



Books in Jails in Western North Carolina

By: Gillian (Jill) D. Ellern

Abstract

These presentations to Dr. Claudia Gollop's class talk about the research project and article about library services to the inmates in rural jails of Western North Carolina. This project and article were completed with Karen Mason and Liz Greg and review what was discovered about the materials found.

Ellern, G.D. (2017, March 28, & 2015, March 31). *Books in Jails in Western North Carolina* [Invited lecture]. Video conference with University of North Carolina School of Information and Library School students.

Archived version from NC DOCKS available at: <http://libres.uncg.edu/ir/wcu/listing.aspx?id=37397>.



LIBRARY SERVICES TO INMATES IN THE RURAL JAILS OF WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA

Originally given at NCLA 60th Biennial Conference in 2013

UNC – SILS – Dr. Claudia Gollop
INLS 739: Information Services for Specific Populations
March 31, 2015



Visitor

Date:
03/31/2015

Name:

Gillian (Jill) D. Ellern
Systems Librarian
Western Carolina University

Destination:

Elizabeth (Liz) J. Greg

Time in:

Karen Mason



Presentation Outline

- Why did we do this project?
- Laying the groundwork
 - The research, interviews, and article
- Working with two regional jails in WNC
 - Negotiations, challenges, and crusaders
- Why should you think about it?



The idea for this project

- Combining disciplines of the researchers
 - What happens when a librarian and a criminal justice professor want to do a research project together
- Boyer's model of scholarship
 - Community involvement and applied scholarship
- Mutual friends were jailers



Why?

Listening to the stories from our friends about working as a jailers, we thought about what it would be like should we find ourselves unfortunate enough to be there.

Perhaps you, like us, might think it a quite attractive prospect to have nothing but time to read all day.

However, the reality we found that the library services provided in the regional jail situations are not what you might imagine.

And even if innocent, you can be in there for up to two years awaiting trial.



What can we do?

- What is the actual situation?
- What is needed to help?
 - How can we keep from looking stupid or like crazy academics trying to stir up trouble or a crusade?



Background information

- Doing the background research
 - Example: difference between a jail and a prison
- Finding out who was the policy makers at each jail
- Talking to the public libraries in each area

Tip #1: Concentrate on the books



impact and sustainability

- Investigation focused on what we could do
- Concentrating on how to keep good books in inmates hands
 - Understanding the unique environment
 - What are the challenges?
 - Grant writing ideas
- Who can we do something that would be sustainable in our area?



Questions asked

1. Would you tell us what you know about the history of library services to this institution?
2. What is the role of library services in the jail?
 - Follow up question – Was there been any interest in expanding, limiting, or changing these services?
 - Follow up question – With the new Justice Reinvestment Act, and with inmates staying in jail much longer, do see any changes being made to Library Services in the future?
3. Where do you get your materials for library services?
 - Follow up question – Where could you get materials in the future or where would be preferable?
4. What administrative or operational issues or concerns you have had with providing library services to inmates?
 - Follow up question – What benefits or positive outcomes have you seen with providing these services to inmates?
5. Do you tailor your services to different populations?
 - - Follow up question – How do you provide materials for illiterate, Spanish speaking, or other special needs inmates?
6. What do you do to support inmates with legal issues?

The results of the interviews

The collections

- Primarily paperback
- Predominately fiction

What you might find at a thrift store

- Genres were typically romance, with some popular fiction, and a few young adult.
- In general they were leftovers, older and unknown authors and titles, duplicates of currently popular titles
- Very few nonfiction or self-help books
- Acquired from donations, friends and family of inmates, staff making donations, thrift stores and yard sales (no budget)



Administrative and operations procedures

- Housed in a variety of places (multipurpose, closets, carts, lockers) – none had a “library”
- Loan rules (2-4 books at a time) plus the Bible per week
- Shared community space so sharing between inmates was common
- Getting additional items was difficult



Issues and challenges

- Physical state of the collections
- Variety genres
- Budgetary challenges
- Space limitations
- Time and staff resources
- Lack of items for special needs
- Differences of option on law materials



