

# Beyond Access, Beyond Literacy: Restorative Justice in a Juvenile Detention Center Library

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## Introduction

In 2008, juveniles accounted for 16% of all violent crime arrests and 26% of all property crime arrests in the United States (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2009). Nearly 100,000 youth are held in detention facilities on any given day. (OFJJDP, 2009). Often, residents in juvenile detention centers (JDCs) are reading far below their grade level, with the average individual at a ninth-grade level by age but reading at the fourth-grade level (Vacca, 2008). Research has consistently shown that there is a strong link between marginal literacy skills and increased involvement in the justice system (Krezmien and Mulcahy, 2008). Thus, there is a critical need to provide excellent education for youth already in detention settings. Libraries and Library and Information Science Programs have a unique opportunity to forge partnerships with JDCs to change these conditions and increase the life-chances of incarcerated youth by creating innovative library and literacy programming.

## Why are JDC libraries important?

- 1/3 of juvenile offenders read below the fourth grade level (Hayes, 2007).
- 2/3 of prison inmates dropped out of high school (Hayes, 2007).
- Most juvenile offenders who exit detention facilities after the age of 16 do not return to any formal school program (Vacca, 2009).

## Restorative Justice: from 'doing time' to 'making time count'

The overarching goal of restorative justice is to repair offenders, victims, and the wider community that was negatively impacted by a crime (Smith, 2001). JDC libraries can be critical sites through which this work can take place. By moving beyond recreational reading JDC libraries will not only improve residents' reading levels, but help build other competencies as well (Gilman, 2008).

To support this process, JDC librarians can:

- Develop library skills training so that residents can effectively utilize the public library as a community and educational resource upon release.
- Hold book talks and discussion groups on stories and themes that emphasize decision making skills and restorative outcomes.
- Collaborate with peer mentoring organizations to create programming that is empowering and responds to the residents' interests.

## Ideas for creating a JDC library

1. Contact a local juvenile correction facility to discuss how a library can best support their mission.
  2. Identify potential collaborators. Discuss how collaborating organizations can support the JDC's needs.
  3. Search for funding sources and plan fundraising activities.
  4. Develop a service proposal.
  5. Create a collection development policy with administrative support.
  6. Initiate services. Start small. Have room for growth.
  7. Evaluate services.
- When developing services and building a collection, it is critical to determine residents' interests. Conduct surveys, hold focus groups, and get to know the residents.
  - Ultimately, it is the JDC staff who determine appropriate reading materials for the residents. As staff may disagree over what materials are permissible, a JDC library can form a review committee for contentious materials.

## Building a JDC library with minimal funding

As library budgets shrink, Library and Information Science (LIS) programs can offer critical support in sustaining a JDC library.

- Use LIS student volunteers to organize book donation drives.
- Offer a practicum in JDC librarianship.
- Approach public libraries for recently weeded relevant materials.
- Establish a listserv so interested parties can communicate.
- Publicize your work.
- Bring local community leaders to the library who can speak about experiences to which JDC residents can relate.



Author Regina Louise speaks to teens in a California JDC library about growing up in foster care.  
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## The Champaign County Juvenile Detention Center Library

- The Champaign County Juvenile Detention Center (CCJDC) in Illinois is a short-term correctional facility with a resident capacity of 40. The majority of the CCJDC resident population is from historically underserved groups (75-77% of youth are African American).
- Much of the initial work on the CCJDC library initiative was carried out through a collaboration between the CCJDC and the Peer Ambassadors (PA), a peer mentoring organization comprised of African American youth who do peer counseling and education in the Champaign-Urbana community.
- While the CCJDC already had a large library, the PAs, CCJDC staff, and Graduate School of Library and Information Science (GSLIS) volunteers identified a need for new and relevant materials, and someone to organize and run the library.
- The PAs and GSLIS students are currently developing library skills training workshops for the residents of the CCJDC. This form of restorative librarianship emphasizes the public library as a resource that will provide them with information about employment, resumes, financial aid, interview skills, computer skills, etc. The breadth of library services are emphasized.

