

The Campaign for America's Libraries presents

# Speaking Up for Library Services to Teens

## A Guide to Advocacy

Prepared by



yalsa @ your library<sup>®</sup>

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# Introduction

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**Y**ou know there are more teens out there who could benefit from the library. If only you had the space...the time...the materials. With many libraries—public and school—pressed financially, how do you get service to teens to be a priority? How do you sell your ideas to your director? Principal? Library or School board? Fellow staff?

You may choose to advocate for any number of things—a dedicated teen space, more space, bigger and better young adult collections, a young adult specialist, more staff, more and better computers, faster connections. The possibilities are virtually endless. But it almost always comes down to money. The focus of this guide is on helping you get the support you need.

Libraries with successful teen programs:

- Provide teens with an adequate space of their own.
- Have designated staff who are professionally trained to serve teens.
- Sponsor services, programming and activities that address teens' interests and needs.
- Include teens in creating their own space, services, resources and programs.

Traditionally libraries have invested most heavily in services to children and adults. It's time for that to change. Investing in YA services isn't just good for teens; it's good for our libraries and communities. Tomorrow's voters and funders are today's teens, so it's important to reach out to them through the library now, and to help stakeholders understand this. But advocacy is more than telling people; it's persuading them.

It's up to those of us who care deeply about these services and understand their importance to make the case—with our administrators, colleagues, boards and communities.

The teen services advocate is:

- Interested
- Engaged
- Enthusiastic
- Prepared
- Positive
- A good listener
- Always learning
- Always connecting
- Always informing
- Always inviting

If you have the vision and the passion, you're halfway there. This guide provides tips, messages, facts, strategies and sample materials to help you speak up because your teens deserve more and you are their voice.

# Getting Started

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**A**dvocacy requires you to think ahead and plan. You'll need to decide how you want to improve and increase services to teens. Come up with some concrete goals and think of ways you can work to achieve them. A good way to begin is by using the following tips:

1. **Start with a plan.** Have a clear goal for what you want to achieve, whether it's more computers, a bigger YA collection, a designated YA specialist, or a separate space for teens. Identify your target audiences—whose support you will need—and strategies for how you will convince them. Having a plan will help you focus your efforts where they will have the most impact. See the Action Plan on page 20.
2. **Have a clear, consistent message.** Be prepared with talking points to back it up and a call to action that says what exactly you are asking them to do. Approve a plan? Give money? Volunteer? Focus on the benefits not just to teens, but the library and community. See the Message Sheet on page 22.
3. **Make it easy for others to support you.** Look at your community's needs and identify how the library can be part of the solution. See Listen, Don't Just Talk on page 8. Try to link what you are proposing to the library or school's strategic plan. Be sure to keep all key administrators, your library or school board, town council and other influentials informed about your successes. Send or e-mail your library's newsletter and other updates.
4. **Get teens involved.** Teens are no different than anyone else. If they feel a sense of ownership, they will support the library. Creating a teen/student advisory group is one way to do this. Having a teen serve on the library board is another. Talk to them about advocacy and why it is important in a democracy. Encourage them to write letters, testify in support of the library—or, better yet, come up with their own ideas for library advocacy.
5. **Get out there.** Attend town council and school board meetings, or take turns with other library staff to ensure that you have a presence with key decision makers. Invite a school or library representative to sit on your board or advisory committee. See Build Partnerships on page 9.
6. **Keep teen services visible.** Check out *ALA's Communications Handbook for Libraries* for tips on how to get your message out in the media. Or, if your library or school has one, work with the marketing and communication specialist.
7. **Get others to deliver the message for you.** Teens, parents, teachers, school officials and representatives of community groups are all potential advocates. If you don't have a Friends group, start one. That includes school library media centers. See Making a Difference.
8. **Be persistent.** Change doesn't happen overnight. Celebrate your successes, learn from your mistakes, and keep moving forward.
9. **Repeat.** Advocacy is not a one-time project. It's something that needs to be a part of your job as much as planning activities for your TAG or submitting book orders. For more ideas on how to incorporate advocacy into your routine, see the next section, Everyday Advocacy.

# Everyday Advocacy

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Everyone who works at the library is or should be a library advocate. Why? Because your teen patrons deserve more. Here are some tips for incorporating advocacy activities into your every day routine. Many take just minutes to accomplish. Share them with your colleagues. Remember, what's good for the library is good for teens. And what's good for teens is good for the library.

## Five minutes or less

- Wear your support on and off the job. Wear your library's t-shirt or see ALA Graphics for a wide range of items, including posters promoting youth services or pins that say "libraries work because we do." Visit their online store at [www.alastore.ala.org](http://www.alastore.ala.org).
- Add key stakeholders like school board members and the mayor's office to your library's newsletter and holiday card mailing list.
- Sign up for an email discussion list, such as ALAWON to learn more about policy issues and lobbying. To keep an eye on the profession and learn about advocacy efforts of other youth services practitioners, subscribe to lists like yalsa-bk, ya-yaac, pubyac or LM\_Net.
- Set up an RSS feed for youth services blogs, including YALSA's blog (<http://yalsa.ala.org/blog>), to keep abreast of the latest developments in serving teens and how to increase advocacy for youth issues.
- Send news articles relating to teens to staff or policy makers.
- Talk briefly to a staff person or community member about an upcoming library event or about a recent success story.

## Fifteen minutes or less

- Send an invitation to key stakeholders whenever you hold an event. Consider asking them to be judges for any contests you do or speakers at appropriate events. Publicly recognize them when they do attend and thank them for their support.
- Print out photos of successful events and mail them to key stakeholders with a brief note.
- Share advocacy ideas at staff meetings.
- When you attend community functions, mention appropriate library resources or distribute relevant library brochures.
- Call your elected officials and ask them to support specific legislation that would benefit libraries and teens.
- Post photos of key stakeholders in the break room so staff will recognize them and make them feel welcome.
- Stay abreast of library-related issues. Visit your state library association's website for news, subscribe to a free email services like ALAWON or get the RSS feed for District Dispatch. For more information go to [www.ala.org/ala/washoff/washnews/news.cfm](http://www.ala.org/ala/washoff/washnews/news.cfm). Bookmark the ALA Office for Library Advocacy homepage ([www.ala.org/ola](http://www.ala.org/ola)) and subscribe to its discussion list.
- Share information via a blog or other means about positive teen news

- Create a flier about YA activities, additions to the collection, or services you provide at your library and post it around the library and elsewhere in your school. Keep copies at checkout. Make sure your own efforts on YA services are well publicized.

### Thirty minutes or less

- Watch for issues in the local news related to teens/libraries and write a letter to the editor ([www.miamiherald.com:80/456/story/321013.html](http://www.miamiherald.com:80/456/story/321013.html)) like this one from the YALSA President in the *Miami Herald*.
- Inform all new employees and board members about the importance of YA services. Make an information packet for just this purpose, and share it with local stakeholders and community members as well.
- Find out if key stakeholders have teenage children and provide them with booklists and other helpful information.
- Connect with educators and youth organizations in your area to see what their needs are to ensure that your advocacy efforts are appropriate for your community.
- Publicize all library events in the community. Ask local businesses to post fliers about library events.

### As You're Able to Devote More Time

- Attend a library legislative day event at your state capital or participate in ALA's National Library Legislative Day in Washington, D.C. each May. For more information, go to [www.ala.org/ala/washoff/washevents/nlld/nlld2008.cfm](http://www.ala.org/ala/washoff/washevents/nlld/nlld2008.cfm)
- Take advantage of National Library Week, Teen Read Week™ and other occasions to celebrate the library and what you do. For a calendar of events go to
- Volunteer to host library or school board meetings. If the opportunity arises, give a brief tour or share a recent success story.
- Create and distribute an award for a stakeholder who has shown significant support to the library.
- Staff an information table at local events, such as Back to School Night, street fairs, charity events, and the like. Hand out information about the library, give out library card applications, feature materials that relate to the specific event.
- Regularly attend town meetings, board meetings, etc. and make your presence known. Introduce yourself to elected officials, make announcements about library events when appropriate, and so forth. Share this responsibility with other library staff. Remember: the squeaky wheel gets the grease!
- Form a friends group at your library to help you advocate for excellent teen services. For more information go to [www.folusa.org](http://www.folusa.org)
- Contact your local newspaper; see if you can write a column about the latest news and developments in serving teens at your school or community.
- Last but not least, consistently deliver over-the-top library service!

# Implementing Advocacy @ your library®

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**A**s you start to increase your advocacy efforts, you'll need to pull together some facts about your library and community. You'll also need to create a plan to achieve your goals. Start with the smaller suggestions in *Everyday Advocacy*, and look through the following steps to come up with a cohesive strategy.

1. Determine the number of young adults in your community or school and the amount the library spends on materials and programming for them. Also determine the number of younger children and adults and the amount spent on services to those groups. The amounts should be comparable.
2. Take inventory.
  - How does the library serve teens now? What is the current circulation of YA materials? How old are the YA materials?
  - How many and what kinds of materials and formats do you have and what is most popular?
  - What percentage is this in terms of the entire library collection?
  - What kinds of materials do teens request that you need more money to purchase?
  - Survey young adults to determine what needs are not being met.
  - Do they need longer hours? Before or after school? On evenings and weekends?
  - Do they need more materials for homework assignments?
  - Do they need more Internet computers or access to word processing software?
  - Do they need more materials for recreational reading or summer reading assignments?
  - Do they need more guidance on finding materials for recreational reading?
  - Do they want more music CDs, magazines, DVDs?
  - Do they want a welcoming, comfortable place to hang out?
  - Do they want more programs? If so, what kind? Help with college applications, social activities like gaming, book discussions?
  - Are they interested in volunteer opportunities?
3. Look at other libraries in similar communities and schools with dynamic YA programs and compare your situation. Collect copies of their newsletters, program flyers and YA budgets.
4. Find statistics about youth services on a national scale. YALSA's Harris Poll data and the 2007 Public Library Data Service Survey can help you find data on how teens are using libraries and the resources that libraries offer. Learn more at [www.ala.org/ala/pressreleases2007/july2007/yalsastudy07.cfm](http://www.ala.org/ala/pressreleases2007/july2007/yalsastudy07.cfm).
5. Prepare a brief report that highlights both your findings and suggestions for how the library might address them. Keep the tone positive and helpful.

