
Executive Director's Report June 2022

Open Meetings Law – Recent Changes

New York State Governor Kathy Hochul signed [Executive Order \(EO\) 11.7](#) on June 14th, which declared a disaster emergency in the State of New York. With EO 11.7, library boards have the option to host a 100% virtual board meeting through Thursday, July 14, 2022. Library boards still have the option to meet in person and are not required to host an online/virtual meeting.

On April 9, 2022, Governor Hochul signed Chapter 56 of the Laws of 2022, which included an amendment to the Open Meetings Law (OML) to make permanent until July 1, 2024, the expanded use of videoconferencing by public bodies to conduct open meetings under extraordinary circumstances regardless of a declaration of emergency. The Committee on Open Government created a [Questions and Answers document](#) to provide an overview of the law. The new law is not intended to change or limit what was required of public bodies complying with OML. The law was intended to expand, *only in extraordinary circumstances*, the ability of public bodies to meet in a hybrid (in-person and online) environment. Library boards planning to host a hybrid meeting in accordance with the new law are strongly encouraged to review the [Questions and Answers document](#).

Public Library Collection Management

Based on requests from public libraries across the state, the Empire State Library Network (ESLN) and the Public Library Systems Directors Organization (PULISDO) have partnered on the creation of a "Collection Management Policy Template & Guide" to help public libraries confirm that their policies are ready for materials challenges. This resource clarifies and emphasizes not only the law underlying collection management issues, but the very different roles of trustees and directors in the collection management process. The "Template & Guide" is available at <https://www.wnylrc.org/resources>.

Attorney Stephanie Cole Adams (Ask the Lawyer), the primary author of the "Template & Guide" will review this resource during a free, virtual workshop that will take place on Tuesday, July 19, 2022 from 10 AM-11 AM. [When registering for the webinar](#), choose "METRO - Metropolitan Library Council" when asked to select an ESLN council. The workshop will be recorded.

In addition, a webinar entitled, *Handling Complaints or Protest about Content*, will be held on Thursday, June 30, 2022, from 2-3 p.m. This 60-minute training webinar is presented by Library 2.0 and ALA author and library service, safety, and security expert, Dr. Steve Albrecht and Barry Trott, Adult Services Consultant with the Library of Virginia.

This webinar aims to help library staff and library leaders respond with tact and skill when it comes to complaints about what one or more patrons thinks is inappropriate content in the library. It will also discuss how to handle the security issues and media management related to an organized protest about potentially controversial materials, both in or near your library.

The webinar is free to attend but [registration is required](#) (Registration deadline is 12:00 PM on Wednesday, June 29th). All registrants will receive access to the webinar recording.

A free virtual symposium is being hosted by the Freedom to Read Foundation – *Where Intellectual Freedom and Social Justice Meet: A Call to Action* – on Tuesday, July 12th and Wednesday, July 13th from 12-4 p.m. on both days.

Day 1: The agenda will focus on exploring the topics of Intellectual Freedom and Social Justice and how to find the balance between them. Keynote speakers and panelists will address essential topics such as library policies, intellectual freedom and community values, alternatives to neutrality, and challenges facing the library community. Participants will have opportunities to ask questions of the panelists and engage in both small- and large-group discussions.

Day 2: Panelists will draw on their knowledge and experience to offer strategies for community change, building consensus, developing strong policies, and building coalitions and public outreach. Participants will join in breakout groups to plan specific strategies to shift narratives and communicate the ways in which social justice and intellectual freedom support one another.

The event is free but [registration is required](#). All are welcome to attend.

Access to Justice Initiative (AJI)

The Access to Justice Initiative (AJI) is identifying public libraries within the 9th Judicial District (Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland and Westchester Counties) interested in hosting virtual meeting spaces for individuals working through civil law related activities.

This initiative will follow an approach similar to that used by faith-based sites during the pandemic. A participating library would provide a private space and access to a computer/laptop, printer and scanner so that an individual could engage in a virtual session with legal counsel for their civil legal needs. AJI is working on a formal document to describe the requirements of the program and to clarify the obligations and roles of the participating libraries. WLS member libraries that have expressed interest in learning more about participation in the program include: Mount Kisco, Mount Vernon, New Rochelle, Port Chester-Rye Brook and Yonkers. Others interested should contact Terry Kirchner.

