

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE YOUNG ADULT LIBRARY SERVICES ASSOCIATION

# young adult library services

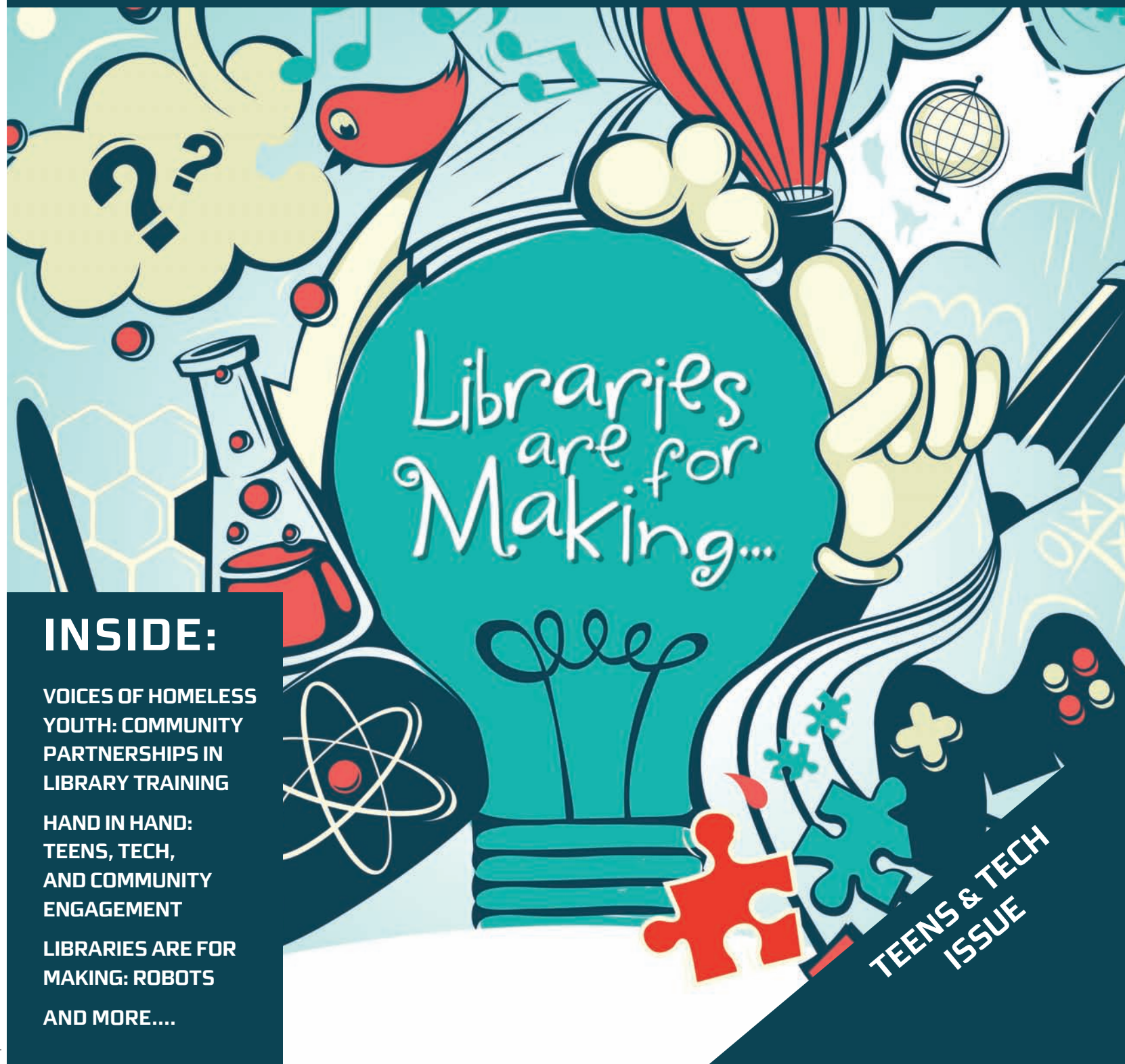


VOLUME 13 | NUMBER 2

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## INSIDE:

VOICES OF HOMELESS  
YOUTH: COMMUNITY  
PARTNERSHIPS IN  
LIBRARY TRAINING

HAND IN HAND:  
TEENS, TECH,  
AND COMMUNITY  
ENGAGEMENT

LIBRARIES ARE FOR  
MAKING: ROBOTS  
AND MORE....

TEENS & TECH  
ISSUE



# THEIR LEGACY IS A CALLING. AN HONOR. A LIE.

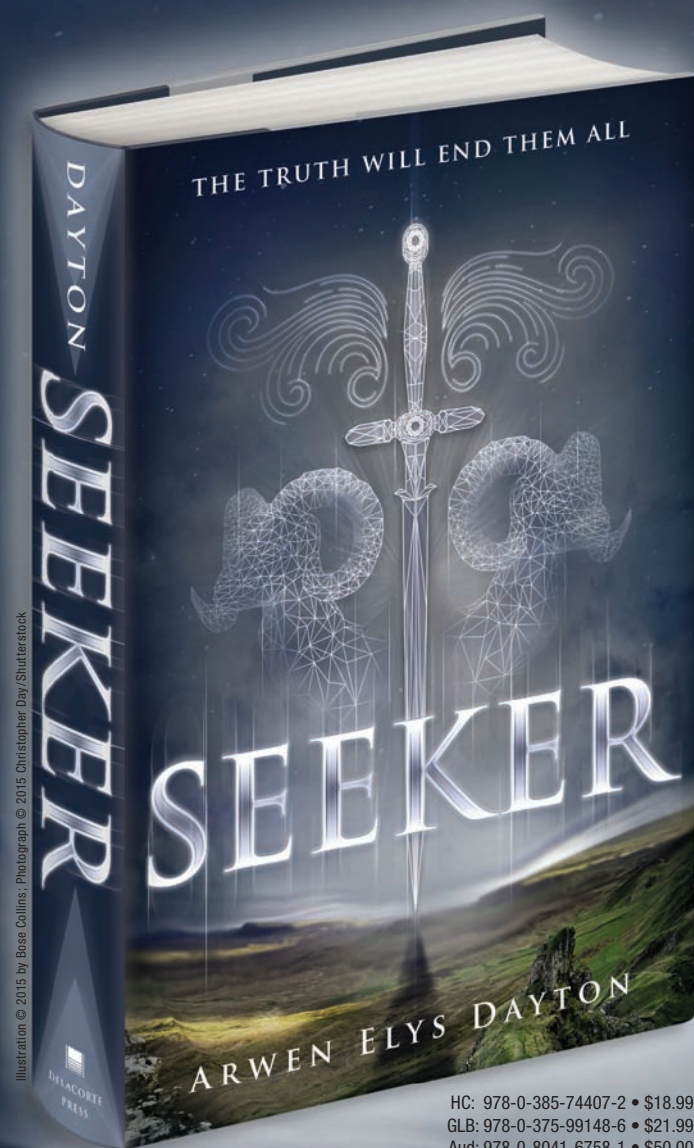


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## About This Cover

This Teen Tech Week™ (March 8–14, 2014), YALSA invites you to celebrate Libraries are for Making.... The theme encourages libraries to promote themselves as a place for teens to pursue their interests via hands-on activities and where learning can take place beyond the classroom. YALSA encourages school and public library staff across the country to use Teen Tech Week as an opportunity to raise awareness in their local community about the digital resources and services the library offers to help teens succeed in school and prepare for college and careers. Learn more about Teen Tech Week at <http://teentechweek.ning.com/>



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#### Statement of Purpose

*Young Adult Library Services* is the official journal of the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), a division of the American Library Association. YALS primarily serves as a vehicle for continuing education for librarians serving young adults, ages twelve through eighteen. It will include articles of current interest to the profession, act as a showcase for best practices, provide news from related fields, publish recent research related to YA librarianship, and will spotlight significant events of the organization and offer in-depth reviews of professional literature. YALS will also serve as the official record of the organization.

#### Production

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#### Manuscripts

Manuscripts and letters pertaining to editorial content should be sent to YALSA, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611; e-mail: yalseditor@gmail.com. Manuscripts will be sent out for review according to YALS's established refereed procedures. Visit [www.ala.org/yalsa](http://www.ala.org/yalsa) for further information.

#### Indexing, Abstracting, and Microfilm

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# from the Editor

Linda W. Braun

You've probably read about libraries integrating makerspaces into their facilities, and even how these spaces are popping up elsewhere within communities as centers for learning and creating. Whether in the library or at a separate location in your community, makerspaces and the idea of making should be an important part of what your library staff working with teens provides and supports.

I know that some of you consider the idea of making and makerspaces a fad. But making and makerspaces are not really about the spaces or the accoutrements of the space. They are about the learning that takes place and how library staff can work with teens, their families, and other members of the community to help youth gain the skills they need to succeed in academics and other parts of their lives. That's hardly a fad.

