

Bookmobile Staff Perceptions on Bookmobile Service: A National Survey

by
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Introduction

On, October 2, 2007, The Boston Globe published the following article:

“Bookmobiles' final chapter? A few libraries, drivers refuse to give up on relic of days gone by” Within its text, it described a bookmobile as “now a ragged shadow of itself, with malfunctioning heaters, a rheumatic suspension, and an engine that huffs gray smoke whenever it is coaxed to speeds over 40 miles per hour.” It described the bookmobile driver as “a relic of an era whose glory days are in the past” and quoted Tina Wilson, branch manager at Cleveland Public Library as saying "I sold bookmobiles for 15 years, and I would come across people who said 'bookmobiles are dinosaurs' and 'bookmobiles are fading,' "

The rebuttal to the article’s claims was immediate. Tena Wilson of the Cleveland Public Library exclaimed “I'm sending a statement this week. When he quoted me saying that I hear people (i.e. library school professor) saying "bookmobiles are dinosaurs," he neglected to finish the rest of my sentence – they aren't! When people say bookmobiles are a thing of the past, they are incorrect! Bookmobiles are as vital as they ever were.” Amy Stephens of Tulsa Library stated “I think the most irritating thing in this article is that it completely ignores the variety of uses there are for mobile services! Even if it was true that this particular aspect of service may be waning, look at senior living! Jail service! At risk communities! Preschool programs....”

Eleanor Francis Brown in 1967 wrote “Poor (bookmobile) service is worse than no service at all, because it engenders dissatisfaction with the entire idea of bookmobile operation” (Brown, 46), and her words still ring true 40 years later.

From across the country, the responses came, swift and numerous- librarians, bookmobilers, individual libraries and entire library systems across the nation, vigorously defending the modern bookmobile. What is about such a service that engenders so many impassioned defenses? Are they truly the dinosaurs that the article maintained- aging hulks going off into the sunset of extinction? Or do they exemplify what modern paleontology is now discovering about dinosaurs? That, in fact, dinosaurs did not completely disappear. Some evolved- adapting to changing environments, growing feathers and eventually becoming the ancestors of some of our modern day birds. Is this what bookmobiles have done? As Tena Wilson stated, “Bookmobiles are as vital as they ever were -- only the target groups are evolving, adapting as societal needs change. Perhaps the only ones fading are those who are not adapting”

Literature Review

So what is it about bookmobiles? To many people, as it was to the newspaper reporter, the day of the bookmobile is past. It's part of a lovely bygone era but hardly has its place in the technology laden, internet driven, modern world of today. Even so, bookmobiles still take to the roads through out the United States everyday- “booking on down the road”.

As a consequence we must evaluate their use and ask –Why do bookmobiles exist? Do they have a roll to play in the modern world? If so, what is it? These are important questions to be answered if we are to understand the bookmobile of today.

To begin, how do you define what a bookmobile is? What image does the term bring to mind? If a mechanical wheeled vehicle, resembling a bus of sorts filled with books comes to mind, you're not alone. However in the past and still in some parts of the world the image of the bookmobile might be replaced with donkey cart, a pair of camels or a boat. For indeed the word “bookmobile” literally means “books in motion” “Whenever books are taken out of the four walls of a library building and transported to the areas in which the people live, so that they are given an opportunity to select what they will read, even though the choice may be limited, we have the rudiments of what today we call “bookmobile service” (Brown, 13).

How did bookmobiles come to be? Why were they started? Who did they serve? And how did they attempt to meet the needs of those that they served?

The history of books traveling away from libraries to meet the needs of remote users actually begins before the “official” date of the first bookmobile. Traveling libraries, “a collection of books lent to a community for general reading” were boxed up and sent to various communities to make a sort of browsing collection (Bullock, 1).

In 1893, Melvil Dewey, obtained “a state appropriate to experiment in library extension” and sent off the first traveling collection on February 8 of that same year. Soon traveling libraries were being sent throughout the United States. Michigan and Iowa began traveling collections in 1895, followed by Wisconsin and Ohio in 1896.

By 1899, 2500 traveling libraries existed in the US, many funded by women's clubs, farm grange organizations or private philanthropists. These libraries were circulated by canal boats in Washington D.C., pack mules in Kentucky and Tennessee, by street cars in Europe, by air in Alaska, New Mexico and Texas, and by railroad car across the country (Brown, 13).

However, it is generally regarded that the first bookmobile began officially in 1905 in Washington County, Maryland, where it "began as the dream of a dedicated librarian to carry the magic of books to rural residents" (Brown, 13). Mary Titcomb, librarian of Washington County Free Library in Hagarstown, Maryland had maintained rural deposit collections as early as 1904 by sending the janitor, Joshua Thomas, with a hired horse and Concord wagon around to each deposit collection, keeping the collection renewed with new volumes. However in 1905, the janitor began driving a team of horses hitched to a converted spring wagon which held 250 volumes. It is this vehicle that most regard as the first bookmobile. The wagon covered 16 different routes, over 500 square miles and took four days to make one round trip (Brown, 14).

In 1906 Melvil Dewey, although he apparently had not heard about the success of Mary Titcomb's bookmobile, made a suggestion for "field libraries". He recommended that a traveling book wagon with a traveling librarian go to places too small to support a permanent organization similar to the commercial traveler, missionary or traveling orchestra, that were common at the time. "It is," he asserted, "after all not the few great libraries but the thousand small ones that may do most for the people."

Mary Titcomb's first bookmobile lasted until 1910 when it was destroyed when it was struck by a train. Service was suspended until 1912 when a donation enabled them to create a specially equipped automobile which could hold 600 books.

In 1916, Plainfield Public Library in Indiana became the second library in the United States to have a bookmobile when it started house-to-house distribution using a touring car (Brown, 18). .

Why bookmobile service was started at this point in history is a mixture of different factors. One factor is the basic realization that the rural dweller was cut off from what the library existed to offer. As Mary Titcomb explained, "No better method has ever been devised for reaching the dweller in the country. The book goes to the man, not waiting for the man to come to the book" (Titcomb, 15).

But also at this point in time, the emphasis was not only on providing materials but on providing beneficial materials that would uplift and improve the lot of the rural dweller as Edna Bullock expressed in her 1907 book The Management of Traveling Libraries "...the belief that this class of literature will help people to live on farms and in villages more intelligently and therefore more contentedly..." Much thought was given to making not only the lot of the rural dweller better but to make them into a better Americans. Edna Bullock also stated "a most significant testimonial not only that illiteracy is becoming unpopular, but that good taste in reading is to become an American habit" (3). In 1919, Hibbing Public Library in Minnesota with the proclaimed purpose of "making better Americans of the mine workers" started a bookmobile service to serve mining villages, schools and temporary camps. They carried titles in English, Croatian, Finnish, French, German,

Greek, Italian, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Serbian, Slovenian, Spanish and Swedish (Brown, 20) in what is believed to be the first walk-in bookmobile (Vanbrimmer, 20-21).

There was concern for not only making good citizens but also making them moral and upright readers who chose the “right sort” of books, to deliberately direct readers to the great and serious literature and away from the much maligned “penny dreadfuls” of the day. “In the cities, the public libraries are alive to the necessity of getting people to read, and to read that which is, at least, not distinctly harmful, with strenuous efforts to promote the more vigorous and helpful sort of reading” recommended Edna Bullock in her 1907 book The Management of Traveling Libraries. She instructed her readers, that when they choose books for the traveling libraries:

The traveling library should carry “sweetness and light” into the remote places but especially the sweetness. Cheerful, clean and wholesome fiction is the most effective conductor of the sweetness and not without its value as a transmitter of light (3)... In these days, when the farmer is just as close to the heart of the world as the rest of us, if he chooses to be, he is greeted by a bewildering opportunity for choice among mediocre and even more vicious publications that were common even twenty years ago. There are capable men and women, highly cultivated and useful citizens, whose early reading was largely of the character then current in the cheap weeklies; but who shall dare to prophesy that the youth of to-day, whose literary excursions take him into the company of “Buster Brown” and “Happy Hooligan”, will have an even chance with the youth of a generation ago to develop into a useful and law abiding citizen? The influence of the dukes, haughty countesses, swaggering pirates, and common ruffians of those days was certainly not so quickly transmuted into bad conduct as that of the current yellow favorite (9).

So, the combination of realizing the needs of those who could not get to libraries easily combined with the ideals to make better people out their readers

created a new movement to bring the book to the reader, when the reader could not come to it.

Throughout the 1920's, bookmobiles, now called book wagons or trucks, continued to appear throughout the United States. In 1926, Greenville, South Carolina gained its first bookmobile, followed by St. Louis, Missouri; Birmingham, Alabama; Clarksdale, Mississippi; Detroit, Michigan; Durham, North Carolina; Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and Portland, Oregon.

Urban service also started at this time in New York City, Evanston, Illinois and Dayton, Ohio. In these, it was usually considered the best way to supply books to heavily populated sections of the city until a permanent branch could be built (Vanbrimmer, 21).

In the 1930's the depression hit, resulting in dramatic cuts to library funding across the nation. At the same time, there was more demand than ever for library service as those unemployed looked to strengthen work skills and fill free time and everyone looked for cheap forms of entertainment. In 1937, there were only 60 bookmobiles in operation in the United States (Brown, 28). Unfortunately, there is little other information about bookmobile service during this period. However in 1939-1940, the Work Projects Administration (WPA) began funding library projects, covering the costs of books, salaries and vehicles and again bookmobile service expanded (Vanbrimmer, 25). During World War II, bookmobiles had to cope with the rubber shortage for tires as new tires were limited to essential military needs only. Despite this, in October 1944 a national bookmobile census found 300 bookmobiles

in operation and with an estimated 1,000 vehicles needed for replacement or new service needs (Brown, 26).

By December 1947, there were 377 bookmobiles throughout the United States. The Library Services Act in 1956, aimed at improving library services in rural areas, followed by the Library Services and Construction Act of 1964, which made urban areas eligible as well, greatly improved funding and bookmobile service boomed. There were 2,000 bookmobiles in the United States in the early 1970's. However bookmobile numbers began to level off due to the building of many more permanent branch libraries in outlying areas and the fuel crisis of the 1970's. ("Your fuel costs may go to a dollar a gallon!" predicted one author in 1979 (Maroney, 15).

The 1980's saw the continuation of these forces combined with reevaluation of services and a realignment of spending. This led to some library systems to discontinue their bookmobile programs. In 1981, Maine ended its 25 year bookmobile service, replacing it with deposit collections. In the same year, New Mexico looked to books-by-mail service (Vanbrimmer, 28).

Nevertheless, an Adult Services in the Eighties project found that 38 percent of the library systems serving a population of twenty-five thousand or more provided bookmobile service in 1987. The exact number of bookmobiles in use during the 1980's is hard to determine. The above project did not get responses from a number of states and estimated the total number, based on what information they did gather saying "Thus we can be confident of a minimum of 1,130 bookmobiles in the U.S. in 1988 and can reasonably assume that the maximum does not much exceed 1,222. In

fact, since there are no bookmobiles currently in Maine, and very likely none in Vermont, 1,175 is a fair maximum” (Boyce, 46).

However the survey also showed that “Ninety percent of the surveyed libraries expect to continue bookmobile service in the 1990s, and 53 percent expect their bookmobile service to increase over the next ten years. A decrease in service is anticipated by 14 percent, and 33 percent expect no change. Forty percent are currently planning the purchase of a new bookmobile”(Boyce, 49).

Indeed, the 1990’s continued these trends. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the Department of Education in 1991 showed surprisingly that “the bookmobile still plays a significant role in the provision of library service.” It reported that about 970 libraries, across the country use about 1,000 bookmobiles in their programs (Philip, 30). The average bookmobile in the 1990’s was a bus or van type vehicle, an average of 9 years old. Fifty percent of bookmobiles carried fewer than 2,500 hardbound titles, consisting of approximately 39 % children's books and 45 % adult materials (Boyce, 58).

In 2000, a survey regarding rural bookmobile service conducted and came up with the conclusion “rural bookmobile service in the United States is alive and serving patrons well”. This was based on 121 responses from bookmobiles across the United States, drawing from 28 states. Seniors, school children, and teachers were the largest segment of the population served. However, 40 percent of the respondents served the mentally or physically challenged, and 31 percent served the homebound. Bookmobiles stopped at a wide variety of locations to serve their users- churches, grocery or general stores, schools, post offices, main cross roads, rural schools, and

individual homes. Average circulation for a rural bookmobile is 40,000 to 49,000 items, and average patron use is 1,000 to 14,999 patrons (Meadows, 47-48).

It is clear that after 102 years, despite great changes in technology, in vehicles, and in libraries themselves, bookmobiles are still being used throughout the United States. However, it's not enough to note that bookmobiles are still roaming the streets. We need to know, what is being done with them. Why do they still exist? How have they adapted to the changing times? Who do they serve and why do these persons need their services?

First, why do bookmobiles still exist? What is our philosophical justification for starting and maintaining such a service?

