

Rural Library Program in Romania

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Youth and Adult Services in a Public Library

Librarianship: A Philosophy of Passion, Vision & Imagination

As libraries – especially libraries serving rural populations – continue to evolve, librarians must feed their passion and nourish their vision so that they can imagine the future and subsequently find creative solutions to new and existing challenges. This philosophy of passion, vision and imagination provides an environment where a contagious enthusiasm thrives and where endless possibilities are discovered to connect communities with known and anticipated informational needs.

Youth Services

- More than any other single skill, the ability to read – and read well – allows a child to succeed in school, learn about the world, learn how to function in the world and contribute to mankind.
- Children who learn to read and enjoy books at a young age, will usually be very good readers as adults.
- Speaking, reading and writing are all connected.
- A child at an early age learns that words stand for something and marks on a page mean something.

Identify your population of youth in your service area (demographics)

- How many youth under the age of 18 live in your service area?
- Break it down further to 0-5, 6-9, 10-13, 13-18 (or a similar breakdown. Each of these age groups fit into a different stage of literacy development and programming needs)
- Other good statistics to research are number of families, number of homes with computers, number of homes with Internet access

Stages of Literacy

As with any component of child development, there are also stages of literacy development. As a library staff working with children, you must become aware of these different stages and plan your collection around them:

Emerging Readers –

- This takes place long before a child enters school. Even the youngest child begins to realize that the marks on a page mean something. Reading aloud is very, very important to this age group. Also, as the child grows into a toddler, about the age of 2-3 years old, if they had been read aloud to, they may start making up stories and pretend reading. The very young child will make marks on paper that may be unrecognizable to the adult, but have a meaning for the child. This is the beginning of writing.

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- Talking, playing, and drawing are all bridges to literacy. The child begins to understand that words have meanings. Playing allows a child to develop their imagination and drawing allows the child to express themselves without having to know how to write.
- Reading aloud to a child. - When young children see other people reading, and when others read to them or involve them in other activities related to reading, they become familiar with print and some of its uses.
- The young child will begin “reading” the pictures of the book. A good picture book can tell the story through the illustrations. A child will turn page after page and make up their own story based on what the illustration says to them.

Early Readers --

- Early readers now know that reading needs to make sense
- The early reader is more attentive to print and understand that books have exact and unchanging messages carried by print as well as pictures
- The early reader can identify most letters by name, and can use some letter/sound knowledge (i.e.: the sound of the first letter) to help figure out words.
- The early reader can recognize, by sight, a small but growing store of words in different contexts and can use pictures, story patterns, context and memory of some words as well as some phonics to make sense of print

Early Fluent and Fluent Readers –

- Usually in the second through third grade, these early fluent readers can recognize many words in and out of context
- They can apply what they already know by sounding out and other word analysis skills to figure out and confirm new words
- Fluent readers monitor their own reading for meaning and self correct as needed and they now read with increased fluency, accuracy, and expression

Each child will be at a different stage of reading. As a library staff you must be able to guide the child or parent to the books that will help develop their love of reading.

Other important points regarding library service to youth:

- It is very important to teach parents the importance of reading aloud to their child. Consider developing a program where new parents receive a new book as a gift for their child so that they can read aloud.
- When a child has missed one or more of the stages of literacy development, or if they have had trouble, they are more likely to become reluctant readers. Do not forget this group. Make sure you have books in different formats (graphic novels) to excite these children. Sometimes, reading text in a comic-book-style “bubble” will be easier to understand than reading left to right in paragraph form.
- Youth service staff must read a certain amount of children’s books and be able to guide children to books of interest. Staff must be able to tell a reader about a book by giving just enough information to hook their interest. Readers’ advisory is a helpful skill when a reader wants to read books “like” the Harry Potter series. Staff members must be able to find these titles.
- You might have a wonderful youth collection but it is wasted if no youth come into your library. Make sure you are visiting classrooms to tell them about the library. Put up posters, offer free give-a-ways. Offer snacks after school. Get the kids in the doors.
- Special programs for youth make reading fun. Reading clubs are ways for youth to participate in a group event and competition without having to be athletic and participate in sports. Kids get prizes as they read for more and more minutes each week.
- Do not forget your teenaged readers. They want to read about characters about two years older than themselves. They want to read about real-world issues. They are trying to find their identity and reading will provide them with validation of who they are. The collection for

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teenagers should be separate from the youth collection. Some of the titles in this collection will be socially “edgy” and not appropriate for younger audiences. This is also a transitional period from teen to adult services.