The Legal Services Corporation released a report, [The Justice Gap: The Unmet Civil Legal Needs of Low-income Americans](#), in April 2022. This report provides a good overview of the reasons why participation in the AJI program could positively impact the lives of many individuals in every library's service area. In addition to reviewing the Legal Services Corporation's report, libraries interested in learning more about the civil legal needs of low-income individuals can access [free courses and resources on this topic from WebJunction](#).

The New York State 9th Judicial District Supreme Court Law Libraries will host a webinar for public libraries on June 29th at 2 p.m. to showcase the Supreme Court Law Libraries' resources, and services that are available for free to the public. The webinar will also include information covering services and legal information typically provided by AJL sites for litigants who represent themselves in their court cases. Resources discussed will include those available in the district as well as online information services and resources available statewide. Library staff are encouraged to [register for this free event](#) and a recording of this workshop will be made available.

Central Library Update

The Field Library (Peekskill) has been officially recognized as the Central Library of the Westchester Library System and this change has been reflected in the System's 2022-2026 Plan of Service. The Maintenance of Effort waiver, the request to restore full funding of Central Library Aid, was filed with the Division of Library Development; and WLS has received notice that there will not be a reduction in Central Library Aid this year.

The Public Library Directors Association (PLDA) Central Library/E-Content Committee has started the review process of potential services and products to be funded through Central Library Aid as part of the 2023 WLS Budget. The current membership in this committee includes:

Jennifer Brown, Director, Field Library/Peekskill
Yvonne Cech, Director, John C. Hart Memorial Library/Yorktown
Jennifer Coulter, Director, Pound Ridge Library
Jennifer Daddio, Director, Somers Library
Timur Davis, Director, Mount Vernon Public Library
Mary Kane, Director, Katonah Village Library
Terry Kirchner, Executive Director, WLS [nonvoting member]
Allison Midgley, Senior Technology Trainer, WLS [nonvoting member]
Jesse Montero, Director, Yonkers Public Library
Christina Ryan-Linder, Director, Greenburgh Public Library (Chair).

This committee will continue to meet over the summer and bring forward recommendations to PLDA at their September 2022.

Great Give Back (GGB)

The [Great Give Back \(GGB\)](#) is a day for public libraries to shine as a community hub by inviting community members to participate in meaningful service-oriented experiences. The 2022 GGB activities are scheduled to occur on October 15th. This program offers a way to showcase the good work many libraries are already doing in connecting people willing to help with needs in their community and to highlight the public library's evolving role. To learn more about GGB, view a [recording of the June 7th webinar](#) on this event and visit the [GGB website](#).

Individual libraries can participate in the GGB or if there is enough interest, this can be pursued as a WLS system-wide event.

ReadersFirst - Publisher Price Watch

ReadersFirst is an organization of over 300 libraries dedicated to the effort of ensuring that library users have the same open and free access to eBooks that they have with physical books. ReadersFirst launched, [Publisher Price Watch \(PPW\)](#), a report that provides tables listing the most popular publishers offering eBooks and eAudiobooks, the average price they charge for each format, the average price for the same books in physical format, and the markup. Created by Carmi Parker and the team at Whatcom County Library System, with feedback from the ReadersFirst Working Group and others, [Publisher Price Watch \(PPW\)](#) provides information that helps library selectors optimize their digital book budgets by identifying the publishers who offer good or reasonable value.

WLS Trustee Institutes/Advocacy Events

Incorporating Community Aspirations in Your Long-Range/Strategic Planning Process

July 7th – In-person/WLS Conference Room: 6-7 PM light supper, 7-8:30 PM program

July 21st – Online/Zoom: 6-7:30 PM

When creating and updating the long-range/strategic plan, how does the library discover who is living in the community and what aspirations they have? What techniques and questions will help more voices, especially those that have often been silenced, to be heard? Come and find out. Elena Falcone, Director of WLS Public Innovation & Engagement, will be the presenter. Register to attend this program [in-person \(July 7\)](#) or [online \(July 21\)](#).

Legislative Breakfasts

Please consider joining one of our Legislator Breakfasts being hosted throughout the County. At these meet and greet events, learn more about the WLS Digital Equity Initiative and thank your County and State Legislators and local government figures for their support of libraries. Light refreshments will be served, so registration is appreciated to ensure enough goodies will be on hand. To RSVP, click on the location and date noted below.