“So long as we have readers and the necessity for equalization of library opportunity in any part of the world, we will have need of bookmobiles,” stated Eleanor Francis Brown in 1967. It has been long recognized that it is not enough for a library to just service a certain portion of a population. Long gone are the southern libraries, pre-civil rights era, that served only whites or the northern subscription libraries that served only those with enough money to pay the yearly fees or even the early public libraries serving only adults. It is a fundamental foundation to public libraries everywhere that there should be equal access for all. The Public Library Association's “The Public Library: Democracy's Resource, A Statement of Principles” states “Free access to ideas and information, a prerequisite to the existence of a responsible citizenship is as a fundamental to America as are the principles of freedom and equality and individual rights. This access is also fundamental to our social political and cultural systems...Access to information and

the recorded wisdom and experience of others has long been held a requirement for achieving personal equality and for improving the quality of life and thought in the daily activities and relationships of individuals” (Philip, In Defense, 1).

But how can libraries achieve universal public access? It is not enough to build a library building, throw open the doors and wait for the community to wander in. Philip states that “Community analysis and librarian experience indicate that most library patrons live as close as 2 or 3 miles from the libraries they use, and a significant percentage travel about a mile to use the library” (Philip, Bookmobile Service, 2). Thus, the physical building might reach a percentage of those who live close by, but what about those who live farther away? What about those who can’t travel even those few miles? How far do we expect a mother with young children to walk? What about those with disabilities or the elderly? What happens when these people have no transportation and no public transportation is available? What physical barriers such as major highways or large rivers keep people from getting to the library? In addition, there are other barriers that keep people from wandering through our doors. There are barriers of cultural differences, various languages, fears, psychological barriers, and a host of other reasons can keep people out of the library building.

“The old idea that “the books are in the library, let those who will come and get them” has long since been outmoded. Everywhere libraries are reaching out beyond their doors, becoming a dynamic force throughout their service areas”(Brown, 45).

In some places, the library building itself is not there at all. There are small communities in Texas separated by 1500 miles with only 250 people per town who are unable to support a library. There are other communities where the only community institution is the local bar (Vavrek, The Rural Bookmobile, 21-22). In 1990, 3 out of 4 librarians surveyed believed that fixed locations could not be alternatives to bookmobiles due to too few people in sparsely populated areas, costs being too great and shut-ins and other disabilities not able to be serviced (Vavrek, In Defense, 11).

From the very first, the desire has been to take the books to the people- people that are not served by libraries in physical buildings. As Mary Titcomb the first bookmobile librarian said “The book goes to the man, not waiting for the man to come to the book” (Titcomb, 15).

In 1967, Eleanor Brown wrote, “Now, more than ever, it is essential, if our civilization is to survive, that we keep the public, young and old, informed concerning the important events, the discoveries, and the new ideas shaping human lives, Libraries must utilize every possible means for channeling this flood of information to the people... Everywhere libraries are reaching out beyond their doors, becoming a dynamic force throughout their service areas...They service the child and young, people who will manage tomorrow’s world and cannot, for one reason or another, easily find their way to a central or branch library. They serve adults who have no other library service and those who would not otherwise make the effort to go to the library” (Brown, 45).

In 1990, John J. Philip wrote. “The bookmobile has been and continues to be, successful in reaching the public” (Philip, “In Defense”, 1-2) The same year, Bernard Vavrek concurred, stating “Its [the bookmobile’s] existence is based on the belief that it extends services to those who cannot get to the library” (Vavrek, Mapping, 9).

Thus, throughout the history of the bookmobile, bringing the library to the people who could not or would come to the library building has been the main focus of bookmobile service. However, it has been pointed out by many that while this is the one of the main motivations for bookmobile service, it hardly is the only objective accomplished. In fact, the bookmobile serves many other purposes.

The bookmobile also creates library users. Even Mary Titcomb, the creator of the first bookmobile noted “Psychologically too the wagon is the thing. As well try to resist the pack of a peddler from the Orient as the shelf full of books when the doors of the wagon are opened by Miss Chrissinger at one's gateway” (Titcomb, 15).

Studies have shown that “people will use bookmobiles services that will not go to the public library” (Rawles, 2). In 1984, a study of library service was conducted by Nancy Bolt regarding a rural Ohio county. The study showed that when bookmobile service was discontinued at the school, Parents overwhelmingly did not take their children to the public library. In fact, 39% of students previously served by the bookmobile stopped library use altogether. Additional surveys by the State Library of Ohio showed that while 30 to 50% of bookmobile patrons surveyed had reasonable access to fixed facility libraries, they still used only the bookmobile. “Bookmobile Service creates library users and may well create readers. At the very

least it enables readers with access problems to continue their habit”(Philip, “Bookmobile Service”, 2).

In addition, bookmobile service may often “demonstrate the value of library service in areas that have had none... many times bookmobiles have brought residents of such an area to a realization of what they have been missing.” This happened in one town in 1958. Residents of Pleasant Grove, a suburb of Dallas had voted against library development. The bookmobile began weekly service to the town with such success that a new branch was soon built. “Many a county or regional library has been established after a demonstration period with a bookmobile or bookmobiles manned by librarians who give untiring, enthusiastic service, making a new friend with each batch of books they hand out over the library desk. Well-planned and well-managed bookmobile demonstrations have been and probably will continue to be a great boon to the extension of library services” (Brown, 47).

The Bookmobile can act as temporary response to service needs. Populations change and move. New communities are built, while others fade away. A new manufacturing plant can bring an entirely new population where none were before, while as industry moving its plant overseas can cause the demise of a town. The bookmobile provides the flexibility to meet these challenges. In sparsely populated areas, where density of population would not support a branch, a bookmobile can provide service. In fast growing suburbs outside the city limits, where the area is not eligible for service, a bookmobile can supply the needs. Where areas are declining in population due to losing the main industry or changing from residential to commercial areas, Bookmobiles can provide service. Its mobile nature allows it to

respond to developing communities where library needs are not yet clear (Brown, 49). The bookmobile can also test various locations to find the best possible location for future branches. In rapidly growing areas, it's sometimes difficult to tell where the next branch of growth will be. A bookmobile allows a library system to try out different locations. Since it is already mobile it's an easy thing to move the location of a stop if only a few people come. A new location, just few streets over, might find a large population eager for service. To do this with physical buildings would be a very costly but the bookmobile can try out different options and find the best fit (Brown, 46).

The flexibility of the bookmobile also allows it to move when the population shifts. One of the earliest bookmobiles which in 1919 started serving the mining camps in Hibbing, Minnesota lasted until 1952, when "the camps dwindled in population and finally disappeared as most to the miners moved to Hibbing and drove to work". However the bookmobile didn't disappear. In 1966 the library system merged with a three-county regional library system and the bookmobile was again put into service for the rural residents of the region (Brown, 21).

The Lee County library system, in Fort Myers, FL had a bookmobile dedicated to primarily serving retirees. However in 1995 they reviewed their bookmobile service and suddenly realized that many of the retirees were driving to the bookmobile, which meant they could drive to a library branch as well. So in September 1995, they revamped and began to focus on people who needed it the most- those who couldn't get to a library. They changed their routes to focus on those who lived in low income neighborhoods, housing projects, and isolated

neighborhoods with little transportation. They changed the collection from heavily adult to 75 % juvenile and added programs for Headstart and summer camps. Based on this experience, Kathy Mayo of the Lee County library system suggested “If you want to use it [a vehicle] for bookmobile service, that’s great, but be thinking of it in a more generic term. If you are going to buy a vehicle, be looking at something that’s flexible that can be used for different purposes because your purposes might change as your populations change. As you build new libraries you may not need your mobile vehicle in the same way” (To Bookmobile or Not).

Bookmobiles are well adapted to serving specific communities and populations. For the elderly, the library can come to them. At one time, education was not as wide spread, older people were cared for at home and old age was considered a time to take it easy. However in the modern era this has been almost completely reversed. A good number of the older generation have finished high school and college, and have become “habitual users of books”. Many of the people once cared for at home are now grouped in assisted living, retirement homes, nursing homes, and senior day care centers, making it much easier to offer a one stop service to a large group. Modern medicine has determined that keeping the mind mentally active and keeping socially active throughout the older years is vitally important to good mental and physical health. Increased leisure time for reading at this stage of life and the increasing proliferation of large print books, books on tape/CD and other modern reading aids lead to more demand for materials. Bringing the books to seniors via the bookmobile provides for these needs. As the “baby boom” generation

ages, there is certain to be even greater demand for library services, which is all the more reason to look to bookmobiles to bring the library to seniors (Nauratil, 60).

For low income neighborhoods bookmobiles can provide much needed essential information. In an article entitled “Bookmobile Services: Moving the Library to Disadvantaged Adults”, it stated that disadvantaged adults have urgent information needs but with limited time for information seeking due to time consuming jobs and family responsibilities. Due to their low incomes, they have little ready access to the reliable free information. It advocated bookmobiles as an ideal solution because they are informal and friendly thus less intimidating than a large library, the collection is small enough to for them to easily browse and the relaxed atmosphere welcomes them in. A bookmobile’s flexibility of scheduling was also ideal since late afternoon or evening stops work well with these adults (Rawles, 2-3).

Memphis-Shelby County Library in Tennessee created the JobLINC bookmobile in 1990. JobLINC is a mobile job and career center that helps job seekers locate employment opportunities. Traveling around the city, it provides job information with listings of available jobs and helps with locating training opportunities. It also provides help with resume development and gives one-on-one assistance in conducting job searches and preparing for interviews. (“JobLINC”)

Children in low income neighborhoods are also subject to disadvantages. In 2003, Pierce County Library System, Tacoma, Washington had a large number of at-risk youth, needy urban areas, and struggling schools and day-care centers. Judy Nelson, youth services coordinator for the library system, realized that “If the majority of your children are in a child-care setting or can never get to the public

library, maybe you need to take the story time to where the kids are”. So, she came up with the “Explore Bookmobile” which is designed to bring the “total library experience to Pierce County’s low-income neighborhoods”. Once referred to as “the coolest clubhouse ever”, it makes regular stops at head-starts, after-school programs and apartment complexes (Nelson, 29).

In 1996, Memphis-Shelby County Public Library created a specialized bookmobile called Training Wheels, in response to the great demand by the community and managers of day care centers raining of day care workers. It travels around to various day cares and gives workshops to those who work in day cares, bringing the training to them (To bookmobile or Not). The program provides on-site, customized training for those who care for young children, ages 0-6, and is designed to improve caregivers' skills in developmentally appropriate practice, especially as it relates to early literacy (“Training Wheels”).

Immigrant communities have long been realized to have their own specialized needs and challenges. From as early as 1919, when Hibbing Minnesota started a bookmobile service to serve mining villages, schools and temporary camps and carried titles in English, Croatian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Italian, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Serbian, Slovenian, Spanish and Swedish (Brown, 20), there has been a awareness of the need to reach immigrant communities.

In the mid 1990’s Memphis, Tennessee was seeing significant increases in immigration due to the availability of construction and service industry jobs, a relatively low cost of living, plus a strong refugee assistance and placement program. Ethnic businesses and multicultural communities flourished. “In response to the

challenge of serving these growing, underserved communities,” InfoBUS was created. This is a mobile branch dedicated to serving the country’s immigrant and refugee populations. A colorful body decal on the bus says “library” and “welcome” in Spanish, Chinese and Vietnamese. It goes to any place in the county where there are large immigrant populations and offers 19 different languages, English as a Second Language materials, a collaborative family literacy program plus foreign books, videos, & audiotapes for enjoyment (Virgilio, 7-8).

In Illinois, Arlington Park Racetrack offers thoroughbred racing from mid-May through Mid-Sept. During this period, hundreds of stable workers come for the jobs and as come, they bring their families with them. As a result, the population at the racetrack explodes during the summer months to approximately 1200 adults and 500 children, most who are from rural Mexico and speak only Spanish. In response, the Arlington Heights Memorial Library has offered bookmobile service to this population for more than 10 years. They provide Spanish speaking staff to help the workers and their families find Spanish, English and bilingual books, DVD’s, videos and CD’s (Voss, 325).

Thus it is clear that the bookmobile is uniquely equipped for serving trailer parks, senior citizens complexes, retirement villages, preschool centers and special schools with fixed facilities which lack their own libraries (Philip, 4) as well as many other specialized, underserved groups.

Beyond these reasons, the Bookmobile acts as a positive advertisement for the library system as a whole. “There is still an aura of glamour around the idea of “books on wheels” and its value cannot be ignored. In an age when people conduct

businesses in walk in vans, live in mobile homes, move frequently and travel the highways at high speed, a mobile library seems the most natural thing in the world and one which fits neatly into the scheme of their lives,” stated Eleanor Brown (51). Electra Doran, librarian of the Dayton Public Library in 1930 stated that she felt the “parading of the book trucks through the streets was excellent publicity of the library in general. I am much surprised at the spontaneous publicity that has arisen from this very simple expedient for reaching those for whom we have no branch library service.” (Brown, 22) Thus, bookmobiles are a useful advertisement for the library in general. Often they serve as the face of the library, on exhibit at county or state fairs or other large community gatherings or driving in parades. Large, attractive vehicles with bold emblems and colorful designs attract much positive attention and are a rolling advertisement no matter where they go.

“But bookmobiles are so expensive!” some exclaim. However, the initial costs of a bookmobile are much lower than building a permanent library. Sometimes operating costs for a bookmobile may be higher than for a very small branch, but usually the cost is lower than for a medium or larger branch. (Brown, 46) In 1984, Judy Boyce of the Louisiana State library noted “the percentage of the total budget so devoted ranged from 2.4 to 25% or an average of 10.5%. This would appear to be a very good investment, Louisiana bookmobiles contribute on the average 26% of a library system’s circulation.” (J. Boyce, 62). In 1983, the bookmobile of Steubenille and Jefferson County in Ohio “reported an average cost per circulation of \$0.34 as opposed to \$1.50 at the four system branches, Nevada’s Humboldt County

Bookmobile...circulated books for \$1.17 less than at their main library” (Tutton, 32-33).

