

Library Service To Young Adults defines as “a factor promoting positive teenage development.” The independent, nonprofit Search Institute offers a framework of forty such developmental assets.

YALSA finds another of the chief values of young adult literature in its capacity to offer

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which encourages emotional, social, and intellectual development, and building a sense of teen belonging, community involvement, and library appreciation.

Creating appealing teen environments is also an effective way to expand a library's customer base, by appealing to both users and non-users, creating a wider variety of customers from a diverse social groups, backgrounds, and interests. If done correctly, teen space is a very useful marketing tool, enabling libraries to draw teenagers into the physical library space, leading them to other library services such as materials, programming, etc.

All of these efforts provide a path to increasing current & future library supporters. The future of libraries is tomorrow's adults and, believe it or not, these are today's teenagers.

Other key success teen space factors include making teen participation and input a priority as well as a regular practice throughout the planning, design, implementation, maintenance, and marketing of the space and related teen library services. It is also crucial that libraries appropriately size their teen facilities based on community/student population (ages 13 – 18). Libraries must re-evaluate space allocations in their overall facilities and scale them according to demographics, not personal bias. In public library facilities, the ratio of a teen area to the overall library should be equal to the ratio of the teen population of that community to the overall population of that community.

All space and facilities projects should include a well thought-out plan for improvement, including short-term and long-range planning for current and future teen space and services. During this process it is equally important to get buy-in and support from all stakeholders, including teens, staff, faculty, administrators, and the community. And, lastly, think about what teenagers' *need*, not about what adults *want*. In regard to the actual design and décor of teen spaces, a truly teen-friendly space is comfortable, colorful, interactive, flexible in design, and filled with technology. It is important to keep in mind that "teen-friendly" is not synonymous with unruly, unreasonable, impractical, and tacky. Don't make assumptions or let personal biases impact decision making, whether selecting furniture, shelving/display units, flooring, lighting, paint color, signage, etc. Items should be welcoming, have visual impact, be versatile, and encourage positive, independent use of the library.

Conclusion

Making libraries appealing and important to teenagers is not an impossible task. Library facilities design is one integral step in attracting teen customers and redefining libraries of the future. Looking at teen facilities design in a new light, letting go of antiquated ideas, re-evaluating traditional ways of doing business, and emphasizing customer needs and wants are essential first steps in moving forward in the world of 21st century libraries.

Resources

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--Written by Kimberly Bolan on behalf of the Young Adult Library Services Association

They also work with youth development experts in the community and collaborate with agencies that provide services to teenagers.

The Chapin Hall Center for Children, www.chapinhall.org, completed a study in 2004 on Teens in the Library. In the area of staffing, the first recommendation for improving youth services in libraries is that “dedicated staff are essential to effective youth programs”. Across all of the sites senior administrators and librarians agreed “that youth programs require a staff person whose priority is to manage the program...”

Why provide staff and services just for teens?

Because it improves the library as a whole. According to key findings from the “Public Libraries as Partners in Youth Development (PLPYD), a Wallace Foundation Initiative,” public libraries selected for this program were challenged to “develop or expand youth programs that engaged individual teens in a developmentally supportive manner while enhancing library services for all youth in the community”. Based on the experiences of the PLPYD sites the findings concluded that: “Public Libraries have the potential to design youth programs that provide developmentally enriching experiences to teens and have positive effect both on youth services and the library more broadly.”

Young Adult librarians build relationships with teens and help other staff become comfortable with them. One of the findings from a study by Chapin Hall indicated that staff prejudices broke down when they develop relationships with teenagers. Youth development principles were credited with changing the general culture of the library by providing an “important new language” for library administrators that helped the library establish a new leadership role in the community. In an era when libraries must clearly articulate their importance to the larger community, these collaborative efforts increase our value as an institution and also make good economic sense for the community.

Because that’s what teens want. The 2007 survey conducted by the Harris Poll for YALSA asked young people what needed to happen in their local library in order for them to use it more often. 1 in 5 respondents said they would use their library more if “there was a librarian just for teens.” One third of respondents said that they would use the library more if the library had more interesting materials to borrow and events to attend.

Conclusion

Why employ Young Adult Librarians? The obvious reasons are listed above. On a fundamental level the goal is to provide excellent service to a large but unique segment of the population, teenagers. Young Adult librarians are essential to providing the best service to young adults in libraries and they are essential to keeping libraries viable and up to date. They are creating the next generation of tax paying library users. So the answer is simple – it is the smart thing to do.

Resources

“7 in 10 Voters want New Congress to Increase Funding for Afterschool Programs, Poll Finds,” [Afterschool Alliance Press Release](#), 13 November 2006.

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