Wednesday, July 13th, 9 - 9:45 AM

Croton Free Library

171 Cleveland Drive

Croton-on-Hudson, NY 10520

[Register for July 13th at the Croton Free Library](#)

Wednesday July 27th, 9 - 9:45 AM

Somers Library

Route 139 - Reis Park

Somers, NY 10589

[Register for July 27th at the Somers Library](#)

Wednesday, August 10th, 9 - 9:45 AM

Harrison Public Library

Bruce Avenue

Harrison, NY 10528

[Register for August 10th at the Harrison Public Library](#)

Wednesday, August 24th, 9 - 9:45 AM

Yonkers Public Library: Grinton I. Will Branch

1500 Central Park Avenue

Yonkers, NY 10710

[Register for August 24th at the Yonkers Public Library: Grinton I. Will Branch](#)

Public Library Construction Aid Program

With the state-wide allocation of \$34 million to support the FY 2022/2023 Public Library Construction Aid Program, WLS was notified by NYS Library Division of Library Development (DLD) that \$1,605,184 will be available for approved public library and public library system construction projects within Westchester County. This is an increase of \$14,716 in funding from last year.

WLS is currently scheduling workshops regarding the Construction Aid application process, and this year's deadline for submission of project applications to WLS is Tuesday, August 23rd.

Cataloging Services

Manager of Cataloging Services Douglas Wray has begun cataloging a special collection for New Rochelle Public Library, the Louise Edeiken Score Collection. Mr. Wray and Cataloger Melissa Glazer are also continuing their work on the book collection of the National Maritime Historical Society. As of this writing, about 2,300 of the society's approximately 6,000 books have been cataloged. WLS Catalogers are committed to serving the community by making collections such as these visible and accessible via the shared online catalog.

Prompted largely by the announced retirement of Cataloger Qingshe Ren and the ensuing plan to hire two new catalogers (one full-time and one part-time), Mr. Wray and Ms. Glazer have completed a thoroughly revised and updated version of the WLS Cataloging Services manual. The manual will be incorporated into the training process and serve as a reference tool thereafter.

Mr. Wray, Ms. Glazer and Systems Librarian Lindsay Stratton met on May 20th with Angela Kilsdonk of the Equinox Open Library Initiative to discuss possible enhancements of the Evergreen function which is used by WLS Cataloging Services to import and edit bibliographic records. The hope is that these software enhancements, if achieved, will streamline the WLS catalogers' workflow, and in turn, provide more timely and efficient service to the community.

OCLC has finished a data reclamation project which updated OCLC's accounting of the WLS member libraries' holdings. This will aid interlibrary loans by presenting a more accurate representation of our holdings to OCLC users throughout the country.

The WLS catalogers perform original cataloging when a request from a member library cannot be filled by a MARC record from a vendor, or by a bibliographic record found in the OCLC database. This category of titles often includes local history items, which are uniquely valuable to the community. Here are three examples of local history books cataloged recently by Mr. Wray:

Reflections on our lakes: Three Lakes Council 1970-2020: Lakes Waccabuc, Oscaleta, and Rippowam / Janet Andersen, editor and primary author; and Jean Lewis, author and contributor

This illustrated work about a beautiful, natural area in Lewisboro discusses conservation and land use, and the history of the Three Lakes Council (cataloged for the Lewisboro Library).

The Town of Eastchester's 350th / by Faithe Gerol

The author, a young Eastchester resident, created this children's picture book (cover title: *History of the Town of Eastchester*) for her Girl Scout Troop 1529 Gold Award project (cataloged for the Eastchester Public Library).

History of the Chappaqua Library / by Amy Berger; with text contributions from Gray Williams.

This book was prepared for the library's centennial celebration in June 2022. The authors are a Chappaqua Library reference librarian and a town historian (cataloged for the Chappaqua Library).

Digital Equity Initiatives

The Special Projects Department has been working hard to promote the WLS strategic goals of equity and access, and to expand community and partner engagement. Every successful event the team attends allows them to expand library awareness, bolster access, and connect with both new and ongoing non-profit partners throughout Westchester County.

Joe Maurantonio wrapped up May with the last two Salute to Seniors events on May 18th at Croton Point Park and May 25th at Glen Island Park in New Rochelle. Both events were successful with approximately 90 engagements in Croton and over 130 engagements in New Rochelle. In Croton participants expressed a high awareness and use of online resources; while in New Rochelle, there was a lot of new interest. Multiple vendors at the New Rochelle event approached the WLS table for information.



