



## The Correctional Facility Library: History and Standards

BARRATT WILKINS

IN A RECENT SURVEY by the U.S. Office of Education, correctional library programs were assessed overall as poor. Of course, there were a few exceptions. Most correctional libraries surveyed were not making a significant contribution toward the achievement of the institutional goal for inmates of reentry into the community. Governing factors for this situation were: unreliable funding—most correctional libraries do not have a line item in their governing agency's budget; the lack of library knowledge at decision-making levels; the lack of long-range planning; staffing problems which resulted in no weekend hours (when the inmates were most free to utilize library services); problems of communication and cooperation; and lack of good library services for staff, for it was found that when there was good library service for staff, there would be good library services for inmates.<sup>1</sup>

One of the most disturbing findings of this survey was the great difference in the perception of institutional goals between correctional administrators and librarians employed in correctional institutions. For administrators, the primary objective was to provide custody for persons sent to the prisons by the courts. Administrators also hoped to achieve sufficient change in the offender to allow the person a chance to secure a productive place in the community after release. "Reentry" was the catchword. For librarians, "rehabilitation" was the principal institutional goal. This term was frequently used to impart a sense of humanitarianism. It was found that there was little realization given by librarians of this direction in correctional objectives (i.e. reentry), resulting in the paucity of practical, current, detailed reentry information in the correctional library.<sup>2</sup>

While the results of this 1974 survey are not particularly encouraging, it should be remembered that the development and philosophy

Barratt Wilkins is acting State Librarian, State Library of Florida, Tallahassee.

behind library service in correctional facilities has been cyclic. In the nineteenth century books were provided to prisons to evangelize prisoners and make them good Christians. Largely, these books were religious tracts. By the early 1900s, at least one state (Minnesota) had recognized the therapeutic value of books in prisons, and by 1905 a state supervisor was appointed for correctional library programs. Other states which pioneered in this early development were Iowa, Illinois, Nebraska, New York, Ohio, and Massachusetts. During the early twentieth century, the American Prison Association and the American Library Association worked cooperatively to develop better libraries in federal prisons. In the 1930s, encouraged by the strong advocacy of correctional officials such as Austin MacCormick in New York and Richard McGee in California, correctional library programs received a new status in the development and delivery of correctional services. This encouragement by correctional officials led to the establishment of the American Prison Association's Committee on Institution Libraries in 1938. Since that time, this committee has provided the focus and leadership in the development and publication of numerous informational, bibliographical, and promotional items.<sup>3</sup>

In the five years since progress in development and implementation of correctional library services was last reviewed, there have been several trends identified which are having a profound impact on the further development of prison library programs.<sup>4</sup> These include: the perceived dichotomy between correctional administrators and librarians of the goals of correctional programs; the revision and development of library standards to recognize and incorporate new philosophical goals; the accreditation process now being developed by the American Correctional Association; and the development of court-mandated provision of law library services to inmates.

Since 1972, the first "Library Standards for Juvenile Correctional Institutions" has been published;<sup>5</sup> the final draft of the "Library Standards for Adult Correctional Institutions" has been completed;<sup>6</sup> the first national "Library Standards for Jails" has been developed; and *Guidelines for Legal Reference Service in Correctional Institutions* has been published.<sup>7</sup> These documents will eventually form a package of correctional library standards and guidelines to meet most situations in correctional service programming.

The primary movement for development of new correctional library standards came from the recognition by the library profession and corrections officials of the inadequacy of existing standards—i.e.

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the absence of measurement criteria in these areas of library service. This movement has been closely aligned with the widespread interest in applying standards for improving correctional programs by judicial courts, governmental agencies, professional associations, and correctional officials. The result has been development of standards for all areas of corrections, without a systematic and uniform application and evaluation.<sup>8</sup>

To remedy this situation, the American Correctional Association in 1974 received a grant from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration to establish a Commission on Accreditation for Corrections. This committee was charged with developing a voluntary accreditation program for correctional agencies of all types—adult and juvenile correctional institutions, jails, community residential facilities, halfway houses, and probation and parole agencies and programs which include foster and group homes.

