



## The background text to the Guidelines for Children's Libraries Services

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*"Guidelines for Children's Library Services" in various languages available at:*  
<http://www.ifla.org/VII/s10/index.htm#GuidelinesChildren>

### *Libraries for Children and Young Adults IFLA Section*

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## SECTION ONE

### Introduction

No-one should doubt the importance of children's libraries to children and their families all over the world. They are often the first encounter with life long learning, introducing the readers and learners of the future to an exciting, rich and varied resource. Every child should be familiar and comfortable with their local library, and despite international variations, there are basic ideas and good practice that all children's library professionals can follow. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has brought many challenges and many opportunities, it is up to the managers and practitioners of public library services to make sure that children have the best start in their reading and learning lives.

The children's librarian must plan, market, implement and evaluate activities and services to children of all ages, based on their development and interests, and the objectives of the library.

### Mission and Goals

"The special responsibility of the children's library is to meet the needs of children. If children can be inspired at an early age by the excitement of finding knowledge and by works of the imagination, they are likely to benefit from these vital elements of personal development throughout their lives, both enriching themselves and enhancing their contribution to society. Children can also encourage parents and other adults to make use of the library. It is also important that young people who experience difficulty in learning to read should have access to a library to provide them with appropriate material."

*(from: The Public Library Service – IFLA/UNESCO Guidelines for development, 2001)*

The children's library equips children with lifelong learning and literacy skills enabling them to participate in society.

"By providing a wide range of materials and activities, public libraries provide an opportunity for children to experience the enjoyment of reading and the excitement of discovering knowledge and works of the imagination. Children and their parents should be taught how to make the best use of a library and how to develop skills in the use of printed and electronic media. Public libraries have a special responsibility to support the process of learning to read, and to promote books and other media for children. The library must provide special events for children, such as story telling and activities related to the library's services and resources. Children should be encouraged to use the library from an early age as this will make them more likely to remain users in future years. In multilingual countries books and audio-visual materials for children should be available in their mother tongue." *(from: The Public Library Service – IFLA/UNESCO Guidelines for development, 2001)*

### Goals for services for Children

- To facilitate the basic library principle of the right of every individual to information, literacy, cultural development, lifelong learning and creative programmes in leisure time.

- To provide children with open access to adequate resources and media, and in addition provide cultural and recreational programmes, oriented towards reading and literacy. Children's libraries hereby respond directly to children's rights and create conditions for their optimal development
- To provide various activities for children and their parents or carers, children's libraries provide opportunities, outside the school or family environment, for learning about the rights and responsibilities, for acquiring skills necessary in the promotion and protection of rights and freedoms, as well as for living in conditions that reflect such rights and responsibilities.

### **Goals of the Guidelines**

The purpose of these new Guidelines is to inform decision makers, to give guidance to the international library community about children's needs and rights on information, literacy and reading and to help public libraries implement high quality children's services. They are aimed at practising librarians, library administrators and decision makers, and the students and lecturers of library and information faculties.

## **SECTION TWO**

### **Definition of target group**

The children's library must serve all citizens and groups. No-one is too young to be a library user. Target groups coming into the children's library, either individually or in groups, include:

- babies/toddlers
- pre-school children
- elementary/primary school children (age 5-10)
- “older” children (age 11 - 14)
- young people with reading, learning and developmental difficulties
- parents and other adults working with books / media and children
- families

### **Needs of target group**

The *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* is the basis for defining the rights of the child in the context of children's libraries. It stresses the right of every child to the development of his/her full potential, the right to free and open access to information, materials and programmes, under equal conditions for all, irrespective of age, race, sex, religious and national background, language or social status (particularly Articles 1, 2, 4, 13, 14, 17, 23, 28, 29, 30, 31, 42).

Children's libraries promote the rights of the child, through different activities designed for children and adults. Activities for children include exhibitions, promotions of books and other media dealing with the rights of the child, workshops, reading and literacy sessions/programmes and other leisure time activities. Children's libraries should be the

place where children meet and communicate freely, where they develop their potential creatively and where they learn, apply and expand their rights and responsibilities

Free and varied activities in children's libraries require modern approaches, such as small-group activities, work in pairs, role-playing, guided fantasies, discussions, team and co-operative work, etc. Such methods and strategies help children acquire knowledge and skills for free and non-confrontational communication and co-operation.

