

# The Future of Library Services for and with Teens: *A Call to Action*

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# The Future of Library Services for and with Teens: *A Call to Action*

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# ABOUT

The Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) is a national association of librarians, library workers, and advocates whose mission is to expand and strengthen library services for teens, aged 12–18. Through its member-driven advocacy, research, and professional development initiatives, YALSA builds the capacity of libraries and librarians to engage, serve, and empower teens. YALSA is a subspecialty of the American Library Association. Visit [www.ala.org/yalsa](http://www.ala.org/yalsa) to learn more.

The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) is the primary source of federal support for the nation’s 123,000 libraries and 17,500 museums. Through grant making, policy development, and research, IMLS helps communities and individuals thrive through broad public access to knowledge, cultural heritage, and lifelong learning. Visit [www.imls.gov](http://www.imls.gov) to learn more.

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# I. INTRODUCTION

## *Why a National Forum on the Future of Library Services for Teens?*

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 adolescents and teens.



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?

### Teens Make Up a Significant Portion of Library Users

Teens are drawn to libraries to access the library's Internet or computers, use the library's research resources, study, read, write, discuss books, socialize, participate in programming, and just “hang out.”<sup>1</sup> Libraries are neutral, safe public spaces that provide opportunities for adolescents to grow intellectually, emotionally, and socially, to develop new literacies for learning and expression, and to gain workplace preparedness.<sup>2</sup>

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

### Library Services and Resources for Teens Are in Jeopardy

Recent economic downturns have negatively affected library services, particularly those provided for youth.<sup>9</sup> In many communities, frequently poor urban and rural ones, school districts no longer employ school librarians; some have even closed their school libraries.<sup>10</sup> Public libraries in many communities have reduced their hours, closed branch libraries, and cut their budgets for collections and technology.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> 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, to master 21st-century skills, and to ensure that they become productive citizens. Now is the time to explore the future of library services to teens and to reaffirm the right of all youth to have access to the unique expertise and services that school and public libraries can provide for young adults.

Similar to YALSA's push for a national dialogue on the future of library services for teens, the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) recently developed a set of national guidelines for school library programs, which aim



to respond to the changing nature of teaching and learning in an economically challenged and technologically rich schooling context. The primary focus of these guidelines is building a flexible learning environment with the goal of producing successful learners skilled in multiple literacies.<sup>13</sup>

## There Has Been a Significant Shift in the Demographics of Teens

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% of them are children of color.<sup>14</sup> 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%.
- The number of Hispanic children grew by 39%.
- The number of non-Hispanic Asian and Pacific Islander children grew by 31%.<sup>15</sup>
  - Today more than one-fifth of America's children are immigrants or children of immigrants.<sup>16</sup> 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."<sup>17</sup> Now is the time for the field of librarianship, the population of which is overwhelmingly Caucasian, to consider what these demographic changes mean to school and public library services and programs for and with teens.<sup>18</sup>
  - 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.<sup>19</sup>
- The number of unemployed youth ages 16–24 is currently 22.7%, an all-time high.<sup>20</sup> Among the major demographic groups, unemployment rates are lower for young women (14.8%) and whites (13.9%), while jobless rates continue to rise for young men (17.6%), African Americans (28.2%), Asians (15.0%), and Hispanics (18.1%).<sup>21</sup>
- An extensive body of research has documented the "achievement gap" between white and Asian students and African American and Latino/a students. Students from low-income households are disproportionately represented in failing schools.<sup>22</sup>
- While high school dropout rates have decreased in the last decade, approximately 3 million teens still quit school each year in the United States. 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 United States.<sup>23</sup>
- More than 1.3 million children and teens experience homelessness each year.<sup>24</sup> Among the factors cited by teens for leaving home are family alcohol or drug abuse, physical or sexual abuse, teenage pregnancy, and homosexuality.<sup>25</sup>
- Schools nationwide are hostile environments for a distressing number of LGBT students, the overwhelming majority of whom hear homophobic remarks and experience harassment or assault at school because of their sexual orientation or gender expression.<sup>26</sup>

- Approximately 5% of children ages 5–20 have a disability. These youth often face challenges that negatively influence their emotional and physical health and have significant implications for future life outcomes and overall quality of life.<sup>27</sup>
- Cyberbullying, teen depression, violence, and eating disorders are on the rise in many communities.

Now is the time for public and school libraries to determine how they can contribute to solving and alleviating the issues and problems that negatively impact teens. Cultural competence preparation for future and current school and public library and information professionals is one place where these issues can and should logically be addressed since many of the statistics cited above stem from structural issues such as institutional racism, classism, and sexism. However, research suggests that some LIS students feel ill-prepared to deliver this kind of culturally competent library service upon graduation. “Cultural competence has to do with recognizing the significance of culture in one’s own life and in the lives of others; and to come to know and respect diverse cultural backgrounds and characteristics through interaction with individuals from diverse linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic groups; and to fully integrate the culture of diverse groups into services, work, and institutions in order to enhance the lives of both those being served by the library profession and those engaged in service.”<sup>28</sup>

## Technology Continues to Impact Communication Methods, Teaching, and Learning

Teens’ use of technology (smartphones, 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.<sup>29</sup> Teen levels of engagement falls “along a continuum of practice that ranges from ‘hanging out’ and ‘messaging around’ to the more invested ‘geeking out,’ depending on individual interest in a given media activity.”<sup>30</sup> Many schools have implemented Bring Your Own Device programs (BYOD) and have moved to digital textbooks as a way to capitalize on teen interest in technology and to deal with shrinking school budgets.<sup>31</sup> However, ownership of technology devices continues to vary across socioeconomic and racial demographics. White suburban teens with highly educated parents or with parents in the highest income brackets, for example, are more likely than their African American urban or rural counterparts to own a computer, tablet, or smartphone. In overall Internet use, teens ages 12–17 living in lower-income and lower-education households are somewhat less likely to use the Internet in any capacity—mobile or wired.<sup>32</sup> Now is the time for public and school libraries to systematically determine how technology will affect the future of teen services, with special attention to the access gaps that continue to exist.

## Teens Are Entering the Workforce without Critical Skills

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).<sup>33</sup> Accordingly, preparing young adults for the workforce is a major concern in the United States. In the last three decades, the skills required for young adults to succeed in the workforce have changed drastically, but the skills emphasized in schools have not kept up with these changes.<sup>34</sup> This has led to a widespread concern that young adults lack the necessary skills for job success and are entering the workforce unprepared. Several recent studies, including Workforce Preparation in the Context of Youth Development Organization<sup>35</sup> and Literacy Skills and Self-Views of Ability among First Year College Students,<sup>36</sup> have documented this skills gap. Now is the time for school and public libraries to reimagine 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 (details about the forum can be found in Appendix A).

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.”<sup>37</sup> It is the “pivot point for change.”<sup>38</sup> 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 that today’s teens need in order to succeed in school and in life.

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

*“Libraries used to be grocery stores. Now we need to be kitchens.”*

— participant, Forum

The library is no longer simply a quiet 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.

Whether it is obvious or not, ever since computers entered library spaces, public and school 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 all 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—many of whom have at their fingertips information and resources that just 25 years ago were 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 that 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 and to help all of them grow up to be successful, productive members of society.

### The Shift as Seen through Teen Use of Technology

The first step in understanding the paradigm shift in school and public 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 all 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 toward 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 one another 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 & 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>39</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 that 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>40</sup> This world of online engagement creates participatory and collaborative environments that go beyond the traditional connections that teens have previously had access to for learning and library services.

Unfortunately, in many communities, opportunities for teens to connect to libraries is primarily limited to school-related work and activities.<sup>41</sup> They use school and public libraries for homework and school-related research, but prospects for engagement beyond that are often 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.”<sup>42</sup>

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>43</sup>

“The library helped me become the person I want to be.  
It is also my home where I can have fun with friends.”

— Brianna, Salem, Oregon



Clearly, if all libraries serving teens want to more effectively serve today’s “connected” teen and demonstrate value to the community, they must ramp up engagement in areas beyond academic or formal learning, and make this engagement visible to teens, their families, and the community. It is not enough to merely use the tools that adolescents are using—the Internet, social networks, and mobile devices. Libraries need to embrace the connected learning model and recognize that they must do more to engage 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.

## The Shift as Seen through Expanded Literacies

*“I’m a huge proponent of learning how to program. It requires logical thinking; it teaches you how to pick problems apart step-by-step.”*

—Young Adult Workshop facilitator, Detroit Public Library Teen HYPE Center

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.<sup>44</sup> This fundamental shift means that school and public 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.<sup>45</sup> 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 too narrowly to a range of instruction that focuses only on teaching teens about books and how to find library resources. Instead, librarians have the tools to meet teens where they are and must focus on helping 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 physical library space 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 school and public librarians are engaged in with teens on a regular basis.

Type of Literacy	Definition
Multiple Literacies	Providing 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. Emerged from the New Literacies Studies (NLS) movement.
Critical Literacies	Learning how to formulate difficult questions concerning societal inequities and investigating real-life issues with the goal of transformative social action.
Digital Literacies	Possessing an ability to navigate, manipulate, and stay ahead of emerging computer and Internet technologies. Also having 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 that libraries must do more concertedly and aggressively is support teens’ acquisition of media-literacy skills. As Renee Hobbs asked in her presentation at the Summit on the Future of Libraries and Teens, “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?”<sup>46</sup> 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 that 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 and 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 to 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 and Research Skills

Helping teens acquire access and research skills has long been a strong suit of school and public 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 their lives or those of others. Through media teens can join campaigns that promote positive lifestyles and good choices, and they can see how media can have an impact on making change in the world.

School and public 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 teens and create with teens when it comes to media literacy education, and this will give teens the chance to connect to others who can play a valuable educational, informational, and personal role in their lives, especially in relation to workforce preparedness.