Bookmobiles do require maintenance however so do library buildings. When building maintenance, electricity, phone and other costs are factored in they are compared equally, bookmobiles are often less expensive. “But what about the rising cost of gas!” some exclaim, which costs indeed are rising. However in 1990, when after 5 years of operation, the costs on one bookmobile were averaged and it was discovered that the main expenses were for staff and books- just as for a library in a building- only 7 percent went to maintenance and fuel (Tutton, 32-33).

In conclusion, are we at Bookmobiles' final chapter? Are they “aging relics of days gone by” - unused, unloved and alone, riding off into the sunset of extinction? From the facts of the case, this view hardly seems reasonable. One hundred and two years after the first horse drawn book wagon was making its way slowly down dirt roads, bookmobiles are still going strong. They are serving readers in rural and urban areas. They have updated and include computers, satellite links, DVD's, CD's and other forms of technology. They have continued to adapt throughout the many years, remaining ever innovative and fresh to new generations. They serve the young, the old, the disabled, the disadvantaged, the incarcerated, the free and the general public.

Thus, no matter if you call it “a permanent library on a mobile route” (Roberts, 16), People's University on Wheels (To Bookmobile or not), a mobile library, a book truck, a book wagon, Infobus, Training Wheels, or a host of other names “there is a genuine belief in the value provided by bookmobile service, a real belief that if there wasn't a bookmobile, there wouldn't be anything else...There is a

sense that the bookmobile is not just an instrument, not just a unit, not just a symbol but it really that library itself, ” wrote Bernard Vavrek. “We should be optimistic about the future of the bookmobile, contrary to impressions otherwise, problems of cost, etc....it is still a unique service, a way of providing information to people who otherwise would be disenfranchised of a library” (“What’s happening today”, 31).

As one of the respondents on a survey said, “There should always be a need for bookmobiles. They can’t really go anywhere and do anything, but they come closer to it than any other form of library service” (Vavreck, “What’s happening today”, 32).

Yet, despite all these explanations, the debate still rages on. Bookmobiles- are they expensive toys or essential conduits for serving the public? Are they relics of days gone by staff by nostalgic persons longing for the golden days of yore or are they modern, streamlined, computerized vehicles that bring a new generation to the library every time they open their doors? Are bookmobile librarians independent pioneers blazing trails through urban and rural wildernesses of nonreaders, or are they somewhere out on a limb, doing expensive “social work” with a just a few patrons? Are they keeping the bookmobile going so one lone senior can get her Harlequin romances or are they breeding new generations of readers and creating a whole new throng of library users?

There is no one definitive answer to these questions and, as usual, the truth lies somewhere among these extremes. However beyond the hyperbole, beyond the rhetoric lie the facts of the modern bookmobile. The bookmobile is still “booking on down the road”. It is still being used throughout the United States and the world. It

can be found in urban and rural areas, serving seniors and children, with large multi-branch library systems and with small, one building libraries. Thus it begs the question- Why? Why are bookmobiles still being used? What purpose do they serve? What are they accomplishing on those many miles of roads? For the answers to these questions and more, this study has turned to the people who spend the most time with bookmobiles, who know well those who use bookmobiles and who spend everyday with these questions- the bookmobile staff themselves. This is not to say that there isn't a need to evaluate bookmobile service from an outside perspective or conduct a solid cost-benefit analysis or conduct a broad investigation of outreach library work in the United States, in which bookmobile service would be just one small part. There is a definite need for all these. However, this particular study was designed to ask the "experts"- the bookmobile librarians, clerks, drivers, administrators, and managers- for their views, thoughts, and ideas regarding what they do.

Research Question

In what ways do bookmobile librarians and staff perceive bookmobiles as important and relevant to contemporary bookmobile users and how do they perceive the bookmobile's role in fulfilling patron's informational, recreational, and educational needs?

Subsequently, the answers to the above question will also help to answer- Why do bookmobiles currently exist? Do they have a roll to play in the modern world? If so, what is it?

Methodology

In this study, the goal was to understand the perceptions of bookmobile staff persons throughout the United States. Although, a trip to every bookmobile in the nation in order to interview every bookmobile staff person would have been very enlightening and informative, it would have also been very expensive and time consuming. Instead, a survey was decided on as the best way to obtain many bookmobile staff's perceptions with the least amount of expense and trouble. As was stated in The Practice of Social Research, "Surveys are particularly useful in describing characteristics of a large population. A carefully selected probability sample in combination with a standardized questionnaire offers the possibility of making refined, descriptive assertions about a student body, a city, a nation, or any other large populations" (Babbie, 276).

However, the question still remained of how to reach bookmobile staff across the nation with the request to take a survey. Since the Association of Bookmobile and Outreach Services brings together many different bookmobile's staffs from across a diverse range of rural, urban, geographic and other settings, it was a natural avenue to acquire research information. The fact that they also have a listserv for their members made it even more appealing as to its accessibility. However, using the Association of Bookmobile and Outreach Services (ABOS) listserv also creates a bias. Those who read and respond to the listserv will have the following characteristics in common: 1) have consistent access to the internet and computers, leaving out those who work on bookmobiles but do not have these and 2) have paid

membership fees to join the ABOS, since one must join ABOS to have access to their listserv, which leaves out those who do not belong to ABOS. Despite these limitations, this listserv was chosen since ABOS is the only professional organization dedicated to bookmobile service. This makes it the only location where a large number of people who work on bookmobiles would be able to see the survey, in order to choose to take it. Also, since the survey was self-selected, it would also be subject to the bias of the type of person who would choose to answer the survey.

In asking for bookmobile staff's perceptions on bookmobile service, the intent was to use those opinions to understand bookmobile service itself and to be able to generalize the information into "descriptive assertions" regarding bookmobiles. These persons were selected since they have great knowledge of the subject and know intimately their profession. They know why they do the work and who it serves-and they're not afraid to tell you! Thus bookmobile staffs are considered to be the "experts" at what they do and it was hoped that their reasons for and understanding of bookmobile service could be applied to the overall understanding of what bookmobiles are, what they do and their place in the modern world.

However using the opinions of bookmobile staffs does have its drawbacks. The first is that one would expect their opinions to be positive regarding their work. Since most people do not usually engage in work that is seen by them as useless, ineffectual or pointless, it must be assumed that these people find their work meaningful and important and will respond thusly when answering, showing a distinct bias in their answers. It would also be expected that there would be a type of

bias, based on the typical gender, race, educational status and other characteristics that an occupational role might have in common.

Still, it was determined that the staff of bookmobiles would be most likely to have the experience and knowledge that the study was looking for. Thus, a survey was created to collect that information. In creating the survey, both quantitative and qualitative elements were used. Some of the items only allowed for a few, pre-scripted answers. These types of questions dealt generally with location (state), background (level of education, years worked), and personal information (gender). However, the majority of questions were qualitative in nature as they were open-ended questions which allowed for many varied responses from the subjects. This type of questioning avoided the “square peg in a round hole” type of answers that closed-ended questions can create. On the other hand, the wide variety of answers possible created a large amount of data to be sifted through at the end of the data collection.

The questions were divided into several categories. The first section was titled “Your Bookmobile” and asked for general information about the bookmobile the subject worked on. Question 1 was - Which state is your library system in? This was used to determine how spread out were the responses and how much the survey had succeeded in becoming a national survey. The second question asked- How many bookmobiles are in your system? This was used to understand how many bookmobiles’ situations were reflected in the survey’s answers and to judge how large a library system the person came from. Questions 3, 4 and 5 were designed to evaluate the trends in bookmobile service and asked if, by the person’s estimation,

bookmobile service had increased, decreased or had no change in the past 5 years and what direction the service might take in the next 5 years. Question 5 asked for the reasons for these changes in order to understand why the person thought change might or might not take place.

The next section was entitled “Bookmobile Staff” and contained personal questions regarding the survey participant’s gender, title, level of education, and library career. This was for two reasons. One was to give some background on the survey participant themselves. The second was to draw conclusions about bookmobile staff in general – were they generally male or female, more or less educated, experienced or inexperienced, etc. Although the bias regarding those surveyed still applied, it was hoped that the specific details of the participants could be generalized to apply to those who work on bookmobiles at large.

The next sections were comprised entirely of open-ended questions and, for ease of use, divided into 3 sections. The sections were entitled Bookmobile Service – “Your Thoughts”, “Bookmobile Service and Your Patrons” and “The future of bookmobiles”. These questions were the heart of the survey. Questions 12 and 13 asked for the high and low points of bookmobile service, i.e. the challenges and the rewards. Questions 14 and 15 asked for details about the people who used the bookmobile. Question 14 wanted to know if there were any special populations targeted. Questions 15 asked what would happen if the bookmobile service was discontinued. Question 14 gave insight regarding the specific populations who used the bookmobile. However, question 15 not only told more about the specific populations served but also why the bookmobile staff believed these populations

needed this service. It spoke to the fundamental motivations and reasons for bookmobile service. Question 16- Beyond just the people that you serve, is your bookmobile service important to your library system and to the greater population in general? Explain why or why not. This question was designed to capture the “big picture”, describing how bookmobiles fit into the library system and into the greater world at large.

The next to last question, number 17, was designed to provoke an emotional response by mimicking criticism often leveled at bookmobiles. It read- “It has been said by some that the day of the bookmobile is over. Technology, such as the internet, improved roads and proliferation of library branch buildings has made the bookmobile obsolete. Do you agree with this perspective? If not, what value(s) do you see in continuing to provide bookmobile services?” This served several purposes. One, to understand why the bookmobile staff valued the bookmobile and two, why they believed the bookmobile did or did not have value to the community at large. Third, it also allowed for the direct evaluation of factors that critics use to disparage the need for bookmobile service.

The last question, was number 18 - If money were no object, how would you make your bookmobile and its service better? Explain why you would make these specific changes. This was the only question that looked to the ideal of what bookmobile service could be. It allowed the bookmobile staff to list their visions for what they wished the bookmobile to become. It also spoke again to the value the bookmobile staff placed on its services.

These 18 questions were the accumulation of many drafts and trials. One of the drafts was sent to a local bookmobile staff as a trial run. They completed it and gave their very helpful comments, critiques and ideas which were then used to edit the survey until it reached its final form.

When the survey was finalized, an account was set up with SurveyMonkey.com. This online survey site was judged to be the most convenient and straightforward method to reach potential subjects. After the Institutional Review Board approved the survey, an email was sent out to the listserv, asking for anyone who worked with bookmobiles to fill out the survey. Participants could click on the link at the end of the letter which led to SurveyMonkey.com. There participants could fill out the survey online. The survey started gathering information on October 2, 2007. On October 16, 2007, a follow-up email was sent to the listserv, in the hopes that it might stir up more response. On October 28, 2007 at 6 PM, the survey was closed to any further participation with a total of 48 responses.

After the survey was closed, the results were downloaded into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The information was sorted by state and region. For the closed-ended questions, tables were created with the choices, tallied by response for each choice and the totals entered into the table. Unfortunately, a number of questions were left blank by various persons, which created additional difficulties in analyzing the results. Had there been more participation, any incomplete surveys would have been thrown out. However, with only 48 responses, it was deemed undesirable to limit the sources any more than was absolutely necessary so all responses stayed in.

Next, the answers to each open-ended question were examined as a group for repeated phrases and similar ideas. These similarities suggested specific categories which in turn created emergent themes. Categories were set up and the responses were divided into the appropriate column. As this was done, it was discovered that often a respondent had covered a number of different issues in a single response. Subsequently, each response was divided according to the issues it addressed and placed each separate issue into the appropriate category. This led to having a single response divided into multiple categories. It also led to some very fine distinctions between the different issues. Thus the number of responses for each question totals more than the original number of respondents.

Once the responses were divided up and placed into categories, the categories were then totaled. The categories and totals were then placed into tables and used to draw conclusions.

Results

In the 48 responses, 22 states plus Washington D.C. were represented including California, Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Indiana, Illinois, Idaho, Kansas, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, North Carolina, New Jersey, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Virginia, and Washington. A total of 77 different bookmobiles were represented, averaging 3.5 bookmobiles per state.

Table 1- Respondents to survey divided by state

State	Number of Respondents	Number of Bookmobiles Represented
CA	4	7
CO	3	4
DC	1	5
FL	1	1
IA	1	1
ID	1	1
IL	4	4
IN	3	4
KS	1	4
KY	1	1
MA	2	5
MD	1	1
MN	1	1
MO	2	2
NC	2	3
NJ	2	2
OH	9	15
OR	1	1
PA	2	2
RI	1	1
SC	1	1
VA	2	2
WA	2	9
TOTALS:	48	77

The first questions were designed to assess usage of the bookmobiles. Were they slowly dying out, getting less and less use or were they in more demand? Had they been growing in the past but now were expecting to level off or was the bookmobile poised to suddenly grow to new heights?

Table 2 – Respondents’ assessments of changes in bookmobile service
between the past 5 years and the next 5 years

Change	Last 5 years	Next 5 years
Increase greatly	17	14
Increase slightly	19	22
No change	6	7
Decrease slightly	2	2
Decrease greatly	2	1
No response	2	2

When asked, “Over the past 5 years has your bookmobile(s) service - increased greatly, increased slightly, no change, decreased slightly, decreased greatly?

