
Executive Director's Report October 2020

Notable Surveys

NOVELny Survey: The New York State Library (NYSL) is evaluating the online databases provided through [New York Online Virtual Electronic Library \(NOVELny\)](#). Provided by NYSL, NOVELny is supported with temporary federal Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funds from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). The NOVELny databases provide basic coverage on a broad range of topics including: business and finance, education support (especially K-12), health and medicine, newspapers and technology.

NYSL has requested member library participation in a short survey about the current database selection. The survey responses will help NYSL plan for the future of the NOVELNY program, especially within the context of the NYSL's next [LSTA Five-Year Plan](#). This survey can be accessed [here](#), and the deadline for completing the survey is close of business on October 29th.

The electronic resources recommended by the PLDA Central Library/E-Content Committee supplement and expand the scope of digital content made available to cardholders at the member libraries by NYSL.

Housing Needs Survey: Nonprofit Westchester (NPW) is conducting a survey to learn about the current housing needs and challenges faced by nonprofit/library staff members living in Westchester County. Staff members at WLS and the member libraries have been asked to complete the survey that can be accessed online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/QJN87R9> or as [a paper form](#). The ability of WLS and the member libraries to attract and retain a diverse work force is directly impacted by the ability of individuals to find safe, affordable and conveniently located housing.

Economic Impact of COVID-19 Survey: The United Way of Westchester and Putnam (UWWP) has requested assistance from WLS and the member libraries in promoting their survey that aims to better understand the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on individuals and communities. The information gathered will help identify trends and local needs and will enable UWWP to more effectively work with community partners to provide resources and support in this difficult time. This anonymous survey (available in English and Spanish) asks about how the individual completing the survey and their household have been impacted. The survey only takes 7 to 8 minutes to complete and can be accessed via [this link](#). The results of this survey will provide helpful data for WLS and the member libraries as we strive to provide programs and services that best meet the current and anticipated future needs of Westchester County residents.

Cataloging Services

Manager of Cataloging Services Douglas Wray cataloged 40 Launchpads, which will be used by WLS Public Innovation and Engagement (PIE) to support early literacy initiatives at participating member libraries and help provide greater access to digital literacy. Launchpads are pre-loaded educational computer tablets manufactured by the Findaway company, specifically designed for circulation.

Cataloger Melissa Glazer utilized original cataloging to create bibliographic records for several shipments of French and Spanish language books for the Warner Library/Tarrytown and Bronxville Public Library. Original cataloging is necessary when member libraries submit requests for titles which cannot be found in OCLC's WorldCat database or supplied by vendors. All of the WLS catalogers are able to perform original cataloging of materials in all Roman alphabet languages, and Cataloger Qingshe Ren is able to handle Chinese and Japanese as well. Materials in other non-Roman alphabet languages, such as Korean, Hebrew, Arabic or Russian, are occasionally sent to Queens Library to be cataloged for a fee. Mr. Wray recently did this with four Korean children's books owned by Croton Free Library. Ensuring that such materials are included, and findable, in the WLS catalog is a vital service to foreign language-speaking Westchester residents.

Of course, original cataloging is sometimes required for English language works, too. Here are three recent examples, done by Mr. Wray:

How I Lost My Mind and Found Myself / David Rabadi

The author, a Yonkers resident, recounts the challenges he encountered as a closeted gay man in a Middle Eastern culture, while additionally struggling with bipolar disorder. (Cataloged for Yonkers Public Library)

Visions: an Anthology of Ekphrastic Poetry / Ann Koshel van Buren, editor

"Ekphrastic" is defined by Merriam-Webster as "a literary description of or commentary on a visual work of art." This is a compilation of poetry written by Westchester residents and honors the work begun by the late Brenda Connor-Bey, the first poet laureate of Greenburgh. She founded the *Brenda Connor-Bey Learning to See* Legacy Workshop, which established poetry teaching at the Greenburgh Public Library. (Cataloged for the Greenburgh Public Library)

