

A day in the life of prison library

STATE LIBRARY SYSTEM AIMS TAKES A SNAPSHOT OF PRISON LIBRARIES

BY DEBORAH TRACY
The Daily World

The library at a correctional institution can be a busy place. To get a one-day view of the activities taking place at all 11 institutional library branches in Washington, the state library system set last Tuesday as Institutional Library Snapshot Day.

Stafford Creek Corrections Center participated in the day's activities, which included gathering statistics of the day's visits, having inmates fill out surveys and taking pictures throughout the day, said Jeannie Remillard, library associate at Stafford Creek.

Most days at the prison library are pretty busy, Remillard said. "We serve a population of almost 2,000, and probably 800 plus use the library," she said.

Last year, the library circulated a total of 118,018 items. On Tuesday, 148 inmates came to the library, 10 corrections staff members dropped by, 127 reference questions were answered and 68 information requests

were turned in. Some inmates bring their dogs to the library. The prison has a program in which inmates train dogs, and once the dogs have achieved certain behavior requirements they are allowed in the library, Remillard said.

Remillard has worked at prison libraries for 21 years, working at the Washington State Penitentiary at Walla Walla before coming to Stafford Creek about two years ago.

"The library is really an important part of their lives; I have seen lots of lives changed through the years I've been doing this, making those inmates going back out into society better human beings, better people," she said.

She has seen inmates pursue online college degrees, using the library for research and information gathering. One recent patron who obtained his degree and is interested in starting a small business will be leaving Stafford Creek next week. He stopped in to visit with Remillard, who has helped him search for information. He wanted to thank the library because of the support it has provided him. "He said it set him in the right direction, and now he has a vision for himself and what he is going to do with his life when he gets out. That makes me feel good," she said.



STAFFORD CREEK CORRECTIONAL CENTER
Inmate Library Clerk Curtis Rambert has some fun with two of the dogs that are in a prison training program and happened to be in the library with their trainers.

In addition to reference materials, the library also has books for recreational reading, including best-sellers. Science fiction is a particular favorite. The library also provides answers to "release information requests." This is infor-

mation for inmates about to be released to find out about housing, utility costs, substance abuse assistance and treatment programs in communities they plan to locate in upon release.

The library also answers reference questions, every-

thing from what are the different types of cholesterol, good and bad and what states allow skunks to be kept as pets. Music is also popular, and the library has a stock of CDs and cassettes. Magazines and newspapers are also available.