

1. Describe the projects accomplishments to date in relation to its objectives and the target population.

The purpose of this project was to encourage youth with disabilities to become lifelong library users. This would be accomplished by developing programs and accommodations to help youth develop needed skills, encourage participation in regularly scheduled library programs, provide parents with opportunities to increase their ability to support their children's growth, offering library staff trainings that would enhance library services to this population, strengthening collaborations between public libraries, advocacy agencies, and parent groups, as well as, improve community awareness and acceptance of youth with disabilities.

Programs and Accommodations:

In year two of the grant, librarians continued to focus on creative ways to include youth with disabilities, as well as, meet the needs of this population. This started with developing a general awareness among patrons by including a statement in program brochures and/or on websites welcoming people with special needs, regardless of age, to participate in library programs. The awareness statement Chili Public Library has developed is "Chili Public Library welcomes people of all abilities to participate in our programs. Please let us know if you will need any special accommodations. We strive to make your library visit an enjoyable one!" This simple addition encourages parents and those with disabilities to take a second look at programs being offered and participate.

In addition, librarians continue to use materials developed in year one of the grant showing ways to make accommodations, modify programs and/or provide materials more accessible to this population. Taking a creative approach to include youth with disabilities in regular library programming does not require substantial work on the part of the librarian. For example, Donna Peasley of Gates Public Library states, "I provided and encouraged the use of audio books for those who had trouble reading. Two children did this and loved the audio books. They read at a lower level than the others and this enabled them to keep up. I will advertise this as part of the club next year."

It is important youth with disabilities feel welcomed as a part of the library community. Penfield Public Library states, "'Having fun' is emphasized over competing against other program attendees. ...In addition, participants are encouraged to work in teams and/or receive assistance from library staff and teen helpers." Ogden Farmers Library offers group tours for BOCES classrooms to encourage students to use the library and to get their own library card. Bottom line, librarians are working hard to include youth with disabilities and make them feel welcomed at the library.

This year we have also focused on developing tools that would make materials more accessible to people with disabilities. Mayer-Johnson, a national company offering picture symbol programs and equipment for people with special needs, donated two copies of Boardmaker, a symbol-based communication and educational computer program (a \$600 value) to The Building Bridges Project. Using this nationally known program, we developed a set of images that correspond to Dewey Decimal Numbers. A bulletin board was developed at Webster Public Library to bring these icons to the attention of library patrons. This development will produce consistency among all libraries. Regardless of which library a patron chooses to visit, Dewey Decimal icons will be familiar to library patrons. Picture icons have been made available to all libraries participating in this grant.

We have updated the Kids Computer Instruction Guide and published it online enabling teachers and parents to access and print the instructional guide to use at home and in classrooms prior to visiting the library. This enables youth to learn how to use the Kids Computer in advance, allowing students to spend more time finding materials, instead of becoming frustrated with a computer system they are unfamiliar with, running out of time and going home empty handed.

A library guide to the locations of all MCLS libraries was developed to help youth to get to know all of the libraries in Monroe County. It was used during the summer reading program and titled “Libraries Are More Than Books: Summer LIBRARY Treasure Hunt.” (The “hunt” focused on finding the actual library and then discovering that particular library’s individual treasures.) We included library addresses and phone numbers, as well as, which libraries were accessible by public transportation. Youth with and without disabilities were encouraged to visit and journal about their summer library visits. Participants were encouraged to submit their journals to win great prizes depending on the number of libraries they were able to explore. All children received prizes for their journal entries. We are currently revising, and will continue to provide this library journal to library patrons in the future.

To continue the development of lifelong library skills, several libraries set up volunteer opportunities for youth with disabilities. With the support of parents and community organizations, volunteering promotes familiarity with the library and the various components of how a library is run. While volunteering, youth learn a variety of skills enabling them to become lifelong library users. Volunteering has been set up, upon request, on an individual basis, enabling librarians and those working with the person with disabilities to develop experiences to meet their personal needs and wants.