Remarkably, for 75% of the respondents, the answer was their service had increased over the past 5 years. Thirty-six respondents chose increased greatly or increased slightly over 10 respondents who chose no change, decreased slightly, or decreased greatly.

They were also asked to predict future growth by giving an educated guess as to the next five years. Again, 36 respondents, 75%, chose increased, either slightly or greatly increased service over ten respondents who chose no change or decreased service. Note- the difference in the total number of responses of the survey versus the total number of responses to these two questions is due to one respondent who did not answer either question, one respondent who only answered the first question and one respondent only answered the second question.

It is clear, from this data that those who work on bookmobiles certainly feel that their service has increased and will continue to increase. One respondent went even further, writing, “Demand will increase greatly; capacity will allow only slight

increase.” When asked to explain why these increases were happening, respondents listed a variety of reasons that were distilled into 9 categories- expansion of services, changes in community or library system, increased funding, replacing or adding a bookmobile, changes in the collection, more advertising, staff changes and administration support.

Table 3- Reasons for increases in service given by respondents

Reasons for Increase in Service	Number of responses
Expansion of Services	9
Changes in community/library	7
Increased Funding	7
Replace/add bookmobile	5
Changes in collection	4
More advertising	3
Staff	3
Administration support	2

Expansion of services included adding more stops and serving new groups as one respondent wrote “We are expanding service at neighborhood stops, adding new service points and longer hours”. Others spoke of adding stops for daycares and Headstart or to senior and Hispanic populations. These expansions were in response to the next largest group of concerns.

The next section cited changes in their communities and in their library systems. As one person pointed out “Bookmobile and outreach services are always changing as communities age and target audiences move. What once was a thriving community may change as population ages, or stay at home parents go back to work

and children are off at school. At the same time preschools may be expanding and need service as parents go back to work.” One respondent described the changes taking place in their communities “There has been demographic changes, general population increases (doubled in ten years) and increases to our services populations - seniors, children, and low income”. Another mentioned “In our rural county (pop. 24,000) the fastest growing segment are seniors. That is one of the groups that can really benefit from bookmobile service.”

Some of the community’s changes led to transference of services. This means that instead of expanding and increasing services, the services were discontinued in place and started in a new place. Thus implying that the initial net growth was stationary but it was expected that the impact of the change would lead to growth in the future. As one person described that they were “Discontinuing unsuccessful stops (stops with low circulation) and the addition of potentially successful stops. We have been decreasing the number of stops serving middle schools and increasing the number of stops serving preschools and day care centers.”

Library system changes also affect bookmobiles as one respondent explained, “We are in the middle of a library expansion and the newest library is being built within 2 miles of 2 of our stops. A small, storefront library is being closed due to the new building and we are considering reducing our stops by 2 and then providing service to the area where we removed the store front location.”

Seven responses mentioned attributed the growth to increased funding. Some cited increased funding by grants for new ventures. However for some, the increased funding allowed them to return to former levels of service. “Our whole

library had serious financial reverses in 2004. After subbing for 6 months I was hired as the bookmobile librarian June 1; this is the first time in 3 years the bookmobile has had more than a skeleton schedule” said one person. Another stated, “A funding shortage (we're funded by the state --solely) caused us to reduce our on the road time by 10 hrs per week. The state has reformulated our funding to 2.2% of all taxes received by the state and then uses an equalization formula to distribute. This should allow a small growth over time and let us go back to nearly normal hours of operation.”

Five of the responses looked forward to a new bookmobile as the source of their increases. One stated they were “launching a new full sized bookmobile this fall to replace a much smaller less visible vehicle”, while another person was thrilled over having two bookmobiles next year, instead of just one.

Changes in the collection also were credited for the increased service and service expectations for 4 responses. Greater availability of DVDs & Videos with increased borrowing limits on these formats was cited by one. While another cited “tailoring library service to patrons needs (Large Print and audio books)”.

More advertising was cited by three responses, one of whom wrote, “We are more actively promoting the service and increasing services on the bookmobile (leasing new DVDs for example) and putting ads in the local paper with our schedule.” On the other hand, staff was also noted by three responses. One credited their “enthusiastic staff dedicated to making the service grow and develop, who generate fresh ideas for marketing and programming.” Others mentioned their growing staff and the hiring of an additional staff person.

Finally, two respondents mentioned the administration's effect on the increase in service. One succinctly mentioned "administration changes" while another went into detail crediting the "Backing of administration to keep the bookmobile a viable service to the community."

At this point, it should be mentioned that in naming these categories, there has been the need to finely divide the responses. Many of the categories intersect and lead from one to another. For example, one respondent stated that they were launching a new bookmobile and hoped to hire another librarian in hopes that that person would develop a marketing plan and do more community outreach, which covers at least 4 of the categories stated. When possible, I divided the responses, placing each applicable portion into the closest category. I also took into consideration the person's phrasing and what they indicated as most important in order to place the response in the best category. This approach, allowed for the naturalistic inquiry process to be followed, enabling the use of emergent themes. However it also led to having a single response in multiple categories and thus allowing the number of responses for the question total to possibly total more than the original number of respondents.

Table 4 – Reasons given for decreasing service

Reasons for Decreasing Service	Number of responses
Administration changes	2
Revaluation of services	1
Changes in Community	1

As was stated earlier, few persons indicated that they were anticipating the decreasing of their bookmobile services and not all provided explanations as to why they believed so. However, three respondents did list their reasons. One spoke of administration changes saying, “New director came to district and doesn't like bookmobiles. Thinks they cost too much and could use money at the branch level”. Another respondent stated, “I believe that a cost/benefit analysis has shown that this is not the best way for us to deliver service” as the reason for decreasing bookmobile service. On the other hand, the third person spoke of alternative uses for the bookmobile stating, “We are thinking of making one or two of our bookmobiles into mobile computer classrooms, which would have little or no circulation. If they carried any books, it would probably be only computer learning materials for follow up on the classes. This will greatly decrease circulation, but not their usefulness.”

Most people who recorded they expected “no change” from the previous five years did not include any explanation since it was not asked for. However two did and their reasons were quite interesting. One person who recorded that the last five years service had “decreased slightly” and the next five years was anticipating “no change” explained their reasons thus: “We were seeing fewer people at home during the hours our bookmobile operates. So we chose to start dropping neighborhood stops and now concentrate more on schools and daycares. We only have 5 regular stops left in our schedule. This was a conscious decision as we are concentrating more on our long range planning goals which include more adult programming and collection development and promotion. We are using the bookmobile librarian's time

to do these activities.” What makes this reason so interesting is that very similar reasons were given by others for expecting increasing bookmobiles service in the next five years. Another person who elected “no change” for the next five years was apparently using it in place of “uncertain” which was not given as a choice for the person wrote, “It is hard to predict- our school enrollment is currently declining, but there is huge increase in new housing. The economy is suffering; so many poorer families are leaving. There is concern as to whether the new housing with be filled with the current housing/lending troubles. Our stats could go either way.”

Table 5 – Number of responses divided by gender of respondent

Gender	Number of Respondents
Female	39
Male	7
No Response	2

The next section of the survey dealt with the bookmobile staff themselves, in order to create a picture of who was answering the survey. Thirty nine of the respondents were female and seven were male. Two did not respond to the question. As is clear, many more females than males responded to the survey. This may be a reflection of the composition of ABOS membership or the result of the bias of self-selection (i.e. perhaps females are more likely to complete surveys). However, it is more likely that this reflects the typical disproportion of females to males in libraries overall, rather than any specific implication to bookmobiles.

Table 6 – Job titles of respondents

Job Titles	Number of Respondents
Librarian	14
Bookmobile manager	13
Manager of Outreach Services/ Outreach Services Manager Community Outreach Manager	5
Library assistant/associate	4
Coordinator/ Bookmobile Coordinator	2
Library Director / Director	2
Head of Extension Services	1
Library System Administrator	1
Assistant Library Director	1
Bookmobile Assistant II	1
Library Specialist	1
Clerk/driver	1
No Response	2

Respondents gave many titles for their positions, as listed above. Librarian and bookmobile manager were the most common making up over half of the responses. (Two respondents chose not to answer this question). Library assistant/associate was used by 4 respondents. Manager of Outreach Services, Outreach Services Manager and Community Outreach Manager were very close in word choice so they were put into one category, resulting in 5 responses. The same thing happened with one person who listed coordinator and another person who listed bookmobile coordinator and with the two who listed director and library director. Thus, each of these categories received two responses.

Table 7 – Highest level of education held by respondents

Highest Level of education	Number of Responses
Associate	6
Bachelor	10
Master's	30
No Response	2

Table 8 – Types of master's degrees held by respondents

Master Degree Subjects	Number of Responses
Master of Library Science	21
Master's Degree other than library science	2
Master's Degree, subject not specified	7

Thus the bookmobile staff persons we surveyed were overwhelmingly educated librarians. No one held less than an associate degree. Twenty-two percent held bachelor degrees and 65% held master's degrees. (Two non-responses were not included in the calculations.) Of the 65% of those who held master's degrees, 21 listed holding a Master's of Library Science making 70% percent MLS graduates. Seven of the thirty, 23%, did not specify the nature of their master's degree. Thus,

the percentage could be as high as 93 %. Two of the respondents held master's degrees in other fields as well as a Master's of Library Science.

This is a great change from earlier surveys. In 1986, Bernard Vavrek described the average rural bookmobile as "staffed by three full-time equivalent persons, two thirds of whom have only high school training. Only 17% of the full-time staff members assigned to the bookmobile are certified librarians with training at the master's level in library science" (Vavrek, "What is Happening", 28).

For this particular survey, the higher percentages could reflect the source of the information. The participants were drawn from those who belong to the Association of Bookmobile and Outreach Services, which since it is a professional organization, is more likely to be made up of professional librarians who hold master's degrees. It is also possible that professional librarians are more likely to answer a survey such as this one, due to greater commitment to their chosen field. However, it could also reflect a definite upswing in greater professional standards required by the library system that they are a part of (i.e. the system requires that all bookmobiles be staffed with professional librarians) and/or greater numbers of people holding advanced degrees, particularly in the library science field.

Table 9 – Years worked on bookmobiles and in libraries

Years Worked on Bookmobiles & in Libraries	This Bookmobile	On Bookmobiles In total	In Libraries In total
Less than 1 year	5	4	0
1-5 years	21	16	4
6-10 years	8	10	7
11-15 years	5	7	10
16 + years	7	10	23
No Response	2	1	4

The next questions were designed to help understand how much experience the respondents possessed. Were we dealing with respondents fresh out of library school, brand new to libraries/bookmobiles? Or were we dealing with respondents who had “been there, done that” and had seen changes to bookmobiles and libraries over many years?

Overall 44% of the respondents had been with their present bookmobile for 1-5 years and 33% had been with bookmobiles in general for the same length of time. However 56% of the respondents had been with bookmobiles for 6 years or more and 33% had worked with bookmobiles for over 16 years. In addition, 69% had been in libraries for more than 11 years and 48% had worked with libraries for more than 16 years.

Overall, it appears that the average respondent to answer our survey was female, with a master’s degree in library science and worked on their current

bookmobile for less than 5 years. However the average respondent had worked with bookmobiles in general for more than 6 years and libraries for more than 11 years, most having more than 16 years experience over all.

The next section of the survey was comprised of open ended questions and gave the respondent space to explain their point of view. After reviewing the responses, it was discovered that often a respondent had covered a number of different issues in their response. Thus categories were created based on similarities between all responses. Each response was divided according to the issues it addressed and placed into the appropriate category. This approach, allowed for the naturalistic inquiry process to be followed, enabling the use of emergent themes. However it also led to having a single response divided into multiple categories. Thus, the number of responses for the question total will total more than the original number of respondents.

Table 10 – Challenges cited by respondents

Challenges	Number of Responses
Vehicle maintenance/repair	15
Time/management	10
Environmental Conditions	10
Publicity	7
Administration	6
Budget	5
Community/Changes	4
Collection development	3
Technology issues	3
CDL licensing issues	2
Isolation	2

The first question in this section asked “What are the most challenging aspects of working on a bookmobile?” This was asked in order to understand the difficulties faced by bookmobile staff, since their working environment differs markedly from the typical librarian’s at a stationary branch. As Carol Hole wrote in her article in *The Book Stops Here*, “Picture the average librarian. Now consider the average outreach librarian: wears jeans, lives in the country, copes with disabled 15-ton trucks in pouring rain, works packed into twenty-by-eight-foot spaces with wall-to-wall kids, two feet away from a deafening generator in an isolated spot miles from aid. Knows the location of every public bathroom in the county” (48).

Vehicle maintenance and repair issues were at the top of the list when it came to challenges. The simple phrases “maintenance issues” or “mechanical issues” were most often used but some went into more detail. Often this issue was linked to the age of the vehicle as one person wrote “A current challenge is several mechanical issues that have come up with our 9 year old vehicle. I hope to keep this one for 15 years or so, but don’t know if we’ll make it that long.” Another person mentioned “The generator seems to break down a lot- that could be due to its age”. These problems in turn led to other stresses as two persons explained - “getting unexpected repairs done while trying to stay on schedule” and “how to serve your stops when the bookmobile is broken down is always a challenge.”

