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Sharing resources: Partnerships that work

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Providing quality library service to rural communities in northeast Oregon is always challenging because of geographic isolation, winter weather, and limited resources. With the loss of more than one million dollars in national forest receipts during the past several years, Wallowa County is facing financial difficulties that have a direct impact on the library system. Earlier this year, the county commissioners considered making substantial cuts to the library budget, requiring reduced hours at the main

office as well as at the three library stations that serve remote areas of the county. Similar steps taken in 1987 resulted in a 50% budget reduction, loss of a full time staff position, and drastic cuts in service hours.

Faced with possible revenue loss, we began to explore alternative funding sources for new and existing programs. We have discovered that the formation of partnerships with other agencies in the community has greatly increased our ability to provide resources and outreach services.

In 1994, the Wallowa County Commission on Children and Families awarded the county library a grant to create family resource centers. The goal of family resource centers is to increase the availability of parenting resources and family support programs to at-risk families and to encourage the development of language and literacy skills among preschool children. Books, videos, and other materials on parenting are now available at each of the Wallowa County libraries, and TV/VCR units are available for in-library use. Additional materials are accessible to organizations and schools for workshop or classroom use, including videos on communication, anger and stress management, substance abuse, problem solving, and self-esteem. We have worked with county agencies to provide support materials for their programs. Agencies sponsoring parenting classes have borrowed collections of preschool books for use by parents at home. This project has been labor-intensive, but the benefits to children and families have been considerable.

Committed to reaching unserved members of the early care and education community, the parent/provider consultant of the Child Care Support Project, the Wallowa County librarian, and the director of the educational services district formed a partnership. We proposed a home delivery service that would provide free storytelling and reading materials for children and allow childcare providers on-site access to training materials. Our propos-

al received funding from the Wallowa County Commission on Children and Families in June. The new program will serve approximately 20 registered home-care providers, a preschool, and two Head Start sites. Funding allows five hours per week of staff time for outreach activities and the purchase of additional preschool materials for collections that will circulate among program sites.

Using a Children's Services Improvement Grant awarded by the Oregon State Library, we created storybox kits to use in preschool storytime. The kits are being used by the county's branch libraries and the three city libraries, which have found them especially helpful for summer programs. The storyboxes are organized around themes and contain a combination of paperback and hardcover books, puppets, and puzzles. We are creating additional story kits for preschool audiences.

Because the library lacks dependable transportation for outreach service, the Wallowa County Commission on Children and Families and the county librarian are working cooperatively to locate funding for a van, which could be used as a storymobile as well as for transporting book collections to the six libraries within the county. (Our current mode of transportation is one of the county's three ancient police cars.) We are exploring several possibilities, including government auctions.

Although our most recent collaborative effort does not affect children, it continues to illustrate the importance of sharing resources. We are working with Community Connection, the local agency responsible for providing a wide range of services to seniors. Approximately 23% of the Wallowa County population is over 60 years old, and many of these seniors are becoming less mobile. Library resources are often inaccessible to those who can no longer drive. Our goal is to extend service to homebound elderly citizens—and to those living in adult foster homes and assisted living facilities—by establishing an outreach program. This project will provide on-site access to materials that address the special needs of older adults. The library will contribute the resource kits, books-on-tape, and videos, and the Community Connection staff will furnish transportation and coordinate activities programs.

Sharing experiences, ideas and resources in rural Wallowa County has enabled a broader segment of our population to enjoy the benefit of library services, has increased our effectiveness, and has greatly improved our services to families and children. When agencies come together because of shared goals, not just because of dwindling resources, they *can* have a positive impact on the community. □

Sharing Resources:

Partnerships That Work
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