

# DRAFT REPORT

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*please note: footnote content will be provided in a future draft*

## The Future of Library Services for and with Young Adults A Call to Action

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### I. INTRODUCTION

#### Why a National Forum on the Future of Library Services to Young Adults

Teens are drawn to libraries to access the library's internet or computers, use the library's research resources, study, read, socialize, participate in programming, and just "hang out". [1] Libraries are neutral, safe public spaces that provide opportunities for adolescents to grow intellectually, emotionally, and socially, develop new literacies for learning and expression, and gain workplace preparedness. [2]

There are over 40 million adolescents, aged 12-17, living in the U.S today and they use libraries. [3] *The Opportunity for All* study reported that youth ages 14-24 make up 25% of all public library users. [4] A 2013 Pew survey found that 72% of 16-17 year olds had used a public library in 2012.[5] Almost 82% of public libraries report providing library services to young adults, youth aged 12-18.[6] School libraries are available to more than 62% of the youth enrolled in public schools. [7] Eight in 10 Americans want all children and teens to have some type of organized activity or safe place to go after school; libraries often serve as those places. [8]

Although we know libraries, librarians, and library workers play an important role in the lives of adolescents, discussions at the national level about adolescents and libraries have not occurred.

While there have been conferences on the future of libraries, as well as conferences focused on youth development, there has not, in recent memory, been a national gathering that examined library services specifically for and adolescents.

The Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), a national association of librarians, library workers and advocates whose mission is to expand and strengthen library services for teens, believes the time for a national discussion about the future of young adult library services is NOW. Why now?

Recent economic downturns have negatively affected library services, particularly those provided for youth. [9] In many communities, frequently poor urban and rural ones, school districts no longer employ school librarians; some have even closed their school libraries [10]. Public libraries in many communities have reduced their hours, closed branch libraries, and cut their budgets for collections and technology.[11] Results from the 2012 Public Library Data Services (PLDS) study found that only one-third of the responding public libraries employed at least one dedicated teen services librarian.[12] Closures, reduced hours, lack of staff, and insufficient resources mean that teens in many communities no longer have access to the resources, knowledge, and services they need to support their academic, emotional, and social development, master 21st century skills, and ensure that they become productive citizens. Now is the time to explore the future of library services to teens and to re-affirm the right of all youth to have access to the unique expertise and services libraries can provide young adults.

According to an analysis of the 2010 census data completed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, there are currently 74.2 million children under the age of eighteen in the United States; 46 percent of them are children of color.[13] All of the growth in the child population since 2000 has been among groups other than Non-Hispanic whites. Three major groups experienced significant increases between 2000 and 2010:

- Children of mixed race grew at a faster rate than any other group over the past decade, increasing by 46 percent.
- The number of Hispanic children grew by 39 percent.
- The number of non-Hispanic Asian and Pacific Islander children grew by 31 percent.[14]

Today, more than one-fifth of America's children are immigrants or children of immigrants.[15]

If these trends continue, demographers conclude that "soon there will be no majority racial or ethnic group in the United States—no one group that makes up more than fifty percent of the total population." [16] Now is the time for the field of librarianship, the population of which is overwhelmingly white, to consider what these demographic changes mean to library services and programs for and with teens. [17]

Today's adolescents face an increasing array of social issues that place them at physical and psychological risk.

- More than 16 million children in the United States – 22% of all children – live in families with incomes below the federal poverty level – \$23,550 a year for a family of four. Poverty can impede children's ability to learn and contribute to social, emotional, and behavioral problems. It can also contribute to poor health and mental health.[18]
- The number of unemployed youth ages 16 to 24 is currently 22.7%, an all time high.[19] Among the major demographic groups, unemployment rates are lower for young women (14.8 percent) and whites (13.9 percent), while jobless rates continue to rise for young men (17.6 percent), African Americans (28.2 percent), Asians (15.0 percent), and Hispanics (18.1 percent).[20]
- An extensive body of research has documented the "achievement gap" between white and Asian students and African and Latino/a students. Students from low-income households are disproportionately represented in failing schools [21]
- While high school dropout rates have decreased in the last decade, approximately 3 million teens still quit school each year in the U.S. African American and Latino teens

are more likely to drop out than white teens. High school dropouts are not eligible for 90% of U.S. jobs and commit 75% of the crimes in the U.S. [22].

- More than 1.3 million children and teens experience homelessness each year [23]. Among the factors cited by teens for leaving home are family alcohol or drug abuse, physical or sexual abuse, teenage pregnancy and homosexuality.[24]
- Schools nationwide are hostile environments for a distressing number of LGBTQ students, the overwhelming majority of whom hear homophobic remarks and experience harassment or assault at school because of their sexual orientation or gender expression [25].
- Cyber bullying, teen depression, violence, and eating disorders are on the rise in many communities.

Now is the time for libraries to determine how we can contribute to solving and alleviating the problems that negatively impact teens.

Teens' use of technology (smart phones, tablets, laptops, the internet, etc.) is pervasive. More than 81% of online teens use some kind of social media and texting dominates their general communication choices. [26] Teen levels of engagement falls "along a continuum of practice that ranges from 'hanging out' and 'messing around' to the more invested 'geeking out, depending on individual interest in a given media activity.'" [27] However, in overall internet use, teens ages 12-17 that are living in lower-income and lower-education households are still somewhat less likely to use the internet in any capacity — mobile or wired. [28] Now is the time for libraries to systematically determine how technology will affect the future of teen services, with special attention to the access gaps that continue to exist.

Today's teens are part of an increasingly global and competitive society. Success in that environment requires an expanded set of skills that goes beyond traditional academic skills and includes learning and innovation skills (i.e. creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, communication and collaboration), and information, media, and technology skills (i.e. information literacy, media literacy, digital literacy, and ICT literacy).[29] Now is the time for libraries to re-imagine themselves as 21st century learning spaces.

With funding from a 2012 grant awarded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), YALSA held a year-long national forum "The Future of Library Services to Young Adults: A Call to Action." The forum provided an opportunity for the library community to join other youth-development organizations to engage in a conversation about how the library community can better meet the needs of adolescents in a time of diminishing resources and rapid demographic and technological change.

The outcome of the forum is a call to action for the library community. As Theodore Zeldin notes, "real conversation catches fire. It involves more than sending and receiving information." [30]. It is the "pivot point for change." [31] By acting on this call, by joining this conversation, the library community can work within their own local communities to create the kind of spaces, services, and opportunities today's teens need in order to succeed in school and in life.

## The Forum

The forum consisted of two components—a face-to-face summit and three virtual town hall meetings. A third component, a month-long series of virtual chats sponsored by YALSA and [connectedlearning.tv](http://connectedlearning.tv), emerged because of partnerships formed during the project. The overarching goals of the Forum were to:

1. Envision the future of library services for and with today's young adults.
2. Help communities develop effective library services and resources for and with today's young adults.
3. Provide a model for engaging researchers and practitioners from the broader community in productive dialog about the needs of today's young adults and the ways in which partnerships across agencies can be established and leveraged.
4. Establish a framework for the ongoing review and continual development of library services for and with young adults.

### **Future of Teens and Libraries Summit**

In January 2013, YALSA hosted a Future of Teens and Libraries Summit. The summit, which featured two days of speakers, panels and small group discussions, examined the current state of library services for and with young adults and explored how library services need to evolve to meet the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century adolescents. The summit planners cast a wide net for participants who could bring their unique perspective about teens, libraries, and community partnerships to the conversation. Attendees included front-line school and public library staff, faculty at schools of library and information science and schools of education, state library agency youth consultants, representatives of agencies that provide after-school programming and focus on workforce development, and more.

The Summit focused on three essential questions:

1. Why do young adults need libraries?
2. What do we know about teen needs?
3. How do we determine what library services to/for young adults should like for the near future?

Participants were asked to think deeply, challenge ideas, brainstorm, question, and plan.

