

State-Level Commitment to Public Library Services for Young Adults: Frances Henne/YALSA/VOYA Research Grant Results

Authors:

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In 1949, Frances Henne (1906-1985) established ten goals in library service to youth, including "Strengthening national, regional, and state planning."² She believed that "Strong professional organizations are needed to interpret effectively in our services and plans to librarians, teachers, administrators, and others, and to participate in the construction and implementation of planning programs to achieve our objectives."² If Frances Henne were still alive, she would be honored to know that two strong professional organizations, the Young Adult Committee of the North Carolina Library Association (NCLA), a subdivision of the Public Library Section, and the Arizona Library Association, Arizona Librarians for Young Adult Services Roundtable (ALYAS), collaborated in striving toward one of her goals.

John P. Bradford and I became compatible colleagues even though we resided in opposite ends of the United States and even though we never met for a entire year after deciding to conduct research together. On June 29th, 1997 at the American Library Association Annual Conference in San Francisco, I attended a program called *The Frances Henne/YALSA/VOYA Research Grant: Past, Present, and Future*. It highlighted previous research supported by the award and was conducted by YALSA's Research Committee. The grant of \$500-\$1000 is to provide seed money for small scale projects which will encourage research that responds to the YALSA Research Agenda. When presenters urged audience members to consider applying for the grant, I was inspired.

Fate was in my favor. After attending the *Teaching Young Adult Literature Discussion Group*, I shared a seat on the bus with Dr. Joan Atkinson, a member of the Research Committee who was a grant recipient in 1992. I expressed interest in applying for the grant, but I mentioned that I was reluctant because most of the previous researchers had been university professors. Joan replied that she would like more public librarians to apply for the grant, and that she was disappointed because there had been no applicants that year. When I was awarded the Baker & Taylor/YALSA Conference Grant to attend the 1997 conference in the first place, I had no idea that my attendance would lead to research with John about library associations and state libraries throughout the United States.

During that time, I served as the Chair of the Young Adult Committee of the North Carolina Library Association (NCLA), a subdivision of the Public Library Section. After much discussion with the Young Adult Committee, we decided that it would be useful to find out what other committees like ours, in other states, were doing to serve young adults. We were also interested in learning how state libraries and youth services consultants in the United States supported young adult library services. Soon after the Young Adult Committee decided to apply for the grant, I saw a message on the listserv *Public Libraries, Young Adults, and Children (PUBYAC)* from Diane Tuccillo of the Mesa Public Library in Mesa, Arizona. She was requesting information from other states about young adult committees of state library associations.

Since many of her questions were similar to what our committee had planned to research, I contacted her and asked if the Arizona Library Association, Arizona Librarians for Young Adult Services Roundtable (ALYAS) would like to collaborate on the grant proposal, and she said yes. Since John had recently been named the President of ALYAS, Diane asked him to serve as the representative from Arizona. John and I believed that representing two different state library association groups for young adults was a head start toward our final goal, and that our chances of being awarded the grant were much stronger due to our collaborative efforts.

Previous Research

In the December 1988 issue of *Voice of Youth Advocates (VOYA)*, an article entitled “Overview of the State of the States Report on Young Adults” by Betty Davis Miller, at the time the Consultant for Youth Services for the Florida State Library, analyzed library services for young adults including information about state associations and the role of the state library. Miller said “After reading the reports of the State Agencies and the Library Associations of the various states, the most generous conclusion one can draw is that service to young adults is not an important issue in the library world.”⁴ Patrick Jones’ *Connecting Young Adults and Libraries: a how-to-do-it manual*, 2nd edition includes some information about state library associations and their activities, such as standards for services to young adults. YALSA’s web page includes a section called “State & Local YA News” which has information about “Books for the Beast: Fifth Margaret Edwards Day” at the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore, Maryland, young adult standards in Massachusetts, and a “Great Young Adult Services Tour: Innovative Library Programs for Young Adults” featuring programs throughout the United States. None of these three sources by Jones, VOYA, or YALSA represent activities by state library associations and state libraries throughout the entire United States.

