
Organizing and Establishing a Prison Library

Mike Johnson Sandra Morris

Southern Correctional Center is one of North Carolina's newest medium/close custody adult male felon institutions. It is located in rural Montgomery County near the town of Troy. This 480 bed single cell complex serves as a diagnostic and reception center for inmates from the 56 counties in eastern North Carolina and has a total staff of 271. Its primary mission is to protect the public and secondarily, to further human potential for those incarcerated by providing them with programs for rehabilitation, enrichment, and growth.

Mike Johnson, Southern's principal, arrived in January 1983. Before him lay the difficult task of establishing a school program in the prison. Southern's Education Section, with only 14 employees, would include academic, vocational, and library components and would serve as a foundation on which to build; therefore, staffing it with the most competent and qualified individuals was essential. One such person, Sandra Morris, was selected to establish the library.

On April 5, 1983, the new prison librarian began her first day of employment as library technician at the brand new correctional center. She had been employed by the Montgomery County Public Library for four years and quickly realized upon her entrance through the admission gates at the institution that her new library position would be quite different from her previous one. During the first week there were many orientation sessions and briefings on institutional rules and regulations. Getting acclimated to an environment where security had top priority proved to be a difficult task.

As we would be working together as principal and librarian, we were relieved to find that we shared a genuine enthusiasm for establishing a functional library. Our plan was that the library at Southern be both the hub of the school program and an oasis for those inmates not attending school. We realized that our patrons would represent various racial, social, and religious groups and would need a wide variety of materials. We hoped to satisfy the recreational, liter-

ary, and educational needs of our patrons by maintaining a public library image.

Arrangements were made for inmates in disciplinary and administrative segregation (solitary confinement) to receive books from a book cart transported to their unit.

It was immediately apparent that one of the major problems to be resolved was the small size of the area designated for the library. Initially, this space, about 920 square feet, was to be used both as a work room for processing books and for the library. The adjoining room was to be used as the law library. It soon became evident that this room could not house the number of volumes necessary for a full law library and the location was changed. It was recommended that this adjoining room be utilized by the library as an office, work room, and a space to house the equipment for a proposed music listening center. For security purposes, the library is constructed with the entire front wall of glass. Shelving could not be placed in front of this wall as it would block the view of the interior of the library. This was another limitation.

In the previous months several boxes of donated books had been gathered and placed in the library. These donations came both from the general public and from the Education Office of the Department of Correction (which subscribes to a publisher's giveaway program). This was our initial collection. On taking inventory of these 500 books, we found many to be duplicates or of little value to us. At that time, furniture in the library consisted of one reference table, one card catalog (far too large), and a number of four-foot bookshelves.

On April 7, 1983, James R. Myrick, institutional consultant for the State Library, visited our library. He came to discuss the possibility of our obtaining LSCA Title I funds for our library and

Mike Johnson is Principal and Sandra Morris is Library Technician at the Southern Correctional Center in Troy.

presented us with several boxes of new paperbacks purchased by the State Library. Jim proved to be a valuable asset to our library program. Having worked as librarian at Sandhills Youth Center, he had experience in correctional library settings. He also provided us with the following information that proved to be very beneficial in establishing our library:

1. A copy of the "Library Standards for Adult Correctional Institutions"
2. The booklet "How to Organize and operate a Small Library" by Genore H. Bernhard
3. Information on the State Library's film service and its processing center
4. A copy of suggested rules and regulations we might adapt for our library
5. Results of reader's interest surveys he had conducted in prisons
6. Criteria for discarding books
7. Guidelines for materials selection

On April 22, Dr. Swarn Dahiya, curriculum specialist for the Department of Correction (DOC), and Nathaniel Boykin, DOC Library Consultant, visited the education section at Southern. Mr. Boykin gave us a list of reference books that we might consider purchasing, relayed to us information on how to obtain materials for the library through the inmate welfare fund, and gave us a report on the status of our newspaper and magazine orders (which had been placed with the DOC several months previously and had not as yet been received).

We visited a number of libraries prior to opening the library at Southern. Among these were Montgomery Technical College Library, Montgomery County Public Library, and Cameron Morrison Youth Center Library. We discussed our basic needs with the librarians and made note of the types of audiovisuals and books used in each library. Most profitable was our visit to the library at Piedmont Correctional Center in Salisbury, NC, where Michael Childress, the library technician, provided us with a wealth of valuable information.

