

D9- Serving Special, Diverse, and Underserved Populations

The goal of public libraries to provide access and service to all members of their communities can only be met with careful consideration of underserved groups. The large percentage of the US population over age 55 is expected to continue to grow. The American Library Association (ALA) promotes services for this community in its "Guidelines for Library and Information Services to Older Adults" (ALA, 2008). Library programs that address the information needs of senior citizens are a critical aspect of librarianship in the 21st century.

Members of the aging population face dramatic changes in their health and social lives. The specific challenges of older adults involve difficulties with mobility, hearing, and vision. Also, they are often socially cut off, and crave human contact (Angell, 2008, p. 32). Although it is common for public libraries to dedicate programs, spaces and librarians to teens and children, there are few corresponding considerations for the elderly. This discrepancy can perhaps be explained by the "cultural obsession with youth" (p. 34). The changing demographic landscape demands that this inequity of services be addressed.

Library services designed for older adults "have the potential to greatly enhance the social, intellectual, and general well-being of seniors" (Meyer & Worster, 2015, p. 203). "Reading is just as important for the health of the elderly as it is for the development of the young" (p. 197). Several studies have demonstrated that reading "preserves aging minds, warding off certain mental health conditions including Alzheimer's disease and dementia" (p. 196). Although members of this group are associated by age, it is important to recognize the varying interests among individuals. To assess information needs of older adults, the ALA advises the collection of data on

"language, culture, education, income, internet skills and access, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation and age" (ALA, 2008).

Libraries have the opportunity of addressing the changing demographics of the population by creating programs for senior citizens. In order to respond to the diverse needs of older adults, librarians must take the time to develop relationships. Through regular meetings and discussions, librarians are better able to serve elderly patrons. In order to provide equitable access to information, collection, program, and service planning must account for marginalized groups.

References

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