

**THE LIBRARY-COMMUNITY PROJECT IN CUMBERLAND COUNTY**

By DOROTHY E. SHUE\*

The Library-Community Project is the most significant thing that has happened to the Cumberland County Public Library since the tax vote in 1946. That is the feeling of those of us who are working closely with LCP in Cumberland County. LCP has come at a time when the Library needs to evaluate itself—to take a long, penetrating inward look, as well as a look outward at the direction in which it is going.

Like other public libraries in North Carolina, the Cumberland County Public Library has experienced rapid growth since World War II. Demands upon it have been especially heavy because of the extensive expansion of nearby Fort Bragg, and a corresponding population increase in the surrounding area.

For some time the Library has been in the process of physical enlargement, beginning in 1951 with the construction of a new building for the Main Library. A new city branch was built in 1955, and two branches in rural areas were established recently. The book collection has grown from 18,000 in 1948, to 48,000 by the end of 1958.

It will not be necessary to point out to busy librarians that these growing pains, and the attempt to keep abreast of demands for books and materials, have been time-consuming. But the Board of Trustees and the Librarian have long felt the need for a planned adult education program resulting from systematic study of community needs.

At a most opportune moment the Cumberland County Public Library was chosen as the pilot library for the North Carolina Library-Community Project. Now, with the assistance of professional consultant services provided by the American Library Association, we are enabled to make the study we have long needed. Miss Dorothy Kittel is LCP consultant from the ALA and Patrick Penland is State Project Director from the State Library. They are both most generous with their services, giving the local project guidance, advice and moral support.

LCP is a two-year project, and its duration in Cumberland County is from September 1, 1958 through August 31, 1960. The first year here is being devoted to a study of the library and the community; in the second year there will be a period evaluating the information gathered in the studies, followed by the planning of an adult education program.

Early in August, 1958, the librarian and a member of the Library Board, with representatives from the State Library, were given preparation for the Project by attending an orientation meeting at ALA headquarters in Chicago. In September our consultants, Miss Kittel and Mr. Penland, spent several days in Fayetteville and the County, orienting Library Board and Staff members to the meaning and procedures of the Project. This pattern has been followed throughout the Project to date. At any time when people become newly involved in the Project, they are given a careful period of orientation. Consequently, all "hands" become acquainted with fundamentals of the program and no one goes into it "cold." We have found that this applies also to the community at large, and that orientation through the media of newspaper, radio, club talks, and the like, contributes to public understanding of—and enthusiasm for—the Project.

Following orientation, the Pilot Library's next step was the adoption of a written statement of objectives, a procedure recommended in PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE.

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The adoption of objectives is the basis upon which programs and services can be evaluated. Objectives were studied by librarian and staff, and recommended to the Library Board, which formally adopted them.

The Library then embarked upon a period of self-study and this is still in process. In order to know the quality of our basic book collection, titles are being checked with those on standard lists, such as *The Standard Catalog*. A study of library services includes a questionnaire to borrowers, to find out what they are seeking from the Library and whether they are finding it. Something about the borrower is also asked—educational level, age group, hobbies, occupation, where they live in the community, and how long they have lived in Cumberland County. On the days that borrowers' questionnaires are given, there is also an analysis of circulation and of reference questions. The purpose of the library and library-use study is to establish a baseline, to find out how well the Library is presently serving the community.

An important phase of LCP is a study of the community, its needs, resources, and interests, especially in the field of adult education. To make this study, the Library enlisted the help of a Citizens Community Study Committee, a group of people carefully selected by the Library Board on the basis of their interest and work in the community, the Library, and in adult education. There are fifteen members of this Committee, and their job is to determine community characteristics and resources, and to identify its needs and problems. This, obviously, is no small undertaking, and is one in which the Committee decides upon its own methods and procedures for study. These methods and procedures, though now still in the planning stage, will involve questionnaires to heads of organizations and agencies, studies of all available statistics about the community, and probably a sample survey of the community at large. The Committee is currently exploring approaches to a sample survey, and is giving consideration to the information to be sought through the survey. The first two business sessions of the Committee have been concerned with deciding what it does want to know about the community.

The Library self-study and the community study are expected to be completed by July 1, 1959, at which time evaluation of the information gathered and planning for a community adult education program will begin.

It is hoped that LCP in Cumberland County will set a pattern and work out certain procedures which other libraries may follow in making a library-community study. Possibly some methods used will be found to be unfeasible or unproductive. Other libraries, profiting from the experience of the pilot library, may be able to move faster by following only those procedures which have proved successful. Aside from its value to other libraries and communities, however, the Librarian and Trustees of the Cumberland County Public Library are sure that the Library will serve the community better, and that the community will be more aware than it ever has been that it has a public library.