

October 24, 2011

Ms Liz Markel,

Laura Sherbo is one of those people who works hard but never draws attention to herself, which is why I feel so excited to nominate her for an ASCLA Leadership and Professional Achievement Award. In this letter, I am going to describe the characteristics that make Laura a great leader and professional in the world of library services to incarcerated populations throughout the state of Washington. I have the full support of every single person who works for her as well; the people who work in Washington State Library's Institutional Library Services treat her with the utmost respect and admiration. Truly, I believe they would do anything she asked them to do. She is also well-respected among the offender populations served by the libraries. They know her by her first name, and they often stop to say hello, or thank you, when she visits the branches.

The personal trait I admire most about Ms Sherbo is her inner strength, which allows her to remain focused on the fundamentals of Librarianship in the face of adversity. Prison has an organizational culture that is, in many ways, contrary to everything that Libraries stand behind. The prison culture also tends to be domineering and inflexible; a weak person does not stand a chance at building and maintaining professional, customer-service-oriented libraries inside a prison system. But Ms Sherbo knows who she is, and she knows what a library looks like. Within the safety-oriented limits a prison presents, libraries flourish in Washington State's major prisons, and this unlikely success depends on Ms Sherbo's steadfast insistence on upholding the values of intellectual freedom and privacy of user records. Behind the steadfast insistence is a woman who is sure of herself, knows what she believes, and is unafraid to act on her convictions.

Another characteristic that has allowed Ms Sherbo to stand her ground while negotiating with prison administration is her ability to listen, gather information, and base decisions on fact rather than hearsay or emotion. She has an uncanny ability to pick salient points and relevant information from the massive amounts of information that she encounters each day. She identifies changes in the prison setting that may threaten library services and uses factual, convincing information to be proactive and strategic in her communication with prison administrators.

Ms Sherbo is also highly skilled at managing people and supporting the achievements of others. She is especially adept at laying the groundwork for people to succeed and encouraging people with talent and ambition to do more. She supports risk-taking by helping her subordinates think through all the possible outcomes of an action, and by acknowledging successes through awards and public announcement. She excels at bringing people together to accomplish tasks as a group, which has been a vital piece of her success in most recent years as budget reductions have reduced staff to a bare minimum.

Ms Sherbo not only has the characteristics of a great leader and library professional, she has also accomplished some miraculous things. These accomplishments are outlined in the letters of support enclosed. I hope you will consider her as your number one choice for the 2012 ASCLA Leadership Award.

Sincerely,

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