“Throw the Book at ‘Em”: Reading and Library Use in Juvenile Halls

Michele Gibney
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by Michele Gibney

School of Library and Information Science
San Jose State University

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Dr. Ziming Liu

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Abstract

This paper investigates the role libraries play in American juvenile detention centers. An overview of facilities and services nation-wide is followed by survey results from three specific institutions: King County Youth Service Center in Washington, Contra Costa County Juvenile Hall in California, and Pima County Juvenile Detention Center in Arizona. The surveys were administered to minors at all three centers and faculty and probation staff at two. The literature review analysis and survey results reveal that reading habits and behavior of the majority of detained youth have benefited from having a library on-site which they can visit on a regular basis. However, further research is needed to determine whether there is a quantifiable improvement in test scores or recidivism rates.
“Throw the Book at ‘Em”: Reading and Library Use in Juvenile Halls

In the Fall of 2007, I was enrolled in a graduate level library science course at San Jose State University. This class was entitled, “Publishing for the Profession” and in it we were required to write articles on various subjects aimed at several different audiences. One of the articles I wrote promoted a volunteer program at the juvenile hall in my county, Contra Costa. Through interviewing the librarian, Alison McKee, at Contra Costa County Juvenile Hall (CCCJH) and subsequent conversations with her this research project was born.

Forward to the present, Spring of 2008 sees me enrolled in a class titled “Library Services to Racially and Ethnically Diverse Communities” where my current term paper is on library services to the youth at juvenile halls. In order to ascertain the benefits or lack thereof these students receive from on-site library usage, I created and administered surveys to the staff and minors at two detention centers as well as the minors at a third hall.

This paper shall set forth background research on libraries in juvenile halls, my survey development and administration processes, and the results of the surveys. The purpose of this investigation was to determine how detained youth felt about the juvenile hall libraries and public libraries. In addition the surveys were designed to discover whether or not having literary access inside detention was affecting their behavior or future library use upon release. According to my findings, I believe that, predominantly, library use is a benefit to these teenagers. It is shown to positively affect their behavioral attitudes on the inside and can also be seen as creating a drastic shift from youth who have no interest in reading to youth who like reading and plan to continue visiting public libraries upon release.
Background

There are a few recurring themes in literature on the subject of libraries in juvenile halls. These tend to fall into three categories: physical descriptions of institutions, how to interest minors in reading, and specific programs offered. In order to give context to the survey I conducted at three juvenile halls, I will first give background information on detention center libraries in general focusing specifically on these three main categories. There is also one additional category which I have found a single example of and that is of a similar survey given to detained minors at juvenile halls.

Institutions. The physical spaces of juvenile halls are generally comparable across the board—at least according to articles and papers describing them. The main elements include a series of locked doors separating the minors from the outside, and the outside from them. On my own visit to the Contra Costa County Juvenile Hall, I had to sign in at a front desk where the staff was protected behind glass, and then prominently display my visitor badge on the front of my shirt so the security cameras could see it while I stood in front of the multiple remote-controlled locked doors. Kathy McLellan and Tricia Suellentrop (2007), two librarians who do outreach to detained teens, had a similar experience their first time visiting a detention center, “it was no surprise that we were asked first to walk through a metal detector, next through doors that automatically locked behind us, and then through a winding maze of hallways,” (403). In addition to these elements there is generally institutional lighting, concrete floors and walls, detainee uniforms, and no pencils, pens, staples, or hard-back books allowed. The library tends to be a spot of color in the building. At Pima County Learning Resource Center and Library in Arizona, for example,
The center’s cold, concrete floors end abruptly at the library’s entrance, replaced by a brilliant blue carpet with splashes of yellow, green, purple, and red. Three beautiful murals painted by former JDC youth from images of actual totems around the world, decorate the area. The wall of windows on the east side of the 775-square-foot space welcomes the rays of sun to brighten the room. A glass door among the windows opens to a large, secure outdoor area with basketball hoops and picnic tables. Fiery red metal bookshelves line the perimeter, and two double spinners with lower shelves on wheels move freely in and around the space. The two laminate tables and twelve plastic yellow chairs provide adequate seating for the small number of youth allowed in the library at a time. (“600 pod…”, 2007, 410).

This is quite a difference from the prior Pima County Library incarnation. The year 1999 is when they first started having library service, but then it was merely a tiny room which teens couldn’t physically visit and books were wheeled on carts around to the different living units. It wasn’t until March 1, 2007 that the new library space opened at Pima County offering students a much wider variety to pick from and an incentive for good behavior so as to be allowed a visit. A similar situation exists at the Multnomah County Donald E. Long Detention Center in Oregon where the librarian, Naomi Angier, brings books on a cart to the living units once a week as well as doing book talks during certain classroom times, (Angier and O’Dell, 2000, 331).

Alameda County’s Juvenile Hall has “13 to 15 small libraries scattered throughout the various wards. It is not unusual to see teens perusing the shelves throughout the day,” (Dittman, 2007, ¶9). This is certainly one way in which teens can have access to the books but the question then becomes whether it’s better for them to have constant access or to have a wider variety on a more limited time basis. The Pima County library is an excellent example for the former.
Before a dedicated on-site library was available to teens, circulation statistics were 1,500 a month. The month after the new library space opened in April 2007, there were 2,000 checkouts a month, and by June the number reached 3,000, (“600 pod…”, 2007, 410).