The next largest category was named time/management issues. This was due to a series of responses that spoke of not having enough time to get done the jobs necessary or frustration with scheduling or difficulties with communication- all things which spoke to the organization and direction necessary in running a bookmobile.

One person stated “Everything is so fast that there is no time for reflection and searching for a book. I do a lot of requests and some patrons now use the OPAC so their books are waiting for them. Time to restock and order for the collection. If it wasn't for my colleagues including me in their orders I would soon run out of books. We are so busy with card applications and lines of children who want books.”

Some spoke of the difficulties brought on by the mobile aspect of the work. One librarian mentioned “getting office responsibilities done when you're on the truck 80% of the time”. Another referred to the challenge of “communication since they are always on the road. Not much time for staff meetings.”

Environmental conditions ranked equally with the time/management category. This category concerned anything that had to do with physical environment. Weather, and the resulting weather related difficulties, was the most prominent, listed by 7 of the 10 responses in this category, while 2 others mentioned the small space in serving customers and in programming. On a different note, one person mentioned an additional environmental concern saying “We work in very challenged neighborhoods, so safety of patrons and staff is always a top priority”

Publicity was mentioned in 8 responses. One person said “The most challenging is getting more people to use it. There still aren't enough people using the bookmobile, but we do get new people every day.” Apparently getting the word out about the bookmobile isn't easy for one respondent described the challenge of “Making contacts with the people who can benefit from the service i.e.: daycares, home school families, housebound, seniors etc. I still have people come on the bus

and say "I've been in this county x number of years; I didn't know we had a bookmobile".

Six respondents mentioned problems with the administration as challenges for them. For this category administration refers to anyone who is above the bookmobile and its staff in the organizational hierarchy, which varies according to each system.

Three specifically mentioned politicians as a source of difficulty. One person complained of "Having people of power make decisions when they don't know what it's really like to work on board." Another person echoed this same sentiment citing "Dealing with administration that doesn't understand the importance of what the bookmobile does for those that can't get to a library." In the same vein, a third person spoke of "Administrative decisions being made by people that don't know what working day in and day out on the vehicle takes and what really works."

"Continually having to justify the whole bookmobile program to people who are uninformed" was a challenge for another person.

Budget was mentioned by 5 respondents while keeping up with the community's changes was a challenge for 4 others. This second issue was described by one person as "Tracking changes in our communities and providing corresponding services that make the most impact on peoples lives" and by another as "Finding the best locations for service as these change through the years."

Collection development difficulties were mentioned by 3. One person said "Carrying enough materials in a broad enough range of subjects to satisfy customers." On the other hand, another bookmobile was having trouble "maintaining sufficient

collection for highly focused demands” And a third bookmobile had trouble “getting our materials back.”

Technology difficulties also ranked with 3 responses, one of whom described the challenge as “to always keep technology working. When it works it makes the job easier, when it doesn't the job is much harder.”

Getting and maintaining the Commercial Driver’s Licenses needed by those who drove the bookmobile was mentioned by 2 responses and tied with the difficulties of isolation and being apart from the main parts of the library. As one person described, “The most challenging aspects come from my co-workers. The Bookmobile is consistently left out or not considered by other departments and branches.”

Yet despite all the challenges faced daily by those who work on bookmobiles, one of the respondents cheerfully noted “There are challenges... but overall, it's too much fun to call "challenging."

Thus the next question in the survey was “What are the most rewarding aspects of working on a bookmobile?” This was meant to get to the motivations of bookmobile staff. Basically it was asking- Why do you get up each day to drive through the rain, the wind and the muck, with vehicles that break down, technology that goes awry and all the other stressors of bookmobile life? Why do you keep on going? What makes it worthwhile to you?

Table 11 – Rewarding aspects of working on a bookmobile

Rewards	Number of Responses
Appreciative & Eager Patrons	17
Making a difference	15
Personal relationship/service	11
Response from kids	5
Variety	4
Dedicated staff	2

At the very top of the rewards of working on a bookmobile were the appreciative and eager patrons. Seventeen different responders cited how time after time the patrons continually expressed how much they appreciated the service and how much they looked forward to the visits by the bookmobile. One responder stated, “Customers tell us everyday what a difference bookmobile service makes to their quality of life.”

Closely following the patrons, was the knowledge of the difference the bookmobile made to the people they serve. “Being able to make a difference in someone's life... whether it is a senior who is depending on the bookmobile to bring materials or a youngster who is turned on to reading and loves visiting the bookmobile. I view it as honor and a privilege to work on the bookmobile which I don't take lightly,” said one. “Helping those people who would possibly have no other way of reaching a library. Introducing the public library to children or to adults who have never before visited a library. Serving immigrants and introducing them to one

of the best and most democratic aspects of American life - the public library,” said another. Fifteen responses spoke of the effect they knew they had in “serving those who would otherwise not be served.”

For 11 respondents, the personal relationships they formed and the personal service they gave was the best reward. As one person said “Patrons!! They are much friendlier than working in a building. Maybe because we come to where they live, or work, or play. You have a "small town" atmosphere where you know everyone and you know what books or movies they like. Kids in diapers grow up and suddenly they are leaving for college. There is that connection...”

Juvenile patrons were mentioned in particular by 5 respondents for their enthusiasm. One person noted favorite memories “hearing a class of kindergartners chant "We Love Books" while marching across the parking lot to the truck; hearing kids say "This is cool!" when they come on board; having kids around town call out "Hey Bookmobile!" when they see me at WalMart.” Another said, “They run to greet us; sometimes I have a line of 50 kids to get in the bookmobile, they really want what we have to offer!” A third spoke of “the kids whose faces light up when they come in for the first time”.

Four other respondents liked the variety that came with working on a mobile unit. “The interior of our office doesn't change but the scenery outside the windows does!” stated one. “Seeing different places and people, never knowing what challenge comes up next – it’s all fun!” declared another.

Two people credited their “dedicated and hard-working staff” as the best aspect of working on a bookmobile.

The next question asked “Do you target special portions of the general population? If so, which ones and why? If not, why not?”

Table 12 – Special populations targeted by bookmobiles

Special Populations	Number of Responses
Seniors/senior centers/ homes	29
Preschool / Daycares	27
Community stops	11
Children (Elementary age)	10
Low income	9
Schools	9
Distance from library/ lack of transportation	6
Urban	6
Spanish speakers/ Immigrant Groups	4
Homebound	4
Disabled	3
Rural	2
Corporate	3

The two largest groups served were the seniors and preschoolers, making up 45% of the total responses. Both were considered to be the most at risk for many areas since both groups have difficulty with getting to the library building. As one respondent stated, “[the bookmobile] stops at several retirement homes because the

residents can not drive to other libraries, with out our visits they would not have access to reading or listening materials.”

Another described why they served preschools saying, “A large portion of our stops serve preschools and after school programs because children cannot get themselves to the library, and parents are often too busy to take them or don't see the importance. We want to support literacy efforts and develop lifelong library users by giving kids a positive experience.”

The third largest group was community stops that did not distinguish a specific group. One stated the reason as, “Our bookmobile is a general purpose vehicle because our community is not large enough to justify one devoted to a special segment of the population.” Another said it even more simply: “We serve all ages.”

A number of bookmobiles did a little of everything. “My own little mission statement is this: To service all the young children to get them going and to service all the seniors to keep them going.” one stated. “We are a bit unique in that I stop right at people's houses, all they have to do is call and if I can get the bus in and out most times they will be added to the service. So the service is available to the public at large. At the same time I try to target children up to 5 or 6 years old at daycares, preschools, Headstart, home school kindergartens. Also any retirement facilities, assisted living homes, housebound of any age.”

Even some of the bookmobiles that targeted specific populations found themselves expanding to multiple groups. As one bookmobile explained “Our title is "Library service to the aging" and since we are aging from the moment of birth, we try to provide the best library service we can to all our county's citizens.”

Urban areas presented their own challenges. One responder said, “We target children. Our library is located in a city with a high murder and crime rate. It is not safe, and some neighborhoods are too far away for small kids to walk. It is a very diverse place with many languages and customs. Introducing children to a free library at school or daycare is a way to address their literacy needs.” Another bookmobile stated, “We are in an urban setting and serve primarily elementary school age children although we have materials for teens and Spanish speaking adults. All of our stops are in areas that qualify as a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) neighborhood. We serve high density, low income neighborhoods where patrons have limited access to libraries due to cultural barriers and lack of transportation. Many of our stops are in known gang areas. We provide a safe, positive alternative. Most of our patrons are Hispanic...the kids do speak English, but the adults speak mostly Spanish. For many, bookmobile is their first positive experience with a government agency.”

Corporate stops were served by 3 bookmobiles. One of these bookmobiles described the stops as “Working people- We provide "corporate lunchtime stops" so that plant workers can easily use our service at their place of business.”

The next question in the survey illuminated both why the bookmobiles serve and why they serve the persons they do. The question asked, “If your bookmobile service were discontinued, how would it affect your patrons?”

Table 13 – Projected results of discontinuing bookmobile service

Projected results of Discontinuing Bookmobile Service	Number of Responses
No Service	27
Find other ways to get service	11
Emotional effects/reactions	9
Literacy affected	5
Lack of variety/choice	5

The largest group, 46% believed firmly that without their bookmobile, their patrons would have no access to library services at all. This held true no matter the special population served. Regarding seniors, one person maintained that the discontinuing of bookmobile would be, “Devastating--Much of our service population is Amish and would have to pay someone to drive them to a library (70 cents per mile per person). Many are homebound, rural and poor and lack the means to get to a fixed facility.”

Children, especially preschoolers were also among those that would suffer lack of library service. One respondent stated, “Our daycares have no other way of getting library materials and programs. Changes in seat belt laws and insurance in the last 10 years have stopped them from taking the kids anywhere. And many of these children will never be able to get to a library at any other time in their life.”

For other groups, their traveling distance from the stationary library would be an insurmountable barrier. “It would be devastating to some that are 80 miles away from the nearest library,” wrote one person; “Patrons would not get any kind of

library service at all.” Another respondent concurred saying, “Many would have no access to the library at all. Because many are poor and, in some cases, uneducated, it is possible that no one would notice or care.”

In addition to known groups being affected, another respondent pointed out there were other groups of people that would suffer, saying, “those who are not yet being served would remain in their state of neglect -- unaware that such service exists and unaware of what a difference it could make in their lives.”

For 19%, the respondents maintained that their users would find other ways to get library service. In fact, one library system had indeed gone through that very event. The respondent stated, “We experienced that 3-4 years ago because of budget cuts. Seniors were moved to Outreach (volunteers deliver once a month to patrons.) Preschools we visited via van and pre-selected storybooks for them. Neighborhood patrons visited the main library. No choice.” However, despite these alternate measures, this system had now reinstated the bookmobile, recognizing that these other methods did not make up for the loss of the service that the bookmobile had provided

Thus, while 11 respondents stated this, most added on a caveat- that while the patrons might find other ways to get library service, the service would not be as good and would lack important aspects that the bookmobile provided. One stated, “If they can't get to the library now, they might find others to get books for them, but not with the care, efficiency, and speed that we do.” Others spoke of the “special time” and the “connection” that would be missed.

Five more respondents spoke to the lack of variety and choice that would accompany these alternate forms of service. One stated, “Seniors would be limited to reading the donated books in the small libraries at their residences.” Another pointed to the children saying, “There would be very few “free reading” choices for students at the schools we visit, especially in Spanish.”

For some 15% of the patrons, lack of bookmobile service would result in negative emotional consequences. One respondent describe this very consequence, stating, “After being off road for a good part of the summer due to mechanical difficulties, my very happy patrons informed me how sad it was not to have their bookmobile and how they have grown to need the service. Many do not come into town for various reasons. I bring the world to them.” Another respondent agreed, and stated, “It’s not unusual for seniors to tell us that having access to library materials makes their life worth living.”

These negative effects would also impact the children served. One person asserted, “The children would lose a safe, positive influence in their lives. Many of the children look to our staff as mentors.”

Five respondents were concerned regarding the lack of a bookmobile’s effects on literacy. One person declared, “Children in 150 preschools and daycare centers across the county would be deprived of the opportunity to select and reject books, and to explore print in a wide variety. They would miss the opportunity to experience excellent programming. Since we concentrate on Smart Start & More at Four centers, and since children in daycares usually go home to very busy parents, we feel that many of these kids otherwise would not have the library experience at all before

kindergarten. (As a former elementary school media specialist, I know how important this is.)” Similarly, another person affirmed, “Last year (2006) we saw over 15,000 kids and teachers on our truck. Many of these folks would not have library experiences without us.” The end result was pointed out by one respondent who succinctly declared, “Reading scores would most likely decline for the children we serve.”

The next question dealt with bookmobile in the bigger picture. Granted they made a wealth of difference to the special populations that they serve, but did they do anything more for the library system and/or for the greater population as a whole? Thus the question asked- Beyond just the people that you serve, is your bookmobile service important to your library system and to the greater population in general? Explain why or why not.

Table 14 Effects of bookmobiles on the library system and geographic region

Effects on the library system/region	Number of Responses
Positive Public Relations	20
Reaches unserved/underserved populations	11
Contributes to circulation	7
Support literacy	5
Flexibility	2
Increased funding for library system	2
Library growth	1

Forty-two percent of responses pointed to the positive public relations that bookmobiles produce. Many spoke of the bookmobile as “a moving billboard advertisement for the library” One respondent explained this saying, “Everyone

seems to enjoy seeing the bookmobile tooling around. Most everyone waves and we do attend the parades in the area which is especially exciting to the children that come on the bookmobile.”

