



Libraries complete

the mental wellness picture

Here are 5 tips for a dynamic library service

by Judith Tapiero, MLS

For centuries libraries have played an important role in society as sources of knowledge and places of learning. In small towns or large cities, libraries are frequently at the center of the community, providing friendly and familiar environments for reading, learning and exchanging ideas. So, too, a library service is a valuable asset in today's adult communities.

The resources and programs of a library can contribute to the mental well-being of adults by encouraging mentally stimulating activities and social interaction. Libraries that are well stocked with current information materials and computer resources can foster learning opportunities for community residents and help them take advantage of the resources available on the Internet and at nearby educational institutions. Moreover, the programs organized by an actively managed library create opportunities for social interaction and raise self-esteem through volunteer work and event participation.

For a library to encourage adult involvement, it must offer services with community activities and user interests in mind. Too often adult community libraries consist of a few shelves of outdated paperbacks that no one reads. With planning and the right resources, however, those shelves can be transformed into a community asset that actively contributes to the mental well-being of adults ages 50 and older.

The resources and services provided by a library complement the physical wellness activities of older adults. Mental and physical wellness go hand in hand. As such, a library offering diverse reading materials and engaging programs is a solid investment in the cognitive well-being of community residents.

Here are 5 tips to help you build and maintain a vibrant library in your adult community:

1. Use the talents and skills of local, retired professional librarians

A professional librarian has a master's degree in Library Science (MLS) accredited by the American Library Association, the organization that promotes quality library services and represents the professionals who provide them. You can be sure a professional librarian has the experience and knowledge to help organize and manage

a dynamic library service for your community. Because of their professional status and knowledge of where to go and whom to ask, librarians can tap exclusive library networks to obtain materials and resources that might elude a nonprofessional.

2. Have a budget for purchasing new and varied materials

Relying on donations can lead to a collection of books and magazines that no one wants to read. The library should have its own budget, as well as guidelines on its subject and interest areas. For example, an adult community with a golf course and tennis courts would have a collection of materials entirely different from a waterfront community, where individuals enjoy boating and fishing. Depending on the adult community, some library collections may have substantial numbers of large-print books and audio tapes, while others may have electronic books on CDs and iPods.

Still another consideration for a library budget is access to the library collection over a computer network, so residents can select and borrow materials in the convenience of their homes. Here again, a professional librarian will know how to set up a reasonable library operating budget and how to allocate funds to achieve the greatest return on investment.

3. Develop library programs and events

A popular choice for library programs is the book club. Mental stimulation and social interaction is achieved by engaging adults in conversations about books, events and topics of interest. Other programs an adult community library can coordinate include:

- information exchanges where the knowledge and expertise of residents is shared with others
- author talks by writers or authors speaking about their work complemented by book signings
- travelogues featuring the trips of recent travelers

- presentations by regional experts in finance, and healthcare, as well as hobbies, antique appraisals, cooking, sports, and more.

Another option is to invite the instructors and professors of any nearby educational institutions to lead discussions on a range of topics. All these events can be augmented by library resources, so that residents who want to continue learning and exploring the program topic can do so with the help of the community librarian.

4. Offer computer resources that are “senior-friendly” and provide access to credible electronic resources

Having a professional librarian will help an adult community library to manage computer equipment and electronic resources. The American Library Association is actively involved in the 2005 White House Conference on Aging, which will make recommendations on aging policy for years to come. The conference agenda includes:

- the use of computers by older adults to access evolving healthcare and aging resources in electronic formats
- the *senior-friendly* aspects of computer interfaces

Because they have been at the forefront of helping people get the most out of computer-based information, libraries remain the best place for sharing computer resources. While the Internet offers plenty of information, not all of it is credible, accurate or current. Under the guidance of a librarian, older adults can be sure they are browsing and using reliable information that best matches their particular needs.

5. Make the library a centerpiece of the adult community

Libraries that are dynamic and actively engage people contribute to the social fiber of an adult community. In addition to programs and events, a well-managed library offers volunteer opportunities, giving individuals a sense

of purpose and enhancing their self-esteem.

Volunteers can assist a professional librarian in numerous ways, including:

- delivering materials to homebound adults
- assisting with day-to-day activities, such as processing the mail, checking out materials, and displaying new magazines
- assisting with the coordination of library-sponsored events
- writing brief reviews about books and library activities for the community or library newsletter
- updating library webpages with new books and materials added to the library collections

Adult communities benefit from well-developed library services, too. Residents feel proud of their communities and the amenities they enjoy. A vibrant library is an asset that is not only a source of pride for individuals, but also an attractive feature for prospective homebuyers.

A dynamic library in an adult community is a welcoming and familiar place. It's a social hub for exchanging ideas, and exploring and learning new things. As a source for mentally stimulating activities, an actively managed library is the perfect partner to physical wellness programming in adult communities. ☞

Judith Tapiero, MLS, is a professional librarian and president of The Organized Library. She has spent more than 20 years creating and building libraries for more than 150 organizations and private collectors, including several women's health associations and the United States Golf Association. Her LifeStyle Library™, a complete library service designed for active adult communities, is being placed in residential communities throughout the United States and Canada. Additional information about Tapiero and the LifeStyle Library™ is available by phoning 866-539-6585 or by visiting www.theorganizedlibrary.com/index.html.