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Libraries for all: the place of advocacy and marketing in promoting library services to disadvantaged groups.

By

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Abstract
Libraries exist to meet its user's basic needs for information by acquiring and organizing information resources, creating enabling environment and providing adequate services to users. Once users' needs, future trends and resources available have been established, the librarian is in a position to plan the marketing objectives, the resources to be used, the place and the time scale of the operation and the strategies required in achieving them. Information professionals must therefore understand that it is essential to actively advocate and market their services. Library advocacy and marketing is critical for any information professional in order to spread the word about their library. They need to draw attention to their library, their services, their worth to their community, their administration, their staff, and their users. This paper takes a look at library and information services to disadvantaged groups, the place of advocacy and marketing in promoting library services to disadvantaged groups and strategies for promoting library services to disadvantaged groups. Conclusion was made by recommending that there is need to build collaborative ventures with stakeholder saddled with information dissemination in order to create awareness for the use of library services by disadvantaged group.

Keywords: Advocacy, Marketing, Disadvantaged groups, Information service, Libraries.

Introduction

Information is power and its importance to the success of every aspiring individual cannot be underestimated. Valuable information determine to a very large extent one's success and future development. Every person, be it normal or challenged is to be given free access to information. Consequently, the library is seen as a facility that comprises items and materials that

can be accessed for the extraction of information from a specified location which includes the storage mediums of such information. Libraries therefore exist to meet its user's basic needs for information by acquiring and organizing information resources, creating enabling environment and providing adequate services to users. Jaccarino[1] rightly noted that, "*for libraries to add to the advancement of knowledge, they must not only provide resources but also ensure that the resources are effectively used*" . In this regard, libraries have the mandate of providing access to its resources and making sure that all patrons effectively use the resources. Therefore, Libraries are in the unique position of being a community's sole source of information. They have a responsibility to collect and provide information to their users.

Advocacy on the other according to the Chambers 21st Century Dictionary[2] "*is to recommend, support an idea or proposal especially in the public*" . Gorman[3] defines to advocate as " *to plead in favour of, in support of, promote and defend publicly, and advocacy as "a system of organized support, promotion, and defense of a cause, an association, or an institution in the public arena*". Similarly, Alliance for Justice[4] sees advocacy as "*any action that speaks in favour of, recommends, argues for a cause, supports or defends, or pleads on behalf of others*". When thinking about library advocacy, it is important to know what you want to accomplish through your advocacy campaign.

> *Brey-Casiano[5] pointed out critical questions to answer to include: Do you want to gain support for a new library facility? Pass a tax referendum? Increase your library's overall budget? He further noted that in order to think through what you want to accomplish effectively, it sometimes helps to dream a little, envision what your library will look like when you have accomplished your goal.*

For advocacy to succeed as a concept, it has to employ marketing strategies. Marketing is frequently viewed as a set of strategies and techniques that belong to administrators other than librarians. However librarians are involved in the process of marketing. Kotler[6] noted *that marketing deals with identifying and meeting human and social needs*. Besant[7] as cited by Chiwanza & Musingafi supports Kotler opinion and argues that librarians and information professionals using this concept are heading for success. Thus the essence of marketing involves finding out what the users want, then setting out to meet those needs. Once users' needs, future trends and resources available have been established the librarian is in a position to plan the

marketing objectives, the resources to be used, the place and the time scale of the operation and the strategies required achieving them. Information professionals must therefore understand that it is essential to actively market their services. Library marketing is critical for any information professional in order to spread the word about their library . *It doesn't matter what library type, it doesn't matter how large or small the library is - you need to draw attention to your library, your services, your worth to your community, your administration, your staff, and your users* Ajay & Sapna.[8] It is in this context that marketing strategies will be used for advancing library and library services advocacy. In specific terms, therefore, library advocacy and marketing translates into public support and promotion of individual libraries or library services in the public domain to enable the library meet the various needs of its patrons.

Since libraries are established to ensure that everyone regardless of his 'age, race, gender, religion, disability, cultural identity, language, socioeconomic status, lifestyle choice, political allegiance or social viewpoint' has equal access to information, the disadvantaged group is not left. A disadvantaged group is defined by the particular pattern of denied resources and barriers it faces (rather than the fact of race, or poverty, or sex) Mayer[9]

Mayer[ibid] also pointed out that

> *A disadvantaged group may face more than one barrier. Some barriers may be more easily surmounted or moved than others. Each group presents its own pattern of "disadvantagement" and barriers to self-sufficiency; the implied solutions would vary from group to group as well. A major feature of "disadvantagement" is the presence of "barriers to self-sufficiency." These barriers are the ways in which people are denied access to needed tools, and include unavailability of resources, inaccessibility to resources, the society's regard for a group, government and corporate practices, and certain conditions of the group itself.*