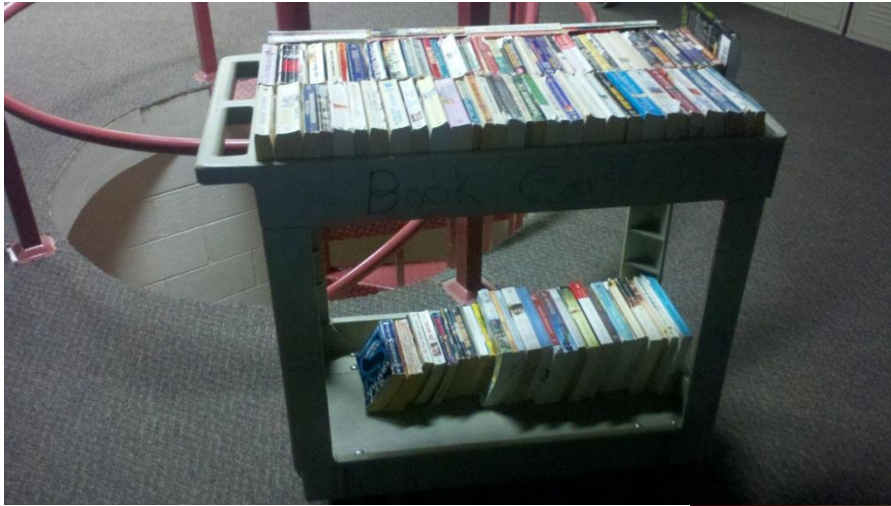
A picture is worth...



Jackson County (72 max)



Macon County (75 max)



Haywood County(130 max)



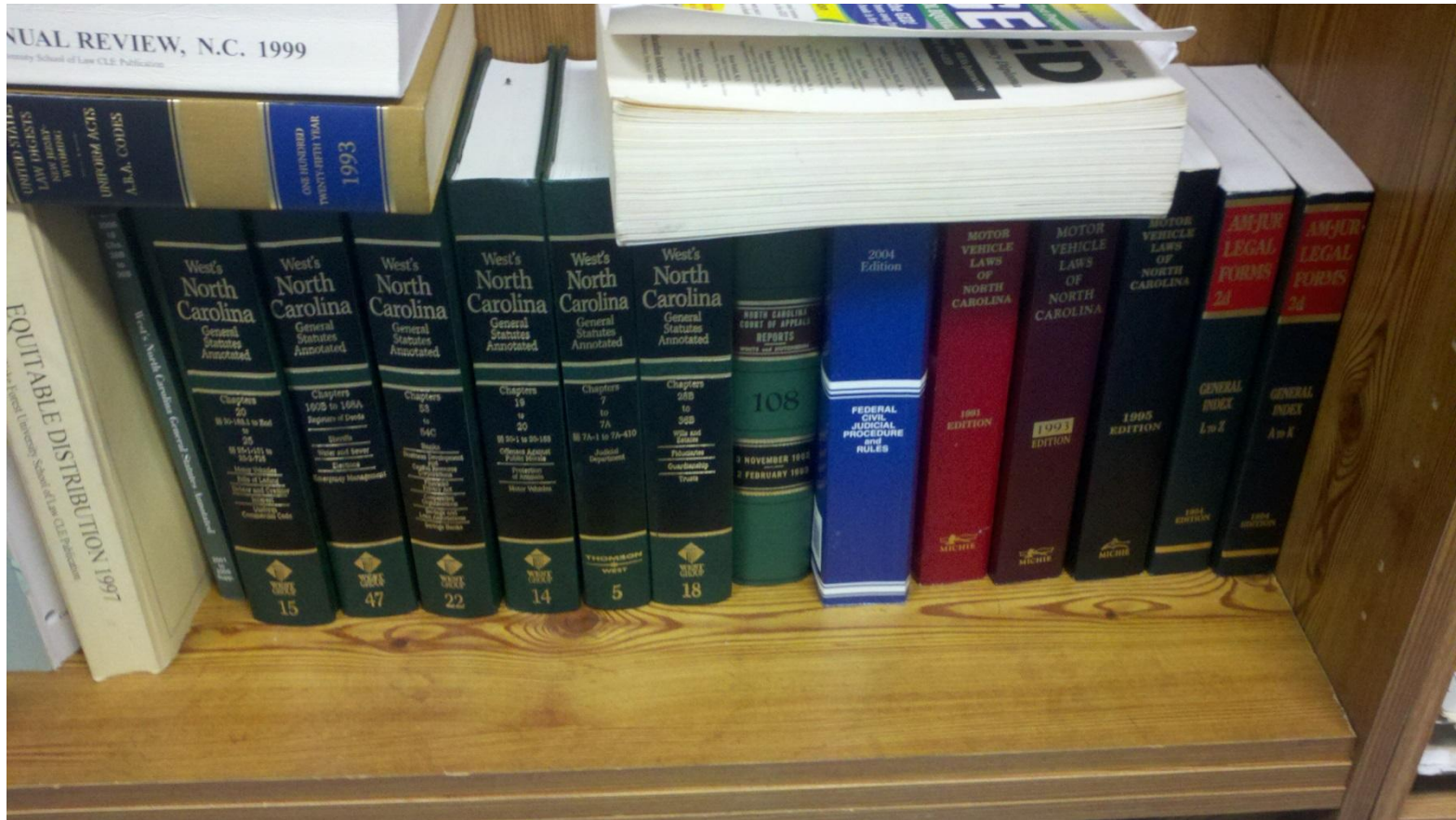
Haywood County(130 max)



