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Announcements

Nominations for the 2009 MLS Awards are open. The MLS awards recognize MLS member libraries, trustees, MLS staff, and government officials for their contribution to libraries and/or the field of librarianship. The nine awards will be presented at the MLS Annual Meeting on October 21, 2009. For award descriptions and nomination instructions, visit <http://www.mls.lib.il.us/members/awards.asp>.

Register for the one day conference for Special Librarians, **Innovate, Create, and Succeed: Thinking Big, Thinking Forward** on Friday, November 6, 2009 at the MLS Burr Ridge office. Anne Caputo, SLA President Elect will speak along with others on topics ranging from facilitating creativity and incorporating it into your work; creative marketing, and use of tools and resources. A lunch-hour Expo will showcase vendors, demos of Second Life and the SLA Innovation Lab. Register at <http://www.librarylearning.info/events/?eventID=5671>.

Before school lets out register for the **MLS Summer School Institute: Assessment** on Thursday, August 6, 2009 at the MLS Burr Ridge office. Pam Kramer, Dr. Gail Bush, Dr. Steven Baule, and Jane Sharka will present on Why Assess Learning in a School Library; How to Gather Information, Measure Library Impact and Assess your Library's Progress; and Why and How to communicate your Library's Value to your Administration. Lunch and 6 CPDU credit hours included in the event cost. Register at <http://www.librarylearning.info/events/?eventID=5028>.

The following chart

http://www.mls.lib.il.us/consulting/additional_services_public_libraries.xls

reflects services at MLS Public Libraries available to the general public, ranging from Color Copiers to Friday Night hours to Typewriters. This information was gathered upon request from the MLS Reference Advisory group. Questions about the results contact the Consultants at consultants@mls.lib.il.us.

MLS staff member Mary Lou Coffman, SWAN Special Projects Assistant recently

MLS Links

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authored the article "The Magic Fairy Bag" in the May/June 2009 issue of *Autism Asperger's Digest Magazine* (<http://autismdigest.netsam.com>) about her success at getting her grandson who has Asperger's to sleep at night. Contact Mary Lou with questions at coffmanm@mls.lib.il.us.

MLS member libraries are eligible for **discount pricing on DEMCO products**. MLS members receive 15% off library, office, technology, and learning materials, and 5% off furniture and non-consumable equipment. Some restrictions apply. Contact consultants@mls.lib.il.us for information on the offer.

[\[Permalink\]](#)

MLS Board Meeting Highlights

Highlights from the April 20, 2009 MLS Board meeting include:

- › The board approved the MLS and LIMRICC FY2010 Budgets
- › Voting for MLS Board Elections now taking place on the MLS website at <http://www.mls.lib.il.us/board/index.asp> until noon Wednesday, June 10, 2009.

Complete board information can be found at <http://www.mls.lib.il.us/board>.

[\[Permalink\]](#)

Addressing Emotional Challenges of Patrons Amid Economic Crisis

America's economic crisis is affecting libraries and librarians in disparate and challenging ways. Author Diane Shelton, a licensed therapist who provides counseling, coaching, and consulting services and workshop instructor on emotional and motivational topics for the library and other diverse industries, addresses several common situations and recommends techniques and resources to assist library staff.

[\[Permalink\]](#)

[Read full article](#)

http://www.mls.lib.il.us/enounce/2009/03_10/addressingemotionalchallenges.asp

Continuing Education Events

Occasionally MLS sends messages to attendees of MLS workshops through the L2 calendar. These messages range from weather emergency information, canceled or rescheduled workshops, or the link to our online evaluation. Be sure to add "librarylearning.info" as one of your allowed domains on your organization's spam filter or your personal email so that you receive our messages.