The 2015 YALSA Teen Tech Week™ (March 8–14, 2015) theme of *Libraries are for Making...* is something that library staff working with teens need to grab on to. With this theme, library staff have the opportunity to highlight how and why making is so crucial to teens in the community. The articles in this issue of YALS will help you to do just that. For example, Jaina Lewis' article articulates how learning to build and program robots at the Westport, Connecticut Library helps teens gain critical thinking, troubleshooting, and digital literacy skills. Rachel Stout's article presents the ways in which the Houston Public Library's Community Engagement Team highlights making in their outreach. This helps demonstrate to the community how libraries provide learning opportunities for teens. And Christie Gibrich's article on making connections with teen interests through technology shows a surprising variety of ways that libraries can support teens.

Along with this Teen Tech Week issue of YALS, YALSA has an array of materials to help you get ready for Teen Tech Week 2015. These include the Teen Tech Week website at <http://teentechweek.ning.com>; the *Making at the Library Toolkit* available in pdf at [http://bit.ly/yalsa\\_making\\_toolkit](http://bit.ly/yalsa_making_toolkit); and YALSA's *STEM Programming Toolkit* available at [http://bit.ly/yalsa\\_stem\\_toolkit](http://bit.ly/yalsa_stem_toolkit).

In this issue of YALS we are launching a new section titled #act4teens. In this, and future issues of the journal, #act4teens will highlight the ways in which libraries are making concrete the ideas put forward in the YALSA report the *Future of Libraries for and with Teens: A Call to Action*. (The executive summary of the report is also included in this issue.) Rekha Kuver's launch article focuses on how libraries and community partners can work together to help homeless teens have a voice in their communities. The article highlights a key part of the YALSA report that centers on partnerships and training as a way for libraries to move into the future successfully.

Don't forget that the YALS website, <http://yalsa.ala.org/yals>, includes information and materials that support every issue of the journal. YALS

# from the President

Chris Shoemaker



So, you've opened the shrink-wrapped box of your new device, and broken the seal on the end-user license agreement, plugged it in, gone through the setup and any necessary installation, and . . . now what? That's actually the same thing that many library staff, teachers, parents, and even teens do and ask themselves every day.

Even though many teens have easy and regular access to technology, there are still significant divides that impact meaningful use of devices and information resources. Libraries are critical in bridging the technology divides that teens face. Libraries do this by giving teens who don't have regular access to technology that access, providing high-speed capabilities for teens without internet at home or even at school, and providing the programs and training that help teens to learn to use technology successfully. It's essential that libraries provide these services for teens because without the access and the opportunity to gain digital literacy skills, it will be harder

for adolescents to succeed in academics, the workforce, and even life.

Of course many libraries are already working to bridge these divides for teens. However, there does seem to be a disconnect in what libraries can make possible for and with teens and the number of teens that take advantage of the technology programs and services available at the library. This might be in part because while teens think of libraries as a place to use computers for research purposes, they don't necessarily think of our institutions as spaces for using technology for creating, collaborating, connecting, and so on. Teens might not realize that not only do libraries make technology available, but the library is a place to learn about technology. It's also a place to find mentors and coaches who can help teens gain life skills and pursue their technological, and personal, interests.

Of course technology mentors and coaches are a fairly new idea in libraries. But, it's an important aspect of supporting teens and helping to bridge the digital

divides we, and they, now face.

When library staff bring in experts that are skilled in areas that the staff is not, it's a time to help teens and to help library staff learn about what teens are interested in. For example, as teens learn how to produce videos on digital devices, library staff can learn right alongside them. Librarians don't need to be the experts but they can always be learning and updating their own skills.

This Teen Tech Week why not work with teens to find mentors in the community that can support adolescent digital passions and interests? Give teens and the mentors a chance to work and learn together. Teens will have a chance to improve their digital literacy skills, library staff will learn new things, and community members will find out how awesome teens are and how the library supports the needs of youth. Now that's a win-win-win situation. YALS

# feature

YALSA Perspectives

## In the Know: YALSA's National Guidelines Oversight Committee

*By Katherine Trouern-Trend*

**W**e all want the best for youth. Today's teens are part of a globally competitive society and need support and guidance to help them thrive as individuals and engaged citizens. Teens require new competencies and expanded literacies to effectively navigate new media and information technologies. The purpose of YALSA's National Guidelines Oversight Committee is to provide structure and oversight for YALSA's portfolio of national guidelines, competencies, position papers, and benchmarks. These materials (all available on the YALSA website at [www.ala.org/yalsa/guidelines](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/guidelines)) are researched and developed to aid librarians, library workers, and libraries to better understand the components of an excellent teen services program and as a way to help library staff support teens in the way that's required in the 21st century.

I am the chair of the Committee and we are focusing on YALSA's *Future of Library Services for and with Teens: A Call to Action* report, YALSA's array of National Guidelines, and the YALSA Strategic Plan as guiding documents in planning activities. For example, we plan to facilitate conversations and collaborative initiatives related to the

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**KATHERINE TROUERN-TREND** is a Youth Services Librarian at Hartford Public Library in Hartford, Connecticut, and a Consultant for Libraries and Makerspaces at Designing Minds Consulting [www.designingmindsconsulting.com](http://www.designingmindsconsulting.com). Katherine's areas of interest are equity, access, connected learning, media literacy, and information literacy. She is the chair of the YALSA National Guidelines Oversight Committee, chair of the ALA Ethnic and Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table (EMIERT), and a founding member and leader at MakeHartford, Hartford's first makerspace. Katherine considers her library youth to be her greatest source of inspiration and motivation in helping to shape the future of libraries. Follow Katherine on twitter @kttrend.

YALSA Teen Services Evaluation Tool and the association's National Teen Space Guidelines. Both of these are comprehensive documents that help libraries fashion engaging and best practice programs of service and space design for teen customers.

### YALSA Teen Service Evaluation Tool

The Committee appreciates that staff with diverse roles and responsibilities serve teens in libraries. These include youth services managers, teen librarians, youth librarians, library assistants, adult services librarians, library directors, or CEOs. All of these staff are often engaged with teen work. Whatever a staff member's role, it is important to know the teen customer and how to best serve them. The YALSA Teen Services Evaluation Tool helps with this by breaking down teen services into seven categories: Leadership and Professionalism, Knowledge of Client Group, Communication, Marketing and Outreach, Administration, Knowledge of Materials, and Access to Information and Services. Not only can library staff use the full evaluation tool, there is also a set of Evaluation Tool Fact Sheets available for specific audiences. For example, there is the Evaluation Tool Fact Sheet for Library Administrators, the Evaluation Tool Fact Sheet for LIS Faculty, and the Evaluation Tool Fact Sheet for Teen Librarians. These fact sheets provide relevant resources and recommended practices that will best support excellent teen library service.

One example of what is included in the YALSA Teen Service Evaluation Tool is a recommendation that libraries develop written policies and mission statements that support the rights of teens to equitable library service. It is further recommended that these policies are designed collaboratively with YA staff and reviewed annually to ensure that resources and services are available to all teens that support adolescent learning and growth and a library's commitment to youth access and engagement.



In order to help library staff achieve this, one project that the National Guidelines Committee is currently discussing is *On a Mission*. The idea of this project is to provide opportunities for library staff to collaboratively create mission statements. We see these as sample mission statements and even example strategic plans that can be remixed and/or reused in a public library. Part of the brainstorming that the Committee is doing related to this project includes inviting library staff from a range of library environments and different sized systems to join our “mission” to share diverse perspectives and support the varying needs of teens in different library environments. This activity as co-makers will illustrate the kind of activities that support 21st century learners and the skills necessary to perform and thrive in a connected community-focused future.

### National Teen Space Guidelines

The National Teen Space Guidelines give library staff a comprehensive overview

of key elements to consider for physical and virtual 21st century teen spaces. Many of the same factors that define best practice teen services also inform best practice teen spaces. These elements include teen input, diverse resources, new and emerging technology, flexible and multipurpose features, social media, media literacy, and information literacy. YALSA’s Guidelines offer a sample of best practice teen spaces, including YOUmedia at Chicago Public Library, Story Lab at Tacoma Public Library, H.Y.P.E. (Helping Young People Excel) at Detroit Public Library, and Best Cellar at Waupaca Area Public Library.

The National Guidelines Committee is brainstorming ways to expand on the samples and ideas of the Teen Space Guidelines. One way we are talking about achieving this is through Pinterest where it is possible to share visuals of best practice spaces with specific boards focused on key elements to consider when envisioning the perfect space for a specific context and set of teen demographics. We are also talking

about another crowdsourced project on Instagram, which will give library staff the chance to upload pictures of current teen spaces and get feedback from YALSA colleagues and ideas on how to improve or re-imagine.