#### Day 1

Participants were welcomed to the summit by Jack Martin, YALSA president, and Maureen Sullivan, summit moderator and ALA President. Lee Rainie presented an analysis of the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project's most recent research on teens and libraries. Following the presentation, participants met in working groups to respond to Dr. Rainie's ideas. After a short break, a panel of teens from Kitsap Regional Library responded to a series of questions about their experiences with libraries, social media, and learning. Participants then heard from Dr. Mimi Ito who shared her research related to libraries, teens, and connected learning.

#### Day 2

Day 2 began with small group discussions of how the research and ideas shared on Day 1 inform how libraries can best serve teens. Renee Hobbs then provided a media literacy perspective on teens and libraries. Over lunch, participants met in groups to respond to Dr. Hobbs' ideas and discussed how they impact the design of library services for teens. The final speaker of the summit, George Needham, challenged libraries to develop a new value proposition. After Mr. Needham's presentation, participants again worked in groups to outline key themes from the two-day summit and to develop action steps for various stakeholder groups.

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## **Virtual Town Hall Meetings**

In order to provide an opportunity for additional stakeholders to engage in this important conversation about the future of young adult library services, a series of virtual town hall meetings was held in the spring of 2013. Attendees included teen librarians, community-based after school directors, state library youth coordinators, and library vendor representatives, to name just a few. The meetings, facilitated by Linda W. Braun, focused on three key themes that emerged from the Future of Teens and Libraries Summit:

### **Partnerships**

1. Why are partnerships important?
2. What are the opportunities?
3. What is needed to move forward?

### **Teen Learning Environments**

1. Why do libraries need spaces for teens?
2. What is happening to teen spaces in libraries?
3. What are examples of successful learning spaces?
4. What type of learning can take place in library learning spaces?
5. What staff/management is required for successful learning in libraries?

### **The Future of Teen Libraries and Services**

1. If you could design the ideal teen library services, what they look like?
2. What makes them different than what is available today?
3. What do you think is exciting about these?
4. How will they benefit teens?
5. What will it take to get there?

The Virtual Town Hall meetings were held in Adobe Connect and the archived conversations can be found at [www.ala.org/yaforum/virtual-town-hall](http://www.ala.org/yaforum/virtual-town-hall).

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## **connectedlearning.tv Virtual Chats**

In May 2013, YALSA and [connectedlearning.tv](http://connectedlearning.tv) held a series of free virtual chats focused on teens and the future of libraries. The discussions were moderated by Jack Martin, YALSA president, and Crystle Martin, Postdoctoral Researcher for the Connected Learning Research Network. Topics included:

- The importance of youth access to technology in libraries
- Effectively leveraging social media in library programs
- Getting library and IT administrators on board with leveraging social media
- Sharing best practices

The chats are archived at <http://connectedlearning.tv/teens-and-future-libraries>.

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## II. OUTCOME: A PARADIGM SHIFT FOR LIBRARIES AND TEEN SERVICES

*“Libraries used to be grocery stores. Now we need to be kitchens.”*  
-Participant, Forum

Whether it is obvious or not, ever since computers entered library spaces, libraries have been on a precipice of change. It was not entirely possible to envision what that change would look like during the early stages of library-based tech, but as technology in libraries changed from “dumb terminals” available to customers for searching a catalog, to computers connected to the internet, to e-content and mobile devices, the role of the library in the community has shifted. A central part of that shift is how library staff working with teens effectively serve the age group. Teens, who have at their fingertips information and resources that just 25 years ago was only available in physical library spaces, need widely different types of service, access, collections, space, and staff than ever before.

Similarly, the definition of literacy has expanded. Teens today must be able to read, write and interact across a range of platforms, tools and media from signing and orality through handwriting, print, TV, radio and film, to digital social networks. Literacy is no longer viewed as a mechanical process, but is understood as the construction of meaning. This expanded definition of literacy impacts the types of services, programs and collections that libraries provide, as well as the nature of the work library staff perform.

The lives of teens are also affected by the social and political landscape. Issues like poverty, homelessness, failing schools, and bullying have physical and psychological ramifications for teens. As part of the larger community, libraries have a responsibility to contribute to solving and alleviating the problems that negatively impact teens.

The library is no longer a place to connect to physical content. It is instead a place, physical and virtual, to learn how to connect and use resources of all types from physical books to apps to experts in a local, regional, or national community. It is a kitchen for “mixing resources” in order to empower teens to build skills, develop understanding, create and share, and overcome adversity.

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## The Shift as Seen Through Teen Use of Technology

The first step in understanding the paradigm shift in library services for and with teens is to look at who teens are today. We begin by putting their lives within the context of the facet that is causing perhaps the most disruption for libraries, for education, and for society overall - technology. While technology is not the only aspect of teen lives that is important to libraries, it is probably the most pervasive element causing a need for a shift in library services for and with this age group.

For more than a decade, the Pew Internet & American Life Project has studied teen use of technology with an eye towards what this use means for educational institutions. In late 2012 and 2013, the Project released a number of reports that give librarians, educators, youth workers, and parents a clear view of how teens relate to resources, information, and each other through the lens of technology. Recent Pew Project reports focus on teens and privacy in the digital world, teens' use of apps, and teen reading and engagement with libraries.

In his presentation at the YALSA Summit on the future of libraries and teens, Lee Rainie, Executive Director of the Pew Internet and American Life Project, outlined seven takeaways from the project's research:

1. Teens live in a different information ecosystem.
2. Teens live in a different learning ecosystem.
3. Teens' reading levels match/exceed adult levels.
4. Teens use libraries and librarians more than others, but do not necessarily love libraries as much.
5. Teens have different priorities in library services.
6. Teens will behave differently in the world to come.
7. The public and teachers recognize this and want libraries to adjust to it. <sup>[31]</sup>

Taken individually, and as a group, these findings have a powerful bearing on the future library services for and with teens. It is clear teens live in a world in which they are connected to friends, family, and others 24/7 through digital devices and social networks. As Rainie noted, 81% of teens use social networks and 95% are on the internet. <sup>[32]</sup> This world of online engagement creates participatory and collaborative environments that go beyond the traditional connections teens have previously had access to for learning and library services.

Unfortunately, in many communities teens continue to connect primarily to libraries as places that support school related work. [33]. They use libraries for homework and school related research, but engagement beyond that is lacking. This lack of engagement results in fewer opportunities for teens to connect to resources that support their personal independent growth--resources that allow them to explore their passions, connect with others who share their interests, and turn their learning into "academic achievement, career possibilities, or civic engagement...." [34]



In his presentation, Rainie also provided a vision of the teen of tomorrow:

“In 2020 the brains of multitasking teens and young adults are ‘wired’ differently from those over age 35 and overall it yields helpful results. They do not suffer notable cognitive shortcomings as they multitask and cycle quickly through personal- and work-related tasks. Rather, they are learning more and they are more adept at finding answers to deep questions, in part because they can search effectively and access collective intelligence via the Internet. In sum, the changes in learning behavior and cognition among the young generally produce positive outcomes.”<sup>[35]</sup>

Clearly, if libraries want to more effectively serve today’s “connected” teen, they must ramp up engagement in areas beyond academic or formal learning, and make this engagement visible to teens. It is not enough to use the tools adolescents are using - the internet, social networks, and mobile devices. This means libraries need to embrace the connected learning model and recognize that they must do more to connect with teens via the library’s technology presence and services. Ultimately, we must be the proverbial dog that wags the tail of technology instead of being driven by technology without a clear purpose or aim of how it can impact teen services.

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### **The Shift as Seen Through Expanded Literacies**

*“Information devoid of social context fails to live up to its transformative potential.”*

- Former Librarian turned feminist activist Audre Lorde

The library profession has come to understand literacy as much more than a cognitive ability to read and write, but as a social act that involves basic modes of participating in the world. [36] This fundamental shift means librarians no longer view literacy merely as a technical competency that can be added to people as though they were machines, but rather as a social practice that varies from one context to another and is part of cultural knowledge and behavior. [37] This more fluid understanding of literacy has meant that librarians’ work with teens now falls under a larger umbrella of multiple literacies, which encompasses information literacies, critical literacies, digital literacies, media literacies and much more.

