

JOSEPH F. SHUBERT LIBRARY EXCELLENCE AWARD APPLICATION

Please check one category only: Individual Library _____
Library Consortium (System) x

NAME OF LIBRARY OR LIBRARY CONSORTIUM (SYSTEM) _____
Western New York Library Resources Council

PARENT INSTITUTION: _____

ADDRESS: 4455 Genesee St., PO Box 400, Buffalo, NY 14225-0400

CONTACT NAME: Sheryl Knab

PHONE NUMBER: (716) 633-0705

SIGNATURE: _____
CHIEF LIBRARIAN/DIRECTOR

For Consortia applications:

SIGNATURE:  _____
CHIEF OFFICER

SIGNATURE: _____
CHIEF OFFICER

Your nomination for a project/achievement that took within the last 2 years should consist of your responses to the following 4 questions:

1. a) Briefly describe your library or library consortium (system) and its community. Provide information about size, budget, type, users. b) Briefly describe your project/achievement.
2. How did you identify the user need(s) for your project?
3. What did your library or library consortium (system) do to respond to that (those) need(s)? What challenges were met?
4. What impact did this project have on your users and/or your community? Supply quantifiable data if appropriate.

Please limit your narrative to no more than 4 pages. Please send 4 copies of each application, and include 4 copies of any attachments, to the following address by the deadline of *June 30th, 2009*.

Regents Advisory Council on Libraries
Joseph F. Shubert Library Excellence Award
c/o Mary Woodward
New York State Library
10D45 Cultural Education Center
Albany, NY 12230
Phone: (518) 473-8362; E-mail: mwoodwar@mail.nysed.gov

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Applications should:

- show measurable progress in identifying user needs
 - show actions were taken to respond to those needs
 - show that the results were measured and evaluated
 - relate to a project or achievement that took place within the past two years
 - consist of a single-spaced narrative of no more than 4 pages in length
 - respond to the 4 questions as listed on the form
 - be signed by the Chief Librarian/Director or, in the case of consortia, by the Chief Officers of all participating organizations.
 - provide 4 copies of the application, each with original signatures
- provide 4 copies of any relevant attachments, such as pamphlets or articles relating to the project described.
(Please keep attachments to a minimum.)
- be postmarked by June 30th, 2009

Joseph F. Shubert Library Excellence Award Application

The Western New York Library Resources Council (WNYLRC) is a not-for-profit consortium of libraries and library systems serving six counties: Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Genesee, Niagara, and Orleans. Our 89 member libraries include academic, public, corporate, hospital, and museum libraries. Our total receipts for the 2007-2008 fiscal year were \$1,158,395, while our total expenditures were \$1,152,760.

Most WNYLRC programs are funded by state aid from the Division of Library Development at the New York State Library. The Council also seeks funding from private and other government sources for specific projects.

Ask Us 24/7 is a cooperative virtual reference service open to New York State Libraries, which allows library patrons to chat with a librarian to get research assistance. The cooperative nature of the service means that each participating library staffs the virtual reference desk for a certain number of hours per week, while their patrons have access to the service all day, every day.

Ask Us 24/7 grew out of a previous WNYLRC virtual reference program, *Ask a WNY Librarian*. This service, which began in 2002, was available 20 hours per week, and only staffed by libraries in Western New York. In September 2003, WNYLRC joined the 24/7 Reference Cooperative, made up of libraries throughout the country, allowing us to have the service staffed 24 hours per day, even if our participating libraries were not online at the time. The service was renamed *Ask Us 24/7*. The service now runs on QuestionPoint software, which is owned by OCLC. It can be accessed through the websites of participating libraries, as well as the general website for the service, at <http://www.askus247.org>.

The service has continued to grow, expanding beyond Western New York into the rest of the state. A significant number of new libraries joined in 2008 and early 2009, for a total of 5 public library systems (comprising over 250 individual locations) and 31 academic libraries currently participating. In 2008, a total of **5673** chats were conducted with patrons of *Ask Us 24/7* libraries (some of which were with librarians in other states, if our own librarians were unavailable). Also in that year, a total of **7107** chat sessions were conducted by our librarians (some of which were with patrons in other states, if their librarians were unavailable). Each participating library creates a Policy Page, which lists links to the catalog and databases, as well as other policy information that patrons may ask about. The chatting librarian can then access this Policy Page to assist them in helping patrons from other institutions.