## 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.<sup>47</sup>

## Definition of Connected Learning

“Connected learning is socially embedded, interest-driven, and oriented towards educational, economic, or political opportunity.”<sup>48</sup>

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

- At Quest to Learn, a public school for grades 6–12 in Manhattan, educators weave together connected learning principles to challenge students to build Rube Goldberg machines, to write and perform short plays based on fairy tales, to design and orchestrate a series of outdoor games for an end-of-the-year field day, to research and construct a travel website featuring three NYC neighborhoods, to build a sculpture from recycled materials, and so forth.
- 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 dropout (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>49</sup>

Connected learning centers on an equity agenda—an agenda that fits with the mission of public and school libraries to “change lives.” Mizuko 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.”<sup>50</sup> This points to a 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.”<sup>51</sup> 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% of African American teens, 15.1% of Hispanic teens, and 12.4% of Native American teens dropped out of high school as compared to 5.1% of white teens.<sup>52</sup> The national unemployment rate for African Americans stands at 15.9%, 15.2% for Native Americans, and 11.5% for Latinos.<sup>53</sup> 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.<sup>54</sup> Approximately 27.7% of all African American persons, 26.6% of all Hispanic persons (of any race), and 24.8% of Native Americans live in poverty as compared to 9.9% of all non-Hispanic white persons.<sup>55</sup>

School and public libraries, acting as connected learning centers, must 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 library services for and with teens, 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<sup>56</sup>

All school and public libraries serving teens can improve their services even more by:

- Tapping expert human resources from communities (both real and virtual)
- Connecting to school and workplace trajectories<sup>57</sup>

“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.”<sup>58</sup>



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 reaffirms 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 school and public libraries with teens is no longer the purview of the library's 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 ‘in charge’ of them” (participant, YALSA Summit). This

theme was echoed by other participants, who used words like allies, mentors, coaches, and partnerships to describe the relationships that library staff must develop with teens in order to provide effective and substantive programs and services.

In order to connect meaningfully with all teens, library staff must:

- Recognize teens as thinking human beings who have ideas, interests, and passions that are valid and important.
- Be willing to talk with teens about their interests and passions and reach beyond traditional library resources to support them.
- Seek out and 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 that 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 skills and knowledge to teens that might not be a part of the library staff portfolio, and to expand teen access to those 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.

## The Shift as Seen through the Social and 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, YALSA 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 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 social groups at school” (participant, YALSA Summit). For many homeless teens, the library is a place to be out of the elements and to connect with others.

However, school and public libraries must do more than just be safe places. The issues that teens face are significant. These issues not only negatively impact the day-to-day life of many teens, but they also have the potential to negatively impact the future of a nation that may find itself lacking enough skilled workers and engaged citizens to support a democratic society. Throughout the year-long forum, participants provided examples of how libraries help to mitigate the social and economic factors that teens face by bridging the growing knowledge divide, building on teens’ motivation to learn, providing workforce development training, and serving 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% of libraries report offering the only free Internet access in their communities.”<sup>59</sup> 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.”<sup>60</sup> At the most basic level, school and public libraries must provide access to technology for teens—not just desktop computers for 30 minutes, but the kind of technology that more 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 public and school libraries to address what Dave Lankes calls the “knowledge gap”—“the ability of people to take advantage of these new tools.”<sup>61</sup> 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. While teens are often referred to as “digital natives,” research shows that many teens are no more savvy about technology, digital media, or

the web than adults.<sup>62</sup> Thus, school and public 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 is a critical goal of library staff.

## Build on Teens' Motivation to Learn

*"Families, and particularly non-dominant 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, et cetera, may also interfere with formal school-based learning.

School and public libraries have always been associated with learning and literacy. As one of the year-long 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 public and school libraries embrace their role as both formal and informal learning environments teens are able to:

- focus on the experience of learning
- construct their own learning about topics that are important to them
- weave virtual and face-to-face learning together in meaningful ways
- build non-traditional and "non-tested" skills and literacy
- develop 21st-century skills, content knowledge, and expertise
- 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, YALSA Summit

Building on teens' motivation to learn also allows school and public 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<sup>63</sup>

As a 21st-century learning environment, school and public 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.”<sup>64</sup>

From setting up teen learning spaces like the Chicago Public Library’s YOUmedia labs, to employing teens to provide literacy activities for young children like the Free Library of Philadelphia does, to providing volunteer service credit for teen bloggers like Mission Viejo Library is doing, to facilitating a student-conceptualized and student-produced daily live news show at Mt. Vernon High School in Alexandria, Virginia, to sending students into the community to conduct problem-based inquiry projects that address real-world concerns like Lakewood Montessori School in Durham, North Carolina, is doing, school and public libraries can support teens as they gain these necessary life and career skills.

## Serve as the Connector between Teens and 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 meeting

Libraries are only one of many organizations with a vision to build better futures for teens. Too often, however, teens are unaware of the services offered in their communities. As leaders in youth development, school and public libraries need to serve as the connector between teens and other community agencies.

There are a number of ways that school and public libraries can do this. At the most basic level, the library can offer in-person and/or virtual referral services. The Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, for example, provides a link on their website to the Gay and Lesbian Community Center of Pittsburgh and Three Rivers Youth, a nonprofit organization that serves abused and neglected youth in the Pittsburgh area. As more and more states institute service learning requirements for graduation, school librarians can help students explore their interests and find community matches. The school or public library can also partner with community organizations to offer teen programming, thus making teens aware of other community agencies and the services that they offer. Finally, the school or public library can bring community groups together through a variety of strategies, including having regular conversations as a group about how various organizations and agencies can (1) improve their specialized services and (2) work together to better support teens.

Acting as the connector, however, is only possible when library staff get to know the other adults in their community who work with or on behalf of teens—religious leaders, social workers, health professionals, law enforcement personnel,

## 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 an e-mail.

—contributed by YALSA Summit participant Julie Winkelstein

athletics coaches, after-school providers, cultural center directors, arts organization leaders, chamber of commerce directors, public housing representatives, employment agency directors, educators, and more. Library staff must be active in the community and work with other community agencies to develop an agenda for teens and to help accomplish it.<sup>65</sup>

## The Shift in the Big Picture

*“Libraries need to be a space to connect, a space to create, a place to be.”*

—participant, YALSA Summit

So what does this paradigm shift mean for school and public libraries? What would it mean if all libraries became true connected learning centers and capitalized on today's new media? What would libraries look like if they fully embraced 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 school or public 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 that library services for teens are needed, library staff serving the age group are available.

	<b>Historical Practice</b>	<b>Envisioned Future</b>
<b>Audience</b>	Teens who are readers and users of the physical school or public 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 school or public 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, and regardless of whether or not they frequent the physical library space.
<b>Space</b>	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. Designated teen areas provide teens with an age-appropriate space, but sometimes lead to the narrow expectation that the area is the only part of the library where they are allowed.	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 is connecting to other people, physical materials, or digital materials. Recognition that teens need and want to make use of the entire library space or site, not just a designated teen area.
<b>Collections</b>	Primarily physical collections with selection driven by “best of the best” lists and awards and “core collections” lists. Physically visiting a library is necessary to gain access.	Materials in the collections reflect the demographics of the community and the needs, interests, and preferences of the teens that each library serves, and exist in a variety of formats—video, audio, books, databases, e-content, etc. Collections include content created by teens and others in the community. Collections are 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 guiding them to materials.



<b>Programs</b>	Library-driven sometimes with teen input. Focus on literature-related events and making “stuff” as a fun activity. Outcomes measured primarily by attendance.	Driven by teens’ passions and interests in each community, 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. Leverages 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 in a public library from MLIS degreed full-time teen services librarians, to reference and/or children’s staff serving the age group, to part-time volunteers and more. When a teen services librarian exists in a library, he/she is viewed as the sole person who is expected to interact with teens. In schools, the model varies from certified school librarians with full-time support staff to certified school librarians with no support staff. In some schools, the library is run by paraprofessionals or parent volunteers.	Degreed library professionals focus on developing and managing teen services in a public or school library 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. Serving teens is embraced as a role that all library staff must play, regardless of job title, position, or department.
<b>Youth Participation</b>	Library-driven, seeking feedback from teens on topics such as collections, space, etc. Usually a formal group with activities pre-defined by current models of library service.	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. Teen participation is not limited to formally organized groups, but instead participation includes informal digital interactions as well as face-to-face activities aimed at individuals or groups. 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.

<b>Outreach</b>	Primarily confined to outreach between the school and public library. Often focused on visits between the two types of libraries 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>Year-round use of a variety of tools, both 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 school library or public library space regularly and provide services to targeted communities of teens (e.g. those who are incarcerated, homeless, in foster care, or in classrooms and other in-school locations) where they are, rather than waiting for teens to find a way to get 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 the use of technology resources are 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/whole school 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 with experts and educators. Explores who teens are and their overall needs and interests, instead of focusing on materials and specific programs of service.

## What the Shift Means for Teens

When this shift starts to happen in school and public 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. All libraries in teen lives become 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 that teens gain when young adult library services are re-imagined.

### Learning

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

### Leadership

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

### Community

- Connect with others interested in the same topics/issues
- Build a sense of community
- Take meaningful action in the 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 both traditional and non-traditional literacy skills
- Gain digital-literacy skills
- Put literacy skills gained into action

## 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

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

# III. MISSION AND CORE VALUES OF TEEN LIBRARY SERVICES

*“Libraries need a new value proposition.”*

—George Needham

The paradigm shift described above requires a new mission for young adult library services and a reexamination of the core principles or values that librarians hold. The mission statement and values presented below reflect the expanding responsibilities of school and public libraries to help ALL teens grow up to be successful, productive, members of society.

## Mission Statement

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 and fulfilling adult lives.

## Values

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

## Connected Learning

Libraries that serve teens embrace the concept of connected learning. They bridge teens' different spheres of learning (peer culture, interests, and academics) through innovative school and public library programs and services that leverage and engage all parts of the library and community.