This shift to a more expansive view of literacy is not inconsequential to librarians’ work for and with teens. Without these broader pedagogical frameworks, librarians would be confined to a narrow range of instruction that focuses on teaching teens about books and how to find library resources. Instead, librarians have the tools to meet teens where they are and help them develop a much more meaningful and culturally relevant set of skills that they can use in their everyday lives--whether they are in the library or not.

This expanded literacies framework can be seen as part of the ‘social turn’ in literacy scholarship that was eventually coined as New Literacy Studies (NLS). The crux of new literacies is not the surface level issue of multiple modalities (e.g., using text, graphics, and sound) but of the use and adaptation of new literacy practices, or creating new ways of interacting with others and new ways of thinking (e.g., new habits of mind). The table below provides definitions for some of the expanded literacies that librarians are engaged in with teens on a regular basis.



<b>Expanded Literacies</b>	
<b>Multiple Literacies</b>	Emerging out of the New Literacies Studies (NLS) movement, the concept of multiple literacies provides teens with a repertoire of ways for accessing, acquiring, constructing, expressing, sharing, and using knowledge, as well as developing a series of ways to collaborate with others for mutual benefit and collective good.
<b>Critical Literacies</b>	Learning how to formulate difficult questions concerning societal inequities and investigating real life issues with the goal of transformative social action.
<b>Digital Literacies</b>	An ability to navigate, manipulate and stay ahead of emerging computer and Internet technologies. Also an ability to use technology responsibly and ethically and transfer everyday ideas into technology processes.

### Media Literacy

*“Opportunities for frank and candid discussion about media, technology and popular culture should be an essential component of teen library programs”*  
*--Renee Hobbs*

One thing libraries must do more concertedly and aggressively is support teen media literacy skills acquisition. As Renee Hobbs asked in her presentation at the project Summit “What do we need to know and be able to do when it comes to supporting and extending teens’ use of print, visual, sound and digital texts, tools and technologies?” Hobbs answered that question in her presentation which connected teen development to use of media. Hobbs showed how media content can influence a variety of teen attitudes and behaviors, including nutrition, substance abuse, sexuality, aggression, and online social responsibility. Hobbs highlighted seven ways that teens can gain media literacy skills and that have an impact on how library staff working with the age group help in that acquisition.

#### 1. Reflecting on Our Media Choices

The teen years focus on learning how to make good choices. The media they consume is just one of the choices teens make every day. Helping teens to think about how they spend time with media - social, print, and other - will give them opportunities to consider gaps in consumption along with determining if they are making the right choices at any time for what they are watching, reading, listening to, etc.

**2. Play and Learning with Media & Technology**

Giving teens the chance to actually try out various technology tools in unstructured and informal learning environments helps the age group not only to see how things work and gain comfort with the tools, but also opens up opportunities for informal conversation about using and making good choices when it comes to media and technology.

**3. Developing Information Access & Research Skills**

Helping teens acquire access and research skills has long been a strong-suit of library staff working with the age group. When it comes to 21st century media, teens need to take a leadership role in gaining these skills with library staff acting as mentor, coach, and guide. Library staff need to help teens find opportunities for researching topics of personal interest and then help them in gaining the needed skills through facilitated learning.

**4. Strengthening Message Analysis Skills**

In her presentation Hobbs noted that the way people interpret messages varies. Teen analysis of media messages needs to include thinking about the audience of a message, the purveyor of the message, and the images and technology used to send that message.

**5. Composing Messages using Multimedia Tools**

Content creation is a large part of many teen lives. Teens spend time on content creation tools like Vine and Instagram, Tumblr and Twitter, and fan fiction sites. What teens put out and the message they send about themselves is key to teen understanding of how media works.

**6. Exploring Media Issues in Society**

The media is a ripe context to help teens explore societal themes such as social justice, and equality. As avid consumers of media, teens are poised to critically analyze how media issues affect their daily lives and how media can reproduce social inequalities. As an example, teens can look critically at how media conglomerates advertise certain products, play certain types of music, and generally control the broader messages that play out in society that work to sway human consciousness.

**7. Sharing Ideas and Taking Action**

In adolescence young people begin to understand the importance of social issues and how they can play a part in making change happen. Print and digital media is a perfect way for teens to connect with others and brainstorm ways to improve the lives of themselves or others. Through media teens can join campaigns that promote positive lifestyles and good choices and can see how media can have an impact on making change in the world.

Library staff serving teens are not alone in supporting teen media literacy skill acquisition. Educators, parents and caregivers, business leaders, and other members of every community have a role to play. Working with other community members can expand what a library can provide for and with teens when it comes to media literacy education and will give teens the chance to connect to others who can play a valuable educational, informational, and personal role in teen lives.

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## The Shift as Seen Through Connected Learning

In early 2013, the Connected Learning Research Network (CLRN) published their report, *Connected Learning: An Agenda for Research and Design*. At the heart of connected learning is the idea that young people learn best when that learning is connected to their passions, desires, and interests. This focus correlates strongly with the learning ecosystem and learning needs of the teen of 2020 that Rainie described in his summit presentation. As noted in the CLRN report:

“The connected learning model posits that by focusing educational attention on the links between different spheres of learning—peer culture, interests and academic subjects—we can better support interest-driven and meaningful learning in ways that take advantage of the democratizing potential of digital networks and online resources.” [38]

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### Definition of Connected Learning

“Connected learning is socially embedded, interest-driven, and oriented towards educational, economic, or political opportunity.” (CLR, p. 6)

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The report highlights several case studies in which teens drive their own learning, and become empowered by using a variety of tools and resources:

- *Clarissa, growing up in a working-class family, becomes a better writer through playing video games and participating in online role playing on the Faraway Lands website and is admitted to two highly competitive liberal arts colleges.*
- *Louis, a high school drop-out (because he felt school set him up for failure) gains skills as a hip-hop artist in a hip-hop music production program for youth.*
- *At the YOUmedia Lab (at the Chicago Public Library Harold Washington Library), teens from all over the city pursue their interests in everything from creative writing to video game production and connect with mentors who support that learning.<sup>[7]</sup>*

Connected learning centers on an equity agenda; an agenda that fits with the mission of libraries to “change lives.” Ito and her colleagues argue that “it is generally educationally privileged youth with effective learning supports at home who are able to take full advantage of the new learning opportunities that the online world has to offer and translate these opportunities to their academic and career success.” [39] This growing gap between “the progressive use of digital media outside of the classroom, and the no-frills offerings of most public schools that educate our most vulnerable populations. This gap contributes to widespread alienation from educational institutions, particularly for non-dominant youth.” [40] The result is that many of these teens drop out of school or graduate without the skills needed to pursue higher educational opportunities or find high-paying jobs. In 2010, 8 percent of African American teens, 15.1

percent of Hispanic teens, and 12.4 percent of Native American teens dropped out of high school as compared to 5.1 percent of white teens.[41] The national unemployment rate for African Americans stands at 15.9 percent; 15.2 percent for Native Americans, and 11.5 percent for Latinos [42]. In some metropolitan communities the African American unemployment rate is three times the white rate and the Latino unemployment rate is twice the white rate. [43] Approximately 27.7 percent of all African American persons, 26.6 percent of all Hispanic persons (of any race), and 24.8 percent of Native Americans live in poverty as compared to 9.9 percent of all non-Hispanic white persons. [44]

Libraries, acting as connected learning centers, can support these adolescents who otherwise lack opportunity. They can do this by capitalizing on digital and networked media, but by also building on traditional areas of strength associated with young adult library services, namely

- Support for self-directed, learner-centered inquiry
- Sanctioned intergenerational contact centered on youth interest discovery
- Safe public spaces for youth
- Strong ties to non-dominant communities/families (Ito presentation)

Libraries can improve their services even more by:

- Tapping expert human resources from communities (both real and virtual)
- Connecting to school and work trajectories (ITO, presentation)<sup>[45]</sup>

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“Connected learning is realized when a young person is able to pursue a personal interest or passion with the support of friends and caring adults, and is in turn able to link this learning and interest to academic, career success or civic engagement.” (CLR, p. 4)

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Connected learning is the core of library services for and with teens. Connected learning provides a foundation for what teens need and want from libraries. It re-affirms the value of libraries in the lives of teens. Teens who use libraries, virtually or physically, gain skills and knowledge related to their own passions and interests, build their peer-networks, and extend their school-based learning to real world endeavors.

