All SRRT members are encouraged to volunteer for groups in which they have an interest. Personal members may choose to join groups or form their own for specific purposes, in line with the goals of the Social Responsibilities Round Table. These groups may be Task Forces (usually long-term) or project groups (usually of a very short duration).

If you’re interested in being involved in an active task force, please feel free to contact the Task Force’s chair.

- **Feminist Task Force (FTF)**
  **Coordinator:** Katelyn Browne
  Provides feminist perspectives and initiates action on issues related to libraries, librarianship, information services, and ALA.
  Subscribe to the Feminist discussion list.

- **Hunger, Homelessness, and Poverty Task Force (HHPTF)**
  **Co-Coordinators:** Lisa Gieskes and Julie Ann Winkelstein
  Fosters greater awareness of the dimensions, causes, and ways to end hunger, homelessness, and poverty.

- **International Responsibilities Task Force (IRTF)**
  **Coordinators:** Al Kagan and Tom Twiss
  Advocates socially responsible positions on issues of international library concern.

- **Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Task Force (MLKTF)**
  **Chair:** Laluan Pringle
  Supports and advances the observance of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday as an American celebration.

Connect with SRRT

- [https://connect.ala.org/srrt/home](https://connect.ala.org/srrt/home)
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- [https://twitter.com/srrt_ala](https://twitter.com/srrt_ala)
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Hello everyone and welcome to our January 2022 SRRT newsletter. Our theme for this issue is related to services to people who are incarcerated and the questions we posed were: “Why is it important to support the provision of library services to those who are incarcerated? What related social justice issues have you identified in your work?” We are excited and moved by the responses we received and I’m so glad to have them to offer you, our readers. I spent almost seven years providing library services in jails and a federal prison and that experience changed my life – and so this is a topic dear to my heart. If you have any comments or thoughts about this newsletter – or any of our newsletters – please feel free to reach out to us. We’d love to hear from you.

The theme of this issue is one that is of equal importance as any other theme that we previously covered. I am glad that we decided to dedicate this issue to such a topic. I found that incarcerated individuals are the forgotten ones of society, outcasts separated from the mainstream and viewed as those who are destined forever to pay for past wrongs. In this state of separation and confinement, they experience numerous challenges, some of which have been triggered by the recent pandemic. Some of these challenges include social, economical, and information access disadvantages. The truth is, incarcerated individuals are still every bit human as anyone else, and information access is vital to the overall development and progress of any individual. I am pleased at the amazing work that librarians have done and continue to do to support this specific user population. Thank you!

Call for Editorial Board Members

Are you looking for a way to be more involved in the Social Responsibilities Round Table? Are you passionate about libraries, books, media, and their role in social responsibility? Do you have excellent writing and editing skills? Are you good at meeting deadlines and encouraging others to meet them as well? If so, membership in the SRRT Newsletter Editorial Board might be just the volunteer position you’re looking for!

We are in need of more members who can serve on the Editorial Board after January 2022. Final Editorial Board placements are determined by the SRRT Action Council. We’d prefer the SRRT newsletter Editorial Board members be members of SRRT, but that is not a requirement.

The duties of members of the SRRT Newsletter:
Editorial Board members liaise with groups in the profession to solicit content and to collaborate with the SRRT Newsletter co-editors to edit, lay out, publish, and distribute issues of The SRRT Newsletter. If you are interested, please send a copy of your resume/CV and a brief letter of inquiry outlining your qualifications and interest in the position to SRRT newsletter co-editor, Julie Winkelstein, jwinkels@utk.edu and to srrt.newsletter.content@gmail.com
Probably for the first time in its existence, SRRT did not have an official presence at the American Library Association’s winter meeting. This is because there’s really no place for meetings and programs at this new midwinter iteration, LibLearnX. But you’ll see evidence of SRRT’s influence on the organization in offerings such as 50+ Years in the Making: Claiming Social Justice as a Core Value, which focuses on the Intellectual Freedom and Social Justice Working Group and the work of centering social justice as a guiding principle, and Advancing Social Justice Through the 9th Principle of the Code of Ethics, a Q&A session that supports the professional framework of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

For more direct involvement with SRRT, be on the lookout for details about our virtual summit on homelessness, with a focus on homelessness as a library and social justice issue. We’re beginning to work on programs for our third Afternoon of Social Justice in June, and virtual monthly meetings open to all SRRT members will resume in February. As I write, we’ve proposed two new resolutions: one to support the Youth Council Caucus resolution on intellectual freedom and the second our Resolution Calling on the US Executive Branch to Drop All Charges Against Julian Assange.

This is all to underline SRRT’s continued role as a place within the association for folks who want to commit to activism, to reach beyond strictly defined “library issues,” and to push the organization that represents us to do the same.

I hear and read more and more dissatisfaction with ALA, often along the lines of the organization prioritizing libraries over library workers, of ALA’s slowness to adopt social justice as a core value and that being evidence of a lack of commitment to the issues, that ALA lets the fear of retribution from conservative rule-makers prevent it from taking a clear position in support of social justice. I understand that disaffection with the association, and also sometimes feel it (for example, ALA’s Executive Board never responded to SRRT’s widely endorsed statement that holding a meeting in Texas did not align with our shared values, racial and social justice, and democracy). The transition to a virtual LibLearnX meeting was based purely on the COVID-19 pandemic. But I’m not ready to abandon the work, and I’m so often buoyed by our successes. SRRT is a remarkable place within the association for anyone who wants to push the boundaries, redefine “library issues” and help make the case for seeing the work we do through a social justice lens.
Services to those who are INCARCERATED

Why is it important to support the provision of library services to those who are incarcerated? What related social justice issues have you identified in your work?