Adult Services

- As you did with youth, it is important to identify your adult population – how many adults live in your service area. How many are seniors? Do you have a literacy rate? (How many know how to read?) How many have computers in their homes and access to books? your service area (demographics)
- To identify the needs of your citizens, you can distribute a survey. What would you be interested in seeing in your public library? Books, magazines, newspapers, computers, movies, etc.? Keep in mind that many older readers will not understand the concept of a public library and may question... why is this free?
- There are certain user needs that you can assume exist. Adults want to read the best sellers. They want to read for pleasure. They want to read to improve their health and their quality of life. They might want to read to learn a new skill, to repair a home, to explore other lands. Many adults will not have computers in their homes. They need to be able to access high-speed computers with Internet. They need to learn how to find authoritative information about their government, taxes, health care, etc. They may want to learn how to sell items on E-Bay. They may want to learn how to use social networks such as Facebook and MySpace.
- Adult users may also want to read different newspapers and magazines. They may want to search for their family roots – or genealogy. They may want to learn a new language.

Building the Collection

The core library collection should include books that are up-to-date, authoritative and written in a read-able style. You would not necessarily want a complex and scholarly college text book about health symptoms on your shelves, because the average person would probably not understand what they are reading. Keep in mind how easy to understand your books are to the average reader.

There is much to consider when building a collection:

- You should write a Collection Development Policy Statement. This statement will show why you are selecting what you are selecting and what happens to the item once it is placed in the collection. It may spell out what you plan to do with donations. You might want to state that “your library will maintain a broad array of information, educational and recreational resources. The library will strive to maintain a balanced collection with a variety of points of view.
- Fiction titles may include mystery, science fiction, romance, inspirational and more.
- Non-Fiction titles will be based on authoritativeness, is it current, readable, use of illustrations, copyright date, indexed, format, binding, cost, compelling and fills a gap in a subject area.
- Biographies will be included in the collection will consist of political, popular cultural, and historical persons as well as those who have impacted the worlds of medicine, exploration, etc. Your collection might also include a variety of “entertainer” biographies.
- Magazines in libraries usually include a news magazine, glamour or fashion, home improvement, finance, sports, and more.
- Movies may be purchased exclusively in a DVD format or a popular format that is used in your country. Recent theatrical releases should be in the collection as well as documentaries and educational movies. Your library board may decide not to carry movies that carry an “R” rating, however most public libraries do.
- Non-Print materials may include information on CD-ROM, online databases, etc. These materials usually are not borrowed by the patron but are for in-house use only.

Maintaining the Collection

Library collections must be reviewed and maintained in an ongoing process. Weeding titles that are no longer relevant, current or popular will be vital to keeping your collection looking “fresh”. Many of

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the titles withdrawn from the collection can be sold at a book sale to raise funds to further build the collection. Books that are torn, musty, damaged, moldy, stained or otherwise “icky” need to be pulled from your shelves. Replace with a new copy if needed.

Censorship & Intellectual Freedom

The public library is unique, because it should have something on the shelves to appeal to all readers. That being said, there will also be materials on the shelves that may be offensive to some readers. Library staff should not remove an item or allow an item to be removed by a patron because they find it offensive or they may not agree with the message. A public library provides information on all points of view. The concept of the public library is not to judge or control the information or books a person has access to, but to provide free and equal access to all without regards to their age or any other consideration. This is the concept behind Intellectual Freedom. As long as they are a patron in good standing with your library, they should be able to check out anything on your shelves.

Computers

- Your library must incorporate public computers for your patrons to use. The Romanian “Biblionet” project will be vital for the development of computer databases and resources for all citizens.
- Imagine citizens being able to come to their public library, use a high-speed computer, and find the information they need to make informed decisions for their lives. Or, perhaps they want to check e-mail or join an online social community. The public library shows value to its citizens when it provides resources that impact a person’s everyday life.

Other points to consider:

- As with youth services, library staff must be able to share books of interest with patrons and direct them to books they might like to read. Staff must be familiar with a number of genres and the writing styles of many authors.
- Special programs such as reading clubs, author visits, demonstrations, special speakers, etc. will draw patrons into the public library.
- Getting the word out about what the library has to offer may include a column that the librarian writes in the local newspaper. Or, flyers at restaurants, bus stops, or other places when people gather. Local grocery markets may allow libraries to distribute flyers. Word of mouth is always the best advertising.
- Do not forget that you might have some adults that are slow readers or cannot read at all. Your library may consider a literacy program that hooks tutors up with new adult readers. Books for these readers should be “high interest” and “low vocabulary”

Remember: You cannot be all things to all people, although public libraries try to be! Stay passionate about what you do. Each day you have the power to change lives and to impact the citizens of your country. Hold your head up high and let each day be better than the day before! Happy Reading!