The principles of connected learning call for a shift from professional library staff as the focal points of all knowledge to a model in which the library makes it possible for skilled people around the world, either physically or digitally, to support teen needs by providing coaching, mentoring, and hands-on opportunities for learning. Working in libraries with teens is no longer the purview of professional and support staff only. Instead, all staff work to make connections between teens and those who can provide the most support and help for academic, career, and personal pursuits.

To support their learning—personal, work-related, and academic—library staff must connect with teens as individuals. As one participant noted: “Many teens don’t have relationships with non-supervisory adults...Teens need more adults who are not only ‘in charge’ of them” [45] This theme was echoed by other participants who used words like allies, mentors, coaches, and partnerships to describe the relationships library staff must develop with teens in order to provide effective and substantive programs and services.

In order to connect with teens, library staff must:

- Recognize teens as thinking human beings who have ideas, interests, and passions that are valid and important and call for changes in library service.
- Be willing to talk with teens about their interests and passions and reach beyond traditional library resources to support them.
- Listen to the voices of adolescents who are often marginalized and may not currently be seen as library users.
- Reflect on the privileged positions and perspectives many librarians possess and consider how those standpoints inform the work with teens from non-dominant backgrounds.
- Understand the value of partnerships and collaborations to bring to teens skills and knowledge that might not be a part of the library staff portfolio and to expand teen access to resources.
- Respect the new teen ecosystem that focuses heavily on technology, and recognize that use of that technology provides levels of empowerment and access never before available to the age group.
- Take risks in order to find out what works and does not work with and for teens and make changes based on both successes and failures.

Thus, library services for and with teens in the future are not librarian-based or book-based or even place-based. They are centered on relationships—relationships between teens and library staff, between library staff and the broader community. These relationships result in connections; connections that allow libraries to create an ever-changing collection of programs and services that meet the requirements of individual teens and teen groups at any moment of need.

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## **The Shift as Seen Through the Social & Economic Factors Impacting Teens**

*“Librarians can make real connections with teens who are shown that the library is a safe place and the librarian is an ally.” (Participant, Summit)*

Libraries are part of the larger network of community organizations that are committed to improving the life outcomes for teens. As outlined in the introduction to this report, a number of social and economic factors negatively impact the lives of teens today. At the most basic level, libraries provide a safe and welcoming place for ALL teens. Public libraries are often described as safe places where teens can go after school or in the summer to stay off the streets. School libraries often become “havens for students who don’t fit into other social groups.” [46] For many homeless teens the library is a place to be warm and to connect with others.

However, libraries must do more than just be safe places. The issues teens face are significant. They not only negatively impact the day-to-day life of many teens, but they also have the potential to negatively impact not only teens' futures, but the future of a nation that may find itself lacking enough skilled workers and engaged citizens to support a democratic society. Throughout the Forum participants provided examples of how libraries bridge the growing knowledge divide, build on teens' motivation to learn, provide workforce development training, and serve as the "connector" between teens and other community agencies.

### **Bridge the Growing Knowledge Divide**

*"Access to technology is really important to kids, but we all know they don't come in with built-in skills. So, having adult or peer support can help them learn how to use technology to become makers and doer and creators is really, really important."* (Participant, connectedlearning.tv Chat)

The *Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study 2011-2012* found that nationwide, over 62 percent of libraries report offering the only free Internet access in their communities." During the connectedlearning.tv virtual chat, one of the participants shared this observation: "Statistics show that one in four teenagers don't have access to technology (whether they can't afford it or just don't have access). That's a huge number of teenagers that can't go online. If nothing else that should be a wake-up call to school and public libraries." At the most basic level libraries must provide access to technology for teens—not just desktop computers for 30 minutes, but the kind of technology privileged teens have such as laptops, tablets, e-book readers, raspberry pi's, video and photo editing equipment, still and video cameras, drawing tablets, etc.

Perhaps more important is the need for libraries to address what Dave Lankes calls the "knowledge gap"--"the ability of people to take advantage of these new tools." [47] Digital literacy skills are critical for completing homework, applying for a job, accessing government online resources, applying to college, being successful in the workforce, contributing to the democratic process, communicating with peers—the list goes on. Libraries must ensure that in addition to providing access to the tools, that they also provide formal and informal opportunities for teens to learn to use them in meaningful and authentic ways. Closing the knowledge gap should be the goal of library staff.

### **Build on Teens' Motivation to Learn**

*"Families, and particularly nondominant communities...embrace libraries in a way that provides a tremendous opportunity for us to reach communities of youth who may feel disenfranchised from schools."* (Participant, connectedlearning.tv Chat)

Teens are motivated to learn. In fact, adjusting to their new intellectual abilities and expanded verbal skills is one of the developmental tasks of adolescence. Too often teens' desire to learn is thwarted by an educational system too focused on testing, unwilling to adopt culturally relevant pedagogy, or so strapped for funding that only the basic resources are available. Social factors

such as poverty, homelessness, violence, teen pregnancy, etc. may also interfere with formal school-based learning.

Libraries have always been associated with learning and literacy. As one of the Forum participants observed: “Where libraries play a unique role is that they’re a set of institutions that occupy not just purely that sphere of ‘academic achievement,’ but that space of intersection between an individual’s interests and the kind of opportunity that our formal institutions represent in young people’s lives.” Another noted: “Libraries bridge the intersection between formal and information learning.”

When libraries embrace their role as learning environments teens are able to:

- focus on the *experience* of learning
- construct their own learning about topics that are important to them--topics they care about
- weave virtual and face-to-face learning together in meaningful ways
- build non-traditional and “non-tested” skills and literacy
- engage in peer-supported learning
- connect with a broader community of others interested in the same topics

### **Provide Workforce Development Training**

*“Teens don’t just want makerspaces, they want to know how to make the next step in developing their interests and workforce skills.” (Participant, Summit)*

Building on teens’ motivation to learn also allows libraries to provide needed workforce development training for teens. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills has developed a framework that includes life and career skills—skills that are required for students to be successful in the increasingly competitive and global economy. These include:

- flexibility and adaptability
- initiative and self-direction
- social and cross cultural skills
- productivity and accountability
- leadership and responsibility [48]

As a 21st century learning environment, libraries have the responsibility (and opportunity) “to enable teens to learn in relevant, real world 21st century contexts (e.g., through project-based or other applied work)” and to provide “equitable access to quality learning tools, technologies, and resources.” [49]

From setting up teen learning spaces like Chicago’s YOUmedia labs, to employing teens to provide literacy activities with young children like the Free Library of Philadelphia does, to providing volunteer service credit for teen bloggers like Mission Viejo Library is doing, libraries can support teens as they gain these necessary life and career skills.

### **Serve as the Connector Between Teens & Other Community Agencies**



*“Research shows that the teenage years are one of the most vulnerable times for mental illness or disorders. We can provide a place in between work, school, and home and access to resources.*

*We can serve as a buffer zone.”* (Participant, Virtual Town Hall)

Libraries are only one of many organizations whose vision is to build better futures for teens. Too often, however, teens are unaware of the services offered in their communities. Libraries can serve as the connector.

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### **Libraries in Action**

Sometimes we, as teen services librarians, underestimate the impact we may have on the lives of the youth in our communities.