## 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 toward inquiry and learning that calls existing hierarchies into question.

## Education

Librarians and library workers affirm their role as educators, supporting learning in both formal and informal environments. They understand the learning process, emphasize critical and creative thinking, utilize effective teaching and assessment strategies, and integrate emerging technologies in innovative ways.

## Adaptability

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

## Respect

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

## Collaboration

Libraries 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 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 that society wants to see with respect to addressing various forms of oppression (race, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) that are often manifested in library policies, practices, and the dispositions of library staff.



## Intellectual Freedom

Libraries are leaders in the area of intellectual freedom, protecting the First Amendment rights of teens to interact with information in all formats, building support for less restrictive filtering, protecting the privacy of teens, and educating the community about intellectual freedom.

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

*“The community’s rethinking 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, five fundamental elements must change, including:

1. Embracing our role as facilitator rather than expert
1. Refocusing beyond our traditional roles and traditional measurements of success
1. Partnering strategically to reach beyond the library’s walls
1. Creating a whole-library and whole-school approach to serving teens in physical spaces and online
1. Supporting library staff in gaining new skills

### Embracing Our Role as Facilitator Rather than 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 teens 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 and students come to them in search of



information and answers. The paradigm shift articulated in this paper is one in which all individuals in the library—students, 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.<sup>66</sup>

To succeed in this role, library staff may 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 formal 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.

### Refocusing Beyond Our Traditional Roles and Traditional Measurements of Success

*“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

A significant attribute of public libraries is their ability to support a broad mission that can appeal to people of all ages. School and public 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 what they want to read, explore, or participate in. Now there are many other elements of choice in libraries, including in-person and technology-based program options.

Public libraries, institutions that have sometimes shied away from articulating teen services as “learning based,” must reclaim this concept 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 Virtual Town Hall meetings articulated, “Libraries have always been about learning—we are just focusing and taking ownership of being facilitators of learning” (participant, Virtual Town Hall meeting).

In school libraries, where learning has always been a focus, librarians must look for opportunities to meet the full needs of students, connecting formal learning based in curriculum with opportunities outside the classroom for teens to explore their personal interests and passions, and to connect with others who share similar interests.

In addition to embracing new roles, librarians and library workers must engage in evidence-based practice. Public libraries must become adept at measuring the learning outcomes of programs and services. They must move from documenting outputs, like the number of attendees at a particular program, to identifying outcomes—concrete and

measurable changes for the teens participating. School librarians must continue to partner with teachers to assess student learning to ensure that the program is meeting its goals. They too, like public librarians, must develop methods for setting outcomes related to the informal learning that occurs in school libraries. Evidence-based practice need not to be costly or time-consuming.

## Partnering 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 meeting

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 students or for the community. While the roles they discontinue may vary, other partners can help.

Libraries are not able to do this work all by themselves, nor do they need to. While both school and public 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 and library workers to support them in building these partnerships and collaborations in their communities.

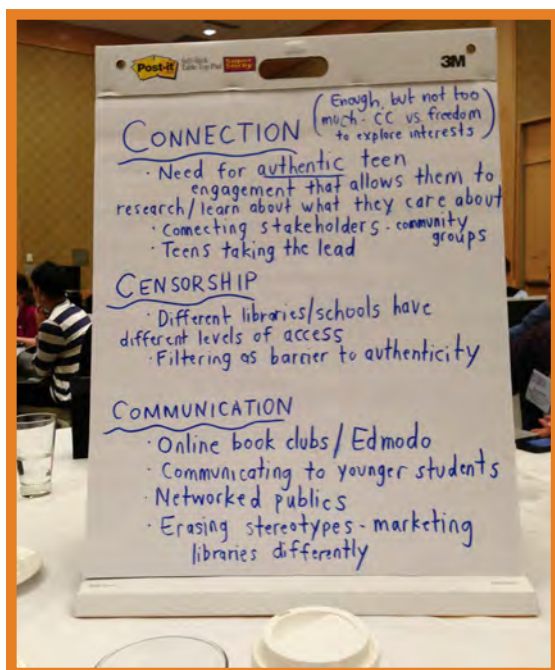
Working with partners in the community will also take the form of public and school library staff leaving the physical space and interacting with partners and teens in a variety of settings—within other organizations, in classrooms, online, or wherever teens are within the school or public library community (Virtual Town Hall meeting #3). This can be challenging in many libraries, and library managers and school administrators must support changing practices in library staffing overall in order to permit librarians and library workers to support current and potential library users.

## Creating a Whole-Library and Whole-School Approach to Serving Teens in Physical Spaces and Online

*“It’s important to invite all areas of staff into dialogues concerning teen services.”*

—participant, Virtual Town Hall meeting

All public 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 not all public library staff may have a natural ability to positively engage teens, understanding their developmental needs and following best practices to support them in their learning should be an expectation of all library staff members. Libraries and schools should look proactively for staff who 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 teens must be shared among staff to ensure that teens experience positive and meaningful interactions with both school and public libraries 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 staff, library spaces in school and public libraries must also support this paradigm shift in supporting learning for and with teens. While teen spaces in public 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 meeting).

In school libraries, too, change is needed. School librarians can and should find opportunities to build relationships with their students beyond their academic needs—facilitating successful, connected learning beyond the

school day by providing space for hanging out, geeking out, and messing around. Additionally, school administrators should support this effort.

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.

## Supporting 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

Public library and school library staff whose primary responsibility is working with teens need additional skills and training. Librarians and library staff who choose to work with teens tend to understand and appreciate young people—they must be supported and encouraged to articulate what they know to other staff through formal and informal training. 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 and information science graduate schools and are necessary for continuing education for librarians already working.

One skill in particular stood out in which more support for library staff serving teens 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. All library staff working with teens in school and public libraries must be open to growing these skills and using them to support teens.

## 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. School and public libraries, although not a panacea, can be a vital resource for teens during the short but often 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:

### Public and School Library Staff Serving Teens

- Develop supervisory and management skills to coordinate the variety of individuals who provide support for teens in the library, be they staff, volunteers, community partners, or teens themselves.
- Improve the ability to communicate with others about the 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 that the library provides excellent customer service to all teens, regardless of their reasons for visiting the physical or virtual library space.
- Lead by example in setting clear and respectful behavior standards and reinforcing them consistently.
- Keep up-to-date on current research and policy and practice concerning adolescent development, teaching and learning, and emerging technologies.
- Cultivate relationships with all of the teens in your community, not just those who are regular library users.

### All Library Staff

- Understand and embrace the reality that all in the public and school library community 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 library users.
- Reflect with other staff and administrators regularly about successes and failures, and work toward consistency among all who interact with teens.
- Learn from others who work successfully with teens and ask them for ideas and tips.
- Avoid common but misleading negative stereotypes about teens.
- Treat every teen with dignity and respect.



## Principals and Administrators

- Become familiar with and adopt YALSA's National Guidelines, Position Papers, and Issue Briefs.
- Set and communicate a vision for services for and with teens, reinforce it through supports (including adequate funding for resources and staff), and hold all staff accountable for high-quality service to teen patrons.
- Support teen services librarians and school librarians in playing a leadership role in providing appropriate training for staff, including teens and volunteers, 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 that a vision for services for and with teens is integrated into the overall library mission and goals.

## LIS Faculty

- Actively publish research in the area of teen services that aligns with the YALSA's National Research Agenda and with other youth services-related organizations.
- Incorporate 21st-century learning standards and competencies into the curriculum of courses related to teen services and school libraries.
- Foster a sense of 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 are built upon the theories of youth learning and development, and require pre-service students to utilize the connected learning framework in developing library programs, services, etc.
- 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.
- Integrate cultural competence and teen services issues throughout the LIS curriculum as opposed to only in elective courses.

## 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

- Actively publish research in the area of teen services that aligns with the YALSA's National Research Agenda's four priorities and with other youth services-related organizations.

- Conduct 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 life 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.
- Conduct participatory action research with library staff that provides compelling exemplars of how they are creating and using new models of program evaluation and outcomes-based measurement.

## 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 school, public, and academic libraries, and seek out potential partnerships for purposeful youth participations and critical engagement.
- Advocate for strong library programs in schools and public libraries.
- 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 and Administrators of Youth-Serving Organizations

- Familiarize yourself with libraries in your communities, and look for opportunities to collaborate with them in improving community-wide service to young people.
- Pursue opportunities to connect youth to their school and public library resources—both in person and online—and consider developing joint programs with your school and public libraries.
- Expand your professional network to include library staff who work with youth in the community, and identify ways to work collaboratively and invite libraries to staff trainings or networking meetings to talk about their resources and create pathways to collaboration.
- Consider offering your expertise in assisting the library in creating a welcoming, supportive environment for young people.

## Library Trustees

- 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 policy in which all library 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 that all staff have in providing service for and with teens.

- Read and disseminate research and best practices related to teens to library stakeholders.
- Strive to ensure that adequate resources are available to libraries so that they are well-positioned to support community efforts relating to teens, including workforce development.

## Elected Officials

- Advocate for library services for and with teens within your network.
- Create opportunities for libraries to collaborate with other individuals or organizations, and develop systems to make collaboration easy and possible.
- 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.
- Strive to ensure adequate resources are available to libraries so that they are well-positioned to support community efforts relating to teens, including workforce development.
- Recognize the potential that libraries play in community development.
- Seek out experts in the library field for information about libraries when considering policies that may impact youth, education, community development, technology access, and more.
- Visit local school and public libraries to learn firsthand about the ways that they help teens gain critical literacy, workforce, and other skills.

## Library School Students

- Recognize that teen librarianship is no longer confined to four walls and requires having a flexible and progressive mind-set about the possibilities of engagement with teens.
- Recognize the customer service aspect of the profession and the need to build strong communication and interpersonal skills.
- Acknowledge that in order to effectively serve teens, teen services librarians must embrace emerging technologies.
- Think about what talents and skill sets that 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.