The Very Best of Keely Smith

This is a two-disc music CD which gathers some of the most popular performances by the late jazz singer, who is best known for her work alongside bandleader Louis Prima. (Cataloged for the Mount Vernon Public Library)

Development

On October 13th, Director of Development Pat Brigham presented a workshop on *Planning a Giving Tuesday Campaign* for the Westchester Library Association (WLA). Attendees included Westchester member library staff and library trustees, and the presentation incorporated lessons from Ms. Brigham's fundraising experience along with resources from [#GivingTuesday.org](https://www.givingtuesday.org). Giving Tuesday, a campaign that focuses on the spirit of gratitude and generosity at the end of the year, is a one-day event which builds its foundation on the online and social media platform. This year's #givingtuesday is December 1, 2020. WLS will join thousands of nonprofits across the county and throughout the world in this online giving campaign. WLS will use this opportunity to highlight library services during the pandemic and to increase the visibility of WLS outreach services.

More information will be sent in the coming weeks on how each board member can participate including sample text for social media posts. *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* emphasized that donors are still giving during the pandemic. "Thirty-six percent of donors plan to give more in December than they did during that month last year, and 44 percent plan to give the same amount, according to a new survey," said Dan Parks in his October 2020 article. He also noted that about 44% of the donors who say they will give more in December have already given more in 2020 than all of 2019! Giving Tuesday gives potential donors an opportunity to give and to become strong advocates for WLS library services.

The past month WLS received support from Con Edison (\$15,000) and from M&T Bank (\$1,500) for the COVID -19 Challenge Initiative. Efforts so far have brought \$31,500 to support this initiative to:

- Enhance pandemic and post-pandemic outreach supports for vulnerable populations: low literate adults, recently incarcerated, senior adults and at-risk children;
- Support job and career counseling for job seekers, including job search tools in Spanish, online job search tools and virtual mock interviewing workshops;
- Provide public access to self-help tools for dealing with stress and anxiety; and
- Assist libraries in meeting health and safety guidelines for re-opening their buildings.

Development is working closely with WLS PIE to find enhanced support for critical outreach services in anticipation of any shortfall in 2021 (e.g., the re-printing of the Job Search Tool Kit in Spanish) and for services and resources to help bridge the digital divide (e.g., hotspots, laptops and tablets) for participants in outreach services.

Ms. Brigham attended the United Way of Westchester's Virtual Leadership Summit the week of October 5th and served on the Steering Committee representing WLS. Each day offered a different speaker for a 90-minute session that focused on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

UPCOMING INITIATIVES

Access to Justice Initiative

The Westchester County's Access to Justice Initiative would like to expand upon the County's 9th Judicial District's Pilot Project to distribute information regarding civil court issues. After starting with Faith-Based Leaders, they are now looking to identify additional partners. A call of interest has been sent out to the member libraries to see if any would be willing and able to participate.

This pilot program is being considered as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. With court houses being limited for in-person operations (with the exception of essential matters) and the inaccessibility to computer access, the distribution of information regarding civil court issues has been greatly limited. The communities most affected are those of color and those economically disadvantaged. The Judicial District turned to various houses of worship, who during the pandemic are still considered essential services, to establish safe-haven sub hubs for pro se litigants who do not have access to personal home computer equipment to access the information they need. Operating on an appointment schedule, the convenience of a congregation's availability was a good fit. Below is a brief description of a host site's responsibilities:

Services offered at participating sites:

- Access to a private area to conduct the pro se litigants' request for services (e.g., filing divorce papers, etc.)
- Availability of a congregation point person to direct and assist the pro se litigant in familiarizing themselves with the equipment and private area
- Access to a telephone to contact pro bono assistance in the understanding of the filing of court forms and papers.

Equipment to be provided at participating sites:

- Computer workstation or laptop
- Web camera speakers/microphone as part of computer/laptop or as separate devices
- Internet Access
- Telephone
- Printer
- Scanner
- Schedule of room availability

Westchester libraries are encouraged to explore the possibility of assisting with this initiative that is aligned with the mission of many libraries. This program would help to alleviate the barriers of digital access and financial costs of legal support that make it difficult for many individuals to successfully navigate through the civil court system.

