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Press Release

The Illinois State Library is the recipient of the 2016 Illinois Library Association's Demco Library Innovative Award. This award recognizes a library's achievement in planning and implementing an innovative or creative program or service, which has had a measurable impact on its users. The award is sponsored by Demco, Inc.

Targeting Autism: A National Forum on Serving Library Patrons on the Spectrum is the product of a National Leadership Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). The Grant was earmarked to fund two sessions that would bring together librarians from around the state and experts on library service to people with autism (ASD) with the aim of developing strategies that would improve the ability of all types of libraries to support patrons and families impacted by ASD.

The first forum session held in March, 2015 had over 80 participants. Over a two-day period, presenters informed attendees about the needs of people with ASD and introduced some existing programs and resources. Attendees left the first session armed with information, including two key books on the subjects, and were energized and inspired to go into their own communities, assess needs and begin to offer programs and services locally.

The Forum reconvened in March 2016. Speakers provided more information about ASD and several of the groups presented their findings, which included an identified need for more services for people with ASD transitioning from school to the workforce or adult services. An assistive technology "petting zoo" was offered by students who had collected a wide range of items that would be made available to libraries from around the state. Winners of a newly created grant, Autism Welcome Here: Library Programs Services and More, received their awards and presented their grant-winning projects to those in attendance.

In addition to the Autism Welcome Here Grants, the work of the Forum identified the need for training of librarians. To meet this need, the Illinois State Library applied and was awarded the IMLS Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Grant. These funds will allow the state library to administer a training program for librarians that will result in improved library service and programs for the ASD community.

The targeting Autism Forum was a first-of-its-kind in the nation. The project addresses a key issue faced by all libraries (with the incidence of ASD now at one in 68, every library is now encountering patrons with this disability) and its potential impact is enormous and far-reaching. The Forum helped create a standard of training and service for the state of Illinois that can and most likely will be replicated in other states.

The Demco Library Innovative Award will be presented at the Awards Luncheon held on Tuesday, October 18th, during the 2016 ILA Annual Conference in Rosemont.

For Immediate Release