

Guidelines for Library Services to Older Adults

Library Services to an Aging Population Committee of the Management and User Services Section of the Reference and User Services Association of the American Library Association 1987. Revised 1999, approved by RUSA Board of Directors, 1999.

Introduction

This is the third set of the guidelines developed by members of the American Library Association promoting library services to seniors. The first guidelines were prepared in the 1970's when public and institutional librarians noted the need to define library services to older adults and offer guidelines for librarians to use with them. People were living longer and with increased levels of literacy; older adults wanted to continue their enjoyment of reading and learning throughout their lives. With little in the literature addressing these issues and needs, the RASD Library Services to an Aging Population Committee developed Library Services to Older Adults Guidelines in 1975. The guidelines proposed and promoted the basics of library service to older adults. This was the era when many library outreach programs started with available federal and grant money. In 1987, the guidelines were revised and expanded, describing in greater detail how and what should be involved in strong programs for service to seniors.

In this edition, the guidelines address organizational functions and needs in serving this population. Since 1987, many technological advances and new technologies have been introduced to libraries and to the general public; computer use is an accepted part of life. The Americans with Disabilities Act was passed in 1992. These two factors influenced this revision of Library Services to Older Adults Guidelines as did the fact that libraries regularly develop and offer specialized services and programs to meet the needs and demands of their communities.

The current revision of these guidelines began in 1996. Members of both RUSA/MOUSS/Library Services to Aging Population Committee and ASCLA/LSSPS/Library Service to the Impaired Elderly Forum contributed greatly to this project. Thanks are offered to: Caroline Blumenthal, Greg Carlson, Jean Cornn, Ann Eccles, Betty Ann Funk, Mary Harrow, Kathleen Hegarty, Susan Kaminow, Allan Kleiman, Rev. Jovian Lang, Julia Martin, Kathy Mayo, Arthur Meyers, Ann Miller, Sara Parker, Jane Pellusch, Rhea Rubin, Carolyn Schaffer, Emilie Smart, Joyce Voss, and Howard Zogott for their participation in creating the draft of this document.

Library Services to Older Adults Guidelines

1. Integrate library service to older adults into the overall library plan, budget and service program.

It is essential for the leaders and policy makers of the library to understand that service for older adults is not a fad; that the need and demand for library services will only increase; that the stereotypical perceptions about older adults and libraries no longer holds; and that nothing short of a total moral and financial commitment to library services for older adults will meet the needs and demands of the present and future older library user.

1.1 Acknowledge the changing needs of older adults in the library's strategic planning and evaluation process.

1.2 Incorporate funding for materials and services for older adults in the library's operating budget.

1.3 Actively seek supplemental funding for programs and services to older adults.

2. Provide access to library buildings, materials, programs, and services for older adults.

That older adults may have easy access to library services, library materials, and programs is a primary need. Staff attention to the environmental needs of older adults with visual, physical, and aural acuity benefits more than just seniors. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 provides basic guidelines for access to buildings and services for people with disabilities, among which are many older adults. Knowledge of the community, attention to local populations and end- users should further guide library staff and administrators in the provision of appropriate services and programs.

2.1 Ensure easy access to library buildings by older adults.

2.2 Provide lighting, signage and furniture that is compatible with older adults' needs.

2.3 Permit older adults to access information through its provision in a variety of materials and formats.

2.4 Promote the purchase and use of assistive technology devices for older adults to easily access library materials and programs.

2.5 Provide service for older adults who are unable to visit the library easily.

3. Treat all older adults with respect at every service point.

All library users, regardless of age, benefit when staff emphasize customer service in their work with the public. Training opportunities which focus on cultural awareness and an avoidance of aging and cultural stereotypes will enhance staff attitudes and communication skills.

- 3.1 Promote better working skills and communication with older adults or people of all ages through continuous staff education.
- 3.2 Integrate library services to older adults with those offered to other user populations.
- 3.3 Assure that services for older adults embrace cultural diversity and economic differences.

4. Utilize the experience and expertise of older adults.

Older adults have valuable and long-established connections within the community that can enhance the library's performance, its place in the community, and its ability to offer additional service programs. Proactive recruitment, development and inclusion of older adults bring the intergenerational role of library service full circle.

- 4.1 Recruit older adults to serve as program resources and volunteers.
- 4.2 Promote the employment of older adults as professional and support staff members.
- 4.3 Encourage older adults to serve as liaisons to the community.
- 4.4 Develop opportunities for intergenerational activities.

5. Provide and promote information and resources on aging.

Today's library collection extends beyond the traditional print and audio-visual materials to electronic and Internet resources on aging. The library's role extends beyond gathering resources to keeping them current and actively seeking means to publicize and promote them. Library staff and administrators should position the library as a primary access point to information on retirement planning, health issues, second career opportunities, etc. to aid caregivers, family members, professionals and older adults themselves.

- 5.1 Develop collections to reflect the information needs of older adults.
- 5.2 Act as a clearinghouse for information and resources on aging for older adults, their families, caregivers, and professionals.
- 5.3 Incorporate technology resources and access to online and Internet services and information into library collections.

6. Provide library services appropriate to the needs of older adults.

The explosion of accessible information and of service expectations by the public in recent years has changed the focus of library services and programs. Libraries provide a community setting for older adult programming, enabling older adults to develop new library skills, to remain independent and skillful library users, or to enjoy traditional informational or recreational programs. Library-initiated outreach services (e.g., Transportation to the library, home delivery of materials, and remote access to collections) benefit more than just one population and help all users increase or maintain independence in using the library.

- 6.1 Provide programming to meet the needs and interests of older adults and family members.
- 6.2 Train older adults to become self-sufficient library users.
- 6.3 Provide older adults with access to or training in technology.
- 6.4 Develop programming and services to meet the needs of older adults unable to visit the library.
- 6.5 Publicize services and programs for older adults.

7. Collaborate with community agencies and groups serving older adults.

Library programs and services for older adults should not replicate those of other agencies, but can complement and support them. Investigate possible joint programs for older adults. Identify resources the library can provide to assist professionals who work with older adults. Contact local American Association of Retired Persons chapters, senior centers, Meals on Wheels, Area, Agencies on Aging and literacy programs. Identify continuing education programs offered by area academic institutions that appeal to older adults. Day care centers and groups working with children provide opportunities for inter generational activities. Not only can your library assist these groups but they can help to promote what is available through the library and even tap funding sources not usually open to libraries.

- 7.1 Identify community organizations and groups of and for older adults.
- 7.2 Identify roles for library and agency staff in meeting the goals of collaborative organizations.
- 7.3 Partner with local organizations for library programs and delivery of services.
- 7.4 Work with existing agencies and educational institutions to promote lifelong learning.

Bibliography

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