[North Suburban Adult Programmers Meeting](#), Wednesday, June 3, 2009, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m., North Riverside Public Library District

[South Suburban Adult Programmers Meeting](#), Wednesday, June 10, 2009, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m., Orland Park Public Library

[MS Access, Part 2](#), Richard Flint, Friday, June 19, 2009, 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m., MLS Chicago

[MS Access, Part 3](#), Richard Flint, Friday, June 26, 2009, 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m., MLS Chicago

[Advanced Communications: Strategy & Advocacy](#), Gordon Mayer, Tuesday, June 30, 2009, 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m., MLS Chicago

For more information and to register, visit the MLS CE Calendar at

<http://www.librarylearning.info/?LibSys=MLS>.

[Permalink]

Grants & Awards

The **W.H.O. (Women Helping Others) Foundation** funds organizations with 501(c)(3) non-profit status, qualified to receive deductible charitable contributions, and incorporated for a minimum of three years prior to application. Grants are provided to organizations serving women and/or children with specific projects and programs addressing health and social service needs are our priority. The Foundation recognizes the value of new programs created to respond to changing needs and will consider funding projects of an original or pioneering nature within an existing organization. Funding amounts vary and application deadline is September 8, 2009. For more information and to apply visit

<http://www.whofoundation.org/Funding/index.asp>. [Permalink]

Library Law: Registered Sex Offender in the Library: What Should We Do?

Public libraries are recognized as "the quintessential locus of the receipt of information," and the right to some level of access to a public library is constitutionally protected under the First Amendment right to receive information. To that end, all individuals are welcome in public libraries, but some individuals may be excluded based on individual behavior that violates the law or library policies. What about "registered sex offenders?" In order to answer this question, a review of applicable Illinois law is necessary. [Permalink]

[Read full article](#)

http://www.mls.lib.il.us/ennounce/2009/03_10/librarylaw_05_09.asp

MLS Service: Behind the Curtain: Newsletter

Twice a month the MLS electronic newsletter, *MLS E-announce* appears in your email. Yet, how is content selected, who writes the articles, and how much work really goes into producing this form of member communication? Continue with our Behind the Curtain series as this article examines how an issue of our newsletter is born.

[Permalink]

[Read full article](#)

http://www.mls.lib.il.us/ennounce/2009/03_10/newsletterbehindcurtain.asp

Member Spotlight: Black Metropolis Research Consortium

The Black Metropolis Research Consortium, with several MLS libraries and archives as member institutions, is dedicated to making accessible "its members' holdings of materials that document African American and African diasporic culture, history, and politics, with a specific focus on materials relating to Chicago." They also have a strong commitment to recruitment in the archival community with the goal of increasing the number of underrepresented groups within this field.

[Permalink]

[Read full article](#)

http://www.mls.lib.il.us/ennounce/2009/03_10/blackmetroconsort.asp

Next Issue

The next issue of *MLS E-announce* will appear June 3, 2009. [Permalink]

Addressing Emotional Challenges Of Patrons (And Yourself) Amid Job Loss And Economic Crisis by Diane Shelton, MA, LCPC, *founder of Follow Your Instinct*

America's economic crisis is affecting libraries and librarians in disparate and challenging ways. This article addresses several common situations and recommends techniques and resources to assist.

Patrons in Emotional Crisis

Every day across America, shell-shocked patrons are walking into their local library asking for help to deal with the often destructive effects of the recent economic climate. Patrons are presenting in tears, desperate to be told how and where they will find answers to ease their pain. Spouses are fighting, each blaming the other for the misfortunes that have befallen them. People displaced from housing (perhaps for the first time) are increasingly using the local library as a place to spend their waking hours, straining the physical resources and raising a new level of safety concerns.

So how do librarians help them and cope? Obviously the very competent skills of each of you allow you to direct them toward the diverse career, financial, and technology resources that exist in your holdings and programming. But how do you address their emotional needs, particularly when there are so many more patrons, and the needs are often so heartbreaking and acute? How do you cope with what may be similar fears or challenges in your own life, and keep those factors from negatively influencing how you help your patrons?