Some participating libraries purchased and/or staff received training for the Interpretive Computer. This system is used to assist deaf patrons in communicating with library staff. These systems were purchased by individual libraries without the use of grant money. However, libraries were encouraged to use this system through the Deaf Awareness training given earlier this year.

Parent Support:

Considering the majority of youth with disabilities depend on their parents to bring them to the library, we felt it was important to get parents to use the library more. Parent meetings were offered at public libraries throughout Monroe County. One topic of interest was planning for the future of your loved one with special needs. Therefore, we collaborated with Maria Caton of Mass Mutual to provide families with information to make their search easier. In addition, René H. Reixach, an attorney of Woods Oviatt Gilman, voluntarily provided a workshop on wills and trusts. Rhonda Miga, grant consultant, developed a program focusing on the “Letter of Intent”. Through these workshops, parents frequented several libraries, learning about the Building Bridges Project and had the opportunity to review and check out newly purchased materials on important topics about their child’s disability and/or educational needs.

Staff Training:

The MCLS partnered with The Advocacy Center and National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) to provide library staff with disability awareness training. We held five training sessions during the second year of the grant. One training session was a presentation called “Baggage,” focusing on the “baggage” we all bring with us to any given situation. Helping

librarians to become aware of their personal baggage and think of the possible baggage a patron is carrying; enabling better communication and interaction. One training session focused on deaf awareness to help librarians understand what it may be like to be deaf. Participants learned basic ASL signs and the latest technology available to help deaf people communicate with hearing people. The publications “Tips for Communicating with People with Hearing Loss” and “Let’s Communicate” were purchased and distributed to workshop participants. A special presentation was given on a new piece of equipment available for free to any public library. A special presentation was given on a new piece of equipment available free to any public library. The Sorenson Video Relay Service (VRS), a free service for the deaf and hard-of-hearing community, enables anyone to conduct video relay calls with family, friends, or business associates through a certified ASL interpreter via a high-speed Internet connection and a video relay solution. Libraries in NYS can receive this equipment free of charge. Information can be obtained at www.sorensonvrs.com

The other training sessions provided general disability awareness, including hands on activities allowing participants to establish an understanding of what it may be like to have a disability. This training session took place at Gates, Chili and Brighton Memorial Libraries. Training sessions were provided to all staff, not just those participating in the grant. Other libraries have added disability awareness to their regular staff training agendas.

Collaborations:

It has been important to continue strengthening collaborations between public libraries, advocacy agencies, and parent groups. We addressed this goal by inviting area agencies and parent groups to set up displays in conjunction with information about The Building Bridges Project at participating libraries. Agencies provided information about their organization to library patrons through the displays, enabling patrons to increase their awareness of this organization and the services they offer within our community. In addition, we developed a list of MCLS libraries having community meeting rooms available for use. This information was provided to agencies and organizations upon request, encouraging them to schedule upcoming events and meetings at the library.

This year, the Flower City Down Syndrome Network (FCDSN) donated 117 books to the Monroe County Library System. The organization’s resource library was not being used as much as they would have liked. FCDSN decided materials would be better circulated within the public library system. They used the guidelines we developed in year one of the grant to determine if a book depicts a person or factual information appropriately. The FCDSN then brought the books to a grant advisory meeting and libraries picked titles to add to their personal collections. The FCDSN has stated they would like to continue this working relationship with the MCLS, providing a certain dollar amount of money to purchase new publications about Down syndrome and/or issues surrounding Down syndrome.

Using NYS Social Studies Standards and the Social Studies Curriculum of the Rush Henrietta Public School District, librarians at Henrietta Public Library have searched to find lower reading level materials appropriate for public library use. Librarians found it difficult to find materials with sturdy binding. It was also difficult to find lower level reading materials for curriculum used at the middle and high school levels, regardless of its binding. However, even with the limited availability of materials, librarians purchased a quality collection of items (including audio and video) that can be used by youth with and without disabilities. Lower level reading material continues to be a voiced need for both parents and teachers of students with learning

disabilities. A grant focusing specifically on this need would be desirable in the future. With more and more children being diagnosed with developmental and learning disabilities, the need for materials at lower reading levels will continue to increase. If public libraries could support parents in providing a variety of lower level reading materials, it would allow students to do more studying and less searching for appropriate materials.

