

Income generation: a book agency licence

The simplest way of describing a library-based book agency is to say that the library becomes a stockholding bookseller, as a subsidiary of a local bookshop. Under the terms of the agency, the bookshop agrees to supply stock at a discount, for resale at full price by the licensee. The discount is agreed locally, between the licensee and the bookshop, but the licence requires that discount may only be given when the bookshop receives more than 16 1/2%. Licences are granted by the Publishers Association for a small fee.

In Ipswich, the book agency developed from an informal system where the library acted as a go-between, passing orders to the bookshop, holding ordered books and forwarding payment. The suggestion for this scheme came from the booksellers themselves. They used to visit the school of nursing to sell textbooks to new intakes but this had become less successful due to lack of positive support from the tutors. The agency relieved them of the displays and enabled the library to take advantage of the business that was generated. Because the library bought the books for resale, their cash turnover was quicker than when nurses took several weeks to pay for their books under the informal system.

A batch of orders was telephoned to the bookshop every few days. At the end of each week, these were incorporated into an official health authority order confirming the calls. When the books arrived, part orders, etc were sent to the finance department - just as for new library stock. The invoices were charged against a nursing library trust fund, into which the cheques were paid later. This secured the money against unwanted attention from managers and earned us interest.

A 'phone call or letter informed the customers that their books had arrived, and their cost. Because many nurses worked up to 25 miles away from Ipswich it was quite common to receive cheques via the internal mail and to post the books on via the same route. Nothing ever went missing!

In the first year of the agency, we realised £400 profit. Against this should be set the staff time involved. It took 2-3 hours a week to maintain the order file, pay in the money and deal with the official paperwork. In financial terms, this is not cost effective. However, when seen as a means of making the library an accepted part of day-to-day hospital activity, it is invaluable.

Our bookseller's nursing shelf-stock improved dramatically. They had a far better idea of what was needed and we could feel confident in recommending people to them. Their discounts with publishers (subsidised by regular library stock orders) soon reached the maximum level. In 1985 and 1987 they underwrote a nursing bookfair, which in turn supported a regional nursing research study day.

It would not have been possible to maintain the agency purely on nurses' business. We were dependent on orders from other professions, in particular the medical

staff. It would not be possible for a nursing library to justify the staff time involved in an agency if the only business were to come from students. However, multidisciplinary libraries should be able to make effective use of agency libraries.

For further information, contact:

Mike Roddham, Library, St Richard's Hospital, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 4SE. (0243-788122 ext 8119).

Alex & Sandy Bennett, Amberstone Bookshop, 49 Upper Orwell Street, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP4 1HP.

Publishers' Association, Bedford Square, London.

Mike Roddham, District Librarian, Chichester H.A. (formerly Nursing Librarian, East Suffolk H.A.).

Based on a talk given at the NIS Forum, MHWLG Annual Conference, 1989.

Sponsored cataloguing raises funds for hospital unit

King's College Hospital Assisted Conception Unit's desperate need for funds and a backlog of books to be catalogued in Normanby College Library gave Kate Clarke the idea of a "sponsored catalogue". The event took place at Normanby College Library, Camberwell Health Authority on 11-15 July, outside the Library's opening hours of 9.30-5.30. A grand total was achieved: 102 books were catalogued, classified and assigned subject headings by Kate. Many firms, including Swets UK and Terrapin Interiors, were very generous in their contributions and a large number of individuals also supported the event enthusiastically: staff from the Library Association, SE Thames Regional Library and Information Service, and Camberwell Health Authority made handsome personal contributions, as did committee members of the Surrey Library and Information Group, Bob Evans and friends from the LASER delivery service, and many of Kate's friends and relatives.

Money for the event is still being received. So far £439.13 has been forwarded to the King's IVF Support Group, the charity which raises money for the King's Assisted Conception Unit. The Unit receives no money from the National Health Service and, without the Unit, many childless couples would have no chance to try the test-tube method and would lose their last hope of having a family.

If anyone would like to contribute, donations, even small amounts, will be most gratefully received: please send crossed cheques or postal orders made payable to "King's IVF Support Group", c/o Kate Clark, 30 Wandle Road, Croydon, CR0 1DD.