Twenty-three percent spoke of how their outreach to specific populations, helped the area in general. One pointed out, “It's important to the library system because we reach populations that would not be otherwise served. Bookmobile service provided the library district with a means of establishing relationships with underserved populations. It's a service with potential to impact society by creating a means for isolated individuals to access information (or entertainment) that can improve or change their lives.” Another pointed out, “Our City recognizes that a good city serves all its citizens and that working to improve neighborhoods with many needs benefits the City as a whole. For this reason, many City resources (bookmobile included) are directed toward these "priority" neighborhoods.”

Fifteen percent discussed how their circulation helped the library system in general. Many of the statistics stated showed just how much bookmobiles are used. One stated, “We circulated 13% of the total items (of our library system) in 2006.” Another asserted, “Because of the "captive audience" we do a great deal of our total circ through the schools and daycares on our bookmobile. Our branches have to work much harder to get the same levels of circulation.” And a third described, “My circulation figures are excellent for a staff of two 5,000 items a month and growing; 400+ cards in the month of September. This is good for the library.” A fourth affirmed this trend, saying, “Our bookmobile service ranked second in statistics in the

6 libraries in our county. This would justify the belief that we are providing a vital and much appreciated service to our population.”

In at least one system, this improved circulation results in a monetary benefit for the entire system –“We contribute a significant amount to the circulation within the system which in turn generates more funding for the library.” stated one respondent. Another spoke of the good will created, which also led to financial support, saying “In some cases, they have said it (the bookmobile) made them feel good about voting for our levy.”

Ten percent reiterated the bookmobile’s support of literacy that in turn improved the entire area. One person stated, “Absolutely, whether they know it or not. [The bookmobile is important.] We’re offering these kids the opportunity to have fun and develop literacy skills at a developmentally appropriate time. They’ll be more ready to learn when they go to school.” Another respondent agreed, stating, “We are a reminder to our community that literacy and reading is important. I think we remind everyone of that each and every time they see us on the road”

Four percent spoke of the flexibility that the bookmobile gives to a library system, one calling it “the most versatile location the system has”. Another respondent described its special uses stating, “It has given us the ability to respond to totally unexpected situations such as the fire, as well as planned renovations. This creates a sense of responsiveness and innovation.”

Two percent credited the bookmobile with initiating the growth of the entire library system declaring, “It is because of the bookmobile that we have a regional library system. In 1946, we had one main library and a bookmobile. Because of the

bookmobile's success in outlying areas, branch libraries were built. We now have 8 branches, the Central library and one bookmobile.”

The next question was designed to respond to criticisms often leveled at bookmobiles. Many critics of bookmobiles complain that they are “dinosaurs” whose day is over and whose service is unnecessary. Of course, many of the reasons for the necessity of bookmobile have already been delineated and discussed in the previous questions. However, I thought it important to see what the bookmobile staff had to say to the critics. The question was purposefully written to stir up emotions, taking an antagonistic stance, so that the reactions would be equally pronounced. Thus the question was “It has been said by some that the day of the bookmobile is over. Technology, such as the internet, improved roads and proliferation of library branch buildings has made the bookmobile obsolete. Do you agree with this perspective? If not, what value(s) do you see in continuing to provide bookmobile services?

Table 15 – Why are bookmobiles not obsolete?

Why are bookmobiles not obsolete?	Number of Responses
Lack of technology/transportation	18
Special Populations	16
Positive influence	9
Cheaper/more flexible than a stationary branch	7
Green	5
Convenience	4
Other thoughts	4

“Oh, brother” was the most humorous response. The rest of the responses expounded a variety of reasons. The largest number of answers responded directly to

the assertion that “Technology, such as the internet, improved roads and proliferation of library branch buildings has made the bookmobile obsolete.”

Some spoke to the mobility issue, saying, “If you have no way to get to the library due to lack of transportation or infirmity - it doesn't matter how good the roads are or how many buildings there are.” Others to the technology side of it stating, “There are those populations in our county that will never have internet access or the technology that goes with it”

Still others spoke to the combined effects, asserting, “Bookmobiles are still important in serving people with limited transportation, little or no computer access, etc. These are exactly the same people often overlooked in theories such as the above.”

One response spoke to all these issues, saying, “I think the people who make the above provocative statements (and really believe them) need to get out into the world and see the huge number of "have-nots" that the new technology has bypassed. There are many populations who find it difficult or impossible to visit the traditional library (elderly people, classes of preschoolers, disabled people). Some people may also find the large library intimidating and difficult to use (we serve the local Board of Mental Retardation's workshops and these folks do very well on the Bookmobile and, because they frequently live with aging parents or in group homes, do not have ready access to the library). If someone is leading a class of preschoolers or using a walker, a busy street may be an insurmountable barrier so even a nearby branch may be out of reach.”

Some disagreed with the assertion that the proliferation of branches has happened universally. One response stated, “Library branches still are not near enough to a significant number of patrons in our library district.” Another maintained, “There are still many square miles across the United States that have populations who cannot make it to a branch library.”

The second largest number of responses pointed out the needs of the many special populations that they serve. “Children are not mobile. They go to school; then they go to daycare or home. In urban areas it is often not safe and they don't go out again, even to play. Would you send your 5 year old on 2 miles of buses to get to a library across the territory of gangs, drug dealers or would you walk there with him? I don't think so.” pointed out one respondent, who continued, “Our value is safety and helping with literacy- You have to read to become literate; never mind fine literature, just literate. We really help this cause. Also the population isn't getting any younger, old people are often afraid to go out of their housing areas.”

Another respondent reiterated this thought: “There will always be patrons that cannot make it to the physical library buildings. I hate to stereotype but most children who are in daycares parents probably will not be thinking about taking their children to the library until they are school age. Also retired patrons are a huge part of our community, as there becomes more and more with the baby boom generation their need will be even greater as they get older and want library materials.”

The positive influence of the bookmobile and its staff was cited by 9 responses. “Nothing replaces the pleasure of reading and the importance of the positive role models/mentors bookmobile staff provide for underprivileged children.

You can't replace the human influence or a special book's influence in a person's life with a machine,” stated one. “Face-to-face human contact is irreplaceable,” agreed another response. A third response pointed out, “The bookmobile is perceived as “fun” - not usually a word that immediately comes to mind about libraries.”

Within the positive responses, it was also noted that the bookmobile creates and fosters a sense of community to its patrons. “Folks see each other on the bus and get caught up with each other's lives,” described one respondent, “By default, I get caught up in their lives too! The personal contact and personalized service the bookmobile provides cannot be duplicated by computers, and unfortunately is rarely found in libraries in buildings.”

Responses to this question, also dealt with the oft stated criticism that complains that bookmobiles cost too much. However, the respondents pointed out, “The bookmobile will always be less expensive to operate than “brick and mortar.” “In fact,” one person stated, “we may see more bookmobiles in the future because libraries may turn to them rather than a branch building because of the expense. It is expensive to run a bookmobile, but it is more expensive to staff a building.”

Respondents spoke also of the bookmobile’s advantage of flexibility over a stationary building. “One of the great strengths of bookmobile service is its flexibility. We can go where people are TODAY, and offer what they need TODAY. If that changes next week we can adapt a lot easier than a fixed building,” maintained one response. “Overall there are more libraries returning or beginning bookmobile services because it is efficient--It can change easily with changing demographics,”

asserted another. And a third stated “It is not always feasible to place a branch everywhere the bookmobile can go.”

Also addressed was the rising cost of gasoline and its effect on bookmobiles. One response pointed out “Gas prices are high, and while that affects our expenses, it also affects are patrons expenses. We have had new patrons come in saying they do not want to waste the gas to go to the nearest branches 10 minutes away.” In addition, two different respondents emphasized the “green” nature of bookmobile, describing its potential for conserving energy. “Bookmobiles are "green"- moving one vehicle to the patrons rather than many vehicles to the library.” stated one. The other pointed out “People say it is wasteful and not very green to have a 30 foot bus driving around the county. Which is more green? Having one bus visit 30 people in a day or have 30 people drive their own car to a branch building?”

Some respondents also spoke to the convenience of bookmobile service, saying “We get grateful parents who don't have the time or patience to load up 4 kids in the minivan just to go to the library on a busy Saturday. The bookmobile allows them to walk down the block. An educated population comes from those who read.” Another response added “Even though people may be able to get to library locations easier than in the past (ours is not a rural library) they have more demands on their time and appreciate the convenience of finding us in their neighborhoods or where they shop.”

An interesting comparison was made by one respondent who wrote “Bookmobiles are one of the ultimate service vehicles (pardon the pun!) An interesting comparison - are ice cream trucks obsolete? People have access to

grocery and convenience stores as well as fridges in the home. Why do trucks come around? Because they offer a service that people want.”

Table 16 - Ways to make bookmobile service better

Ways to make Bookmobile Service Better	# of Responses
More vehicles	22
More staff/staff hours	19
Expanded service to more groups/places	15
More hours/days/stops	13
Bigger/Better/Newer Vehicle	8
More/better technology	7
More materials/Better Collection	7
More green/environmentally friendly vehicle	2
More Advertising	2

The final question on the survey asked- If money were no object, how would you make your bookmobile and its service better? Explain why you would make these specific changes. This was the first and only question that did not ask about what was currently happening. Instead it asked for respondents to think about where they wanted to go and to think about the future. Thus respondents could speak to the realm of the ideal bookmobile service and their dreams and wishes for their own bookmobile instead of the pragmatism of the here and now.

Aside from one respondent who half-jokingly suggested “I'd like a really good espresso machine and coffee grinder to keep my energy level high enough to meet the demands of my patrons. A more comfortable driver's seat would be nice, too,” overwhelmingly the ideas were how to serve more people. Instead of demand for bookmobiles quietly fading away, the bookmobile staffs were seeing more and more

demands- more needs, more underserved groups, more ways they could serve their patrons, more ideas for better service- and they wanted ways to meet these needs.

Similar to the answers to question 5- If there has been or you feel there will be a change in the service, what is/are the reasons for this change?- These answers often overlapped each other. Overall one respondent's answer sums up the top desire of almost all bookmobile staff – “We would have more of everything - more staff, more space, more materials, and more bookmobiles!” Of course, this desire was not to be greedy. Instead more of all those things would to expand and improve service, enabling more people to be better served, and addressing the needs the staff saw everyday. Naturally, this type of answer also made it very difficult to divide each answer into meaningful categories. Again, categories were created based on the emergent themes in the total responses and then each respondent's answer was carefully divided into anywhere from one to several categories.

The number one wish was for more vehicles. Respondents wanted more vehicles to specialize each vehicle to a specific group, as one person wrote “Outreach vehicle for seniors, one for preschools and one for Latino services.” Another wanted “the children's bookmobile separate from the adult”; while a third wanted “at least 3 technology mobile facilities.”

Correspondingly, the next wish was for more staff. Staff that would fill the new vehicles but also staff that would help with the current situations where the current staff was already stretched thin. One wanted “more staff so the bookmobile could be out longer.” Another person wanted “enough additional staff to participate

in community events”. Yet another mentioned “more staff to plan story times and crafts, along with senior programs to do at stops.”

Expanded service to more groups and places was desired by 15 of the respondents. One person wanted to “visit older housing and senior sites; along with all of the middle schools in town. Middle schools are neglected; they have reading interests that could be addressed and should be addressed.” Another wished to “increase the number of daycares we serve. There are a number of daycares/Headstarts that want service that we don't have time in the schedule for. I would love to be able to do programming on the bookmobile for each daycare/Headstart and add in home daycare providers.”

Similarly, one responder stated “I’d expand the program. I would like to be able to visit centers more frequently (at present we’re on a five-week rotation). I would like to offer full service to more of the smaller centers (at present, we drop off a box of 60 books at these centers, and I think many of the kids at these centers really, really, need the full library experience.) I’d like to lengthen the time we spend at some centers, since sometimes we run out of time before all teachers or some of the classes can get on. I’d like to offer programming more often. (At present it’s every third visit, when comes out to less than four times a year. And, wouldn’t it be nice to once again serve after-school institutions, camps, neighborhoods, and shopping centers (a whole ‘nother story).”

In order to get in all this additional service, 13 respondents specifically mentioned adding more hours, more days and more stops to their service. One person stated “We would add night and weekend hours. We would stay at stops all day in

some cases, instead of just 2 hours.” One even wanted to “double the hours of service.” Several persons also mentioned adding weekend hours-“to where people go on the weekends”.

Eight respondents wanted a bigger, better and/or newer vehicle. One person explained “I would regularly replace our vehicles as soon as there were performance issues (which isn't the case now due to our budget). Larger vehicles with more features would also be helpful so more could be offered to the public.”

More/better technology was wanted by 7 persons. Five of the seven wanted computer access for patrons. As one explained, “I would like to add a cybermobile(s) to our program. While people and books are very important to our population, they do need access to and training in technology. Our current bookmobiles do not have the space nor time to provide access to computers. Our patrons do not have computers in the home and have limited access to public libraries that have these resources.” Four of the seven also wanted improved automation. One hoped to “buy that fancy smancy satellite internet hook-up”. While another said “the ability to connect to our automation server in a more speedy way would be nice.”

