

INSTITUTE OF MUSEUM AND LIBRARY SERVICES

MR. WIGGIN: Kendall Wiggin, Connecticut State Librarian. Some of the greatest needs in our community or actually in our state related to the economic crisis I think is what is showing around the country is people are turning to their libraries both as a source of entertainment, programming, free inexpensive programming. They are also coming looking for materials on how to cope. Maybe they have lost their job. They need to stretch their dollar more. Cookbooks are very popular items again. Magazine subscriptions cost people money. They have stopped their subscriptions and they come to the library looking for that. Books, of course, are free at the library and they are expensive at the bookstore.

People are also coming looking for job information. Many of these are people who have not been unemployed for a long time and some of them are coming from upper management. In our state, there are a lot of insurance and banking jobs that people are losing after 30 years in the business, haven't written a resume in a long time. How do you write a resume? What are some of the resources that are out there?

What we have been doing to try to help libraries in our state we have putting things up on WebJunction. There are things there for libraries and coping in hard

times and tough times from a perspective of managing their library, doing with fewer resources, but also how do you help those people that are coming into the library.

WebJunction is a resource that was started several years ago with a special funding from the Gates Foundation now offered through OCLC (OCLC Online Computer Library Center). Many of the states have a presence on WebJunction and every state does it a little differently. For Connecticut, it is our main resource for library development. We offer a lot of information, courses. Courses are available through there. But it is a great place to set up a forum or if you want to have a discussion group on how are you handling these hard times. People can talk about and share experiences there. There is a national WebJunction site as well as the state specific site. Information flows up and down. Somebody might post something at the national level and you can share it at the local level. We find it is a great place to make our libraries more aware of some of the resources that are there. So WebJunction is available to anybody really, but many of the states have specific training programs that you have to be from that state to use those.

Also, we follow what some our libraries are doing and we are learning from those and then sharing that information with other libraries. We have found that many

of our libraries didn't know a lot about what was available from the Department of Labor. Some of our libraries have really good relationships with the Department of Labor. Others didn't really know that they offered seminars. They had a lot of resources that the library could tap into. Many of the libraries have brought those resources to the library. We have been developing some training for library staff in working with the Department of Labor so they know more about what those resources are, who to contact, and that has proven I think very valuable to libraries that just all of a sudden have all these people in looking for job information and don't really know where to turn. Many of our online databases have proven helpful.

But it's not just people looking for jobs. Some people are looking to develop a new career. They want to go back to school. How do you get some scholarship money? You have been working and not saving up for college because you didn't think you were going to college. What are some of the opportunities? How do you apply to go to college? We are seeing that. These are adults with many years in the labor force now out.

People are looking to create new jobs for themselves. Maybe they are going to become a consultant. They have worked in the banking industry for years. Maybe they can become a consultant. I think everybody thinks they

are going to become a consultant at some point in their lives. Well, how do you do that? How do you start a small business? It's really a small business.

We find many people are coming in the library and running their small businesses. They may have a computer. They can get their Internet from the library. Many of our libraries have wireless now so folks are coming in, setting up their little office in the library. Sometimes they are doing recruiting. All kinds of activities are going on that the library may not have envisioned when they were first developing their services and many of them are finding a real need for online resources because their print materials aren't necessarily as up to date as they might want.

I think our libraries are just seeing this influx of users which are typical of downturns but I think a little different this time in that so many people are facing either job losses or are trying to cope with a very different change in their lives. So there are a lot of different things happening. Libraries are proving very valuable resources and I think we always knew they were there but many of our users may not have been in the library for a number of years so they are suddenly finding 'oh, I have a public library' and 'gee in our state you can use many of the public libraries' which is a nice resource.

In terms of unexpected sources of support, well, that's I think in a large part being libraries helping libraries. There certainly aren't very many other resources although some, I think, state agencies are seeing that libraries are playing a more important role. One of our state agencies is responsible for the parks in our state and they have developed some nice programs with libraries and making the public more aware of the state parks that they have in their own state. Our governor has been promoting 'stay-cations.' Stay at home and do all the wonderful things that are available in Connecticut and many of our libraries already have free pass programs to museums in the state and those are becoming very popular. So, sometimes it is neighbor telling neighbor about the library. They are certainly coming in and using the library. State agencies are utilizing the libraries as a delivery mechanism for some other services, getting material out. We are delivering material on behalf of state agencies. So there is a lot of that self help going on. Not a lot in terms of financial support certainly but I think in terms of helping each other out.