Objectives

Our objectives in the grant proposal were to:

- 1) identify sections of professional library associations that are specifically for librarians serving young adults, and to identify their activities such as; producing standards for library services to young adults, creating publications such as newsletters, articles, or web pages, providing professional development opportunities at statewide conferences or elsewhere, and any other functions.
- 2) identify state library consultants and to determine whether they are;
 - a. responsible solely for young adult services or both children’s and young adult services and how this impacts upon services to young adults and librarians serving young adults in the state, including professional development opportunities, grant money, teen summer reading programs, statewide teen book awards, and other functions.
 - b. actively involved in the section of the professional library association specifically for librarians serving young adults.
- 3) to provide the library profession in a printed and/or electronic format;
 - a. directory of professional library associations specifically for librarians serving young adults and information gathered about the activities of these committees and information about geographical patterns reflecting commitment to young adult library services.
 - b. information gathered about the role of state youth services consultants in affecting services to librarians serving young adults and services to young adults in the state.

Problem Statement/Questions to be Answered

Is there state-level commitment to services for young adults in public libraries? If so, how is that commitment reflected within the structure of the state library and any state-level professional associations of public librarians? Are there regional patterns of support for young adult services?

Methodology, Including How Data Was Collected and Analyzed

We mailed a survey to every state youth services consultant in the United States as well as the District of Columbia. We also sent a survey to every state library association, totaling one hundred two surveys. We

included self-addressed, stamped envelopes, believing that this would increase our return rate. A memorandum on YALSA letterhead which stated that we had been awarded the grant was included with the survey for the purpose of giving us more credibility. This was another strategy that we used in attempting to further increase our return rate. Surveys were sent to both state youth services consultants and to state library associations because we believed that the information we received would be more complete. Although this method worked in some cases, in others, the information was contradictory, leaving us to question how well the state library association and the state youth services consultants communicated with one another.

Two young adults, Catherine Bourne in Indiana and Theresa Bengtson in Arizona, were hired to type the answers into a database. The states were separated into geographical sectors, and we analyzed the different sectors against each other by means of chi-square. Variables were regions, presence of and membership in statewide sections of library associations devoted to young adult librarianship, services offered regarding young adults, and roles of state library youth services consultants.

Survey

1. Does your state have a state-level association of librarians promoting young adult (YA) services in public libraries?

- Yes
- No (please skip to question 6)

2. Please provide contact information for this group, including name of contact person, name of group, address, phone number, fax number, e-mail address, and URL:

3. Does this association promote:

- Only YA library services?
- Both YA and children's services?
- Other (please describe):

4. How is this group affiliated with your state library association?

- Committee
- Task Force
- Round Table
- Division
- Other (please describe):

5. How does your state YA group communicate with: (check all that apply)

Its members?

- Meetings (please list frequency):
- Newsletter (please list frequency):
- Web page (please list web address):
- E-mail
- Listserv
- Other publications (please describe):

Other YA librarians in the state?

- Meetings (please list frequency):
- Newsletter (please list frequency):

- _____ Web page (please list web address):
- _____ E-mail
- _____ Listserv
- _____ Other publications (please describe):

6. For librarians providing YA services, does your state library association provide programs at its annual/biennial conference? How many at each conference, on average? What kinds of programs are given?

7. Does your state library association provide, for YA librarians, programs outside the conference? How many, annually? What kinds of programs are given?

Does your state library association have set statewide standards of YA librarianship? If so, please provide information on how interested librarians may order copies.

8. Are there other local, regional, or statewide groups promoting YA librarianship and/or services in your state? Please provide contact information for these groups, including name of contact person, name of group, address, phone number, fax number, e-mail address, and URL.