Project Hope

WLS continues to work with the Westchester County Department of Mental Health to participate in Project Hope. This FEMA-funded Crisis Counseling Program (CCP) plans to provide direct crisis counseling services through contracted provider agencies in 12 counties across New York State, including the five boroughs of New York City, the Long Island Counties of Nassau and Suffolk, and the upstate counties of Westchester, Rockland, Dutchess, Orange, and Erie. Designed to provide emotional support and assistance to individuals adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, WLS would be working with five other Westchester County-based nonprofits on this program: Mount Vernon Neighborhood Health Center, Family Services of Westchester, Open Door Family Medical Center, People USA and Empress Emergency Medical Services. WLS's essential role would aim to do two things:

1. Develop and deliver educational materials and forums that help individuals and communities to learn about and discuss the impact of the pandemic on individual and community health and wellbeing.
2. Provide supportive counseling to assist community members in reviewing and assessing their current needs during this pandemic and identifying potential coping strategies, resources and services.

Target audiences would be both library staff (library professionals, clerical staff, support staff) and library patrons and their communities. This program would not collect personally identifiable information. Consistent with library services, these services would be available at no charge to all members of our community.

The budget and recruitment process are still under negotiation. If WLS decides to move forward, Elena Falcone, WLS Director of Public Innovation and Engagement (PIE), would lead this initiative. An update will be provided at the board meeting.

Digital Content

Even as member libraries provide more access to their physical collections for browsing and checkouts, there has continued to be strong growth in the demand for digital content, especially downloadable audiobooks, e-books, magazines and movies/TV shows. The following chart represents data from Freading, hoopla, Kanopy, OverDrive, PressReader, RBdigital and Tumblebooks.

Download Format:	January-September 2019	January-September 2020	Increase %
Audiobooks	183,032	250,180	137%
E-books	363,669	666,227	183%
Magazines (issues)	22,162	39,559	178%
Movies/TV shows	35,545	77,040	217%
Total:	604,408	1,033,006	171%

WLS continues to work with the member libraries to promote and provide training on educational support resources such as Tutor.com, LearningExpress, Learning Upgrade and Lynda.com/LinkedIn Learning.

Information Technology

The WLS IT Audit Working Group has been working on WLS IT and library interaction scenarios as part of the process of drafting a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with each member library as recommended by the IT auditors. These scenarios were created to help libraries understand all the service provider relationships that WLS IT and the library may have going forward, which will be outlined in future SLA drafts. Multiple sessions were held over several days, and the response was positive for the supportable options which WLS IT can offer. The next step for the Group is to compose a section outlining WLS IT responsibilities.

The IT Department is in the final stages of identifying and purchasing a new Help Desk solution system. This system is expected to better support the needs of the member libraries and provide metrics that gauge success—the top priority identified for a new system. This system has been tested and meets the needs of WLS IT staff, and the PLDA Technology Committee will also have time to test the product to get their perspective of the new system as a user.

IT staff continues to follow-up on recommendations from the vendor and independent auditor regarding VDI. Numerous settings have been adjusted to achieve greater speed and better connectivity. To further enhance this service, hardware upgrades are being explored and information is being gathered regarding pricing and other details related to the equipment.

The new Online Bill Pay service is being tested by several libraries. Once the initial testing is completed, all libraries will deploy full access that will allow patrons to pay fines online.

Finally, WLS IT has begun the final stage of interviews to fill the phone support technician post which was vacant since February. All candidates who were in the running are still interested. The post should be filled by the end of the year.

