

OLDER KANSANS INFORMATION FORUM

How Small Libraries Can Develop Library Services For Older Kansans

By Shannon Roy

Increasingly, large libraries have senior service coordinators and mid-size libraries have a staff member who has planning for senior library services as part of their responsibilities. These people do excellent work and are a fine resource for all of Kansas.

But small library directors, even if they clearly understand the critical importance of quality library service to older Kansans, may wonder how they can effectively integrate this priority into their already over-scheduled and under-funded library responsibilities. This article is intended to help them make the best use of their time and money.

HOW TO REFER SENIORS AND CAREGIVERS TO PEOPLE WHO CAN HELP THEM

- The library director and appropriate staff members should become familiar with the services offered by the local senior citizen centers. Staff members should have the contact information to offer to any library user who needs it. A listing of senior centers by county is available at: http://www.agingkansas.org/srctr_index.htm
This resource is also available in the OKIF website's ready reference page.
- The library director and appropriate staff members should become familiar with the services offered by the Area Agency on Aging that serves the library's community. Staff members should always have the contact information for the local Area Agency on Aging to offer to any library user who needs it.

The website for the local Area Agency on Aging should be bookmarked by library staff. A hotlink to the Area Agencies on Aging is available on the OKIF homepage or the URL is

<http://www.agingkansas.org/aaa/index.htm>

This resource is also available from the OKIF website's ready reference page.

COLLECTION MANAGEMENT FOR SENIORS

- The library director and appropriate staff members should have bookmarked access to online publications available from the Kansas Department on Aging. These publications are available at: http://www.agingkansas.org/kdoa/publications/pub_index.htm

KDOA publications can also be ordered online from this web page. This resource is also available from the OKIF website's ready reference page.

Every library should have at least one current copy of the KDOA publication called *Explore Your Options*. The print publication is tailored to the geographic region and the latest version should be available from the local Area Agency.

Magazines in a small library should be shelved near comfortable chairs, if possible, with ample non-glare lighting provided. The magazine collection should have large, clear signage with excellent contrast.

Large print magazines have not had the growth they should have but the two that are most often requested are *Reader's Digest* and *Guideposts*. *Reader's Digest* also offers a bi-annual Select Edition Large Type magazine format condensed edition of two popular titles per issue.

Low vision and print-handicapped individuals have access to a larger selection of recorded magazines through the Talking Books Service as well. The library staff should have applications for the Talking Books Service on hand. They should know the contact information for their Talking Books subregional in the library's service area.

The library staff should keep watch for new publications that model and discuss happy and successful aging. It is going to be critically important that people believe that their senior years can be rewarding, even though they are dealing with serious problems.

The library staff should obtain and publicize materials in a variety of formats that will help with:

- Caregiving issues
- Healthcare issues
- Grandparent issues
- Retirement and financial planning
- Travel
- Hobbies

WHERE YOU CAN FIND INFORMATION ON PROGRAMS FOR SENIORS

One of the best books currently available on library services to seniors is the Neal-Schuman How-to-Do-It Manual called *Serving Seniors: A How-to-Do-It Manual for Librarians* by RoseMary Honnold and Saralyn Mesauros, ISBN: 1555704824. This is a highly recommended purchase for all Kansas public libraries. It is available from Neal-Schuman Publishers, 100 Varick Street, New York, NY 10013. You can also get ordering information or order a print catalog from their website at: www.neal-schuman.com.

It is also available at:

www.amazon.com

This publication has a large variety of excellent sample programs designed for older community residents. While the print publication is a highly recommended purchase for all Kansas public libraries, information on these programs can be found in a series of hotlinks at the publication's website at: <http://www.cplrmh.com/seniors.html>

An additional professional resource is *5-Star Programming and Services for Your 55+ Library Customers* by Barbara T. Mates, ISBN: 0838908438, one of the American Library Association's Programming Guide Series. It is available at ALA's bookstore at: <http://www.alastore.ala.org/>

HOW TO MARKET THE NEED FOR STRONG LIBRARY SERVICES TO SENIORS TO TRUSTEES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

You should find out how many people over 55 you have in your library service area. You can find this information by going to <http://factfinder.census.gov> clicking on people and requesting the desired information by local community or county.

Another excellent resource is the *Kansas Elder Count* from the Center on Aging, University of Kansas Medical Center, Kansas Department on Aging, Kansas Health Foundation. The *Kansas Elder Count* describes key measures of older adult well-being, at the county level. Specific information by county can be accessed at: <http://www2.kumc.edu/coa/ElderCount/index.htm>

The more older Kansans your library serves, the more you should plan and market library services to your older citizens.

The library staff should seek opportunities to know older people in the community. Don't ask them what they need from the library, ask them what the needs and concerns are in their daily lives. The library staff can gain valuable information on what the library needs to serve seniors effectively. This information can be documented and presented to trustees and local government.

There are a number of points that can be used when marketing the need for library services to seniors to trustees or local government. It is true that older Kansans need good library service. But it is also true that older Kansans can be powerful allies for developing excellent library service.

- People over 55 will be a quarter of the American population by 2015. The Baby Boomers and their surviving parents will be the first giant senior population in human history.
- This will be not only a larger senior population, it will be completely different. More seniors will be healthy, productive, solvent and genuinely happy. They will have no patience with bias against older people.

- People who are 60 and over vote more than any other age group. Their sheer numbers will give seniors tremendous political clout in local, state and national politics. They will no longer be a group that can be marginalized.
- Many of them will have financial clout as well, that they can use to benefit their communities and their libraries, if they choose to. They often choose to, if they are treated with respect. Many libraries have received gifts or bequests from older citizens who appreciated the library.
- Seniors have traditionally been among the public library's strongest supporters. They have contributed disproportionately to library boards, Friends groups, library programs, volunteer programs and heavy library use. They are likely to be even more important in the future. Librarians can actively foster partnerships with seniors, to the great benefit of both.
- People over 55 will have urgent information needs that libraries can choose to help with:
 - o Seniors will be insisting on high quality pain management and end of life care.
 - o Caregiving will grow into a major social problem.
 - o Geriatric and preventive healthcare will also be major concerns.
 - o A large number of grandparents will be concerned about their legal rights in their grandchildren.
 - o Financial savvy will become critically important.
 - o Retirement will change completely.
 - o Seniors will be pursuing education, changing fields, starting businesses, planning travel and investing in hobbies and avocations.