9. Does your state library provide consultants or assistance in the provision of YA services?

- _____ Yes (Please provide contact information for these consultants/assistants):
- _____ No (Please skip to Question 12)

10. Do these consultants/assistants (check all that apply)

- _____ Attend state library association meetings and annual/biennial conferences
- _____ Attend state YA librarian meetings and annual/biennial conferences
- _____ Provide grant-writing assistance to YA librarians
- _____ Provide grant opportunities for YA services
- _____ Provide regular communications to YA librarians
- _____ Provide training/professional development programs developed for YA librarians
- _____ Provide programming for YA librarians at state library association meetings and conferences
- _____ Provide programming for YA librarians at state YA librarian meetings and conferences
- _____ Provide special programs (e.g., summer reading, teen programming) developed for YA audiences
- _____ Provide special programs (e.g. summer reading, programming) developed for combined YA and children's audiences

11. Do these same consultants/assistants also provide assistance to:

- _____ Children's Services
- _____ Adult Services

12. How does your state library communicate with:

YA library groups in your state:

YA librarians in your state:

13. In your state, is there an award given for the best books for teens?

- _____ Yes
- _____ No

14. Who selects the winners of this award, and what is the name of this award?

15. How can interested librarians obtain a list of the winners?

Please give your name, position, address, telephone number, fax number, and e-mail address. Thank you for completing and mailing this survey in the self-addressed, stamped envelope that has been provided to you.

Results and Discussion

Seventy-three responses were returned of the one hundred two surveys sent. Eighteen states and the District of Columbia only returned one of the two surveys. In thirty-one states, the survey sent to the state's young adult librarians group and the one sent to the state library were returned. Kansas, Minnesota, Mississippi, North Dakota and Oklahoma returned neither survey.

While the results reported here derive from the surveys, John also used the web pages of various state libraries, library associations, and YALSA to clarify responses to the survey. Some respondents did not fill out the survey completely. In some states, the same person completed both surveys. Other states collaborated between the state library and the state library association when completing the survey. In the cases of those states from which no surveys were returned, John gathered answers to selected survey questions from the web sites of the state library associations. Information on state library consultants was expanded upon by a list of state consultants for services to children and young people prepared by Association of Library Services to Children (ALSC) of the ALA.

The ways in which both the young adult librarian groups and the state library consultants promote young adult services are as diverse as the states themselves. We found no evidence of regional differences in the likelihood of young adult librarian organizations, state consultants working on young adult issues, young adult book awards, or young adult standards. Chi-square analysis of various interactions of these variables proved impossible, as the cell values of the interaction were so low as to violate the assumption of chi-square.

Nonetheless, what did present itself through our data was the extraordinary inventiveness of those working for young adult services. Each state's consultants and librarians work with available resources and local conditions to provide the best possible services and libraries for the young adult community. Each state responded differently to the common struggle on behalf of young adults. A different constellation of communication styles, activities, and populations served by the statewide groups and the consultants emerged across the country.

We did receive some negative feedback when attempting to gather surveys. A representative from one state responded that she did not want our survey. When mentioning that it might be embarrassing for the state when the national results were published, and the state would not be represented, she said that it would not be the first time the state library would be embarrassed. Another state library representative, thinking that she was forwarding an e-mail message to her colleague, mistakenly forwarded the e-mail message to the researcher. The e-mail message contained an insult directed at the researcher. In another state, a representative responded in the survey that the state had no need or desire for a young adult library association. In too many cases, we found that people felt bothered by having been asked to complete the survey in the first place.

Young Adult Organizations

In forty-five states and in the District of Columbia, there are subunits of library associations or other statewide groups dealing with the provision of library services to young adults. Five states, Alaska, Arkansas, Idaho, New Mexico, and West Virginia, do not have such subunits. Further, the Pacific Northwest Library Association has a committee that selects a young adult book award.

--Insert Table 1

(Young Adult Librarian Organizations)

The activities conducted by these organizations varies. Several sponsor book awards, a few have pushed for the establishment of standards of young adult service, and most appear to focus on increasing communications between those on the front lines of library service to young adults.

Young Adult Book Awards

One regional and twenty-eight state young adult book awards were identified. Of these, the two from Texas are reading motivation lists drawn up annually by committees of librarians; there is no award-winner but publishers and booksellers use the placement of books on these lists as a marketing tool.