6. Invite experts from the outside, such as a board member or committee chair from YALSA, a successful YA librarian or teens themselves to share their experience and insights with the director and library or school board.

## *Developing & Delivering Your Message*

To be an effective advocate, you must present a compelling case. To do that, you must do three things. The first is to develop a persuasive message—one that touches your listeners’ hearts, as well as their minds. The second is to deliver it with conviction. Sharing your enthusiasm is the best way to get other people excited and motivated. The third is to use it consistently. The more you (and your supporters) deliver the message, the more people you will reach and the more impact it will have.

Having a message sheet will help you deliver a message that is clear and compelling. You will need a key (overall) message, three supporting points, stories and examples that support your key message. Most importantly, you will need a call to action that clearly defines what you want to happen.

### **Tips**

- Keep your key message simple—about 10 words. Avoid library jargon.
- Adapt your talking points to address the concerns for your audience, whether that be teens, parents, the library director or principal or public officials.
- Don’t just talk about the library. Talk about teens and their needs.
- Paint a positive picture. Focus on benefits, as well as needs.
- Use statistics but use them judiciously and back them up with stories and examples that bring them to life.
- Test your message on other people to see whether it resonates, is clear and memorable.

### **Incorporate Personal Stories in Your Messaging**

One of the best and most powerful ways to tell your story is to get others to do it for you. Here are a few examples, but it’s easy to collect your own testimonials—just ask, “May we quote you?” “Would you be willing to speak to our library board or board of education?” Comment cards also can be a good source of quotes, but don’t just collect them. Use them in reports, presentations and publications. Post them on your website.

### **Listen, Don’t Just Talk**

Advocacy is most powerful when it’s about people and their needs—not what the library needs. How do you know what those needs are? You listen.

Showing how your library addresses real needs is the most powerful way to demonstrate the value of the library. Whether it’s improving reading scores or helping immigrant families adjust to a new country, every community has many needs. Keeping teens safe and engaged during out-of-school time (OST) is an area of particular concern.



Investment in OST programs is increasing along with mounting evidence that quality OST programs can make a difference. In 2006 the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers ([www.ed.gov/programs/21stcclc/applicant.html](http://www.ed.gov/programs/21stcclc/applicant.html)) made 57 grants totaling \$981 million. And yes, school and public libraries are eligible. In addition to public funding, many local organizations, businesses and foundations are investing in OST programs.

Set up informational sessions for your patrons. Let them talk about their needs and concerns, and approach funders and stakeholders with these issues and use your community members' stories to advocate for resources.

## Using Web Tools for Advocacy

Blogs, email, social networking sites, Twitter, wikis, your website...all of these offer opportunities to deliver your message, gather information and garner support. The key is understanding which tool or tools are the best for your particular needs.

Email blasts are a great way to make announcements and point your supporters to other Web resources, such as your blog, your MySpace or Facebook page, or your wiki. They are also a good forum for releasing alerts and telling subscribers any news they may need to know.

Web 2.0 tools, such as Twitter posts and MySpace bulletins, are helpful if urgency is a factor. Messages such as "remember to vote tomorrow" or "be sure to attend the school board meeting" can easily be disseminated to library supporters. In general, however, these tools are most effective when the goal is simply to provide information, rather than change minds or educate supporters on the finer points of an issue.

Social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook provide an online gathering point for your current supporters and if used effectively can nurture a sense of community among your library supporters. They also allow you to attract potential library supporters and build a list of contacts that you can use to assist you with advocacy efforts.

While opportune for sharing information, one of the most valuable uses of web tools for library advocates is for gathering information. Free or inexpensive tools such as sites that allow you to create surveys to get feedback from your library patrons can provide you with invaluable information and support for your effort to improve library services to teens. Wikis are free and easy-to-use tools where individuals can share information. They can be used for gathering and sharing success stories of advocacy efforts, for example.

Video sharing sites such as YouTube can have a powerful impact on your advocacy efforts. For example, have your teen advisory board create and post a brief commercial that features all the great things the library has to offer the teens in your community. Be sure to link to it from your library's website and show it at board meetings.

For maximum impact, keep your message consistent and use a mix of media. When deciding which strategy to use, think about the strengths each one offers: send bulletins through Twitter, build community support through Facebook, or use email blasts to deliver a variety of news to a wide base of supporters.

## *Build Partnerships*

When community and school leaders discuss how to address the needs of teens, are you at the table?

One of the best ways to build your base of support is by working in collaboration with community groups like the YWCA, YMCA, Rotary Club, 4-H Club and PTA/PTO. Look online for other possible organizations that might be a good fit for your library and your specific

goals. But don't wait for them to come to you—and don't wait for a crisis. Passive doesn't pay when it comes to advocacy.

When the time comes for you to ask for a show of support, it helps to have well-established relationships in place. Building relationships takes time. Set a goal for yourself of reaching out to two or three groups per year and set reasonable expectations. You'll find that some organizations are easier to work with than others. Make the best use of your time by focusing your efforts on those groups that are easy to work with and that are a good fit for your goals.

## Tips

1. Make a list of both existing and potential partners. Be strategic. Which have goals compatible with yours? Which represent the audiences you want to reach? Which potential partners are most influential?
2. Be prepared to give as well as get. Make a list of what you can offer. For example, many libraries provide meeting and display space for organizations. The library's newsletter and website also can provide visibility.
3. Make the connection. Pick up the phone. Invite your contact to have coffee or lunch and invite their views on what you are trying to accomplish. The best partnership projects are hatched together.
4. Build your network. Ask to meet with representatives from key organizations to talk over how you might work together for mutual benefit. Attend their meetings and invite them to yours, when appropriate. Serving on boards and committees of other organizations is one effective way to show the library cares and is a player.
5. Be open to business partnerships, but be very clear about what you are asking and what you can offer in return. Put it in writing.
6. Make sure your partners get regular updates and have opportunities to give input.
7. Thank everyone involved. Whether it's a personal letter, a party or plaque, a thank you is powerful.

# *Marketing & Media Relations*

## Marketing Basics

What do McDonald's, Target and Starbucks have that libraries don't when it comes to their public image? They all have a logo so well known that all it takes is the glimpse of a golden arch, a bullseye or a mermaid for instant recognition. Consider creating a simple but eye-catching graphic image for your library or teen services department. Use it on all your letterhead, websites, promotional materials, library cards, bookmarks, and any other collateral you may need. Consider hosting a contest where teens develop the logo. The logo helps raise awareness about the library among the general community and provides a consistent image that people will come to recognize and associate with the library.

You may also want to incorporate a tagline into your logo. Some examples of famous tag lines are:

- National Education Association: Great Public Schools for Every Child
- Red Cross: Preparing Communities for an Emergency and Keeping People Safe
- ASPCA: We Are Their Voice

A tagline should sum up your library's or teen services department's key mission in a carefully worded phrase.

Libraries now have their own brand—@ your library®—thanks to ALA's Campaign for America's Libraries, a multi-year public awareness and advocacy initiative. Consider using it in your own library when appropriate. For trademark information, visit [www.ala.org/ala/pio/campaign/downloadlogos/yourlibrary.cfm](http://www.ala.org/ala/pio/campaign/downloadlogos/yourlibrary.cfm).

## Working with the Media

*(Portions of this section have been adapted from the Library Advocates Handbook, available from the ALA Office for Library Advocacy.)*

One way to get your message out and encourage community support is to contact the media. There are many ways to reach out to the local media to get your story heard and drum up support for your advocacy work. Here are a few that may work very well for you.

### News Release or Media Advisory

Send a news release or advisory to alert news and assignment editors to announcements, events or developments of wide community interest. Both a release and media advisory should include the 5W's (Who, What, When, Where, Why) and H (How). A release should have the most critical information in the first paragraph with facts of lesser importance in descending order. Include a statement or sound bite from a spokesperson. The media advisory can be a simple outline highlighting important information, availability of spokespeople and photo opportunities. Always include a contact and website for further information. Follow up with a phone call to make sure the piece was received, to pitch coverage for the event and to answer any questions.

### Non-library Publications

Consider where your target groups, including your partner organizations, get their information. Ask if they would be willing to carry news or feature articles about the library in their newsletters or magazines. Offer to supply articles for legislators' district newsletters, the campus newspaper, alumni magazine, parent-teacher organization newsletter and other publications.

### Story Pitch

Send a letter to a specific editor, producer or reporter. Briefly explain your story idea and why it's important. Include relevant examples, names of possible spokespeople and photo possibilities. Call back a few days later to check on the status and offer your assistance.

### Op-eds and Letters-to-the-Editor

Op-eds and letters-to-the editor provide a forum for readers to express their views. Op-eds are guest opinion columns that appear opposite the paper's own editorials. Call the editor of the op-ed or editorial page and explain your idea briefly. Explain your library affiliation. Also ask about length—most op-eds are about 750 words. When submitting your copy, include a proposed headline to let the editor know your theme, but don't be surprised if the newspaper changes the actual headline or edits your op-ed for style or length. Send a copy of any pieces that appear to others you wish to influence such as elected officials, the college board of trustees or

school board. Some radio and TV stations will air guest opinions. Call the news or public affairs director to inquire.

### **Partnerships and Coalitions**

Recruiting other organizations with common concerns to endorse your position and publicize your cause is one of the most effective ways to communicate your message. Building a coalition of groups focused on a joint initiative can be particularly effective in gaining credibility and influence with legislators.

### **Public Service Announcements (PSAs)**

Most radio and TV stations have community calendars or public service announcements they offer free of charge to nonprofit community groups. These messages must focus on events or news of community interest. Contact information should be included.