Incarceration in a Pandemic

Jenny Rogers, Librarian II, Alameda County Library

I am a member of a small department within a large county library system. Our department operates multiple library locations off-site—at the county juvenile hall, its adjacent camp, and a community youth center, in addition to running a free meals program at a county branch, and running a twice-weekly library services delivery to the local jail.

When libraries began shutting their doors in the spring of 2020, the majority of prisons and jails nationwide did as well. What that meant for the latter is a cessation of visiting—whether by family, loved ones, or legal teams, and an end to programming that relied on people who did not otherwise work at the institutions: programming such as college courses, yoga & meditation practice, art-making of all kinds, re-entry services, writing workshops, drug and alcohol counseling, and more.

By June, 2020, we were back to running the library at the juvenile hall; four days a week we entered into the facility, interacted with staff, and hosted multiple units for library time & programs. Aside from two months at the pandemic’s beginning, we did not close.

The jail, on the other hand, has not yet opened to external parties, so we instead continue to deliver hundreds of boxes of books, magazines, and individually requested titles to the outer doors of the facility every month.

The importance of staying connected to loved ones while incarcerated cannot be overstated. The inability to see a partner, child, or friend in person, even if only for an hour or two, destabilizes, eroding a person’s worth and hope, rendering them increasingly alone. To be an incarcerated teenager experiencing these things would seem to present an impossible obstacle to overcome.

As the pandemic continued, throughout the series of suggested quarantines and multiple outbreaks, the belief in showing up at the juvenile hall and running library never wavered among us. The importance of showing up, the consistency of attention, care, and concern that we have maintained at our department’s sites and throughout the pandemic, cannot be overstated. This is what libraries are about, providing a community hub for all in its radius.

By the end of summer 2020, everyone who knew me knew better than to liken the pandemic shutdowns, closures, and prohibitions to “being in jail.” However, imagine using this inane analogy for the pandemic year while already being in jail. To continue to provide library services and an additional space to visit for fun, conversation, challenges, and growth feels more important and necessary than ever.

“We'll when you really, fully open…”

The disconnect, to me, speaks to the larger issue of the invisibility of the incarcerated, the foundational absence that presents itself even in casual conversation. Whether the library within the juvenile hall, up on the suburban hill, through the metal detectors, through the series of sally ports, after checking in, and finally down the long hallway, is actually open or not is unfathomable. It cannot be truly imagined or considered by those outside.

The question that then arises is: What happens to those that are held indefinitely in these largely forgotten spaces during a pandemic? How are those that are incarcerated affected when “everything is closed”? What great and small opportunities or “freedoms” are further prohibited during a state of emergency, and how does an incredibly prolonged state of emergency impact the people detained?

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A cademic, public, and special libraries across the United States serve patrons who are negatively impacted by incarceration, including people who have been incarcerated, their loved ones, and their friends. Libraries may or may not intentionally provide these services—recent research has found that one in every two adults has a close family member who has been incarcerated (FWD.us), and research has long shown that incarceration most negatively affects people who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color, people living in poverty and those who are experiencing homelessness, and LGBTQ and especially transgender people. While incarcerated, people have few ways to access information or the books they need or desire. This can be true even when there is a well-functioning and staffed prison library. Lack of access can place the responsibility (and cost) for access on their social networks, who may not be able to afford sending books in addition to paying for phone calls, commissary, and their own basic needs. This is an obvious point of concern for librarians.

Acknowledging incarceration and its impact on library patrons can reshape how library services are conducted. In order to identify some of the ways that academic, public, and special libraries have integrated awareness of incarceration by tailoring their services to incarcerated people, people in reentry, and their loved ones and friends, Chelsea Jordan-Makely and I conducted a year-long project of locating these services. With help from LIS students at UIUC, we scoured library and prison websites, as well as news and press releases, and reached out to librarians providing these types of services through listservs such as Library Services to the Justice Involved (LSJI). We also spread the word about our information-gathering project by asking librarians within our professional networks to share information about our research with their colleagues. We described our findings from this preliminary round of research in a September 2021 Library Journal article entitled “Outside and in: Services for people impacted by incarceration.”

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If the survey has closed by the time you try to access it, please reach out to Chelsea Jordan-Makely at jordan.makely@gmail.com.

We plan to publish an article that includes information gathered through the survey this year, and hope to conduct research on other types of library services (including prison library services) in the future.

Thank you for helping us to promote this work!
Jessica Kirk selected as SRRT’s sponsored member of the ALA Emerging Leaders program for 2022

The International Responsibilities Task Force (IRFT)
Submitted by Al Kagan

The International Responsibilities Task Force is planning a discussion group and a superlative speaker for the 2022 ALA Annual Conference in Washington DC. The discussion will focus on the free speech implications of state laws that commit state agencies to reject all contracts with vendors who support the international boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) campaign against Israel’s occupation of Palestinian territories, and for freedom, justice, and equality for Palestinians wherever they may live. We are working on finding librarian speakers who have had to sign such contracts.