As with a designated physical space for teens, it is imperative that libraries have virtual spaces where teens can connect with staff and peers and experience collaborative learning and sharing to support 21st century learning standards and skills. One way the National Guidelines Committee is thinking about supporting the ideas in the YALSA space guidelines is through a series of twitter chats and tutorials focused on understanding and using new and emerging technologies with teens and creating pathways that support teen digital literacy needs.

Look for updates on our plans in the YALSA e-news and on YALSA social media. And don’t forget you can access all of YALSA’s National Guidelines on the association website at [www.ala.org/yalsa/guidelines](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/guidelines). YALS

# Become a Friend of YALSA

Friends of YALSA (FOY) was created to ensure excellence in the Association’s traditional programs and services to library workers serving teens and to support growth in new directions as our profession meets the exciting challenges of the 21st century.

Each year, FOY funds are used to support over \$16,000 in member scholarships, grants and stipends, including a Spectrum Scholar and

Emerging Leader. Funds also support areas such as advocacy, continuous learning, research, planning for the future and teen literacy & young adult literature.

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Visit [www.ala.org/yalsa/givetoyalsa/give](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/givetoyalsa/give) today.

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

## Executive Summary

**L**ibraries provide a lifeline for teens, their families, and communities across the nation by providing a safe and supervised space for adolescents to engage in creative, educational activities with caring adults and mentors. But a variety of significant developments point to a need for libraries to change in order to successfully meet the needs of today's teens.

*The Future of Library Services for and with Teens: A Call to Action* is the result of a yearlong national forum conducted by the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) in 2013, with funding provided by the Institute of Museum and Library Services. The *Call to Action* lays out a new path for serving 21st century teens through libraries. This 2014 report shows that many libraries are continuing to grapple with diminishing resources while at the same time struggling to meet the needs of a changing teen population. Additionally, significant developments in technology have led to the need to rethink how services for and with teens are best created and delivered. The *Call to Action* provides recommendations on how libraries must address challenges and re-envision their teen services in order to meet the needs of their individual communities and to

collectively ensure that the nation's 40 plus million teens develop the skills they need to be productive citizens.

## The Issues

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

There are over 40 million adolescents, ages 12 to 17, living in the United States today, and they use libraries. A 2013 Pew survey found that 72 percent of 16 to 17 year olds had used a public library in 2012.

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

Library closures, reduced hours, lack of staff, and insufficient resources mean that teens in many communities no longer have access to the resources, knowledge, and services they need to support their academic, emotional, and social development, to master 21st-century skills, and to ensure that they become productive citizens.

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

According to an analysis of the 2010 census data completed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, there are currently 74.2 million children under the age of

18 in the United States; 46 percent of them are children of color. Additionally, more than one-fifth of America's children are immigrants or children of immigrants. Now is the time for the field of librarianship, the population of which is overwhelmingly Caucasian, to consider what these demographic changes mean to school and public library services and programs for and with teens.

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

Teens' use of technology (smartphones, tablets, laptops, the Internet, etc.) is pervasive. However, ownership of technology devices continues to vary across socioeconomic and racial demographics. Now is the time for public and school libraries to systematically determine how technology will affect the future of library services for and with teens, with special attention to the access gaps that continue to exist.

## Teens Are Entering the Workforce without Critical Skills

In the last three decades, the skills required for young adults to succeed in the workforce have changed drastically, but the skills emphasized in schools have not kept up with these changes. Libraries need to create the kind of spaces, services, and opportunities that today's teens need in order to succeed in school and in life.

## The Paradigm Shift and Libraries

Several important factors have come together in such a way that libraries are experiencing a seismic shift. Ever since computers entered library spaces, public and school libraries have been on a precipice of change. The library can no longer be viewed as a quiet place to connect to physical content. Instead it needs to



evolve into a place, physical and virtual, where individuals can learn how to connect and use all types of resources, from physical books to apps to experts in a local, regional, or national community. Libraries must leverage new technologies and become kitchens for “mixing resources” in order to empower teens to build skills, develop understanding, create and share, and overcome adversity. In addition to the impact of new technologies, the definition of literacy has expanded beyond the cognitive ability to read and write, to a recognition that literacy is a social act that involves basic modes of participating in the world. New research also points to a concept of connected learning, in which studies show that young people learn best when that learning is connected to their passions, desires, and interests.

### What Teens Need from Libraries

**Bridge the Growing Digital and Knowledge Divide:** School and public libraries must ensure that in addition to providing access to digital tools, that they also provide formal and informal opportunities for teens to learn to use them in meaningful and authentic ways.

**Leverage Teens’ Motivation to Learn:** Too often teens’ desire to learn is thwarted by an educational system too focused on testing, unwilling to adopt culturally relevant pedagogy, or so strapped for funding that only basic resources are available. Libraries live outside of a school’s formal academic achievement sphere and offer a space where interest-based learning can occur in a risk-free environment. Public and school libraries, therefore, need to embrace their role as both formal and informal learning spaces.

**Provide Workforce Development Training:** In order to address the growing need for a skilled workforce, school and public libraries have the responsibility to

enable teens to learn in relevant, real-world 21st century contexts.

**Serve as the Connector between Teens and Other Community Agencies:** Libraries are only one of many organizations with a vision to build better futures for teens. Too often, however, teens are unaware of the services offered in their communities. As many of today’s teens are faced with serious social and economic challenges, libraries must provide teens the assistance they need.

### Implications for Libraries

In order to meet the needs of today’s teens and to continue to provide value to their communities, libraries need to revisit their fundamental structure, including these components:

**Audience:** The focus is on serving all teens in the community, not just those who are regular users of the physical library space.

**Collections:** Are tailored to meet the unique needs of the teens in the particular community they serve, and are expanded to include digital resources as well as experts and mentors.

**Space:** A flexible physical library space that allows for teens to work on a variety of projects with each other and adult mentors to create and share content. Virtual spaces also allow for teens to connect with each other and with experts. Libraries recognize that teens need and want to make use of the entire library space or site, not just a designated teen area.

**Programming:** Programs occur year-round, leverage the unique attributes of libraries, allow for teens to gain skills through exploration of their interests, and measure outcomes in terms of knowledge gained or skills learned.

**Staffing:** Degreed library professionals focus on developing and managing teen services at the programmatic level, while face-to-face encounters are made up of a hybrid of staff

and skilled volunteers who act as mentors, coaches, and connectors.

**Youth Participation:** Is integrated throughout the teen services program and enables teens to provide both on-the-fly and structured feedback for the library staff. Teen participation is not limited to formally organized groups.

**Outreach:** Is ongoing and occurs in order to identify the needs of teens in the community and then work with partners to alleviate those needs.

**Policy:** Focuses on serving teens no matter where they are. The policies are flexible and easy to update in order to reflect changing needs.

**Professional Development:** Takes a whole library or whole school approach to planning, delivering, and evaluating teen services. Investigates attributes and resources unique to libraries and identifies means for leveraging those to achieve library goals.

Today’s 40-plus million adolescents face an increasing array of social issues, barriers, and challenges that many are unable to overcome on their own. With nearly 7000 teens dropping out of high school per day, and approximately 40 percent of high school graduates not proficient in traditional literacy skills, the nation is in danger of losing an entire generation, which in turn will lead to a shortage of skilled workers and engaged citizens. Now is the time for public and school libraries to join with other key stakeholders and take action to help solve the issues and problems that negatively impact teens, and ultimately the future of the nation. These challenges are not insurmountable. It is a moral imperative for libraries to leverage their skills and resources to effect positive change and better the lives of millions of teens. In turn, libraries will be providing an invaluable service to their community and position themselves as an indispensable community resource. YALS



Thank you to our official Teen Read Week™ 2014  
sponsors for their support!

Teen Read Week was once again a huge success! Thank you to our official sponsors of Teen Read Week 2014 for their support in our Teen Read Week mission of encouraging continued literacy development and library use amongst teens.



**SAVE THE DATE!**

Teen Read Week 2015 will take place October 18 - 24, 2015!



To learn more about Teen Read Week and how to become a sponsor,  
please visit [www.ala.org/teenread](http://www.ala.org/teenread)



## YALSA Tune-up

Check your knowledge of what YALSA has to offer and ways for you to get involved by using this brief survey. Answer yes or no to the following:

- YES  NO I Receive YALSA's Quarterly Journal, *YALS*
- YES  NO I know whether or not I qualify for a discounted dues rate
- YES  NO I know how to be involved in YALSA in my hometown or state
- YES  NO If I want to get involved in the work of YALSA, I know what opportunities there are and how to volunteer
- YES  NO I know which YALSA grants and scholarships I'm eligible for and how to apply for them
- YES  NO I know how to vote in the ALA/YALSA election
- YES  NO I know that I have free access to all of YALSA's live and archived webinars, and how to access them
- YES  NO I know who to contact and how to reach them if I have a question about my membership
- YES  NO I can find what I need on the YALSA website
- YES  NO I know how to find out about upcoming YALSA activities and events

If you answered NO to any of these questions, keep reading for more information about YALSA resources and ways to get involved. Or, contact Letitia Smith at [lsmith@ala.org](mailto:lsmith@ala.org) or 312.280.4390.