The other thing we have noticed is that our communities are under stress and I think it is going to take some time before we really see the full impact of that because I think budget cycles are such -- our state budget

is under enormous stress right now. Our budget was cut 5 percent at the beginning of the fiscal year. The governor's budget looked like we might be losing some of our service centers. Those libraries that are served by our service centers really came forward and built a great case to legislators for the need for that kind of service and so far have been restored in their budget. We still don't have a budget so I am no sure what that will ultimately look like.

We have done some survey work with our communities. Some of them seem to be holding their own. Some have actually seen a little bit of increase here and there but we're not sure if that is going to last until the next year. So we are trying to at least ensure that the state aid and the resources that they get from us stay at least level funded which I guess in this day and age is a good thing. So we are looking at that.

The state library itself is looking at an early retirement program, which may cause us to lose a lot of employees. Unfortunately, in our library development area we don't see as many but what's going to be happening throughout the state government in our state is a loss of lot of institutional memory, a lot of people who knew where to go to get information so we are going to have to figure that out, I think, as we move forward in that area.

In terms of the libraries - again we talk a lot about how libraries are helping the unemployed, but I think we have to look at that very broadly in terms of the families that are part of that situation. Children's programming again is very popular. I think we will probably see a large increase in summer reading programs this year, attendance of programs. I think our libraries are really stepping up to the plate. We have invested a lot. Communities have invested a lot in Connecticut in new buildings. Those are certainly paying off in terms of more space for more programming.

One of the problems we are having in a lot of our buildings is just not enough computer terminals and not enough space to put those computer terminals. New buildings are accommodating that a little better. We are worried about having enough Internet access so we are looking forward to at least, at the state level, applying for some of the broadband stimulus funding. We think that is going to be essential if libraries, particularly in rural parts of our state where we are also seeing unemployment, that people will have the Internet access and the need to find the resources they need to succeed. That is another area where we are looking for some support. I think we will be able to help libraries greatly. With that, encourage libraries that in our state we have a statewide network.

That is going to provide, we hope, increased access to those libraries that don't have it now, again, another source of funding.

When it comes to what kind of advice do I have my colleagues and other state librarians, it's an interesting question. I think we all learn from each other. I would encourage more of us to share more on some of our experience and whatnot. Actually, in Connecticut we saw the press release that North Carolina put out which got our governor very interested in at least asking what are we doing. We were doing some things and we were able to show that back.

I think one of the things we need to do is make our governors more aware that libraries are filling this role and legislators as well because I think there is a perception that you have the Department of Labor. They take care of that. Libraries are doing their thing and don't realize that while -- in our state we have a lot of one stops and where people go to the Department of Labor. We are seeing a lot of people have not been unemployed for a long, long time are out looking for job in maybe 20 years. There is some stigma to going to a job center. They just don't see themselves doing that and then they really don't know where to begin. They are more comfortable often going to the library first. They may end up going to one of the

labor sites but I think what we need to do is work with our Departments of Labor. We have reached out to ours to see can we connect them back with libraries. What can libraries do for some of these state agencies? I think that there is that kind of role and I am sure many of my colleagues are already doing that. But I think sometimes the work we do is just taken for granted and not seen as being contributing to this.

We do a lot with statewide database licensing. We have been trying to point out that some of our licenses are there for business resources for other kinds of material that may be able to help people that are looking for jobs.

We have also found that as our own state government cuts back we have kind of made people aware of some of our resources. The governor wanted to cancel all subscriptions in state governments. So, while we have online databases that have access to these so we have been promoting with state agencies to say well you had to cancel your subscription but you can use Icon, which is our statewide database program.

So I think it's just trying to stay in tune to what's going on in your state. That is part of our job anyway, but where can libraries fit in. And not overselling libraries. That is another issue I think. While libraries are doing yeoman's work, we can't put more expectations on

them than they can handle. I think we have to be realistic. Sometimes somebody will have a great idea, a legislator, and we have to advise them. Well, without more resources the library really can't do that. It is a balancing act. We want libraries to be busy and well used. Unfortunately right now funding isn't following that.

What is happening now, like with the broadband application, and suddenly we have some interesting new players at the table. It turns out we have a broadband commission or something of the state which most of us didn't even know existed. Suddenly, they are at the table, which is good. Showing up is half the battle. I learned that a long time ago and we still do that. So we are in a lot of broadband discussions. We have had to write a lot of pieces.

I think ALA has had some good stuff out there. That is another thing that could be very helpful is why should we be getting broadband in libraries. We have put together quite a bit of stuff for our application but we are all doing the same thing.