Library staff members will benefit if they understand that most patrons who come into libraries today looking for financial/career resources, are scared, feeling powerless, likely in some stage of grief, and often experiencing great shame. The more librarians understand the psychology behind those emotions and learn some tools to manage that distress, the more effective they will be for patrons, while also supporting their own emotional health.

Loss of a job or financial and housing security strikes at the heart of a person's self-esteem, sense of competency, and hope for the future. They lose elements of their communities, identity, structure, purpose, and roles. Understanding the stages of grief helps to normalize and encourage the healthy expression of the accompanying feelings. The need to fully mourn and to seek the "life messages" in this time of transition are well addressed at these sites:

- <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/FY878>; <http://www.allaboutlifechallenges.org/impact-of-job-loss-faq.htm>
- <http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/familydevelopment/components/07421d.html>
- <http://www.mileslehane.com/articles/shame.html>
- http://www.wmbridges.com/resources/article-way_through.html

One of the greatest gifts we can offer another person is to listen to them with compassion in a way that they feel heard and understood, while also attending to safety and appropriate boundaries. Given the emotional fragility of some patrons, speaking with them using "reflexive listening" and "positive language" is important. For examples and excellent suggestions see these sites:

- <http://work911.com/cnflct/carticles/poslan.htm>
- <http://www.huntel.net/rsweetland/cman/verbal/refllistng.html>

People experiencing job and financial loss are often feeling extreme powerlessness, which is characterized by feelings of "zero control or a sense that one's actions will have no significant impact on an outcome" (the latter is particularly demoralizing). They generally experience what are known as "cognitive distortions" such as "all or nothing thinking, catastrophizing, minimizing, or filtering" (see <http://www.healthymind.com/s-distortions.html>)

In particular, they tend to generalize the lack of power in their job and financial situations to their overall life, and lose perspective over what is still working. From that position, hopelessness and paralysis are often the result.

You will hear it in their word choice, and can assist them by mirroring back what they say while subtly changing the words – altering “never” to “seldom”, and “always” to “often” or even “sometimes.” You can also encourage patrons to explore the question “where is the evidence for that belief (about them or their situation). Often that will help them to widen their perspective again (what I call “the landscape is larger than you can see” mindset).

Another key remedy to the sense of powerlessness and lack of hope is to reflect on what is and is not in their control – essentially adopting the Serenity Prayer attitude (“Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference”). They can be encouraged to acknowledge that what others – a spouse, child, bank, employer, or government - may or may not do is generally totally out of their control. Yet the good news is that how they approach those events and the work they do to prepare fully is totally within their control. Asking “what are three actions you can do right now (or put into motion) to improve your situation” will help refocus patrons and allow them to be more positively productive, and hence more hopeful and creative.

“Cognitive reframing” is another technique that assists people to regain perspective, through statements such as “Although it might be tougher for a while, I know that we will get through this economic cycle”, or “Although there are lots of candidates for this job, I did all that I can do, and that is enough”. Both of these statements will inspire hope and increased motivation, rather than despair and paralysis. Sites detailing cognitive reframing techniques and tips are found at:

- http://hprc.stanford.edu/pages/classes/006_stress/step02/05Reframing.asp
- http://www.gulfbend.org/poc/view_doc.php?type=doc&id=15670&cn=117

So, we’ve demonstrated that there are clearly many ways that librarians can assist their patrons with the emotional distress of their current situation. One other important area is to increase the safety quotient for both patrons and staff. Each library will of course follow their own safety policies and there is no guarantee that a potentially hostile person might not turn violent. However, there are certain behaviors that library staff can take that tend to decrease the likelihood of a situation escalating. They include the following techniques:

- Give patrons your undivided attention and set expectations up front if you think you will need to shorten your time to help them.
- Be mindful of cultural and personal differences in what is needed for “personal space bubbles” - you can subtly participate in negotiating the ideal distance by slightly approaching and backing away until you both appear to be comfortable.
- Adopt a “non-threatening stance” – body at slight angle to patron, not square on, and hands relaxed at sides in full view. Be mindful of not demonstrating negative body language or non-verbal cues – for example: crossed arms of irritation or sighs of impatience, which increase a patron’s sense of being unimportant or dismissed.
- Ask permission before you touch a patron in emotional or physical support
- If a patron raises their voice in anger, pitch yours more quietly with a calm response – this helps avoid escalation.. As their volume diminishes, continue to pitch yours below theirs until both are appropriate in volume and tone.
- Never blame, accuse, or criticize and validate their feelings regardless of whether or not you agree. Be appropriate in your words and approach, and never - ever - take their upset personally; while it may be directed at you, it is not about you (despite what they may claim). Taking it personally means you are emotionally triggered and likely will be unable to stay empathetic and offer useful support and recommendations.
- Don’t dismiss it if your “instinct” is telling you that there is potential danger when dealing with a particular patron. Honor that instinct and at a minimum enlist a second person to assist you in managing that patron’s needs so that you increase the possibilities for a good outcome.

Finally, a useful resource (though nearly 10 years old) is the book “Dealing with Difficult People in the Library”, reviewed at <http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=31714>, and available at <http://www.alastore.ala.org/detail.aspx?ID=339>.

Taking Care of Yourself Emotionally While Helping Others

Dealing with people in emotional distress can be draining and discouraging. Librarians need to manage their own stress and worry in order to be effective for patrons. Enhancing your support systems is one key, as is developing relaxation, breathing, and meditation routines. These sites provide good ideas:

- <http://www.howtodothings.com/business/how-to-build-a-strong-support-system>
- <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/meditation/HQ01070>
- http://www.umm.edu/sleep/relax_tech.htm

What to Do If Lose Your Own Library Job

Losing your own job is possible, especially for those in the harder-hit specialty library sector. The emotions you experience will likely mirror those of the general population. Practicing all of the above skills on how to care for oneself in order to help others will be of benefit, as will the skills on how to care for the patrons. Draw on the considerable career and financial resources readily available through your colleagues on how to conduct an effective job search in today's market. Use this seemingly "bad" event as an opportunity for self-reflection, refocusing, and renewal.

The Future For Libraries Given Today's Uncertain Economy

The above information hopefully will even better equip each of you to address the emotional needs of your patrons today as well as to manage the economic impact in your own lives. It is harder to offer clarity regarding what this financial turmoil holds for the near future of libraries. As we hit the mid-point of 2009 and look forward into 2010, it appears that the economy will be in more of a recovery position, which should bode well personally for library patrons and staff. However, the anticipation of the impact of reduced property taxes and other revenue streams for libraries is quite pessimistic.

Academic and school libraries are impacted by decreased enrollments and a shift in funding to more critical resources. It is difficult to predict exactly where the stresses and deficits will fall, as we have experienced unprecedented and unforeseen fallout throughout this economic crisis. The task for library staff members is to maximize their flexibility and their emotional resilience. In each new challenge, there is the seed of a new beginning and the loss of the old. Embracing that change and walking upright with confidence for yourself and those you help is your mission and opportunity.

Hear Diane speak at the workshop ***Helping Job Hunters: Recommendations and Resources for Librarians*** taking place Tuesday, June 16, 2009, 9:00 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. at the Oak Brook Public Library. Register at <http://www.librarylearning.info/events/?eventID=6744>.

About the Author



Article author is Diane Shelton, MA, LCPC, the founder of *Follow Your Instinct*. She is a licensed therapist with a private practice in Algonquin, Illinois, providing individual, teen, couple, and family counseling. She also provides counseling, coaching, and consulting services by telephone and frequently speaks and presents workshops on emotional and motivational topics for the library and other diverse industries throughout the United States. She can be reached at (847) 594-7447, via email at dishelton@earthlink.net or at <http://dianeshelton.com> for speaking, training, coaching, consulting, or counseling services. She will be presenting a workshop on Meeting the Emotional Needs of Patrons While Caring for Yourself (subset of *Helping Job Hunters: Recommendations and Resources for Librarians*) at the Oak Brook Library on June 16, 2009. Registration is available at <http://www.librarylearning.info/events/?eventID=6744>.

