

**EXPLORING THE ROLES  
AND PRACTICES OF LIBRARIES  
IN PRISONS**

# ADVANCES IN LIBRARIANSHIP

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**EXPLORING THE ROLES  
AND PRACTICES OF  
LIBRARIES IN PRISONS:  
INTERNATIONAL  
PERSPECTIVES**

EDITED BY

**JANE GARNER**

*Charles Sturt University, Australia*



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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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**Jeanie Austin** earned their PhD in Library and Information Science from the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign. Their research interests and activities include the provision of library services to people in juvenile detentions, jails and prisons. They primarily examine the complex political and social systems that surround this work. They are interested in the incorporation of critical praxis in LIS and in the evaluation of technology's roles in carceral institutions and policing practices.

**Meri Bajić** is a School Librarian at Tehnička škola Požega, Croatia, who previously worked in a public library. She obtained her MA in Information Science from University of Osijek, Croatia in 2015. Her research interests include information behaviour and library and information services to the undeserved and underprivileged communities like prisoners and students with dyslexia. Also, she is interested in Library and Web 2.0. She was nominated for ISI 2015 *Gerhard Lustig Award* for the best Master thesis in Information Science for her research about information needs and reading interests of prisoners. She can be reached at [meri.bajic@skole.hr](mailto:meri.bajic@skole.hr).

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**Renée Barnes** happened upon the field of correctional librarianship in 2005 while searching for a job. She began working as a Library Technician in a correctional facility and hasn't considered working with any other population since. Since 2005, she has facilitated book groups, created summer and winter reading programs, and taught Spanish and cognitive behavior change classes in addition to providing other library services at three different correctional facilities. These opportunities to serve and impact those who may not have seen the library as relevant to their lives fueled her desire to pursue a Master's Degree in Library and Information Science and a promotion to Librarian. She began working as an Institutional Libraries Senior Consultant in March 2013 and was promoted to Institutional Library Development Supervisor in January 2021. She wants to leave the world a better place than when she found it and believes her work with institutional libraries allows her to do just that.

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**Erin Boyington** began working in correctional libraries in 2013 after receiving her MLIS from the University of Washington's iSchool. She started her career as a Library Tech in the Colorado Department of Corrections, providing library services and innovative programming to Sterling Correctional Facility, the largest state prison in Colorado. In 2016, she joined the Institutional Library Development Unit of the Colorado State Library. She has served as a Co-leader for the American Library Association's Library Services to the Justice-Involved (LSJI) interest group; a juror for the Stonewall Book Awards; a juror for Pop Culture Classroom's Excellence in Graphic Literature Awards; and as a Member of the RUSA CODES 2022 Reading List Council. She contributed her story of witnessing censorship in prisons to *Intellectual Freedom Stories from a Shifting Landscape* (ALA, 2020). Her passion is removing barriers and helping connect people to new ideas and resources that allow them to achieve their personal goals.

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**Cheryl Canning** is a joint PhD student at the University of Strathclyde and University of Stirling. She is a Professionally Qualified Librarian who has worked in three prison libraries in Scotland; responsibilities including general circulation duties, reference services, collection and reader development and facilitating cultural activities (e.g. reading groups and author visits). Funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council, her PhD research provides insight into the information needs of prisoners, and appropriate methods of support.

**Kim McNeil Capers** is the Director of Community Engagement and Outreach at the Queens Public Library. She oversees correctional services, mobile library outreach, hip hop programs and special outreach initiatives. In 2018, she received the Advocacy Award from The Third National Joint Conference of Librarians of Color (JCLC) and in 2017 was *Library Journal's* Mover & Shaker recipient known as the human bridge of connectivity. Aside from being an outreach expert, she is the Admission and Career Service Advisor for Public libraries at the Graduate School of Library and Information Studies at Queens College CUNY. As a Leader and Educator, she is passionate about community and promoting librarianship.

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**Jane Garner** is a Lecturer and Researcher with the School of Information Studies at Charles Sturt University, Australia. Her research interests include the role of libraries, books and reading in the lives of underserved and disadvantaged communities, including people living in prisons and people experiencing homelessness. She is a Member of the International Federation of Library Associations' Section on Library Services to People with Special Needs. Her doctoral thesis examined the lived experiences of prison library users.

