

## **Early conclusions from the library survey:**

Seven prison libraries are closed: Centralia, Decatur, Graham, Hill, Pinckneyville, Sheridan and Vandalia. Sheridan has been closed since 2008. Some of these manage to maintain some access to the federally mandated legal section and a couple don't. Prison personnel were generally cooperative, but one prison refused to tell us anything (Pontiac). There are other prisons which have no librarian, but manage through other personnel to give some limited access to inmates, such as Menard and Stateville. Two prisons were on lockdown which means no access to the libraries, or to our surveys. (Illinois River and Shawnee).

All the remaining libraries have at least one of these interlocking problems:

1) **not enough physical space** (newly donated book - usually from inmates - arrives, a book on the shelf goes out). or only 10-20 people can be accommodated at one time (with a census of 2,000 or more).

2) **not enough personnel** - Librarians need help to catalog books, type up library cards and paste envelopes inside the cover, plus check out books. Inmates do this quite well, but for unknown reasons a number of libraries complained that their inmate helpers had been a thing of the past or "might return at some time in the future."

3) Space and staff problems usually result in **too few hours of accessibility**, particularly for large populations. For example, there are 3,466 prisoners at Menard and library is opened with "temporary staff" around twenty hours a week. This could mean that a prisoner does not get access once a month. This is further complicated by the fact that a number of prisoners work in prison industries and that limits the hours they have free to go to the library.

## **One problem that virtually all libraries cited is lack of current material.**

Those librarians who had been in their positions for several years all said that they used to have a modest budget for new books, magazines and newspapers. Seven to ten years ago, that was cut. Now their collections are falling apart and lacking in non-fiction and reference categories. In a world without access to computers, there is very little access to **Information** - health care, educational possibilities, job search techniques, trades and skills, grants, self-help on addiction, parenting. Special populations are receiving no consideration: inmates who only read Spanish and are trying to learn English, large print for prisoners who need glasses, and those who are struggling to become literate.

**Donation procedures** are extremely diverse. Some are user-friendly and some are not. However, in all cases, there needs to be a decent amount of communication between prison and community so that donations are not just "a box of left-over books" but are targeted to meet the needs of the particular prison.