Disclaimer: All recommendations and website links in this article are provided for informational purposes only and are not intended to be a substitute for professional medical or mental health care; please seek professional care as needed).

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Library Law: There is a registered Sex Offender in the Library: What Should We Do?

by James W. Fessler and E. Kenneth Friker

Public libraries are recognized as “the quintessential locus of the receipt of information,” and the right to some level of access to a public library is constitutionally protected under the First Amendment right to receive information. To that end, all individuals are welcome in public libraries, but some individuals may be excluded based on individual behavior that violates the law or library policies.

What about “registered sex offenders?” In order to answer this question, a review of applicable Illinois law is necessary.

Like many other states, the State of Illinois enacted the “Sex Offender Registration Act” (730 ILCS 150/1, et seq.) which requires all persons adjudicated sexually dangerous who are later released or found to be no longer sexually dangerous and discharged to register with proper local law enforcement authorities so that their whereabouts are known by these authorities.

The “Sex Offender Registration Act” also prohibits child sex offenders from residing within 500 feet of a school, park, playground or other facility providing services exclusively to persons under the age of 18. As public libraries do not provide services exclusively to persons under the age of 18, at this time, registered sex offenders in Illinois can live within 500 feet of a public library.

The State of Illinois has also enacted the “Sex Offenders Community Notification Law” (730 ILCS 152/1, et seq.) which requires local law enforcement authorities to disclose information regarding sex offenders to entities, including public libraries, when registered sex offenders are registered or employed in their area. The “Sex Offender Community Notification Law” does not, however, advise or otherwise instruct public libraries what to do when they are so notified.

In light of this apparent omission, legislation has been introduced in the Illinois General Assembly on February 10, 2009 in the form of Senate Bill 1294 (SB 1294). SB 1294 seeks to amend Section 11-9.4 of the Illinois Criminal Code of 1961 (720 ILCS 5/11-9.4) and provides that it will be a Class 4 felony for a child sex offender to knowingly be present in any portion or area of a public library facility designated by the library’s governing body for use by children under the age of 18. SB 1294 also provides that it will be a Class 4 felony for a child sex offender to knowingly be present at any program in a public library facility directed toward children under the age of 18. At this time, SB 1294 has not been enacted and is pending in committee.

In anticipation of SB 1294’s enactment and to provide protection for children under the age of 18 who are patronizing public libraries, it is advisable for public libraries to adopt policies regarding facility use by registered sex offenders and knowledge of such use by public library staff. To that end, the public library’s governing body should designate those portions or areas of the public library facility that are primarily for the use of children under the age of 18. The public library’s governing body should also designate those programs that are directed toward children under the age of 18.

Once these designations are made, registered sex offenders should be prohibited from entering these areas and participating in these programs. Moreover, the designated areas and programs should be clearly defined and posted. An exception should be made, however, if a registered sex offender is a parent or legal guardian accompanying their biological child or legal ward. This exception should be made so that the child does not suffer because of the past transgression of their parent or legal guardian.

Finally, with regard to staff knowledge of use of public library facilities by registered sex offenders, staff should not be expected to review the registered sex offender database. Staff may, however, know that an individual is a registered sex offender because the individual has self-identified, law enforcement has provided identification or staff may have independent personal knowledge. In such cases, the librarian in charge should be notified and should advise the sex offender of library policy.