Our speaker will be Trita Parsi, a co-founder and executive vice president of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, as well as the founder and former president of the National Iranian American Council. The Council is dedicated to strengthening the voice of Iranian-Americans and promoting greater understanding between the American and Iranian people. Considering that the US relationship with Iran is again in flux and is a flashpoint for regional conflict, Parsi’s insights should make for a highly stimulating program.

Trita Parsi is an award-winning author and the 2010 recipient of the Grawemeyer Award for Ideas Improving World Order. He is an expert on US-Iranian relations, Iranian foreign policy, and the geopolitics of the Middle East. He has authored three books on US foreign policy in the Middle East, with a particular focus on Iran and Israel. In 2021, he was named by the Washingtonian Magazine as one of the 50 most influential voices on foreign policy in Washington DC, and preeminent public intellectual Noam Chomsky calls Parsi “one of the most distinguished scholars on Iran.” He is frequently consulted by Western and Asian governments on foreign policy matters. Parsi has worked for the Swedish Permanent Mission to the UN, where he served in the Security Council, and in the General Assembly’s Third Committee, addressing human rights in Iran, Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Iraq. Parsi has served as an adjunct professor of International Relations at Johns Hopkins University, New York University, and George Washington University, as well as an adjunct scholar at the Middle East Institute and as a Policy Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington DC. He currently teaches at Georgetown University in Washington DC. He is fluent in Persian/Farsi, English, and Swedish. Parsi’s articles on Middle East affairs have been published in the Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Financial Times, Jane’s Intelligence Review, The Nation, The American Conservative, The Jerusalem Post, The Forward, and others. He is a frequent guest on CNN, PBS’s Newshour, NPR, the BBC, Al Jazeera, and Democracy Now!

Feminist Task Force (FTF)
Submitted by Katelyn Browne

One of the Feminist Task Force’s ongoing projects is Rise: A Feminist Book Project for Ages 0-18. Every year, the Rise committee (formerly the Amelia Bloomer Project) selects a list of recommended feminist books for young readers. The 2022 Rise committee deliberated during LibLearnX, and we look forward to seeing their list in January!

On Wednesday, January 12th, at 1:00 Eastern/noon Central, current and recent Rise co-chairs also celebrated the project’s 20th anniversary with a webinar reflecting on the past two decades of reading, feminism, and the work of getting feminist books to young readers. A link to the recording is available at https://www.ala.org/ala/alaorg/aboutala/press-releases/rise-feminist-book-project/january-2022-update.

The Feminist Task Force also co-presented a webinar with Committee on the Status of Women in Librarianship (COSWL) and Women & Gender Studies Section (WGSS) on harassment intervention in the library on Tuesday, December 7th, at 1:00 Eastern/noon Central. If you have suggestions for future work that FTF should be doing (and particularly if you’d like to be a part of that work), please don’t hesitate to reach out! You can reach me at katelyn.browne@uni.edu.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Task Force (MLKTF)
Submitted by LaJuan Pringle, MLKTF Chair

The Martin Luther King Jr. Sunrise Celebration took place on Monday, January 24, 9 a.m. (Central) during LibLearnX. The theme for this year’s event was: Give Us the Ballot: Equality for All People! The Struggle for Voting Rights, Then and Now. This year’s keynote speaker is Keisha N. Blain. From the Beacon Press website regarding Ms. Blain, Keisha N. Blain is an historian of the 20th-century United States, specializing in African American history, the modern African diaspora, and women’s and gender studies. She is the author of the multi-prize-winning book Set the World on Fire and co-editor, with Ibram K. Kendi, of the #1 New York Times bestseller Four Hundred Souls. She is an associate professor of history at the University of Pittsburgh, president of the African American Intellectual History Society, and a columnist for MSNBC. Follow her at keishablain.com, on Twitter (@keishablain), and on Instagram (@keishanblain).

The Call-to-Action was delivered by ALA Executive Director, Tracie D. Hall. This event is being sponsored by Beacon Press, the ALA Office of Diversity Literacy and Outreach Services, the Black Caucus of the American Library Association, and the ALA Social Responsibilities Round Table.

Bayard Rustin was one of Dr. King’s most loyal advisors and was instrumental in organizing the March on Washington for Freedom and Jobs in 1963. He was also a gay man who was subject to discrimination for the color of his skin AND his sexuality. The King Holiday Task Force would like to recognize Bayard Rustin and his efforts with a program to be held during an annual conference. We don’t know yet if this will take place in 2022 or 2023, but planning will begin on this project. Eventually, we’ll recognize not only Rustin’s contributions, but the countless contributions of others who all played a role in manifesting Dr. King’s vision of living in a world where we’re not judged by “the color of skin, but by the content of their character.” Stay tuned for more details as we begin planning for this event.

For more information about the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Task Force, please contact LaJuan Pringle at lpringle@cmlibrary.org.

Hunger, Homelessness and Poverty Task Force (HHPTF)
Submitted by Julie Ann Winkelstein, HHPTF Co-coordinator

There are so many aspects to addressing homelessness and poverty through libraries. One of these is library fines and fees, which have a disproportionate effect on people who are experiencing homelessness and poverty. There are numerous articles and listserv conversations about this topic, such as this September 9, 2021 piece by David

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What's happening at SRRT and around ALA continues on p. 9

January 2022

Happy hour later that day for the Spectrum community.

On September 29, 2021 Spectrum held a virtual event for the 2020 cohort, and a happy hour later that day for the Spectrum community.