Talking about disadvantaged group in a society that is looking for special assistance, the tendency is to focus almost only on the physically and mentally impaired and on those who are confined to a place either legally (prisons) or politically (refugees) or by natural disaster (earth upheaval). There are other classifications of disadvantaged groups but a more accommodating definition for disadvantaged group as noted by Unegbu[10] would be "*people who are physically, mentally, socially, politically, economically, racially, culturally, religiously, and environmentally*

deprived of the privileges and rights due them from the government or the civil society. Instances of people under this category are illiterates, semi-literates, low income earners, elderly, prisoners, hospital patients, physically challenged, people with special needs, refugees, to mention a few". Bearing in mind the limitations of different disadvantaged groups, library and information services should be provided in the format that will be most appreciated and helpful to them.

Library and Information Service to Disadvantaged Groups

The library has been described as a home for all; a level playing ground for all and sundry. The disadvantaged groups in the society are multifaceted and depicts a group that are hindered owing to physical, location, status, knowledge, among other limitations. People in this category include aged, physically challenged, prisoners, illiterates and half-literate, to mention a few. In an article titled "Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners" Lehmann and Joanne[11] noted that the extent and level of library services to the inmates should be based on a demographic profile of the prison population and the library long-range plan. They opined that user services should include, but not be limited to:

- *reference and information service through in-house materials and, where feasible, Internet resources – to meet patrons' needs for facts and data*
- *readers advisory service – to recommend to patrons items of interest and at appropriate reading levels*
- *regular library orientation and instruction in the use of the library*
- *interlibrary loan – to access other library collections through participation in regional and state systems, networks, or other cooperative relationships*
- *provision of special materials for patrons with disabilities (e.g., materials from the national library for the blind, disability support groups, etc.). Library programs such as author readings, book clubs & discussions, literary and "fact" contests that use library resources, creative writing, workshops, music programs, art workshops & displays, literacy tutoring, spelling contests, holiday & cultural celebrations and job fairs were suggested by them.*

ALA[12] identified services to older adults such as including:

> *Inter-generational programs and participating in inter-generational projects sponsored by others in the community; pursuing other opportunities for cooperative programming with partners such as community and senior center; providing computer and internet courses specifically designed for older adults to accommodate a slower pace of instruction, providing sufficient time to develop "mousing skills," and allow for the possibility that some older adults may have visual, physical, or hearing disabilities; exploring opportunities to provide library services and programming to older adults outside the library, such as in senior or community centers, nursing homes, and senior housing units; using library displays to combat ageism or the stereotypes in our society about older adults; and creating opportunities for lifelong learning programs among older adults.*

More so, beyond building and circulating a collection of library materials, a library serving hospital patients should provide at least some services and programs.

> *Regularly-scheduled book cart service to patient floors should be a fundamental service in any institution caring for a large number of semi- or non-ambulatory people. Ideally, the service should be provided twice weekly, although local circumstances will ultimately decide that; An interlibrary loan program will provide users with materials unavailable to them through the library's own collections; Reference services are especially important where the library provides health information materials and resources, the sheer wealth of which can easily overwhelm the lay person; Readers' advisory (or readers' guidance) is particularly important in long-stay institutions where patients stand to benefit from ongoing, individualized reading programs. The goals of reader's advisory can be education, diversion, or therapy; the patients' library should encourage and support bibliotherapy programs* Panella.[13]

Marketing and Advocacy as a Tool for Democratization of Information

The concept of democratization has a political undertone and refers to the transition to a democratic political regime. However, in this context, we are interested in the tenets or principles of core democracy and that is equality. As a normative concept, *equality is the notion that there is some special respect in which all human beings are in fact equal (descriptive) but that this factual equality requires that we treat them in a special way. Special treatment may mean ensuring identical treatment, or it may mean differential treatment to restore them to or to aid them in reaching or realizing the specific factual state* Capaldi[14]. Similarly, Blackford[15] noted that "*Equality is a state of affair in which all people have the same status in certain respects, often including civil rights and equal access to social goods and services*". The equal right of people to information cannot be overemphasized. It is in view of this that most democratic nations have outlined the rights to information acts in a bid to empower its citizens irrespective of colour or other physical challenges. The equality of access to information is brought to the fore or projected through advocacy and marketing. On the one hand, there are evidently some disadvantaged groups in our society, but access to information by these groups is enhanced by advocating for proper channels and efficient media for reaching them. Advocacy also serves as a tool of bringing to the attention of relevant government agencies or non-governmental organization about the information needs of disadvantaged groups and the utmost necessity of meeting these needs.

