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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NCW LIBRARIES ANNOUNCES RURAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

10/20/2023 – NCW Libraries has recently established a Rural Services Department, encompassing our Bookmobile Services, Mail Order Library, and Regional Contact Center.

Executive Director, Barbara Walters said, “By aligning these previously distinct departments, we are adopting an equity based model and developing a unified vision and strategy for reaching individuals and communities experiencing the most barriers to accessing the library.”

The NCW Libraries Bookmobile brings library services to communities that do not have proximity to a library location or who have other barriers to accessing library services. The Bookmobile serves as a library on wheels, bringing all the materials you would find in one of our branches – books, DVD’s, music, and more. Moving forward, Bookmobile will primarily focus on groups that do not have access to a nearby library location including public and private elementary schools that do not already have school libraries, job training sites, senior living facilities, and other community programs.

The Mail Order Library Service is one of the first of its kind in the nation and one of the last remaining. Mail Order allows NCW Libraries to serve individuals and families who have barriers to access local library branch locations. Library card holders can place holds for library materials online at www.ncwlibraries.org, through email, or over the phone. Items are then mailed directly to the person’s home, free of charge. The package includes a prepaid return shipping label and bag. The Rural Services team is collaborating with local branch staff, the NCW Libraries marketing team, and community partners to build awareness and engagement in Mail Order services.

The Contact Center routes incoming calls from the public to appropriate branch and administrative staff. They assist patrons with placing holds, account and technical support, and accessing online resources. The team responds to all emails sent to info@ncwlibraries.org and manages the live chat messaging system. On average, they

respond to 150-200 emails and messages per week. Contact Center staff regularly answer questions related to library accounts and checkouts and provide an extra tier of support for patrons.

The development of the Rural Services Department has provided NCW Libraries with the opportunity to review the ways we reach our rural patrons. Our North Bookmobile was first established with the priority of serving our region's rural schools. However, a recent audit showed that each of these schools already have a school library or access to a nearby NCW Libraries location. Additionally, North Bookmobile service has proved challenging due to the geography of the region, winter weather, and subsequent road closures. As a result, the North Bookmobile will be discontinued in mid-November. Moving forward, local branch staff will connect with these schools, partner organizations, and rural communities to identify more sustainable and consistent ways to provide library services. The Library's South Bookmobile does not have these same challenges, and their services will continue to evolve and grow where possible.

All three of these services have similar goals of reaching historically underserved populations across the region. Bringing these departments together, reviewing their service models, and aligning their goals will allow the district to serve even more people living in the most remote areas across NCW.

NCW Libraries' mission is to connect the people of North Central Washington to vital resources and opportunities that foster individual growth and strengthen communities. Learn more about all NCW Libraries offers its community members at www.ncwlibraries.org.