

## MEMO

**To:** State Library Commission  
**From:** Karen Strege  
**Re:** Draft letter to public librarians and institutional administrators  
**Date:** January 26, 2000

In January you were notified of a meeting of the Working Group on Institutions which was appointed by the Montana State Library (MSL) Commission to review this agency's current practice of providing public library service to residents of state institutions. As a result of that meeting, the Working Group has recommended the following action and the Commission has voted to accept this recommendation:

For FY 2000 there will be no change in the current practice whereby MSL provides approximately \$14,000 to institution residents: \$8,041 federal LSTA grant funds contracted to four public libraries (Great Falls, Kalispell, Glendive, Lewistown) to provide services to selected institutions in their service area (respectively Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind, Montana Veteran's Home, Eastmont Human Services Center, Montana Mental Health Nursing Care Center) and \$6,000 state funds allocated to Montana State Hospital (MSH) Patient's Library for books and other materials.

For FY 2001 no contracts will be transacted and no LSTA funds will be used for institution library service. However, \$6,000 state funds will be provided to the MSH library for the final year. Beginning in FY 2002 money to support the library's collection will be included in the budget of the Montana State Hospital.

A survey of library services available at state institutions will be taken in the next three to four years to determine the status/changes in these services and to measure the impact of the decision to discontinue MSL's grant funds for institutions.

The cessation of MSL's current institution program, which has been implemented for more than a decade, comes because of the Working Group's determination that it was both inefficient and inequitable, providing only minimum services to only one-third of the institutions administered by the state. During their meeting, members considered a number of options, and after lengthy discussion reached the very difficult decision to recommend that MSL stop the grant program in the next fiscal year. The Working Group is to be commended for its efforts.

Of course, this does not mean that MSL is distancing itself from the issue of institutions and library service. It is my sincere belief that all Montana residents have a right to quality library service and that this service is of value to everyone in our state. This agency will continue to work toward discovering the best means of obtaining this goal for institution residents.

Because the State Library does not have statutory responsibility for library services in institutions, this agency's role is determined at this point to be one primarily of support. My staff is available to provide library expertise and consultation to institutions in the development of libraries that are designed to fill the needs of the specialized clientele at many institutions. This consultation would include assisting institution libraries in participating in statewide library projects such as subscriptions to information databases like InfoTrac and LaserCat, and participation in the Montana Library Network that is currently being developed to link all libraries in the state for greater resource access and sharing. MSL is also available to assist institutions staff, as it assists all state employees, with information needs through reference and interlibrary loan services.

I am anxious to assist agency administrators overseeing institutions in developing the long-range planning process that will bring quality library services to individuals residing in those institutions. I feel the best service for institutions will come from within, and in most cases would encourage each institution to have its own in-house library available to its residents. These libraries would vary greatly depending on the residents and their specific needs and could range from a large staffed library to a less traditional facility such as a small book area or rotating collection of materials. Whatever type of facility is most appropriate, the services provided could be supplemented in some instances with materials and programs from the local public library if adequate staff and funding are available to that library to expand its services. MSL staff could assist in arranging for local agreements that would provide for this service.

Of course, the major component of expanding any program or service is funding. I welcome the opportunity to form a partnership between MSL and other agencies interested in this issue to begin the process of planning for and locating funding for library services. It is my hope we can work together to formulate a plan and process that will bring state funding to address this need of institution residents in the future.

Thank you for your interest in this issue.

Sincerely,

Karen Strege  
State Librarian