Salute to Seniors: Krishna Brodigan lends a hand. (Croton Point Park)



Salute to Seniors: Joe Maurantonio with a group of happy visitors. (Glen Island Park)

Dana Hysell attended NYLA's first ever Spring on the Hill Advocacy Conference in Albany with Terry Kirchner on May 16-18. The event provided an opportunity to hear and compare with librarians and library directors (from all over the state) about their Digital Equity efforts. While there, Ms. Hysell was asked to participate on a New Voices panel at the NYLA Annual Conference in November to speak about the WLS digital equity projects.

Mr. Maurantonio and Ms. Hysell partnered again with Family Services of Westchester (FSW). On May 26th, they held the first two of four sessions for 28 families in the New Rochelle head start program. Sessions were held at the New Rochelle Public Library where participants were able to obtain library cards to ensure access to the free in-person and online resources about which they learned.



FSW Chromebook & Hotspot Training: Dana Hysell takes participants through the training. (New Rochelle Public Library)



FSW Chromebook & Hotspot Training: Joe Maurantonio and Dana Hysell with the seven happy participants from session two. (New Rochelle Public Library)

Several members of the WLS team attended Westchester Pride presented by The Loft: LGBTQ+ Center in White Plains on Sunday, June 5th. It was a beautiful day to celebrate and share library resources with our community. Once again, an artist was on hand to do sketches. We also raffled off two WLS tote bags filled with library-related giveaways and information flyers as well as a

bonus Pride Funko Pop. Congressman Jamaal Bowman stopped by for a photo op, as did several member library staff. With over 300 engagements, it was a very successful day.



Westchester Pride: Megan Brown, Dana Hysell, Terry Kirchner, Joe Maurantonio, and artist Greg Maldonado. (White Plains)



Westchester Pride: Megan Brown, Congressman Jamaal Bowman, Dana Hysell, and Joe Maurantonio. (White Plains)



Westchester Pride: Four happy participants show off their sketches. (White Plains)



Westchester Pride: Something for everyone at the WLS table! (White Plains)

Ms. Hysell was joined by Katherine Gasparich of *Events to Remember* at the Mount Kisco Interfaith Food Pantry on June 14th. They interacted with participants as they were either entering or exiting the distribution line. A total of 52 engagements happened that afternoon. The Food Pantry representatives were quite pleased with the visit and asked if we could schedule another date with them soon.

[Pictured right: Mount Kisco Interfaith Food Pantry: Dana Hysell & Katherine Gasparich talk to a participant about the library offerings. (Mount Kisco)



The Special Projects team is looking forward to the summer months and furthering our WLS Digital Equity efforts by participating in more events and adding a bilingual staff member to the team. Ms. Hysell also helped plan the series of Legislative Breakfast events in July and August (mentioned earlier in this report) to thank the County Government and Legislative Delegation for all of their support and funding of the many projects that help further promote equity and access to the underserved throughout Westchester County.

Information Technology (IT)

The first half of 2022 has been eventful and productive for the WLS IT Department. A vast part of all the major projects are either underway or have been completed. Below is a brief recap of current activity.

Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) Rebuild and Local Terminal Replacement: The server infrastructure for the VDI environment was upgraded and the previously acquired local terminals have been tested and deployed to most libraries. This was part of earlier goals to upgrade the VDI environment. The last part of the local terminal replacement should take place by the end of 2022.

Server Infrastructure Upgrade: The installation and configuration of the new services infrastructure has been completed. The migration process is underway to move our core infrastructure from the legacy hardware to the newly purchased hardware.

Ransomware Recovery: The attack in April slowed down operations for a few days and the department decided to re-image all public computers, a process that took place over several weeks, to mitigate future cybersecurity risks. A full recovery was made from the attack, and testing is taking place for additional solutions to provide more proactive approaches to potential ransomware and other malicious attacks.

Data Dashboard: A platform to help automate the process of reporting has been developed and is being rolled out to library staff. The new platform will provide access to the ILS monthly statistics and other databases that are used by library staff. WLS is working with vendors to help fully automate the process since most vendors do not have a simple process to provide ongoing statistics without staff intervention.