Seven of the respondents also stated that they wanted more materials and / or a better collection to help serve their patrons. One stated “I’d increase the collection size (and storage capacity here in the building) so we could offer sufficient quantities of books pertaining to a particular curriculum or season” Another mentioned carrying “more DVDs and popular reading materials.”

Two of the respondents wanted to improve the environmental impact of their bookmobile by using “a hybrid or alternative fuel vehicle in order to better promote the "green" factor of bringing the library to you”

And 2 wanted to do more advertising. One suggested “maybe we could mail our schedule out to people.” While the other wanted to “spend money on promotional materials. I’d let the bookmobile be the traveling face of the whole system.”

Cross Comparisons

In an attempt to more fully understand the results from the survey, the responses were divided into geographic regions. These regions were based on the four official US census regions as constructed by the US Census Bureau. Although not equitable, this method allowed the 48 responses to be divided into categories that could reasonably be expected to share certain characteristic based on geographical location. However it should be noted that with 48 responses split into 4 categories, the divisions that were readily apparent in the first section of this study begin to blend together. As before, some distinctions were very finely divided. A top answer may only be one mark away from another in some cases, making the results less useful. However, it is hoped that the combined effects of the data will be more useful to the overall study.

Table 17 – Responses compared by geographic region

Regional Comparisons	Northeast	South	West	Midwest
States	MA, RI, PA, NJ	KY, VA, DC, MD, NC, SC, FL	WA, CO, ID, CA, OR	KS, MN, IA, MO, IL, IN, OH
Number. of Respondents	7	9	11	20
Number of Bookmobiles	10	14	19	26
Average number of bookmobiles per respondent	1.4	1.5	2.1	1.4
Number of male respondents	2	0	1	4

As can be seen by the above table, the northeast region had the fewest states and respondents, while the Midwest had the most. However, the west averaged the most bookmobiles per respondent. It should be noted that in the south, Washington D.C. had 5 bookmobiles represented by one respondent. This was a disproportionate number of bookmobiles compared to other states in the region. Taking their numbers out left an average of 1.1 bookmobiles per respondent, a much smaller average than the other regions. In addition, the number of respondents per state and the number of bookmobiles represented per state have been charted on individual national maps which can be found in the appendices.

Table 18 Years worked on bookmobiles and libraries by male respondents

Years Worked on Bookmobiles & in Libraries	This Bookmobile	On Bookmobiles In total	In Libraries In total
Less than 1 year	0	0	0
1-5 years	2	2	1
6-10 years	1	1	1
11-15 years	3	2	2
16 + years	0	1	2
No Response	1	1	1

Out of the 7 males that responded to the survey, the Midwest had the most at 4. The Northeast had 2, the west had 1 and the south had the fewest at zero.

The responses of the males to the survey were studied as well. All except one of the males had master's degrees. Out of these, three held a master's of library science, one did not specify and one held a master's in small forestry management. The only one that did not hold a master's degree listed his job as clerk/driver. However, their other responses were spread throughout the results (as demonstrated by the table above) and it was difficult to determine any particular trends that exemplified the male point of view. Overall, their views seemed to reflect the general trends of all those who work on bookmobiles rather than their gender demographics.

. Table 19 – Job titles of respondents sorted by geographic region

Job Titles	Northeast	South	West	Midwest
Librarian	1	4	3	6
Library assistant/associate	0		1	3
Bookmobile Manager	0	2	4	7
Manager of Outreach Services/ Outreach Services Manager/ Community Outreach Manager	0	0	1	4
Clerk/driver	1	0	0	0
Other titles	4	2	0	3

When it came to job titles, the Midwest had the most managers to respond to the survey while the south had more librarians. The northeast's responses were very spread out, encompassing several unique titles while the west had no unique titles.

However, when it came to dividing the job titles based on supervisory and non-supervisory criteria, the distinctions were very tenuous. Despite the variation of titles (or perhaps because of it) it became apparent that the meaning of the titles varied widely. One who listed Head of Extension Services further explained by stating “supervising 2 bookmobiles, 4 branches and all outreach services”, which made the supervisory nature of the job clear. However another person who listed Bookmobile Manager also stated “our bookmobile/outreach staff consists of only me so I do everything”. Bookmobile Assistant II was listed by another who also specified “over all things bookmobile but not staff”. These variations made it difficult to determine the exact role of each person to the organization, especially whether the

person acted as a supervisor over other employees or not. Thus it was decided not to try and sort the job titles by supervisory and non-supervisory criteria and instead to just use only the exact titles as stated for evaluation. However, judging by the other answers to the survey, it was apparent that each was vitally involved and active with bookmobiles

Table 20 – Highest level of education sorted by geographic region

Highest Level of Education	Northeast	South	West	Midwest
Associate	3	0	1	1
Bachelor	1	3	2	3
Masters	2	5	7	16

The Midwest had the most Master's degrees represented, numerically and proportionally, while the northeast had the most Associate degrees. The south had all bachelor and master's degrees. However the west and Midwest had the largest variety of subjects listed for bachelor degrees. The West's list included anthropology, liberal studies, English with creative writing, history, education and small forestry management. The Midwest was not far behind with business management, Spanish, English and French, Home Economics (2 different people), English Literature, plus master's degrees in public administration and middle/childhood education. It is very interesting to note that all the degrees were from the humanities. Perhaps these subjects and degrees lend themselves to a love of reading or are chosen by those who already love reading. It may be possible that the humanities also lend themselves to those who wish to affect peoples' lives directly since, the desire to help others and

make a difference in peoples' lives has been reiterated throughout the survey responses.

Table 21 – Years worked on current bookmobile sorted by geographic region

Years worked on the current bookmobile	Northeast	South	West	Midwest
Less than 1	1	2	0	1
1-5 years	1	4	7	9
6-10 years	2	0	1	5
11-15 years	2	0	1	2
16 or more years	0	1	3	3

Table 22 – Years worked on bookmobiles in total sorted by geographic region

Years worked on bookmobiles in total	Northeast	South	West	Midwest
Less than 1	1	2	0	1
1-5 years	1	3	3	9
6-10 years	2	1	3	4
11-15 years	2	0	4	1
16 or more years	0	1	3	6

Table 23– Years worked in libraries in total sorted by geographic region

Years worked in libraries in total	Northeast	South	West	Midwest
Less than 1	0	0	0	0
1-5 years	1	1	0	2
6-10 years	1	2	0	4
11-15 years	0	2	2	3
16 or more years	4	2	7	10

As for experience per respondent, the south had the least number of years on bookmobiles overall with 1-5 years being the most common answer and the fewest with 16 or more years experience. The northeast was split between 6-10 years experience and 11-15 years experience, giving them a good average in bookmobiles and even more experience with libraries in general. On the other hand, the Midwest had the most people with 16 or more years of experience both in libraries and with bookmobiles plus a large number with 1-5 years experience on bookmobiles. The Midwest's higher numbers may reflect the long history of bookmobiles in those states. Although Maryland is credited with the first bookmobile, Minnesota followed soon after, as did Illinois, Missouri, and Michigan. In addition, large areas of rural farm country can make it difficult for people to get to libraries, making bookmobiles the best way to bring the books to the people. These factors together may help explain why those who work on bookmobiles in this region tends to stay with them for the long haul.

In the south, the fewer years of experience on bookmobiles may reflect changes in library service overall. Budget cuts over a number of years may have led to the decline of bookmobiles in this area. However, bookmobiles may be poised for a comeback as additional uses are being explored (i.e. cybermobiles) and as rural areas continue to fall behind urban. Thus the fewer years of experience may reflect the new generation of bookmobile librarians, ready to expand services to those who need it.

The west's even spread between the most and least experienced may suggest that they have a good balance between those experienced and those new to

bookmobiles. However all their respondents were very experienced in libraries overall.

Table 24- Rewards of working on bookmobiles sorted by geographic region

Rewards	Northeast	South	West	Midwest
Appreciative & Eager Patrons	3	3	4	7
Making a Difference	4	2	3	6
Personal Relationship/ service	2	2	2	5
Response from kids	1	0	1	3
Variety	0	2	0	2
Dedicated staff	0	0	0	2

When asked about the rewards of bookmobile service. Those in the Northeast most often pointed towards knowing they were making a difference in the lives they served. Those in the South pointed towards personal relationships and service. Those in the West spoke of the appreciative and eager patrons as did those in the Midwest. It should be said that the top three choices- the patrons, making a difference and the personal relationships- rated so closely together, that it is almost irrelevant to divide them. All are part of the rewards of working on bookmobiles.

Table 25- Challenges of working on bookmobiles sorted by geographic region

Challenges	Northeast	South	West	Midwest
Vehicle maintenance/repair	2	2	2	9
Time/management	3	3	1	3
Environmental Conditions	2	0	3	5
Publicity	2	1	1	3
Administration	2	1	2	1
Budget	2	1	0	2
Community/Changes	0	2	0	2
Collection development	1	1	0	1
Technology issues	0	2	0	1
CDL licensing issues	0	0	1	1
Isolation	1	0	0	1

Challenges faced by bookmobiles also differed by region. Those in the Midwest overwhelmingly indicated vehicle maintenance and repair as the most challenging. Those in the west picked physical challenges which included weather, plus “cold feet in the winter, generator fumes, lack of space”. These most likely reflect the harsh conditions faced by the Midwest and west in term of colder weather, and more snow, than are faced by other areas, especially the south.

Time/management issues were shared by the northeast and the south. These may reflect the respondents backgrounds since the south had the least amount of years of experience while the northeast had the least amount of education. However it may also reflect how thin their resources are stretched. The south, (with the adjustment for the disproportionate number of bookmobiles in Washington D.C.) had the fewest

bookmobiles per respondent. The time/management issues there may show the stresses of so few trying to reach so many.

Table 26- Why are bookmobiles not obsolete sorted by geographic region

Why are bookmobiles not obsolete?	Northeast	South	West	Midwest
Lack of technology/transportation	3	7	3	5
Special Populations	4	2	4	6
Positive influence	2	3	1	3
Cheaper/more flexible than a stationary branch	2	1	0	4
Green	2	1	2	1
Convenience	1	1	1	1
Other thoughts	1	0	1	2

When asked if bookmobiles were obsolete the northeast, west and Midwest pointed to the special populations that they serve. Those in the south indicated the lack of technology and lack of transportation.

Table 27- Ways to make bookmobile service better

sorted by geographic region

Ways to make Bookmobile Service Better	Northeast	South	West	Midwest
More vehicles	4	3	5	10
More staff/staff hours	4	5	4	6
Expanded service to more groups/places	5	4	3	3
More hours/days/stops	2	2	1	8
Bigger/Better/Newer Vehicle	2	1	3	2
More/better technology	0	2	1	4
More materials/Better Collection	1	1	0	5
More green- i.e. environmentally friendly vehicle	0	1	0	1
More Advertising	0	0	0	2

To improve their bookmobile service, the Midwest wanted more vehicles, as did the west. The south wanted more staff/staff hours and the northeast wanted to expand service. However what they all truly seem to want is more ways, more time and more people to expand bookmobile service in order to serve more people.

Short Synopsis of Findings

When it comes to bookmobile staffs' perceptions of bookmobile service, it is clear that they believe strongly in what they do. They see their work and bookmobiles as vitally important to many disparate people and people groups. They seem themselves as essential extensions of the library in its aims to serve all. The bookmobile isn't just a nice idea, something that has a nostalgic air and is slowly

fading away. It's a fundamental element of modern library service that is poised not only to continue on, but to be more in demand than ever before.

Discussion & Summary

Those surveyed, who work on bookmobiles are seeing as much need as ever – possibly even more need than ever before- for their services. Thirty-six out of 48 respondents, 75%, saw their services increase in the past 5 years and expected them to continue to increase in the next 5 years.

The number one reason of the growth was due to expansion of services- adding more stops, longer hours and more staff in order to serve more people. Bookmobiles, as all good libraries, continue to adapt to changing environments. They discontinue unsuccessful stops (i.e. stops with low circulation) and add new stops. They add new materials that are in high demand such as DVDs and videos, and materials that meet the need of the populations that use the bookmobile such as large print books.

The most challenging aspect of bookmobile service is keeping the vehicle out on the road, especially as vehicles continue to age. This was followed closely by time/ management issues and by environmental conditions such as those with weather, limited space and safety.

It appears that the average person to work on a bookmobile (if the results of this survey reflect bookmobiles as a whole) is female, with a master's degree in library science and has worked on their current bookmobile for less than 5 years. However the average person had worked with bookmobiles in general for more than 6

years and libraries for more than 11 years, most having more than 16 years experience over all. On the whole, this may indicate that bookmobile staffs are well educated, but also aging and possibly beginning to think of retirement. This could mean shortages ahead for staffing bookmobiles. On the other hand since the average person had more library experience than bookmobile experience it also may mean that the library systems will continue to pull from their experienced staff to fill the vacancies.

For the staffs who work on bookmobiles, it is the patrons that keep them going, appreciative and eager patrons who continually express how grateful they are for the service and how much they looked forward to the visits by the bookmobile. This was followed closely by the knowledge that they are truly making a difference in the lives of the people they serve.

The two largest groups served were the seniors and preschoolers, making up 45% of the total responses. Both were considered to be the most at risk for many areas since both groups have difficulty with mobility, making just getting to the library building a challenge. This did not mean, however, that bookmobiles were limited to just these two groups. Serving community stops of all ages ranked third overall. Also mentioned were both rural and urban areas, homebound, schools, low income areas, disabled, Spanish speakers, immigrant groups and children of all ages.