Other juvenile detention centers which have on-site libraries which can be visited include some of the following: Contra Costa County in Martinez, CA, King County in Seattle, WA, the Tell Aggeler Opportunity High School for juvenile offenders in Los Angeles, CA, and the Beaumont Juvenile Correctional Center in Beaumont, Virginia. These libraries range in size, book selection policy, frequency of allowed visits by minors, and number of books. The King County library for example has over 10,000 titles, is 1,200 square feet of space and has been open for use since 1972, (Angier, Cohen, and Morrison, 2001, 16). This is an amazing accomplishment. The Contra Costa library is 600 square feet by comparison and has over 6,000 books. It was opened in 2006, (Huff, 2006, n.p.). Beaumont’s is a 20-by-25 foot room with books in excess of 2,000, (Davis, 2000, 58-59). Finally, the Aggeler School was built as part of an Eagle Scout project by a 14-year old boy, Chas Duff, and ended up getting state funding to buy 4,000 books plus an additional 1,000 collected by Duff. It was built in an old locker room on the campus, (I, 2003, 26).

These are just a few examples of the types of library service offered to minors in detention centers around the country. It is by no means comprehensive but it does provide a general view of what’s available to these teenagers.

Engaging the Audience. Katherine Dittman’s (2007) article on Alameda County Juvenile Hall begins early on by posing the question of, “[c]an you create a culture of literacy in an unlikely place and will it make a difference?” This question is incredibly astute and focuses specifically on the area which my research is interested in—how do you get the teens in lock-up
to read and does it impact their lives in any beneficial way? Dittman’s answer is ‘yes’, however it is a process which every juvenile hall librarian must face and overcome through sheer will-power and ingenuity. Dittman writes about Alameda’s librarian, Amy Cheney:

[her] attitude about getting the kids to read is ‘Let’s push ‘em. The goal here is to inspire and motivate the youth to read books they wouldn’t normally read,’ she says. What’s more, during a time of angst and uncertainty about their young lives, teens can turn to books as ‘a way to pursue their individuality,’ and learn about people, issues, places, or ideas that would not otherwise be readily introduced to them, says Cheney. (¶13)

Cheney’s attitude thus falls into the camp of positive and pro-active. There is a flip-side to this which questions the efficacy of library services to these youths and whether or not it is possible to reach them.

Libraries, for some of the youth, are not a place to discover these marvelous “people, issues, places, or ideas” that Cheney is waxing eloquently on, but rather are seen as “nothing more than a leisure-reading library, a place to sleep or bang on the tables to the beat of a rap,” (Davis, 2000, 60). McLellan and Suellentrop also debate how best to approach this audience where their “biggest concern was doing something that they wouldn’t laugh at or be hostile about—and that they wouldn’t think was stupid. We knew that reading was ‘uncool’ for these kids, but we also realized that they had nothing to do but read,” (404).

Looking again at the positive side to juvenile hall libraries, the space can provide an opportunity for these teens—as Cheney suggests—to evaluate their lives and assess where they are headed. The detention centers provide highly limited mobility and physical self-expression with lock down hours and uniforms. Reading is both an escape and a form of individuality that
is achievable. Juvenile hall libraries, in this sense, provide a liminal space where the teens can test their personal boundaries and expand their horizons.

Naomi Angier, the Multnomah County Juvenile Hall librarian is cited in an article by Melissa Madenski (2001) as saying,

They want books. They’re in their rooms a lot…They do not have open access to TVs and computers, they have some [but] it’s very limited by honor status. Basically they have nothing to do. And when you put a teenager in a situation where they have nothing to do, they become readers…It was just a matter of finding books they were interested in.” (41).

This sentiment is echoed by another librarian, Diana Tixier Herald (2004), who states, “[w]hile the favorite authors have changed over time, the enthusiasm of locked-up teens to escape through reading has remained constant,” (20). The divide between students who honestly love visiting the library in the detention center and ones who are apathetic towards it is echoed in my survey results with comments from both minors and staff reflecting their appreciation towards it as well as the occasional naysayer. One comment from a staff member even expressed the possibility that some teens just “go with the flow” and are not really interested in the library’s services, (Pima County Library Survey). However, the positive comments far outweigh the negative in the survey results as they do in the literature.

Another article in talking about Dr. Joe Marshall, author of Street Soldier: One Man’s Struggle to Save a Generation, One Life at a Time and guest speaker at a juvenile hall library, writes that “[a] few of the grim-faced youths—clad in matching navy blue sweat shirts, light blue t-shirts and khaki slacks—seemed intent on ignoring him. But the majority paid rapt attention, hanging on every word uttered by the San Francisco social worker…” (Benedetti, 2004, n.p.).
Thus it seems that Dittman’s affirmative answer to the possibility of creating a ‘culture of literacy’ is borne out on two fronts. The process of engaging the audience might be difficult, but it is still possible and more likely to occur than not.

*Library services to detained youth.* Services at the detention center libraries occupy a great deal of space in the literature. These typical services can include book discussion groups, writing workshops, and guest speakers. Book discussion groups are one of the most common, (Dittman; “600 pod…”; Angier and O’Dell; and McLellan and Suellentrop). The guest speakers program where librarians can involve inspirational authors to come and talk to the teens also occurs frequently, (Dittman; Angier). Naomi Angier brought Ernest Gaines and Luis Rodriguez to the Multnomah County Juvenile Hall, (Angier, 15). While Amy Cheney at Alameda County Juvenile Hall has introduced such notable authors as Ishmael Beah, who wrote *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* and Terry McMillian, author of *Waiting to Exhale* and *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*, (Dittman, n.p.). McMillian even offered a $500 grant to any of the detainees who decided to go to college—one of whom took her up on the proposal, (n.p.).

