

Durham County Libraries lend to disabled, prisoners

Durham County Library's OASIS programs help prisoners and people with disabilities read.

By **Laura Medlin**
Durham VOICE writer

The Durham County Library is more than just a building: patrons who cannot visit the library due to disability or other reasons can still check out books.

Older Adult and Shut-In Service (OASIS) serves "individuals who are unable to visit the library due to age, illness or physical disability," according to the OASIS informational brochure.

Borrowers call or fax Priscilla Barbee, the OASIS coordinator, with requests. Barbee delivers the library books to them in prisons and correctional institutions, senior centers, nursing and rest homes, homes for people with mental illnesses and private homes. All services are free for Durham County residents.

To Barbee, this job is not just about delivering books. "It's a lot of one-on-one time," she said. "This work requires a lot of interpersonal skills, compassion, empathy and patience."

Barbee said her favorite part of the job is working with older adults.

When she goes to a nursing home she works with the community activity directors to help residents choose which genres they like. Then, she brings a selection from the library from which they can choose.

Barbee estimates that the library lends 100 to 150 books a month through OASIS.

Barbee visits one to two places a day, except for the day she goes to the Butner Federal Corrections Complex. She even works some weekends.

Barbee stressed that even though her work can be emotionally draining, it is rewarding. "You really get to change people's lives," she said.

"You feel like you have a purpose here in life," echoed Derrian Jones, manager of Durham County



Derrian Jones, left, and Priscilla Barbee display some of the books available in Outreach Services. (Staff photo by Laura Medlin)

Library's mobile and outreach services, which includes OASIS, the bookmobile and Hispanic services.

Jones makes sure that all the outreach services at the library have the resources, equipment, money and volunteers they need.

Borrowers who have a disability that prevents them from reading can borrow talking books on discs or cassettes, braille books or large print books. If there is a shortage of equipment or books, preference is always given to veterans of the Armed Forces, according to the application.

Borrowers who are homebound can receive books by mail.

"I go by my referrals," she said. Social workers, family members and friends contact Barbee to refer her to a new borrower and new borrowers to her.

People call the OASIS request line at all times of the day and night, Barbee said. If she is gone for more than a few days she can get as many as 40 calls.

OASIS "has always been one person," Barbee said, but the demand has grown in the past few years to the point where she cannot meet every need. At the same time, budget cuts

have reduced the number of books the library gets.

"Whenever possible, I utilize volunteers," Barbee said.

When they get the money, Jones said they will expand the program by adding more staff and building a separate area for outreach. The ultimate goal, she said, is to serve more people.

"I think we're doing a phenomenal job with no more staff than we have," Barbee said.

Barbee and Jones said that this job makes them appreciate what they have. "It makes you complain less," Barbee said.

Barbee's favorite part of the job is "being appreciated. I know I'm appreciated."

For more information:

OASIS Request Line: 919-560-0152

Or visit online:

Durhamcountylibrary.org

pbarbee@durhamcountync.gov