**Emilie J. Hancock** is a Technology Librarian at Charleston County Public Library (CCPL) and the Founder of Books Unbound, an Independent Literacy Program for teens who are incarcerated. She is a Founding Member of both CCPL's Prison Outreach Task Force and the Accessibility Team. Her primary interest is to establish libraries in South Carolina jails, and for them to one day become so ubiquitous as to almost be taken for granted. She received her MLIS, BA in Anthropology and BA in English from the University of South Carolina. To collaborate or for inquiries, please send emails to [hancocke@ccpl.org](mailto:hancocke@ccpl.org) or letters to 68 Calhoun Street, Charleston, South Carolina, 29401.

**Tina Malén Hansen** has a Bachelor degree in Library Science, and has worked for six years in the two prison libraries she runs, in the Horten and Bastøy prisons. In 2016, she won a prize for her library work, and in 2020 she won a national prize for her work as a Leader in her field.

**Martina Dragija Ivanović** is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Information Science, University of Zadar, Croatia. Her research interest includes public libraries (their social impact and role in rural areas, reading and research methods in LIS. She previously worked as a Librarian in Public Library Zadar as a Coordinator for the development of library network in Zadar County. She is the Recipient of the Ljerka Markić Čučuković Award (1999) and the Croatian Librarians' Association (CLA) award *Eva Verona* (2008).

**Emily Jacobson** has worked in jail libraries for the past 10 years. She has focussed on patron-centered collection development, as well as issues around information access for people in jail and prison. Her writing is also included in *Reference Librarianship & Justice: History, Practice & Praxis* (2018).

**Iona Johnson** works for Libraries Tasmania as a Literacy Co-ordinator running a literacy program in Risdon Prison, Tasmania. In this work, she brings together her training in fine arts and adult education and her experience in working with people experiencing disadvantage. She has strong sense of social justice and the need for advocacy to work towards inclusion in the wider community. The arts and storytelling can be a vehicle for enabling the voices of disenfranchised people to be valued and heard. In the prison literacy program, she is exploring the connections between prison education and literacy work, focussing on practices that support transformative learning and rehabilitation.

**Damien Linnane** was sentenced to two years imprisonment in late 2015, with a non-parole period of 10 months. The sentencing magistrate described his crimes as “vigilante action.” Since his release from prison he has completed a Master of Information Studies, and now works primarily as an Archivist. He is the Author of the crime novel *Scarred*, which was written by hand while he was in prison, and also works as an Illustrator.

**Sarah McCall** is a Masters' student in Library and Information Management at Emporia State University who is passionate about censorship and library services to incarcerated individuals.

**Dale Monobe**, PhD, has taught Rehabilitation Counseling (as well as Practiced Rehabilitation Counseling) and Library Science on the graduate level and is currently the Utah MLS Regional Director in the School of Library and Information Management at Emporia State University. He not only has an interest in underserved patrons at academic libraries, but also in accessible games and gamification, and in humanistic lifelong learning.

**Nili Ness** is the Correctional Services Librarian for Queens Public Library. Her work includes providing Library Services at local jail facilities and community outreach. She is a Strong Proponent of the Prisoners' Right to Read and is the recipient of the 2020 ASGCLA Exceptional Service Award.

**Gerhard Peschers** holds university degrees in Theology and Library Science. Since 1992, he has worked as librarian in Germany in the North Rhine-Westphalia Prison Service, where he is currently responsible for 30 libraries in 19 adult and 3 juvenile correctional facilities. Since 2003 until 2019, he has also been directly responsible for the daily operation of the library at the Münster Correctional Facility. Since 1996, he has been spokesperson for the Prison Library Workgroup, a unit of Section 8 of the German Library Association. Since 2006, he has been the Chairman of the Prison Library Support Group, which he also founded. From 2016 to 2019, he acted as a Corresponding Member of the IFLA Section on Library Services to People with Special Needs (LSN). Since 2009, he has been an Active Member of the IFLA Working Group on Library Services to People with Special Needs (LSN) with a focus on updating the international guidelines for prison libraries.

