



# Library Services to Inmates in the Rural Jails of Western North Carolina

By: Elizabeth J. Greg & Gillian (Jill) D. Ellern

## Abstract

This presentation talks about the WNC jail project, why we did the project, the interviews with WNC sheriffs to collect the information for the *NC Libraries* article, and working with the two regional jails with Fontana Regional Library system. It includes talking about the negotiations, the challenges, and the crusaders that were part of the project. The slide show includes pictures of the book collections in the jails.

Greg, E.J., & Ellern, G.D. (2013, October 17). *Library Services to Inmates in the Rural Jails of Western North Carolina* [Presentation]. NCLA Biennial Conference. North Carolina Library Association, Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

Archived version from NC DOCKS available at: <http://libres.uncg.edu/ir/wcu/listing.aspx?id=37409>.



# LIBRARY SERVICES TO INMATES IN THE RURAL JAILS OF WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA

**NCLA 60TH BIENNIAL CONFERENCE OCTOBER 17, 2013**



## **VISITOR**

Date: 9/11/13

Name:

**GILLIAN (JILL) D. ELLERN**

**SYSTEMS LIBRARIAN**

**WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY**

Destination:

**ELIZABETH (LIZ) J. GREG**

**ASSISTANT LIBRARIAN, SYLVA BRANCH**

**FONTANA REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM**

Time in:



# PRESENTATION OUTLINE

- Why did we do this project?
- Laying the groundwork
  - The research, interviews, and article
- Working with two regional jails in WNC
  - Negotiations, challenges, and crusaders
- Why should you think about it?



# THE IDEA FOR THIS PROJECT

- Combining disciplines of the researchers
  - What happens when a librarian and a criminal justice professor want to do a research project together
- Boyer's model of scholarship
  - Community involvement and applied scholarship
- Mutual friends were jailers



# WHY?

Listening to the stories from our friends about working as a jailers, we thought about what it would be like should we find ourselves unfortunate enough to be there.

Perhaps you, like us, might think it a quite attractive prospect to have nothing but time to read all day.

However, the reality we found that the library services provided in the regional jail situations are not what you might imagine.

And even if innocent, you can be in there for up to two years awaiting trial.



# WHAT CAN WE DO?

- What is the actual situation?
- What is needed to help?
  - How can we keep from looking stupid or like crazy academics trying to stir up trouble or a crusade?



# BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- Doing the background research
  - Example: difference between a jail and a prison
- Finding out who was the policy makers at each jail
- Talking to the public libraries in each area

Tip #1: Concentrate on the books



# IMPACT AND SUSTAINABILITY

- Investigation focused on what we could do
- Concentrating on how to keep good books in inmates hands
  - Understanding the unique environment
    - What are the challenges?
  - Grant writing ideas
- Who can we do something that would be sustainable in our area?



# QUESTIONS ASKED

1. Would you tell us what you know about the history of library services to this institution?
2. What is the role of library services in the jail?
  - Follow up question - Was there been any interest in expanding, limiting, or changing these services?
  - Follow up question - With the new Justice Reinvestment Act, and with inmates staying in jail much longer, do see any changes being made to Library Services in the future?
3. Where do you get your materials for library services?
  - Follow up question - Where could you get materials in the future or where would be preferable?
4. What administrative or operational issues or concerns you have had with providing library services to inmates?
  - Follow up question - What benefits or positive outcomes have you seen with providing these services to inmates?
5. Do you tailor your services to different populations?
  - - Follow up question - How do you provide materials for illiterate, Spanish speaking, or other special needs inmates?
6. What do you do to support inmates with legal issues?

# **THE RESULTS OF THE INTERVIEWS**

# THE COLLECTIONS

- Primarily paperback
- Predominately fiction
  - What you might find at a thrift store
    - Genres were typically romance, with some popular fiction, and a few young adult.
    - In general they were leftovers, older and unknown authors and titles, duplicates of currently popular titles
- Very few nonfiction or self-help books
- Acquired from donations, friends and family of inmates, staff making donations, thrift stores and yard sales (no budget)



# **ADMINISTRATIVE AND OPERATIONS PROCEDURES**

- Housed in a variety of places (multipurpose, closets, carts, lockers) - none had a “library”
- Loan rules (2-4 books at a time) plus the Bible per week
- Shared community space so sharing between inmates was common
- Getting additional items was difficult



# ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

- Physical state of the collections
- Variety genres
- Budgetary challenges
- Space limitations
- Time and staff resources
- Lack of items for special needs
- Differences of option on law materials