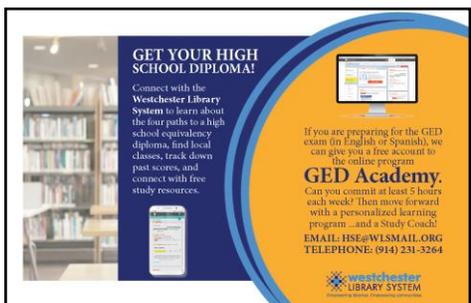
Local Area Network Upgrade: The biggest project of the year is the replacement of the existing network design and infrastructure. This includes switching the Internet Service Provider (ISP) and upgrading all the network equipment at participating member libraries. A Request For Quote (RFP) was recently concluded, and a vendor has been selected to provide the necessary network hardware to complete this task. This project is already ongoing and the new ISP has completed all site surveys and is ready to install the circuits. The full conversion should take place before the end of the summer and will provide libraries with faster internet access and a more secure environment.

Public Innovation & Engagement (PIE)

HSE CONNECT! and READ BETTER

HSE Connect! works to provide information, guidance and resources to adults seeking their New York State high school equivalency diploma, as well as adults who seek to improve their core

literacy skills. The program is fueled by two program coordinators, Pam Hoffman and Amy Gonzalez, and a core of more than 25 volunteers. Ms. Hoffman acts as the program lead; she fields all inquiries to the program, conducts student intakes, and oversees the training and coordination of our volunteer coaches. Ms. Gonzalez is both knowledgeable about HSE and is bilingual, so she acts as a coach for all Spanish-speaking students.



The majority of program clients work toward their diploma by using Essential Ed's GED Academy, an online independent study program. Our volunteers act as coaches - they monitor student progress, work with the students to assure sufficient content mastery, and provide encouragement to keep these adults moving toward their goal.

Fundamentally, our program fills gaps in the adult education landscape.

While students are actively advised to

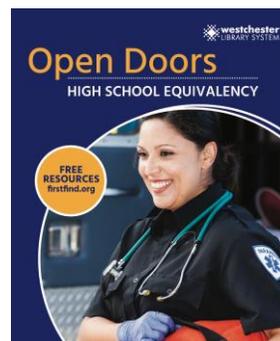
enroll in the free/low cost programs offered by BOCES and others, many students report that they cannot manage juggling between class schedules, work, and family commitments. Students who are sufficiently motivated to commit at least 5 hours per week find a home in our supported, independent study program. Given a limited number of GED Academy seats and volunteer coaches, it is explained to students who cannot put in the time and effort (as assessed over a six week period) that they are welcome to return when their schedules allow.



Through mid-June, more than 50 Helpline inquiries were answered. Our coordinators and volunteer pool coach more than 40 active HSE students who put in from 3-5 hours each week in study time using GED academy and additional study aids. (GED Academy study time in each quarter is close to 1,100 hours). Additionally, our volunteers provide online literacy tutoring to eight adult students.

Two 2022 success stories illustrate the very different pathways we encounter:

- A young man at the Youth Shelter of Westchester (a youth justice initiative) was counseled by Ms. Hoffman on how to obtain Regents credit that could serve as passing grades for GED subtests. The student was able to apply all of his Regents, which meant he only had to take one subject test of his choice. He passed and has his diploma in hand.
- An adult woman whose primary language is Spanish connected with ReadBetter in late 2019 for help with core reading skills. She put in consistent effort with her tutor. This year she started towards her GED by passing the math subject portion of the test. In her own words, "I will make appointments for all the subject tests in the following days to finish this adventure. I will inform you every step of the way. [She is using our Essential Ed program!] Thank you for helping people like me."



We are doing the final proof of our HSE guide, which had to be substantially revised when NYSED announced the shift in late 2021 from the TASC exam to the GED test. Copies will be available this summer. A Spanish-language translation will follow in the fall!

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS: HARWOOD STYLE....Starting Again!



When the Community Conversations program was launched in 2017, the intention was to roll out a series of community events using the Harwood model of community conversation. The model is one that seeks to initiate dialog and robust engagement through an exploration of shared aspirations that individuals have for their community. This is offered as a strong framework from which community members can then work together to address specific issues.

Critically, the Harwood model asks that community groups and service agencies cultivate a mindset and ongoing practice of making decisions grounded in 3 core concepts:

- Turning outward - making the community the main point of reference for their work;
- Aspirations - start with understanding people's shared aspirations; and
- Practice the 3 "A's" of public life - authority, accountability, authenticity.

