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Report to the Winnefox Library Board

Tom Willadsen, Inclusive Services Consultant

As of today I have visited 19 of the libraries in the Winnefox system. I have been impressed at the level of service and the dedication of the staff at each library. Libraries are what sociologists called “Third Places.” Nearly everyone has a home—First Place—and a job or something like a job—Second Place. Strong communities have Third Places, like libraries, parks and coffee shops. Especially in smaller communities I see how important and treasured the public libraries are.

I am a lifelong “Library Rat.” In college my work/study job was in the Children’s Room at the public library. I was just a block off campus—but in a different world. I encountered people younger than 18, and their parents. I also shelved books at the university library and later at seminary and law school libraries. I have served on both the Oshkosh Public and the Winnefox System boards.

If I have a super power it is the ability to misinterpret signs and instructions. I get lost a lot. My wife and I know that we have to be very deliberate and plan carefully anytime we carry anything heavy together. I find that this ability, or lack of ability, is quite helpful in spotting things like ambiguous signs. This is the only occasion when this is helpful. My unfamiliarity with libraries in the system helps me spot things that may not be clear to patrons. A lot of people find libraries intimidating and they will not ask for help in finding something. Signs are very important to me. So are diaper changing stations in public restrooms. I only check the men’s and unisex restrooms, unless the door to the women’s restroom is open. Another thing that is very important to me is that the phone can give the hours of operation and street address of the library when it is not open to the public. Once I phoned a library during off hours and a staffer answered; I wasn’t ready for that, but I was favorably impressed.

Finally, I try to read each library’s website. I skip over the pages that are common to libraries in the system. I’ve noticed that it is common for “library” to be both capitalized and uncapitalized. As a grammarian I understand that both may be acceptable, as a stylist I suggest that a consistent choice is made. My pet peeve is “PIN number.” “PIN” stands for “personal identification number;” “PIN number” is redundant.

I have very gratified at the responses I have received from the libraries I have visited. It’s my job to point out others’ mistakes—and I get *thanked* for it! I told a friend yesterday “Being the Inclusive Services Consultant is the opposite of being married.”

Sincerely yours,

Tom Willadsen