On the other hand, marketing serves as a tool of awareness creation. In a democratic setting, an awareness of the rights and privileges due to an individual or people will prevent an abuse or neglect by others. In the same vein, marketing brings to the awareness of disadvantaged group the vast access opportunity as well library and information services available to them; hence giving them the chance to gain access and participate with other members of the society. It is on these bases that marketing and advocacy are described as tools for democratization of information.

Strategies for Promoting Library Services to the Disadvantaged Group

Advocacy and marketing plays a central role in the promotion of library services to the disadvantaged group (mobility impairments, visually impaired, hearing impairment, ethnic/language minorities, geographically deprived, socially deprived, learning disabled, aged, e.t.c). As libraries, Library and Information Scientists (LIS), Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), Nigerian Library Association (NLA), government ministries and agencies, Non-governmental organization (NGO), stakeholders and spirited individuals must work collaboratively to ensure that the library exist for all. Specifically, Hicken[16] outlined that appropriate advocacy and marketing provides that:

- Social inclusion should be the mainstreamed as a policy priority within library and information services

- Library authorities should consult and involve socially excluded group to ascertain their needs and aspirations.

- Opening hours should be more flexible, tailored to reflect to the needs and interests of the community.

- Library authorities should consider the possibilities of co-locating their facilities with other services provided by the local authorities.

- Libraries should be local learning places and champions of the independent learner.

- Libraries should be a major vehicle for providing affordable (or preferably free) access to ICT at local level.

- Library and information services should form partnerships with other learning organisation.

More so, the framework for the future is that libraries irrespective of types should meet the needs of the disadvantaged group in the 21st century through appropriate strategies as: promotion of reading and informal learning, access to digital skills and services, building community identity and developing citizenship. In addition, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) in Library and Information Commission[17] (LIC) suggested the following measures as strategies for effective ways for Promoting Library Services to the Disadvantaged Group :

❖ plan for a more inclusive workforce, reflecting the whole society; by advocacy to government and key stakeholders; by support for leadership development and acting as an exemplar organisation.

❖ Encourage LIC organisation to mainstream services to disadvantaged group regardless of the organisational changes required; help to ensure that support is available by working in partnership with other relevant agencies; seek to influence government and agencies to support such change.

❖ Encourage and help the LIC organisation to form partnership and engage in community activities to ensure that the disadvantaged group are at the centre of service delivery.

❖ Ensure that lifelong learning strategy has information literacy as a social inclusion issue; thereby advocating and marketing for the importance of informal learning as a method of involving disadvantaged group; promotes the importance of workplace libraries and outreach library services as a resource for providing learning opportunities for the disadvantaged group and encourage libraries to promote empowerment by equality of access to all the community.

❖ Monitor research and best practices in work related to social inclusions and diversity.

In a nutshell, for advocacy and marketing strategies to promote library services among the disadvantaged group; staff training, community profiling and faceted partnership with all level concerned must be strictly adhered to and supported by packaging and repackaging of information product with sound and systematic product promotion. Moreover DDG and BlueFrog[18] stated that these four key marketing strategies will fast-track promotion of library services to the disadvantaged. They include:

❖ Introducing more people to the library (i.e. breaking down objections) thereby promoting full range of library services as not all audience in all library services and target specific audience

❖ Increase library enquiries (phones, foot, website and external) which increases awareness of the library service through varying range of communication mediums

❖ Promote services to increased traffic (cross-selling and up-selling library services)

❖ Build interest groups for greater engagement with library services (platform for advocates)

Conclusion

Having discussed the concepts of: libraries and library for all, advocacy and marketing of library services and disadvantaged groups as well as strategies for promoting library services to the disadvantaged group. It is pertinent to state here that library from the origin existed for all and as such no individual should be deprived of its services irrespective of age, economic status, physical status, cultural affiliations, language barriers, colour, educational status, gender and location. Hence, this paper posits that library services should be extended to all in order to comply with the universal access to knowledge which the libraries irrespective of types and forms seek to achieve.

Recommendations

Based on the above discussion this paper recommends the following:

➢ The provision of library services that is centered on the need of the user (i.e. disadvantaged group)

➢ The repacking of library services that will address the information needs of the selected disadvantaged group

➢ The establishment of libraries in remote location where these disadvantaged groups resides so as to bring library services to their door steps.

➢ The building of collaborative ventures with stakeholder such as, National Orientation Agencies (NOA), Nigeria Bar Association (NBA), educational Institution, other non-governmental organization (NGOs) saddled with information dissemination in order to create awareness for the use of library services by the disadvantaged group.

➢ The librarians, librarians registration councils and the National Library of Nigeria to partner with other media houses, to create awareness on the need for disadvantaged groups to use libraries and their services

➢ The use of modern technologies in library services should be embraced by librarians in delivering services to the disadvantaged groups so as to enhance utility.

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