**A PICTURE IS WORTH...**



# JACKSON COUNTY (72 MAX)



# MACON COUNTY (75 MAX)



# HAYWOOD COUNTY (130 MAX)



# HAYWOOD COUNTY (130 MAX)

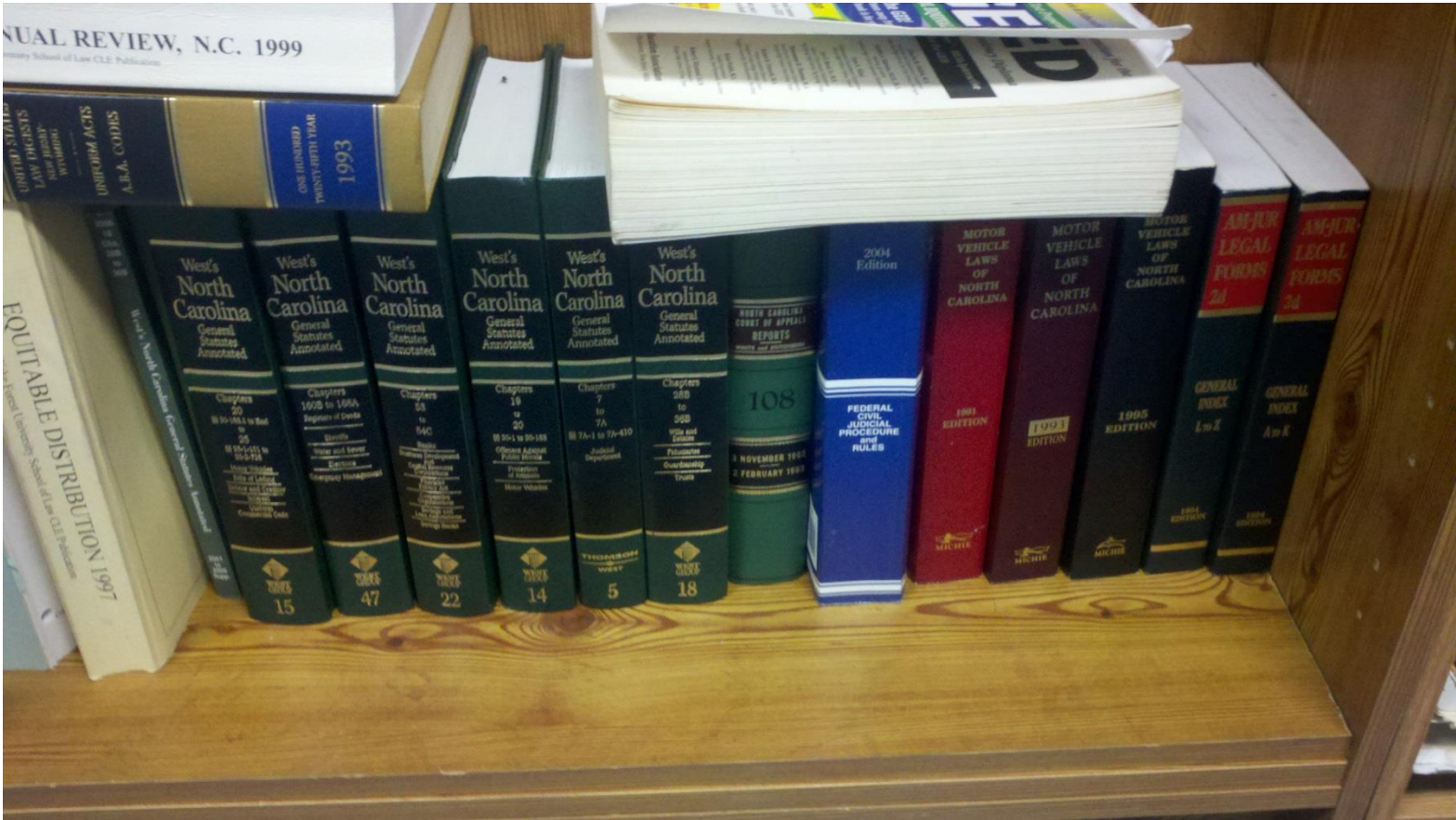


# HAYWOOD COUNTY (130 MAX)



# HAYWOOD COUNTY –LAW BOOKS

(130 MAX)



# CLAY COUNTY (52 MAX)



# CLAY COUNTY (52 MAX)





# CHEROKEE COUNTY (150 MAX)



# CHEROKEE COUNTY (150 MAX)



# CHEROKEE COUNTY (150 MAX)



# GRAHAM COUNTY (8 MAX)



**WORKING WITH  
FONTANA REGIONAL  
LIBRARY SYSTEM**

# A TAIL OF TWO JAILS

The difference between the two jails approaches to library services

## Jackson County Detention

- Philosophical
  - Safety and Security
- Who is running it
  - Single nurse volunteer
- Collection and logistics
  - Book list to select from
  - Numbers are large and unorganized

## Macon County Detention

- Philosophical
  - Stewardship
- Who is running it
  - All jailors together
- Collection and logistics
  - Browsing carts
  - Small, varied, accessible

# JACKSON COUNTY

## CURRENT STATE OF COLLECTION - SEPT 2013



# MACON COUNTY CURRENT STATE OF COLLECTION - 2013



# MACON COUNTY

## CURRENT STATE OF COLLECTION - 2013



# REALITY OF WORKING WITH JAILS















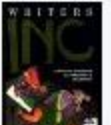






# LIBRARYTHING.COM

LibraryThing interface showing a list of books. The top navigation bar includes: Home, Your books, Add books, Groups, Talk, Local, More, Zeitgeist. The user is BettyJean79, with options for Share, Sign out, and Help. A search bar is present with the text "Search site".