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# INTRODUCTION

Jane Garner

A subject keyword search in *Library and Information Science Abstracts* for ‘prison librar\*’ OR ‘jail librar\*’ over 50 years of writing from 1970 to 2020 yields just 380 results. When limiting to scholarly, peer-reviewed publications, the number reduces to just 120. Individual papers from within these 120 often appear together in publications such as the 1977 issue of *Library Trends* that saw the first issue of volume 26 publishing nine articles relating to various aspects of prison library research. Similarly, the *Bulletin des Bibliothèques de France* published five articles together in their fifth issue of volume 53 in 2008, and *Library Trends* published nine articles in their third issue of volume 59 in 2011 each about some aspect of prison libraries. The most recent of these, the 2011 *Library Trends* publication gives us a location focussed collection where prison libraries are described across multiple countries: Canada (Ings & Joslin, 2011), France (Cramard, 2011), Germany (Peschers, 2011), Japan (Nakane, 2011), Italy (Costanzo & Montecchi, 2011), Poland (Zybert, 2011), Spain (Pulido, 2011), and the United Kingdom (Bowe, 2011). Some of these same places are also represented in this current volume, along with writers from countries that are often absent from such collections.

Contributors in this current volume are writing from the United States, Croatia, Sri Lanka, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Australia, Norway, and Germany each on a different aspect of libraries in prisons. It is common for prisons across the world to provide a library service of some kind to their inmates. Such a provision is in fact mandated by the United Nations in their *Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners* (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 1957) that state in Rule 40:

Every institution shall have a library for the use of all categories of prisoners, adequately stocked with both recreational and instructional books, and prisoners shall be encouraged to make full use of it.

This language is often echoed in national prison standards, such as the Australian *Standard Guidelines for Corrections in Australia* (Australian Correctional Administrators, 2012, p. 28) in Guideline 2.54 that states:

Prisoners should have access to a library, adequately stocked with both recreational and information resources, which is operated according to standard library practice. Prisoners should be encouraged to make full use of the library,

Although the most recent iteration of these guidelines (Corrective Services Administrators' Council, 2018, p. 13) has reduced this statement to 'Prisoners are provided with library services for legal, recreational and educational needs'. The United Nations language is also often found in guidelines pertaining specifically to libraries in prisons, such as in the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions' (IFLA) *Guidelines for library services to prisoners* (Lehmann & Locke, 2005, p. 5) that quotes Rule 40 directly, and in England within their *Prison Education & Library Services for adult prisons in England Policy Framework* (Ministry of Justice, 2019, p. 4) that states 'All prisoners are regularly able to access appropriately stocked libraries that support them in their learning and personal development', and 'All prisoners are encouraged to undertake reading for pleasure and improve literacy skills'.

This current volume allows us to move beyond the guidelines and standards to hear from academic researchers, public librarians who operate prison library services, prison librarians and finally, from the prisoners themselves. The volume is divided into six sections, the first of which focusses on library programmes and services offered in prisons in Scotland and the United States. Canning and Buchanan (pp. 9–38) open this section with their chapter that explores the information needs of prisoners, in particular the information needs of a sensitive nature such as those regarding mental health, relationships, emotions and coping strategies for surviving prison life, and the role the prison library can play in providing cultural activities that address these needs. Following a thorough exploration of the international literature relating to the information needs of prisoners, Canning and Buchanan discuss the broad themes that are identifiable in the literature, in particular those that relate to more sensitive information needs. Following on from this, the authors discuss the role of cultural activities, including reading groups and projects in prisons as supporters of prisoner wellbeing and reflection, and the role the prison library can play in meeting the needs of prisoners through the provision of education, recreation and as a provider of cultural activities. They finish with a call for future research to be undertaken that further explores the possibilities of collaboration between creative agencies and prison libraries to help satisfy the information needs of prisoners, including those relating to sensitive topics.

One such example of research that explores prison libraries and their role in the provision of creative activities comes from the second chapter in this section relating to prison library programmes. This chapter, authored by McNeil Capers, Anderson and Ness (pp. 39–56) examines a recent programming effort in two New York prisons delivered by the Queens Public Library. The authors describe programming delivered into the Queensboro Correctional Facility and the Rikers Island jail complex that saw prisoners interacting with hip hop and other musical programming, along with literacy, meditation and mindfulness

activities, all delivered through the public library. The chapter examines the planning process of designing and delivering these programmes in collaboration with prison staff and managers, along with advice to other library services who may be considering offering similar programmes in prisons. The chapter finishes with a discussion of the outcomes of these programmes, most importantly the creation of an awareness for prisoners that the library is represented by caring and approachable people who can provide much more than books to support them during their time in prison. An additional benefit described is the raising of awareness within the prison management and staff of the positive role and influence the library can have in the lives of prisoners, and in the life of the prison itself. Such an awareness paves the way for future programming and collaboration.