Using the Gaylord, Demco, and Highsmith library supply catalogs borrowed from the Montgomery County Public Library, we compiled a list of necessary supplies. At this time, we were introduced to the purchasing procedures used by the Department of Correction. While awaiting the arrival of library supplies (which were not obtained until August), the following duties were performed:

1. Preparation of the LSCA grant application;
2. Compilation of library rules and regulations;
3. Discarding of old, inappropriate books;
4. Classification of all salvageable books;
5. Procurement of additional library furniture;
6. Functional arrangement of the shelving;
7. Inventory of all books and equipment;
8. Preparation of shelf title guides;
9. Requests for current catalogs, as well as possible donations, were sent to publishers;
10. Stencils were prepared for monthly circulation statistics.



Southern Correctional Center in Troy.

On April 25, 1983, we received a number of minimum security inmates. These inmates resided at Southern for less than a month and assisted in preparing the institution to house its permanent population of medium security inmates. A temporary check-out system was put in place in the library to accommodate these inmates.

The first of our medium security inmates arrived on May 23. By this date, we had established a permanent schedule for inmate use of the library. This schedule permitted each inmate to visit the library twice a week for not more than one hour per visit. Inmates were to be escorted to the library by a correctional officer who was to remain in the library during their visit. Due to the small size of the library, no more than ten inmates were allowed to utilize the facility at a given time. Arrangements were made for inmates in disciplinary and administrative segregation (solitary confinement) to receive books from a book cart transported to their unit.

On May 16, we signed a film service agreement with the Film Service Branch of the North Carolina State Library. This enabled us to begin borrowing 16mm films.

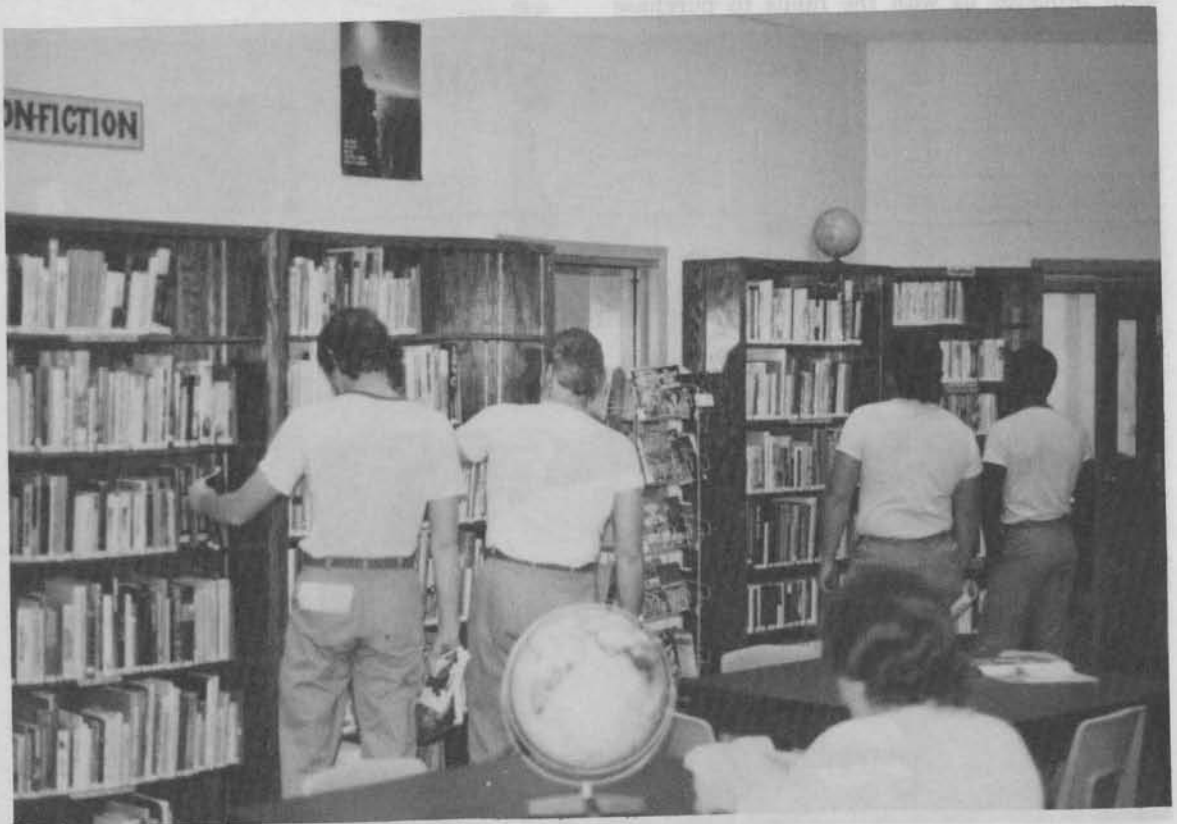
In June, the DOC consultant informed us that we had been approved to receive \$950 from the inmate welfare fund to be used for the purchase of reference books for the library. We ordered a set of World Book encyclopedias, as well as other needed reference materials with these funds.