## National, Regional, and State Library Associations, including YALSA

- Provide professional development to support the implementation of the paradigm shift outlined in this paper.
- Seek short- and long-term funding to help libraries design and implement services based on the paradigm shift identified in this paper and to continue to research the future of libraries for teens.
- Examine guidelines, position papers, competency statements, research agendas, and issue briefs to ensure that they reflect the paradigm shift identified in this paper (e.g., YALSA's National Guidelines, YALSA's Competencies for Librarians Serving Young Adults, and YALSA's National Research Agenda).

- Create committees, working groups, and task forces charged with developing toolkits, professional development videos, etc., to help libraries implement the paradigm shift outlined in this paper.
- Continue to advocate for strong public and school library programs at the state and national levels.
- Highlight successful programs in association journals, newsletters, and blogs (e.g. *Public Libraries*, the YALSAblog, etc.).
- Fund and publish research related to connected learning, literacy, serving diverse populations, community engagement, etc., in *JRLYA* and other respected publications.
- Continue to use social media to disseminate emerging and best practices and to connect members to one another.
- Seek out partnerships that will build the capacity of the association to meet the needs of libraries as they implement changes described in this document.

## State Library Agencies

- Recognize that library services for and with teens is not primarily limited to summer reading, and strive to provide resources, services, and training that support robust, ongoing teen services programs.
- Leverage census and other state-level data about teens, and use it to conduct an audit of state library agency services in order to ensure that adequate resources are being directed to this age group.
- Advocate for library agency consultants whose specific focus is teen services.
- Employ teen services consultants who are knowledgeable about the paradigm shift outlined in this paper and the research that supports it.
- Provide professional development for administrators (public library directors and school principals), teen services librarians, library staff, and school librarians to support the implementation of the paradigm shift outlined in this paper.
- Provide short-term and long-term funding to help libraries design and implement services based on the paradigm shift identified in this paper.
- Develop and disseminate issue briefs and position statements to share with state legislators and other agencies that work with youth to educate them about the value of library services for and with teens.
- Leverage existing federal funding to develop and implement programs that support updating and expanding library services for and with teens in your state.
- Seek out partnerships with other relevant state agencies and organizations, such as the department of education and after-school organizations, in order to strengthen library services for and with teens in your state.
- Be inclusive of library services for and with teens when developing multi-year plans and goals; and when considering issues such as workforce development, e-rate, broadband, and more.

## 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.

## Funders

- Build an understanding of the critical role that libraries play in supporting learning outside the classroom.
- When designing funding opportunities in the after-school or informal learning environments, including summer learning, ensure that 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 library leaders to attend and participate in existing, or convene new, youth-focused roundtables, coalitions, and alliances to share knowledge and to help support networking and shared projects between/among institutions.
- Offer opportunities and resources to organizations that support libraries in order to build their infrastructure and expand their capacity to assist the nation's 123,000 libraries.
- Use program and grant evaluation information to improve outcomes.
- Share successes, failures, and lessons learned internally and externally, as appropriate.

## VI. CONCLUSION

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

—R. David Lankes

Today's 42 million adolescents face an increasing array of social issues, barriers, and challenges that many of them are unable to overcome on their own. With nearly 7,000 teens dropping out of high school per day,<sup>67</sup> and approximately 40% of high school graduates not proficient in traditional literacy skills,<sup>68</sup> the nation is in danger of losing an entire generation, which in turn will lead to a shortage of skilled workers and engaged citizens. Now is the time for public and school libraries to join with other key stakeholders and take action to help solve and alleviate the issues and problems that negatively impact teens, and ultimately the future of the nation. These challenges are not insurmountable. It is a moral imperative to leverage our skills and resources to effect positive change and better the lives of millions of teens. In turn, we will be providing an invaluable service to our community and position the library as an indispensable community resource.

As previously stated, the time for the library community to take action is now because

- Teens make up a significant portion of library users.
- Library services and resources for teens are in jeopardy.
- There has been a significant shift in the demographics of teens.
- Technology continues to impact communication methods, teaching, and learning.
- Teens are entering the workforce without critical skills.

In *The Atlas of New Librarianship*, Dave Lankes argues that the nobility of librarianship “is found in action.”<sup>69</sup> The paradigm shift called for in this report may point to the need for a variety of stakeholders to come together to leverage expertise and resources; however, its success depends on those of us in the library community. These important changes will only be implemented if we hold ourselves accountable for taking action to improve the lives of today’s 42 million teens and, ultimately, our community as a whole. The teens are depending on us, and our communities need us to help them thrive. We must support and empower teens by working with stakeholders to provide a range of timely, progressive, and effective services for and with the teens, thereby putting them on the path to a successful and productive adulthood. When libraries take on this role, the value they add to their community will be immense, and community members will embrace the library as a crucial resource.

So what is the next step? Gather the library staff and key stakeholders in the community to determine what the most pressing needs of the teens in your community are. Then examine the library services currently being provided for and with teens and work with stakeholders to create a plan for moving forward together. Use the questions below to guide your work.

Be bold, persistent and critical. Do not be afraid to experiment. Above all, never lose sight of your goal: to change the lives of teens and provide them with a brighter future. In the end, you won’t just be changing teens’ lives—you’ll be changing libraries and making them great!

## Questions to Guide Local Assessment and Planning

### Knowledge of Teens

- How well 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?
- What strategies are you using to identify specific groups of teens that 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.
- How are you identifying the aspirations, interests, needs, or issues within each targeted group? Have you identified the strengths of each targeted group? Have you prioritized their interests and their problems?
- What are the most pressing problems and challenges of the teens in your community? What is it that teens need in order to overcome them?
- What processes do you have in place for reaching out to and engaging the members of each targeted group? How are you engaging teens in helping the library develop programs and services that meet their needs?
- What steps are you taking to talk to the teens in your community and learn 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 on 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, and so on?
- 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

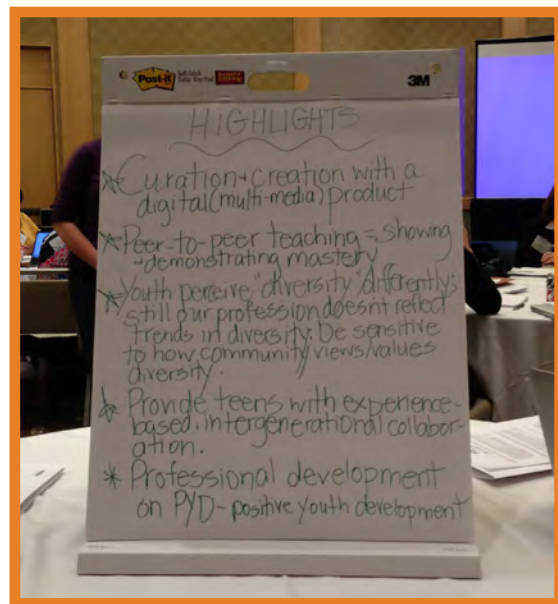
- Do you have a list of outreach partners—other community agencies that also work for or with or that address teen-related issues such as career readiness?
- Do you have a process in place for formally and regularly interacting with other relevant agencies in your community? Do these organizations know 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 and 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 that 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; in other words, 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 coaches and mentors?
- Do library policies acknowledge and create opportunities for library staff to incorporate 21st-century technologies into their services and programs?

"I always look forward to going to the library, for teen events or to volunteer for things like the summer reading program. Coming to the library is always a highlight of my day."

—Johnathan, Port Orchard, Washington

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- Maureen Sullivan, YALSA Summit Moderator and ALA Immediate Past President
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## IX. ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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“Without libraries, I wouldn’t be able to pass all my classes.”

— Devin, 18 years old, Alabama



## X. APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: *About the Forum*

The forum consisted of three components including a face-to-face summit and three Virtual Town Hall meetings. The 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 dialogue 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.

### 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
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- 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

### 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 21st-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's ideas and discussed how they could 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.

## 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
- **Mizuko (Mimi) Ito**—Professor in Residence and MacArthur Foundation Chair in Digital Media and Learning at the University of California Humanities Research Institute
- **George Needham**—Vice President, OCLC Global and Regional Councils
- **Lee Rainie**—Director of the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project
- **Maureen Sullivan**—ALA President (2012–13) and organization development consultant
- **Teen Panel**—Kitsap Regional Library, Bainbridge Island, Washington

## 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).

## connectedlearning.tv Virtual Chats

In May 2013 YALSA and 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>.

## 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

## APPENDIX B: Literature Review

At the start of the year-long forum, Kris Millecam conducted the following literature review for YALSA:

Transformative changes in information needs as well as young adult knowledge and skills will propel the skills and knowledge required of librarians to serve their young patrons. As technology develops by leaps and bounds, so do the creativity and abilities of young adults to create literacy opportunities, both formal and informal, beyond the walls of traditional education. This reality has broadened the role of both school and public libraries. Through collaboration and new and emerging technologies, libraries can transform learning environments to meet young adult informational needs and inspire their recreational curiosity. To support the summit and online town meetings, the literature review primarily focuses on research from the past four years, 2008–12, to answer nine thematic questions.

This literature review explores research on the following subjects:

1. Information needs and behaviors of 21st-century young adults
2. Librarian support of 21st-century learning skills
3. Barriers to information-seeking behaviors of young adults
4. Special skills or knowledge needed by librarians to support informal and formal learning

5. Young adults' creation of literacies within and outside of school and public libraries
6. Public libraries working with school libraries to develop formal and informal learning opportunities
7. The impact of emerging technologies on information-seeking needs and behaviors of young adults and how this informs the work of libraries
8. The impact of lack of access to new and emerging technologies in schools and libraries on teens' successful and safe use of technology for informational and recreational purposes
9. Communicating through technology as the gateway to reach young adults

## Information Needs and Behaviors of 21st-Century Young Adults

In many ways, young adult behaviors and information needs are framed by the technology they use. In addition, young adult behavior is framed by factors such as “cognitive status, identity formation, value negotiation and social interactions” (Dresang & Koh 2009) within various contexts. Technology is pervasive in connecting peers, exploring interests, and finding both informational and recreational material (Ito et al. 2008). According to Ito et al., teens use online spaces, which allows for “constant contact with friends via texting, IM, mobile phone and Internet connections” (2008, 1). Youth also “use the online world to explore their interests and find information beyond what they have access to at school or in their local community” (1). This enables them to connect to peers with specialized interests and fosters exploration of new media and technology. This “messaging around” and variety of play experiences (Ito et al. 2008; Crow 2011) foster curiosity and give students the opportunity to explore and create. Games like Minecraft let students explore and learn about games' mechanics while building their skills (Daly 2012).