Children's libraries can be an important factor in the development of democracy in a society. They should empower children for active participation. Through early access to information and books, creative contacts with peers and pursuing interests in the library, the child learns how to live with others, how to protect their own rights while respecting the rights of others.

### **Materials**

According to UNESCO's Manifesto for Public Libraries, one of the public libraries' most important tasks is "to support and participate in activities and programmes for the development of reading and writing skills within all age groups".

Children of all ages should find the library an attractive place to visit. The library is important to parents, who can bring their babies to a source of local culture, where they join other parents, create networks, gain information on childcare, children's psychology, and children's cultural needs. Many parents use the children's library before the birth of their child. It is now well known, that rhythm, tunes, lullabies etc for the unborn baby can aid their later development.

As the child grows, the library becomes an important place for interacting with other children. At the same time parents see materials which help to build the linguistic skills needed for evolving competencies in telling, imagining, understanding, reading, and being a social person.

Easy texts for early reading, adapted for the child for their level of development, are of major importance. A child cannot be too prepared for the formal learning which starts at school.

Children in the early stages of school, from first to third grade, enjoy with playing and learning. Libraries, which provide both experiences, are essential for children and their parents.

When children start to investigate on their own, they are curious about everything, from the tiny insect under a microscope to distant galaxies and dinosaurs of long ago. The library is there as a source of information for everything.

During adolescence the opinion of peers is of major importance. The library offers a meeting place which is neither school, nor home. Furthermore, the young person finds materials to prepare them for the major transformation and personal growth to come.

Adults visit the children's library on both personal (as parent or carer) and professional (teacher or health visitor for instance) levels. Adults with learning difficulties also often use children's libraries, where they find materials matching their own level of ability.

### **Information and communication technology**

Offering access to the Internet is probably only the first step for libraries into the information age. As technology develops, what will remain is the need of the public to find information and educate itself, to interact, to play and to add to personal growth. The need for the fundamental library skills of finding and citing and presenting will also continue. Libraries offer a public space, where children and young adults meet each other – in both cyber-space and in real library accommodation. They search, they find and they help each other, they interact.

It is a goal for the libraries of the world that children are able to access the internet as freely as possible. It is also important that libraries protect the younger and more vulnerable members of the public from being confronted with inappropriate information and images, this is a matter of protecting their privacy. Information from the internet should aim to be comparable with any other source of information – and in some cultures it may be the first and primary source.

In any library, the internet can be the first and dominating supplier of information. It is available to let users find resources directly and for ordering resources in book-form and other media. The role of the children's librarian is to educate and support their young audience.

Librarians must organise access to internet resources according to the needs of their public. Books, magazines, videos, audio and music, which often answer most frequent questions, add to the functionality of the internet by their ease of transportation and ease of handling by the library. It will be essential for library staff to be able to inform the public about internet resources as well as traditional resources.

Organising internet stations in the library building will demand great intuition; protecting the public from intrusion by unwanted or inappropriate information, whilst offering an undisturbed room for meeting the world through the internet. At the same time offering room for discussion between library users and staff on the immense, impressive and often intimidating amount of possibilities. The role of the librarian as an adviser is very promising!

### **Services and programmes and library building**

The public library must understand the needs of children and provide services to meet them. It has a special responsibility to organise, implement and support library programmes and to promote books and other media as appropriate. The children's library must have suitable space within the public library and the services for children should be treated as equally as those for adults.

Although the children's library service and the public library services have common goals, the rights of the child and his/her specific needs require specific approaches.

The development of children's library services within the public library is an overall reflection of the development of the public library itself. No endorsement can be made of a modern updated public library if it does not meet the needs of children and their future by providing adequate services, materials and programmes.

Children's services need their own library area which must be easily recognisable (special furnishings, decoration and colours) and distinct from other parts of the library. The children's library is a place to meet, play and communicate. It is here that its goals are realised, where they come alive. An inviting atmosphere encourages children to use all library resources, to read and linger in the library.

