

Wasilla Public Library

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INFORMATION MEMORANDUM NO. 91-12

FROM: Mary Ellen Emmons, Librarian

DATE: August 7, 1991

RE: REPORT BY SONYA LYON - "Library Services in the Mat-Su Borough"

The Alaska State Library awarded an interlibrary cooperation grant to Mat-Su Borough public libraries in FY'91. Sonya Lyon, a librarian who has lived in the Mat-Su Borough and presently works for the Alaska Resources Library, was hired to implement the grant. Sonya had completed a similar project for the Juneau area libraries, so she came to us with some practical experience for the job.


Attached is the final report, prepared by Sonya, upon completion of the project. She spent many hours working with the individual public libraries in the Borough, and met several times with us a group.

Some positive results of the interlibrary cooperation grant include:

- establishment of a regular meeting schedule for Borough public libraries. (Meetings are scheduled for every other month.)
- training workshops completed for library staff on reference services and resources, resources for grant information, cataloging, facility planning.
- Union List of periodicals developed for public libraries and Mat-Su College.
- guidelines established for interlibrary loan procedures and reference procedures.
- development of a reference material recycling list for the public libraries and the Mat-Su College. (Each library cannot afford each reference item on an annual basis; this list ensures that at least one library in the Borough has a current edition of costly items, with older editions being passed on to other libraries in the Borough.)
- staff exchanges. (The staff from the four Borough libraries are invited to spend training time at the Wasilla, Palmer and Mat-Su College libraries, and staff at the Wasilla, Palmer and Mat-Su libraries will have an opportunity to learn about procedures among those three libraries.)

The final report outlines problem areas and suggestions for possible solutions. Hopefully this evaluation can be used to improve library services in the future.

Please let me know if you need additional information.


Mary Ellen Emmons

May Elle

July 26, 1991

To: Don Moore, Mat-Su Borough Manager
Pat Wamsley, President, Mat-Su Library Advisory Board

From: Sonya Lyon, Mat-Su Library Coordinator

Re: Library services in the Mat-Su Borough

As you are aware, my grant-funded position as Mat-Su Library Coordinator is ending. I have enjoyed working with Mat-Su librarians and their staffs and hope that their cooperative efforts will continue to be supported. In parting, I'd like to share with you a few of my observations concerning current library services in the Mat-Su Borough.

Library materials (books, magazines, videos, etc.): - Overall, the Borough is lacking in both quality and quantity of materials. Several libraries still contain a large percentage of donated items, which are often in poor physical condition with outdated information. The actual number of items is also low and, where worn and dated materials have been withdrawn, the shelves are obviously bare. A library should contain a well-rounded, diverse collection of recent materials, selected with community needs in mind. Adequate book budgets and resource sharing are essential in order to provide sufficient materials.

Staffing and services: With the current, independent mode of providing library services, staffing is minimal at all libraries. Although highly motivated, library employees are often asked to perform duties beyond their abilities (both in time and expertise). Services suffer accordingly. When staffs are overextended dealing with clerical and administrative duties, there is little time left for librarianship - selecting and cataloging materials, providing reference and childrens services - let alone library cooperation and training. A re-evaluation of staff allocation, qualifications and training would result in improved services to Mat-Su residents.

Facilities and equipment: - The physical condition and layout of library structures varies from library to library. Inadequate, sub-standard shelving is a problem at several Borough libraries. Equipment age and condition is also a problem, particularly at Palmer. A long range plan for facilities & equipment is needed.

The lack of automation is a major problem. A Borough-wide, integrated system (circulation, cataloging and public access functions) was initiated several years ago. An example of library cooperation which would vastly improve public access to all library collections. However, this system (Dynix) is currently operational only at Wasilla Library. Funding to bring the other five libraries on-line was pulled by the Borough in 1986 and recent attempts for State funding failed (with a strong hint that this should be locally funded). Continuation of manual sorting and filing systems is very time consuming - an extremely inefficient use of valuable staff time and frustrating for library patrons.

Library organization and utilization: - Currently three governmental units are providing similar services - resulting in wasted, duplication of effort. Each of the six libraries separately selects, orders, catalogs and processes materials. Tasks, which if done centrally, would be much more cost effective.

Utilization of these 6 libraries varies greatly - some are consistently, heavily used while others are underutilized. These use patterns are not taken into consideration when planning staffing and hours of operation - all libraries are open similar numbers of hours.

The two city libraries provide the most cost effective library service to the majority of Borough residents. These libraries are owned and managed by their respective cities, however, they receive the majority of their funding from the Borough government. They are in the difficult, nebulous position of reporting to one governmental unit, yet financially dependent on another. They have no direct input into the Borough budget process.

The four Borough librarians report to the Borough Community Services head, who manages such diverse programs as animal control and parks as well as libraries. With scant time to spend on libraries, he provides little coordination and no professional guidance. As a result, Borough librarians have made decisions about their individual libraries in a vacuum without concern for the long range effects on other libraries. This has created situations that will be difficult and costly to correct in the future.

The Borough librarians do call on the Palmer and Wasilla librarians for professional advise and assistance and city librarians have attempted to fill this leadership void and foster cooperation (such as this inter-library cooperation grant). But, finding time to even advise is increasingly difficult and frustrating considering the city librarians' work loads and minimal staffs. The Coordinator position was a start towards filling the leadership gap, but there has been no governmental support for the continuation of this position.

CONCLUSIONS: Library services in the Mat-Su Borough suffer from lack of materials, inadequate staffing, training and facilities, as well as poor administration. The latter has resulted in duplication of effort, thus wasting the limited funds of all governmental units involved.

I strongly recommend that these governmental units (Borough and cities) review their current method of providing services and consider cooperative efforts. Explore alternative methods that take into consideration the current structure.

A FEW POSSIBILITIES:

Start a courier system to service all the public libraries - ideally, it should be tied into the existing School District Courier system (and also include the Mat-Su College Library).

Fund the automation system (Dynix) for more efficient use of staff time and improved access to all library materials in the Borough.

Contract library services to one governmental unit to facilitate:

--Consolidation of tasks - particularly technical services (selection, ordering, cataloging).

--Review library use patterns. This could result in limiting hours at underutilized facilities and shifting staff hours to more heavily used sites.

--Reorganization of staff to reflect consolidation of tasks. This would allow for the creation of a Borough library coordinator position to provide expertise, direction and leadership.

I am returning to my permanent position at the Alaska Resources Library. Please feel free to contact me regarding this report.