



Local 1321 News

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Queens Library Guild Local 1321

Queens Library Guild
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A New Children's Room With No Children's Librarians?



Management's Strategy: Chronic Understaffing?

"I am overworked, underpaid and I'm busier every year." How many times have you said this (probably never, because you've said much worse, but this is a family-friendly newsletter) while trying to cover your partner branch on a Saturday, or when you've just covered a reference desk from 2-5:30 pm with an InfoLink in the morning? It's systemwide and it's a problem.

Let's run the numbers (from the library's annual reports): 16.9 million items circulated (100,000 more than the year before); 15.9 million customers; more than 22,000 programs; we answered more than 5.1 million reference and directional questions (510,000 more questions than the previous year); we collected \$2,947,000 in fines and fees; we shoveled 2003's record-breaking snowfall; and more.

Meanwhile, the library administration tells us that we have a full complement of librarians and too many clerks. The library simply refuses to fill custodian positions.

But when we look around, we see

29 branches without ABLMs and more than 20 of them without children's librarians. We have branch staff working more than three Saturdays in a row, which is a violation of the library's own policies. We have clerks who spend the whole day dealing with customers who are fed up because they can't bring their books back on time. Then the library goes and creates new positions that take four hours to explain how they might somehow serve the public. The question invariably asked is: Why does the library have such high turnover? Besides the money, which is pitifully low, it's the great working environment! Who doesn't like to be by himself or herself at the reference

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Safety and Service Compromised

desk from 2-5:30 pm every day of the week when IS 77 gets out?

In this newsletter, a couple of articles will discuss the impact the library's hiring practices are having on our morale, our experience at Queens Library and why most people feel cheated.

This is a problem, but it is not the only problem affecting our employment. We are overworked and understaffed. The library's own numbers show we are doing so much more, yet we don't have a lot of people doing it.

Have you wondered where your ABLM is? Well 29 other branches wonder the same thing. Have you also wondered why you don't have a children's librarian? More than 20 of those positions are vacant. These vacancies have created severe staffing issues that affect our public service, the library and its staff. I am sure all of you can come up with hundreds of reasons why this is wrong for everyone, but let me enumerate a few.

Case Study: Rego Park

Here's the sad story of Rego Park. See if it strikes a chord. A little more than six years ago, Rego Park had eight librarians, eight clerks and a custodian. The staff has now been halved to four clerks and four librarians. Hourly-rate and Teen Net hours have also been slashed. There is no Assistant Branch Manager, and the remaining staff have to help smaller branches and a larger branch on Saturdays. One clerk was sent to another branch, in another geographical area, for four weeks. Is this the best service we can offer our customers?



The public is our lifeblood, and the library's decision not to have enough staff in a branch affects the service they receive. How is public safety affected by staff shortages? Since the library doesn't release statistical information on workers' compensation claims or incidents involving customer injury, we can't tell you (but we can guess) what they're so anxious to keep quiet. Unsupervised children are always at risk, and with fewer and fewer children's librarians the risk is growing. When these increasingly unsafe conditions finally culminate in a really serious injury, the Queens Library stands to lose a lot more than the cost of adequate staffing.

From a service perspective, customers will have fewer librarians who can assist them; they have to wait longer to get help; reference desks are not covered; and if both desks are covered, it is by a haggard librarian trying to sign up ten kids on two computers. Unfortunately for the public, many will go away from this experience feeling less than satisfied, but resigned to the fact that their branch will never have a children's librarian who can assist them.

As the library continues to lose Office Aides through attrition, some days a branch may be so short staffed that the complicated "cash drawer" system cannot be implemented. When adequate staff is no longer available to count money and do accounting chores, customers are simply not allowed to pay fines. They may not be able to check out books if their fines have exceeded the threshold, and they can't pay up because no one is authorized to accept their money.

Branches are dirtier as custodians struggle to cover two or even three

branches. As Will Manley writes in *American Libraries*: "... if your bathrooms are dirty, cramped, and in a state of decline, you're not meeting the needs of your end users." (March 2004, p. 184) Yet the Queens Library continues to refuse to hire new custodians and the few left are so overworked that they are often injured, further exacerbating the situation.

Another very tangible problem of this staffing issue is the library's ability to groom and train librarians on how to become effective supervisors. Twenty-nine ABLM vacancies do not promote good institutional memory and supervisory training. This position is a perfect training ground that affords an opportunity for employees to gain the essential skills of supervision and management. Without this level of training, the library has neglected a whole generation of employees who will not have enough experience to supervise a branch.

Finally, the librarians are affected because if they do not have an opportunity to gain supervisory skills they are ineligible for promotion. Whether they want it or not, employees have lost an important step in becoming a supervisor. All, including the branch library manager and clerks, are affected because everyone has to fill the void left by the ABLM (a strong case can be made for out-of-title work).