Haywood County (130 max)



Haywood County –Law books (130 max)



Clay County (52 max)



Clay County (52 max)



Clay County (52 max)



Cherokee County (150 max)



Cherokee County (150 max)



Cherokee County (150 max)



Graham County (8 max)



Working with Fontana regional Library system

A Tail of two Jails

The difference between the two jails approaches to library services

Jackson County Detention

- Philosophical
 - Safety and Security
- Who is running it
 - Single nurse volunteer
- Collection and logistics
 - Book list to select from
 - Numbers are large and unorganized

Macon County Detention

- Philosophical
 - Stewardship
- Who is running it
 - All jailors together
- Collection and logistics
 - Browsing carts
 - Small, varied, accessible

Jackson County

current State of collection - Sept 2013



Macon County current State of collection - 2013



Macon County current State of collection - 2013



Reality of working with Jails



Librarything.com

Librarything.com interface showing a list of books. The user is BettyJean79. The page displays a list of books with columns for Title, Author, Tags, Date, and ISBN. Each book entry includes a cover image, a list of tags, and a set of action icons (book, comment, share, edit, delete) along with user counts (729, 105, 12,551, 818) and comment counts (4, 1, 113, 3).






















Home Your books Add books Groups Talk Local More Zeitgeist

BettyJean79 Share Sign out Help

Search site

Jackson County Jail Bo... List Covers Tags Authors Style A B C D E

1 - 20 of 344 next page [1] 2 3 4 5 6 7 ... 18 (show all)

	Title	Author	Tags	Date	ISBN	
	A 2nd Helping of Chicken Soup for the Soul: 101 More Stories to Open the Heart and Rekindle the Spirit	Canfield, Jack	non-fiction, self-help, inspirational, short stories	1995	1558743316	     729 4
	Chicken Soup for the Soul Cookbook: 101 Stories with Recipes from the Heart	Canfield, Jack	nonfiction, cookbook, inspiration, short stories	1995	1558743545	     105 1
	Oliver Twist (Barnes & Noble Classics)	Dickens, Charles	fiction, classic, 19th century, english literature	2004	1593082061	     12,551 113
	Writers INC: A Student Handbook for Writing & Learning	Sebranek, Patrick	non-fiction, english, grammar, writing, reference	1995	0669388130	     818 3



Negotiations

- Introductions
 - Organizational landscapes and dynamics
- Control
 - Who's in charge of what
 - End results
- Support and politics



Challenges

- Professional awareness
 - A pile of books doesn't make you a librarian
- Advocacy and education
- Loss of control
- Life cycle and longevity
- Personalities



Crusaders

- Jail and Officer Safety
- Religious agenda
- Social justice
 - mental health, recidivism, and more



Jackson County current State - Oct 2013



Future Directions

- Workflow to keep it sustainable
 - Weeding
 - Selection
 - Friends bookstore for non-fiction
- Keep relationships going
- Looking at working with other public libraries