In library buildings, where services for all age groups in the community are housed, children should get an appropriate proportion of the whole library space. The children's library needs to be large enough to accommodate school groups.

Children are not a homogenous target group, they have very different skills, gifts, talents and needs (dependent on their age, cultural background etc) which must be considered in the space planning process and furnishing of the library. As target groups in the children's library cover a wide range of ages and abilities (from babies to adults) both the furniture and design space should suit their different needs.

The furnishings must be flexible (e.g. mobile shelves) and shelving must allow different media to be presented. Shelves should be low (max. height 1.5 metres) throughout the children's section, open boxes for large formats like picture books, and special areas for different age groups. Furnishing should support communication among children / library users, that children can meet with their peers, this is known as 'Social Furnishing'.

Accessibility of all facilities for disabled children (and pushchairs) is self-evident. Entrance doors of the library building and/or the children's department must be easy for children to open. Bicycle racks should be provided outside the building. The children's library must be a safe place; any risk of accidents, e.g. by staircases, sharp edges of shelves, must be avoided. Staff must be alert to those in the children's area to ensure a safe environment for everyone.

OPACs, Multimedia Workstations, Internet workstations, and a variety of software (to use in the library and for loan) must be provided. The children's department should be equipped with IT facilities with the same priority as the adult section of the library. Libraries must consider legal aspects concerning children's access to the internet which are relevant in their country.

## **SECTION THREE**

### **Co-operation with other institutions**

A good network with other organisations and institutions in the local community is key to the effectiveness of the children's library. The children's librarian can keep the community informed about programmes and events in the library by:

- using bulletins and information boards in the library as well as in schools, hospitals, children's centres, supermarkets, bus stations and all possible meeting places for children and their parents/carers
- making and distributing posters, leaflets, booklists, bookmarks etc.
- supplying newspapers, radio and TV with information about activities and events
- writing newsletters and preparing special articles and programmes about children's reading
- using the internet; a special website is a very effective way to present information.

The children's librarian should investigate the information needs of the community and try to match these needs with library resources. S/he co-operates with schools, hospitals, kindergartens, community centres, museums, art studios etc. Mutual community projects for children involve them in the cultural life of the community. Co-ordination ensures that local institutions do not compete but co-operate to the benefit of children. Special programmes may also be created for parents and children with special needs (disabled, cultural minorities, at risk groups).

Schools are one of the most important partners for the children's librarian. Co-operative planning between school libraries, schools library services and the children's library can better meet the needs and interests of users. While the school library and schools library services provides information support for the educational process, the children's library deals more with self education and leisure reading.

The children's librarian should provide various special programmes for the benefit of schools such as:

- library visits
- library orientation programmes
- information literacy
- reading promotion
- lending services
- cultural programmes
- homework clubs
- author/storyteller visits

The children's librarian can also provide reference services and training for teachers and school librarians including booktalks, reference and information assistance. Where there is a Schools Library Service, some of this work would be undertaken by the Schools Library Service perhaps in partnership with the Children's Library Service

To develop new projects and services, the children's librarian can attract volunteers and sponsors from the local community (e.g.: social services, local companies, publishers). Partnership and co-operation in mutual projects is extremely important and could be carried out on the principle of matching funds.

## **SECTION FOUR**

### **Planning**

Children's libraries need an annual budget to ensure they develop and grow. This budget should provide for the purchase of books and other resources including magazines, audio visual and computer games etc.

Children's library budgets can be linked to the percentage of children in the overall population. Therefore, if the child population of the community served is 20%, the proportion of money spent on children's books and other resources should be the same (i.e.20% of the total library budget).

Different types of books and resources will be required for babies/toddlers, pre-school children, elementary/primary school children (age 5-10), and older children (age 11-14). Each age range has different needs and expectations. The amount spent on these will vary depending according to the profile of the local community and the use made of the library, e.g. a library service with a very young community will need more pre-school materials. It is important to get the balance of stock correct as this influences the use made of the library.