If another patron advises staff that a registered sex offender is on the premises, the patron should be allowed to point out the individual and, if possible, provide their name. The librarian in charge should then be notified and should review the sex offender database to confirm whether the individual is a registered sex offender. If the individual is a registered sex offender, the librarian in charge should advise the sex offender of library policy. If the name of the purported sex offender cannot be obtained or the fact that the individual is a registered sex offender cannot be confirmed, the individual should not be approached and the signs posted in the library will have to suffice.

Unless the registered sex offender is engaged in conduct creating risk of harm to others or is otherwise violating any library policy, the individual is welcome in the library. If the registered sex offender is engaged in conduct creating an immediate risk to others or is otherwise violating any library policy, the individual should be asked to leave. If the registered sex offender is engaged in criminal behavior creating an immediate risk to others or in violation of any library policy, as with any other crime, law enforcement officials should be contacted and the crime reported.

Such a policy should protect not only the library and its patrons, but also the rights of registered sex offenders who seek to use library services.

E. Kenneth Friker and James W. Fessler are partners with Klein, Thorpe and Jenkins, Ltd., a law firm with offices in the Civic Opera Building at 20 North Wacker Drive in Chicago and at 15010 S. Ravinia in Orland Park. The firm concentrates in the representation of local libraries, Library Districts and Library Systems, as well as other local governmental units.

MLS Service: Behind the Curtain: Newsletter

by Christina Stoll, MLS

MLS E-announce, MLS's electronic newsletter was launched January 24, 2007. Since its inception 55 issues have been published. With almost 5,000 subscribers, *MLS E-announce* continues to provide libraries with information relating to new services, new staff, system announcements, workshops and networking events, grant and award opportunities, legal and technological issues impacting libraries, and spotlights of member libraries.

Have you ever wondered how each issue arrives in your email or through your RSS reader? Or how the content is selected, to who writes the articles, to how much work really goes into producing this form of member communication?

The birth of an issue often starts 6 months prior to its publication, and a single issue can take on average two week's work of staff time. Electronic is simply the vehicle in which *MLS E-announce* is delivered; the work behind it still runs the old fashion way with hard work and determination.

Editorial Board & Setting the Editorial Content Calendar

Identifying content for the newsletter is the first priority. This task is charged to the MLS Editorial board, made up of staff from each department who meet twice a year to discuss overall changes to the newsletter's structure and to brainstorm upcoming content. The meetings are lead by the MLS Consultants, who serve as the primary editors, writers, and publishers of the newsletter.

The MLS staff works hard to keep with the newsletter's original concept of only promoting information relating to MLS and its members. While there have been exceptions, MLS is dedicated to its member's requests to reduce the amount of communication it pushes out, and focuses on making *MLS E-announce* one of our top forms of communication.

Setting the stage

A content style guide and pre-set templates aid each editor with keeping their issue as similar to the next, despite the challenge of three separate writing styles and the occasional guest writer. Establishing a pattern of balancing articles on different library types and library areas enables the focus of the newsletter to offer something for all of its readers. There is also an attempt to balance articles which focus on system related events to an individual member library event to a focus on larger issues impacting the entire library profession.

A recent change to the newsletter process is that the head of the Consulting Department now serves as the primary proofer for each issue. This aids in keeping a consistent style. This has also reduced each consultant's work load, given they used to rotate editorial and proofing tasks.

Another helpful secret behind the newsletter is the software's flexibility, in that an editor can create their entire issue but another MLS staff member can publish it. This has been utilized when staff have been away at conferences, in meetings, or out of the office during the time of publication.

An Issue at a Glance

At the beginning of the calendar year, the newsletter issues and dates are set, averaging between 20-22 issues a year, with consideration for holidays and office closings. The consultants are pre-assigned their issues, rotating every 6 weeks as the editor for a single issue.

Once the 6 month editorial content calendar is set, the consultants begin research for their upcoming issues. Content changes as new information or issues take priority. With planning 6 months ahead, often you're not aware of everything that you need to or want to communicate.