The second section of this volume includes two chapters that examine literacy programmes offered by libraries in prisons. The first of these comes from Tasmania, Australia where Johnson (pp. 57–84) discusses the role of the state-wide library service 'Libraries Tasmania' in the delivery of library and literacy services to Risdon Prison. Johnson is the Literacy Co-Ordinator for Libraries Tasmania and takes a reflective approach to move beyond operational writing about prison libraries and to instead examine the thinking, theory and research pertaining to her prison literacy programme. In her chapter, Johnson addresses the questions: How can prison library services support rehabilitation? How are library collections, services and programmes useful for prisoners? Who is not accessing the library and why? How does education in prison support individual change and rehabilitation? How does library work link with prison education and desistance goals? What does adult literacy look like in the library context in Australia? How does the Prison Literacy Service work towards engaging disengaged learners? And How can the prison Literacy Service be as effective as possible? In doing so she is able to explore how the library service can best be utilised to meet its full potential as a supporter of literacy development in prisons and provides context specific information regarding the provision of library services to Tasmanian prisoners.

A second chapter dealing with literacy development work by public librarians in prisons comes from Hancock (pp. 85–102) who writes of critical information literacy pedagogy. Hancock challenges all public library workers who work with prisoners to frame their work through the philosophy of Paulo Friere where they place themselves alongside the prisoners, not above in an effort to facilitate true empowerment through learning. Hancock uses her chapter to explain the use of critical information literacy pedagogy and provides many examples of how this can take place in prison settings.

The following section of the volume examines censorship in prison libraries. The first chapter in this section comes to us from Monobe, Bushman and McCall (pp. 103–118) from the United States and provides a study of the factors to be considered by public and academic libraries when seeking partnerships with prison libraries, particularly in relation to censorship in collection development. The authors describe the importance of academic and public library staffs' awareness and understanding of the censorship restrictions on collection development and freedom of access for borrowing within prison environments. To support this discussion, the authors explore the balance required to ensure the prisoners'

right to read alongside the security and censorship restrictions that are inevitably associated with the carceral context. Their chapter also provides practical recommendations and advice on how academic and public libraries can initiate and maintain partnerships with correctional facilities to develop programmes and collections despite these restrictions.

The second chapter in this section examining censorship explores two contemporary examples of censorship in American prisons today. Steele (pp. 119–132) presents two in-depth case studies of censorship in Southern Mississippi prisons through a series of qualitative interviews with prison employees, lawyers and other individuals connected with the cases. She discusses the tension between prisoners' right to read and theoretical freedoms of access to information as proclaimed in the United States First Amendment, along with the American Library Association's central tenet that intellectual freedom should be possessed by all Americans, in contrast to the two case study sites who took steps to censor all reading materials being sent to the prisons with the exception of religious writings. Steele describes the ensuing lawsuits against the Mississippi Department of Corrections and the South Mississippi Correctional Institution and uses these cases to explore the questions: How can the policies of a prison facility enact censorship, and how can those policies be changed?

The fourth and largest section of this volume is dedicated to studies of various aspects of prison libraries based on their place in the world. Finlay and Bates (pp. 133–156) write of the role of the library in the informal learning journeys of individuals imprisoned at Hydebank Wood College and Women's Prison in Northern Ireland. Garner (pp. 157–182) provides the only writing that explores libraries in juvenile justice facilities and does so by describing the results of a recent survey of juvenile justice facility library services across Australia and compares this level of service provision with an example of best-practice – that being the library of the Birchwood School of the South Carolina Juvenile Justice Center. Bajić, Ivanović and Tanacković (pp. 183–200) have written the results of a study into the reading interests and library use of prisoners in six Croatian prisons. Over 500 Croatian prisoners provided data on their reading interests and practices, and their impressions of their libraries. The influence of the libraries and the books they access there on the prisoners' experiences of prison are also discussed. An exploration of the limitations and potential of libraries in Sri Lankan prisons is presented by Bandaranayake (pp. 201–226). The chapter allows us to hear from prison officials as well as current prisoners and those recently released from prison about their experience of prison libraries in Sri Lanka through their perceptions, feelings and emotions. The chapter also stresses the importance of libraries in Sri Lankan prisons and the relationship between these libraries and the future desistance from crime. The final chapter in this section (pp. 119–132) extends Peschers' existing writings on libraries in the prisons of the Federal Republic of Germany. Peschers takes a wide-ranging view of his topic including the history of German prison libraries, the governance frameworks that ensure prisoners have access to libraries, and the staffing arrangements of prison libraries including the use of inmate library assistants. He then focusses his writing on an in-depth study of the library services in the correctional facilities of one of

the federal states of Germany – North Rhine-Westphalia. Peschers is one of a very small number of librarians employed within German prisons and therefore gives us a unique insight into the operations and role of libraries and reading in German prisons. Each of these chapters provide a unique insight into the provision of library services within their geographic contexts along with a thorough engagement with the relevant literature.

