Executive Director's Report
November 2020

New York Library Association (NYLA) Annual Conference

The New York Library Association (NYLA) held its first virtual Annual Conference from November 5-6, with the theme of *Strengthening Our Core*. The conference was well attended, and a number of WLS Trustees participated. Jennifer Brown, Executive Director of The Field Library in Peekskill, and I gave a presentation on *Leading the Library through Turbulent Times*. The key objectives covered the following:

- Help attendees better understand how work style influences reactions to change;
- Identify typical responses to change;
- Encourage use of Bridges' Transitions model to frame conversations about change; and
- Explore strategies to help oneself and others better manage the change process.

The presentation slides will be posted shortly to the WLS website as part of the online WLS Trustee Manual that is currently being organized.

WLS Annual Meeting

WLS's 61st Annual Meeting was also held virtually for the first time via Zoom on November 19th. I was glad to have an opportunity to thank and applaud all of the WLS staff and Westchester library staff for how well they adapted to and flourished in this new environment by finding creative approaches to ensure that the people in Westchester County have access to materials, programs and services. In addition, a lot of hard work helped reduce the social isolation, fear and loss that individuals experienced during the pandemic. Even in Westchester, we were reminded that there is a large digital divide that limits who has access to the Internet. WLS and the member libraries found ways to expand WiFi connections and circulate hotspots and Chromebooks, while also helping those with a smart phone to better understand how to use the device to connect to the apps that would serve them best.

Our efforts to support Census 2020 were a big success, even though the original plan for achieving a successful Census self-report initiative in Westchester was designed around public computers and physical spaces of the libraries. By switching gears to a new digital strategy and working together, WLS and the member libraries helped Westchester County exceed its 2010 self-response rate by 1.4%--reaching a county-wide rate of 69.3%.

In an active year of politics at the local, state and federal levels, the member libraries and WLS helped promote the vote through our efforts to encourage and support voter registration, to work with nonpartisan organizations like the League of Women Voters to provide opportunities for our communities to learn about candidates' positions, and in many cases to serve as a polling site. The voting rate this year was at an all-time high, and the member libraries and WLS played an important role in supporting democracy.

Internally, WLS and the Public Library Directors Association (PLDA) have been working together to craft the future road of IT services. Three audits were completed to review overall operations, the network and the VDI environment. Feedback from these audits has been invaluable, along with guidance from PLDA and the WLS Board, to create a more customer-oriented technology environment that will provide additional

security and stability, while also providing the member libraries with more flexibility to decide what services they would like to obtain from WLS or a third party vendor. A strong, reliable and affordable technology infrastructure is key to the ongoing success of the member libraries and WLS.

The following Trustees were elected to a second term to the WLS Board: Andrea Bober (District X: Port Chester, Rye Brook, Rye City, Rye Town) and Julie Mills-Worthey (District XIII: Mount Vernon). The term for District V (Armonk, Bedford Village, Mount Pleasant, Pound Ridge) is currently vacant.

We have learned and accomplished so much this year. Let us remain united and strong as we work together to provide quality library services to every resident in Westchester County.

Cataloging Services

Manager of Cataloging Services Douglas Wray recently consulted with Diana Lennon, Head of Adult Services at Ossining Public Library. Ossining Public Library is undergoing a collections diversity audit, and Ms. Lennon inquired about the best way to find "diversity"-related materials in their collection. Mr. Wray suggested and explained the subject headings that would support them in their efforts.

All of the WLS catalogers perform original cataloging when member libraries submit requests for titles which can't be found in OCLC's WorldCat database, or supplied by vendors. Here are three examples, done by Mr. Wray:

Our Roots Run Deep: a Pictorial Study of African American Life in the Town of Greenburgh, New York From the 1800's Into the 21st Century / by Harold A. Esannason, in association with the Greenburgh African-American Historical Alliance, Inc.