Recently a volunteer who was maintaining a small library at an emergency shelter for homeless teens contacted the local teen services librarian and asked: Did the librarian have any books she could donate? And would the librarian be willing to help these young people have access to the public library? Many of the teens had library cards that were either blocked by overdue fines or missing materials or had long since expired. Some had never had a library card with the city library and had no permanent address to offer. The teen services librarian showed up at the shelter with her laptop and a stack of extra paperbacks from Friends of the Library donations. She sat down with one teen after another and - as they shared their stories - she negotiated with them over missing materials and long overdue books. One young man, who had never exchanged a word with the volunteer librarian or shown any interest in the small on-site library, emerged from his meeting with the teen services librarian with a smile on his face. His record was clear and he could now check out the books on Eastern philosophy he'd been eyeing at the local library. The impact of the teen services librarian visiting the shelter was more than simply the practical aspect of getting a library card. Each young person was thrilled that a librarian would take the time to care, because in general her or his experiences with adults in authority hadn't been positive. This was particularly true for the LGBTQ youth at that shelter, many of whom were on the streets due to abuse or eviction based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. The teen services librarian continued to visit the shelter regularly and this relationship, between the shelter and the library, meant two agencies that had never interacted were now working together for the sake of these young people. This is a partnership that changed lives and all it took was a phone call.

-contributed by Summit Participant, Julie Wilkenstein

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### **The Shift Big Picture**

*“Libraries need to be a space to connect, a space to create, a place to be.” (Participant, Summit)*

So what does this paradigm shift mean for libraries? What would it mean if libraries became connected learning centers and capitalized on today’s new media? What would libraries look like if they embraced fully teens’ use of social media? How would libraries change if they focused on an expanded view of literacy? What difference would libraries make in the lives of teens if they built on teens’ desire to learn and served as the “connector” between teens and other community agencies?

To answer these questions, it is helpful to view the paradigm shift as a comparison between 1) past and present and 2) envisioned future library services. Each of the areas described in the table below is not place-based but is focused on creating a library learning environment that is driven by the needs of teens and is virtual, digital, physical, and location independent - whatever the needs of teens, wherever in the community library services for teens are needed, library staff serving the age group are available.

	<b>Past/Present</b>	<b>Envisioned Future</b>
<b>Audience</b>	Teens who are readers and users of the physical library space, especially teens who use the library for homework and leisure reading. A self-selected group that often doesn’t include underserved members of the teen population (e.g. non-readers, immigrant teens, homeless teens, incarcerated teens, teens from non-dominant cultures, etc).	Teens who view the library as a community space for hanging out, messing around, and geeking out. Teens who are readers and those who are non-readers or reluctant readers. The library reaches out to and serves ALL teens in the community no matter what their backgrounds, interests and needs might be.

<b>Space</b>	<p>Fixed furniture with tables and chairs for study, bookshelves making up a large portion of the space available for teen collections, programs, and services. Books and other print materials are the focal point of the space. A limited number of desktop computers with internet access are available for teen use. Wi-fi might be available for patrons with their own device.</p>	<p>Flexible furniture that can be moved around as need be to suit the needs of teen patrons. Fewer book stacks and desktop computers as teens use more mobile devices of their own or borrow devices that are available from the library. Virtual and physical spaces for hanging out, creating content, working collaboratively, and working individually are provided. Connecting is the central focal point of the area whether it be connecting to other people, physical materials, or digital materials.</p>
<b>Collections</b>	<p>Primarily physical collections with selection driven by “best of the best” lists and awards. Physically visiting a library is necessary to gain access.</p>	<p>Collections made up of physical and digital materials that are easily accessible no matter where a teen is. Flexible circulation policies and systems allow teens to access what they need, when they need it, and for how long they need it. Collections include access to skilled people who can help teens as well as to materials - video, audio, books, databases, e-content, etc. - created by teens and others in the community. Collection reflects the demographics of the community and the needs, interests, and preferences of the teens each library serves.</p>

<b>Programs</b>	Librarian-driven sometimes with teen input. Focus on literature and making “stuff” as a fun activity. Outcomes measured primarily by attendance.	Driven by each community’s teens’ passions and interests and strongly connected to learning a skill of personal, work, or academic interest. Co-created and co-led by library staff, content experts and teens and leverage the unique resources offered by the library. Beta-driven with the expectation that not everything will work, evaluation will be ongoing, and changes will be made at the time of need. Outcomes measured by skills or knowledge gained.
<b>Literacy</b>	Viewed mainly as a cognitive ability to read and write, or a technical competence. Focused primarily on the written word and contextualized by librarians as bibliographic instruction or information literacy.	Understood as a social practice that extends beyond the written word and involves making meaning across multiple contexts including written, spoken, visual, performative, and media, etc.
<b>Staff</b>	Models of library staff working with teens vary from MLIS degreed full-time teen services librarians, to reference and/or children’s staff serving the age group, to part-time volunteers.	Degreed library professionals focus on developing and managing teen services at the programmatic level while face-to-face encounters are made up of a hybrid of staff and skilled volunteers who act as mentors, coaches, and connectors to the information and resources needed by individual teens in the community. Library staff, mentors, and coaches build relationships with teens with the goal of supporting their academic, career, and civic engagement and growth.

<b>Youth Participation</b>	<p>Librarian-driven seeking feedback from teens on topics such as collections, space, etc. Usually formal group with activities pre-defined by current models of library service.</p>	<p>A flexible participatory design and action research approach is utilized where teens provide both on-the-fly and long-term feedback for the library staff. Groups of teens are not necessarily formally organized, but instead participation includes digital interactions as well as face-to-face activities. An emphasis is placed on encouraging all teens, not just those who are regular visitors to the physical library, to participate in the development, implementation, and evaluation of library programs and services.</p>
<b>Outreach</b>	<p>Primarily confined to outreach to schools. Often focused on school visits one or two times a year to promote seasonal programs and activities. Teens are expected to find a way to come to the physical library space to take advantage of services and programs.</p>	<p>Year-round using a variety of tools - digital and physical. Includes connecting with stakeholders throughout the community in order to develop shared goals and an implement a comprehensive plan of service that reaches all teens throughout the community.</p> <p>Librarians leave the physical library space regularly and provide services to targeted communities of teens (e.g. those who are incarcerated, homeless, or in foster care) where they are, rather than waiting for them to come out to the physical library space.</p>

<b>Policy</b>	Frequently focused on collections and an individual's (instead of a group's) use of the library. Barriers to use of technology resources often the norm. Takes time to develop and to gain approval.	In a connected flexible model of service for and with teens (individual and group) policies focus on serving teens no matter where they are. The policies are flexible and easy to update in order to reflect changing informal and formal learning environments and are focused on the library as a place - physical or virtual, in the building or in the community - where teens can create, connect, and collaborate. Policies that support technology use for learning and collaboration are the norm rather than the exception.
<b>Professional Development / LIS Education</b>	Often focused on literature and programs that act as models of success and treats teen services as separate from the overall library program. Little discussion of adolescent development, connected learning, teen trends, etc.	Takes a whole library approach to planning, delivering and evaluating teen services. Investigates attributes and resources unique to libraries and identifies means for leveraging those to achieve library goals. Learning takes place in a variety of environments and includes connecting with a professional learning network as well as experts and educators. Explores who teens are and their overall needs and interests, instead of materials and specific programs of service.

### What the Shift Means For Teens

When this shift starts to happen in libraries, teens will have a community-based institution they can rely on to support them in pursuing expanded opportunities and in developing skills and talents that will help them succeed today and in the future. The library becomes the focal point for informal and formal learning. A place - virtual and physical - where teens want to spend time with friends, find a mentor/coach, connect to experts in a variety of fields, and explore and become better at what they are most interested in. The library is the place for teens to become who they want and need to be!

The following bulleted lists provide examples of the specific benefits teens gain when young adult library services are re-imagined.

### **Learning**

- Try out and build on academic knowledge & skills
- Gain job skills
- Explore career pathways
- Connect with mentors
- Opportunity to engage in peer-supported learning activities
- Learn through experience
- Weave virtual and face-to-face learning together in meaningful and productive ways
- Learn about what is important to them /what they are passionate about
- Construct their own meaning
- Demonstrate proficiency in non-traditional ways
- Become the experts that other teens and adults turn to

### **Leadership**

- Take on leadership roles - become leaders
- Have their voices heard
- Gain skills as decision makers
- Learn to take risks
- Become proactive and independent

### **Community**

- Connect with others interested in the same things
- Build a sense of community
- Take meaningful action in a community
- Hang-out (be engaged and sometimes anonymous)
- Build relationships with adults they can trust
- Become familiar with ideas and experiences that take them beyond their own community
- Develop empathy

### **Literacy**

- Build non-traditional literacy skills
- Gain digital literacy skills

### **Technology**

- Use communication tools that they are comfortable and familiar with in positive and proactive ways
- Access technologies that they might not otherwise have access to
- Gain digital citizenship skills
- Have the opportunity to overcome the digital divide

### **Creativity**

- Engage in self-expression
- Create meaningful and authentic content/products



- Share their expertise

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The remaining portions of this paper look at how the shift relates to the core philosophy of libraries and how library staff working with teens can make change and the shift a reality in their libraries.