As this work began, the enthusiasm for the library system taking a leadership role in coordinating, hosting, and facilitating community explorations was quite strong. Coincidentally, as funding was secured and partners for this effort were found, we were drawn into several successful issue-specific opportunities for community dialog:

2017 - With funding from the Westchester Community Foundation and a partnership with the Sing Sing Prison Museum, we hosted presentations and panel discussions on the history of imprisonment in Westchester and the evolution of criminal justice reform.

2018-2019 - The successful 2017 effort strengthened a number of agency connections, which led to the Westchester Resilience Coalition, which worked to educate and foster dialog on the subject of trauma and resilience.

2020 to present - WLS led the delivery of a pandemic-timely health and wellness program - Westchester Breathes, which specifically addressed the growing stress of those impacted by trauma as well as the stress of communities upended by Covid-19. Our 2022 award from the Westchester County Department of Health is just the latest evidence of the worth of this effort.

Along with information generated by Project Hope, the pandemic-driven NYS effort to support community mental health, all of the initiatives mentioned above have worked to engage community members in learning and dialog on important topics. All of these programs can be found on the Community Conversations website.

SENIOR SERVICES UPDATE

At the beginning of the year, the volunteer program for Medicare counseling (Senior Benefits Individual Counseling Services aka SBICs) was discontinued. Happily, a number of committed, experienced volunteers continue to provide community service through the County's Department of Senior Programs and Services (DSPS) in conjunction with the John C. Hart Library (Yorktown) and the Yonkers Public Library-Grinton I. Will Branch. WLS's role in this continuing wave of Medicare

counseling is to facilitate the transition of materials, procedures, and any other helpful documentation as the former volunteers organize under the DSPS umbrella.

Senior-directed programming will continue to be offered via our involvement with the Senior Law Day Collaborative, Vision Labs: Reading for a Lifetime, and Music and Memory at the Library. All of these programs tap skills in content development and curation, as well as education and outreach.

In October 2021, we launched seniors.westchesterlibraries.org. This relatively young site serves as a repository for program information related to available Medicare information services, including the *Demystifying Medicare* audio series as well as the programs mentioned above. Whereas these programs had previously been located across a number of WLS websites and wikis, visitors are now directed to this single site no matter which flier they read, advertisement they view, or webinar they attend.

Since its launch, the site has received over 3,000 visits, with more than half of those being in the first quarter of 2022. Our goal for the Seniors site in the second half of 2022 will be an overhaul of the style and layout to improve consistency and accessibility across the different program pages.

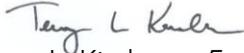
OUTREACH WEBSITES

At least twice a year, our websites are reviewed for traffic and user behavior as a means to assess the success of outreach efforts and to inform content development. The chart below compares 2021 (full year) to 2022 (year-to-date). In 2021 the Community Conversations page provided health information about COVID-19, as well as other supporting services, and this resulted in an unusually high number of page views in 2021.

All sites continue to have a strong level of activity. With the new round of promotional materials (e.g., Online Learning and Discover & Connect brochures) and the active outreach from the PIE and Digital Equity & Inclusion teams, we expect to see growth throughout 2022.

OUTREACH WEBSITE	2021	2022 (YTD)	Notes (thru 6/13/2022)
Community Conversations (conversations.westchesterlibraries.org)			
Users	9,096	3,461	Most visited content in 2021/2022: Westchester Breathes
Page views	191,212	7,181	
FirstFind.org			
Users	7,294	4,248	Current outreach supports traffic to this site. A recent addition is expanded college content.
Page views	20,175	11,065	
Senior Law Day Collaborative (seniorlawday.info)			
Users	4,273	2,523	Increased page views reflect a greater depth of content for site visitors.
Page views	19,482	12,976	
Seniors (seniors.westchesterlibraries.org)			
Users	247	808	Site analytics went online 10/18/21. Highest traffic to Demystifying Medicare, Senior Benefits, and VisionLabs.
Page views	1,374	1,820	
Westchester Connections (connections.westchesterlibraries.org)			
Users	18,011	11,888	Strong promotion via our reentry projects drives increased use of Helpline.
Page views	29,961	19,500	

Respectfully submitted,


Terry L. Kirchner, Executive Director