> This work contains much biographical and historical information and is a valuable source for researchers, or for anyone who is interested in the topic. (Cataloged for Greenburgh Public Library)

Significant Habitats in the Town of Pound Ridge, Westchester County, New York: Report to the Town of Pound Ridge, the Hudson River Estuary Program, and the Westchester Community Foundation / by Christopher Graham, Elise Heffernan, and Gretchen Stevens

> When bibliographic records for works such as this and the previous book are contributed to WorldCat, they become accessible to the larger world beyond Westchester County. (Cataloged for Pound Ridge Library)

Riley the Retriever Wants a New Job / by Jill Mangel Weisfeld and Deborah Mangel; illustrated by Shirley Ng Benitez

> In this children's book written by a Scarsdale resident, a dog learns about several types of jobs before deciding to become a therapy dog.   (Cataloged for Scarsdale Public Library)

Development

The challenges of the pandemic, social distancing, remote learning, and job losses have put a spotlight on the significant number of Westchester residents without Internet access or digital devices. Over the past several weeks, Development has been working with a number of Westchester funders, Department of Social Services and nonprofits to assess Westchester's digital divide, identify communities of need, and assist in bridging the divide for families and those who are most affected.

The first phase of our efforts is a pilot program working with Westchester Community Opportunity Program (WestCOP) /Head Start Centers and Caring for the Hungry and Homeless (Jan Peek Shelter) to deploy up to 20 Chromebooks previously purchased with funds from private funders and used for the *Everybody Counts!* initiative. When needed, mobile hotspots with a paid subscription will be provided to families. These devices are meant as loaners to the nonprofit and will be renewable for as long as needed and as long as funding is available. This fits in well with the library's mission to connect people to information they need and highlight the digital resources available via the library – such as the Job Search Toolkit, Learning

Resources for Children and Adults, Firstfind.org, and more. Temporary library cards will be issued, if needed.

According to WestCOP, over 700 Head Start families do not have access to the internet and/or a device. With families participating either in 5-day remote learning or a hybrid, this is a most critical need and has risks detrimental to early literacy. As any parent of a 3-year old knows, doing lessons on a cell phone is NOT optimal, nor is sharing a device with older siblings (in many cases school-loaned Chromebooks are filtered for the student's use only). Over the past several years, grant funds have helped WLS and member libraries strengthen relationships with Head Start and support their early literacy efforts. This pilot program will help leverage those relationships made particularly challenging during a time when visits to the library are on hold. Joe Maurantonio and Pat Brigham are collecting data from the member libraries to determine the digital needs of their communities and their capacity to provide the required resources. Articulating what is needed, where it is needed, and the library's role in supporting digital equity is critical to developing financial support.

As WLS explores additional funding for this initiative, we continue to build our relationship with other nonprofits working with under-resourced populations. Ms. Brigham is working with the Department of Social Services Temporary Housing Assistance, Urban League, The STEM Alliance and others to identify and support those families most in need. Currently, 60 families in the shelter system in the communities of Mount Vernon, Yonkers, and New Rochelle need digital devices (as per DSS/Temporary Housing Assistance.

Concurrently, Ms. Brigham is working with major Westchester funders to help them better understand WLS's capacity to reach the communities with high concentration of digital inequity, the costs associated with this initiative and how WLS can partner with agencies to support digital equity. Currently, Con Edison and H.W. Wilson Foundation grants support digital equity programs and other initiatives that assist libraries in meeting the challenges of COVID-19.

Ms. Brigham continues conversations with Westchester Community Foundation and a major Westchester funder to support these initiatives. Additionally, Development has designated this year's December 1st #GivingTuesday's campaign to support digital equity.

UPCOMING INITIATIVES

Access to Justice Initiative

Work continues with the County's 9th Judicial District on the Westchester County's Access to Justice Initiative, which focuses on providing easier access to legal resources, services and support for individuals faced with civil court matters. The planned pilot project to use meeting rooms at the member libraries as a physical location for pro se litigants who do not have access to personal home computer equipment to have virtual access to information and support regarding their civil court issues has been placed on hold due to the spike in COVID cases and ensuing library restrictions on onsite activities. A virtual visit and orientation to the Supreme Court Law Library is being developed as a professional development/educational opportunity for member library staff to learn about what legal resources and services are available to support local reference activities and to encourage patron referrals to the free services provided by the Supreme Court Law Library.