### How to receive YALSA's weekly e-newsletter via e-mail

Check your email account to make sure messages from [yalsa@ala.org](mailto:yalsa@ala.org) are not going into your spam folder. If that is not the issue, please contact Anna Lam at [alam@ala.org](mailto:alam@ala.org) for assistance.

### How to receive YALSA's quarterly journal, *YALS*

Make sure ALA/YALSA has your current postal mail address by going to [www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org) and clicking on "Login" in the upper right corner. Log in, and confirm your address is correct. You can also contact Letitia Smith at [lsmith@ala.org](mailto:lsmith@ala.org) and confirm your address with her.

### How to find out if you qualify for a discounted dues rate

Check the discounted rates at [www.ala.org/yalsa/join](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/join) or contact Letitia Smith at [lsmith@ala.org](mailto:lsmith@ala.org).

### How to be involved in YALSA in your hometown or state

Visit <http://ow.ly/DWHT5> for information and follow up with Letitia Smith at [lsmith@ala.org](mailto:lsmith@ala.org) if you have any questions.

### How to get involved in the work of YALSA, and how to volunteer

Visit [www.ala.org/yalsa/getinvolved](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/getinvolved) to learn how to participate in YALSA, check out the infographic and watch the free webinars. Follow up with Letitia Smith at [lsmith@ala.org](mailto:lsmith@ala.org) if you have any questions.

### Find out which YALSA grants and awards you are eligible for and how to apply for them

Visit [www.ala.org/yalsa/awardsandgrants/yalsaawardsgrants](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/awardsandgrants/yalsaawardsgrants) to read about the various opportunities and eligibility requirements. Follow up with Letitia Smith at [lsmith@ala.org](mailto:lsmith@ala.org) if you have any questions. Applications are online and most deadlines are December 1.

### How to vote in the ALA/YALSA election

The election runs from mid-March through April each year. In mid-March, ALA e-mails you a link to a web page to go to vote online. Members are only eligible to vote if their membership is current as of January 31 of that year. Follow up with Letitia Smith at [lsmith@ala.org](mailto:lsmith@ala.org) if you have any questions.

### How to access YALSA's live and archived webinars

Live webinars are advertised in YALSA's weekly e-news, where a link is provided for members to sign up to participate. All archived webinars are accessible from the For Members Only section of the website. Follow up with Nicole Munguia at [nmunguia@ala.org](mailto:nmunguia@ala.org) if you have questions.

### How to contact someone with a question about your membership

Letitia Smith is YALSA's Membership Coordinator and she can be reached at [lsmith@ala.org](mailto:lsmith@ala.org) or 312.280.4390.

### How to find what you need on the YALSA website

If you have trouble locating anything on the site, please contact Anna Lam, YALSA's Communications Specialist, at [alam@ala.org](mailto:alam@ala.org) or 312.280.5849.

### How to find out about upcoming YALSA activities and events

The weekly e-news lists events for the current month, and all events are accessible from YALSA's Google calendar, <http://ow.ly/DW1zl>. Follow up with Letitia Smith at [lsmith@ala.org](mailto:lsmith@ala.org) if you have any questions. YALS



# feature

#act4teens

## Voices of Homeless Youth: Community Partnerships in Library Training

By Rekha Kuver

*If you didn't have a place to sleep tonight, would you sleep in an abandoned building or would you rather sleep outside?*

*If you felt unsafe, would you report this to a police officer, or would you try to handle the situation yourself?*

*If you lived in a rural area and became homeless, would you try to stay in your town where things were familiar to you or would you try to take a bus to an urban area like Seattle in the hopes of more social services support?*

These questions and others like them were asked of teen librarians by three young adults in their late teens to early 20s who represent Youth Advocates Ending Homelessness (YAEH). YAEH is a program for youth run by The Mockingbird Society, an organization in the state of Washington that advocates for systems reform based on the personal experiences of children,

youth, and families affected by the foster care system. YAEH's specific mission is to give youth and young adults who have experienced homelessness a chance to tell their stories and advocate for programs and services that they think will improve the lives of young people living on the streets in King County, Washington.

All of the young adults asking the questions above have experienced homelessness and were presenting to a joint meeting of teen services librarians from adjacent library systems: the King County Library system and the Seattle Public Library. The young people presented a training session called "Stories of Youth Homelessness" in order to raise awareness of their experiences and to provide suggestions of the ways in which libraries and library staff can serve this patron group.

For the part of the training in which the questions were asked, each librarian

was given a notecard that had a "1" printed on one side and a "2" printed on the other side. As a question was asked, participants held up a card with either a 1 or 2 showing, depending on how participants imagined they would feel if faced with the situations mentioned. As library staff looked around the room at each other's answers, everyone quickly realized that there was never a unanimous response.

Some in the audience were surprised by colleagues' answers and sometimes were surprised by their own. The activity had three key outcomes. Librarians were asked to:

- look at specific, concrete issues around homelessness,
- personalize this experience even if just in a small, imagined way
- think about what types of practical options, or lack thereof, youth with unstable housing issues face on a daily basis.

This style of questioning and response led to many ideas about how libraries can more successfully support the needs of homeless youth. Even though most librarians in the room had a range of experiences serving homeless teens and young adults, this exercise, as well as the training in its entirety, was an eye-opening experience for me and for many of my colleagues.

### The Training

The three-hour training had three modules

- The first module was led by YAEH Network Representatives: Lamar Campbell, Trai Williams, and Mandy Urwiler. The young adult facilitators had support from the Mockingbird Society Engagement Specialist Coordinator, Courtney Millan. The training consisted of a mix of

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**REKHA KUVAR** works for the Seattle Public Library, where she manages staff who serve children, teens, and families in the Central Library location.

personal stories, interactive audience participation, and practical suggestions for library staff and services.

- The second module was led by Megan Gibbard from the King County Committee to End Homelessness. She talked about the Count Us In project, King County’s annual effort to count unstably housed or homeless youth and young adults ages 12–25. This part of the presentation included important and informative data that showed not only numbers of homeless youth but also demographic information, descriptions of vulnerability factors, as well as needs assessments for service providers.
- The final module of the day was an overview of the National Safe Place program, given by Courtney Warren from Friends of Youth and Julian Kaplan from Auburn Youth Resources. This program provides access to immediate help and supportive resources for all young people in crisis through a network of sites sustained by qualified agencies, trained volunteers, and businesses. Libraries can elect to be designated as official Safe Places and have library staff trained on how to connect youth with Safe Place resources and services, or if they elect not to be designated as such, they may also refer youth in crisis to another Safe Place in the network. Warren and Kaplan explained that teens in crisis need quick, safe intervention and are much more likely to seek help in places that are familiar and easily identifiable, like libraries. They also explained that Safe Places only work if teens understand what the designation means and how to identify official Safe Places (the main way for libraries to help with this is through active promotion and posted Safe Place logos). Libraries have a

## Learn More About Community Partners Serving Homeless Youth

YAEH and The Mockingbird Society – [www.mockingbirdsociety.org](http://www.mockingbirdsociety.org)

King County Count Us In project – <http://bit.ly/kccui>

King County Committee to End Homelessness – [www.cehkc.org/](http://www.cehkc.org/)

Safe Place – <http://nationalsafeplace.org/>

vital role to play in becoming a Safe Place for teens, training library staff to promote the network wherever it exists, and to advocate for more sites in communities.

After the training was over, I heard so many positive, enthusiastic responses from my colleagues from both library systems. “That was one of the best trainings I’ve ever been to,” said one. “This was more than worth the time and effort to bring this together,” said another. “How can we have more training that is as successful as this one?” was a common comment, and one that I thought about both in the weeks leading up to the training as it was being planned as well as in the weeks following. My conclusion is that there were four major elements that came together to make this a rich experience for library staff that participated and that could be used to shape future learning opportunities.

### Partnering with Community Organizations

Libraries, especially in recent years, have been increasing their attention to partnering with community organizations for programming, marketing, and shaping library services. In this case, training organizers Jerene Battisti (Teen Services Coordinator for the King County Library System) and Linda Braun (Youth and Family Learning Services Manager for

the Seattle Public Library) extended this focus on community partnerships into the realm of staff training. When thinking about training for staff, libraries often rely on internal resources or look at gaining training from other library professionals through professional library networks. While I am not suggesting that this focus diminish, turning up the volume on community partnerships for training purposes was a powerful move in this case and was a large reason for the rich learning that occurred. By reaching out to organizations that serve homeless youth, co-planning the training with them, and then having those partners and the youth that they serve deliver much of the training, the learning environment for library staff was made deeper overall.