### III. MISSION AND CORE PRINCIPLES OF YOUNG ADULT LIBRARY SERVICES

“*Libraries need a new value proposition.*” (George Needham, Tweet p. 13)

The paradigm shift described above requires a new mission for young adult library services and a re-examination of the core principles or values librarians hold.

#### **Mission**

The mission of young adult library services is to foster learning, personal development, and civic engagement among teens in a culturally responsive, information-rich, and technologically advanced environment that spans physical and virtual library spaces to prepare teens for productive adult lives.

#### **Values**

The values library staff hold serve as a compass for actions and describe how the profession views, interacts with, and serves teens through libraries.

#### **Connectivity**

Libraries that serve teens value connectivity. They bridge teens’ different spheres of learning (peer culture, interests, and academics) through innovative library programs and services that leverage and engage all parts of the library.

#### **Literacy**

Libraries that serve teens help teens read both the word and their worlds through a pedagogical standpoint of multiple literacies. They embrace all representations of meaning including: linguistic, visual, audio, spatial, gestural, etc. and promote a critical stance towards inquiry and learning that calls existing hierarchies into question.

#### **Education**

Libraries that serve teens embrace their role as educators, helping teens to learn in both formal and informal environments.

#### **Adaptability**

Libraries that serve teens respond proactively to the constant shifts (technological, social, global, and otherwise) that shape teens’ daily lives.

**Respect**

Libraries that serve teens treat teens with dignity and consult with them in important library decision-making processes.

**Collaboration**

Libraries that serve teens leverage the resources/talents of all library departments as well as non-library institutions and establish community partnerships around teens' needs and interests.

**Diversity**

Libraries that serve teens affirm teens' constantly shifting hybrid multicultural identities by adopting inclusive policies, practices, attitudes and dispositions.

**Inclusivity**

Libraries that serve teens integrate teen services across and throughout the entire library program. They disrupt monolithic views about what type of teens they are serving and adopt an inclusive paradigm that embraces the gifts and abilities of ALL teens, including those from non-dominant backgrounds and those whose identities and experiences fall outside the mainstream. Librarians and library staff view these differences among teens as assets and not cultural deficits.

**Equality**

Libraries that serve teens break down barriers of access (intellectual, digital and physical). Librarians and library staff model the change society wants to see with respect to various forms of oppression (race, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) that are often manifested in library policies, practices, and librarians' dispositions.

## **IV. HOW WILL WE GET THERE? WHAT DO LIBRARIES NEED TO DO?**

*“The community’s re-thinking and paradigm shift of the library role won’t change until our profession makes the shift first” - George Needham*

Libraries are in the perfect position to support and provide the kind of meaningful connections that young people need between formal, academic learning and interest-based learning in any community. In a society in which some young people are succeeding and others are being left behind, libraries play a critical role in preparing ALL teens to be productive, engaged citizens in both their work and personal lives. For libraries to make this needed shift, however, multiple fundamental elements must change.

**Abandon Our Role as “Expert”**

*“Teens are the experts in many things but we don’t always trust them to teach, that they will follow through, that they will do it the way the librarian wants”* (Participant, Virtual Town Hall Meeting)

In a world where lifelong learning is increasingly necessary, promoted and valued, there are fewer ‘experts’ and more learners. Like in other areas of the library profession, the skills and knowledge needed to work effectively for and with young adults continue to evolve, just as they do within the broader field of education, as more classrooms are flipped and various styles of learning accommodated in different ways. To best support successful teen services in public and school libraries, this same kind of change is needed on the part of all library staff members.

Library staff have traditionally been the information keepers; as young people and their learning expectations change, it will be critical for library staff to establish themselves in a role of co-learner and to be comfortable working alongside young people to learn together. The change this brings to the work of library staff cannot be overemphasized. Librarians have traditionally sat in a position of knowledge keeper, in which patrons come to them in search of information and answers. The paradigm shift articulated in this paper is one in which all individuals – patrons and staff – are neither experts nor are they keepers of information – they are, as articulated within the connected learning model, the “guide on the side” not the “sage on the stage,” a term that was first used by Alison King in 1993 as a way to talk about the changing role of college professors. [50]

To embrace this role, library staff need support in moving from a more traditional model of providing service to one that is inquiry-based and flexible. This support can take several different forms, including articulation of this as the library’s new model for serving teens, conversations and trainings that take into account the feelings and varying perspectives inherent in this change, as well as opportunities for library staff to experience this learning model themselves – in their daily work as well as in their interactions with teen patrons.

### **Re-focus Our Work on Learning and Measure It**

*“Success isn’t having the most number of computers per student and making sure that everything is the newest form of technology...for us, it’s a combination of the social practice, the technology, the goals, and the interaction with mentors--they all work together.” (Participant, connectedlearning.tv Chat) S*

A significant attribute of libraries is their ability to support a broad mission that can appeal to people of all ages. Libraries are in the perfect position to support connected learning because they are built on a solid foundation of choice -- in libraries, young people have been able to choose the book they want to read; now there are many other elements of choice in libraries, including in-person and technology-based program options.

Even public libraries, institutions that have sometimes shied away from articulating teen services as “learning based,” must re-claim this word and intentionally talk about their work with teens as supporting the type of learning articulated in this report – formal and informal learning that supports teens in making connections between their interests, academics and the peer culture in which they are immersed. As participants in the forum and town halls articulated, “libraries have always been about learning – we are just focusing and taking ownership of being facilitators of learning.” (Participant, Virtual Town Hall)

In addition to embracing the educational role, libraries must also become adept at measuring the learning outcomes of programs and services. Libraries must move from merely documenting outputs, like the number of attendees in a particular program, to identifying outcomes – concrete and measurable changes for the teens participating. These changes can be evaluated in a variety of ways and do not need to be costly or time consuming.

### **Partner Strategically to Reach Beyond the Library's Walls**

*“Partnerships give us the opportunity to model collaboration for the teens we work with and demonstrate how things work.”* (Participant, Virtual Town Hall)

The broad mission and choice-based setting of libraries can also be a detriment. In order to continue to succeed with young people and embrace a new role, libraries and library staff must be willing to consider discontinuing other roles that have become less of a priority for the community. While the roles they discontinue may vary among communities, other partners can help.

Libraries are not able to do this work all by themselves, nor do they need to. While libraries have tended to look to others within the field for promising practices, they must look to other organizations and individuals who share similar values about empowering and supporting teens in gaining the skills they need to be engaged citizens.

Who these partners are will vary from community to community but throughout the information-gathering stage participants shared examples of local partners who, in many cases, had not previously seen the library as a partner in their work.

Ironically, the skills need to begin partnerships are often different from those needed to nurture them on a longer-term basis and evaluate their effectiveness. Training, support and coaching are needed for librarians to support them in building these partnerships and collaborations in their communities.

Working with partners in the community will also take the form of library staff leaving the physical space and interacting with teens in a variety of settings –within other organizations, online or wherever teens are within the community. [51] This can be challenging in many libraries and library managers must support changing practices in library staffing overall in order to permit librarians to support current teen patrons as well as attract new ones.

### **Create a Whole Library Approach to Serving Teens (Online, too)**

*“It’s important to invite all areas of staff into dialogues concerning teen services.”*  
(Participant, Virtual Town Hall)

All library staff, not just those who are directed to serve teens through their job descriptions, need to be aware of the developmental needs of adolescents and how to provide both the best customer service to this age group but also how to set and manage behavior expectations. While it is not realistic for all library staff to love working with teen patrons, understanding them and

the best ways to support them in learning should be an expectation of library management and training required of all staff that interact with the public. Libraries should look proactively for staff that are especially skilled in working with this age group and support them by identifying opportunities for them to grow this strength.