Some other programs are poetry workshops and a monthly newsletter (Davis, 60-61), pen pal programs with teenagers at public high schools and special summer activities like root beer float parties and classes on juggling (“600 pod…”), and an alternative sentencing program called Changing Lives Through Literature (CLTL), (McLellan and Suellentrop, 403). CLTL is a seven-week long program held in a public library branch for two hours weekly. The program is required of, on average, eight teens whose sentences include this mandatory activity. It is basically a book-discussion group, however it includes a librarian, a probation officer, and a judge. McLelland and Suellentrop cite that “CLTL’s positive effects are evident not only in anecdotal stories but also in dramatically lower incidences of probation revocation than the
norm: recidivism figures are…17 percent for teens in CLTL, compared with 58 percent for other corrections clients,” (405).

These programs on the whole offer a range of opportunities for the detained youth in juvenile halls. Through exposure to different books and adults interested in their responses to these texts; to promoting their writing skills and lauding personal accomplishment; juvenile hall libraries may help, as CLTL does, to decrease recidivism figures.

*Comparable survey results.* I have found, after copious searching, only one article by Patrick Jones (2004) that includes a survey on juvenile halls. His survey, however, is primarily on the juvenile halls themselves and not about the minors. It is a very interesting piece all the same and surveyed 43 institutions that offered some level of book services to the inmates, of which 16 responded. He asked questions about the history of services offered, range of offerings, and restricted material. The main part of the paper is a comprehensive list of all the services these various juvenile detention centers offer. The selection ranges from creative writing workshops to a Born to Read program for teen parents.

In addition there is a small section devoted to survey results from the teenagers on a few issues such as: whether they are more or less likely to now use the public library, if their impression of reading is more or less positive, if they are reading more since being locked up, and their favorite activity while in holding (with visiting the library being the top choice). Jones’ conclusion states that:

The question no longer asks what a young adult does in a library or as part of an outreach, but also asks what happens to that young adult as a result of checking out a book, attending a book discussion program, having their creativity tapped, or learning how to locate information on the Internet. (18)
Building on this article is one of the main goals of my paper with a larger survey devoted to teenage responses with the additional information gleaned from their teachers and probation officers to present a fully rounded out picture of three particular juvenile halls’ library use and effect.

I find it interesting that this is the only article I have found that concerns itself with libraries in juvenile halls and actually presents survey results. I contacted and got approval from three different juvenile halls in three states to conduct a survey on the incarcerated youths—so the lack can’t be because it’s difficult to reach this population. I can only assume that the reason there is so little academic research is because juvenile hall libraries are not at the forefront of public consciousness. This is a shame in my opinion because they are an underserved and highly grateful population. From my reading and conversations with the librarians at these institutions, the juveniles absolutely love visiting the library, checking out books, and reading. They request a wide range of reading material from street books to *The Iliad*, (personal conversation with Alison McKee, March 3, 2008).

Jones’ conclusion that his article is helping to understand what happens to these youth as a consequence of library use is a little over-stated. There is no way to track the minors after they leave the detention center and survey the effect the library had or didn’t have on their lives. This is due to confidentiality and protecting the rights of under-age teens. I do wish this was possible because it could provide proof of the importance of library services to detained youths; however even a survey of current detainees should provide a lot of valuable intelligence. Jones’ article makes a significant start with a wide range of institutional study respondents, and I hope to further the information base by a concentrated survey on current juvenile hall residents.
Survey Development.

Survey developments follows certain rules which I will herein describe before following it with comprehensive insight into how I created the survey used in this research project.

General. At the outset of any research project, the investigator needs to set out specific goals and plan how she will meet them. In describing the process of research, Joseph Janes (1999a), a professor at University of Washington’s School of Library and Information Sciences, writes that the problem must be identified, relevant research read, methodologies identified, data collected, analyzed, and evaluated, and finally conclusions must be reached, (212). If the methodology decided upon is to be a survey, then one must fully consider the ramifications of each question to be asked. Janes writes “[t]he most important thing to remember is that people will answer the question you ask them, not necessarily the question you wanted to ask them. The words you use and the way in which a question is constructed can have profound implications for the answers you get,” (1999b, 322). Janes goes on to give various examples of the good types of questions to ask. These include: multiple-choice, open-ended, and questions with definitive answer selections such as yes, no, maybe, don’t know, strongly agree, agree, no opinion, disagree, and strongly disagree. He also advises on questions which are “clear”, “not leading”, “able to be answered by the subject”, “not double-barreled”, “short”, “not negative”, and “unbiased” (322-323). The recommendation for open-ended questions that Janes offers is refuted in another source which states that “in most cases they should be avoided. A major reason is variation in willingness and ability to respond in writing,” (Frary, 2003, “Writing the Questionnaire Items”, ¶1). Frary goes on to say that “[o]pen-ended questions are quite likely to suppress responses from the less literate segments of a population or from responders who are less concerned about the topic at hand,” (¶1). He does admit that one good reason for using
open-ended questions is “the capture of unsuspected information.” (“Writing the Questionnaire Items”, ¶2). However, he suggests this should only be used for informal questionnaires with fewer than 50 respondents, (¶2).

Other factors which should be considered when creating surveys are the design and order of questions which could influence the outcome. Janes suggests that leading off “with the most interesting, non-threatening questions” can help people get started on the free flow of information (1999b, 324). Another source backs up this suggestion:

Ideally, the early questions in a survey should be easy and pleasant to answer. These kinds of questions encourage people to continue the survey…Whenever possible leave difficult or sensitive questions until near the end of your survey. Any rapport that has been built up will make it more likely people will answer these questions. If people quit at that point anyway, at least they will have answered most of your questions. (Creative Research Systems, 2006, n.p.)