Conclusions

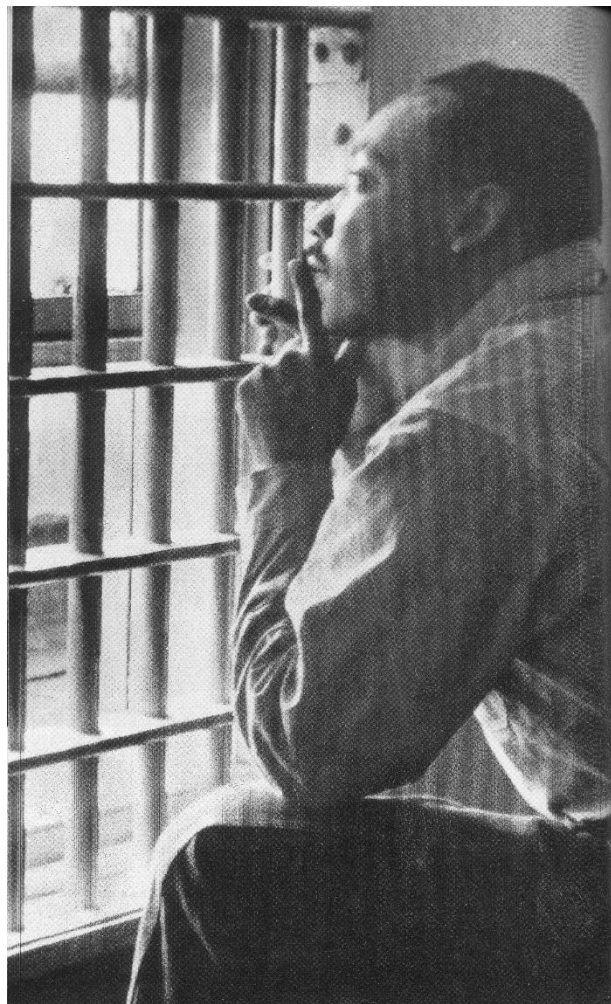
- Encourage you to think about doing this
 - Inmates are public library patrons
 - Small captive group with a great need
 - Dedicated library users
- Rewarding
 - Individual inmates and those providing the services
- Challenges
 - Political, monetary, etc



“People will look at you and they’ll judge. Even the good ones. They’ll say, ‘There’s a woman who’s on drugs,’ or ‘There’s a woman who can’t keep her kids...’ Books don’t do that. Books say, ‘I don’t care who you are. I’m here to help you learn and escape this place for a bit.’ We need books in here. We deserve that. We deserve to grow, to learn, and to heal.”

- Tracie, from the documentary Books Behind Bars





Updates - 2015

- Created a Blog
 - <https://jailswnc.wordpress.com/>
 - Almost 400 views with over 130 visitors
- Tons of publicity for the project
 - Newspapers, local radio, social media
- Donated law books to Detention Centers
 - Haywood and Cherokee given NC Statutes
- Haywood Public Library created a budget line for the jail



Updates - 2015

- WCU service learning project
 - 3 students from the “Ripple Effect”
- 2014 Service Innovation Project Award
 - North Carolina Public Library Directors Association
- Unsuccessful WCU grant

- Liz Gregg left Fontana Regional Library



Other resources - 2015

– Photos

- <https://plus.google.com/photos/110377422716169856481/albums/6130615427278042337>

– NC state library's Innovative programing blog post by Joyce Chatman

– WRGC Sylva AM radio morning show – Interview with Jill Ellern and Liz Gregg

– LibraryThing site

- Titles: MCDC (140) and JCDC (647)
- <http://www.librarything.com/catalog/jailswnc>



Updates - 2015

- Rebooting the programs
 - Assignment new staff from Fontana
 - Current situation at the two jails





LIBRARY SERVICES TO INMATES IN THE RURAL JAILS OF WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA

Originally given at NCLA 60th Biennial Conference in 2013

UNC – SILS – Dr. Claudia Gollop
INLS 739: Information Services for Specific Populations
March 31, 2015



Visitor

Date:
03/31/2015

Name:

Gillian (Jill) D. Ellern
Systems Librarian
Western Carolina University

Destination:

Elizabeth (Liz) J. Greg

Time in:

Karen Mason