A popular children's library will probably lend more fiction than information materials, e.g. 60% fiction and 40% information, and this should be reflected in the purchase of new items. Every children's library should have the widest range of new materials possible, however it is also important to spend a proportion of the budget on replacing titles which have been worn or lost.

Children's librarians also need access to other budgets for items such as furniture and equipment. Computers are increasingly prevalent in children's libraries, and must be budgeted for. Money also needs to be allocated for guest speakers and performers.

Standard budgets can often be supplemented with outside sources of funding such as:

- Government grants – these are often targeted at specific projects, e.g. literacy and libraries
- Cultural organisations – they will often support book events such as author and illustrator visits
- Publishers – children's publishers will often provide their own authors or illustrators free of charge for library events, plus free promotional materials
- Sponsorship – local business companies are often interested in sponsoring specific events, e.g. summer reading programmes, book weeks etc.



The best way of achieving a successful budget proposal for the children's library is to prepare an annual report on what is required. This requires preparation of evidence, and generally speaking the more detail that can be included, the more likely the budget is to be accepted.

For a rolling annual programme of purchasing, the following questions should be addressed:

- what areas of stock do you wish to target?
- how many books and other resources do you wish to purchase?
- how much will they cost?

In the future more project work is likely to be undertaken and with much more creative financing than previously. Children are a worthwhile investment. The use of both state and private funding in ordinary operating projects must be used increasingly to reach increasingly high targets.

### **Desirable characteristics for staff & Education and training**

Effective and professionally run children's libraries require trained and committed children's librarians. The children's librarian is the advocate of children in the library, the child is the focus of all his/her activities.

In order to have committed trained professional children's librarians, there must be education and training in all areas of the service. IFLA supports efforts to organise basic and continuing courses in library services for children and young adults. Children's librarianship should be part of the curriculum of any public library education programme.

Personal skills:

- enthusiasm for working with children and books
- good communication, interpersonal, team working and problem solving skills
- ability to network, to make contacts, integrate, and co-operate
- ability to initiate, to be flexible and open to change
- eagerness learn new skills and develop professionally

Professional awareness/knowledge of:

- the cultural heritage/literature/media market and media use by children and to be able to communicate about these to children
- theory of reading development and promotion of reading
- IT and media-literacy
- developing services and programmes for different target groups, being aware of community needs and developments
- child psychology and development
- promotion and marketing of services to multicultural communities
- and be a member of relevant professional organisation(s)

Management skills, ability to:

- take responsibility for resources and people whilst supporting library objectives
- organise and manage time effectively
- create confidence and motivate people
- consult and be a active listener
- organise successful events
- present to a variety of audiences
- analyse user needs, and to plan, manage and evaluate programmes

### **Planning services**

Children's librarians should participate in public library management meetings whenever questions of the services for children are discussed.

When discussing financial policy and managing the budget for children's services, the children's librarian (or children's services co-ordinator) should be directly involved. This is particularly important when the resources are limited and when the priorities are defined by the public library as a whole.

The goals and objectives of children's library services should be developed by children's librarians for approval by the management team. The children's librarian has a particular responsibility for the components of the service for children and should ensure that there is a child-oriented approach.

Plans must be in line with national regulations and guidelines for library work and be based on factual knowledge of the local community including population demographics, education, voluntary teams and associations, business and trade organisations, infrastructure and residential patterns.

They may also be related to more comprehensive municipal plans, and co-ordinated with plans within related fields such as culture, social services, education and language services.

It is important that those who manage children's services participate in the planning process for the library as a whole, to ensure an awareness and support of children's services in the overall goals and long term plans of the library.

Monitoring the needs of current and potential users of the children's library (community needs analysis) should be done by the children's librarian. It is different from the monitoring done for services for adults (oriented directly on users) because often parents and carers decide how small children use the library.

A children's librarian must develop goals for the department along with measurable objectives. The goals should support and complement overall library goals. An annual review of these goals and objectives helps to develop priorities for the next planning cycle.

Children's librarians should participate in selection of new staff for children's library services. A children's department manager must write accurate job descriptions for all staff within the department. The descriptions should be based on standardised competencies. The job description is the basis for interview questions when new staff are hired. In-service training should be planned and/or co-ordinated by children's librarians.