Public Innovation & Engagement (PIE)

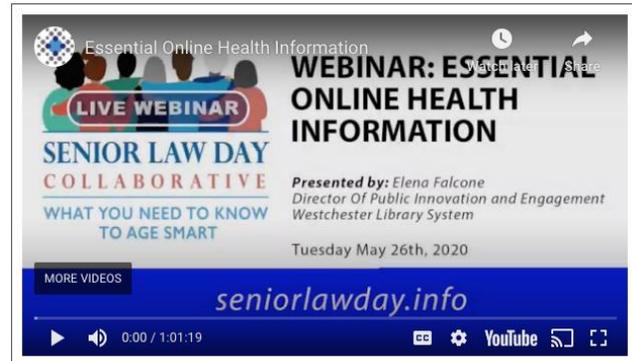
Westchester Seniors Out Speaking (WSOS) remains an active program during this pandemic. The retooling described below reflects some of the creative approaches now used by our other programs:

Senior Benefits Individual Counseling (SBIC) Helpline: This service provides free one-on-one counseling for Medicare and other senior benefits such as HEAP and SNAP. Counseling services - traditionally offered at several host libraries - are still available by phone/email. We've recently engaged a subset of our larger volunteer pool in training to deliver Medicare Plan Finder guidance by phone and via video conferencing. This is critical during this fall Medicare Open Enrollment period, which started October 15 and runs through December 7.

Our print and social media promotion generally includes the image above below and this call to engage: "Curious about Medicare's fall open enrollment period? Trying to save money on your prescription drug coverage through Medicare or Medicare Advantage? If you have a question about Medicare or senior benefits, leave a message on the Westchester Library System's FREE Senior Benefits Individual Counseling (SBIC) helpline at 914-231-3260 or SBICS@wlsmail.org. The helpline is monitored 7 days a week; counseling can be provided by email, phone, and video conferencing. Visit westchesterlibraries.org/sbic for more information!"

Demystifying Medicare Presentations: These longer volunteer-led presentations were offered each spring and fall at member libraries. The program offers an excellent deep dive into Medicare in all its complexities. Due to the pandemic, we had to suspend in-person presentations. Knowing the value of this information, we produced an audio version of the entire presentation with accompanying slides and handouts. Review this offering at wikis.westchesterlibraries.org/sbic/demystifying-medicare/.

Senior Law Day presentations, counseling, and legal FAQs: The Senior Law Day Collaborative, composed of more than 150 attorneys, financial planners, care managers and other senior-service professionals, provides educational workshops and counseling to older adults and caregivers. Our signature programs have been full-day programs offering workshops and consultations with Collaborative professionals. Since the start of the pandemic, the Collaborative shifted to a weekly webinar format, delivering more than 20 programs since the end of March. Attendance at these events has been strong with over 300 participants at live events, 400+ views of our recorded events and several hundred more Facebook live participants.



Starting September 2020, in lieu of its day-long events, the Collaborative now offers a monthly morning for “walk-in” counseling via phone and video conference. This is in addition to a Helpline service coordinated by WLS. The program’s website, also coordinated by WLS, is the launch point for registration, the Helpline, a video library of prior programs and our latest edition of the Elder Law Q&A. The Elder Law Q&A is an annually updated reference that addresses Senior Law Day topics covering living wills, financial planning, housing rights and everything in between.

Special Projects

During the past month, Joe Maurantonio and Dana Hysell Alongi of the Department of Special Projects have been dealing with challenges to the 2020 Census process due to ongoing litigation of the final response date. Library directors, staff, and local municipal partners were encouraged to continue ongoing community engagement and updated changes were shared as they unfolded. Additionally, local and county meetings were attended to understand, engage with and better support these efforts.

COVID-19 has highlighted disparities that can happen with regard to digital access. Even though technology is being provided, sometimes students cannot connect to that equipment due to lack of internet access in the home. Those who go to a library location for their connectivity (e.g., students, those in shelters or seniors) now have limited access if at all. WLS is working with other non-profit community partners to better understand the needs of the County's citizens who have no Internet access to gain a better idea of how this affects communities and if WLS can provide assistance to help the member libraries to play a role in filling this gap. WLS recently worked with the Mount Kisco Public Library to help one of their local families with a young child to gain Internet access. Existing WLS MiFi (Jetpack) were available on a short-term basis to help the family until the school system was able to supply them with a device. This library and several others have identified this situation as becoming more commonplace.

Respectfully submitted,


Terry L. Kirchner
Executive Director