Donations from various sources continued to arrive almost weekly and by July the book collection exceeded 1,000 books. Circulation reports continued to show a steady increase. Inmates began expressing a desire for more new books and in August, we distributed an inmate reading interest survey form to assess our patrons' needs. August also brought the arrival of our magazines and our processing supplies.

Foreseeing the vast amount of work ahead, the prison administration assigned an inmate aide to the library.

The State Library institutional consultant brought a number of paperback books in August, as well as the good news that our grant had been approved. The \$4,200 in grant funds allowed us to purchase additional books and enough equipment to initiate our listening center operation.

The listening center features wireless headsets and has proved to be a very popular library



Piedmont Correctional Center's vocational carpentry class built the seven-foot shelves that the inmates are browsing.

program. Statistical reports for 1984 indicate an average of 213 inmates utilizing this resource per month. Listeners have the privilege of selecting music by their favorite artists. A wide array of cassettes and phonodiscs provide patrons with many types of music, such as rock and pop, rhythm and blues, gospel, soul, jazz, and country. Religious and motivational tapes are also available upon request.

A non-reader in prison is truly locked out as well as locked up.

With the continuing contribution of books from the State Library, donations from the Department of Correction and from individuals, and materials purchased with LSCA and inmate welfare funds, the book inventory has increased to over 2,000 volumes by January 1984. Four-foot book shelves would no longer accommodate our growing collection. With funds provided by the inmate welfare fund, we arranged for Piedmont Correctional Center's vocational carpentry class to build seven-foot book shelves for the library. We received these shelves in February. The institution itself provided us with the funds to purchase

three revolving book racks, thus providing us with additional shelving space.

In June 1984, we submitted another LSCA proposal. The library received \$2,045 from this effort. \$1,000 was spent on books, \$420 on phonodiscs and cassettes, and \$625 on listening center equipment which included a turntable and three wireless headsets. Inmate welfare funds were applied towards the purchase of another cassette recorder and four additional headsets.

By the end of December 1984, our book inventory increased to 3,300. According to 1984 circulation statistics, the percentages of types of materials circulated were as follows:

BOOKS	
Non-fiction	17%
Mysteries	13%
Westerns	14%
Science Fiction	3%
Occult	4%
Other	14%
	<hr/>
	65%

Magazines accounted for 35% of the total print circulation. No record is kept of newspaper use.



An inmate prison aide checks out materials to another inmate at Southern Correctional Center Library.

The three most popular authors in the collection are Donald Goines (black experience), Louis L'Amour (western) and Harold Robbins (soft core sex). The most popular magazines are "soft porn" types such as "Playboy," "Penthouse," and "Players." "People," "Ebony," and "Sports Illustrated" are also in demand.

Our increased book inventory and the addition to our listening center boosted our number of patrons to 1,717 in January 1985. Our total circulation for the same month reached a record high of 2,559 items.

Future plans for the library include discarding all noncirculating items to allow space for books proven to be in demand. With the purchase of additional book racks, we anticipate housing a

collection of around 8,000 books. We hope to make the library's physical appearance more appealing by carpeting the floor and adding some lounge-type furniture. We foresee establishing a computer station for the recreational and self-educational purposes of our patrons. Relying on institutional and inmate welfare funds, donations coordinated by the Department of Correction and individuals, state and federal grant funds, and book money administered by the State Library, we will strive to maintain and build upon a good beginning. Our prison library, although small, is viewed as a quality product. It is one that the inmates themselves view as a Mecca for enlightenment and for brief periods of escape: a window to the outside world. A non-reader in prison is truly locked out as well as locked up.

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CHECK TYPE OF DUES:

- SPECIAL—Trustees, paraprofessional and support staff, non-salaried persons, retired librarians, library school students, "Friends of the Library," and non-librarians \$15.00
- LIBRARIANS—earning up to \$12,000 \$22.00
- LIBRARIANS—earning \$12,000 to \$20,000 \$30.00
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- CONTRIBUTING—individual, Association, Firm, etc. interested in the work of NCLA \$50.00
- INSTITUTIONAL—Same for all libraries \$50.00

CHECK SECTIONS: One free; \$4.00 each additional.

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Mail to: Eunice Drum, Treasurer, NCLA, Division of State Library, 109 East Jones Street, Raleigh, NC 27611.