Another way of building up a rapport in order to ensure question answering is the survey giver’s introduction. A “thoughtfully-crafted introduction…dispels any suspicion that the questioner works for the tax-gatherers, it introduces the themes and purpose of the survey,” (Statistical Survey System, 2000, “4. Questionnaire Design”, ¶3). By giving the survey respondents a chance to understand the meaning behind the survey, they will have an appreciation for the intent and this contributes to their willingness to answer.

Janes’ last suggestion is to “maximize white space” and “make it as uncluttered and clean as you can, but do not make the survey too long,” (1999b, 324). Frary seconds this idea when promoting a streamlined survey, “[t]he investigator must define precisely the information needed
and endeavor to write as few questions as possible to obtain it. Peripheral questions and ones to find out ‘something that might just be nice to know’ must be avoided,” (n.p.).

The final aspect I considered generally when in the preparation phase for designing my surveys was the audience to which I would be administering them. The primary focus for the survey building tips discussed up to now were aimed at adults. Teenagers require an additional set of rules and suggestions for optimum survey results. A paper on the challenges of interviewing adolescents found a few key areas where problems arose: “recruitment of teens, locating a quiet place for interviews, the silencing affect of the tape recorder, and asking about abstract concepts…” (Bassett, Beagen, Ristovski-Slijepcevic, and Chapman, 2008, 119). The issue with recruitment is that minors need parental consent in order to be interviewed. This can mean the minor is not asked first but merely signed up by the parent. Consent goes a long way to getting truthful and verbose answers from teens since it is likely they will be more forthcoming when they actually want to be there. Otherwise it’s possible, as the authors found, that “[m]ost saw the interview as a chore, fidgeting throughout,” (124).

**Development and administration of juvenile hall surveys.** Taking in to consideration all the above, I attempted to design surveys targeted toward the specific populations, with simplistic questions, and condensed to one page with questions on the front and back. The initial survey was modeled heavily upon a 2006 survey done previously at Contra Costa Juvenile Hall when Ms. McKee was first doing collection development in the newly opened on-site library. My intent at the beginning of the survey process was to discover what the minors liked about the library and whether or not they would be more likely to read books or visit a public library in the future. Basically, I was testing to see if using a juvenile hall library had impacted their lives in any way. The questions therefore are primarily geared towards asking them to rate their
enjoyment of the library, about their favorite books, their reading habits before and now, and their future plans to visit libraries and bookstores upon release. Each survey for the three different counties is slightly different based on the particularities of that county (please see Appendices A, B, and C). So, for example, there is an additional question about public library cards on the King County survey as the librarian suggested this as a measure of their honesty in answering “Yes” to whether or not they visited the public library on the outside. In correspondence she had mentioned how often the teens would mention having multiple library cards within the King County system, (personal correspondence with Jill Morrison, January 28, 2008).

In order to establish a rapport with the youths being surveyed it was decided that the librarian at each institution would administer the test to the students. Thus the survey was coming from an adult who was already trusted by the population. The administration process was slightly different at each institution. At Contra Costa, the minors were given the surveys to take while in the library during library time over a one month period. Those that had already taken the survey the week before (if they were still being detained) were exempt from taking it again. At King County the librarian went around to all the classrooms in a one week period and gave out the tests. Finally, in Pima County the surveys were also given out in the library but for only two weeks as opposed to a whole month.

A big caveat in surveying minors at a juvenile hall is that some may answer untruthfully in their desire to please the figures of authority. I attempted to circumvent this by not asking for their names (which would be illegal anyway as they are detained minors) and the staff administering the surveys gave out instructions including to answer honestly as it would be anonymous. The other instruction given by staff was to make sure to fill out both sides of the
page—a request which fell on some deaf ears as there is an occasional survey with no responses on the back page.

I feel in retrospect that the survey could have been pared down further by eliminating some of the more peripheral questions Frary warned about including. It also would have been excellent to have a pre-test survey given to iron out kinks. For example, I learned that possibly adding text to the bottom of the front page stating something along the lines of, “Turn over for more questions” would have been helpful. On the whole, however, the youth surveys returned an excellent stack of responses from all three institutions—272 responses in total.

The questions towards faculty and staff in Pima and Contra Costa Counties (see Appendices D-G) were to ascertain whether they had noticed any changes in student behavior and reading habits since the facility had created an on-site library. For King County I did not survey the staff and faculty due to the fact that their library had a much longer history. Both Pima and Contra Costa County juvenile hall libraries had been open less than two years to resident visits. These surveys were only one page long and quite limited in questions. However, the questions were primarily open-ended due to my interest in hearing concrete examples of change or lack of change in youth attitudes. This seemed an important risk to take based on the small survey group size and the fact that the research would be promoting their efforts to reach these students. It seemed likely, therefore, that they would answer with detail and honesty. This theory was proved correct, especially from the number of responses received from Pima County. For Contra Costa County only the probation officers and teachers were given surveys, while at Pima all detention center staff were given the surveys. This created a much higher response rate even if some of them have potentially less interaction with the students.
**Results**

*Student surveys.* From all three juvenile halls: Contra Costa, Pima, and King Counties, a total of 272 minors were surveyed. The median age was 15.97 and the ratio of males to females was 223 to 49, (82% male, and 18% female). Of these numbers, 116 completed surveys were returned from Contra Costa, 82 from Pima, and 74 from King County Juvenile Hall.

The portions of the survey which are of primary importance to this paper were the following questions:

Do you like to read?

Did you like to read before you came to Juvenile Hall?

Do you go to the library on the outs?