### Making the Library Connection

While the community partners were able to provide valuable content for the training, it was also vital that the presented information would connect back to libraries. In the planning stages, Battisti, Braun, and I discussed with our community partners the ways that library staff already serve homeless youth, what services and programs currently occur, and what gaps or challenges exist in serving this patron group better. This set the stage for all of the community presenters to better prepare their material. In addition,

during the training itself, the teen services librarian participants actively engaged in dialogue with the presenters by asking questions, raising awareness of library services, as well as having conversations with their colleagues at their tables. This mix of conversation between community members and librarians ensured that we were not only learning about homeless youth (although that would be a valuable goal in itself), but that we were asking and re-asking our patrons, each other, and ourselves how libraries are responding and how we can respond even better.

### Numbers and Narratives

Each presenter from YAEH, the Committee to End Homelessness, and National Safe Place provided a robust mix of two things in particular: they presented current, relevant, compelling data, and they shared powerful stories of experiences that brought the data to life. For example, data presented by the Committee to End Homelessness showed that at least one-third to one-half of youth who are seeking housing are either employed or in school at the time that they are experiencing homelessness. The YAEH representatives

were able to speak about the ways in which holding down a job or trying to keep up in school were integrated into their experience of being unstably housed, and how these factors interact with each other to create challenges that libraries may be able to help youths conquer. The eloquence of the youth presenters coupled with the enlightening evidence presented through data painted a clear but complex picture for all.

### Ready, Set, Action

Lastly, the training not only laid out data, stories, and learning. In addition, the format and the content of the training were also shaped with opportunity for dialogue that led to action items for future library work. Having librarians who serve teens from adjacent library systems, whose service areas often overlap, all in the same room led to cross-pollination of ideas and laid the foundation for future collaborative work. The same was also true of the librarian group and the community organizations in attendance. During the interactions that I had personally, I was able to connect with two local youth homeless organizers that I had not met before and plan for future

work together. And, as I looked around the room I saw other such connections in the works. Many librarians were interested in advocating for more Safe Places in their communities. Others were thinking about enhancing or starting youth drop-in programs. At one point toward the end of the training, we went around the room and were asked to sum up in one word what we were thinking. Many librarians said “planning” or “plotting.” All of the information that had been taken in was already taking shape for future action.

Library staff have long sought to serve youth who are homeless, and so keeping ourselves current and connected is always one of our overarching needs. Training that incorporates community partners in this way helps us to meet this need on a neighborhood level, a countywide level, and an overall systemic level. The youth that spoke to us in our meeting expressed sincere gratitude for library staff and libraries, and we, in turn, were honored to be trained through what they had to say. Connecting with patrons to serve them stems from listening and learning directly from them, and community-led training is a powerful strategy we should use more often to accomplish this. **YALS**



Jonathan Friesen is the 2009 recipient of the Schneider Family Book Award for *Jerk, California*. The award recognizes authors and illustrators who artistically capture a disability experience for young readers. His novel, *Jerk, California*, features a character named Sam who lives with Tourette Syndrome. In Friesen's new novel, *Both of Me*, he explores multiple personalities and autism spectrum disorder. YALSA Hub blogger, Kris Hickey, interviewed Friesen about his experience writing about special needs characters.

**Kris Hickey: How Did Your Childhood Illness Help You to Become a Writer?**

**Jonathan Friesen:** It is incredible how the hurtful chapters of our lives often end up serving a magnificent purpose. As a teen, I tried to hide both my Tourette Syndrome and my seizure disorder from the world. I turned in on myself and spent long days locked in my room. Days turned to months, and months to years. In that lonely place, I wondered why I had been cursed. All this introspection was, of course, unhealthy, but soon I was writing out my thoughts, my emotions. These pained writings helped me understand my own internal world, and, I think, taught me how to peek inside my characters.

**KH: What kind of research did you do before writing the characters with special needs? How did you prepare to write Sam from *Jerk, California* and Elias from *Both of Me*?**

**JF:** When writing *Sam*, I just needed to find a mirror. Tourette's is a disorder that I, and many in my family, know well. While the events of *Jerk, California* are fictitious, I had lived out every emotion and so research was minimal.

When I first developed the concept for *Both of Me*, I thought Elias would be a complete unknown. I was wrong. In many ways, I knew him on a deeper level than I had known Sam. However, I did need to do

# An Interview with Jonathan Friesen

By Kris Hickey

research on identity disorders. I frequently speak at mental health conferences, and I've met people living with these conditions and the physicians trying to help them. They became my medical source. Elias, however, sprang from a place deep in my own heart. He's a boy trying to escape a mental reality he doesn't understand. That was the story of my own childhood.

**KH: What do you want readers to take away from this quote from Juan in *Both of Me*: "If the world in Elias's mind is a kinder safer one, why not enjoy it? I mean, we are all running from something."**

**JF:** We have knee-jerk negative reactions to people labeled mentally ill. This stigma is resistant to change, in part, due to perspective. The "normal" among us often view the "world" of a mentally ill individual as irrational at best. Yet, we all slip into periods of cloudy thinking, times when I reckon each one of us views the world irrationally. I wanted to capture the tension between normalcy and abnormality and the whisker of a difference that often separates the two.

**KH: If you had to choose between Elias's real world or Salem, where would you rather reside?**

**JF:** I would choose the real. Salem is alluring. It's clear, defined ... simple. Good

is good. Evil is evil. There are no shades of gray. Moreover, everything has meaning. Every event matters and every sight is significant. All it takes to live there is the ability to suspend belief, something I enjoy doing. But I find great joy in the muck and confusion of this life. This is where the love is. This is where I find hope.

**KH: In *Both of Me*, what does Clara mean by POE?**

**JF:** Ah, yes. POE. Possibility of entanglement. Clara's life has taught her the dangers of entanglements, specifically those she experiences with young men; they tend to slow down her travels. In an effort to self-protect, Clara assigns the handsome blokes she meets a POE score. The higher the score, the more she needs to guard her heart. For the record, Elias scores a 12, the highest rating on her scale!

**KH: *Mayday* is filled with fantastic quotes. How did the quotes inspire the story? Or how did the story inspire the quotes you chose for the book?**

**JF:** It worked both ways. I was taken by the idea of a young woman who simultaneously felt both abandoned by her dad and uniquely connected to the man, in Crow's case by a shared love of philosophy. Crow's dad kept a journal of

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**KRIS HICKEY** is a Youth Services Supervisor at the Columbus Metropolitan Library Columbus, Oh.

## An Interview with Jonathan Friesen

his favorite quotes over the years—and this journal becomes the one piece of him that Crow can't let go. As I wondered what quotes might influence a young man during the various stages of life, I thought it would be fascinating to take that list and build a story that followed that sequence. Those quotes form the breadcrumb trail Crow is following to rediscover her dad, but they also seem to chart the course of her own story. It was a fascinating process.

**KH: What inspired you in your world building in *Aquifer*?**

**JF:** I never intended to write a dystopian novel. I was pondering the world “normal” after speaking at a conference for parents of children with Asperger’s Syndrome. I listened to the struggles their kids were having in social settings, and I wondered what if our world was flipped; what if Asperger’s was the norm, and only one young man remained who we would label “normal” in his relational style? I knew I wanted to explore that kind of earth, and a dystopian one was the best way to do that.