Each newsletter issue contains short abstracts focusing on System Announcements, upcoming CE and

Networking Meetings, and Grants & Awards opportunities.

Longer articles are linked from the shorter abstracts, the first being a lead article which focuses on an issue impacting the entire system or a large section of the membership. Every month one issue contains a legal article written by staff from the law firm of *Klein, Thorpe & Jenkins, Ltd.*, with the opposite issue in that same month focusing on a particular technology and its impact on libraries. Other longer articles include an MLS Service or Staff member and an MLS member library.

Interviewing, Writing & Snapping the Picture

Typically any research, interviews, and library visits related to an issue takes place much earlier, however most of the writing for an issue often takes place during the 2-3 week time frame prior to an issue's publication date. Also taking place during this time, the editor for an issue is setting up the structure for their issue, getting article titles in place, making sure links work, and setting the correct issue date and volume numbers.

Often a longer article involves a phone call or in-person interview. On-site interviews are the favored option by the Consulting staff, as it's a good way to visit a member library.

Balancing the longer articles are shorter announcements which often develop up to the minute before an issue is published. Announcements are collected on an on-going basis from all MLS staff. The consultants track these and set priorities. Any announcement that doesn't fit into an issue is either moved to the next issue or communicated through other means.

MLS's CE Manager informs the editor of which classes to promote. Grants & Awards are identified through related publications that the system subscribes or through blogs, web sites, and other sources that staff search.

On the day of publication, the newsletter content is set; workshops are verified to make sure they haven't been canceled and any last minute changes are completed. Publishing of the newsletter takes approximately an hour from start to finish. This involves uploading the abstract content to the MLS web site, along with the longer articles, creating the PDF pages, and then making both the site and the RSS feeds live. The newsletter is pushed out to its subscribers through a one-way mailing list, which is the final step in the process.

Anyone can subscribe to the newsletter at <http://www.mls.lib.il.us/enounce/subscribe.asp>.

New issues appear on the MLS Home page <http://www.mls.lib.il.us> with links to both the RSS files or to the back issues archived on the MS web site at <http://www.mls.lib.il.us/enounce/archives.asp>.

Member Involvement

Interested in writing for *MLS E-nounce*? Have something happening at your library you'd like to see in a future issue, or have a suggestion for a future article topic? Contact the consultants at consultants@mls.lib.il.us.

Member Spotlight: Black Metropolis Research Consortium

by Christina Stoll, MLS

The Black Metropolis Research Consortium (BMRC) was formed in 2005 and is described as “an unincorporated Chicago-based association of libraries, universities, and other archival institutions with major holdings of materials that document African American and African diasporic culture, history, and politics, with a specific focus on materials relating to Chicago.” (<http://www.blackmetropolisresearch.org>)

While the BMRC does not have a library within its facility, many of its Member Institutions (<http://www.blackmetropolisresearch.org/institutions.html>) are libraries or archives, several of which are also members of the Metropolitan Library System.

In talking with the BMRC’s main Consulting Archivist Tamar Evangelestia-Dougherty, she shared with me insight behind the purpose, goals, and outcomes of this organization.

On August 26, 2006, Dr. Danielle Allen convened a meeting with CEO, presidents and provosts, to discuss the formation of and commitment to an organization that focused on Chicago African American culture. The consortium hopes that through its work to identify and make accessible its collections they can overcome some of the challenges that this type of collection brings.

Many of the African American collections held by BMRC member institutions are in a sense hidden from researchers because they lack the proper access tools such as archival finding aids. A finding aid is an access guide that helps users of primary resources by summarizing the information contained within a collection of records. When a collection is unprocessed, there essentially is no finding aid available to guide a researcher through the collection. The collection exists only to those who know that it is there. It cannot be accessed via an online catalog, hence the term “hidden collection”.

There is also another component of BMRC members, a “second space” which includes those who hold archival materials within their homes. Such collections are also hidden as they are unavailable to the public and have yet to be discovered by researchers.