Ongoing training and professional development resources to support teen patrons must be shared among all staff to ensure that teens experience positive and meaningful interactions with the library every time they access services. In this way the library builds a loyal group of community members and future voters who view the library as an essential community service.

In addition to library staff, library spaces must also support this paradigm shift in supporting learning for and with teens. While teen spaces in libraries are more commonplace and are increasing, their presence and the staff working within them have sometimes inadvertently given the impression that teens have their own space, so they are less welcome in other areas of the library. “We shouldn’t forget that when staff are on board, the entire library can be a teen learning space.” (*Participant, Virtual Town Hall*)

In a new world of teen library services, spaces can also be virtual as well as physical and can exist outside of the physical space of the library.

### **Support Library Staff in Gaining New Skills**

*“Someone working with youth has to have the capacity to learn new things, and really have the desire to learn new types of technology.”* (Participant, connectedlearning.tv Chat)

Library staff whose primary responsibility is working with teens need additional skills and training. Teen services librarians naturally understand and appreciate teens more than other staff – they must be supported and encouraged in articulating what they know and in training other staff. They must broaden their skills beyond programming and book talking to include training others, public speaking, collaboration, supervision, outcome measurement, facilitation, advocacy, and both project and change management skills. These professional skills, which are critical to the continued success of this work, must be taught in library schools and are necessary for continuing education for librarians already working.

One skill in particular stood out in which more support for teen services librarians is needed—advocacy and the soft skills needed to succeed in getting results for the teens they work with, including building support, documenting success and communicating with stakeholders. While the specifics may differ from library to library, the skills needed do not. Teen services librarians must be open to growing these skills and using them to support teen services.

## **V. RECOMMENDATIONS: MOVING THE FUTURE OF TEEN SERVICES FORWARD**

Amidst the excitement and change that surrounds libraries there are a number of pragmatic realities that exist for today's teens that libraries are poised to help address. While all teens must prepare themselves for entering the workforce and becoming an engaged citizen, many of today's adolescents deal with additional pressing realities such as poverty, bullying, homelessness, becoming a parent and dropping out of high school. All teens deserve high quality library service connected to their learning, no matter what their circumstances. Libraries, although not a panacea, can be a vital resource for teens during the short but tumultuous period where they must transition from childhood to adulthood.

There are a number of ways that library staff, stakeholders, and community members can help move the future of library services for and with teens forward:

### **Library Staff Serving Teens**

- Develop supervisory and management skills to coordinate the variety of individuals who provide support for teens through the library, be they staff, volunteers or community partners.
- Improve the ability to communicate with others about your library's values in providing service for and with teens -- what is important, why and how staff can learn more from you or others.
- Develop increased comfort in delegating tasks and projects - to other adults as well as teens themselves.
- Play a leadership role in ensuring the library provides excellent customer service to all teens, regardless of their reasons for visiting the library.
- Lead by example in setting clear behavior standards and reinforcing them consistently.

### **All Library Staff**

- Understand and embrace the reality that all library staff are responsible for serving teen patrons.
- Become familiar with the basics of adolescent development, through formal or informal training.
- Develop agreed-upon standards for behavior and reinforce them consistently for all patrons.
- Reflect with other staff and management regularly about successes and failures and work towards consistency among all staff.
- Learn from other staff who work successfully with teens and ask them for ideas and tips.

### **Library Administrators**

- Become familiar with and adopt [YALSA's National Guidelines, Position Papers and Issue Briefs](#).
- Set a vision for services for and with teens, reinforce it through supports, and hold staff accountable for high quality service to teen patrons by all staff.
- Support teen services librarians in playing a leadership role in providing appropriate training for staff and in empowering other staff to learn how to work directly with teens.
- Look critically at policies and procedures that prevent outside partners or community members from working with the library to deliver relevant services for and with teen patrons.

- Support opportunities for development of persistent spaces in which teens can pursue their interests surrounded by their peers, caring adults, and the technology they are comfortable with.
- Build both organizational capacities and staff competencies with new and emerging forms of technology, looking critically at which can be added to the library to support teen learning.
- Ensure a vision for services for and with teens is integrated into the overall library mission and goals.

## **LIS Faculty**

- Foster a sense of critical cultural competence among pre-service librarians about who today's teens are as juxtaposed to who today's library workers are and work to bridge that cultural disconnect through critically oriented readings and activities.
- Design instructional activities for youth services courses that require pre-service students to utilize the connected learning framework in developing library services.
- Problematize standard Eurocentric, heteronormative, Judeo-Christian frames of reference for understanding and serving teens and incorporate marginalized points of view that reflect today's increasingly diverse populations.
- Actively publish research in the area of teen services that aligns with the YALSA's National Research Agenda and with other youth services related associations.
- Incorporate 21st century learning standards and competencies into the curriculum of teen services and school library related courses.
- Integrate teen services throughout the LIS curriculum.

## **Parents/Caregivers**

- Actively advocate for strong school and public library programs in the community
- Demand more places/institutions in the community where teens can pursue their interests surrounded by caring adults and their peers. Look for opportunities to support the library in becoming one of these places.
- Become familiar with the connected learning framework and look for opportunities to support its advancement in the community.

## **Researchers**

- Consider conducting research about the changing role of libraries in serving teens
- Read, conduct, and disseminate research that captures emerging themes and statistics about teens and their lived experiences and connect that back to the vision for tomorrow's libraries.
- Seek grant funding for teen and youth services related projects that study effective models of connected learning happening in and around libraries and other learning spaces.
- Conduct participatory action research with youth that provides compelling exemplars of how they are utilizing library resources and facilities in innovative ways that exemplify connected 21st century learning.

## **K-12 Educators**



- Listen to teens and seek out ways to affirm their identities through connected learning opportunities with libraries that build upon academic, digital, critical literacies, etc.
- Become familiar with the teen departments/staff at local public library institutions, and seek out potential partnerships for purposeful youth participations and critical engagement.
- Advocate for strong library programs in schools
- Recognize that quality learning continues beyond the classroom and work with out of school time providers to build a bridge between the two learning environments.

### **Youth Workers**

- Pursue opportunities to connect youth to their school and public library resources--both in person and online.
- Expand your professional network to include librarians who work with youth in the community and identify ways to work collaboratively.
- Consider offering your expertise in assisting the library in creating a welcoming, supportive environment for young people.

### **Elected Officials**

- Support a library strategic plan in which the changing role of teen services is acknowledged and addressed.
- Advocate for library services for and with teens within your network.
- Support library policy in which all patrons receive excellent customer service
- Create opportunities for libraries to collaborate with other individuals or organizations, and develop systems to make collaboration easy and possible.
- Support library staffing plans that acknowledge the role all staff have in providing service for and with teens.
- Read and disseminate research and best practices related to teens to library stakeholders.
- Be inclusive of libraries when considering issues such as workforce development, community development, education and more.

### **Library School Students**

- Recognize that teen librarianship is no longer confined to four walls and requires having a flexible and progressive mindset about the possibilities of engagement with teens.
- Think about what talents and skill sets you bring to the profession and how they can be best harnessed within the connected learning framework of library services.
- Seek out opportunities to build the soft skills needed in order to be effective advocates for teen services.

### **Teens**

- Consider the ways in which you already use, create, connect, find, critically read, consume and produce information on a daily basis and how that type of activity might be harnessed in ways that benefit you and your life, education, career goals, etc through different literacy and library outlets.
- Exert your voice and take ownership in your library space by being a frequent presence (both online and physical).

- Think about what excites you the most and how you can explore, create, and share that with a broader audience in cultural public spaces like libraries that are designed to respond to your information and developmental needs.
- Familiarize yourself with the organization and structure of your library and advocate for your needs with your school and public library. Look for ways to get involved in your local library to improve services for and with teens.
- Talk with your peers about the library and encourage them to use library resources.