Many factors influence how 21st-century young adults seek information. Dresang and Koh (2009) identify three types of radical changes in information seeking and learning, perspective, and boundaries. Their research discusses the changing forms of information seeking. Today's young adults get their information through a variety of media sources, preferring information given in graphic or visual form and through self-developed controlled paths, often searching in non-linear and non-sequential patterns. In addition, searching behavior is framed within the context of multi-tasking. The second type of behavior stressed focuses on identity formation and value negotiation. Dresang and Koh characterize these behaviors as young people expressing their own opinions, asserting their identity by creating information, having flexible and multiple identities, and experiencing information from a variety of perspectives (37). Young adults are connected to a global society and thus continuously negotiate their identity and values through these interactions. The third characteristic that Dresang and Koh point out is the changing boundaries that have emerged through a global community. They describe young adults as having access to a variety of information, collaborating in both finding and creating information, forming new types of social networks, and engaging in these communities (41). Dresang and Koh stress that all three of these aspects of seeking are intermixed and are not mutually exclusive (29), and thus are entwined in young adults' behavior.

Yet as young adults continue to build their searching skills, they still encounter uncertainty, problems, and challenges (Beheshti 2012; Bowler 2010; Terrile 2009). Bowler stresses that young adults use talking as an important cognitive strategy in their search process. Verbalizing helps the information seeker to clarify points of confusion and conflicting information to help unite understanding (4). She also found that parents, family, and friends were not only “a bridge between the participants and the information, they were the information source.” Young adult information seekers depended upon family and friends as “information mediators” to help them traverse “the tangled web of information” (5) and construct new meaning from the information. Understanding that young adult information seekers may prefer to talk out their ideas as a cognitive strategy, in order to organize and create their understanding, may help librarians create learning opportunities and strengthen positive interactions with these patrons.

According to Mayer (2011), games are an excellent way to inspire young adults and to build their searching skills at the same time. In addition, access to appropriate databases support middle-school students in developing their searching skills. A survey by Vincelette and Queen (2012) provides feedback from teachers that students are more successful in their research when using databases. “Students know they are getting accurate information when they research with the databases and this helps middle school students focus on the content instead of the validity of the information” (16). Thus as young adults build their searching skills, it is important to incorporate technology and educational scaffolding to support students as they build information-seeking skills.

In order to meet the information needs of 21st-century learners, Agosto (2011) emphasizes that educators must continuously learn about young adult behavior. Understanding the ways in which young adult searching differs from adults’, distinguishing “to what extent are age-based differences due to chronological age, and to what extent are they due to varying levels of experience with digital information, digital information resources, and digital information systems” (Agosto 2011), and knowing how librarians can assuage the differences in digital information proficiency levels are paramount for librarians. Also essential is making sure that young adults have access to technology such as games, databases, and e-books (Mayer 2011; Vincelette & Queen 2012; Zickuhr 2012). Creating spaces where students can explore physical and virtual spaces in Learning Labs and Learning Commons will help young adults develop essential curiosity and solid information-literacy skills. Learning Labs in public libraries and museums allow young adults to “explore science, technology, art and literature—not just to read about it—through building and making” (Watters 2011), which is fundamental for young adult exploration. In addition, Learning Commons in school libraries foster inquiry through a “connection of learners to information, to each other and communities around the world” (Mihailidis 2012). These spaces support media literacy’s goals of “informed decision-making, individual empowerment, nuanced understanding of mediated, savvy consumption and production skills, and participation in local, national and global dialog” (Mihailidis 2012) to cultivate lifelong learners.

## Librarian Support of 21st-Century Learning Skills

Throughout the literature, technology and social interactions are proving to be at the center of the young adult’s life. Harnessing the technology to provide young adults with learning experiences that strengthen their searching skills is critical. The Common Core standards “seek to establish fluency in the fundamentals with a shift toward experience-based applications” (Mayer 2011, 47). Technology and Web 2.0 allow learners to take theoretical ideas and apply them to learning experiences. The literature about the effect of technology is limited, as technology transforms faster than the research can be done. The research that has been done thus far does point to success in technology as a platform for building information-literacy skills (Braun 2012; Daly 2012; Mayer 2011).

The current research on gaming strongly supports the postulation that it not only motivates young adults, but also provides a solid foundation in 21st-century literacy skills. However, there is not much research in helping educators choose the technology. Husid (2011) found that “educational use of technology and Web 2.0 is widespread within the educational community” (28). Yet Husid points out that the little information that is available to guide librarians and teachers in selecting and implementing technology is vague (29). This means that librarians need to use the tools they already possess—“sound pedagogical practice, learning theory, information literacy, content standards, and technology” (31)—as their framework and guide for choosing games that support 21st-century skills.

The literature does provide specifics of how games directly link to the 21st-century learning standards. Games allow a safe environment in which students can take risks (Braun 2012; Daly 2012; Mayer 2011), and games connect learners to the skills they already have and “push learners further in new and unknown directions” (Mayer 2011, 49). Mayer asserts that games require the players to adapt, analyze, and develop strategies as the game progresses, and this allows them to practice their skills in situations that are not permanent. Most importantly, the task of gaming is meaningful for young adults and connects to their world (50). In addition, the social aspect of gaming enables learners to build confidence and explore teamwork



and leadership (Braun 2012; Daly 2012; Mayer 2011). The Institute of Play explores how games can be best used to foster learning; its GlassLab explores ways that games can “serve as both potent learning environments and real-time assessments of student learning” (Institute of Play, nd).

Collaboration serves as another key factor in librarians supporting 21st-century skills. Much of the literature focuses on collaboration between school and public libraries. Both school and public libraries share a common purpose: “to provide young people with resources, skills and tools needed to succeed in school” and the greater world beyond (Katz 2009, 28). Essential to this is clear communication between libraries and the collaboration of ideas, people, and resources (DelGuidice 2009; Gilton 2008; McKenna 2009; Vincelette & Queen 2012). An emphasis on communication in regard to assignments is also stressed (Gilton 2008; McKenna 2009; Vincelette & Queen 2012), as well as the sharing resources between libraries. Collaborating in collection development is also recommended, to help ensure that the public library has books that support the curriculum and that materials such as databases are not duplicated (DelGuidice 2009; Katz 2009; Kluever & Finley 2012).

Collaboration with and between young adults is also emphasized as an avenue to strengthen 21st-century skills. Ito et al. discuss the importance on “capitalizing on peer based learning” (2008, 2), as young adults often learn from other teens rather than teachers or adults. Creating learning opportunities where young adults are the experts allows for collaborative and leadership development. Kluever and Finley describe a teen advisory council that facilitated teen input to programming, collection development, library blogs, and connections to the community (2012, 52). Scarlett also recommends captivating teens through a teen advisory group. “A group of teens that represent their peers in planning library programs and services, and may also be involved in the delivery of said programs and services as well as outreach efforts to promote them” (2012b, 9) is a great avenue to create programming that engages teens and connects them to the library. This type of outreach connects more teens with the library and builds essential 21st-century skills for all the teens involved. Boone, Rawson, and Vance (2010) describe successes for young adults when libraries developed literacy collaboratives. Students worked together to “understand difficult texts, discuss provocative or meaningful passages,” and through these experiences of collaboration, students expanded their emotional and social development (36). In addition, collaborating in groups according to their interests, young adults were able to “develop expert strategies for selecting enabling texts” (36). Collaboration between librarians and young adults is key to building solid 21st-century skills.

Employing technology and creating spaces where young adults feel welcome are crucial for supporting the development of 21st-century skills. According to Zickuhr, “43% of high school students have gotten help from a librarian in the past year” (2012, 41), and it is vital that librarians create learning opportunities when working with young adults. In her book *Digital and Media Literacy*, Hobbs emphasizes the importance of young adult capacities needed for the “lives of fast-paced change and technological evolution” and “finds it ever more necessary to harness human curiosity, the ability to listen and seek diverse knowledge across platforms. These dispositions provide students with the basic competencies to handle a reality of integrated information spaces, constant sharing, public identities, and low barriers to production” (as cited in Mihailidis 2012, np). Learning Commons and Learning Labs are necessary spaces for students to build their information-literacy skills by providing opportunities for exploration. According to Susan Hildreth, director of Institute of Museum and Library Services, “Libraries and museums provide powerful, out-of-school learning experiences and this project [Learning Labs] will use recent research to seed innovative learning strategies” (MacArthur Foundation 2012, np). These spaces are not luxuries for learning but imperative for young adults to fully develop their information-literacy skills, curiosity, and love of learning.

Moreover, presenting information literacy instruction through different technologies such as “blog, podcasting and other forms of social media” (Scarlett 2012a, 9) is critical as it reaches students in a way that energizes and motivates. In addition, Hill and Kumasi emphasize the importance that librarians will play in the “lives of 21st century learners from numerous and linguistic backgrounds,” and thus it is essential that LIS curriculum prepare LIS students with the “concepts and principles of cultural competence” (2011, np) to meet the needs of diverse learners so that learners’ needs are met in ways that enable them to flourish in their literacy skill development.