The spots generally run around 30 seconds (75 words) but may be shorter. They are run at the discretion of the station when free air time is available, which is generally not during prime time. Your spots should be written and submitted based on the type of audience you hope to reach.—don't bother sending an announcement geared to seniors to the local rock station.

### **Radio and Television Talk Shows**

Talk shows producers are frequently looking for guest speakers. Send a letter pitching your topic and its relevance to their audience, and the qualifications of the guest you are proposing. Follow up with a phone call. Make sure your spokesperson understands and is comfortable with the needs of the broadcast media and is prepared to adapt the message for a particular audience and to answer any difficult questions.

### **Special Events and Promotions**

Special events can be designed to take the library message outside the library or to bring specific audiences, such as legislators or non-users, into the library. Activities such as an exhibit at a shopping mall, "Why I Love My Library" contest, postcard campaign or rally, provide a hook to get media attention and help educate the public. An event may be scheduled to focus attention on new Internet training for kids, celebrate an anniversary or kick off a new building or fundraising campaign. Make sure the event supports your key message and reaches one or more audiences you have targeted. Scheduling an event during Teen Read Week™ or Teen Tech Week™ can help attract media interest; doing something special may even be a news draw on its own.

# Legislative Advocacy

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**M**any issues related to public and school libraries are legislated at the state and national levels. These issues include funding and policies regarding intellectual freedom, copyright, education, Internet access, after school programs and literacy.

Legislators depend on their constituents to educate and inform them about their concerns. Your voice as well as those of your teen patrons and library supporters makes a difference.

To make your voices heard, see your state association's website for information and updates about state legislative issues which impact libraries. You'll also be able to find information on advocacy at the state and local level through the new ALA Office for Library Advocacy, [www.ala.org/ola](http://www.ala.org/ola).

To keep up with issues at the national level, visit the ALA Legislative Action Center maintained by ALA's Washington Office. You can also sign up to receive ALAWON, the electronic newsletter maintained by the Washington Office. For the latest national news, visit District Dispatch, the Washington Office's blog ([www.wo.ala.org/districtdispatch](http://www.wo.ala.org/districtdispatch)).

## *Basics of National Legislative Advocacy*

*These tips on communicating with elected officials are adapted from the American Institute of Architects' document "How To Lobby Elected Officials—A Guide for ALA Members," at [www.aia.org/SiteObjects/files/howtolobby.pdf](http://www.aia.org/SiteObjects/files/howtolobby.pdf)*

### Reasons for Getting Involved in Legislative Advocacy

1. While ALA is the official voice of libraries and librarians, individual members have a responsibility to promote the interests of the library profession and to speak on behalf of their library patrons.
2. Even though librarians are respected members of the community, the competition for the attention and time of elected officials is great, as is the competition for federal funding. Every year thousands of associations and interest groups converge on Washington, D.C. to compete for Congress' attention and federal funds. Some well-known groups like oil and tobacco can afford to pay for powerful lobbyists, but ALA is not in a position to do that. As such, we rely on our members to help ensure that the needs and interests of libraries, librarians and library users are adequately addressed by Congress.

### Keeping Track of Current Legislative Issues

1. From the ALA homepage ([www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org)) click on the "Take Action" button. This page provides you with brief information about top federal issues affecting libraries. From here, you can also find out who your elected officials are. To begin, just type in your zip code into the text box.
2. Go to [www.ala.org/washoff](http://www.ala.org/washoff). This is the homepage of ALA Washington Office. They provide information about federal legislation that affects libraries.

3. Check out the ALA Washington Office's blog, District Dispatch, at [www.wo.ala.org/districtdispatch](http://www.wo.ala.org/districtdispatch).
4. Subscribe to ALAWON. This is an announcement service that the ALA Washington Office uses to send out timely information about issues and legislation. To subscribe:
  - Go to <http://lists.ala.org>
  - Enter "ala-wo" in the Search lists box; or click view all lists, and search for [ala-wo@ala.org](mailto:ala-wo@ala.org)
  - Click [ala-wo@ala.org](mailto:ala-wo@ala.org)
  - Click Subscribe
  - Enter your email address and click Submit. A welcome message with your password will be sent to you.
5. Check the category called "Legislation" on YALSA's blog at <http://yalsa.ala.org/blog>.

## Taking Action

1. Each year the ALA Washington Office organizes a national Library Legislative Day where librarians converge on the Capitol to advocate for library issues. It is also possible to participate virtually in Library Legislative Day if you can't make the trip to DC. In 2008, Library Legislative Day was held on May 13 & 14. To learn more, visit [www.ala.org/washoff](http://www.ala.org/washoff) and click on "Events" on the left.
2. Volunteer to serve on YALSA's Legislation Committee. Learn more at [www.ala.org/yalsa](http://www.ala.org/yalsa) (click on "Governance" from the left menu).
3. Find out if your state library association has a Library Legislative Day in your state capital or if they have a legislation committee
4. Take action when ALA or YALSA send out requests via email or on YALSA's Twitter ([www.twitter.com/yalsa](http://www.twitter.com/yalsa))
5. Keep your local elected officials informed about issues that affect your library and its patrons.
6. Visit the ALA Advocacy Resource Center at [www.ala.org/issues&advocacy](http://www.ala.org/issues&advocacy). From here, you can view advocacy tools, resources and publications, learn about legislative issues, funding issues and subscribe to electronic discussion lists.

## Communicating with Elected Officials

Go to [www.congress.org](http://www.congress.org). From here you can find out who your federal, state and local officials are. To begin, type your zip code into the text box on the left.

## Getting in Touch with Members of Congress

1. By phone: use the Capitol Switchboard, 202-224-3121. From here you can get connected to the offices of your Representative in the House or Senators.
2. You can get fax, email, phone and snail mail addresses by going to [www.congress.org](http://www.congress.org).
3. Click on the "Take Action" button on the ALA homepage.
4. Communicating with Elected Officials
5. If time permits, make your communication as personal as possible. A well thought out, personal email or letter has more impact than a mass-distributed form letter.
6. Method of communication: Contact your representative's office or visit their

website and find out the best way to contact him or her to voice your opinion; phone calls and faxes are often preferable to emails or snail mail.

7. All snail mail is irradiated at a location off site, so there is often a significant lag between when you send a letter and when it is received. Additionally, the irradiation can make the letter brittle or hard to read.
8. Some officials have spam-blocking software that could prevent your message from being received. Also, some officials only allow email via an online form on their website.
9. If contacting the official by phone, do not expect to speak with him or her. Only staffers answer the phones, but do not be put off by this. Their job is to take messages and tally how many calls are received and the topic of the calls. Staff members also advise their boss, your legislator, on issues. Cultivating a good relationship with staff is good practice.
10. When communicating in writing, address the official as “The Honorable Firstname Lastname.” For example: “The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton.”
11. Always identify yourself.
12. Be concise, specific, and support your views with facts when possible.
13. Be polite and respectful.
14. Stay on message and keep to your main points.
15. Always be sure to thank them for their time.

## *Meeting With Elected Officials*

*These tips on meeting with elected officials is adapted, with permission, from the “Teacher Leader’s Network’s Tips for a Successful Meeting with Your Elected Officials,” accessed on July 26, 2006, at [www.teacherleaders.org/Resources/talkingtips.html](http://www.teacherleaders.org/Resources/talkingtips.html)*

Meeting face-to-face with elected officials can provide a very effective and valuable opportunity to voice your concerns and share your views about a legislative issue. Not surprisingly, there are a number of ways that you can make a success—or a failure—out of a meeting.

Keep in mind that you don’t necessarily need to travel far for a meeting. Congresspersons are in their home states for part of the year, and state legislators spend part of the year home in their districts. To find out when they’re available visit [www.congress.org](http://www.congress.org) or your state legislature’s website and find out what days they’re in session (when they’re not, that’s when you can schedule to visit with them locally).

### **Always Make an Appointment in Advance**

Legislators have numerous demands on their time. Call ahead to schedule an appointment, and be flexible about when you’ll meet. Keep in mind that legislators’ schedules can fill up quickly; try to give yourself as much lead time as you can.

When calling to schedule an appointment, identify yourself as a constituent and clearly state the purpose of the meeting. The following script may help as you make this call:

Hi! I’m \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_. I’ll be in (your state/capital/city) on (date), and would like to schedule an appointment to meet with (Governor/Senator/Assemblyperson or Representative \_\_\_\_\_) to discuss



proposed legislation that would impact young adults' use of technology and the Internet in schools and libraries. I would be more than happy to meet with the legislative assistant familiar with H.R. 5319 if the (elected official) is unavailable. Is someone available the afternoon of the (date of visit)? If no one is available, I would like to drop by the office to leave information for the (elected official) to review.

Important: Don't just show up to a legislator's office. Chances are you won't get to meet with the official and at best you won't have the time and attention you need to express your views. At worst, you may not be remembered the way you wanted.

## Research Your Legislator

Know his or her history, especially any positions they may have taken on the issue you wish to discuss with him/her. To research his or her voting record, position statements, ratings from special interest groups and other pertinent information, go to [www.vote-smart.org](http://www.vote-smart.org)

## Prepare a Concise Statement for Your Meeting

It's essential that you are prepared to get your point across succinctly and effectively – you won't have more than 15-20 minutes to speak with your legislator.

1. Write down key points you plan to highlight.
2. Discuss how the issue impacts the young adults with whom you work on a personal level.
3. Be familiar with opposing arguments and be prepared to defend your position with facts.
4. Include local data and anecdotes about how the people in your community are affected by the issue. (You can find great data about youth library use from YALSA's Harris Interactive poll at [www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/HarrisYouthPoll.pdf](http://www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/HarrisYouthPoll.pdf), the 2007 or the youth results of the 2007 PLDS survey distributed by the Public Library Association.)
5. Conclude by providing your elected official with a proposed solution to the issue and ask him or her to take a particular action.
6. Do not use library jargon or acronyms and be sure to define terms, such as "information literacy," that the legislator may not be familiar with. It is highly probable that the legislator has not been in a library since his or her college days. This presents a challenge for you: you'll need to paint a picture of what a modern library is like without overloading them with technical terms (e.g. subscription databases).