This staffing level of doing more with less is destroying the staff morale and begs a number of questions. How can the library fulfill its mission in Books and Reading, Customer Service, Children and Teens and State of the Art Libraries, when the library is so short staffed?



I-9 Forms

Many staff members have been concerned about letters they received requiring them to present documentation for the I-9 forms. All affected staff members are advised to submit such documentation as requested. It is the employer's responsibility to collect required information, prior to employment, and to maintain and secure such files. Should any employee be subject to any negative repercussions as a result of missing I-9 documentation, he/she should immediately seek legal counsel.

Can a New Director Make a Difference?

Why should I stay at Queens? I guess the answer is, and I quote our previous director, "If you don't like it, leave!" Truly inspiring words. And they've inspired literally hundreds of librarians to quit or retire in the past few years.

We all know how woefully underpaid we are, when compared to other library systems in other cities. This is well documented. Can Interim Director, Thomas Galante turn this situation around? Will Mr. Galante be able to make the Queens Library a decent, or even a better place to work? Will management work with us for the good of staff and customers or just settle for the same sad status quo?

Collective Bargaining is currently taking place on the Local Working Conditions Contract. Stay tuned!

RIPs for Other Titles

In the previous issue of this newsletter we published the Recurring Increment Payments (RIPs) for Clerical and Librarian titles and announced that RIPs for other titles would be published in subsequent issues. Now that the

tentative contract reached by DC 37 and the city has been approved, these RIPs will have to be recalculated in accordance with the new agreement. Hence their publication will be postponed to a later issue.



Prescription Drug Co-pays

At the DC 37 Health and Security Plan Board of Trustees meeting held on May 5, 2004, the Trustees voted to implement modifications to the Health and Security Plan Prescription Drug Benefit, effective July 1, 2004. These changes will apply to eligible active employees, eligible retirees and eligible dependents. The changes are as follows:

Co-payment Changes:

- The co-payments for medication obtained at a participating neighborhood pharmacy will be:

\$5.00 per Generic medication;
\$15.00 per Preferred Brand Name medication; and
\$35.00 per Non-Preferred Brand Name medication.

Prescriptions obtained at the retail participating pharmacy will continue to be limited to up to a 30-day supply.

- The co-payments for a 90-day supply of medication obtained through the mail service program, CFI, will be:

\$10.00 per Generic medication;
\$30.00 per Preferred Brand Name medication; and
\$70.00 per Non-Preferred Brand Name medication.



**Visit the Local 1321 website:
<http://www.local1321.org>**





Conflict Resolution: turning arguments into agreements

Would you like to improve your communication skills and problem solving techniques? Are you interested in developing better strategies for handling workplace issues?

If you answered yes, why not enroll in the new Conflict Resolution program?

The course will help participants build a collaborative work environment, use a win-win approach to solving problems and get cooperation from others in difficult situations.

The six-week program is accepting applications for spring classes, which will be held beginning in September on Mondays from 6 - 8 p.m. at DC 37, 125 Barclay St., in Manhattan. An orientation will be held in Sept. To attend classes, please return the coupon. If you have any questions, contact Stephen Johnson at 212-815-1698.

Conflict Resolution — Fall 2004

Return to: Stephen Johnson, DC 37 Education Fund, 125 Barclay St., Room 204, New York, N.Y. 10007

Name _____ S.S. # _____
 Address _____ Apt. _____
 City _____ State _____ ZIP _____
 Work phone _____ Home phone _____
 Job Title _____ Agency _____
 Local _____ E-mail address _____



Podiatry Service

The DC 37 Podiatry Service (foot care) is offered at 115 Chambers St., NYC 10007 (212-766-4455) and at 186 Joralemon St., Brooklyn 11201 (718-625-2544). For members only.



Personal Service Unit

Professionally trained social work staff can help with emotional and family concerns, alcoholism, drug abuse, health problems and adjustment to retirement.

Information is available on a wide range of social services in the community. Short-term individual and group counseling is available. Call 212-815-1260, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., for a screening evaluation.



Affordable Mortgage Program

The DC 37 Affordable Mortgage Program helps members secure loans from JP Morgan Chase Bank. The program helps with mortgages for coops, condos, 1-6 family properties, home equity loans and mortgage refinancing at special discounted rates and benefits available to DC 37 members.

You must attend a seminar to find out the advantages of this program, begin the process toward home ownership, and be eligible for discounts.

To reserve a seat, call 212-815-1814 weekdays, 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.



Membership Records/Change of Address

If you have recently moved, changed your mailing address, lost your union card, or are not sure whether you are a member or agency fee payer, or which local you belong to, call 212-815-1570.