Submitted by Nathalie DeFelice, Spectrum Advisory Committee

I wanted to bring this up because sometimes I think it can seem overwhelming for a library to take on addressing homelessness and poverty. Where to begin? What to do? What if we don’t have the staff, the funds, the support, the time? Larger urban libraries may be able to find local partners, which can provide both support and information. But many libraries don’t have these kinds of assets, so it’s important to look at what you can do. Going fine-free is one of those actions.

In an article about the Roxbury (New Jersey) Library going fine-free, the article’s author, Fred Aun, quotes the library: “It said its belief in the chilling effect of fines has been proven by research. ‘Studies indicate that even modest penalties deter people from registering for a library card or using the library because of the risk of incurring fines,’ the library said. ‘Rather than motivating borrowers to return items on time, fines act as an inequitable barrier to service, disproportionately impacting minors, students and community members with limited financial resources’” (Aun, 2021).

When I think about going fine-free, I think about not returning books to my local library when I was a college student because they were so late, I was convinced the minute I entered the library, alarm bells and bright lights would go off, shaming and embarrassing me. So I guiltily held on to the books. I think about a family, living in a shelter, being afraid to check out books for their children in case they can’t return the books on time. I think about the library listserv where one library staff member said they stopped charging fines and put out a donation jar instead and brought in more money for the library, while also not creating a hostile or punitive atmosphere for their community members.

I’m glad to see this movement and I hope it continues to grow. We need to do all we can for every member of our community, and I see going fine-free as one of those actions.

Questions about HHPTF? We’d love to hear from you! Contact Julie Winkelstein at jwinkel@utk.edu and Lisa Gieskes at lgieskes@RichlandLibrary.com

Fine-Free Map from Urban Libraries Council

Black Caucus of the American Library Association (BCALA)

Submitted by Michele T. Fenton, Assistant BCALA Secretary, and Brenda Johnson-Perkins, Executive BCALA Secretary

After a successful summer, the Black Caucus of the American Library (BCALA) moved full steam ahead into the fall and winter seasons of 2021 with events focused on professional development, programming, fundraising, self-care, and solidarity.

In response to the ongoing pandemic, increased racial violence, and a rise in mental health emergencies among people of color, BCALA held a virtual check-in on September 22nd to provide a space for connection and support for the well-being of its members. Attendees shared stories and advice to encourage, empower, and strengthen each other. The virtual check-in was well-received and garnered much praise from those in attendance.

On October 9th, members of the BCALA Executive Board attended a virtual retreat facilitated by Judie Hawley Conley. The retreat was a delightful and rewarding experience. Board members learned about the importance of teamwork, consensus in decision-making, and the development of effective communication skills. Members also participated in ice-breaker activities and a virtual scavenger hunt of the BCALA membership portal.

In continuing BCALA’S solidarity with other national associations of librarians of color, BCALA President Shaunette Burns-Simmond and Vice-President Nichelle M. Hayes attended REFORMA’s 7th National Conference, held virtually from November 4th-7th. The conference theme was “Somos el cambio (We are the change).”

On November 11th, the Professional Development Committee presented the online seminar “Gamifying Your Library Programming: Incorporating Gaming into Your Programs for Tweens and Teens.” Panelists included Tamela Chambers, Annalisa Purdie, Opetaritse Adefolalu, and Brittany Morris, author of the gaming novel, Slay. If you were not able to attend the online seminar or just want to view it again, please visit BCALA’s YouTube channel at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GEhQpXWwgo

On Giving Tuesday, the Fundraising Committee, chaired by Richard Ashby, Jr., launched BCALA’s first Read-A-Thon. From 1:00pm-9:00pm (Eastern), participants read passages from various books and speeches for 5 minutes. Reading categories included poetry, historical speeches, children’s literature, young adult literature, and the Black Librarian in America series. Donors could donate a minimum of $5.00 to a maximum of $100.00. Kindest was the platform used for donations. Proceeds will help further the mission of BCALA to support scholarships, programming, and conferences. Although the read-a-thon has ended, you can still make a general donation to BCALA at: https://kindest.com/443664-bcala1

In the months ahead, BCALA is looking forward to kicking-off its book tour in spring of 2022 in support of its upcoming book, The Black Librarian in America: Reflections, Resistance, and Reawakening, due out in February 2022 from Rowman and Littlefield. To learn more about this phenomenal publication and how to pre-order, please visit: https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781538152676/The-Black-Librarian-in-America-Reflections-Resistance-and-Reawakening

In addition to the activities mentioned above, BCALA saw a 41% increase in its total membership, with a significant increase in student members. This is an important milestone for BCALA, and it is hoped that in 2022 the number of members will continue to rise.

About BCALA

The Black Caucus of the American Library Association serves as an advocate for the development, promotion, and improvement of library services and resources to the nation’s African American community; and provides leadership for the recruitment and professional development of African American librarians.

Spectrum Advisory Committee

Submitted by Nathalie DeFelice

On September 29, 2021 Spectrum held a virtual event for the 2020 cohort, and a happy hour later that day for the Spectrum community.
Reference Services to Incarcerated People: Reflections

Ari Mahrer

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) has long been valued in the American information professions, especially as they relate to intellectual freedom, access to information, and unbiased services. One important way that information organizations can uphold this value is to offer services designed to be intentionally inclusive, especially of marginalized groups who experience significant barriers to services. One such group is incarcerated people.