In May 2008, a position was created at WNYLRC for a librarian dedicated to managing *Ask Us 24/7*. This Special Projects Librarian is responsible for scheduling, troubleshooting, marketing, quality control, training, and other day-to-day management tasks for the service.

The Special Projects Librarian reviews chat transcripts involving librarians or patrons of *Ask Us 24/7* for quality control. She also reviews the results of patron surveys, paying special attention to 3 questions, the results of which are shown below for the first months of 2008:

Were you satisfied with the answer you received to your reference question?	Jan 08	Feb 08	Mar 08	Apr 08
Satisfied	72.73%	74.19%	76.47%	78.26%
Not Satisfied	6.06%	6.45%	5.88%	8.70%
Somewhat satisfied	18.18%	16.13%	17.65%	13.04%
Not Submitted	3.03%	3.23%	0.00%	0.00%

The quality of the library staff service in answering this request was?	Jan 08	Feb 08	Mar 08	Apr 08
Excellent	62.50%	66.67%	80.65%	71.11%
Good	21.88%	21.21%	9.68%	11.11%
Average	9.38%	6.06%	6.45%	13.33%
Poor	6.25%	3.03%	3.23%	4.44%
Not Submitted	0.00%	3.03%	0.00%	0.00%

I would recommend this service to someone else.	Jan 08	Feb 08	Mar 08	Apr 08
Negative	6.25%	3.33%	3.03%	0.00%
Neutral	9.38%	6.67%	9.09%	12.77%
Positive	84.38%	86.67%	87.88%	87.23%
Not Submitted	0.00%	3.33%	0.00%	0.00%

Based on some of the transcripts reviewed, as well as comments included in some of the surveys, she noticed some issues where patrons were not receiving as much help as they could be.

When patrons were seeking the full-text of a specific article, the librarian (if at a different institution) was not always sure how to find this at the patron's library.

Some librarians were repeatedly using Wikipedia (and only Wikipedia) as a source for general reference question. This was a problem for students who were not allowed to use Wikipedia as a source for assignments and papers.

- Patrons of public libraries were identified through the QuestionPoint software according to the library system they belonged to, and time was often spent during the chat trying to determine the patron's specific branch/location.

These issues were taken into consideration when planning training workshops for new libraries that joined *Ask Us 24/7*, in order to improve patron satisfaction and increase the usefulness of the service. Workshops now included the following:

- Practice sessions in which actual questions from the service were used, so that librarians could learn how to find the full-text of articles, among other answers to common questions. In addition, libraries were encouraged to list the steps for finding a full-text article in their Policy Pages.
- Librarians were encouraged to use a range of sources for general reference questions, including Encyclopedia Britannica online, or websites of knowledgeable organizations.

- A demonstration of how to determine the patron's specific library location by seeing which referring webpage they had come from. This would save time when assisting the patron with locating items specific to a single branch or location. This tip was submitted to the QuestionPoint blog and wiki so that other librarians throughout the 24/7 Reference Cooperative could learn from it, which could be useful when librarians in other states were dealing with our patrons. Libraries were also encouraged to add this tip to their Policy Pages.

A page of librarian resources was created on the *Ask Us 24/7* website, geared toward the needs of participants. A page of *Virtual Reference Resources* contained articles and tips on conducting virtual reference, including guidelines from RUSA and IFLA, which participants were encouraged to look at.

Tips and reminders were posted to the *Ask Us 24/7* listserv regularly, as well as posted on the welcome screen that librarians see when they login to their QuestionPoint accounts. The Special Projects Librarian also promoted the QuestionPoint blog as a good source of tips to conduct quality chats.