## Bring Written Materials with You

Leave your elected official with resources that provide quick reference or support to the points you discussed. A brief fact sheet, position papers or other resources, along with information about your organization, is helpful.



## **Be on Time and Be Flexible with Your Time**

Don't be late, even by just a few minutes—it may mean you miss your meeting entirely. If you think you may be delayed, be sure to call ahead and let them know. In addition, be flexible during your meeting. Interruptions can occur, and you may need to communicate your views while walking with your elected official to another meeting.

## **Dress Professionally**

Wear business attire to the meeting. Don't wear anything loud, such as large jewelry or a necktie with a cartoon character, that could distract the official from what you have to say. If you're unsure about an accessory or item of clothing, err on the side of caution.

## **Be Prepared to Meet with a Staff Person**

It's not uncommon for a schedule change at the last minute. Don't be disappointed if you end up meeting with a staff aide. Key staff aides are sometimes just as familiar—if not more—on policy or proposed legislation. Make the most of your time with them; they, in turn, will communicate your views to your elected official, often at the most opportune time.

## **Be professional and diplomatic**

Present your case in a straightforward, friendly, and professional manner. Never argue about an issue with your elected official—rather, show him or her respect and try to find common ground from the very start, and use that bond to express your views. If it appears you will need to “agree to disagree”, follow up with a letter explaining your views more comprehensively, thanking him or her for the meeting.

## **Listen Carefully**

Politicians tend to speak generally, avoid the issues, or go off on tangents. Try to draw out specific answers to your questions and look for topics to connect your point of view with. If the official asks you a question that you do not know the answer to, let him/her know that you will find the answer and get back to him/her.

## **Put the Issue in Human Terms**

Let your elected official know how the policy or proposed legislation will impact the young adults you serve every day. Use short but effective anecdotes to support. Help your legislator understand how this piece of legislation will affect the real people he or she represents.

## **Bring a Well-Spoken Teen or Parent**

When a teen or parent speaks about the same issues that concern you, it sends a message to the official that this issue is one that a large part of the community is concerned with, and not just something limited to librarianship.

## **Be Inclusive**

We speak on behalf of youth because we want them to have access and opportunities that will help them achieve, succeed and grow into competent caring members (and voters) of our community. This is a point where, most likely, you and your elected official can see eye-to-eye. Finding common ground, then demonstrating how this legislation is important to those efforts, respects the motivations and the emotions that drive a piece of legislation. Keep the focus on fostering an environment where young adults have the resources they need to thrive.

## **Always Have an “Ask”**

You’re not just there to inform the legislator about a particular issue. You want that person to take a certain position, vote a certain way, sponsor or support a particular bill, and the like. After you make your points about the issue, make a request of the legislator. You can sum up by saying something like:

Therefore I’m respectfully asking that you cast your vote against the proposed bill H.R. 5319

or

because teen literacy is such an important issue, I hope you will sign the letter that’s currently circulating among senators that is calling for raising the funding for the Improving Literacy Through School Libraries Program.

## **Volunteer to Serve as a Contact for This Issue in the Future**

Legislators will often call on individuals they see as knowledgeable on a specific issue or policy topic. Make them aware of your area of expertise and provide contact information so they can call on you in the future. Leave business cards with the legislator and his or her staffer.

## **Give the Official an Open Invitation to Visit Your Library**

Politicians love a photo-op, especially during an election year. What could be better press for him or her than a photo of them at your Teen Read Week celebration, helping teens with homework, giving out the summer reading award to the winning teen? Once they’re in your library, take advantage of the opportunity to educate them about library services to teens.

## **Say Thank You**

Be sure to send a thank you note promptly after your meeting. This offers another opportunity to restate your views, send any additional information or request action on the issue. If you met with a staff aide, be sure to send a separate letter to your legislator.

## **Don’t Wheel and Deal**

Never offer an elected official anything in return for their support, and never discuss campaign finances, PAC contributions or endorsements.

# *Learn More, Do More*

This guide from YALSA is just a first step. ALA has an action kit called “Stand Up and Speak Out for Libraries,” online at [www.ala.org/ala/issues/toolsandpub/actionkit/home.cfm](http://www.ala.org/ala/issues/toolsandpub/actionkit/home.cfm). Use this for more detailed information on how to reach out to your legislators, launch an advocacy campaign in your community, spread your message via the media and more.

The Office for Library Advocacy offers many tools, as well. Download the Library Advocate’s Handbook, [www.ala.org/ala/issues/2008LAH.pdf](http://www.ala.org/ala/issues/2008LAH.pdf).

The Washington Office offers free advocacy training to ALA members through an online course on talking to elected officials. Learn more at [www.ala.org/ala/washoff/gettinginvolved/onlineadvocacy/OnlineAdvocacy.cfm](http://www.ala.org/ala/washoff/gettinginvolved/onlineadvocacy/OnlineAdvocacy.cfm).

# Sample Materials

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## *Action Plan*

### **Goal (What Do You Want to Accomplish)**

Teens will have a new/bigger/better, more comfortable and welcoming place to study, read and relax at the library.

### **Objectives (Measurable Steps toward Your Goal)**

1. Develop staff awareness and support for a reallocation of space and remodeling.
2. Encourage, collect and incorporate input from teens in the planning and design.
3. Secure necessary approvals and funding.

### **Target Audiences**

Whose support will you need—both inside and outside the library?

#### **Primary Audience**

- Library Director/School Principal/School Superintendent
- Library/school staff
- Library Board/Friends/School Advisory Council/PTA
- Funding agency, e.g. city/county council, school board, foundation, community organization
- Library users

#### **Secondary Audience**

- Influentials (community leaders and groups whose opinion carries weight)
- Elected officials
- Media
- Organizations

### **Strategies and Suggested Timetable**

#### **Months 1 and 2**

1. Identify what research and other tools you will need to draft a proposal. Talk informally to your staff or faculty to get their input. They may have good ideas to

share, and if there is opposition, this is the time to begin addressing it.

2. Prepare a brief concept paper outlining your proposal, what your research shows and potential next steps.
3. Anticipate objections and prepare answers.
4. Seek a meeting with your library director/school principal to share your proposal and what you have learned, ask his/her advice and reach agreement on next steps, e.g., more research, a task force, presentation to staff or board, etc.

### **Months 3 and 4**

1. Gather additional research to support your case.
2. If you haven't done so already, form a teen advisory group to give input and assist with planning and give their endorsement.
3. Seek testimonials and statements of support from staff, parents and users.
4. Prepare a more detailed proposal outlining your goal, the need, research and strategies for achieving it.
5. Develop a message sheet to help you and others deliver a meaningful and consistent message. (See Message Sheet)
6. Present the report to your director/principal for feedback. If you are the library director, share it with your staff and board.

### **Months 5 and 6**

1. Seek to resolve any issues or concerns that have been raised about the need or feasibility of the project.
2. Research funding needs and potential funding strategies, e.g. reallocation of funds, special allocation, referendum, private fundraising and grants.
3. Submit final plan with a proposed budget and funding strategy for approval.
4. Update your message sheet and update your action plan with strategies for sharing the good news once the plan is approved, e.g. news release, letter to youth serving agencies, web or blog postings, library newsletter.
5. Be prepared to address questions—both easy and hard—from the media. Know your message. Have copies of the proposal or an outline of the proposal and supporting research available.

### **Months 7 and 8**

1. Develop an action plan for the next phase of the project, whether that be hiring a designer, conducting a referendum or private fundraising—or revising and continuing to advocate for your cause.

### **Evaluation**

1. Take time to review what worked and what didn't. What did you learn? What will you do different next time?

# *Message Sheet*

**Key message** (What is the most important thing you want to communicate in 10 words or less?):

**Talking points** (supporting messages, usually 3):

**Statistics/Stories:**

**Call to Action:**

# *Talking Points*

Here are some sample messages to inspire you in developing your own key message and talking points.

## **Why Teens?**

- Teens are an important part of our community. The library has a responsibility to address their needs.
- Teens aren't children and they aren't adults. They have unique needs and interests.
- Teens need adult guides who like, understand and respect them.
- Many teens rely on school and public libraries for computers and Internet access.

## **Why the Library?**

- Investing in YA services isn't just good for teens; it's good for the library.
- Teens are our future—future voters, taxpayers, parents and users.
- Libraries offer more resources and recreation opportunities than bookstores—and they're not trying to make a profit.
- Keeping teens safe and engaged during out-of-school hours is a major community issue. The library is part of the solution.

## **Why YA Services?**

- Teens need free access to books, the Internet and other resources that reflect a wide range of topics and opinions
- Teens turn to the library for more than information. They attend programs, volunteer, play games and meet friends.
- Almost every library has children's and adult specialists. Teens have special needs and should have a staff person dedicated to serving them. YA specialists understand teens, needs and interests. They are expert in evaluating, selecting and recommending books and other resources.

## **Why School Libraries**

- For many students, the school library is their first and only library.
- School library media programs contribute to student achievement.
- The school library touches every student and supports every teacher and curriculum area.
- School library media specialists teach 21<sup>st</sup> century information skills that will help students learn and achieve throughout their lives.

## *Advocacy Statement*

This statement by the Berkeley County (W.V.) media specialists has a strong key message—“Our school libraries are central to every child’s education in Berkeley County.” It is supported by talking points, facts and examples and concludes with a call to action.

Presented at the Berkeley County Board of Education Public Forum, November 5, 2007.

Speaking for many of our school library media specialists, we appreciate any efforts to improve and maintain reading opportunities for children.

Our school libraries are central to every child’s education in Berkeley County. We support not only the reading curriculum, but every subject area by providing books and resources on all topics of sciences, social studies, languages, mathematics, and literature. We supply the books and resources for 16,000 students in 28 libraries as they want and need materials for research, information and enjoyment. Every single day of the school year, thousands of students are visiting a Berkeley County School Library.