Below the navigation bar, there are filters for "Jackson County Jail Bo..." and options for List, Covers, Tags, and Authors. A "Style" selector is set to "A". There are also icons for sorting and printing. A secondary search bar says "Search your library".

The main content area shows a list of books, with pagination "1 - 20 of 344" and a "next page" link. A range selector shows "[1] 2 3 4 5 6 7 ... 18 (show all)".

Title	Author	Tags	Date	ISBN	
 A 2nd Helping of Chicken Soup for the Soul: 101 More Stories to Open the Heart and Rekindle the Spirit	Canfield, Jack	non-fiction, self-help, inspirational, short stories	1995	1558743316	     729 4
 Chicken Soup for the Soul Cookbook: 101 Stories with Recipes from the Heart	Canfield, Jack	nonfiction, cookbook, inspiration, short stories	1995	1558743545	     105 1
 Oliver Twist (Barnes & Noble Classics)	Dickens, Charles	fiction, classic, 19th century, english literature	2004	1593082061	     12,551 113
 Writers INC: A Student Handbook for Writing & Learning	Sebranek, Patrick	non-fiction, english, grammar, writing, reference	1995	0669388130	     818 3



# NEGOTIATIONS

- Introductions
  - Organizational landscapes and dynamics
- Control
  - Who's in charge of what
  - End results
- Support and politics



# CHALLENGES

- Professional awareness
  - A pile of books doesn't make you a librarian
- Advocacy and education
- Loss of control
- Life cycle and longevity
- Personalities



# CRUSADERS

- Jail and Officer Safety
- Religious agenda
- Social justice
  - mental health, recidivism, and more



# JACKSON COUNTY

## CURRENT STATE - OCT 2013



# FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Workflow to keep it sustainable
  - Weeding
  - Selection
    - Friends bookstore for non-fiction
- Keep relationships going
- Looking at working with other public libraries



# CONCLUSIONS

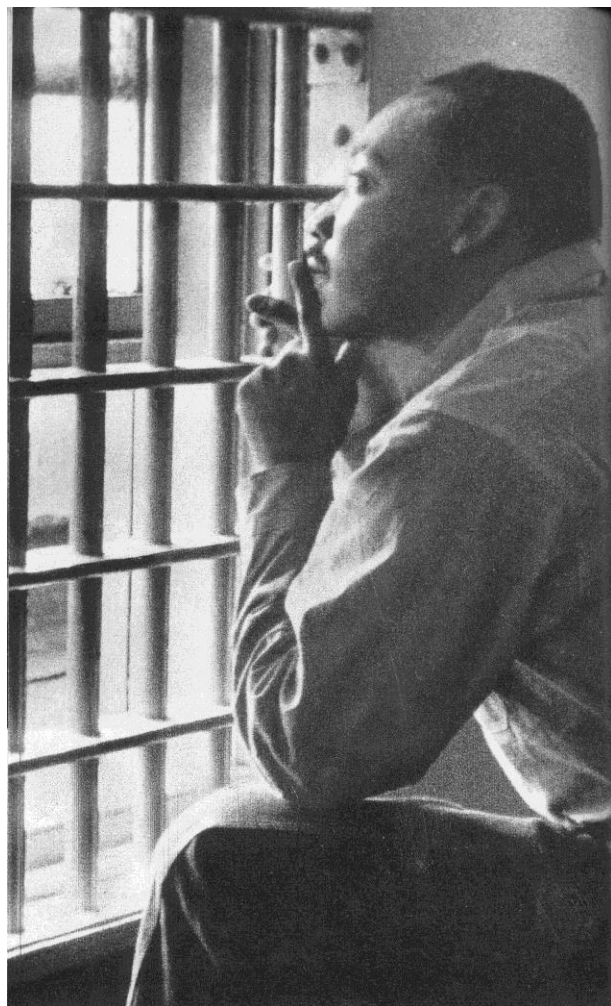
- Encourage you to think about doing this
  - Inmates are public library patrons
  - Small captive group with a great need
  - Dedicated library users
- Rewarding
  - Individual inmates and those providing the services
- Challenges
  - Political, monetary, etc



“People will look at you and they’ll judge. Even the good ones. They’ll say, ‘There’s a woman who’s on drugs,’ or ‘There’s a woman who can’t keep her kids...’ Books don’t do that. Books say, ‘I don’t care who you are. I’m here to help you learn and escape this place for a bit.’ We need books in here. We deserve that. We deserve to grow, to learn, and to heal.”

- Tracie, from the documentary Books Behind Bars







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