Community Awareness, Acceptance and Understanding:

In order for youth with disabilities to be fully included, librarians knew they would have to reach beyond library staff to accomplish this goal. It was important to help peers of youth with disabilities to develop an awareness that would lead to acceptance and understanding. Librarians focused on increasing children's and YA materials by purchasing fiction and nonfiction books that portrayed people with disabilities in a positive way. Irondequoit and Gates developed a brochure listing a collection of YA fiction books to encourage peers to read and learn more. Irondequoit also developed a list of children's books available.

In addition, librarians scheduled book talks or story times using some of these titles. This would enable librarians to prompt questions that would bring awareness, acceptance and understanding to those who participated. Many of the titles were made available in audiobook, providing those with reading disabilities to read the book and participate in the book discussion with their peers.

Four libraries took part in an author chat. Participants at Webster, Pittsford, Henrietta, and Chili were invited to chat with Cynthia Lord via telephone regarding her Newbery-Honor book Rules, which deals with the themes of tolerance and understanding for siblings and friends who have special needs. The children were excited to speak with Mrs. Lord and share their viewpoints of the book.

A school psychologist shared information about the Building Bridges Project with a parent. She recommended that the parent contact Rhonda Miga to find a book discussion group for her daughter to join. The psychologist felt being a part of a book discussion group would provide opportunities to develop needed social skills and strengthen friendships with her peers. This was done and the librarian overseeing the group states, "Through her participation, other members of the group were given the opportunity to learn and display patience and understanding." She continues to participate with this reading group today.

MCLS Guide to DisABILITY Resources in Monroe County was developed as an internet resource for parents and professionals. This extensive listing includes over 288 agencies and organizations that provide services to people with disabilities and their families in the Monroe County area and may be accessed through the MCLS webpage.

2. To what extent were project activities completed within the project timeline?

We revised our summer timeline due to busy summer reading programs. We did not have advisory meetings over the summer and staff training was changed to take place in the fall and spring months. YA book discussions and story times focusing on disability awareness and our author talk with Cynthia Lord were also rescheduled later in the grant year.

Almost all of the activities described in question one were completed, with the exception of one author talk with Cynthia Lord that occurred on April 12 at the Chili Public Library and one is scheduled in the month of May at the Henrietta Public Library. Some libraries have book

talks or story times scheduled in April and May focusing on a character with a disability. These talks were created as part of the grant; however, we expect they will continue as part of many libraries' regular programs.

Rhonda Miga continues to work with Mayer-Johnson to further develop a formal set of icons that will be made available to all MCLS libraries. Future developments will include the ability to reduce or enlarge the size of the icons, spine labels, and posters of various Dewey categories (i.e. 100s, 200s, 300s, etc.). We hope to provide librarians with a digital copy of the images enabling reproduction as needed. Mayer-Johnson hopes to market these icons to libraries nationwide.

Revisions of the library discovery journal titled "*Libraries Are More Than Books: Summer LIBRARY Treasure Hunt*" are expected to be completed by the end of April. We would like to redesign the layout so it takes up only one page and remove any information pertaining to Summer Reading 2007. Once updated, the Discovery Journal will be made available on the internet for parents to print, as well as, given to libraries to reproduce and display.

3. Briefly summarize any quantitative evaluation results for this project and attach the Quantitative Measure page, noting to what extent you reaching the target population.

Thirteen libraries participated in this grant: Brighton Memorial Library, Chili Public Library, Fairport Public Library, Gates Public Library, Henrietta Public Library, Irondequoit Public Library (both McGraw and Evans Branches), Ogden Farmers Library, Monroe Branch of Rochester Public Libraries, Penfield Public Library, Pittsford Public Library, Rush Public Library and Webster Public Library.