BMRC also has a strong commitment to recruitment in the archival community with the goal of increasing the number of underrepresented groups within this field. By partnering with institutions that offer training in archival science, such as Dominican University’s Graduate School of Library and Information Science, the BMRC offers internships and residency programs for graduate students interested in pursuing careers as archivists, librarians and curators. The internships benefit the member repositories by providing extra help and also providing the students with archival related job experience. In October 2008, the BMRC co-sponsored the 1st annual Archie Motley, Archives & Manuscript Internship Fair which was held at the Chicago History Museum.

Starting with a small group of organizations, the BMRC currently stands at 17 member institutions and 7 Associate Members. A listing of the archival holdings of each of the member institutions can be found at <http://www.blackmetropolisresearch.org/resources.html>.

While the main focus of the BMRC is on identification, preservation, and access to the items within its member’s collections, they also provide activities, training, and events for members and the general public.

Projects, Activities & Events @ BMRC

Additional opportunities for its members include professional development training for archivists, seminars and lectures with local artists, and brown bag lunches. The BMRC also promotes the exhibits of its member institutions. Future events include workshops for potential donors on the care of collection materials, the need for preservation, and how to start the process for joining the BMRC.

Perhaps the biggest challenge for the BMRC is building trust between archivists, repositories, and associate members- especially those private owners of archival material in the “second space”. Tamar explained that there is often a misconception that the BMRC is there to take someone’s material away and give it to an archival

repository when in fact the BMRC's intention is quite the opposite. Their main focus is strengthening the memory keeping capacity of the individual or organization so they can maintain their own archive. If a member decides to donate their collection to an archive, the BMRC will facilitate and assist them in a mutually supportive and beneficial donor process. The paramount goal is to make the materials accessible by researchers and others regardless of location or custodianship.

Being a BMRC Member institution

Tamar encourages anyone within the Chicago area to contact the BMRC if they think they may have items that would fall within the African American or African diasporic history. This includes not only museums, libraries, and archives, but local history groups, churches, and hair salons as well as other examples within the black community. Organizations outside the black community should also be considered as in the examples of the Newberry's Pullman Railroad collection, which includes job descriptions of African American railroad workers or Loyola University civil rights collection.

In order to qualify for membership, you must agree to allow access to your materials. There are annual dues which assure a member's full participation and benefits from any grants which the BMRC is funded for, and access to BMRC the events, training, and activities.

BMRC Staff

Tamar is joined on staff by Vera L. Davis, Executive Director of the BMRC. The consortium also has a nine-person board.

Tamar's main duties include inventory of the Member Institutions' collections, outreach, fundraising, grant writing, and additional administrative tasks. Visiting an institution, Tamar will develop a relationship with the archivist and then work with them to inventory their collection to identify how the items relate to the larger history in Chicago. She is also looking to identify black Chicago history that is not being captured such as medical history and black woman's history is low.

Writing and applying for alternative funding is another large component of the work the BMRC focuses on in order to continue its work. Recent grants awarded to the BMRC include:

\$497,364 from the Andrew Mellon Foundation to implement a consortium wide survey initiative of the member institutions as well as various collections held by community based African American organizations and creators. This grant allows the consortium to hire two additional archivists to conduct the three year survey and create a basic inventory of the items within all of their member institutions.

The BMRC was also recently awarded funding from the Andrew Mellon Foundation to bring in eight Fellows over the upcoming summer. To be considered the fellows has to write a letters explaining how they would use one of the BMRC's collections as part of their doctoral work.

These are just some of the ongoing efforts by the BMRC's toward its mission of being "*dedicated to making broadly accessible its members' holdings of materials that document African American and African diasporic culture, history, and politics, with a specific focus on materials relating to Chicago.*"

Questions about this article or for more information about the BMRC, contact Tamar Evangelestia-Dougherty at tamar1@uchicago.edu.