Research has shown that students who have access to a well stocked, maintained school library, administered by a certified library media specialist have higher standardized test scores than those who do not. For many of our students, the school library is the first and only library in their life.

With the cost of books, databases, periodicals, and audiovisual materials rising every year, it is challenging to maintain an excellent school library on our limited funds. Currently, there are no dedicated funds from the Berkeley County Schools budget for school libraries. Some of our school library media specialists are fortunate to work with principals who are supportive of library media programs and provide some funding from their instructional budget. However, there are many who struggle to maintain a quality program on little or no budgeted monies. Within our schools we fund our own library programs by holding fundraisers such as Book Fairs, selling candy bars, cutting box tops and saving soup labels. We strive to provide our students and faculty with current books and resources.

It is our sincere desire that in the future, monies will be made available on a per pupil basis as a minimum for our school libraries.



## *Letter to a Partner*

(You can send something similar to a school official, president of the Rotary, owner of a local restaurant, or another community partner):

What a pleasure and satisfaction it's been to work with you on our Poetry Slam for teens! It has been a wonderful project thanks to you and many others. The program is unique in providing a free activity that promotes literacy and is fun for kids. Attendance has grown consistently over the last three years, and there has been great feedback from kids and teachers.

Unfortunately, the Poetry Slam is in jeopardy because of proposed funding cuts to our library. If the cuts are enacted, the library will no longer be able to stay open on Friday evenings, and teens will lose the space and assistance provided by library staff. There will be other cuts as well

The city council will discuss the library's budget at its next meeting on Wednesday, March 6. I hope you and your organization will want to attend or contact the mayor and your city council representative to let them know how important this program is to teens and our community.

Thank you again for your past support. We look forward to working with you in the future.

# Resources

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## *Facts at Your Fingertips*

### Teen & Libraries

These statistics come from a study conducted in June 2007 by Harris Interactive for the American Library Association.

- Four out of five youth (78%) have a public library card.
- Four out of five (81%) have visited a public library/a public library website in the last year.
- Older youth (16-18) are slightly less likely to have visited the library in the past year. (22%)
- About half (42 percent) say they visited *both* a public and school library and/or used their websites.
- A third of students ages 13-18 say they would use the library more if the computers weren't blocked.
- More than half (57%) visited the public library or its website once a month or more in the last year. Why they used it:
  1. To borrow books/materials for personal use—78%
  2. To borrow books/materials for school assignments—67%
  3. To read books there—34%
  4. To use the website for information and research 34%
  5. To study there—26%
  6. To use the computers for fun—25%
  7. For events—20%
  8. To hang out with friends—18%
- They would use their public library more if...
  1. It was closer to where they live—38%
  2. There were more interesting materials to borrow—32%
  3. There were more activities and events—32%
  4. It was open more hours—31%
  5. There was a space just for teens—26%
  6. The library had a comfortable, welcoming atmosphere—22%
  7. The library computers didn't block information I need—20%
  8. There was a librarian just for teens—20%
  9. They had more online resources—19%

- More than two-thirds (78%) visited the school library or its website once a month or more in the past year. Why they used it:
  1. To borrow books/materials for school assignments—75%
  2. To borrow books/materials for personal use—60%
  3. To use the library website for information and research—46%
  4. To study—42%
  5. To read books—38%
  6. To use the computers for fun—26%
  7. To hang out with friends—21%
  8. For events—17%
- They would use the school library more if...
  1. There were more interesting materials to borrow—33%
  2. The library computers didn't block information I need—25%
  3. There were more activities and events—22%
  4. The library had a comfortable, welcoming atmosphere—21%
  5. It was open more hours—21%
  6. They had more online resources—18%
  7. There was a space just for teens—15%
  8. It was closer to where I live—14%
  9. There was a librarian just for teens—12%

*(Source: ALA Youth and Library Use Study Topline Harris Interactive Inc., June 2007. Sample size: 1,262 youth ages 8-18, 74 % =ages 11-18)*

Participation in library programs for kids under 18 has been rising steadily from 35.5 million a year in 1993 to more than 51.8, million in 2001. (Public Libraries in the United States, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003)

## At School

- Studies in 14 states confirm that academic achievement tends to be higher in schools where library media programs are better staffed, better stocked and better funded. (Source: Scholastic Library Publishing, *School Libraries Work!*, 2004)
- Research shows a direct link between higher reading scores and collaboration between school library media specialists and teachers. (Source: "What Research Tells Us About the Importance of School Libraries," Keith Curry Lance, White House Conference on School Libraries, Institute of Museum and Library Services, June 2002, [www.ims.gov/pubs/whitehouse0602/keithlance.htm](http://www.ims.gov/pubs/whitehouse0602/keithlance.htm).)
- The highest achieving students come from schools with good library media centers. (Source: Keith Curry Lance, Marcia J. Rodney and Christine Hamilton-Pennell, *How School Librarians Help Kids Achieve Standards*, 2000.)
- Libraries are at the heart of the learning experience for almost 44 million elementary, middle and high school students in schools with library media centers. (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *The Status of Public and Private School Library Media Centers in the United States: 1999-2000*, March 2004)
- Americans spend nine times as much on video games and entertainment software (\$7.3 billion in 2004) as they do on books and materials for school library media

centers (\$771.2 million in 2004). (Entertainment Software Association, "Sales & Genre Data," [www.theesa.com/facts/sales\\_genre\\_data.php](http://www.theesa.com/facts/sales_genre_data.php). Book Industry Study Group, Inc., Book Industry Trends 2005, 2005)

## Teens Online

- 87 percent of kids ages 12-17 or some 21 million use the Internet—up from 17 million in 2000.
- 11 million go online daily compared to 7 million in 2000.
- Teens from the lowest income families are least likely to use the Internet.
- Half of the teens online (54%) say they use the Internet at the library—up from 36 percent in 2000.
- One in five online teens keeps a blog and 38 percent read them.

*(Source: Teens and the Internet: Findings to the House Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet, Pew Internet & American Life Project, July 2006, Amanda Lenhart, Mary Madden, Lee Rainie: <http://pewinternet.org/ppt/Pew%20Internet%20findings%20-%20teens%20and%20the%20internet%20-%20final.pdf>)*

## After school

- Three-quarters of Americans believe it is a high priority for local public libraries to offer a safe place where teenagers can study and congregate. (Long Overdue: a Fresh Look at Public and Leadership Attitudes About Libraries in the 21st Century, Public Agenda, June 2006)
- Seventy percent of voters want Congress to increase funding for after school programs. (Afterschool Report, Poll Report, The Afterschool Alliance: A Report on Findings of the 2002 Nationwide Poll of Registered Voters on Afterschool Programs, No. 5, November 2002: [www.afterschoolalliance.org/school\\_poll\\_final\\_2002.pdf](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/school_poll_final_2002.pdf))
- The afterschool hours between 3 and 6 p.m. are when juveniles are mostly likely either to commit crimes or be victims. (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2002)
- 14.3 million kindergarteners through 12th graders take care of themselves after school every day. Older children are more likely to be unsupervised with 34 percent of 6-8th graders and 51 percent of 9-12th graders left home alone.
- African American and Hispanic youth spend more time unsupervised than other children.

*(Source: America After 3 p.m.: A Household Survey on Afterschool in America, Afterschool Alliance, 2004. [www.afterschoolalliance.org](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org))*

# *Advocacy Resources*

The following resources are suggested to help you build support for young adult services.

## **Online**

### **Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA)**

[www.ala.org/yalsa](http://www.ala.org/yalsa)

The world's premiere organization for young adult librarians and the fastest growing division of ALA. Its mission is to advocate, promote and strengthen service to young adults.

### **ALA Office for Library Advocacy**

[www.ala.org/ola](http://www.ala.org/ola)

The office for Library Advocacy (OLA) supports the efforts of advocates seeking to improve libraries of all types by developing resources, a peer-to-peer advocacy network, and training for advocates at the local, state and national level.

### ***Activate Your Teens to Advocate for Libraries***

<http://pdfs.voya.com/JuneV/JuneView.pdf>

A look at YA advocacy past, present and future. VOYA, June 2003, p. 93.

### **Advocacy Talking Points from YALSA**

[www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/talkingpoints\\_advocacy0407.pdf](http://www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/talkingpoints_advocacy0407.pdf)

Helpful background for talking about library services to teens and key legislative issues.

### **Afterschool Alliance**

[www.afterschoolalliance.org](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org)

The premiere advocacy organization for afterschool programs provides extensive resources, including the latest research, success stories and guidance on organizing youth programs.

### **ALA Advocacy Resource Center**

[www.ala.org/issues&advocacy](http://www.ala.org/issues&advocacy)

Extensive resources on all aspects of advocacy, including an *Advocacy Action Kit*, the *Library Advocate's Handbook*, a *Media Relations Toolkit* and much more.

### **ALA Graphics**

[www.alastore.ala.org](http://www.alastore.ala.org)

Find colorful, posters, bookmarks, t-shirts, coffee mugs, pins and other gift items to help reinforce your message. Also see the *ALA Graphics Catalog*. To order, call 800-545-2433, press 7.

### **ALA Legislative Action Center**

[www.ala.org/takeaction](http://www.ala.org/takeaction)

Check out this comprehensive website for updates on current library and information issues, action alerts, contact information and links to members of Congress.

### **ALA Office for Research and Statistics**

[www.ala.org/ors](http://www.ala.org/ors)

Check here for national research and statistics to help build your case.

**Campaign for America's Libraries @ your library®**

[www.ala.org/@yourlibrary](http://www.ala.org/@yourlibrary)

Messages, ideas and strategies for promoting use and support of school library media programs.

**“Helping Youth Succeed Through Out-of-School Time Programs”**

[www.aypf.org/publications/HelpingYouthOST2006.pdf](http://www.aypf.org/publications/HelpingYouthOST2006.pdf)

An excellent introduction to the OST movement from the American Youth Policy Forum. January 2006.

