Rural Library Services for Children

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Introduction

This poster began as a term project for LIS 541. We hoped to find a large amount of literature on rural services in a North American context, specifically in Canada, as we have a large rural population in this country. Instead, we found that, shockingly, there is very little literature on library services for rural children, especially in a Canadian context. This negatively impacts children and puts them at a disadvantage, simply because the lack of literature is a measure of lack of advocacy for funds and supplies that many urban libraries are fortunate to have.

Definitions and Publications

From Statistics Canada:
• **Rural Areas**: "Include all territory lying outside population centres (POPCTRs). Taken together, population centres and rural areas cover all of Canada" ("Rural Area", 2013, para. 1).
• **Population Centre**: "Area with a population of at least 1,000 and no fewer than 400 persons per square kilometre" ("Population Centre", 2013, para. 1).

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989:
• Children are persons under 18 years of age.
• **Article 13, Number 1**: "The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers".
• Children should be able to access global and local information.
• **Article 31, Number 1**: "States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts".

IFLA/UNESCO PUBLIC LIBRARY MANIFESTO, 1994:
• Public libraries must have print, electronic materials and related services for all ages.
• Library services should be modified to accommodate the requirements of rural users.
• Public libraries must help children become readers and engage their imaginations.
• Literacy based programming should be available for everyone including children.

Acknowledgements

Rural Services to Children in Alberta

1) Strathcona County Bookmobile
• Bookmobile visits 12 schools and community centres weekly
• Family Storytime
• Summer Reading Game

2) Whitecourt and District Public Library
• Town population approx 10,000; library serves wider area
• Limits to programming due to physical space and budget
• Small location serving large, widespread population
• Marketing and social media have great impact on program success
• Lack of outreach to schools, community groups

Strathcona County Library Bookmobile.
Image source: http://bit.ly/145yc3H

Rural Children's Services Worldwide

• **China and Vietnam:** The Library Project is a non-profit that donates books and libraries to rural primary schools and orphanages. To date, 1000 libraries of local language books and sometimes furniture have been donated. Teachers receive training in basic library maintenance and programming.
• **Ethiopia:** Donkey Mobile Libraries is run by non-profit Ethiopia Reads. The roofed cart contains books, 30 chairs, and donkey food. It is run by a trained librarian and library assistant. Books stay with the cart, children come to read, then give them back when the cart leaves.
• **South America:** Biblioburros in Venezuela and Colombia; Librarians Without Borders has been working with a school library in Guatemala for the past 4 years.

• **Estonia**: The purchasing of children's materials in rural libraries is low, even though the publishing industry has more than doubled since the Soviet era
• **Finland:** Bookmobiles are popular. They visit schools and daycares. Programming includes storytime and puppet shows Collection policies recommend that 30% of a collection be youth titles.
• **United Kingdom**: Mobile services and books by mail are common in rural areas. Literature states that they provide children's books as part of this initiative, but no literature was found regarding programming

Donkey Mobile Libraries, Ethiopiareads.org

Ideals

• Abundance of Multimedia, audiovisual, and computer technology
• Adequate Funding
• Dedicated Children's Librarian
• Children's programming and instruction
• Extensive children's collection including multicultural and special needs materials, toys and games
• Area designed for children
• Research concerning local children's needs and interests

Realities

• Very little technology is present (Exceptions: North American and some European nations)
• Limited funds means less librarians hired in rural areas
• High illiteracy and poverty rates in many rural areas globally
• Bookmobiles are common as they can reach a large population
• Programming is limited due to lack of funds, lack of knowledgeable personnel, etc.
• Lack of current research

Suggestions for Moving Forward

• Conduct research on children's services in rural areas
• Use this research to promote fund increases in rural library budgets to improve children's services
• Outreach to schools, etc. to maintain relevancy
• Provide recent, relevant, multicultural resources for children-First Nations, new immigrants, etc.
• Variety of programming for a variety of age groups
• Make technology and information literacy funding priorities

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