Project Hope

Contract negotiations and budget determinations are proceeding along for Project Hope. Once these are finalized, WLS will be able to implement the services to support this program. Designed to provide educational materials and referral 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.

Digital Content

Below is the chart for October that shows the continued growth in demand for digital content, representing data from Freading, hoopla, Kanopy, OverDrive, PressReader, RBdigital and Tumblebooks.

Download Format:	January-October 2019	January-October 2020	Increase %
Audiobooks	205,249	280,242	137%
E-books	405,572	741,348	184%
Magazines (issues)	26,197	43,790	167%
Movies/TV shows	39,783	85,947	216%
Total:	676,801	1,151,327	170%

Information Technology

The WLS IT Audit Working Group continues to develop the proposed Service Level Agreement (SLA). The overall goal is to create a more customer-oriented technology environment that will provide additional security and stability, while also providing the member libraries with more flexibility to decide what services they would like to obtain from WLS or a third-party vendor. One topic addressed has been the various case scenarios for library accessibility to the Integrated Library System (ILS) as noted below, and a second topic has to do with WLS IT accountability metrics.

Scenario	ILS	WLS network	Staff computers	Public Computers	WLS wireless	Help Desk support
XYZ library uses WLS for the ILS, network services, staff computers (ILS access), public computers, and wireless service.	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	Full support which covers the ILS, and all devices on the WLS network. The wireless service will also be supported.
XYZ library uses WLS for the ILS, network services, staff computers (ILS access). XYZ is responsible for public computers, and wireless service.	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	Only supports for ILS, and devices on the WLS network.WLS will not support issues with public computers or wireless problems.
XYZ library uses WLS for the ILS, staff computers (ILS access) and public computers.XYZ is responsible for the wireless service.	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	WLS IT would provide help desk support and services for WLS supported devices on the WLS network but not be involved in addressing wireless issues.
XYZ library uses WLS for the ILS, staff computers (ILS access) and wireless service.XYZ is responsible for the public computers and the network which they operate on.	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	WLS IT would provide help desk support and services for WLS supported devices only on the WLS network. No support would be provided to public computers.

Scenario	ILS	WLS network	Staff computers	Public Computers	WLS wireless	Help Desk support
XYZ library uses WLS for the ILS. XYZ is responsible for their network services, staff computers, public computers, and wireless.	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	WLS IT helpdesk would only provide support for ILS issues.

The IT Department has been working on many issues during this chaotic time dealing with COVID and library closings. One of the projects that has slowly been rolled out is the library computer replacement to update machines to the Windows 10 operating system. This project will fully be deployed in the first quarter of 2021; but of course, this will depend on the status of COVID infection rates and library safety plans.

WLS IT has selected a new help desk solution. The last two vendors were ConnectWise and SolarWinds. After multiple rounds of interviews and demonstrations, the vendor chosen was Solar Winds. There were several factors that played a role in the selection. Department staff provided feedback and felt that SolarWinds provides a simpler but more useful system for both IT staff and library staff. Their integration knowledge base was a key factor in the decision. This would allow library staff to obtain answers to their queries quicker than other products. SolarWinds is also one of the recommendations provided during the WLS IT audits. The PLDA Technology Committee was presented a demonstration of the product and provided positive feedback as well.

The Department has also been working with the Scarsdale Public Library to help with the re-opening of their newly renovated building. The library has been used as a pilot site for new networking concepts and the new wireless system for some months and has acted as a performance guide for ideas of future WLS IT support services.

Public Innovation & Engagement (PIE)

Read Better and HSE Connect! work together as services that support adult basic education goals.

Read Better grew out of our experience encountering students who were aiming for a high school equivalency (HSE) diploma but were unable to make progress due to low literacy. To participate effectively in any of the HSE prep classes in the county, one must test in at a sixth-grade reading level.