**Ilovelibraries.org**

[www.ilovelibraries.org](http://www.ilovelibraries.org)

Designed for the public, this website encourages library advocacy and makes it easy to support all types of libraries. Users are invited to share their stories and advocate to members of Congress.

**Intellectual Freedom for Young People**

[www.ala.org/ala/oif/foryoungpeople/youngpeople.cfm](http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/foryoungpeople/youngpeople.cfm)

Guidance and resources for advocating intellectual freedom for youth from the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom.

**Library Advocacy Discussion List**

Share ideas updates and stories about library advocacy via the Library Advocacy Now! electronic discussion list. To subscribe, go to <http://lists.ala.org>. Click on Login. (First-time users will need to get a password.) Click on ALADNOW and then Subscribe.

**Library Research Service**

[www.lrs.org](http://www.lrs.org)

Check here for studies and research to help build your case.

**Libraries & Out-of-School Time Programs:** [www.urbanlibraries.org/lil\\_ostfaq.html](http://www.urbanlibraries.org/lil_ostfaq.html)

Learn more about the need and opportunities for libraries to get involved in the OST movement.

**Libraries Reach Out to Teens**

[www.connectforkids.org/node/3008](http://www.connectforkids.org/node/3008)

A summary of the report “New on the Shelf”, which discusses the impact of youth development programs in nine library systems.

**New on the Shelf: Teens in the Library: Findings from the Evaluation of Public Libraries as Partners in Youth Development**

[www.chapinhall.org/article\\_abstract.aspx?ar=1380&L2=60&L3=0](http://www.chapinhall.org/article_abstract.aspx?ar=1380&L2=60&L3=0)

A look at how public libraries can reach out to teens and connect libraries more closely to their communities. Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, 2005.

**Perceptions of Libraries and Information Sources:**

[www.oclc.org/reports/default.htm](http://www.oclc.org/reports/default.htm)

OCLC, 2005. What do people really think about libraries? The study includes views of young people ages 14-17.

***Say the Right Thing: Winning Strategies for Talking to the Press***

[www.schoollibraryjournal.com/index.asp?layout=articlePrint&articleID=CA152999](http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/index.asp?layout=articlePrint&articleID=CA152999)

Article from School Library Journal that offers guidance on talking to the press.

***Services and Resources for Children and Young Adults in Public Libraries:***

<http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/frss/publications/95357/index.asp?sectionID=4>

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Sept. 1995. Provides general information about public libraries and staffing for youth services.

***Washington Newsline (ALAWON)***

Online newsletter from the ALA Washington Office with timely updates and action alerts on federal legislation and policies regarding libraries and information issues. To subscribe, go to <http://lists.ala.org>. Click on Login. (First-time users will need to get a password.) Click on ALAWON and then Subscribe.)

**YALSA Legislative Guide for Members**

[www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/profdev/LegAdvocacyGuide.pdf](http://www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/profdev/LegAdvocacyGuide.pdf)

Advice on when, where and how to contact your public officials.

## In Print

**“Advocating for Teens’ Technological Needs: Q & A with Stephen Abram.”**

*Young Adult Library Services*, v. 4 no. 4 (Summer 2006): 35-7.

Abram, vice president of innovation for SirsiDynix, discusses the best ways to advocate and serve our teen library customers.

**ALA Editions**

[www.ala.org/ala/ourassociation/publishing/alaeditions/editions.htm](http://www.ala.org/ala/ourassociation/publishing/alaeditions/editions.htm)

Check here for many helpful titles regarding planning, delivering and promoting YA services.

**“Moving on Up,”** Suellentrop, Tricia

*School Library Journal*, v. 53 no. 4 (April 2007): 32.

Moving into a managerial position may be the best way to advocate for teens. This article explains how and why.

**“Letting Go,”** Suellentrop, Tricia

*School Library Journal*, v. 52 no. 5 (May 2006): 39.

Tips for librarians on how to give teens more power and control over their library, including how to build an informed army of teen advocates.

***Libraries Prosper with Passion, Purpose, and Persuasion: A PLA Toolkit for Success***

Public Library Association, 2007. \$100.

This interactive guide (with CD-Rom) will walk you through planning an advocacy campaign.

Includes worksheets, sample materials and templates. Order from the ALA store: [www.alastore.ala.org/](http://www.alastore.ala.org/)

**“Standing Room Only: Want to Get Teens Excited about the Library? Just Surrender Some Control,”** Tuccillo, Diane

*School Library Journal* 53.3 (March 2007): p46 (3)

Advice on how to engage teens.

**“What Do Young Adults Want in Their School Library?”** Higgins, Wanda  
Book Report, v. 8 no. 2 (Sept./Oct. 1999): 25-7  
Suggestions for school (and public) libraries based on a student survey.

**“YALSA’s Advocacy Task Force,”** Welch, Rollie  
*Young Adult Library Services*, v. 5 no. 1 (Fall 2006): 4-5  
YALSA’s new Advocacy Task Force steps up to the plate.

**“YALSA @ your library®,”** Ma’Lis Wendt and Ian Rosenoir  
*Young Adult Library Services*, v.6, no. 3 (Spring 2009): 10–12  
YALSA’s @ your library® campaign takes flight

## Institutes & Training

Advocacy workshops are available to local, regional and state library groups at no or minimal cost (for travel). Topics can be structured to focus on areas of concern. Contact the Office for Library Advocacy at [advocacy@ala.org](mailto:advocacy@ala.org).

## More from YALSA . . .

### **YALSA White Papers**

[www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/profdev/whitepapers/whitepapers.cfm](http://www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/profdev/whitepapers/whitepapers.cfm)  
Position papers from YALSA, advocating for important issues in serving teens

### **Blog**

<http://yalsa.ala.org/blog>  
Get news and updates from YALSA. Exchange ideas with other YA specialists.

### **Professional Development Center**

[www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/profdev/professionaldevelopment.cfm](http://www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/profdev/professionaldevelopment.cfm)  
Information on social networking, advocacy, competencies, programming and much more.

### **YALSA Electronic Discussion Lists**

<http://lists.ala.org> (click “Young Adult Library Services Association”)  
YALSA’s discussion lists offer a place for YA specialists to talk about a variety of topics that affect them, from literature to

### **Social Networking Guide**

[www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/profdev/socialnetworking.cfm](http://www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/profdev/socialnetworking.cfm)  
Resources to help educate your community about online social networking technologies and the importance of free access.

### **YALSA Wiki**

<http://wikis.ala.org/yalsa>  
Everything you want to know or should know about YALSA and library services to teens.



***YALS: Young Adult Library Services***

[www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/yalsapubs/yals/youngadulibrary.cfm](http://www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/yalsapubs/yals/youngadulibrary.cfm)

The official journal of YALSA focuses on issues of concern to those working with teens. Sent to all members and available by subscription. Quarterly.

***Young Adults Deserve the Best: Competencies for Librarians Serving Youth***

[www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/profdev/youngadultsdeserve.cfm](http://www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/profdev/youngadultsdeserve.cfm)

What it takes to deliver the best service—skills and knowledge in seven key areas.

# Case Studies

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## *Advice from a YA Librarian Turned Director*

**A**s a part-time Reference/Children's Librarian at the public library in Stratford, Conn., Barbara Blossveren observed that there was little in the way of collections or services for the 7th and 8th graders who came in daily after school. She volunteered to put together a YA collection and soon established herself as the library's "go to" person on matters related to teens. Blossveren was eventually named department head for YA Services.

Today the library's Young Adult Services Department has a department head and two full-time youth librarians with a budget proportionate to the number of young adults in the community (12%). Blossveren was named library director in January 2007.

### *How important is it that libraries have a department dedicated to serving teens?*

Very. It brought me to the table with other managers. It made a statement that the teen department and teenagers have equal standing with children and adult services. Perception is extremely important.

### *Now that you are a director, do you have any insights into how other directors feel about YA services?*

Traditionally, it has not been on a director's radar. Directors do not usually bring a youth services background to their administration. It is not that they're negative; it's just not been their professional experience. Directors need to be made aware of the importance of service to teens. We also need more directors who come from a youth services background and bring a knowledge and appreciation for its importance.

### *How did you build your program?*

Nothing succeeds like success! I gathered local support by going to the public and parochial schools, working with school media specialists, getting press coverage, and recruiting teens to help at the library Book Sale and other community events. As circulation statistics and program attendance rose, the need for more dollars became apparent. I spoke at local, state, and national conferences, published articles and served on local agency boards serving teens. I also became active in YALSA and Connecticut Library Association Young Adult Section.

### *What do you see as the biggest issue in advocating teen services?*

We'd all like to have more dollars for programs and services for teens, and there is much competition. Being tenacious and flexible is essential. Finding out exactly what teens are interested in (by asking them!) and then meeting these needs is critical to our success.

### *Have you had had success recruiting others to help advocate, e.g. teens, youth agencies, parents?*

Teens and parents speak at Town Council budget hearings and write letters of support. A teen serves on our board of trustees and keeps the board informed of teen services at the library.

*What advice would you give others seeking support for YA services?*

- Always advocate that there IS space, staff, budget, etc. It is merely a matter of how that pie is divided. A space can always be found—we moved the biographies! A librarian on staff can have part of his/her work time devoted to YA services. The materials and program budgets can be divided among all three constituents—adults, teens and children.
- Work closely with schools. Build good relationships. We have a liaison with the district’s library media program on our library board, and we go to the school media specialists’ meetings. We cosponsor many programs. It’s win-win for them and us.
- Join YALSA. Speak with YALSA trainers. There are numerous materials in print and online, which give excellent strategies for developing services to teens, and many librarians who can share their stories and speak to trustees, local boards and others who need to hear the message.

## *Educating the Educators*

### **Advice from a School Library Media Specialist**

**L**ucy Hansen sees advocacy as much a part of her job as organizing and directing the Biblioteca Las Américas, winner of a 2006 National School Library Media Program of the Year Award sponsored by the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) and the Follett Corporation.