- Throughout the grant, parents were encouraged to get library cards for their child with a disability, enabling them to feel a sense of independence while visiting the library and a sense of pride when checking out their own books. Recently, an email was sent to the parents on The Building Bridges email list asking "Does your child with special needs have his/her own library card?" Out of 200 parents surveyed, an amazing 73 responses were received. Out of those 73 replies, only 28 stated "yes" they have library cards, 32 stated they use the parent's card, 13 said "no." Of the 28 yes responses, 21 stated they got their child a library card due to the Building Bridges Project. Of the 45 who replied "no" or "uses parent's card," 14 said they did not know their child with a disability could have his/her own library card and they would look into it the next time they were at the library.
- Our goal was to provide two disability awareness trainings that would enable 50 library staff to acquire skills supporting their efforts to meet the needs of youth with disabilities better. In year two of the grant, we held 5 training sessions (2 countywide, 1 for the Chili Public Library staff and 1 for Brighton Memorial Library staff and 1 for Gates Public Library staff). Over all, 98 library staff attended the training sessions provided.
- Year Two New Materials: From the 2004 recommended collection development list, recent catalogs from disability publishers, and recommendations from various library publications, participating libraries purchased 375 new items. Of those items, 10 large print book titles, 17 audio book titles, 29 video/DVD, and 13 Braille titles were purchased.
- In order to reach more families, the MCLS redesigned The Building Bridges webpage from the 2004 grant, providing current information to visitors. This site was accessed approximately 7050 times in 2005 and approximately 3,800 times in 2006. This year, we

have added two internet resources families can use; the *MCLS Guide to DisABILITY Resources in Monroe County*, receiving approximately 290 hits in the last three months, and the *MCLS Kid's Catalog Instruction Guide*, receiving approximately 65 hits in the last two months. Go to www.libraryweb.org, click on the *QUICKLINKS* and *Youth with disABILITIES*.

- One paid advertisement was placed in the Genesee Valley Parent Magazine's 2007 Family Resource Directory. This directory will be available for the entire 2007 year. The advertisement highlights the new *MCLS Guide to DisABILITY Resources in Monroe County*. Information about upcoming events were advertised in The Bridge (The Advocacy Center's Newsletter), Fairport Parent Group Newsletter, Parent to Parent Network, Kids Out and About.com, participating library publications, and local town papers countless times.
- Rhonda Miga spoke with over 100 parents and professionals at 8 parent organizations this year regarding The Building Bridges Project. (Parent to Parent of New York, PASS Pittsford Parent Group, BOCES I and II Agency Fair, Families with Autism Fair, Brighton Parent Meeting, Rush Henrietta Parent Group, Lay Advocacy Parent Training Group)
- Approximately 220 parents and professionals were kept informed about grant projects via e-mail. 6 of those e-mail contacts would forward information to their list of e-mail contacts.
- 5 community organizations shared information about their agency with library patrons through informational displays. Some organizations have developed a working relationship directly with their town library, speaking directly with them to set up displays and to provide information to patrons. CP Rochester is one of these organizations working with Henrietta Public Library.
- 10 book discussions and story times focusing on characters with disabilities were held in the last three months. 132 patrons attended these discussions.

4. Briefly summarize the qualitative evaluation results, providing information in relation to progress toward expected outcomes.

- In August 2006, library visitors of Webster Public Library Children's Department were asked simple yes/no questions about the Dewey Decimal Icons. 20 adults and children (children were between the ages of 7 and 11) participated. 12 patrons noticed the icons, 7 patrons did not notice the icons until it was brought to their attention, 1 was unsure. Of the 12 who noticed, all 12 found them to be helpful in locating needed materials. One child who did not notice them, said it would be good if we developed a bulletin board explaining the icons (so we did!) and one child thought the icons should be bigger. One parent stated, "these pictures are wonderful, allowing me to find materials quickly before my toddler decides it is time to leave."
- A trial use of the *Kids Computer Instruction Guide* was given to 6 families to use with their child at home prior to visiting the library. Each family was asked if they felt the guide was helpful. 6 families answered yes. This guide has been made available to all participating libraries.
- A simple yes/no survey was given to measure the effectiveness of the parent training programs. Of the 66 parent participants, 55 responded to the survey. 54 participants stated this program provided needed information enabling them to better support their child with a disability.