Bookmobile staffs were convinced of the essential nature of their work. To most of the patrons served they were not just a convenience or a fancy add-on but a vitally important service. Forty-six percent believed firmly that without their bookmobile, their patrons would have no access to library services at all. Words such

as “devastating” were used to describe the impact. Even those that believed at least some of their patrons would be able to fill their reading information needs pointed out the patrons would lose much in the personal service, efficiency, and other important aspects of service that they provided.

Also, many respondents pointed out their positive influence goes beyond these specific groups. Many spoke of the bookmobile as “a moving billboard advertisement for the library,” one that generated good will toward the library overall. Others spoke of their positive effects on literacy and education, while still other pointed out how their increased circulation of books and materials helps the entire library system.

Given all these reasons, it’s no wonder that when the respondents were asked for their opinions regarding if the bookmobile was becoming obsolete the answer was a resounding NO! Again, they pointed to the special populations they serve and the lack of access inherent in each. They pointed to the disparity of the haves and have-nots in regards to access to transportation and technology. They pointed at the human side they give their work, the caring and the personal interactions. They also pointed out that far from being expensive- bookmobiles were cheaper than many stationary branches and more flexible by far. Also, they pointed out that since the baby boomer generation is now on the edge of becoming senior citizens, the number of seniors who need their services is about to skyrocket. Plus, with more and more children in daycare, and the technological divide ever growing, there is no end to those who will need bookmobile service.

Finally, if nothing else could convince one of the viability, practicality and sheer usefulness of bookmobiles today, one need only look at bookmobile staff's wish lists. One respondent's answer sums up the top desire of almost all bookmobile staff – "We would have more of everything - more staff, more space, more materials, and more bookmobiles! Far from fading away, those who work on bookmobiles overwhelmingly wanted more bookmobiles to serve more people. They are seeing more and more demands- more needs, more underserved groups, more ways they could serve their patrons, more ideas for better service- and they wanted ways to meet these needs. Specialized vehicles for specific populations, more technology for patrons to use plus adding more hours, more days and more stops to their service were all on their wish lists.

Future Research

The starting point of this research began with the realization that current research on the bookmobile was sorely lacking from library science literature. The last book was written in 1990, the last survey (before this one) was done in 2000 and concerned only rural bookmobiles. It is clear from the research of this paper that the bookmobile is still active and is still essential to many. However it is high time that additional research be done to truly understand its role in our society today.

A comprehensive examination of bookmobiles in the United States needs to be conducted. This would involve surveying ALL bookmobiles in both rural and urban areas, for details such as size of vehicle, materials carried, population groups served, circulation statistics and much more. Only then can there be a complete and comprehensive picture of bookmobile service in the early 21st century. In addition to

this, there should be an examination of the cost/benefit analysis of bookmobile service, to address the assertions of critics who continually claim that bookmobiles are too expensive. This study has found the reverse to be true; however a complete analysis is needed to fully explore this topic. An additional piece of research needs to be the study of the populations that bookmobiles serve. It is not enough to understand bookmobiles from librarians' and library systems perspectives. We must also understand the perspectives of those who depend on and use bookmobiles and those who might benefit from them. To understand their needs, wants, limitations and expectations will ensure that bookmobiles continue to evolve to meet these. Beyond these we must also seek out those who are not served, otherwise, as one respondent described, "those who are not yet being served would remain in their state of neglect - unaware that such service exists and unaware of what a difference it could make in their lives." If we truly believe in making library services available equally to all, then understanding the unreached and underserved groups' attitudes, limitations and needs is essential.

Conclusion

So in the end, what is it that we've found? After 48 surveys, detailed recording of data, and extensive analysis, we find the bookmobile is still alive and well. It's not wheezing down the road in a choking cloud of dust. It's not driving off into the sunset on a haze of memories. It's not lumbering off with the dinosaurs into extinction. It isn't even just holding its own, barely hanging on, surviving by a thread. Instead, bookmobiles are racing down the road at top speed on their way to serve the next person. They are splendidly alive and well and growing more than

ever as they continue to provide an active and vital service to thousands of people across the county.

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Bookmobile Survey

Perceptions of Bookmobile Staff on Bookmobile Service

Your Bookmobile

1. Which state is your library system in?
2. How many bookmobiles does your library system operate?
3. Over the past 5 years has your bookmobile(s) service
 - _____ - increased greatly
 - _____ - increased slightly
 - _____ - no change
 - _____ - decreased slightly
 - _____ - decreased greatly
4. In the coming 5 years, do you expect your bookmobile(s) service to
 - _____ - increase greatly
 - _____ - increase slightly
 - _____ - no change
 - _____ - decrease slightly
 - _____ - decrease greatly
5. If there has been or you feel there will be a change in the service, what is/are the reasons for this change?

Bookmobile Staff

6. Are you male or female (circle one)?
7. What is your position title?
 - ___ librarian
 - ___ library assistant/associate
 - ___ bookmobile manager
 - ___ clerk/driver
 - ___ other (Please list title here _____)
8. What is your highest level of education?
 - ___ Some high school or less

- ☐ high school graduate/ GED
☐ associate degree
☐ bachelor's degree
 Major _____
☐ master's degree
 field _____
☐ doctorate
 field _____

9. How many years have you worked with this particular bookmobile?

- ☐ less than 1 year
☐ 1-5 years
☐ 6-10 years
☐ 11-15 years
☐ 16 + years

10. How long have you worked with bookmobiles in total?

- ☐ less than 1 year
☐ 1-5 years
☐ 6-10 years
☐ 11-15 years
☐ 16 + years

11. How long have you worked with libraries in total?

- ☐ less than 1 year
☐ 1-5 years
☐ 6-10 years
☐ 11-15 years
☐ 16 + years

Bookmobile Service

12. What are the most challenging aspects of working on a bookmobile?

13. What are the most rewarding aspects of working on a bookmobile?

14. Do you target special portions of the general population? If so, which ones and why? If not, why not?
15. If your bookmobile service were discontinued, how would it affect your patrons?
16. Beyond just the people that you serve, is your bookmobile service important to your library system and to the greater population in general? Explain why or why not.

The Future of Bookmobiles and Outreach Service

17. It has been said by some that the day of the bookmobile is over. Technology, such as the internet, improved roads and proliferation of library branch buildings has made the bookmobile obsolete. Do you agree with this perspective?

If not, what value(s) do you see in continuing to provide bookmobile services?
18. If money were no object, how would you make your bookmobile and its service better? Explain why you would make these specific changes.

Dear Bookmobile Staff Member:

I don't have to tell you how important bookmobiles are. You spend every day seeing the appreciative faces, the happy smiles and hearing the grateful thank you's from the people you serve. However, many people are surprised that bookmobiles are still being used and are unaware of their daily impact.

I'm a graduate student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and as I have studied, I have realized how little current information there is available concerning bookmobiles. The most recent book was published in 1990 and most books date from the 1970's or earlier. It is for this reason that I chose bookmobiles as the topic for my final research Master's Paper. My research is designed to ask you- the experts- for your opinions about bookmobile service. And I'm sending this request in the hope that you might help in my research.

To participate in the study, you will click on the link below to go to Survey Monkey, and to fill out the survey form. Clicking on the link connotes your consent to be a participant in this study. This questionnaire is composed of questions addressing bookmobiles and your views regarding your current position, and the services bookmobiles provide, and some questions (demographic) used to describe the respondents in this study. Completion of the questionnaire should take no longer than 30 minutes. You are free to answer or not answer any particular question and have no obligation to complete answering the questions once you begin.

Your participation is anonymous. You are asked not to put any personally identifying information on the questionnaire. All data obtained in this study will be reported as group data. No individual can be or will be identified. We plan on publishing the results of this research as well as communicating these results to the professional associations in library science. The only persons who will have access to these data are the investigators named on this letter.

We do not anticipate any risks should you participate in this study nor any personal benefits from being involved with it. However, there will be professional benefit from this study, as the information we obtain will be communicated to the profession through publication in the literature, presentation at professional meetings and directly disseminated to the professional associations. There is no cost to you or financial benefit for your participation.

You may contact us with any questions at my email (mfain@email.unc.edu) or that of my faculty advisor, Dr. Brian Sturm (sturm@ils.unc.edu).

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to IRB_subjects@unc.edu.

Thank you for considering participation in this study. We hope that we can share your views with the greater professional community and use your response to help shape professional practice. If you are willing to participate in this research study, please click on the following survey link:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=aKsgbro2YYvyl39fZma6dA_3d_3d

Sincerely,

Kathy Fain
Graduate Student

Dr. Brian Sturm
Assoc. Professor

Dear Bookmobile Staff Member:

Thank you so much to everyone who has participated in my survey so far. I am extremely encouraged by so many responses. If you haven't taken part yet, will you consider doing so?

Your voice and opinions are important and I would greatly value your input. Please respond by October 26, 2007 as I will have to close the survey at 5:00 pm on that date so that I have time to analyze the results and write the Master's paper. If you missed my first letter, let me tell you about myself and what I am doing; the link to the survey is at the bottom of this email.

I'm a graduate student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and as I have studied, I have realized how little current information there is available concerning bookmobiles. The most recent book was published in 1990 and most books date from the 1970's or earlier. It is for this reason that I chose bookmobiles as the topic for my final research Master's Paper. My research is designed to ask you- the experts- for your opinions about bookmobile service. And I'm sending this request in the hope that you might help in my research.

To participate in the study, you will click on the link below to go to Survey Monkey, and to fill out the survey form. Clicking on the link connotes your consent to be a participant in this study. This questionnaire is composed of questions addressing bookmobiles and your views regarding your current position, and the services bookmobiles provide, and some questions (demographic) used to describe the respondents in this study. Completion of the questionnaire should take no longer than 30 minutes. You are free to answer or not answer any particular question and have no obligation to complete answering the questions once you begin.

Your participation is anonymous. You are asked not to put any personally identifying information on the questionnaire. All data obtained in this study will be reported as group data. No individual can be or will be identified. We plan on publishing the results of this research as well as communicating these results to the professional associations in library science. The only persons who will have access to these data are the investigators named on this letter.

We do not anticipate any risks should you participate in this study nor any personal benefits from being involved with it. However, there will be professional benefit from this study, as the information we obtain will be communicated to the profession through publication in the literature, presentation at professional meetings and directly disseminated to the professional associations. There is no cost to you or financial benefit for your participation.

You may contact us with any questions at my email (mfain@email.unc.edu) or that of my faculty advisor, Dr. Brian Sturm (sturm@ils.unc.edu).

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to IRB_subjects@unc.edu.

Thank you for considering participation in this study. We hope that we can share your views with the greater professional community and use your response to help shape professional practice. If you are willing to participate in this research study, please click on the following survey link:

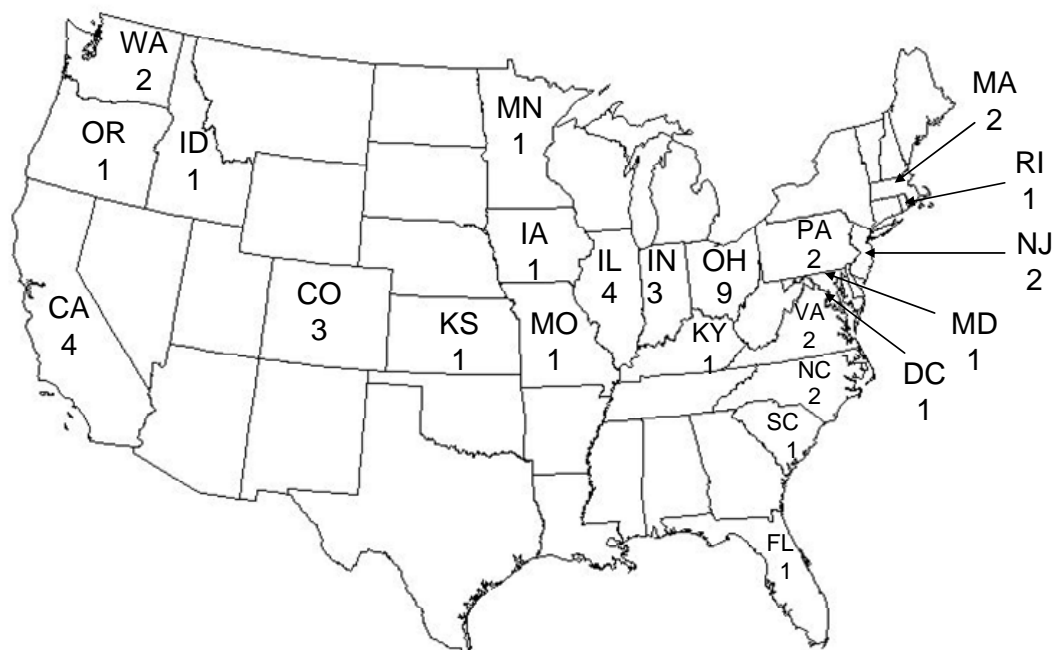
https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=aKsgbro2YYvyl39fZma6dA_3d_3d

Sincerely,

Kathy Fain
Graduate Student

Dr. Brian Sturm
Assoc. Professor

Number of Respondents per State



Number of Bookmobiles Represented per State