Now that you’ve used the _________ Library, do you think you’ll visit the public library on the outs?

And the area for additional comments and suggestions was also of great interest. The other questions asked in the survey involved favorite book, visiting bookstores, owning books, possessing a library card, and student opinion of the library and the volumes included there. The responses are either irrelevant (favorite books ranged from Harry Potter to street books with very infrequent repeats) or provide no contradictory data (bookstore section utilized in Pima and Contra Costa County surveys evinced similar responses to student interest in public libraries).
For the question of “Do you like to read?”, the following responses were garnered:

**Figure 1**

![Bar chart for question of “Do you like to read?”](image1.png)

While for the question of “Did you like to read before you came to Juvenile Hall?”, the answers were as follows:

**Figure 2**

![Bar chart for question of “Did you like to read before you came to Juvenile Hall?”](image2.png)

These charts present some pretty compelling evidence that juvenile hall libraries are increasing literary interest in at-risk youth. Even though only 40% of the 272 respondents enjoyed reading prior to their stays in juvenile hall, since their detention this number has increased to 91%.

Written in comments include the following, “Libraries are like a toy store when you’re locked up, makes you happy to see books,” (King County Library Survey); “I like reading it helped my stay here fly by. [And] plus I like all the books I read while I was in here,” (Pima County Library Survey); “That library has most of the books that I like to read. And if they don't the
library man would real[ly] look or he would order it. That's what I like about the library. There's a lot of fun books to read,” (Pima County Library Survey); and “The Betty Frandsen Library introduced me to some pretty cool books and a new hobby: reading.” (Contra Costa County Library Survey). All of these comments (plus others that I am omitting for space reasons) offer solid proof that the majority of teens gained a love of reading while in the juvenile hall. Of course, there were also a few less complimentary comments—“I have read some of the worst literature I have ever perused and if anything my motivation for not coming back is the terrible books,” (King County Library Survey). There were, however, fewer derogatory comments than pleased, happy ones from the students. The positive notes scrawled in the comments section further reinforced the 51% increase in reading-lovers at these three juvenile halls.

For the questions on visiting public libraries before and the potential for visiting now, the data produces these results for the question, “Do you go to the library on the outs?”:

**Figure 3**

![Bar Chart]

and for “Now that you’ve used the _________ Library, do you think you’ll visit the public library on the outs?”:
Again, although there was a higher number of prior library visitors than I was expecting, the number for potential new patrons increased a great deal since their experiences with libraries on the inside of a detention center. When asked if he had visited the public library before, one teen commented, “Sometimes. I’m not scared to read no more though,” (Pima County Library survey). This statement is interesting in light of research done on “Reading ability as a Predictor of library anxiety”, the title of an article by Jiao and Onwuegbuzie (2003). The authors of this piece cite library anxiety “as a negative experience characterized by worry, self-defeating thoughts, fear, tension, and physiological arousal that arises during the typical library-task cycle,” (160-61). The further state that “[l]ibrary-anxious students typically exhibit many avoidance behaviors such as refraining from asking for help, procrastinating over undertaking a library task, or giving up their library search before reaching their goals,” (161). If in any small measure an approachable juvenile hall librarian and comfortable, cheery library helped to decrease a teen’s anxiety over reading and visiting the library than I’d argue its value is immeasurable. Helping to turn around the lives of at-risk youth is one of the reasons juvenile halls exist. Corporeal punishment for crimes committed is valid, but initiating change at the root behavior is laudable. The detention center library’s efforts are admirable in this light for services provided and every life altered.
There were two follow-up questions to the prior public library visiting question which were multiple choice questions for “yes” or “no” responses. The potential answers were “check out materials for school”, “read for fun”, “study with friends”, “use internet”, “hang out with friends”, and “ask questions of librarian”. The combined survey results from all three juvenile halls were:

**Figure 5**

![Visited Public Library Before](image)

As expected, the highest results were for Internet use at the public library, and the second most popular selection was hanging out with friends. These are not exactly the academic leanings one might wish for in public library usage, however they are typical of all teenagers—a fact which I can state with some confidence as I work in a high school library and have worked at a public one.

The options for “no” responses to the prior library visitation question were, “Unable to get to library”, “Not enough time”, “Nothing at the library for me”, “Don’t need it”, “Do
research/use Internet/find reading materials elsewhere”, “Not open enough”, and “Didn’t know there was a library”. The King County library survey did not include the final two options and will not be included in this tally. So out of the 198 response from Pima and Contra Costa Counties, the results are:

**Figure 6**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unable to get to library</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough time</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing for me</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t need it</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do work elsewhere</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not open enough</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn’t know there was a library</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Not enough time” as the top answer with 38% may be understandable, but hopefully with the increased percentage of those youths planning to visit the public library upon release, this number could change. One hand-written in comment on this section in the King County Library survey was, “Never had a reason to, now I love to read”; which bodes well.

On the whole, the student surveys at the three juvenile halls showed the teens to have an increased appetite for reading, a new interest in visiting the public library, and a high enjoyment level for visiting the on-site libraries while in detention. The question then becomes: What is the library doing for these students? A question which I believe is answered in the staff responses.
Staff surveys. As previously stated I was unable to survey staff at King County, so these results will only be relevant for two of the juvenile halls: Pima County and Contra Costa County. Both faculty and staff were surveyed at these institutions and the return rate was 100%. A total of 14 teachers and 80 probation staff completed the surveys from the two facilities. The average number of years worked in a juvenile hall was 8.8 years from the 94 respondents. The two groups were asked two primary questions and requested to provide comments on both. The two questions were: “Have you seen a difference in student behavior in the classroom since the library opened?” and “Have you seen a difference in student reading habits and levels since the library opened?” The responses were distinctly positive.