Hansen is lead librarian for the South Texas Intermediate School District, which serves four high schools in the lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. Whether seeking support for a new building, more staff or adding digital cameras, Hansen says her approach to advocacy is the same.

“You just can’t be quiet and hope that someone will give it to you. You have to ask for the meeting, get the support of the principal or superintendent and let him/her know what you can do with additional funding.”

Hansen stepped up her efforts about 12 years ago when she began advocating for a new, state-of-the art library media center. The library opened in 1998, but she has not relaxed her efforts. Consistent advocacy by staff and students has allowed the media center to expand its programs and receive continued support.

Her advice:

1. Make advocacy a priority. “It’s not complex. It just takes energy. It’s easy to get stuck in the daily minutia.” Paying student assistants has been helpful both for her library and the students, who are mostly from low-income families.
2. Seek to be on your school or district’s leadership team. It took Hansen two years of “asking and giving reasons” before she was appointed to the district leadership team.
3. Gather data. In advocating for a new building, Hansen provided background papers and checklists comparing the library to state and national standards,

everything from square feet and staffing to hours and technology. She also showed them what today's school library media center can be and the benefits to faculty and students. "It's about educating the educators."

4. Attend school board meetings. The school board meets at district libraries, making it easy to meet and greet members over coffee. Hansen makes presentations at least once a year to show how the library is making a difference.
5. Have a set time when you can advocate. Hansen meets with all four district high school principals weekly. She says she prepares carefully and focuses on the positive. "I don't want them to think 'Oh no' when they see me coming."
6. "Get people into the library and yourself out." She makes a point of inviting the principal to library programs, also to collaborative teaching sessions and student presentations that she feels are exceptional. The principals, assistant principals and superintendent are invited for birthday cake and to the staff holiday dinner, which has an ethnic theme, such as Cuban or Italian.
7. Give faculty, students and parents a voice. Create an advisory group. Hansen also conducts a yearly survey of teachers and has conducted surveys and focus groups with students. She said "dot" voting was popular with students, who participated by placing colored dots on poster-sized sheets with the library's priorities.
8. Document and report. "We track everything...circulation, class visits, laptops checked out, digital camera use." In addition to meetings and presentations, the Biblioteca publishes an annual report highlighting its activities. Library staff also works with the district's marketing director to place stories in parent newsletters and local media.
9. Seek teacher buy-in. Showing that teachers see the potential and are already on board can strengthen your case for funding. Hansen communicates regularly with faculty by attending department meetings and through email. The Biblioteca hosts a special breakfast for faculty during National Library Week.
10. Don't be afraid to sell your services. If there's no class signed up for the library, librarians will contact teachers, ask them what they are working on and tell them how the library could help. "It's a shameless sales pitch."
11. Have a great website. Hansen said teachers use the Biblioteca's website as their home page.
12. Remember, people are more important than technology. "It's when you help people...the little things...that you gain trust and support."

## *Speaking Up for School Libraries*

**C**indy Woods believes in the power of advocacy. Woods is media specialist at Spring Mills Middle School in Martinsburg, W.V., a middle class suburb about 90 miles from Washington, D.C.

It's no accident that her library is well supported.

"It's well funded because I've made clear what it takes to run the library," Woods explains. The first year I worked with my administrator, I itemized a budget of what funding was needed. I think he appreciates my input."

She also makes a point of keeping her principal, teachers and parents informed about the library's activities throughout the school year via newsletters, email, visits and the library's website.

"Most times our parents, teachers, school boards don't have a clue what we do every day and how many great things are going on in school libraries. It's because we're so busy 'doing' that our last priority is tooting our own horns."

Recently Woods (with her principal's knowledge) has been speaking up for school libraries in her county that are not well supported. She and a cohort of colleagues took their case for equitable funding of school libraries to the Berkeley County Board of Education.

The results: the board members requested—for the first time—that all principals submit budget plans showing their allocation to school librarians. The county's Department of Instruction also requested a collection analysis of all school libraries.

While the final outcome is not known, Woods is optimistic that the group's advocacy has already made a difference.

"Before we grumbled among ourselves, but we never took any action. Now they'll be able to see which schools need help. It will be in hard copy form, so it won't be just us saying we need money."

For Woods, advocacy boils down to two things: Making your needs and wants known, and staying positive. She adds that it should start with building administrators.

"They don't know what books cost or what resources you need to support the curriculum in your school. How will they know what to give if you haven't asked? If you grumble and complain, you're not going to get what you want. You need to point out all the good things in your library program."

## *When Words Aren't Enough*

**T**he Maplewood (N.J.) Memorial Library made national news when its board voted to close the library between the hours of 2:45 and 5.

The reason: An escalating pattern of disruptive—and sometimes destructive—behavior by students from a nearby middle school who inundated the library each day after school.

The board made its decision after the library had made extensive efforts to improve its programs and services for young adults and after some 10 years of discussion with community officials failed to yield a solution.

In reality, the library never did close. The mayor called an emergency meeting, and resources were found to establish a recreation center at the middle school, to hire a full-time young adult librarian and explore a better space with more computers for teens at the library. With these concessions on the table, the board agreed to rescind its decision to close the library. Library Director Jane Kennedy offers the following insights.

### *Why do you think your local officials were unresponsive for so long?*

Nobody knew what to do. It was a problem with no easy solution. It was easier to blow it off.

### *What kind of reaction did you get from the Township Council after the board's decision?*

The mayor seemed quite taken aback. He shouldn't have been. We had told him numerous times that it was a possibility. I don't think he thought the board had the gumption to do it. Finally, after the bad publicity, he called an emergency meeting of the library board.

***What kind of response did you get from the community?***

We got a lot of support from other librarians and the public. But we also got our share of intense criticism. It was an emotional issue. People said the parents are responsible, but you can't legislate good parenting. Twenty years ago, you called a parent and they'd come bring the kid home. Now there's no parent at home. Parents are working two and three jobs. We got the least support from the parents of the kids involved. They said we were picking on their children.

***What was the library's message?***

The message was "This is for the kids and the library. The library needs to function as a library for the entire community. The kids need a place to go. They need other activities after school." The board felt it was a community issue and the community needed to solve it.

***Did anything surprise you?***

The board (and I) anticipated that there would be press about the decision and that it would most likely be negative. We discussed that at length, but decided that our need to address the situation was more important than what the press may or may not say. What was surprising was the intensity. We are very close to New York City and have a number of news media professionals living here. Knowing it and experiencing it are two different things. The newspapers sensationalized it. The news crews from TV and radio were intrusive when they came to the library. They were also relentless in their pursuit of a good story. They did not always get the facts straight.

***Do you have any tips for dealing with the media?***

The only tip I have is to have one spokesperson and refer all reporters to him or her. Also, we tried to stick to the message in the board statement. That is not easy because they will try to get you to go off message and into another direction. Eventually you are knocked off the front page by something else and things go back to normal.

***What advice would you give other libraries about advocacy in general?***

Don't make a threat you don't intend to carry out. Other than that, keep talking, keep meeting. We only had one card. That was changing our hours, and we played it. Some people thought the board was "crying wolf" just to get attention, but we were fully prepared to carry out the closing. It would have forced people who were using the library as day care to find other solutions, and it would have broken the sheer habit the kids had of just going to the library because there was nowhere else to go.

***How would you describe the library's relationship with the Township Council now?***

All things considered, it's pretty good. I think the mayor realized he should have been talking (and listening) to the board more. He's now coming to board meetings. There were some hard feelings but no finger pointing. The council and mayor did realize the library had been trying to tell them for years how bad it was. I think there might even be some respect for the board that they made this controversial and difficult decision for what they thought was the "greater good."

## *The Story Behind the Story*

**T**he Maplewood (N.J.) Memorial Library made national news when its board voted to close the library between the hours of 2:45 and 5.

The reason: An escalating pattern of disruptive—and sometimes destructive—behavior by students from a nearby middle school who inundated the library each day after school.

The board made its decision after some 10 years of discussion with community officials failed to find a solution, and after the library had exhausted all other options within its means.

A Teen Advisory Group was started four years ago. A children's librarian was designated a part-time young adult librarian; afterschool monitors were hired, and afterschool programming begun. Behavior policies and procedures were carefully crafted. Staff was given special training both in adolescent behavior and security measures.

Two years ago, the library hired a consultant to conduct focus groups with teens. The results, reported to township officials, were not surprising, says Kennedy.

"The kids wanted a recreation center, a place to hang out with their friends, relax, have fun. We were getting kids who didn't particularly want to be here but there was no place for them go. We were the de facto recreation center."

Library staff worked with school, township, police and recreation officials to explore solutions, but were stymied by a lack of resources. The mayor appointed a youth task force, but after a year little progress. Meanwhile, the situation at the library continued to worsen, and generating complaints both from patrons and staff.

In reality, the library never did close. An emergency meeting was held and resources were found to establish a recreation center at the middle school. The mayor also agreed to provide the library with additional support, including funds for 10 computers. With these concessions on the table, the board agreed to rescind its decision to close the library.

The library now has security guards instead of monitors and a full-time young adult librarian. It has hired a consultant to make recommendations about a separate YA area. The staff had a refresher session on how to deal with kids. Some 120 kids have signed up to go to the Hub (the new afterschool program at the middle school) and on any given day, about 60 kids attend.

Says Kennedy: "These are the same kids that were wondering aimlessly in the library. We had said all along they need a place to go after school. The community solved the problem, but it took a rather drastic step to get them to come up with the resources to do so."

## *The Teen Perspective*

**F**ranklin Eneh, a sophomore at Bunnell High School, in Stratford, Conn., is the first teen to serve on the board of the Stratford Library Association. While he does not have voting rights, Franklin is encouraged to express his opinion. He cites lowering fines for teens as a major accomplishment during his first year.

The son of Nigerian immigrants, Franklin's library use increased greatly when the family moved to Stratford about five years ago. He says the Stratford library has staff who make him feel welcome and many materials and programs of interest to him. He is active in the library's Creative Writing Group for teens and as a volunteer.