- A simple yes/no survey was given to library staff to measure the effectiveness of the disability awareness workshops. Of the 98 participants, 94 responded to the survey. 93 participants stated the workshop increased their understanding of disabilities and increased their sensitivity toward people with disabilities. 1 participant stated that it did not increase awareness.
- Due to the grants desire to include youth with disabilities in regular library programs, we do not know how many youth with disabilities were reached during these programs. However, four participating libraries have had five teen volunteers at their libraries this year. In addition, the BOCES Career Network Services works with several MCLS libraries, providing opportunities for youth with disabilities to learn valuable work skills while volunteering. This is arranged directly between each library and BOCES. Volunteering provides youth with disabilities the opportunity to develop lifelong library skills and the desire to visit the library often. Penfield Public Library stated, "Penfield continues to see a growing participation in library programs by patrons with special needs."

5. Please provide one or two anecdotes or stories about how this project affected people who received services.

Regarding the use of the *Kids Computer Instruction Guide*, one parent stated,

"My son becomes very anxious in an environment where he does not know what to expect. This guide enabled him to be familiar with the computer system before entering the library. This knowledge seemed to decrease his anxiety toward visiting the library and we actually had a pleasant time."

Webster Public Library has participated in both the 2004 LSTA Grant "Library Services to Youth with Developmental Disabilities and the current LSTA Grant "Library Services to Youth with Disabilities." The following statement was provided by Lisa Wemett of Webster Public Library.

"In our three years of participation, we have made a definite "culture shift" in awareness at all levels of staff. We now offer improved staff and volunteer opportunities and placement of individuals with special needs in a more welcoming and supportive work environment. The Monroe County Library System's web site and public programs have kept this project in the forefront of library administrators, adding additional credence and support to our efforts to reach and be attentive to more children and teens with special needs."

The following statement was provided by The Advocacy Center.

"The Advocacy Center's Public Education Program has collaborated with Rhonda Miga to provide disability awareness education to 257 library staff members since May of 2005. Topics have included personal perspectives of individuals with disabilities and their family members, strategies for successful inclusion of individuals with disabilities, and building positive relationships. **Since the first workshop, we have observed an increased receptivity on the part of library staff to the disability awareness message. They have moved from hesitancy to enthusiasm, and many of the libraries have invited us to present to their staff.** In follow up surveys, library staff reported increased use of "people first" language, which recognizes that a disability is just one piece of a person's identity and does not define them. Embracing this philosophy and putting it into practice are crucial steps to including people with disabilities in the community. Public libraries are a vital part of our community."

6. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

Thank you for providing this grant to the MCLS. The efforts of the grant will last a lifetime in Monroe County. We are all winners. It will be important for the MCLS to continue its efforts to include people with disabilities at the library. One of the key components for the MCLS to continue is Disability Awareness Training. Without knowledge to increase a person's awareness, acceptance and understanding of people with disabilities, growth in other areas cannot take place; it all starts with knowledge.

The *MCLS Guide to DisABILITY Resources in Monroe County* will need to be kept current. If possible, I would like to volunteer to be the person for website visitors to contact with updated and new information for this valuable resource.

I would also like to thank the MCLS for giving me the opportunity to work with so many wonderful librarians over the last three and a half years. I have learned a lot from the many librarians I have worked with and my family has grown from my personal involvement with this grant. We have all gained an increased awareness of people with disabilities. However, the most valuable component I am taking away from this grant is that my son, Zachary, has learned to love many of the libraries in Monroe County. He has his own library card, kept by his service dog, Rusty; it is easily accessible when he visits the library each week. As he gets older, it will be a joy to watch his knowledge of the library increase as he becomes not only a lifelong library user, but a lifelong library lover.

Rhonda Miga
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