While federal prisons are legally required to provide “reasonable access to legal materials” to incarcerated people (Cornell Law School, n.d.), without the ability to use the internet, information access remains seriously limited. Combine that with strict physical confinement and you have individuals whose connection to and ability to participate in society is severely limited to a point of virtual nonexistence—which is of course a central purpose of incarceration. (Whether or not this is an appropriate punishment and for what crimes is not something that will be discussed here; however, it is my view that in most if not all cases, incarcerated individuals are no less deserving of basic information services than anyone else).

The term Drabinski & Rabina (2015) use to describe this lack of access is “information poverty”. Britz (as quoted in Drabinski & Rabina, 2015) defines information poverty as “[a situation] in which individuals and communities, within a given context, do not have the requisite skills, abilities or material means to obtain efficient access to information, interpret it and apply it appropriately”. Information poverty is further characterized by “a lack of essential information and a poorly developed information infrastructure” (Drabinski & Rabina, 2015).

To help address these circumstances, the San Francisco Public Library launched their Jail and Reentry Services (JARS) program in 2018, modeled on New York Public Library’s work since the 1980s. The program provides library services to incarcerated adults in San Francisco’s two county jails, totaling a patron base of around 850-900 people. JARS librarians serve incarcerated patrons both on-site through a partnership with San Francisco Sheriff’s Office and by mail, answering approximately 300 letters per month with the help of LIS student interns (San Francisco Public Library, n.d.). In July 2020, I had the opportunity to be a student intern for JARS through a class in my MLIS program.

Throughout my participation in JARS, I answered a total of twenty reference questions from three incarcerated individuals, whose letters were forwarded to me by a JARS librarian at SFPL. The questions varied widely in scope, substance, and research requirement, but a common theme was self-employment and other opportunities to generate income post-incarceration. I was allowed a maximum of 20 pages to respond to inquiries (10 pages front and back). For each question, I copy and pasted information from a reliable source, and identified the source I used.

Besides inquiries regarding post-incarceration business opportunities, the information requests were varied and represented a diverse range of interests. Drabinski & Rabina (2015) write that “the general reference questions indicate that people incarcerated in prisons and jails have general information needs whose purpose may be to satisfy curiosity, help start a business, expand knowledge about a philosophical or religious situation, or any of the other myriad reasons humans seek out information over the course of a lifetime”. I found this to be an apt description. Many requests could certainly be classified under general curiosity, and several sought information about spirituality and/or religion. For example, one patron requested information about a Goddess in Buddhism, as well as a history of sun signs and horoscopes.

Drabinski & Rabina (2015) point out that in addition to various general information needs, incarcerated individuals tend to have unique and complex information needs resulting from the difficult realities of incarceration itself. For example, since people who have been previously incarcerated face severely limited job opportunities upon reentry, many of the questions I received sought information on “entrepreneurial and self-employment opportunities”, a reflection of the “deleterious effects of incarceration on the job and career prospects of individuals” (Drabinski & Rabina, 2015). My first letter, for example, included a request for a business plan or model used by a successful independent film production company, and for information on generating revenue on YouTube. Another letter requested information about trading stocks and bonds and investing in real estate. Questions such as these allude to information needs that are either produced by or are likely highly influenced by incarceration.

While I enjoyed my time participating in JARS and found the experience interesting and informative, it was also quite challenging. Since I only had the written request to work from, there wasn’t an opportunity for a reference interview and therefore no opportunity to ask any clarifying questions or zero in on certain aspects of a request. The Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) Guidelines (n.d.) state that “the reference interview is the heart of the reference transaction and is crucial to the success of the process”. This is because the reference interview is the information professional’s opportunity to develop and/or confirm an understanding of an inquiry—it allows them to clarify any confusion, identify the goals or objectives (when appropriate) to help guide the information-seeking process, and ask open and/or close-ended questions to gather additional information about the request (Reference and User Services Association, n.d.).

Because I only had the opportunity to interact with the patron through my single response, I often found myself packing as much information as possible into my reply. This was especially the case when an inquiry was broad or vague, such as the request seeking information on stocks and bonds. In these cases, had it been an in-person request, I would’ve asked several follow-up questions to determine the patron’s goal, and therefore what information I could focus on supplying that would be the most helpful. Instead, I included as much relevant information as possible, and adjusted the formatting to the best of my ability so my response was within the page limit.

I felt a degree of pressure when gathering information in these cases for two reasons. One was a genuine desire to be as helpful as possible, and the other was the lack of opportunity to correct or refine my response. If I ended up providing information that wasn’t exactly what the patron is looking for, they would have to go through

Information poverty is further characterized by “a lack of essential information and a poorly developed information infrastructure”
Supporting Incarcerated Students: A Prison Education Program List for Librarians

Nathaniel Moore, Archivist and Co-Director, The Freedom Archives and Chrissy O'Grady, Research & Education Librarian, State University of New York at New Paltz
Members of the Progressive Librarians Guild

According to a March 2020 report by the Prison Policy Initiative, the American criminal legal system holds almost 2.3 million people in 1,833 state prisons, 110 federal prisons, 1,772 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,134 local jails, 218 immigration detention facilities, and 80 Indian Country jails as well as in military prisons, civil commitment centers, state psychiatric hospitals, and prisons in the U.S. territories.[1]

Beyond being listed as a basic right in the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as in the Global Goals for Sustainable Development, education has also been shown not only to decrease recidivism (the rarest, reconviction or return to prison with or without a new sentence during a three-year period following the prisoner’s release) but also provides incarcerated peoples with important links to the outside world, opportunities to grow and develop personally, and mechanisms to earn parole or sentence reductions.

