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KnowItNow24x7: The Year in Review

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2011 was an eventful year for KnowItNow24x7 (KIN24x7), Ohio's collaborative statewide virtual reference service. The year started out with a major development by introducing text messaging as an option for patrons to interact with the service through a partnership with Mosio Text-a-Librarian. Brian Leszcz (KIN24x7's Website Coordinator) worked with Mosio to get the technological infrastructure in place. The text messaging went live statewide in February, and to-date over 1,500 incoming text messages have been handled by KIN24x7 librarians. This also includes local messages routed to libraries that have taken advantage of the reduced-cost subscription made available by Mosio to KIN24x7-participating libraries.

Statistically speaking, librarians staffing KIN24x7 handled almost 60,000 sessions from January to October 2011. 95.5% of all sessions continue to be from the live chat service through KnowItNow.org and Academic.KnowItNow.org with e-mail, instant messaging, and text messaging making up the remaining 4.5%. Patrons of Columbus Metropolitan Library initiated the most sessions by library on the live chat service (5,095), while residents of Cuyahoga County initiated the most sessions overall by county (10,040). Librarians contracted by NEO-RLS AfterDark handled a little more than 40% of the live chat sessions through October, and the remaining 60% were handled by librarians working in Ohio's public, academic, and special libraries.



Three new public libraries stepped up this year and joined the ranks of those contributing staff time to the cooperative online reference effort: Barberton Public Library, Rodman Public Library, and Stark County District Library. When asked what the deciding factor was in Stark County District Library's decision to join KIN24x7, David Krajci (Reference and Nonfiction Services Manager) said, "The library's virtual reference task force felt that the library's best course of action to begin a virtual reference service was to actually become a part of KnowItNow24x7 and to work with it in providing this essential reference service for our customers and all Ohioans. The task force members were drawn to KnowItNow24x7 by its organization, support, training, and its statewide network of service providers." This coming year will see additional efforts by KIN24x7, in collaboration with the State Library of Ohio, to recruit more libraries to join KIN24x7 to provide the reciprocal coverage that has been a hallmark of the service's collective effort. A list of current KIN24x7 participants is available online.

In September, KIN24x7 began its second semester of partnering with Dr. Miriam Matteson at Kent State University School of Library and Information Science and the students in her reference services class. There were two days of training (one in Kent, one in Columbus) for the students who then signed up to staff two one-hour shifts on KIN24x7 and then to reflect on their experiences. One student even had one of her sessions chosen by the Quality Assurance Committee for KIN24x7 as a transcript of the month for October.

In March and April, KIN24x7 librarians Melissa Groveman (Greene County Public Library), Katherine Blocksidge (Owens Community College), Ann Marie Smeraldi (Cleveland State University), and KIN24x7 Coordinator Don Boozer co-presented "Reinvigorating Reference: Enhancing Customer Service Skills through Transcript Evaluation" at the Ohio Library Council Chapter Conferences in Wilmington and Toledo. There was a good turn out and lively discussion at both venues.

Due to its success, the chapter conference program was incorporated (in an abbreviated form) into the regular training routine for KIN24x7 librarians. KIN24x7 training sessions took place this year in Massillon, Worthington, Xenia, Shaker Heights, Twinsburg, Cleveland, Barberton, and Canton. These contained both basic and advanced virtual reference training and provided interesting discussion among attendees. Other libraries are encouraged to consider hosting training days and inviting librarians from other area institutions to join them. These are also helpful for libraries not yet members of the KIN24x7 cooperative. In fact, staff from Barberton Public Library, Rodman Public Library, and Stark County District Library participated in training sessions before they joined to get a better idea of what was involved with staffing KIN24x7.

The KIN24x7 Coordinator also presented talks incorporating information on Ohio's virtual reference service this year at the Elyria Kiwanis Club at the invitation of Elyria Public Library Director Janet Stoffer, at the Ohio Educational Library Media Association Conference in Columbus, and at the Ohio Library Council Convention and Expo (with Tamar Kreke of Greene County Public Library) in Toledo. The coordinator was also able to distribute KIN24x7 promotional items by helping to staff the Reference and Information Services Division table in the exhibits area at the OLC Convention and Expo. As part of his travels around Ohio, the KIN24x7 Coordinator also made visits to and dropped off publicity materials in Elyria, Lorain, Mansfield, Delaware, Westerville, Fremont, and Medina.

Next year promises to be another exciting year, so stay tuned for developments benefiting both librarians and patrons of KIN24x7 in 2012.