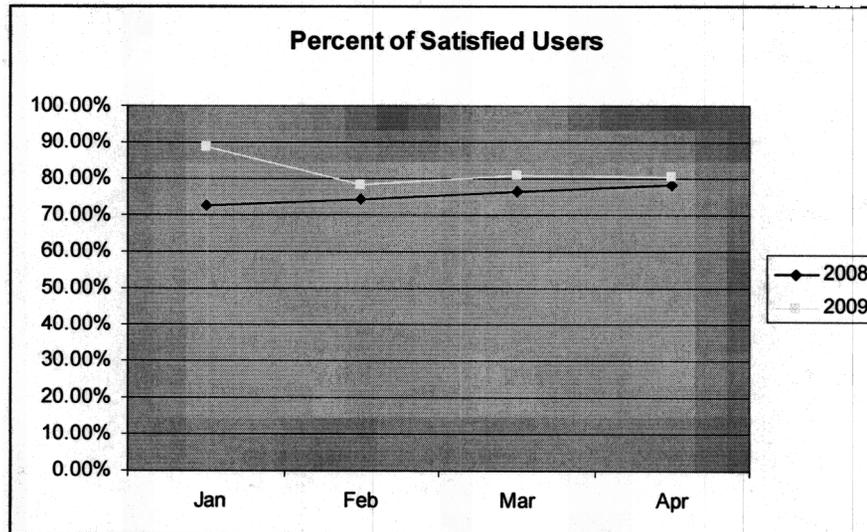
A "Transcript of the Quarter" program was instituted, which recognized quality chats conducted by *Ask Us 24/7* librarians. When reviewing transcripts, the Special Project Librarian would make note of any chats that deserved recognition, and place them in a list of nominees. Every three months, the members of the *Ask Us 24/7* Advisory Board (made up of participants around the state) would vote on one winner among the Academic libraries, and one among the Public libraries. The winners would be announced on the listserv, along with a copy of the transcript (with patron details removed) so that the librarians would receive recognition, and all participants could learn from these quality examples.

In May 2009 the survey results were reviewed again, and showed a slight increase from the previous year:

Were you satisfied with the answer you received to your reference question?	Jan 09	Feb 09	Mar 09	Apr 09
Satisfied	88.89%	78.38%	80.95%	80.39%
Not Satisfied	7.41%	16.22%	7.14%	9.80%
Somewhat satisfied	3.70%	5.41%	9.52%	7.84%
Not Submitted	0.00%	0.00%	2.38%	1.96%
The quality of the library staff service in answering this request was?	Jan 09	Feb 09	Mar 09	Apr 09
Excellent	80.00%	79.41%	65.71%	75.56%
Good	13.33%	8.82%	28.57%	11.11%
Average	6.67%	5.88%	2.86%	2.22%
Poor	0.00%	5.88%	2.86%	6.67%
Not Submitted	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	4.44%

I would recommend this service to someone else.	Jan 09	Feb 09	Mar 09	Apr 09
Negative	0.00%	2.86%	2.78%	0.00%
Neutral	3.57%	8.57%	5.56%	15.91%
Positive	96.43%	85.71%	88.89%	81.82%
Not Submitted	0.00%	2.86%	2.78%	2.27%

The line graph below shows the increase in the number of users answering “satisfied” to the first survey question between the first months of 2008 and 2009.



The increase, while slight, shows that efforts to provide a quality virtual reference transaction do pay off in higher patron satisfaction. In addition, comments left in patron surveys show that this continues to be a useful service to patrons, due to the fact that it is available 24 hours a day, and that it can be accessed from home. A sampling of comments follows:

"I liked using the live chat because I got instant answers, which I need at this late hour.
10:53pm 2009/04/01

"This is a terrific service and I'll definitely be spreading the word about it to my friends and family!"
10:35am 2009/03/14

"They were very quick and helpful. would definitely recommend it to someone else if they had a question after hours"
10:10pm 2009/03/03

"I received very helpful information to my question that I was unable to find when I tried to search online myself!"
9:36am 2009/02/06

"Nice to have an immediate answer without having to leave your house"
12:42pm 2009/01/10