## Barriers to Information-Seeking Behaviors of Young Adults

Librarians, available resources, and young adults themselves each pose unique barriers to successful completion of information seeking by young adults. Young adults often lack the skills, and librarians lack the necessary resources, including staff, technology, and training. By far, the largest barrier for young adults was a lack of access to information and technology. Access is an important concern for young adults (Giles 2013; Ito et al. 2008; Shabi & Shabi 2011). According to Denise Scott, managing director of the New York City program for the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), “Libraries are often the only access to digital resources available at no cost in low income communities” (Giles 2013, 6). While libraries do provide basic access, Ito et al. state that “libraries provide sufficient access for basic information seeking, but [are] insufficient for the immersed kind of social engagements with networked publics that are becoming a baseline for participation on both the interest-driven and the friendship-driven sides” (2008, 36). Libraries often block sites that are “central to social communication” (37), which hinders communication as many connections with peers are made in the online virtual world. In addition to lack of resources, technology is an important barrier (Ito et al. 2008; Terrile 2009). Ensuring that the library has accessible technology tools to meet all young adults is key (Terrile 2009).

An important second barrier to information seeking of young adults is their information-literacy skills. Young adults can encounter problems searching when given an imposed task because they do not know where to go or they are saturated with too much information (Beheshti 2009; Shabi & Shabi 2011; Dresang & Koh 2009). Anxiety is also an issue for many patrons of the library (Carlito 2009), which impacts students’ information-seeking success. To help students build their skills, librarians should scaffold information-seeking tasks and provide mini-lessons to help young adults focus on individual skills (Boone, Rawson & Vance 2010). This will help build student confidence and reduce anxiety. Dresang and Koh stress that while students do develop skills through informal learning in everyday information seeking, technology and higher-level knowledge must be taught in the library (2009, 32).

The library culture can become a barrier to young adults’ information seeking as well. A culture of hostility will certainly turn them away. It is important that young adult services provide “a safe, structured environment with friendly staff. This is particularly important because young adults frequently experience judgment in their lives” (Derr & Rhodes 2010, 96). According to Scarlett, “Teens are often viewed with suspicion by adult library staff and patrons alike, and are confronted with rules intended to keep them quiet and ‘well-behaved’ by isolating them from one another, despite the fact that socializing in groups is normal for this stage of development” (2012b, 7). Making teens feel welcome is imperative; when young adults are “given opportunities to acquire developmental assets through programming and are able to contribute to the library through volunteer opportunities, a number of behavioral problems commonly encountered in libraries will simply not present themselves” (10).

Kumasi focuses on interactions with urban students, but points out that it is essential that all librarians scrutinize any negative bias or assumptions about young adults. “Conditions such as dress, speech patterns and other cultural signifiers shape how educators view and instruct students” (2012, 35). In addition, Kumasi emphasizes that librarians need to examine their background and ethnicity such as “whiteness” and see “how it functions in school library practices and [the] librarian’s belief system” (36).

Derr and Rhodes describe a fine line that the library must walk between an environment that feels like school (watched and controlled) and home (a place to relax). YA services need to provide a place where young adults feel relaxed and comfortable and safe (2010, 96). In addition, adult attitudes toward “hanging out as a waste of time” (Ito et al. 2008, 13) can become a barrier as well. Ito et al. emphasizes that “youth who engaged in a dynamic range of learning opportunities with new media generally had robust technology access, ample time and autonomy to experiment and explore, and a network of peers who supported their new media interests” (36). Such exploratory opportunities are not available in many libraries. Creating this type of learning atmosphere for young adults must continue to expand.

The bottom line is that libraries must provide young adults with access to technology that can help guide them in building strong information-literacy skills, Farrelly warns that “if young people want access to a subject, they are going to get it; where they access good information on the subject is up to us” (2011, 28).

## Special Skills or Knowledge Needed by Librarians to Support Informal and Formal Learning

The literature points to three main areas of focus for librarians. First, librarians must understand (a) how young adults learn and (b) the ways in which modes of learning are changing. Librarians must be able to apply this understanding and make necessary changes to programming and teaching. Second, librarians must continually update their knowledge to support young adults with technology. As seen throughout this literature review, how young adults learn and the ways that they express their knowledge may be very different from a librarian’s own educational experience. Third, librarians must ensure they have cultural competence to create a library environment that supports learning for all young adults of diverse backgrounds.

As we forge into the new millennium, the ways in which young adult learners process information have changed profoundly. Librarians must understand how these processes differ from their own and meet young adults where they are as well as foster new modes of knowledge expression. Ito et al. reflect, “Our values and norms in education, literacy, and public participation are being challenged by a shifting landscape of media and communications in which youth are central actors” (2008, 4). As reflected in the Common Core’s focus on meaningful learner-centered experiences, Crow emphasizes a constructivist approach to learning. “Constructivist learning environments are (1) ‘student-centered and instructor-facilitated,’ and (2) ‘they provide meaningful, authentic learning tasks’” (as cited in Small 2005, 23). Within constructivist learning environments, authentic learning tasks require use of higher-order thinking skills, provide for collaboration, and “foster responsibility for learning” (23). Librarians must explore the new directions of the educational landscape, then synthesize and apply new information to create and support learning environments for their young patrons. Mayer stresses that the Common Core “represents an educational shift towards preparing students to deal with information and not simply teaching them towards it. But this shift is going to require educators to use new approaches for engaging our students” (2011, 51). Absorbing this new information may seem overwhelming, but it is important to remember that we do not work alone. Connecting and collaborating with partner libraries is paramount to everyone’s success (Katz 2009; Vincelette & Queen 2012).

Mihailidis describes several shifts in the way that young adults are learning and how these shifts are supported by transforming the library into a Learning Commons. First is a pedagogical shift from passive to active learning, where learning outcomes support a media literacy agenda of “dialog, critical inquiry, collaboration, informed decision-making, savvy information production and consumption skills, and understanding how to negotiate identity and participation in digital contexts” (2012, np). In creating the Chelmsford High School Learning Commons, in Chelmsford, Massachusetts, the print material was moved to the periphery of the library space to foster a participatory culture. This supports the second learning shift “from an introspective to interactive pursuit” (Mihailidis 2012, np), which focuses on expression, cooperation, and engagement. The next change involves a shift from students searching for information to investigation. With so much information available via the Internet, critical “attention to credibility, verification, and savvy navigation on the web” (2012, np) requires foundational information-literacy skills that students must master. The final shift that Mihailidis describes is the move from consumption to connectivity. The switch refers “both to connectivity within the learning commons space, and connectivity between the learning commons, the classroom, and the community” (2012, np). Valerie Diggs, head of school libraries in Chelmsford, suggests that when libraries create comfortable and interactive learning environments for students, it leads to more productivity and learning.

Another transformation in the way that young adults acquire information is through connected learning. The Digital Media and Learning Research Hub website describes reimagining learning as a way to “empower and motivate youth to pursue knowledge and develop expertise at a pace, to a degree and on a path that takes unique advantage of their unique

interests and potential” (nd, np). Connected learning goals harness learning through interest, peer support, and academic achievement. In addition, connected learning utilizes today’s “interactive and networked media” to make learning “more effective, better integrated, and broadly accessible” (nd, np). Librarians not only must understand how learning is changing, but also must integrate these shifts in learning and technology into the programming to reach young adults.

Technology is the cornerstone of young adults’ lives, and librarians must be prepared to support them in this area. According to the Children and Technology committee, the ALA 2008 survey of 349 respondents showed that “82% of librarians felt mostly or fully comfortable with technology in their libraries,” while an equal number, 82%, “reported an interest in information about technology” (cited in Burek-Pierce 2008, 106). Librarians need technological know-how of games, social networking sites, and new technology such as apps (Braun 2012; Daly 2012; Derr and Rhodes 2010) to support young adults’ learning in the library. Scarlett stresses the importance of using social media sites to reach out effectively to teens. “It is important for librarians and library workers to be aware of technology developments with an eye toward better service” (2012a, 1).

Finally, librarians must have strong cultural competence skills to create learning environments where all feel welcome. Hill and Kumasi use Overall’s definition of cultural competency as the “ability of professionals to understand the needs of diverse populations” (Overall 2009, 176). Hill and Kumasi found that LIS students “reported only a moderate knowledge increase in cultural competence as a result of course work” (2011, np). Changes to LIS cultural competency curriculum are needed to support LIS students in developing these critical skills. In addition, it is the responsibility of all librarians to evaluate their cultural competency skills. Kumasi (2012) stresses that librarians must engage in the “often messy—yet critical—work of holding up our own practices to scrutiny to see how they might cause cultural disconnects for certain students” (37). She emphasizes that “feelings of disconnect and exclusion should be attended to by school librarians” (36) to ensure that all students feel that the library is their space too.

## Young Adults’ Creation of Literacies within and outside of School and Public Libraries

Technology is the key that unlocks young adults’ creation of literacies in and out of school and libraries. As Derr and Rhodes reflect, young adults want to be involved in their communities, and “they are engaged on their own terms, using the Internet and social media to develop communities across boundaries of space, geography and interests” (2010, 92). Livingston and Brake assert that “educators and advocates of new digital literacies are confident that social networking encourages the development of transferable technical and social skills of value in formal and informal learning” (as cited by Crook & Harrison 2008; Ito et al. 2008, 77). Many young adults use social networking sites as a means of self-expression (Beheshti 2008; Braun 2012; Livingston & Brake 2010).

Through these social networking sites (SNS), Ito et al. divide young adults’ use of SNS and other media into genres of participation (2008, 9) from which they create literacies both within and outside of traditional education. Young adults connect to others through “friendship-driven genres,” which are their main connections, both for friends and romantic partners, while “interest-driven genres” connect to specialized activities, interests, or hobbies (9, 10). Both genres rely on peer-based learning, which is structurally different from formal instruction or parental support (11). These genres of participation “describe different forms of commitment to media engagement and correspond to different social and learning dynamics” (13).