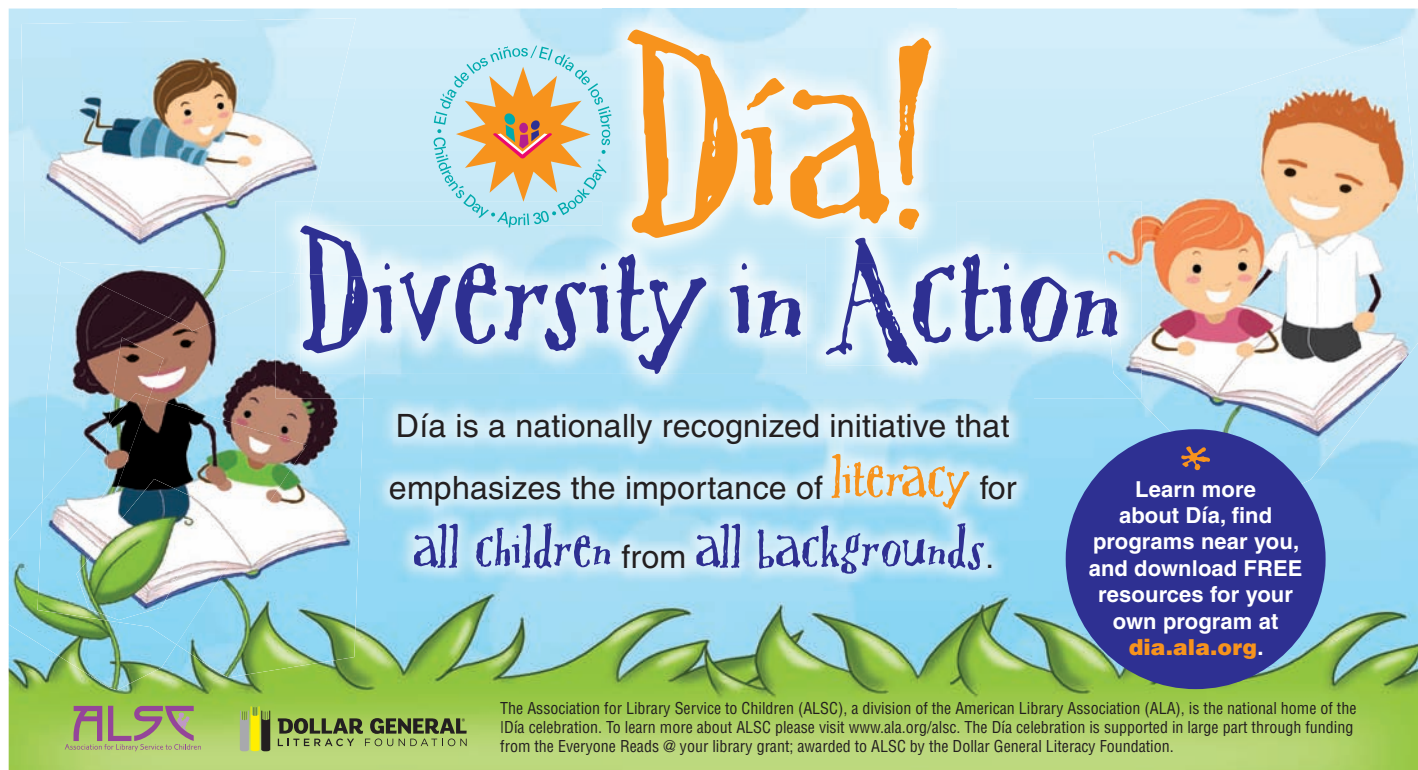
**KH: Who are your favorite writers?**

**JF:** I would list five. All have given me rather profound cases of goose bumps.

- A. A. A. Milne
- B. Kate DiCamillo
- C. Jerry Spinelli
- D. Leif Enger
- E. Henri Nouwen

**KH: What are you working on now?**

**JF:** The book is entitled *Unfolding*. I find myself drawn toward unlikely couples, and this story is no exception—an epileptic with severe scoliosis and a young lady with the gift of “knowing” work to uncover the terrible secret their town has kept for generations. YALS



The poster features a light blue background with green foliage at the bottom. It includes illustrations of children reading books, a sunburst logo for Children's Day/Book Day, and the text 'Día! Diversity in Action'. A circular callout box contains information about finding programs and resources at [dia.ala.org](http://dia.ala.org). Logos for ALSC and Dollar General Literacy Foundation are at the bottom left, and a disclaimer is at the bottom right.

**Día!**  
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Día is a nationally recognized initiative that emphasizes the importance of **literacy** for **all children** from **all backgrounds**.

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ALSC  
Association for Library Service to Children

DOLLAR GENERAL  
LITERACY FOUNDATION

The Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), a division of the American Library Association (ALA), is the national home of the IDía celebration. To learn more about ALSC please visit [www.ala.org/alsc](http://www.ala.org/alsc). The Día celebration is supported in large part through funding from the Everyone Reads @ your library grant; awarded to ALSC by the Dollar General Literacy Foundation.

There's an exciting new body of work developing in the world of young adult literature. Since the late 1990s, a growing number of novels focus on teens' experiences with mental illness, and this is great news for those of us who work with young people and books. I know that when I worked as a high school English teacher, and then later as a high school librarian, I saw the occasional student "disappear" for two weeks as the result of a psychiatric hospitalization. Then as the years went by, and I began teaching community college English, I read students' essays about how mental illness had affected them or their loved ones.

I became even more aware of just how big a concern mental illness can be for teens and 20 somethings when I taught a book featuring a musician with schizophrenia. It was *The Soloist*, by Steve Lopez—you may know it or the movie adaptation with Jamie Foxx and Robert Downey Jr. While teaching the book I asked a volunteer from the National Alliance of Mental Illness (NAMI) to speak to my class, and it was then that I learned that the age of onset for most mental illnesses is the age of the people I've dedicated my career to! In fact, according to NAMI, "one-half of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14, three-quarters by age 24."<sup>1</sup>

Anyone who works in schools and libraries with this age range can play an important role in getting stories of mental illness out there, and letting students and patrons know they are not alone. It's important to help get the word out that there is help available for those suffering from mental illness or those watching a family member or friend suffer. I wish I had known that in the eighth grade when I began to experience the symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder.

As a librarian and English teacher, I was well acquainted with literature of ethnic diversity, but I wondered if there

was much available that young people with diverse mental health experiences could relate to. We need stories of mental illness that focus on the illness as a biological brain disorder, a chemical imbalance in the brain. What's exciting about the recent YA literature of mental illness is that it treats mental illness as a medical problem while a lot of older literature has treated mental illness only symbolically, as "madness." In Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, for example, "crazy" is a label given to the creative or subversive members of society. Or, "madness" is the result of

oppression, a la *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's groundbreaking work of feminist literary theory. While these are very valuable points of view, we also need books that mirror teens' experiences of clinical illness, including visiting the psychologist's or psychiatrist's office, trying out different medications, dealing with side effects, having conflicts with family members, and all the rest that a modern-day diagnosis of mental illness entails.

Mental illness isn't just a symbol or trope for today's teens; it's a real medical

# Not as Crazy as It Seems: Discussing the New YA Literature of Mental Illness in Your Classroom or Library

By Diane Scrofano

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**DIANE SCROFANO** teaches English at Moorpark College in southern California. She holds an MA in English and an MLIS as well as teaching credentials in English and Library Media Services. Prior to her current position, she worked as a high school English teacher and a high school librarian. This article is drawn from a recently completed sabbatical project on mental illness in young adult fiction and memoir.



experience that ought to be, and now, helpfully, is being represented in literature. I hope to build awareness of the literature of mental illness, just as others have increased awareness in recent years of the literature of physical disability experiences or developmental disorder experiences (autism, for instance). I'd also like to say that, while some mental illness results from trauma, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and while trauma and biological predisposition to mental illness are often intertwined, my focus here is mainly on diseases primarily linked to brain structure and chemical problems, such as depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia. These diseases are largely biological and inherited, and the literature that I cover displays the current attitude of the medical community that mental illness is not a character flaw, a personal weakness, or anyone's fault.

What follows is a discussion of stylistic and thematic trends that have emerged in books that discuss mental illness, and how these issues might raise discussion questions in book group or classroom settings. Also, while it focuses more on physical and developmental disabilities than mental illness, teachers and librarians may also want to consult the American Library Association's (ALA) Schneider Family Book Award & Bibliography website, [www.ala.org/awardsgrants/schneider-family-book-award](http://www.ala.org/awardsgrants/schneider-family-book-award), to keep an eye on new books coming out about health diversity.

## Style and Media Trends

### Point of View

Teens reading about mental illness have different relationships to it, so it is good that different stories of mental illness are told from different points of view. The story might be narrated from the point of view of the ill person, a sibling, or a child.

Julie Halpern's *Get Well Soon*, George Harrar's *Not as Crazy as I Seem*, Terry Spencer Hesser's *Kissing Doorknobs*, John Green and David Levithan's *Will Grayson, Will Grayson*, Terry Trueman's *Inside Out*, and Ned Vizzini's *It's Kind of a Funny Story* are narrated by teen protagonists suffering from mental illness. Sonya Sones's *Stop Pretending* is narrated by a teen reacting to the onset of her older sister's bipolar disorder. Han Nolan's *Crazy* and Holly Schindler's *A Blue So Dark* feature male and female teens, respectively, trying to keep the household under control while their single parents' psychological conditions deteriorate due to schizophrenia. In Julie Ann Peters's *Define "Normal,"* a young high achiever tries to take care of her siblings as her mother sinks further into depression. In C. J. Omololu's *Dirty Little Secrets*, the narrator's mother has a severe hoarding problem.

### Setting (Time Period)

While most recently written YA novels of mental illness are set in the present time, I did find two pieces of historical fiction: *Tomato Girl*, by Jayne Pupek, and *Memories of Summer*, by Ruth White. Both are set in the era of the 1950s and 1960s, and while *Tomato Girl* realistically depicts the attitudes of the time toward mental illness (confusion, powerlessness, stigma), characters in *Memories of Summer* provide a genetic and biomedical explanation of the narrator's sibling's schizophrenia, and her treatment in the psychiatric hospital is depicted as humane. Both of these parts of the story are more reflective of the attitudes of the modern medical world than of the time during which the novel is set.

### Novels in Verse

Two notable titles in this style are Sonya Sones's *Stop Pretending* and Ellen Hopkins's *Impulse*. Both are written

in free verse and contain complete sentences, albeit with line breaks within the sentences, so I didn't feel that the experience of reading these works differed very much from reading a traditional prose novel.