The next section of this volume contains two chapters, each with a view to a different and better future for libraries in prisons. Boyington and Barnes (pp. 259–290) write from Colorado, United States of America of the problems faced by the Colorado Department of Corrections and the Colorado State Library, who are responsible for the provision of library services to Colorado prisons and for staffing their prison libraries. After their description of the libraries and the problems faced by those who work in them regarding recognition, professional interaction and fair pay, the authors propose a staffing model that aims to tackle these issues. They base their model on an in-depth study of existing best-practice guidelines, and a thorough analysis of work tasks undertaken by prison library staff and their experiences of performing their jobs. Their model describes four levels of service typically undertaken by prison library staff and provides a staffing formula designed to meet the staffing needs of each of these levels of service. They also discuss training needs and retention strategies to ensure a reduction of turnover of library staff. Boyington and Barnes close their chapter with a call for further research and a statement of recognition of the value of libraries and librarians in the lives of prisoners.

The final scholarly chapter comes from Austin and Jacobson (pp. 291–310) who challenge their readers to recognise that the narrative of reform through reading supposes those being reformed, in this case prisoners are of poor moral character and require ‘improving’ to be fit to re-join productive society. The authors argue by that imposing collections and services developed to bring about reform of prison library users, we are contributing to their dehumanising criminalisation and institutionalisation. Instead, they call for patron-centered models of library services that prioritise the recognition of their patrons’ humanity through shared processes of collection development and service provision. The authors use their knowledge and experience of working with prisoners and prison libraries to present a model of such processes.

The sixth and final section in this volume presents short pieces of writing from a different perspective from the earlier sections. This last section contains three contributions from ‘behind the wall’ from a prison librarian and from two prisoners. Hansen (pp. 311–316) is the prison librarian at Bastøy prison in Norway. She describes the prison, its residents, and their library in the context of a ‘normalisation prison’. The goal of ‘normalisation prisons’ is to provide residents with living conditions as similar as possible to life outside prison as a way to begin the process of reintegration to life after the end of their sentences. Hansen describes the role of the prison library in such a carceral environment, and echoes statements made in previous chapters regarding the importance of strong relationships with prison management, and the value of cultural activities provided by the library.

The final words of this volume go to two people who have spent time in prison and have had that experience influenced by their prison library. Damien was incarcerated in an Australian prison and tells the story of his life and pathway to that point. Once within the prison system, he was faced with the common problem of too much unfulfilled time and insufficient access to programmes and activities to avoid boredom. When he was able to access his library and its collection, he found a refuge and an escape. Damien shares his thoughts on the role of libraries in the lives of prisoners and also of the wasted potential of Australian prison libraries due to the absence of funding and library staff and the barriers to access that are often in place. The last piece of writing comes from an inmate of Risdon Prison in Tasmania, Australia who cannot be named. He tells us about his difficulties in transitioning to prison life and how working in the prison library gives him hope and purpose. He writes of how his work in the library makes his interactions with other prisoners easier and of his vision for how his library could be improved.

This volume contributes 16 chapters of unique and valuable research and writing about many aspects of prison libraries across many parts of the world. The contributions from academic researchers, library practitioners, prison librarians and prisoners give a solid addition to the small body of work existing on the topic. It has been my great pleasure to facilitate the publication of these chapters, and I wish to express my gratitude to Professor Paul Jaeger for his support and enthusiasm for this publication, and also to Professor Kim Thompson, University of South Carolina for her ongoing support and for getting this project started. Much can be learned here about what a prison library could and should be, and how to achieve such a result. My thanks go to all the inspiring contributors to this volume for their hard work and dedication to their shared cause of making the lives of prisoners better through the provision of quality library staff, services, spaces, and collections. My thanks also go to the prisoners who have contributed their writing to this volume for reminding us of why it is important for this work to continue.

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