Figure 7

Have you seen a difference in student behavior in the classroom since the library opened?

![Bar Chart Figure 7]

Figure 8

Have you seen a difference in student reading habits and levels since the library opened?

![Bar Chart Figure 8]
(Note: The “Not applicable” category is for those staff members who have been working at the juvenile halls for less two years. The question was specifically attempting to test whether an on-site, open-to-students library had made a significant impact on student behavior and reading habits. Thus, the employees who were hired after the libraries opened could not properly address the question.)

Comments by the staff were effusive and primarily imparted the same positive or negative remarks. Some examples on positive behavior are:

- “Reading scores up -- Improved reading skills in Text (school), Vocabulary improvement, Improved attitude toward reading in general.” (Contra Costa Library Survey)
- “Students are given a chance to access books when the testing is complete. They like to access something worthwhile like the library program. They also at times tell us they like the chance to go visit the library.” (Contra Costa Library Survey)
- “The residents just don't read one book. It's book after book. They also are starting to recognize different authors. Most residents always ask to get a new library book and love to go to the JH library.” (Contra Costa Library Survey)
- “Residents seem to be a lot calmer in their rooms. They are even content to miss free play at times to stay in their room to read a book.” (Contra Costa Library Survey)
- “I find that the youth are more interested in reading during their detainment. Also they have voiced how good it feels to get lost in a book and how reading offers them a safe way to escape their surroundings.” (Pima Library Survey)
• “More eager to read than before. Minors look forward to their library time and if they don't receive if on that particular day for whatever reason, they are very disappointed.” (Pima Library Survey)

• “Students tend to act better so they can earn the privilege of going to the library.” (Pima Library Survey)

• “Students are reading more challenging books. Students are trying different types of books. Students seem to be getting more comfortable with the library.” (Pima Library Survey)

There was only one partially negative comment on behavior which was that in regards to visiting or not visiting the new library at Pima County, “[s]ome state they don’t care either way.”

Some positive comments on reading habits were:

• “The residents want to read more. They ask for staff opinion on what books they should read. Never have I seen so many residents wanting to read.” (Contra Costa Library Survey)

• “I have seen even the lowest level readers have books. I never used to see that.” (Contra Costa Library Survey)

• “Students are wanting more and more. They are excited when they know they are going to get to go to the library. They are enjoying reading and have more incentive to get better on New Century.” (Pima Library Survey)

• “I'm amazed that certain students grab educational material to learn more.” (Pima Library Survey)

• “The minors are more excited now about reading than ever. Even the minors that do not normally read are now reading.” (Pima Library Survey)
• “I think they read more and for those kids that continue to come back numerous times, they are not stuck with reading the same books. I think they respect the books more also [be]cause they get to see that some will be checking them out after them. A little more respect at least.” (Pima Library Survey)

• “They read more and like to suggest books they've read to other minors.” (Pima Library Survey)

The two negative comments on student reading habits were:

• “Many minors enjoy the variety of books to choose from and they enjoy the library environment, however, others just "go with the flow" and state it doesn't matter to them either way.” (Pima County Library Survey)

• “Some minors enjoy going to the library and picking up books that cannot be found in the living unit library. Those particular minors do well in school throughout the week and avoid getting zeros so they can go to the library at the end of the week. Other minors enjoy reading, but don't necessarily care about going to the library because there is one on the unit. There has been no change in the behavior of those particular minors.” (Contra Costa Library Survey)

Again, overall, the responses on behavior and reading were positive more often than they evinced signs of negativity. Results from all the surveys administered to groups of minors, staff, and faculty show that the minors are reading more, enjoying reading more challenging works, and behaving better in order to receive the privilege of continued library visits and book check-out privileges.
Summary

First, the paper provided analysis of various juvenile hall libraries across the United States while also giving a literature review of available research on the topic at hand. Following this, there was a review of survey construction and the development of the survey used in this research including how and where they were administered and the questions posed to respondents. Finally, a results section was written which highlighted the research gained from the surveys and came to the conclusion that on-site libraries are positively impacting the lives of minors at the three juvenile halls under review.

Conclusion

In 2007 the National Endowment for the Arts released a report stating that Americans, and in particular children and teenagers, are reading less for fun with a corresponding decline in test scores (Rich, 2007, n.p.). Although the report does not take into account any online reading (Johnson, 2008, n.p.)—which with sites such as MySpace and blogs is a high percentage of youth reading—the findings should still be considered. The study’s data “showed that students who read for fun nearly every day performed better on reading tests than those who reported reading never or hardly at all,” (Rich, n.p.). Considering that the minors at the three juvenile halls under survey had an increase to 91% who enjoyed reading, there should also be a noticeable upswing in their test scores from the time spent in detention. Unfortunately, I was unable to gain access to that data for this paper but it is an area which deserves further study in this field.

A second cause and effect model which should be studied further in conjunction with detained minors is recidivism rates for those with access to books as compared to those without. Alison McKee (2004), the librarian at Contra Costa County Juvenile Hall, wrote a research paper
which discussed the possibility that libraries inside juvenile detention centers could decrease recidivism rates, however she could not find any academic research confirming this hypothesis, (n.p.). This is another area which I was also unable to address but which does deserve further research. One area of research which provides partial consideration of this topic is from the Corporation for National and Community Service (2004) which noted a reduction in continued crime with the introduction of a mentoring program in Imperial County:

Youth in juvenile hall often come from families with histories of incarceration, abuse and neglect, often lack positive relationships with adults, have strong affiliations with gangs, and frequently perform below grade-level in academics. Youth with a parent in prison are seven times more likely to be involved in the criminal court system and spend time in jail or prison themselves. The introduction of a reliable mentor during adolescence can greatly reduce the likelihood that such conditions will lead to further criminal activity and incarceration as an adult. (“Issue”, n.p.)