### **Evaluation of services**

Regular assessments of results, evaluating objectives and use of resources are essential. If for example the library should choose to put a special focus on children who are in the "read alone" stage (1<sup>st</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> grade), the budgets, the competence of the employees, choice of material, and activities for this group must be targeted. This would necessarily affect the service to other groups during the period in which this group is being prioritised.

Reliable performance information is a necessary tool for evaluation and improvement. The collection of statistics related to resources, staff, services, circulation, activities etc. will provide data for planning, show accountability, and assist informed management decision-making.

The following key performance indicators may be used to evaluate and monitor the achievement of the library's objectives:

#### Usage indicators

- Total library visits per capita / visits to children's library per capita
- Membership as a percentage of the population/child population
- Loans per capita / per child
- Total number of children attending activities
- Loans per item or per opening hour

#### Resource indicators

- Total book stock per capita / children's books per child
- Provision of terminals/personal computers per capita / per child
- Provision of on-line public access computers (OPACs) per capita /per child
- Total number of activities for children

#### Human resource indicators

- Ratio of full time equivalent (FTE) staff to population
- Ratio of full time equivalent (FTE) staff to library use

#### Qualitative indicators

- User satisfaction surveys
- Feedback - complaints/comments/compliments

#### Cost indicators

- Unit costs for functions, services and activities
- Staff costs per functions, e.g. books processed, programmes

- Total costs per capita, per member, per visitor, per service point etc.

#### Comparative indicators

- Benchmark statistical data against other relevant and comparable library services, internationally, nationally and locally.

#### Market research

To assess the results and form guidelines for the development of children's services, children also should be invited to express their opinion, either on an individual basis through interviews, or organising children's panels.

In addition to the collection and analysis of statistics, the undeclared needs of non-users need to be established, by carrying out market research including the use of focus groups and community surveys.

Where reliable population statistics are not available it becomes more difficult to develop reliable performance indicators. Use can be made of estimated population totals, the comparison of costs with user and visitor statistics and benchmarking with other libraries with similar characteristics.

NB: Performance Indicators: ref. the new *Guidelines for Public Libraries* (chapter 6.10.3)

## **SECTION 5**

### **Marketing**

The children's library is one product within the library sector that is particularly easy and rewarding to promote. Parents and carers all wish for children to be clever, creative and eager to learn and libraries can play an important part in that process. As long as reading is a necessary skill in order to communicate in an enlightened society, the children's library has an important role. Books provide concrete knowledge and give experiences of emotional involvement. The library can interact directly with children by offering them a place to stay; a place where it is possible to ask a librarian for assistance if required, but where they can be also left to explore the library by themselves or with their peers.

To display books and make materials available is not enough in order to promote reading and children's services. When wishing to promote what the library has to offer to children and young people, it is important to develop a network around the children and youngsters through all the adults who are in contact with them. Teachers, pre-school teachers, health care workers and parents are obvious choices. There are plenty of leisure activities, establishments and societies to choose from. Through thorough and professional collaboration with these groups, the children will experience literature and reading from a variety of sources.

The future for public libraries whether they are dealing with children, adults, families lies in co-operation. Without real co-operation with other governmental and private institutions it is impossible to attract new customers and promote reading and the use of libraries. Good co-operation with others will enable the children's library to stand a better

chance in the fight for good resources. Networking and co-operation provide an automatic way of publicising the library.

Publicity ranges from simple techniques like leaflets advertising opening hours and services, to more sophisticated methods like marketing programmes and the use of websites to promote the children's library services and activities. It is necessary to work constructively with good marketing products which have both good aesthetics and content. To have a public profile is more important now than ever, as there are ever more arenas and increasingly intense competition. Libraries should aim to have a presence on the internet and in local shops, museums, swimming pools and public transport. They should also have a presence within the local council itself through schools, kindergartens and council publications etc.

Those employed in children's libraries should be able to document all aspects of the service through text, figures and pictorial representation. This work could include project reports and it is also important that such documentation reaches the trade environment and beyond. As with any profession, librarians cannot do everything and the use of journalists or other writers may be a sound investment when wishing to draw attention to successful activities and projects.