the state library to be used for establishment grants for new libraries in institutions. These libraries were to serve to demonstrate the value of library service and to serve as models for further development.

While there are now library materials available in all the aforementioned institutions, the quality of library service varies enormously. It is a

constant challenge to the state library to maintain and improve levels of library service when no control can be exercised over the administration of the institutions and provision of library service is neither part of the mission, nor a high priority, of the institutions. To compound the problem, because of limited resources, institutions have attempted, from time to time, to divert LSCA funding from the library program to other institutional programs considered to be of higher priority. The major contribution of the institutions to their library programs has been provision of library personnel; however, all too frequently, library positions are vulnerable to transferral or elimination. Demonstrated success of library programs in institutions correlates directly with the motivation and interest of the library staff. One of the more important aspects of state library consultative services is training of institutional library personnel. Almost as important is maintaining constant communication with the institutional libraries.

### Department of Correction

North Carolina has one of the largest prison systems in the country. It currently totals 87 separate correctional facilities that include treatment facilities for women (half-way houses), field units (road camps), youth centers and adult

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prisons. There is a great range in the resident population of these units, the smallest having only eight and the largest over one thousand. As one might expect, the smaller the correctional unit, the more difficult it is to establish a library. It is

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possible that the denomination of "library" is inappropriate in this context, for the "library" may be only a few bookshelves in the unit barber shop or it may be some discarded public school materials in a locked closet in a trailer. Often, with the exception of a few newspaper and magazine subscriptions purchased with prison canteen profits, library materials consist solely of old and outworn donations.

The state library does not have the resources to meet the needs of all the correctional libraries; however, the larger adult prisons receive new books from the state library on a fairly regular basis. The best prison libraries are found in the youth centers. These centers have a strong educational program, they all have librarians on staff and they have received the largest grants from the state library over the years. Their collections include not only books and magazines, but also contain filmstrips, phonodiscs, and other media.

### **Department of Human Resources**

There are twenty institutions in the Department of Human Resources that include mental hospitals, centers for the mentally retarded, alcoholic rehabilitation centers and special schools. Populations of these institutions range from about 75 to over twelve hundred. Library services in these institutions that are associated with well-established educational components have been the most successful, although donations still form the core of most collections.

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## **The most successful libraries are found in the school for the blind and the schools for the deaf.**

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In the mid and late '70's, on both the national and state level, a concerted effort was made to deinstitutionalize populations and move them into societal and educational mainstreams. The catalyst for this was a growing public disillusionment with the institutional process and resulted in repercussions on the constitution of the populations of mental institutions, schools for the deaf or blind, or mentally retarded centers. The less severe cases were subsequently reassigned to local mental health centers or the public schools, or they were released. This has had profound implications for both library programming and

collection orientation, for, as patient populations declined, library service was obliged to focus on the nucleus of chronic or severe cases that remained in the institutions.

Paralleling the systematic deinstitutionalization of the handicapped is a program to ensure that their treatment take place in an environment that places the least possible restrictions on their developmental potential. This program affirms that educational or recreational materials used by the mentally retarded should reflect, as nearly as possible, their chronological age and not necessarily their mental age. This has made selection of library materials extremely difficult for it is practically impossible to find library materials that correspond to the physical ages of profoundly mentally retarded patients on levels appropriate to their mental capacities.

The most successful libraries are found in the school for the blind and the schools for the deaf. Their libraries in general appearance, organization and function strongly resemble school media centers. They have comparatively better trained staff, substantial collections, varied materials and a history of continuous service. However, these schools now have students who might not only be deaf or blind, but profoundly mentally retarded or disruptive as well.

### **Conclusions**

Currently, library materials are available in all the institutions of the Department of Human Resources and the Department of Correction; however, the collections are very uneven both in quality and quantity. From the state library's point of view, institutional libraries are woefully inadequate and the impediments to improvement are formidable. In the institutions of the Department of Correction, highest priorities are given to custody, control and security; in the institutions of the Department of Human Resources, highest priorities are given to rehabilitation and deinstitutionalization. If progress is to be made, the benefits that can accrue to library patrons, both prisoner and patient, must be demonstrated in a convincing manner to institutional administrators. If this is accomplished, it should lead to the significantly higher levels of funding necessary to build collections, provide equipment and staff the libraries.

In the following pages will be found several articles by educators, institutional librarians, library technicians, chaplains and therapists that give an invaluable insight into the realities of institutional librarianship.