The mentoring program also included a book discussion group and showed an improvement in reading skills. Programs such as this can have a life-altering effect on at-risk youths whose lives up to the point of detention have included very few to no positive role models.

Of course, it’s important to keep in mind that not all the minors who come through the detention center system exit with literary fever and lead forever after sterling lives of perfect character. Dittman says it well:

Realistically, it would be a mistake to assume that all these young people enter the facility jaded, street-hardened and explosive, and exit as hopeful and insightful young adults ready to take on the world simply through reading. This is not a charming place. There are more sullen faces than smiles, more harsh words than kindness. (n.p.)
It’s undeniable that a juvenile hall is not the best place in the world to be, library notwithstanding. However, a juvenile hall which can offer something affirming to teenagers during a time of upheaval and sentencing—a love of reading—is an impressive feat.

Dittman’s quote may be the pragmatic reality to keep in mind, but there are success stories too—youth who go on to attend college, who don’t come back to the juvenile hall, and who become authors and entrepreneurial businesspeople. When Alameda County won a $10,000 federal grant in 2007, a former juvenile hall resident who now attends Chabot College in Hayward was one of the award acceptors, (Holzmeister, 2007, n.p.). McKee relayed a story to me of a minor who applied for and got approval to go on college visits with his probation officer while in residence at the Contra Costa County Juvenile Hall, (personal conversation, March 3, 2008). In addition former residents of Contra Costa County Juvenile Hall who are now residents at a post-detention center facility (Orin Allen Youth Rehabilitation Facility in Byron, CA) worked together with McKee to secure funding from the Dean and Margaret Lesher Foundation in the amount of $70,000 in order to build an on-site library at Byron, (Cain, 2008, n.p.).

There are some teenagers whose lives are irrevocably altered for the better after a period of detention and many of these are improved through the library services offered. In order to increase the success rate of producing reformed characters from juvenile halls, more attention needs to be paid to this disenfranchised population. Greater funding should be made available in order to increase library services nation-wide at juvenile halls. Though attention in this paper was limited to centers with library services, primarily with staffed libraries, most juvenile halls do not have a resident librarian or a dedicated library. Some have no services at all while most have a bare minimum of discarded, beat-up paperback books and no changing variety.
Therefore, further research is called for in order to assist the population of juvenile detention center minors who deserve library services.
References


Appendix A

Betty Frandsen Library Survey

1. Gender:  Male __________  Female __________

2. Age:  __________

3. On a scale of 1 to 10, how much do you like visiting the Betty Frandsen Library?
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
   DISLIKE LIKE

4. Do you think there are a lot of good books in the library?
   Yes _______  No _______

5. What kinds of books do you like to read? (check as many as you want)
   Fiction _____  Fantasy _____  Horror _____  Science Fiction _____
   Poetry _____  Non-Fiction _____  Romance _____  Sports _____
   Anime/Manga _____  Biographies _____  Parenting Books _____

6. What do you like about the library? (check as many as apply)
   Books _____  Graphic Novels/Comics _____  Leaving the unit_____  
   Magazines______  Library Games______

7. Do you like to read?  Yes _______  No _______

8. Did you like to read before you came to Juvenile Hall?  Yes _____  No ______

9. Name one of your favorite books: _______________________________________

10. Do you go to the library on the outs?  Yes ____________  No ____________

11. If YES, what do you do there? (check as many as you want)
    Check out materials for school _______  Read for fun __________
    Study with friends ________  Use Internet __________
Hang out with friends ________ Ask questions of librarian ________

12. If NO, why not? (check as many as you want)

Unable to get to library ________ Not enough time ________
Nothing at the library for me ________ Don’t need it ________
Do research/use Internet/find reading materials elsewhere ________
Not open enough ________ Didn’t know there was a library ________

13. Now that you’ve used the Betty Frandsen Library, are you more or less likely to visit the public library on the outs?

More Likely ________ Less Likely ________

14. Do you visit bookstores on the outs? Yes ________ No ________

15. Do you own books of your own? Yes ________ No ________

16. If NO, are you interested in owning your own books now? Yes ________ No ________

17. Do you have any other suggestions or comments?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

NAME: _______________________________________________________
UNIT: ______________________________________
Appendix B

**JDC Library Survey**

1. **Gender:**  Male _________  Female _________

2. **Age:**  __________

3. On a scale of 1 to 10, how much do you like visiting the JDC Library?

<table>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Do you think there are a lot of good books in the library?