Unfortunately, the sparse literacy support services available in the county are predominantly ESL focused and are geographically restricted. This restricts access for adult students who are native-English speakers and who cannot easily commute to classes and who often face challenging schedules. In non-pandemic times, Read Better engages students at their local library at a time that suits their schedules. During the pandemic, Read Better has shifted effectively to phone and video conferencing platforms.

Read Better assists adult learners by helping them to establish and/or strengthen foundational reading skills so they can pursue their employment and life goals. Instruction is anchored by three offerings:

- Print instructional tools from recognized adult literacy publishers

- Library engagement and resources: Students are assisted in obtaining a library card and in finding relevant resources and services; this includes resources such as:
  =News For You (see ad to the right)
  =Learning Upgrade (a proven mobile application that adds a bit of fun while helping adults master essential skills)
  =FirstFind.org (a curated collection of adult learning tools)

- Volunteer energy and commitment (see below).

> S. is a 50 year old man originally from Mexico. He's been in the US more than 20 years. Despite working nights and getting home early morning, he is always prepared, has practiced given skills and is very motivated to learn. ….hardworking, enthusiastic and I am optimistic that he will continue to make progress.
>
> Tutor L.

Read Better is a volunteer-fueled endeavor. Led by Program Coordinator Pam Hoffman, volunteers are vetted, trained, and partnered with an adult student. Students are recruited through calls to the Helpline, which are driven by referral from community agencies, including libraries.

Both before and during the pandemic, establishing partnerships and consistent study habits requires patience, persistence and creativity. It also involves compassion and clarity. Students arrive with copious misinformation about what it takes to meet their educational goals. Assessment, planning and encouragement help them find a path. A testament to Ms. Hoffman's hard work is that more than three dozen student pairs are now at work and have been moving forward steadily.

Ms. Hoffman is supported in part from two other PIE staff members: 1) Francine Vernon, who has taken on the work of conducting follow-up calls with tutors to track progress, and 2) Paul Gunther Moher, who offers technical support to the volunteers in working with video conferencing and the many online resources.

Given that the goal for many of our adult learners is a high school equivalency diploma, Read Better works in conjunction with HSE Connect. Several Read Better tutors do double duty as HSE-level tutors, aiding students currently in classes, as well as those seeking to build core (and high school level) math skills. The student story below is typical. It is exciting to be able to get students past this hurdle – thanks to our wonderful tutors and staff.

> In April 2019 I was laid off from my job...I first took the TASC Test on February 13, 2019 and I passed all subjects except Mathematics.
>
> I knew I would need extra help, so I did some research and found HSE Connect and Pam Hoffman. Pam was kind enough to meet me at the Ossining Public Library where she tested me and within a week found a great tutor for me - Gary F. Pam supplied me with all the study guides I would need...Gary and I met at the beginning of May 2019, twice a week for an hour at the Greenburgh Public Library. Gary is a great Tutor. He is intelligent and patient. Together we opened my study material and went page by page, with Gary explaining step-by-step and breaking down the rules of Mathematics for me — extremely thorough approach, repeating when necessary without hesitation.
>
> On August 8, 2019, I took the TASC Math Test. I was nervous but more knowledgeable because of Gary F. On August 16th the results were in. I passed!!
>
> I would like to take this time to thank Pam and Gary for their support and extend my sincere appreciation for the help they gave me to accomplish this meaningful step in my journey.
>
> **- Student S.**

WEBS

In the wake of COVID-19, the Fall *Managing Your Career in Changing Times* seminars have been modified to a virtual environment. Following the retirement of Director Elaine Sozzi in September, Dr. Kirchner has been consulting with the WEBS counselors and staff to assess future offerings for the program. Initially known as the Westchester Educational Brokering Service, and then just by its acronym WEBS, Ms. Sozzi professionally led the program since its inception in 1979 through many technological changes. Her understanding of employment strategies and how best to navigate them impacted thousands of people who participated in the WEBS seminars, individual counseling and workshops throughout the years. We are truly grateful for her many contributions to WLS and the library community.

Respectfully submitted,
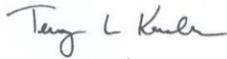
Terry L. Kirchner
Executive Director