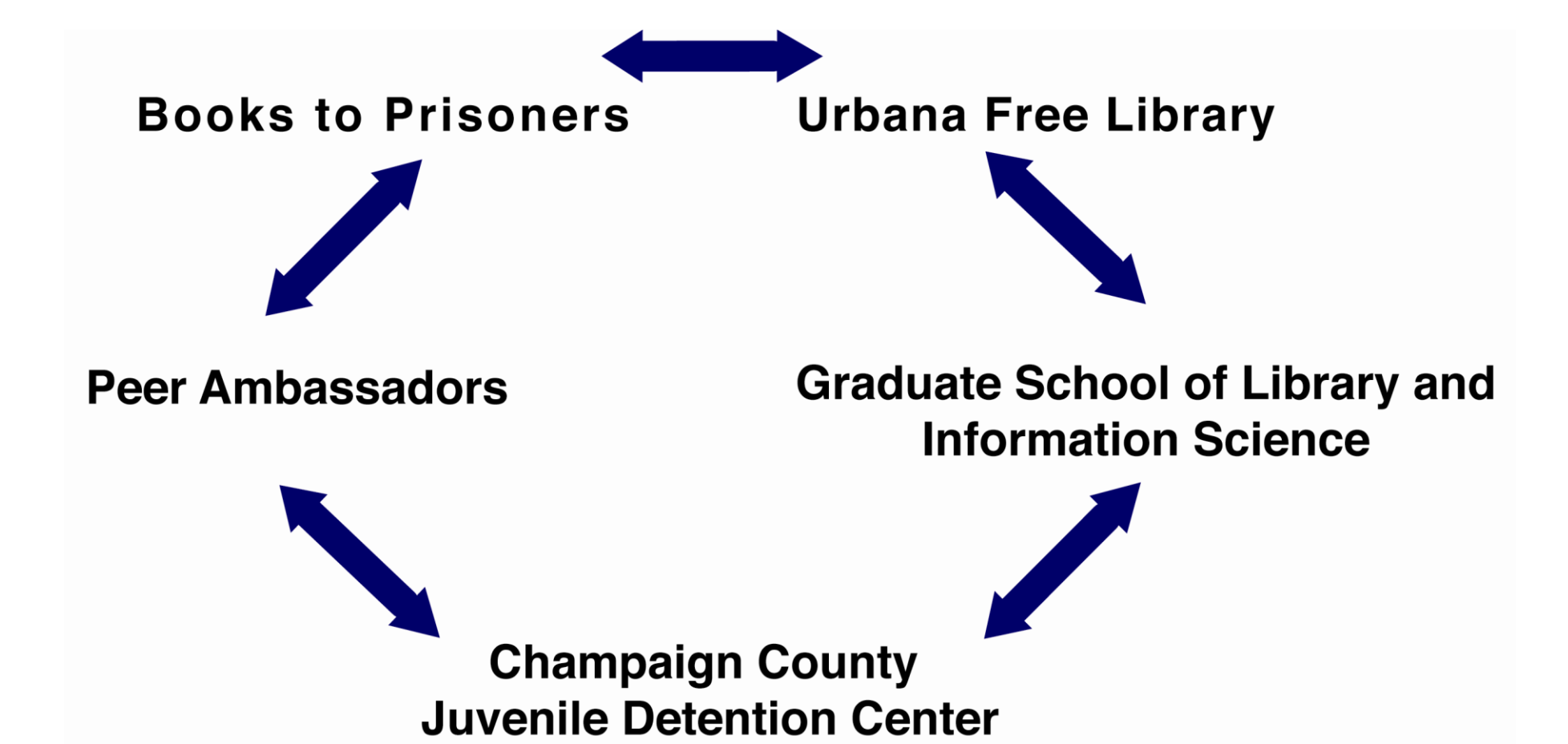
Objectives	December	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	November
Weeding the collection											
Developing Collection Policy											
Developing Programming											
Information Literacy workshops											
Building Partnerships											
Fundraising											
Acquiring book donations											
Maintaining collection											
Evaluation											
Attending Conference											

In preparation for the first year of collaboration, students and faculty at GSLIS created a timeline for numerous objectives. These objectives emerged from initial meetings, suggestions from the Peer Ambassadors, and GSLIS students' insights from volunteering with the PAs and the CCJDC.

## Sustaining a JDC library

Although in its early stages of implementation, the JDC library initiative in Urbana-Champaign has developed a system for sustainability:

- 2 graduate assistants to work on project
- A listserv used to communicate across organizations
- Monthly meetings to discuss plans with all stakeholders
- Close partnership between the Peer Ambassadors and GSLIS for program implementation



Each organization can offer a different set of resources to the creation of a JDC library. Openly sharing resources and skills between groups can help ensure sustainability.

## Conclusions

Despite the need for high quality reading instruction, few public libraries currently provide outreach services to youth in JDCs (Jones, 2004). Problematically, there is a paucity of published research on JDC library outreach initiatives (De la Peña McCook, 2004), the American Library Association has not updated its *Library Standards for Juvenile Corrections Facilities* since 1999, and there is virtually no research that illustrates how LIS programs can be a part of the process in establishing JDC libraries. By forging partnerships with JDCs and other interested organizations, LIS Programs can provide critical resources for correctional facility libraries. Through continued partnerships and published research, best practices can be illustrated for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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