    Yes ________  No __________

5. **What kinds of books do you like to read? (check as many as you want)**

   Fiction ______  Fantasy ______  Horror ______  Science Fiction ______
   Poetry ______  Non-Fiction ______  Romance ______  Sports ______
   Anime/Manga ______  Biographies ______  Parenting Books ______
   Westerns ______  Other _________________________________

6. **What do you like about the library? (check as many as apply)**

   Books ______  Graphic Novels/Comics ______  Leaving the unit______
   Magazines______  Computer Lab ______  Summer activities _________
   Tutoring _____  Book Discussion Group _____  Writing Workshops ______

7. **Do you like to read?** Yes ________  No __________

8. Did you like to read before you came to Juvenile Hall? Yes ______  No __________

9. **Name one of your favorite books:** ________________________________

10. **Do you go to the library on the outs?**  Yes ________________  No ______________

11. If YES, what do you do there? (check as many as you want)
Check out materials for school ________  Read for fun ________

Study with friends ________  Use Internet ________

Hang out with friends ________  Ask questions of librarian ________

12. If NO, why not? (check as many as you want)

Unable to get to library ________  Not enough time ________

Nothing at the library for me ________  Don’t need it ________

Do research/use Internet/find reading materials elsewhere ________

Not open enough ________  Didn’t know there was a library ________

13. Now that you’ve used the Betty Frandsen Library, do you think you’ll visit the public library on the outs?

Yes ________  No ________

14. Do you visit bookstores on the outs?  Yes ________  No ________

15. Do you own books of your own?  Yes ________  No ________

16. If NO, are you interested in owning your own books now?

Yes ________  No ________

17. Do you have any other suggestions or comments?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Appendix C

YSC Library Survey

1. Gender: Male _________ Female _________

2. Age: __________

3. Do you think there are a lot of good books in the library?

   Yes _________ No __________

4. What kinds of books do you like to read? (check as many as you want)

   Fiction _____ Action _________ Fantasy ________ Horror _______

   Street Books______ Romance _____ Comics_______ Non-Fiction ______

   Anime/Manga _______ Biographies ______ Poetry ______

   Other __________________________________________________________

5. What do you like about the library? (check as many as apply)

   Computers ______ Music _________ Magazines _____________

   Checking out Books __________ Time out of the Unit __________
6. Do you like to read?  Yes ________  No _______

7. Did you read before you came to Detention?  Yes ________  No _______

8. Name one of your favorite books: ___________________________

9. Do you have a King County or Seattle Public Library card?
   King County ________  Seattle Public ________  Neither ________

10. Do you go to the library on the outs?  Yes ________  No ________

11. Which libraries do you use? ________________________________

   ___________________________________________________________________

12. If YES, what do you do there? (check as many as you want)

   Check out materials ________  Read for fun ________

   Study ________  Internet ________  Library Programs ________

   Hang out ________  Ask questions of librarian ________

   Other ________________________________________________________
13. If NO, why not? (check as many as you want)

Unable to get to library ________ Not enough time ________
Nothing at the library for me ________ Don’t need it ________
Do research/use Internet/find reading materials elsewhere ________

Other ____________________________

14. Now that you’ve used the YSC Library, are you more or less likely to visit a library when you get out?

More Likely ____________ Less Likely ____________

15. Do you have any suggestions or comments about the library?

________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
Appendix D

Library Survey for Mt. McKinley Teachers

1. Unit you teach on: ____________________________

2. Do you use the Juvenile Hall Library for curriculum support materials?
   Yes _____________   No ______________

3. If so, what materials do you use regularly in the classroom?

4. What materials would you like to see added to the library for your use?

5. If you do not use the library regularly, why not?

6. What changes would attract you to utilize it?

7. How many years have you worked at Mt. McKinley? ________________________

8. Have you seen a difference in student behavior in the classroom since the library
   opened?        Yes _____________   No ______________

   If yes, please describe the changes:

   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
10. Have you seen a difference in student reading habits and levels since the library opened?
   Yes ___________   No _______________

If yes, please describe the changes

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

11. Any additional comments or suggestions?


Please return completed survey to the box of Alison McKee, Library.  
Thank you for your help!
Appendix E

Contra Costa County Juvenile Hall Probation Staff Library Survey

1. How many years have you worked at the Juvenile Hall? _______________

2. What unit do you work on? _______________

3. Have you seen a difference in the residents’ reading habits since the library opened?
   Yes ____________ No ____________

   If yes, please describe the changes
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

4. Have you seen a difference in the residents’ behavior since the library opened?
   Yes ____________ No ____________

   If yes, please describe the changes
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

5. Please include any additional comments or suggestions for the library.

Please return completed survey to the box of Alison McKee, Library.

Thank you for your help!
Appendix F

Library Survey for Pima County Juvenile Court Teachers

1. Grade you teach: ________________________________

2. Do you use the Juvenile Hall Library for curriculum support materials?
   Yes ___________ No ______________

3. If so, what materials do you use regularly in the classroom?

4. What materials would you like to see added to the library for your use?

5. How many years have you worked at PCJDC? ________________________

6. Have you seen a difference in student behavior in the classroom since the student-accessible library space opened in March 2007?
   Yes ___________ No ______________ N/A ______________
   If yes, please describe the changes:
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________

7. Have you seen a difference in student reading habits and levels since the student-accessible library opened?
   Yes ___________ No ______________ N/A ______________
   If yes, please describe the changes
   ______________________________________________________
8. Any additional comments or suggestions?

Please return completed survey to the Library.
Thank you for your help!
Appendix G

**Pima County Juvenile Court Probation Staff Library Survey**

3. How many years have you worked at the Juvenile Court Center? ____________

2. Have you seen a difference in student behavior since the student-accessible library opened in March 2007?
   
   Yes ______________ No ______________ N/A ______________
   
   If yes, please describe the changes:
   
   ________________________________________________________________
   
   ________________________________________________________________
   
   ________________________________________________________________
   
   ________________________________________________________________

3. Have you seen a difference in student reading habits since the student-accessible library opened?
   
   Yes ______________ No ______________ N/A ______________
   
   If yes, please describe the changes:
   
   ________________________________________________________________
   
   ________________________________________________________________
   
   ________________________________________________________________
   
   ________________________________________________________________

4. Any additional comments or suggestions for the library?

Please return completed survey to the Library.
Thank you for your help!