Franklin takes his role as library advocate seriously. He has testified twice at Town Council meetings about the importance of the library, especially for teens. He also encourages other teens to take advantage of its collections and programs.

*Why do you think it's important for communities to support library services to teens?*

We are the future of our town. Having the library promote programs and events for teens shows the entire community that there are places for teens to go and get help. There's a lot of negative publicity about the younger audience. The library tries to provide programs that will help adults

and teens learn from and understand each other.

***Why do you think library services are important to teens?***

Having a department for teens is just as important as having a children's department. There's a big distance between being a child and an adult. Where I lived before, the library did not have a teen department. It was hard to figure out where I fit in. At the Stratford library, there are displays of books on drugs, alcohol, sex, and physical abuse—topics that kids are facing today. It's important to have programs that teens can attend and feel comfortable going to.

***Do you encourage other teens to use the library? What do you say?***

A lot of my friends ask me about where they can get a book or what programs are happening. They know I know what's going on. A lot of kids are afraid of fines. I tell them they're willing to negotiate fines for volunteer service. I always bring up the programs, especially the Creative Writing Group. Having fun should always be part of learning. The collections are always advanced with books and movies and CDs. Some of my friends think they have to go to Blockbuster. And I tell them it's right there at the library for free.

***Not all libraries have teen services as great as yours, what would you say to them?***

A lot of librarians think they know what teens want, and that doesn't work. You have to show interest in getting their opinion. You have to go into the community, see what teens are doing, and ask them what programs might bring more kids into the library.

***What do you think is the most important thing that libraries provide to teens?***

Comfort. When I go to the library, I don't feel like I have to surpass or meet a certain standard. I just have to be myself. When it comes to using computers or the catalog, the librarians are there to help when we have questions.

***Are there things libraries do that turn off kids?***

Before I came to the Stratford library, it was hard for me to ask librarians questions because I thought they weren't interested. Now I understand that it's hard for them to relate to teens as it is for us to relate to them. There's a big difference culture wise.

***What advice would you give librarians?***

They need to work harder at reaching out to teens but stay true to who they are. Some people try too hard. That can also lose people. Don't condescend. Offer to teach them so they don't have to ask as many questions.

***Would you encourage other teens to serve on their library boards?***

I would encourage kids who are active in the library to get involved. You don't have to be an honor roll student. If you are committed to what you do in the library; you are a person who deserves to be a teen representative.

## ***Success!***

**R**emember, advocacy is only a means to the end. Here's what success looks like and some thoughts on what it takes.

"This past summer the Glendale Public Library featured an iPod Mini as the grand prize for the Teen Summer Reading Program. The number of books read was 150% higher than 2004



(the first year of Teen SRP). The raffle winner for the iPod hadn't been a library user since his early elementary school days. Determined to win the iPod, he read 115 books over 7 weeks. Additionally he has been very active in library programming and even got a job here as a homework helper. In his interview for the job he commented that although he won an iPod, now he uses the library more than he uses the iPod."

—*Bridgid Fennell, Teen & Reference Librarian, Glendale (CA) Public Library*

"Is a YA area important? You betcha! Our area has grown from 55 YA books in 2002 to over 600 items today and the books get read and the kids who are middle and high schoolers aren't troublemakers! That was one complaint I heard right before we opened our area: Be careful for what you wish for...you'll get riff-raff and trouble and the section will be ruined. Boy, I'm glad I didn't back down and listen to that! We actually have more trouble with noise from moms with new babies than we do from our YAs.

When we have programs at our library the kids say "Thank You" at the end of the night and they really mean it. I'm not saying we never have issues with YAs, but with the huge growth in YA materials, how can you ignore this segment of your community? Don't forget that these are our voters of tomorrow."

—*Kate Van Auken, Director, Rawson Memorial Library, Cass City, MI*

"One of our young adults has been an avid library user since childhood. Because of her familiarity, I asked to include her on our Long Range Planning Committee. She came out of that process wanting to increase teen involvement in the library. Her idea was an anime/manga club, which would partner with the high school. The result is the Samurai Animanga Club.

The Samurai's meet once per month after school in the high school media center and once per month at the Homewood Public Library. The high school meeting focuses on education: we talk about an aspect of a culture that produces some of the hottest manga and anime. Then, at the public library meeting, we watch anime that deals with the same aspect of the culture: for Go we watched Hikaru No Go. At our first meeting we had seven or eight teens. By our last full meeting we had more than tripled that number.

The "Samurai Effect" on our circulation and attendance was immediate and continues to grow. Teens who never came to the public library are coming to the animanga club, as well as other programs, and checking out lots of manga. Our manga collection has grown to over 800 volumes—many of which were suggested by teens. In addition, we are planning more high school/public library partnerships for the next year.

None of this would have come about if I had not listened to (and seriously considered) ONE teenager's idea."

—*Heather E. Miller, Teen Librarian, Homewood (AL) Public Library*

"We had a Skateboard Expo at our library twice because the first time it was such a big hit. We blocked off the library parking lot that day so kids could skateboard and do their jumps. It was on the front page of our local newspaper with a great picture of a kid jumping high into the air on his skateboard. We came up with the idea because everyday when we would drive home, boys were skating on Main St. and sometimes we would almost see them get hit by a car. They didn't have a place to skate so we hosted one!"

—*Amy Alcott, Youth Services Librarian, Boerne (TX) Public Library*

"When an actual Young Adult Librarian position was created and I was hired for the position, I began organizing and offering two to three stand-alone programs for teens every month in addition to BPL's traditional YA offerings. These programs ranging from duct tape wallet making to bike maintenance and repair to mendhi tattoos, were, almost without exception,

very well attended by young people between the ages of 12 and 20. As of November 1, our attendance statistics for teen programs in 2005 is at 613 individuals, far surpassing the number for any previous year. This demonstrates that, for as much as teens are regarded as a 'tough audience,' interesting teen programs can and do attract that age group to the library!

Prior to 2004, the Teen Advisory Group at our library had been in something of a state of decline for a couple of years. One of the problems, it was suspected, was a lack of awareness about the group. In fall of 2004, the library began offering a regular outreach service to local schools, and the presentation included a description of ways that teens could get involved and actually make a difference at the library, all while earning their required volunteer hours for high school. Once the word got out, our attendance more than tripled, and I have had a great deal of positive feedback from new members. This year, I have a core group of 15 who attend regularly, and about 10 more individuals who come to some of the meetings and help with special events. They are a wonderful, dynamic and hardworking group who genuinely want to be there, and consistently provide me with excellent input regarding programs, collections and other library services for their age group!"

—*Kirsty Moffatt, Young Adult Librarian, Brantford Public Library, Ontario*

"A young man, I'll call him John, came to the library as a middle school student. Bigger than many kids, he was a bully-type at some of our programs and sometimes hard to handle. He also navigated to websites that were inappropriate and we had to keep an eye on him. But the staff stuck by it and treated him with respect despite how he acted at times. By high school he was hired to work as a page and recently as a college student, he has been hired part time to work on the computers with our tech guy. I feel that his success is in part due to the intervention and caring of our youth services staff.

Recently I called all the former members of our young adult book discussion to generate some new interest and had a good response. One mother told me, "The only reason my daughter came tonight was because you called her personally."

—*Ceil Carey, Head, Young Adult and Outreach Department Head, Plainfield (IL) Public Library*

"I was a YA librarian for many years and I used to booktalk constantly; about 25 times per year at the high school and middle schools in Chappaqua NY, and in Ossining NY. For some reason, I mostly booktalked to the 7th graders. About 5 years ago, I got a nice letter from a former student in one of those classes. She enjoyed my booktalking so much that she had become a YA librarian! What a huge compliment! I kept that letter and treasure it beyond belief.

Booktalking is so much work that it's hard to justify to administration, but it pays off in unbelievable ways. If you've ever seen kids arguing over who gets to read your titles first, you'll be so glad that you've made the effort.

Now I'm a library director but I think one of the most valuable things that I do is to continue to strongly support youth services by hiring talented librarians and letting them do their thing! Booktalking is a top priority on my list because IT WORKS."

—*Susan Riley, Library Director, Mount Kisco (N.Y.) Public Library*

"I pushed really hard for a video collection at my library, and the circulation is fantastic. I can't even begin to describe the delight on the faces of the teens when they discover the collection, which is sandwiched nicely between graphic novels and fiction. The teens now associate the library with a cool place. And while they are here, I tell them all about all the great things I have read that are similar to the story lines in the video games they play and the anime they watch."

—*Megan Johnson, Teen Services Librarian, Rochester Hills (MI) Public Library*

"The Daphne Public Library is striving to offer teen activities this year during our Summer Reading Program. To encourage participation, along with press releases and handouts I decided

to use large banners to announce our weekly teen events. The banners were placed outside our front entrance. I am happy to announce that we experienced an excellent turnout for our first-ever teen event with 30 teens present.

Lessons learned: I have found that families perform daily a juggling act to meet their many responsibilities. Any means that create reminders can bring about positive results.

Advice for others: Place yourself in the same situations that many of our families have to deal with while they strive to meet the needs of their children. We live in a very busy society and any type of reminders of upcoming special events can be helpful.”

—*Tonja Young, YA Librarian, Daphne (AL) Public Library*

# Key Contacts

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In any issue related to teens, your best bet is to call YALSA (1-800-545-2433, ext. 4390) or send an email ([yalsa@ala.org](mailto:yalsa@ala.org)). If we can't help, we will refer you to other ALA offices, divisions or organizations. We may also know of a library that has experienced a similar situation with wisdom to share.

## Young Adult Library Services Association

50 E. Huron St.  
Chicago, IL 60611  
Tel: 800-545-2433, ext. 4390  
Fax: 312-280-5276  
Email: [yalsa@ala.org](mailto:yalsa@ala.org)  
[www.ala.org/yalsa](http://www.ala.org/yalsa)

## Campaign for America's Libraries

ALA Public Information Office  
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