Since the passage of the 1994 crime bill which amended the Higher Education Act to ban incarcerated adults from receiving Pell Grants to pay for college programs, participation in college in prison programs has decreased by over 44%.[2] Although hampered by lack of funding, institutional support, and logistical challenges, many states still have college-in-prison programs that offer various levels of degree granting programs, ranging widely in capacity, funding and structure but all mainly instructed, supported and administered by volunteers.

Increased focus and solidarity with incarcerated people must be an integral part of continuing to build on the energy and work within the field of Library and Information Science for racial justice and equity. This is especially important as Covid-19 has now infected 1 out of every 3 people in prison.[3] One of our core values as librarians includes the right to information and life-long learning, and supporting incarcerated populations, and in particular anyone who is pursuing their basic right to education, should be central to our everyday practice.

In an effort to encourage librarians to actively organize to support the information needs of incarcerated learners, we have compiled a Prison Education Program List. This list serves a few purposes. First, to increase the visibility of prison/prisoner advocacy in LIS conversations about racial justice. Second, to demonstrate how librarians and information professionals can use their skill sets and resources to support information/education access. And third, to increase awareness of prison education programs and how there are inequities across states. If you notice a mistake or something missing, please contact us.

We hope this list will also raise the conversation within librarianship about how our professional organizations, such as the American Library Association (ALA), influence who provides services to incarcerated people and how those services are offered. According to the ALA’s Policy B.8.2 Service to Detention Facilities, “the American Library Association encourages public libraries and systems to extend their services to residents of jails and other detention facilities within their taxing areas.” Public libraries and librarians are often the ones supporting the information needs and access to materials to incarcerated populations. However, when we think about the information needs of incarcerated learners enrolled in degree granting or non-degree granting education programs, the public library may not be equipped to provide access to the academic materials needed for successful completion of courses. Academic libraries and librarians are uniquely situated to provide access to specialized academic resources to support those incarcerated learners. One way academic libraries and librarians can engage this issue is to expand collection access to incarcerated learners through partnerships and programs. An example of expanding access and services to incarcerated learners can be seen in Stephanie DeLano Davis’ paper “Supporting Learning on the Inside: Academic Library Services for Students in Prison,” in which they describe how Jackson College librarians provide research support to incarcerated learners in the college’s prison education program.[4] Another example is Merced College’s library guide for its college’s prison education program.[5] The library guide provides a similar research request form as seen in Davis’ paper, while also providing library resources for various disciplines taught in the prison education program.

It should be noted that the List of Programs are derived (primarily/entirely) from state correctional institutions; that is, it does not include federal or private institutions. Programs listed are categorized either as degree granting or non-degree granting. All non-degree granting programs provide either certificates or credit. The list is comprehensive, but inherently incomplete as we may have missed programs that already exist, and programs may expand or decrease their degree granting options without our knowledge. While there are many mechanisms to support the education of those incarcerated, we decided to focus on programs not dependent on state funding or under the direct control of the state, as many times the policies, structures and people within corrections are in direct opposition to creating the conditions conducive to learning.

This list can be used in a variety of ways depending on your position, institution, and workload. Here are some suggestions for how you might use this list:

1. It can be a resource for librarians, faculty and students interested in getting involved in prison/prisoner advocacy.
2. It can also be a resource in conversations about how libraries (your library) can support social justice efforts.
3. It could also be used as a resource list for friends, family and support systems of incarcerated people.
4. If folks are interested in engaging in this work, don’t hesitate to reach out, find a program to volunteer with, or organize in your community to bring greater visibility and attention to the intersection of librarianship, education and incarceration.

Hav ing worked in the library profession for over 25 years in a variety of roles, the last six as director, I’ve seen libraries reinvent themselves to address gaps that continue to widen in our communities, by addressing daunting needs – made more evident during the pandemic and through profound social unrest. As is par for libraries’ meeting crises head on, we must shift from a role of neutrality to driving forces toward equity, diversity, and inclusion (DEI).

Allyship – defined by the Anti-Oppression Network, compiled with PeerNetBC – is an active, consistent, and arduous practice of unlearning and re-evaluating, in which a person holding systemic power seeks to end oppressions in solidarity with a group of people who are systemically disempowered.

The Anti-Oppression Network lists the following steps toward allyship:

- Listen and Respect lived experiences, remember experience is personal
- Provide unconditional solidarity
- Ask questions, don’t assume
- Provide the forms of support you’re asked for rather than the forms of support you imagine would be helpful
- Interrupt stuff, don’t be neutral

When we practice active inclusion, the library organically begins to feel like a place of belonging. We began by culling through job descriptions, job posts, and policies to ensure inclusive, neutral language; redesigning staff onboarding and training processes; and instilling a service model that gives frontline staff permission to make flexible and inclusive decisions. Most recently, NLL is launching an internal JEDI Committee (J = Justice) to assess library operations, recommend operational changes and programs, and seek unique partnerships (following Waterloo Public Library’s example).