Because elements of the new correctional library standards will be incorporated into the accreditation documents, it is important to understand the steps which must be taken in accrediting a correctional agency. First, the correctional agency administrator must apply to the commission to initiate the accreditation process. Upon acceptance by the commission, correspondent status will be conferred on the correctional agency. The agency must then prepare a self-evaluation report utilizing the accreditation document of standards. Assistance from the commission and the American Correctional Association may be utilized in strengthening performance for compliance with standards. After this has been accomplished, a visitation committee appointed by the commission is sent to the correctional agency to verify the self-evaluation report, and another report is submitted. The commission may then award accreditation for a specified period of time, subject to periodic review.<sup>9</sup> This process is very similar to accreditation programs in other professional educational, health, and library organizations, and it represents a significant trend in the correctional field which is seeking to be accountable to the community for the public monies it receives and for the programs it administers.

One of the basic assumptions in the development of the new correctional library standards documents has been that the library must be an integral part of the institution's program, and that the library program must play an important part in the preparation for reentry of the offender into the community. This assumption or premise has allowed the library to remove itself from the current debate in the correctional field between those who believe that reha-

bilitation as a concept is a failure and those who believe that rehabilitation is still a viable program. While a majority of correctional officials believe that rehabilitation is a viable objective, the concept has come under increasing criticism by many responsible individuals involved in the correctional field.<sup>10</sup> What remains, however, is that correctional library programs should be based on the provision of quality public library service. Regardless of the outcome of the debate, the correctional library has an opportunity to become a strong ally in any program designed to foster the successful reentry of offenders into the community. Successful reentry means successful rehabilitation.

This dichotomy of program philosophies may be partially resolved by placing stronger emphasis on another major assumption in the new correctional library standards, i.e. that services available to communities, including library services, must be available in correctional residential facilities. Indeed, the federal courts have repeatedly affirmed in the last five years the rights of inmates to read and to have access to books and other information materials.<sup>11</sup> It has been suggested that by removing libraries from the debate on rehabilitation effectiveness, library programs will be strengthened by emphasis on an inmate's right to read as affirmed by the courts and by the accreditation process which will strengthen all correctional programs.

Another trend which has influenced the development of correctional library programs has been the mandating by federal and state courts of a prisoner's right to have access to law library services. This development, based on the famous *Gilmore v. Lynch* (1970) decision,<sup>12</sup> has created many problems for correctional administrators, as well as for librarians. Guidelines for the provision of legal reference services have been published by the American Correctional Association, and there have been numerous publications addressing the need for development of such services.<sup>13</sup> It is one more trend in ensuring that the same basic services provided in the community are also available to those incarcerated in correctional institutions. To incarcerate a person and sterilize an environment will not prepare that person for reentry into the complex community life and society prevalent in the United States.

It is expected that these trends will influence correctional library programs throughout the United States and that the result will be the provision of quality library service in correctional facilities comparable to those services available to the public.

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LIBRARY JOURNAL (starred review). The Encyclopedia of Prisons and Correctional Facilities presents the questions surrounding the correctional system in the United States. . . . This set is highly recommended for both public and academic libraries, particularly those supporting programs in criminal justice, political science and governmental affairs. John R.M. Lawrence, Reference Librarian. East Carolina University.Â This title is also available on SAGE Knowledge, the ultimate social sciences online library. If your library doesnâ€™t have access, ask your librarian to start a trial. Find out more. Browse. A correctional facility is the building that many criminal justice systems use to detain offenders. These facilities may hold accused people prior to trial, convicted criminals, juvenile offenders, and other types of individuals. Some correctional facilities are intended to reform or otherwise prepare offenders for a successful reintegration into society, while others simply detain criminals until they can be released. Types of correctional facilities include jails, prisons, and juvenile detention centers. Each country has its own approach to the criminal justice system and uses correctional f... Describes the Racine Correctional Institution Libraryâ€™s first-ever Poetry Slam involving prisoners and nationally known poets collaborating for poetry workshops and performance competition. Contact information provided for librarians interested in sponsoring a similar event. 22. Mantilla, Karla.Â 42. Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies. Library Standards for Juvenile Correctional Facilities. Chicago: Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies, American Library Association, 1999. (Z675.I6 L52) Revision of 1975 standards issued by ALA. 43. Bayley, Linda, Leni Greenfield, and Flynn Nogueira.