### **Not-for-Profit Administrators**

- Familiarize yourself with libraries in your communities and look for opportunities to collaborate with them in improving community-wide service to young people.
- Invite libraries to staff trainings or networking meetings to talk about their resources and create pathways to collaboration.

### **Funders**

- Build an understanding of the critical role that libraries play in supporting learning outside the classroom.
- When designing funding opportunities in the afterschool or informal learning environments, including summer learning, ensure they are inclusive of libraries.
- Create funding opportunities to support libraries in advancing their service based on the paradigm shift identified in this paper.
- Support both short-term funding to begin projects and long-term support to sustain organizational and strategic change in libraries.
- Invite libraries to roundtables and alliances of youth-focused funders and youth workers to share knowledge and to help support networking and shared projects between/among institutions.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

*“Scholarship is activism, truth is teaching, and librarianship is radical change.”*[52]

-R. David Lankes

In *The Atlas of New Librarianship* Dave Lankes argues that the nobility of librarianship “is found in action.” [53] The need for action is clearly demonstrated in this report. The paradigm shift called for will be implemented only if librarians and library staff hold ourselves accountable for providing timely, progressive, and effective services for and with today’s young adults.

So what is the next step? Gather the library staff and key stakeholders in the community to examine the library services currently being provided for and with teens and create a plan for change. Use the questions in the box below to guide your work.

Be bold, be critical, and do not be afraid to experiment. As Dave Lankes reminds us, our goal is to create great libraries [54]. This report challenges us to create great libraries for and with teens—libraries that exceed their expectations!

## **Questions to Guide Assessment & Planning**

### **Teens**

- Do you know ALL of the teen groups in your community, not just the teens who are regular library users, but also those who belong to the demographic groups increasingly represented in today's society?
- Have you identified specific groups of teens the library can or should help? College bound teens, homeless teens, teens with disabilities, incarcerated teens, home schooled teens, teens who are English language learners, etc.
- Have you identified the aspirations, interests, needs, or issues within each targeted group? Have you prioritized their interests and their problems? Have you identified the strengths of each targeted group?
- Have you developed a process for reaching out to and engaging the members of each targeted group to help the library develop programs and services that meet their needs?
- Are you talking to the teens in your community and learning from them?

### **Professional Development**

- Are you part of an established professional learning network (PLN) that is supporting your professional growth?
- Are you reading the latest research on youth-development around topics such as the teenage brain, the identity development of teens of color, the social and emotional needs of teens with disabilities or LGBTQ teens, the issues homeless teens face, etc.?
- Have you read research related to culturally relevant pedagogy and funds of knowledge so you are not adopting a deficit viewpoint of the teens in your community?
- Are you aware of the latest research on connected learning?
- Are you keeping up with new technologies, and the research related to teens and how they use these new technologies?
- Have you read the research related to all forms of literacy--digital, media, traditional, etc.?
- Are you sharing what you are learning with other staff members? With teens?

### **Partnerships**

- Do you have a list of outreach partners—other community agencies that also work for or with, or that address teen related issues such as career readiness?
- Do you have a process in place for formally and regularly interacting with other relevant agencies in your community? Do these organizations know what kinds of services the library currently provides, or could provide, for and with teens?
- Have you considered how the mission and goals of the library complement and extend the mission of the other community organizations? Have you shared your ideas with your community partners?
- Do you have a process in place to work with representatives from each targeted group of teens and community stakeholders to set goals for the library services and programs?
- Do you have a process in place to evaluate, or benchmark, the outcomes of community partnerships?

### **Teen Program & Services**

- Are your programs and services focused on educating and empowering teens--enabling them to be successful academically and personally?
- Have you mapped the outcomes of your programs and services to the needs, interests, or issues of each targeted group of teens your library is serving, and should be serving?
- Have you mapped the outcomes of your programs and services to your community's goals for teens? Do these words describe the programs and services your library is providing: youth-led, interest-powered, authentic, relevant, meaningful, inquiry-based, inclusive, stimulating, pressure-free?
- Do the programs/services provided by your library cultivate: development of job skills, proficiency in non-traditional literacies, teen voice, self-expression, leadership, independence, empathy and understanding, connections to others with similar interests?
- Have you developed meaningful, outcomes based ways of evaluating the library's programs and services?

### **Technology**

- Does your library have a vision statement for the role technology plays/will play in its services, and specifically related to teen populations?
- Have you incorporated 21st century technologies (e.g. Web 2.0 tools, social networks) into your library online presence, policies, and practices?
- Is your library website or online presence a bi-directional resource that offers information-seeking tools and allows for content generation for teens?

### **Teen Spaces**

- Does your library have physical and virtual teen spaces where teens can be not just consumers, but also creators?
- Are your teen spaces technology-rich, thus bridging the access gap that many of today's teens still face?
- Do your teen spaces provide opportunities for teens to work collaboratively and individually?

### **Policy**

- Have you systematically examined the library's policies and procedures to ensure that they are patron-driven and respectful; that is, that they acknowledge the fact that teens are on the brink of adulthood and respect the privileges and responsibilities that come with being a young adult?
- Are all staff aware of the policies and procedures and how to effectively communicate them to teens?
- Are library policies structured in such a way that they facilitate the newly envisioned role of librarians as not experts, but as coaches and mentors?
- Do library policies acknowledge and create opportunities for library staff to incorporate 21<sup>st</sup> century technologies into their services and programs?

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- Jack Martin, YALSA President, and Shannon Peterson, YALSA President-Elect
- The Forum Advisory Board and Forum Participants
- Maureen Sullivan, Summit Moderator and ALA President

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## **Footnotes**

Footnotes and resources to be added in the final draft.

## VII APPENDIX

### Summit Moderator and Keynote Speakers

**Renee Hobbs** - Founding Director and Professor in the Harrington School of Communication and Media at the University of Rhode Island

**George Needham** - Vice President, OCLC Global and Regional Councils

**Mizuko (Mimi) Ito** - Professor in Residence and MacArthur Foundation Chair in Digital Media and Learning at the University of California Humanities Research Institute.

**Lee Rainie** - Director of the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project

**Maureen Sullivan** – ALA President (2012-2013) and organization development consultant

**Teen Panel** - Kitsap Regional Library, Bainbridge Island, Washington

### connectedlearning.tv Speakers

**danah boyd** – Senior Researcher at Microsoft Research; a Research Assistant Professor in Media, Culture, and Communication at New York University; a Visiting Researcher at Harvard Law School; a Fellow at Harvard's Berkman Center for Internet & Society; and an Adjunct Associate Professor at the University of New South Wales.

**Buffy Hamilton** – School Librarian at Gwinnett County Public Schools, Georgia.

**Mike Hawkins** (aka Brother Mike) – Associate Director and Lead Mentor for Digital Youth Network

**Crystle Martin** – Postdoctoral Researcher for the Connected Learning Research Network.

**Nichole Pinkard** – Founder of the Digital Youth Network and Visiting Associate Professor in the College of Computing and Digital Media at DePaul University.

**Craig Watkins** – Professor in the departments of Radio-Television-Film, Sociology, and the Center for African and African American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin and a Faculty Fellow for the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement at the University of Texas at Austin.

### Forum Advisory Board

- Stacy Aldrich, State Librarian of California, California State Library
- Mary Frances Burns, Director Morley Public Library
- Erica Compton, Youth Consultant, Idaho State Library Commission
- Priscille Dando, Educational Specialist, Fairfax County Public Schools

- Sandra Hughes Hassell, Professor, University of North Carolina School of Information and Library Science
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- Don Latham, Associate Professor, Florida State University School of Library and Information Science
- Jack Martin, President, Young Adult Library Services Association
- Karen O'Brien, Director, ALA Office for Accreditation
- Jen Rinehart, VP Policy & Research Afterschool Alliance
- Denine Torr, Director of Community Initiatives, Dollar General Literacy Foundation
- Larry Wilkner, Publisher, ProQuest
- Courtney Young, Head Librarian and Associate Professor of Women's Studies, Penn State Greater Allegheny