Our impact is broadened by numerous partner organizations. Where once we told our constituents what we offered, we now turn outward to ask them what they need from us, then find ways to meet those needs, at our library or through our partners. As an administrator, I encourage all staff to take roles on local boards and staff are paid to help organize and produce events outside the library with community partners. Where once we were inviting ourselves to meetings, today, our staff is sought out and asked to be at the table – to contribute and consume.

We continually seek to pinpoint underserved groups. One population that we’ve recently identified is incarcerated and returning citizens. Our library has not historically provided services to those who are incarcerated, outside occasional interlibrary loans to a prison in a nearby community. Our police department, while also rapidly expanding, also does not have a jail in its building. While our opportunities are limited, our library, we started by not simply inviting people to sit at the table but ensuring they naturally feel they belong there, both contributing and consuming. Internally, we worked to build a positive work culture based on trust, allowing all members of our team – part-timers working 1-2 days week to our full-time staff – to contribute and consume. All staff have input into policy and procedure development and are granted decision-making power where it counts most: with our patrons.

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In light of my own recent research on mass incarceration, I have made an administrative decision that our library will no longer do business with our state prison industry, which is currently suspended from services for internal reasons. Additionally, Iowa State Prisons this year banned third parties from sending services for internal reasons. Additionally, Iowa State prison industry, which is currently suspended from services for internal reasons. Additionally, Iowa State prison industry, which is currently suspended from services for internal reasons. Additionally, Iowa State prison industry, which is currently suspended from services for internal reasons. Additionally, Iowa State prison industry, which is currently suspended from services for internal reasons. Additionally, Iowa State prison industry, which is currently suspended from services for internal reasons. Additionally, Iowa State prison industry, which is currently suspended from services for internal reasons. Additionally, Iowa State prison industry, which is currently suspended from services for internal reasons. Additionally, Iowa State prison industry, which is currently suspended from services for internal reasons. Additionally, Iowa State prison industry, which is currently suspended from services for internal reasons.

From prisons to communities: Confronting re-entry challenges and social inequality (American Psychological Association)
The Goals, Guidelines and Standards Committee of the Public Library Association (PLA) reported new "Guidelines for Public Library Service" at ALA in Detroit. These guidelines are seen as an interim document to bridge the gap between the 1966 MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEMS, based on quantitative measures, and the totally new standards based on performance measures which the committee expects to have ready in 1985.

Committee chairperson, Peter Hiatt, introduced the new guidelines as a 'mission statement' for public libraries, one which emphasizes their societal responsibilities in a world challenged by “runaway social change,” “runaway exponential increases in the volume and complexity of the record of human experience” (!), “total egalitarianism” and “depletion of natural resources.” According to the committee, libraries must respond to both major social trends and unique human needs. The ideal information system (AKA public library) would be accountable to the total community, publicly supported and controlled, with services flexible enough to meet both present and future social needs.

The guidelines themselves stress the library’s obligations to continuous studies of community needs and review of library objectives in terms of service output. Total community service would include programs and materials designed for all levels and ages of users and potential users.

While overburdened with educational mush-mush jargon, the new guidelines seem to be an honest attempt to stimulate librarians to affirm their community service role placing users first. The philosophy clearly encourages quality public library service, specifically designed to meet the needs of the community and its individuals.

Very little real substance exists, however, for the guidelines to convince those who have not already adopted this point of view. Neither do the guidelines suggest tools for decision-making. The PLA has proposed research to construct these tools, meanwhile the message is do what you can.

Ready Access: Reentry Services for Decarcerated Populations

Jenny Rogers, Librarian II, Alameda County Library

The Social Justice team for the 2020-2021 California Library Association Leadership Challenge created an initiative with accompanying toolkit called Ready Access: Reentry Services for Decarcerated Populations. The team consists of members who work in a variety of public library systems, all of whom saw an urgency in addressing the programming and service needs of the formerly incarcerated in their communities. The team is available via Zoom to demonstrate the toolkit, and discuss how audience members can tailor the project to address the needs within their own communities.

Ready Access is designed for both community members and library staff, and includes the following facets:

- Brief video on working with decarcerated patrons
- Webpage template for any public library’s existing website
- Workflow, scripts, letter templates and flyers for initiating partnerships and promotion
- Programming ideas and workflow
- Maps to locate (California) carceral institutions and public libraries
- Additional community resources for decarcerated patrons
- Reading List
- Glossary of terms

To access Ready Access please click here [https://sites.google.com/view/ready-access/home](https://sites.google.com/view/ready-access/home).

There will also be a presentation about Ready Access at the upcoming PLA conference in March 2022. Here’s a direct link to the presentation: [https://www.placonference.org/programs.cfm?session_key=97994479-A555-27DA-F96E-F6CD87B8B8F8&session_date=Friday,%20Mar%2025,%202022](https://www.placonference.org/programs.cfm?session_key=97994479-A555-27DA-F96E-F6CD87B8B8F8&session_date=Friday,%20Mar%2025,%202022)
The Importance of Library Services to People Currently Incarcerated

Amy Blessing, University of Iowa MSW Advanced Practicum
Student North Liberty Library, North Liberty, IA

The United States has the highest rate in the world of individuals behind bars. An estimated 0.7% of the U.S. population is currently incarcerated in county jails or federal or state prisons, as well as facilities run by private, for-profit contractors. This number may not seem like a lot at first glance, but put another way, it amounts to one in one hundred people. Racial disparities in arrests and sentencings show black men are six times as likely as white men to be incarcerated, as white men and Latinx men are 2.5 times as likely. Poverty and lack of education have also been shown to be drivers of increased incarceration rates. In 2020, decarceration as home confinement or early release due to the Covid-19 pandemic reduced numbers from 2.1 million to 1.8 million nationwide. Covid-19 has also limited the time many incarcerated people spend outside of their cells, as well as visits from family and friends. 95% of all people incarcerated will eventually be released and return to their communities. Access to no-cost library services, either through the jail and prison systems or the community, offer those who are incarcerated recreational and educational opportunities while they are inside and help prepare those who will be released for a return to life outside.

