

Hi, all – I'm Sue Banks, Director of the Bureau of Library Development for the Office of Commonwealth Libraries, part of the PA Dept. of Education.

One year ago, the Monday after Thanksgiving of 2018, I began my tenure with the Office of Commonwealth Libraries (or OCL as we call it). It's been a challenging and action-packed journey. We've moved offices, I've been getting a feel for the statewide landscape, I've met lots of new colleagues and gotten closer to ones I knew before.

All of this has produced in me both an appreciation and respect for all the work that has gone into getting us where we are – and I'd like to give a giant pile of credit to my colleagues here in the Bureau of Library Development and our Library leaders across the state who stand on the shoulders of the giants in the PA library field who have worked for a century to build our libraries.

And this state is *full* of libraries - of all kinds, sizes and scales. My year's experience of those libraries' work has inspired in me an even deeper faith in the possibilities for excellent and equitable library services for every resident of the Commonwealth.

What else do I know as a result of my year? I know that:

Great libraries make great communities – and vice versa.

I know we have to turn our eyes outward from our buildings – toward our communities. I've always thought about libraries like a building with two-way mirrors for walls. Traditionally – in many cases – those of us on the inside look at the boundaries of our libraries and see ourselves. What we're doing, what we want to do, and what we want to keep doing, with little thought or empathy for what's going on behind those reflective surfaces.

From the outside, the folks in our community see a cozy hub of activity that they may or may not feel welcome to join.

When we reverse the mirror – when we shine the light outward and turn our view to our community, the mirror becomes a window on our side – we see and

recognize the world outside of our library and the context that surrounds us. We let the outside... in.

And what people see from the outside is – themselves! They see their own reflection in the library – making it a place with which they're familiar and a place they feel at home.

I know that remarkable things happen when we turn outward.

It's not always easy to be open and compassionate and outcomes are not necessarily predictable, but the impact on a library of being connected at a deep level to their community is undeniable. And the impact of a connected library on the community is just as potent. It keeps a library safe and relevant.

What else do I know? I know now that a *majority* of libraries in PA are small and have limited resources. So many libraries are between a rock and a hard place that's difficult to navigate and difficult to get out of. And I know that the answer to the tight spot of high expectations and low investment lies at the local level.

I know now that from the state level we can and will help in every way possible, but there's a limit to what we can do from Harrisburg. Good libraries, GREAT libraries spring from communities who understand the investment necessary to help them grow from good to great.

I know now that a successful library – of any size - needs a good board with committed and smart board members who understand their roles and responsibilities. A Board that doesn't mistake micro-managing for good governance.

I know that a successful library of any size needs a full-time director who was trained in librarianship – at whatever level that director can aspire to.

A good board is willing and able to pay their director enough that their director can put their heart into their work without worrying about paying their rent or being driven into bankruptcy by medical bills.

I know that - for us professionals in the field – success comes more naturally when we cultivate a growth mindset – and actively engage in our personal learning journey – every minute of every day.

I know our best work is built on appreciative inquiry. Focus on what works and do more of it. Be Curious! Give people the benefit of the doubt. Assume best intentions. It seldom fails to produce positive outcomes.

I know that there are as many ways to achieve our shared goals as there are talented and visionary minds who will work together to chart a course for those goals.

At this time of giving thanks, I'd like to give thanks to my talented, smart and committed colleagues in the Bureau of Library Development, my fellow leaders in the Office of Commonwealth Libraries – especially Glenn Miller and Jonelle Darr who have provided such inspiring guidance to this newbie and my friends in the Bureau of the State Library who serve our state with professionalism, depth and passion.

In closing, I'll admit that I also know there are some things broken with the way libraries work in PA. Yes, it's a challenging world, a challenging library field. Let's work together to rise up and meet that challenge. Let's move forward fearlessly into the future. Let's look straight at what's broken and see it for what it is. And figure out what needs to be there *instead* – excellent and equitable library services to the people of Pennsylvania. C'mon my friends, let's fix this stuff.

And if you're interested in helping to fix what's broken and strengthen the things we do well, there are lots ways you can join the forces of good. Through the whole year to come, we'll be hosting trainings across the Commonwealth to build skills in front line staff, volunteers and boards. We'll be pursuing more community engagement work – continuing with the first cohort of our Turning Outward effort and introducing new folks to all the options for community engagement work with our colleagues in the PA Humanities Council and others who have been building stronger community connections and better community solutions.

And while all of that is going on and available for everyone to participate, our statewide library leaders – the District and System Administrators and our District Library Consultants - have formed Working Groups - building consensus on the standards to which we'll hold ourselves and each other accountable. That in turn will inform the work we're doing at OCL on revising the Regulations to get us situated for the future.

Reach out to us to hear more about what you can do – and I'll be back with more (shorter) messages about specifics. Reach out to your Borough or Township colleagues, to your partners or future partners and ask them to tell you what they're struggling with – or what their triumphs have been. Listen. Discuss. Care.

Happy Thanksgiving, everyone! Here's to a bountiful year ahead.

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