### Other Nontraditional Narration

As is common in lots of present-day literature for adults, the YA authors of the literature of mental illness are likewise experimenting with narrative formats. For instance, in *Inside Out*, by Terry Trueman, the margins of some of the pages are sprinkled with phrases that protagonist Zach's voices tell him. This marginalia provides for the reader a microcosm of what Zach, who suffers from schizophrenia, must be going through as he tries to focus on tasks despite the voices' presence as persistent background noise. The reader is trying to follow the narrative, but the distractions in the margins interfere. *Inside Out* also includes correspondence between Zach's mother and his doctor, to provide additional perspectives. And the book concludes with a newspaper article explaining the outcome of the story for Zach and the two other prominent teen characters.

In *Crazy*, Han Nolan provides Greek-American protagonist, Jason, with a cast of characters in his mind, including a modern take on the Greek chorus, who voice the conflicting thoughts he has as he deals with his father's schizophrenia. As situations arise, maternal Aunt Bee (from *The Andy Griffith Show*), a cynical guy, a movie critic, a "Sexy Lady," and a group called the "laugh track" all react with their opinions (really, Jason's opinions and mixed feelings). The novel makes clear that Jason's voices are a product of his creativity and that they are not the same kinds of voices that result from his father's illness. Jason envisions his life

as a movie that he's watching in order to get some perspective on his thoughts; the movie metaphor is used in a couple of other novels I've come across as the characters try to make sense of mental illness's progression (see *A Scary Scene in a Scary Movie*, by Matt Blackstone, or the adult title *Too Bright to Hear, Too Loud to See*, by Juliann Garey). Nolan also includes many references to Greek mythology, as Jason and his father shared those stories during Jason's childhood. At times, Jason comforts his confused father by telling him that Jason's friends, who come to visit the house, are the Argonauts. These teens, like their mythical counterparts, really are like a band of heroes; they take charge, helping the family.

Other interesting experiments in narrative technique include *Will Grayson, Will Grayson*, which is narrated alternately by two different characters of the same name; *Get Well Soon*, which begins as a letter from the psychiatric hospital from the protagonist to her best friend; and *A Blue So Dark*, which opens many chapters with the teen protagonist's snarky rewritings of encyclopedia-like entries about mental illness. Finally, see also Laurie Halse Anderson's *Wintergirls*, about eating disorders, in which chapter numbers are given with decimal points to look like a digital scale readout, and as the character considers foods to eat, calorie counts are provided parenthetically. The narrative, like the narrator's life, is literally punctuated by the kinds of numbers (weights, calories) she is obsessed with.

### Graphic Novels or Memoirs

Just as comics and graphic novels are becoming more and more prevalent in writing on other subjects, so too are they becoming prevalent in the literature of mental illness. Ellen Forney, the illustrator of the acclaimed *Absolutely True Diary of A Part-Time Indian*, by Sherman

Alexie, creates a vivid and informative account of her struggle with bipolar disorder in *Marbles: Mania, Depression, Michelangelo, and Me*. Allie Brosh, whose work originated as a blog, has written the bestselling graphic autobiography, *Hyperbole and a Half*. In it, she covers her childhood through her 20s, including her depression and other adventures. Neither book was written specifically for teens or marketed as YA literature, though, so some mature topics arise, and the books should be recommended with caution, with the maturity level of the reader in mind.

## Thematic Issues

### Stigma of Mental Illness and Medication

These are good topics for teens to discuss as they read YA books on mental illness. The characters often hide or overcompensate for a parent's or sibling's mental illness out of fear, as we see in *Define "Normal," Dirty Little Secrets*, and *Stop Pretending*. The fear goes further when a character worries that an ill parent will be forcibly taken away and the teen placed in foster care. Teen readers can discuss stereotypes of the mentally ill, how to combat the stigma, why the characters feel compelled to hide their loved one's illness, and what other solutions might be possible.

In *A Blue So Dark*, the narrator's mother, who suffers from schizophrenia, refuses to take medication; medication compliance is a common problem among the mentally ill who deny their illness. This denial occurs because a symptom of mental illness itself is the failure to realize that you are sick, a problem commonly referred to as "lack of insight." *Will Grayson, Will Grayson*; *Kissing Doorknobs*; *Inside Out*; *It's Kind of a Funny Story*; and *Not as Crazy as I Seem* also mention the use of medication. Teens may want to

discuss the controversies surrounding the question of medication versus or combined with psychotherapy.

While otherwise excellently written, Ellen Hopkins's *Impulse* has a few troubling references to medication. The references throughout the novel to Prozac as having immediately sedative effects are problematic, as that's not consistent with what I've learned about the drug's use. Treating a common antidepressant as a tranquilizer could further the misconception that all psychotropic medication turns the people who take it into dull, numbed creatures. This misconception can lead people to resist taking medication that could help them. The title also seems misleading because as we see once we read the text, suicide isn't, for the characters, the result of a one-time impulse but rather of long periods of abuse and suffering.

*A Blue So Dark* broaches questions about the link between creativity and mental illness. There is a popular perception as well as evidence that many creative people suffer mental illness. Aura, the narrator of *A Blue So Dark*, worries that her mother's artistic nature caused her mental illness. Therefore, Aura, an artist herself, stops creating art, in fear that it will make her sick, until she can be disabused of this notion.

### Financial Worries

Many novels of mental illness discuss the very real risk that mental health care costs will be too much for the families to bear. In Julie Halpern's *Get Well Soon*, protagonist Anna will be discharged from a psychiatric ward after 21 days. While we get the sense that Anna will be able to cope, the novel raises the question of what happens to people for whom the arbitrary and short periods covered by many insurance companies are not sufficient. Many psychotropic medications do not even take effect until several weeks have passed.

In *Crazy*, Jason must deal with the holes in a complicated mental health care system. The insurance company demands his father's release from an acute-care facility where he was placed during his crisis, but the father cannot be placed into a long-term care facility for another month. Jason wonders who will care for his severely ill father during this unaccounted-for month.

### Emotional Responses toward Ill Family Member

*Stop Pretending* eloquently expresses the feelings narrator Cookie has toward her sister, who is experiencing bipolar disorder. Cookie worries what her friends will think when they find out. Cookie contemplates what if it were she who had gotten the illness instead of her sister. Will Cookie, too, get sick in the coming years? Cookie resents the shift in her parents' attention from her to her sister and misses the happy times they all shared as a family. Cookie feels sorry for her sister, but also wishes she would just snap out of it, "stop pretending," and return to the way she used to be. Characters with mentally ill parents, such as those in *Define "Normal"* and *Crazy* vacillate between wanting to care for their families and resenting the parent who leaves them with so much responsibility. Teen readers will likely be able to empathize with all of the mixed feelings that accompany loving someone with mental illness and may wish to discuss how they deal with these feelings.

In *Kissing Doorknobs*, we see the parental frustrations of having a child with mental illness. The mom tries a range of responses, from comforting her child to avoiding her to yelling to even violence. Both parents feel helpless and aren't sure what to do. This confused picture may be slightly more realistic than that of the very savvy parents in *It's Kind of a Funny Story*; their attitudes about mental illness are

enviably progressive, and they are nothing but encouraging to their son.

### Ethnic Diversity

One important observation that I made when doing my reading was that, among the YA novels of mental illness that I read, none addressed the experiences of non-white protagonists. A trend I hope to see soon is the publication of more novels of mental illness that feature characters of diverse ethnic backgrounds. In the course of my research, Bebe Moore Campbell's novel *72 Hour Hold*, an adult title narrated by the mother of a college-age daughter suffering from bipolar disorder, is the only book I could find that portrayed mental illness in an African-American family.

An interesting case to consider, though, is that of *Ball Don't Lie*, by Matt de la Peña. In this YA title, the main character is a severely disadvantaged white teen who spends most of his basketball practice time at a recreational center frequented by African Americans in a tough Los Angeles neighborhood. Though protagonist Sticky stands out because of his skin color and his undiagnosed OCD-related behaviors, he is warmly accepted by the men at the recreation center, and has fully adopted their language and culture. Though OCD plays a pivotal role in two key moments in his life, Sticky's OCD is never treated. A lack of diagnosis of, or treatment for, mental illness is a common problem experienced by members of low socio-economic groups and/or ethnic minority groups. Throughout the book, obsessive-compulsive disorder is never even referred to by name because none of the characters would know what to call it.

### Older Books: Beware

While exploring the young adult literature of mental illness, you may come across some older well-known titles on the topic.

I hesitate to recommend these because some contain ideas that are now outmoded in the medical community. For example, *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* (1964), by Joanne Greenberg, suggests that severe mental illness can be overcome through psychotherapeutic resolution of childhood issues. Mental illness is not presented as having a genetic or biological component that could be treated with medication; instead, it is the protagonist's responsibility to cure herself of mental illness, in essence. John Neufeld's *Lisa, Bright and Dark* (1969) conflates schizophrenia with multiple personality disorder, a misconception that persists even to this day.