--Insert Table 2
(Young Adult Book Awards)

Professional Standards for Young Adult Librarianship

Surveys from seven states reported professional standards of librarianship that specifically referred to young adult services. Mere professional standards of public librarianship were not included in this tally, as those standards seemed too generalized to address issues of specifically young adult library service. Henne, in 1949, stated that "National, regional, and state standards exist for school libraries. Too few school libraries meet either the qualitative or quantitative recommendations of the national standards. National standards for library work with children in public libraries, and for library work with young people in public libraries, are now being formulated and will be published soon. Undoubtedly, too few librarians will measure up to these standards." 2 Have librarians made much improvement in over fifty years? Based upon how few standards have been created for young adult library services on a state-by-state basis, a conclusion can be drawn that the answer is no.

--Insert Table 3
(States with standards of young adult library service)

Consultants

From survey responses and the use of ALSC's list, consultants in library service to young adults in each state were identified. These consultants frequently do not deal with young adult issues exclusively, generally also working with service to children. In several states, the library consultants are expected to promote services for all library users, leaving open the possibility that young adult services can be overlooked.

--Insert Table 4
(Consultants)

Communications and Involvement

The main young adult library services associations in most states serve both young adults and children. Only in thirteen states does the young adult organization focus strictly upon young adults. In one state, Maryland, the young adult organization also focuses on adults. State library consultants, too, were mixed in their focus. Consultants could be responsible for children's and young adult services but more likely were developing library services for all ages.

--Insert Table 5
(YA organizations—activities and communications)

--Insert Table 6
(Consultants—activities and communications)

There is a variety of communication styles and opportunities used by consultants and young adult organizations. Further, different methods of communication can be employed to notify members of the young adult organization and young adult librarians outside the young adult librarians organization. In each state, a different mix of communications has developed. Most young adult librarian organizations and state library consultants have used new avenues of electronic communication to better spread information. Newsletters can become electronic, mass mailings can be sent to an e-mail list, and discussion groups and chat can replace face-to-face meetings.

Some traces of the past structures of communication, however, will still be relied upon. A young adult library association may be used to sending information only to its members to save mailing costs, but communications about young adult programming may be just as important to library media specialists in the schools as it is to librarians serving young adults in the public libraries. The message could be easily spread through shared mailing lists. Consultants may have sent their information to all librarians in the state via United States mail; perhaps a more targeted approach through young adult organizations would be more effectively spread the news via e-mail. Experimentation seems to be the way of the word today; by sharing the techniques of communications used by young adult library organizations and state library consultants, we hope to encourage such experimentation.

We encourage librarians to use the information we have presented to take a fresh look at young adult services in your state. How can they be improved? Do other states have activities or communication styles that could be used in your state? Are there nearby associations or consultants who could be contacted or who could assist with information dissemination? By sharing information even on such prosaic matters as what did and did not work to reach young adults, we can improve the quality of services provided. We now have a national network of experience and experimentation. Now it is time to expand upon our research, improve upon our weaknesses, and celebrate our victories in having successfully served young adults.

“The Frontiers of Library Service for Youth” ends with the following: “Our frontiers are ever shifting and ever being pushed forward. We have reached one frontier now that can be described as the end of our initial pioneer period and the place where we are evaluating critically what we have done and what we should do. Our next frontier will be reached when we achieve such goals as have been reported in this paper and which reflect the current thinking of librarians working with youth. With these goals once obtained, it would be difficult to predict what frontiers would stretch before us-- so boundless would be our opportunities.”² In 1997, Pat Feehan, a member of the Research Committee, said that “The YALSA Research Committee is looking for a few good researchers and some research.”¹ The grant information is located at <http://www.ala.org/yalsa/awards.henne.html> in case you are ready to provide the “ideals, the force, the zeal, the spirit, and yes, the toughness, that is required to turn visions and plans into workable realities.”² There are many more frontiers that need to be conquered.

References

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