In April of this year, the Iowa Department of Corrections (IDOC) initiated a policy banning friends, family members, and third parties from sending books, magazines, and other publications to inmates. The IDOC defends implementing this policy due to a reported increase in contraband entering prisons in books. Under the policy, incarcerated individuals must purchase books themselves and only from approved vendors. Choices are limited and cost increases are significant, particularly since Iowa inmates earn between $0.85 and $1.15 an hour, with average weekly take home pay for a 40-hour work week estimated at $30. The IDOC maintains a list of books that have been disapproved, further limiting options. Some in-prison libraries are available at facilities in the IDOC and state librarians have been designated to respond to information requests; however, implementation of this recent policy further censors and severely limits the right of people who are incarcerated to access books and other information. Similar measures are challenging individuals and groups trying to get books to prisoners across the country.

Every state has different policies regarding prison libraries, outside library services, and the ways people behind bars - be it in prison or jail - are allowed to access information. Earlier this fall, I attended an informative reference volunteer training through the Prison Library Support Network (PLSN) and learned about how the group, locked out of facilities at the beginning of the pandemic, started a reference service to directly support people inside prisons. In Iowa, information access and library services seem to vary from jail - where outside books are more welcome - to less flexibility in the state prison system. As a social work advocate for prison and community library access for individuals who are incarcerated, I continue to learn more about the system and innovative options to bypass imposed limitations every day. My hope with this piece is that those of you with an interest in understanding and advocating for library services for people who are incarcerated will take the time to investigate your state’s policies around information access and library services for people who are locked up, find out what people inside may be needing, and consider ways to make a difference.

Reference Services to Incarcerated People: Reflections

continued from p. 10

...take the time to investigate your state’s policies around information access and library services for people who are locked up, find out what people inside may be needing, and consider ways to make a difference.

...the process of sending in another information request and waiting for the response, a process which could take weeks. If incarcerated individuals were provided with assistance from a librarian or other information professional when crafting the requests, this situation could likely be avoided, or at the very least, improved significantly.

Participating in JARS was powerfully eye-opening, and one of the most memorable experiences I had in my graduate program. It made me realize just how cut off incarcerated individuals are, not only from information access but to the rest of the world. I sincerely hope that this service, in a small way, offers them a sense of connection and an acknowledgment of their humanity. And I hope that information professionals across the country will be reminded that our patron-base extends beyond our immediate reach and that, sometimes, those most in need of our services are those who need our help to access them.

References


Thank you for your article contributions in 2021. We are looking forward to reading about the great work you all will be doing in 2022!
The **SRRT Newsletter** is always looking for good articles, essays, and letters to the editor. The next submission deadline is **February 28, 2022**.

The SRRT Newsletter invites submissions from library and information workers, students, educators, and all others who recognize the critical importance of libraries in addressing community and social issues. Please send your submissions electronically in one of the following formats: MS Word, RTF, PDF, or plain text pasted into the body of an email. Submissions should be 500 to 1,000 words and should include the article title, author’s name and title, and school or place of work (optional). Graphics are encouraged. If using images that are already on the Internet, the URL of the image and a caption or description may be added to the text of the submission.

Please email original submissions to SRRT Newsletter Co-Editors Julie Winkelstein and Doreen Dixon at jwinkels@utk.edu and srrt.newsletter.content@gmail.com, indicating "SRRT Newsletter" within the subject line of your email. A confirmation of receipt will be sent in a timely manner.

**Submissions to SRRT Newsletter Reviews**

Submissions for book or media reviews should be sent to Madeline Veitch, SRRT Newsletter Reviews Editor, at veitchm@newpaltz.edu, indicating "Reviews" in the subject line of your email.

Submissions should be sent electronically in MS-Word format or a Word compatible format. Reviewers should keep their reviews to 300-500 words; any length much shorter or longer should be discussed with the reviews editor prior to submission. Reviewers should avoid conflicts of interest. Full disclosure should be made to the reviews editor when appropriate.

**Submissions to SRRT Newsletter Letters to the Editors**

The Newsletter invites readers to submit letters to the editors relating to social responsibilities and libraries. The letters should be respectful and thoughtful, either respond to specific content in the newsletter or include suggestions for topics of interest to SRRT members to be addressed in future issues. We will only publish letters of more than 200 words in exceptional circumstances.

Letters may be edited for length, grammar, and accuracy. You will be notified if your letter will be published.

Submit your letters to Laura Koltutsky at laurakoltutsky@gmail.com. Please indicate "SRRT Newsletter Letter to Editors" in the subject line of your email. You may submit your letter as an attachment in one of these formats: .doc, .docx; or in the body of your email message.

Letters must include your full name, address, a telephone number and email address if you have one. This is for us only -- we don't share this information.

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