“Hanging out” with peers is the first genre of participation described by Ito et al. Young adults have integrated new media into the ways they “subvert institutional, social and technical barriers to hanging out” (2008, 13). Through hanging out with their peers, they develop their knowledge of other media, gain expertise in gaming, and “engage in a variety of new media practices,” which include “technologies for storing, sharing, listening to music and watching, making and uploading videos” (14).

“Messing around” is a “more intense, media-centric form of engagement” (Ito et al. 2008, 20). When young adults “mess around,” they are taking a more focused interest in technology’s content and the way it works. Ito et al. cite “messing around”

as a “transitional stage between hanging out and more interest-driven participation” (20), which requires an availability of technical resources to support exploration.

The third genre of participation is “geeking out,” which is described as “an intense commitment to or engagement with media or technology” (Ito et al. 2008, 28). Here young adults exceed common knowledge of a subject and develop into an expert on the topic. According to Ito et al., the interest-based communities that provide support for “geeking out” also have “important learning properties that are grounded in peer based sharing and feedback” (31). All three of these genres of participation reflect learning that has emanated from young adults’ interests rather than traditional education settings. Through the technology, young adults engage in and create new literacies.

New technologies help young adults develop essential literacies (Braun 2012; Daly 2012; Ito et al. 2008; Mayer 2011; Livingston & Brake 2010). Mayer (2011) describes how gaming develops skills in inquiry, critical thinking, adaptability, creating new knowledge, cooperation, and self-confidence. Many of these games such as Minecraft support computer literacy, allow for model re-creation, and connect to many applicable classroom topics (Daly 2012, 25). New technologies are the sparks that motivate young adult learners to explore the world.

Fortunately, there is a growing trend of creating spaces where young adults can explore their interests and foster both curiosity and skills. Mihailidis describes Chelmsford’s Learning Commons, where students participate in “live music sessions, open mic sessions, poetry reading and slams, listening lunches, groups workrooms and a general focus on expression and interactivity” (2012, 6). According to the MacArthur Foundation, “Young people are mastering traditional literacies in new ways and surprising places” (2011, np). Spaces like YOUmedia, Learning Labs, and GlassLabs allow young adults to combine explorations of interest and technology (MacArthur Foundation 2011, 2012; MacArthur & Pearson Foundations, nd; Watters 2011). YOUmedia inspires learners to “explore, express and create using digital media and connects them three realms of learning: peer groups, interests and academics” (MacArthur & Pearson Foundations, nd). In a similar vein, Learning Labs provide a “free/open community space for teens to explore digital media & technology on their own terms” (Watters 2011, np). The MacArthur Foundation describes GlassLabs as being based in “an understanding that video games and simulations can validate student learning and provide feedback for teachers and parents on students’ progress toward established learning goals” (2012, np).

These spaces captivate students and meet them wherever their interests lie. They do more than foster creativity and learning; they also allow librarians to reach young adults who traditionally don’t come to the library and create opportunities to link them to their community. Technology like gaming is a way to serve teenage boys “who are one of the most underserved populations” in the library (Scarlett 2012a, 4). Kumasi suggests that librarians can connect disassociated young adults through “inquiry projects that help them answer questions about some of the larger social issues that directly affect their community” (2012, 35). Thus these spaces are not only transformative for creativity and media literacy but also pique young adults’ interests and get them immersed in the library and community.

## Public Libraries Working with School Libraries to Develop Formal and Informal Learning Opportunities

Collaboration between public and school libraries is a great way to connect young adult learners to resources and learning opportunities. However, Miller and Girmscheid report from a *School Library Journal* survey “a disturbing trend: only 30% of respondents say they collaborate with local schools to coordinate book purchases” (2012, 26). An even fewer number, 9%, reported that they worked directly with the school librarian and teachers to purchase materials that support assignments (26). With serious budget troubles for both public and school libraries, collaborating on materials is a natural fit (Kluever & Finley 2012; Miller & Girmscheid 2012; Vincelette & Queen 2012).



The literature reveals that some libraries collaborate in a number of creative and successful ways. Library programming is the most common partnership between public and school libraries (Carlito 2009; DelGuidice 2009; Derr & Rhodes 2010; Gilton 2008; Miller & Girmscheid 2012; Kluever & Finley 2012; Vincelette & Queen 2012). Many public librarians informed teachers and administrators about programs and resources, and provided workshops to educators (Carlito 2009; Gilton 2008; Katz 2009). Public libraries worked with school libraries to create homework and book clubs (Derr & Rhodes 2010). Kluever and Finley describe a number of programs that connect different generations of learners. “To build the relationship between these students (struggling readers) and the public library, JHDL held a separate weekly story hour for students in grade levels 2 through 5 as part of their summer school curriculum. Summer school teachers brought students to the library on a routine basis, at which time they would return materials, listen to a story, and have a chance to browse for new materials to check out” (Kluever & Finley 2012, 51). In addition, the library paired seniors with teens for a high school communications course. Seniors were able to learn the basics of movie creation, and young adults were able fill school requirements using technologies that were not available in the school (51).

In addition, according to Giles, adoption of Common Core curriculum by many states, with its focus on nonfiction over traditional textbooks, will require collaboration between school and public libraries. School libraries won’t be able to provide all the resources that students will need, thus partnerships between school and public libraries will be essential (2013, 20). With the trend in school libraries moving toward a learning commons environment, Mihailidis notes that “extensions into the community only strengthen the position of the learning commons as an integrated space not only for libraries but also for school systems, districts, and vibrant communities” (2012, np).

Furthermore, keeping public librarians updated on school assignments is an essential ingredient of collaboration and one that is not done often enough (Gilton 2008; Katz 2009; Kluever and Finley 2012). This step enables public librarians to better support their younger patrons (Gilton 2008). A few libraries took their partnership a step further and were in the 30% of respondents in the *SLJ* survey that consulted with school libraries for collection development and worked together to ensure that curriculum resources would be available for learners at the public library (Katz 2009; Kluever & Finley 2012; Miller & Girmscheid 2012). Technology is another area of cooperation between public and school libraries (Braun 2012; Daly 2012; Mayer 2011). Public libraries can work with school libraries and implement gaming opportunities for young adults (Daly 2012; Mayer 2011). In addition, connecting young patrons to public library virtual resources also supports both formal and informal learning (Carlito 2009; Vincelette & Queen 2012).

Collaboration does not end with school and public libraries. With the movement toward digital media spaces such as YUmedia and Learning Labs, partnerships between libraries and other community resources are vital. Giles emphasizes that “libraries need to explore creative new partnerships,” working with technology companies to partner in “technology learning centers” to create more digital media opportunities for young adults (2013, 40).

## The Impact of Emerging Technologies on Information-Seeking Needs and Behaviors of Young Adults and How This Informs the Work of Libraries

Emerging technologies have changed how young adults use technology, connect with one another, and construct their identity. New technologies have challenged their information-literacy skills as well as ways that libraries can reach teens to provide services and learning opportunities. According to Purecell from the Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project, teens have the highest rate of Internet use, and their preferred method of communication is texting (2012, slide 14). That said, “Teens are a lot less likely than adults 18–64 to have a cell phone” (slide 16). Zickuhr’s research on young Americans’ reading and library habits also found that younger Americans (ages 16–29) “have high levels of ownership of mobile devices like cell phones and laptops and are also online at higher rates than older adults: More than nine out of ten Americans ages 16–29 (95%) use the internet or email, compared with 78% of adults over age 30” (2012, 20). In addition,



Zickuhr discovered an increase in the use of e-books among young adults. “E-book readers under 30 consume the e-books on a desk top or laptop computer (55%) or cell phone (41%)” (28). Thus while many teens have access at home to these technology resources, the library is a very important point of access for many young adults (Agosto & Abbas 2009).

Technology spaces such as Learning Commons, YOUmedia, and Learning Labs are transforming how young adults search and discover their world. Mihailidis describes the Learning Commons’ four concentric spaces of “expression, production, inquiry and community.” The expression space enables students “to engage in physical and virtual acts of expression” and is a place where students are encouraged to engage in discussion (2012, np). The production space focuses on multimedia storytelling, which means providing space for “students to create and share stories with simple online platforms, and cultivate habits of participation.” Inquiry “involves providing points of access and models or guides for investigation through web tools and print materials.” Finally, community gives students the skills that they will need to connect with others in “meaningful and mediated ways” (Mihailidis 2012, np).

Along with Learning Commons, spaces like YOUmedia and Learning Labs are rethinking the ways that “libraries and museums can create learning experiences for teen visitors” (Watters 2011, np) and are discovering the ways in which digital media is “reshaping how people think, learn and play” (MacArthur & Pearson Foundations 2012, np). The Digital Media and Learning Research Hub describes Learning Labs as integrating spheres of interest, peers, and academics by providing a shared purpose. Connected learning environments are designed around production so that “learning comes from actively creating, making, producing, experimenting, remixing, decoding, and designing, while fostering skills and dispositions for lifelong learning.” Also, “learning is most resilient when it is linked and reinforced across settings of home, school, peer culture and community” (Digital Media and Learning Research Hub, nd, np), offering students exploration and learning opportunities at every turn.

Young adults use emerging technology to communicate and connect with one another. They use the Internet (Baker 2010; Derr & Rhodes 2010; Dresang & Koh 2009; Zickuhr 2012), cell phones (Baker 2010; Purecell 2012), social networking sites (Agosto & Abbas 2011; Derr & Rhodes 2010; Dresang & Koh 2009; Ito et al. 2008; Livingston & Brake 2010; Qayyum et al. 2010), and video games (Braun 2012; Daly 2012; Ito et al. 2008) to create virtual communities. Derr and Rhodes assert that “young adults use the internet and social media to develop communities across boundaries of space, geography and interest” (2010, 92). These forms of communication are creating new social media literacy (Ito et al. 2008). This new way of communication also informs how students create their identity (Dresang & Koh 2009; Ito et al. 2008). Through virtual environments, young adults “negotiate their sense of self in relation to their peers” (Ito et al. 2008, 14). According to Dresang and Koh, young adults shape their identities and create multiple identities through their online communities (2009, 38).

