

## Reference Interview Scenarios

*These scenarios are designed as starting points for discussions in a staff meeting or training sessions. There are more likely to be useful if taken as a role-play but open-ended discussion works well, too. Starting with some of the fact sheets in this house can ground the discussion in objective facts.*

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A woman enters the library with a baby on her hip and two preschoolers. She is evidently unfamiliar with the library and somewhat uncomfortable in the space. When you greet her and offer help she asks for a computer; you get her through the sign-up process noting that she is reluctant to give her name. Once she and the children are at the computer you move on to help others. Several minutes later her children are getting fussy enough to annoy those sitting at the computers next to hers and she is obviously frustrated in her efforts. When you offer help she asks, "How do I do email?"

- What problems are people experiencing here? Consider the woman, her children, other patrons, and yourself.
- What questions could you ask to learn more about the woman's needs without trespassing on her privacy or self-respect?
- Her question could be asked by any number of people in any number of situations. What criteria do you use to determine how much time to give to people with that kind of question?
- What would have given you more tools with which to help her? Are there materials, policies, furniture arrangements, programming, or other tools that you'd like to have available?

You've just finished teaching one of the regular monthly workshops on using the internet and one particularly attentive student stops you after class to ask a couple of questions. He's reserved and at ease. His questions are matter-of-fact and focus on job seeking. He'd like everything from resume writing to finding jobs in a number of fields. You offer a couple of books on job seeking, he's not really interested, and disengages from the reference interview.

- What information needs might be indicated by his actual questions. For example, he's asking for tools to help him in job hunting but a book that covers several questions won't work for him. So what other information does he need? Is the book too long or does he want something that a book doesn't really provide?
- How does the internet class tie in with the job seeking? Does he see the two as related? Has the class made him comfortable enough with you to ask you a reference question?

- What can you do to offer him resources in a manner that leaves the reference interview open? What keeps him with you as you work through his information need?