The freedom that technology affords also brings responsibility to the user. Young adults must have strong information-literacy skills to inquire, think critically, gain knowledge, draw conclusions, make informed decisions, apply knowledge, create new knowledge, participate ethically, and develop sound habits of mind (AASL 2007) to navigate the wealth of information at their fingertips. According to Baker, a 2009 BBC survey found that “one in every three students (ages 12–15) believe that links/listings shown at the top of search results are most ‘truthful’” (2012, 10). Agosto states that while young adults are “increasingly mixing online and offline lives, seamlessly integrating a range of information technologies into their everyday information practices,” not all young adults are technically savvy. Agosto contends that a “picture beginning to emerge from research on young people’s relationships with technology is much more complex than the digital native characterization suggests” (as cited by Bennet, Maton & Kervin 2008).

There is such a wealth of information that has expanded the “boundaries in terms of the amount of subjects and sources of information” (Dresang & Koh 2009, 1) that it is absolutely essential that young adults possess the skills to navigate the wealth of information available. Libraries must ensure access to all their young patrons (Farrelly 2011; Terrile 2009) with a particular mindfulness toward users with disabilities by providing adaptive technology (Terrile 2009). Farrelly emphasizes

that if young adults view library access as limited or feel frustrated by restrictions, “they are less likely to see the library as a valuable part of their lives” (2011, 29). Derr and Rhodes stress that it is important to find ways to engage and become “a relevant part of how young people use these technologies” (2010, 92). For the future, libraries face the vital challenge to connect with young adults through technology in ways that awakens their curiosity and fulfills their information needs.

## The Impact of Lack of Access to New and Emerging Technologies in Schools and Libraries on Teens’ Successful and Safe Use of Technology for Informational and Recreational Purposes

The available literature evaluating the impact of lack of access to new and emerging technologies to young adult success is limited. Additional research is needed. According to Giles, “Libraries have become a destination for students doing in-class research projects or simply looking for something to do after school” (2013, 6), whereas Mitchell Moss, professor of urban policy and planning at NYU, emphasizes that “in many neighborhoods [libraries] are now the only institution where kids can go after school that is safe” (cited in Giles 2013, 4). As young adults increasingly develop a high interest in new and emerging technologies and spend a great deal of time participating in and creating online communities, access at libraries to new and emerging technologies is vital (Dresang & Koh 2009; Ito et al. 2008; Miller & Girmscheid 2012). According to an *SLJ* survey, libraries in rural areas provided the fewest technical resources for young adults, who may be the teens who depend on the library’s resources the most. “Rural libraries devoted about five public-access computers to kids and teens, while suburban and urban libraries assigned about 10 and 15 to kids, respectively” (Miller & Girmscheid 2012, 29). Lack of access can make young adults feel isolated and marginalized (Dresang & Koh 2009; Ito et al. 2008). Dresang and Koh emphasize that there is “still a lack of evidence about the extent to which previously marginalized voices of youth have more opportunities to be heard in the digital age” (2009, 40). Availability to technology allows young adults a freedom and an autonomy, which contribute to self-directed learning and exploration (Ito et al. 2008).

In these times of budgets cuts, it is essential that public libraries and school libraries collaborate in sharing technological resources. Vincelette and Queen describe the collaborative effort between the Douglas County School District (DCSD) and Douglas County Library (DCL). Connecting young patrons directly to the DCL databases at school allowed the school library to “redistribute financial resources.” In addition, the partnership provided increased use of the DCL databases, which afforded DCL an opportunity to “demonstrate the value of the public library to the entire community” (2012, 14).

The research indicates that young adults are becoming savvier in their Internet safety. Mihailidis stresses that “learning commons is best positioned to help teach the ethics of online voices, styles of public dialog, and keen attention to what it means to create content in print, video and audio format for the web” (2012, np). While teens are developing sound Internet skills, some researchers continue to recommend adult supervision of teen use of technology (Agosto & Abbas 2009). The Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project research states that teens predominantly received advice about online safety from parents (86%) and teachers (70%) (Purecell 2012, slide 63). The majority of young adults are savvy about social media sites (SNS). “Most teens use privacy settings on SNS with 62% set to private and 19% set to partially private” (slide 47). Purecell stressed that most teens (55%) considered how their personal postings on SNS would affect them in the future (slide 48). Agosto and Abbas advise parents and educators to supervise teens when they use SNS and to continue to promote online safety and ethical use of computers. Furthermore, they assert that adults need to be proactive when investigating incidents that may be injurious (as cited in Hinduja & Patchin 2009, 35).

While young adults are using caution when online, clearly Internet safety education needs to continue. Young adults still face risks on SNS (Agosto & Abbas 2009; Ito et al. 2008; Livingston & Brake 2010). Livingston and Brake cite the UK’s Home Office Task Force on Child Protection on the Internet, which identified “risks to children’s safety associated with social

networking—bullying, harassment, exposure to harmful content, theft of personal information, sexual grooming, violent behavior, encouragement to self-harm and racist attacks” (2010, 77). Clearly, young adults still need to continue to refine their safety competence when online.

## Communicating through Technology as the Gateway to Reach Young Adults

The literature focuses on two primary areas where libraries can support young adults by providing access to and training in technology. First, it is essential for libraries to ensure access to new and emerging technologies to motivate and foster learning opportunities for young adults (Baker 2010; Beheshti 2012; Braun 2012; Daly 2012; Dresang & Koh 2009; Ito et al. 2008; Mihailidis 2012; Purecell 2012; Qayyum et al. 2010; Scarlett 2012a). Libraries need to provide access to online content that will build young patrons’ information-literacy skills (Baker 2010; Braun 2012; Derr & Rhodes 2010; Dresang & Koh 2009).

Digital learning spaces such as Learning Labs are “part of a larger movement to rethink-reimagine what a public library will look like and what functions it will serve” (Watters 2011, np). Giving students an opportunity for “messing around”—which “includes looking around, searching for information online, and experimentation and play with gaming and digital media production” (Ito et al. 2008, 20)—is an important function for libraries to serve the needs of young adults. Reaching teens through technology and incorporating teen input in the form of book trailers and filmmaking, as well as connecting to teens through social media, QR codes, and gaming programs, are good ways to link teens to library services (Scarlett 2012a).

Librarians must continually educate themselves on how “youth services professionals view literacy—given its evolving context within shifting social norms” (Burek-Pierce 2008, 106), which will help support young adults with emerging technology. Husid discusses criteria that librarians can use to evaluate Web 2.0 tools. Evaluating for user safety is of primary importance, along with tools that support “multiple intelligences, learning styles, higher order thinking skills, information literacy (AASL Standards for the 21 Century Learner), content standards, and technology standards (ISTE National Educational Technology Standards)” (2011, 31). Braun stresses that libraries need to have information on computer programming languages and have knowledge of and ability to link young adults to the latest apps, which serve to develop information-literacy skills (2012). Technology—such as Learning Labs, virtual environments, and games—allows for young adults to widen their perspective, explore new worlds, and have new experiences (Beheshti 2012; Daly 2012; Watters 2011). Libraries can provide web quests and electronic instructions pages (Gilton 2008) for guidance. Communicating through technology is the gateway to reach young adults. E-mail updates, keeping the website current, text messaging, and pages on social networking sites are key to reaching out and keeping young adults updated and drawn to library resources and programming (Farrelly 2011; Scarlett 2012a; Terrile 2009).

A second area of focus is providing information literacy and technology training for young adults. Dresang and Koh stress the importance of assessing what 21st-century skills young adults bring with them and where they need to develop skills (2009, 43). YALSA’s Teen Tech Week “demonstrates to teens library resources beyond books” (Scarlett 2012a, 3). In addition, teaching students how to understand and evaluate diverse and conflicting perspectives will help young adults cope with difficult topics, especially when there is no correct answer (Dresang & Koh 2009, 40). Ito et al. stress that educational programs need to provide friendly learning environments and be ready to “step in and support moments when teens are motivated to move from friendship driven to interest driven forms of new media” (2008, 35). Here librarians can find teachable moments and ignite curiosity and passions in young adults.

There is no doubt that libraries and learning are changing and that technology is the portal to inspire and fulfill young adults’ hunger for exploration. Supporting youth through technology is not a luxury: it is the 21st-century way of learning.

Mihailidis describes the 21st Century Media Literacy Learning Commons model: providing young adults with *access* to technology to “harness the power of digital media”; *investigation* by “cultivating savvy information seekers” in possession of *critical analysis* through “differentiating information online”; *expression* by “negotiating online identity”; and *appreciation* by “empowering creativity” (2012, np). Libraries need to meet the needs of young adults and continue to enhance student curiosity and skills in technology so they develop into successful adults in the 21st century.

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"Our teens' interests and needs are as diverse as the teens themselves and extend far beyond what the Library can provide with existing resources and regular programming. They do share a desire to learn from and connect with experts who have turned their interests into careers and to improve our community. To meet these interests, we sought out and started partnering with various community agencies to provide programs ranging from Learning to DJ as taught by a teen DJ, to making spring rolls and sushi taught by a chef and entrepreneur, to building a better community with City Council members."

— Jennifer Korn, TeenSpot Manager at the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County

"The e-revolution is here. I've been purchasing digital resources to allow students to produce a variety of projects for school. One of my student aides is helping me compile top picks to download to the e-readers (we have twenty one of them now). Showing students how to access and utilize databases for their research has also become a major part of my teaching."

— Kyla M. Johnson,  
Farmington (NM) High School Library

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For further information on YALSA and library services for and with teens, visit [www.ala.org/yalsa/guidelines](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/guidelines) to access:

- National guidelines on library services for and with teens
- YALSA's National Research Agenda
- Position papers relating to library services for and with teens

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