### Looking Forward

#### The Narrative Arc

Many stories of mental illness, both fiction and nonfiction, follow a similar pattern: First, there is the hiding of the mental illness, the denial that help is needed, the fear of what will happen if others find out. Then, there is a climax or crisis point where the illness can no longer be hidden or ignored. Finally, the story is resolved with a diagnosis or care prescribed; this might be seen as a sort of happily ever after. However, in an interview printed at the back of the paperback version of the novel he coauthored with John Green, *Will Grayson, Will Grayson*, YA author David Levithan wonders, "what happens next, when you have to live the rest of your life?" While the novel of confusion, crisis, and it's-ok-to-get-help is still very necessary because even today many people are not educated about mental illness and so much stigma prevails, on the other hand, as awareness builds, a future direction for the literature to take may be to focus on, as Levithan puts it, "what happens next," that is, life after diagnosis and treatment. How do the



families and the patients adjust? After all, when talking about mental illness, the medical community focuses on “recovery” rather than “cure”; a mental illness is a chronic condition that you have to live with, not one that will completely go away.

Some novels that break out of the denial-crisis-stability pattern are *Will Grayson, Will Grayson*; *Inside Out*; and *Dirty Little Secrets*. Will Grayson, for instance, begins his story already on medication and with an uneasy acceptance of his depression. One of his challenges is to resist using his depression as an excuse to sabotage relationships. The novel reads like a relationship story, not a depression story. Depression is not the focus of the entire novel; it is just one of the many challenges faced by a complex character. In *Inside Out*, Terry Trueman takes a stabilized character and plunks him down into an unstable situation; protagonist Zach, whose illness is schizophrenia, has a pretty stable routine of school and medication established. Every day, he waits for his mother to pick him up after school at a coffee shop, but one day that coffee shop is held up by two burglars. How will Zach cope? Finally, in *Dirty Little Secrets*, one of the first things that happens is that the mother, whose mental illness is hoarding, dies. Right off the bat, then, we can see that this is not going to be a successful quest-for-help novel. Lucy, the daughter, decides that she must hide her mother’s death so that she will be able to continue living on her own and maintaining her relationships with her best friend and her boyfriend, the first “normal” relationships she’s been able to have in years. When it appears that Lucy will no longer be able to prevent others from discovering her mother’s corpse, Lucy burns the house down! This surprising turn of events leads to the next issue I’d like to consider....

### Are These Books “Problem Novels”?

One adult reaction to *Dirty Little Secrets* might first be panic; does the portrayal of Lucy’s fire-setting, which successfully fools the authorities, condone doing dangerous deeds, hiding mental illness, and furthering stigma? Lucy’s story certainly doesn’t follow the usual narrative arc of child at first hiding and struggling with parent’s illness but then finally confiding to the authorities and getting help through socially acceptable channels. Is that a good or a bad thing? In an article about how cutting is portrayed in YA literature, authors Jennifer Miskec and Chris McGee, drawing on the work of Roberta Seelinger Trites, suggest that novels that follow the pattern of confusion, crisis, get-help-from-adults are merely “problem novels,” the now scoffed-at format of YA literature from the 1970s that lacks complexity of character and thematic insight and instead functions more as a self-help guide for adolescents struggling with stereotypically adolescent social issues (drugs, abortion, abuse, etc.)<sup>2</sup> Miskec and McGee worry that the literature of self-mutilation suggests that adults are right and must be followed, a sentiment that goes against the principles of the great tradition of subversive YA literature (and children’s literature) in which the young person has special insights that are lost on the convention-following, uncritical adults. Similar concerns might be extended to the literature of mental illness as a whole. Is Lucy, then, who burns down the house and manipulates the situation to end in her favor without relying on adults to rescue her, a true YA heroine and not just the helpless kid to be rescued by grown-ups in a problem novel? Or, should we see the adults who help teens not as rescuers or as convention-followers but as the teens’ collaborators in rebellion, both groups (teens and helpful adults) fighting

against the illness itself, combating misinformation and ignorance, demanding resources, and challenging the dominant cultural discourse of stigma?

I think a good balance, a book in which neither all teens nor all adults are seen as wholly good or wholly evil, can be found in *Crazy*, by Han Nolan. Nolan shows the flaws in both trying to care for a schizophrenic father on your own and in relying solely on the foster care and mental health care systems. Justin receives great help and relief when he confides not only in adults (a counselor and a social worker) but also in other teens (his friends). They work together as a teen-and-adult support system for Justin; it’s not an us-versus-them (teens-versus-adults) conflict. Or, perhaps we can see the us-versus-them not as teens-versus-adults but rather as supportive people versus people, ideas, and institutions that are not helpful enough to patients and their families dealing with mental illness. Finally, once Justin’s father is taken to the hospital and Justin enters foster care, it’s not a simple happily-ever-after, in which Justin can relinquish his control of the situation to the adults and live a carefree life. First, a fellow foster kid stabs Justin. Then, Justin must go to court and advocate for the right to take care of his father during the one-month gap that, due to bureaucracy, will occur between his father’s hospital stay and his placement in a long-term care facility. Justin and the judge negotiate and come to a mutually agreeable solution; if Justin agrees to not neglect his academic work, the judge will grant him permission to serve as his father’s caregiver for the month in question.

### Conclusion

I’ve tried to provide an overview of the issues that you can look for and discuss as you and teens begin reading the young adult literature of mental illness.

## Not as Crazy as It Seems

We're living in a good time, when many realistic works that treat mental illness as a biological brain disorder can provide support to adolescents and inspire them to think critically as well. Stylistically, there's a lot to talk about in this new body of literature, from setting and point of view to nontraditional narrative techniques to visual art. Hopefully, too, you now know what big issues will come up in discussions and you can be prepared with insightful questions. Whether it's mixed emotions, financial concerns, or debates about medication

versus psychotherapy, the potential for conversation is rich. I hope we will also see more representations of different cultural experiences of mental illness.

Finally, as we look forward, we can ask the teens we work with what direction the literature should go to better represent them and address the challenges they face. What do the teens think of the current literature of mental illness? Are the endings of the books too tidy? Are the adults given too much power? Do the novels leave us wondering about characters' lives beyond their initial

diagnoses or once the crisis is over? What kinds of stories of mental illness should be told in the future? **YALS**

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The Houston Public Library's Community Engagement Team (CET) is changing the way the library does outreach. Setting up tables with library brochures at community events is only a small part of what the team does. Their mission is to bring Houston Public Library's (HPL) services to every part of the Houston, Texas, community, even those parts that do not have one of HPL's 44 locations nearby. The team does this by providing classes, after-school programs, and yes, tables full of library information to Houston citizens of all ages.

CET's largest and most iconic tool is the HPL Mobile Express, which is a mobile technology lab with 13 computers, a SmartBoard, and a built-in Internet connection. Purchased with federal Community Development Block Grant funding in 2008, the HPL Mobile Express and its staff became the backbone of the Community Engagement Team when that division was formed in 2011. CET uses the HPL Mobile Express to provide classes such as technology training, ESL, workforce development, LEGO Education and robotics, video game design, and outreach services in low-to-moderate income areas of Houston.

When the HPL Mobile Express is unavailable, CET has four other, smaller vehicles that it uses to bring equipment and staff to community partners that have requested services. In these cases, the partnering organizations provide space for library staff to conduct classes. These organizations include public and private schools, day care programs, community centers, after-school centers, government departments, churches, apartment complexes, and others. CET has partnered with over 250 organizations in the past year; each community partner requests the library's services for anywhere from one to six visits at a time.

# Hand in Hand: Teens, Tech, and Community Engagement

*By Rachel Stout*

## How Tech Fits into Community Engagement

The Community Engagement Team also owns a large collection of technology and equipment, but it was not acquired all at once. Where most libraries have extensive stashes of craft supplies, story time big books, and other supplies acquired over decades of service to their communities, CET collects laptops, LEGO® MINDSTORMS® kits, video cameras, model rockets, Raspberry Pi computers, and other high-tech accoutrements, and only recently began a small collection of craft supplies.

Many of CET's staff members did not know anything about programming, or LEGOs or robotics, or video making, and did not consider themselves STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and

Math) experts when they started working for HPL. But, it did not take long for all that to change. CET provides extensive training for their staff members, and new staff frequently go on an outreach or instructional event with a more senior member of the staff on their first day. These staff members continue to shadow other staff members for about a month thereafter, attending three to five events every week. Through this method staffers get a taste of all the programs that CET offers and become comfortable teaching those programs themselves. Since CET's overriding priority is outreach and provision of services outside the library, staff members are not assigned to service desks, though upon request they provide program support to HPL's neighborhood library locations. In fact,

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**RACHEL STOUT** is a staff member with the Houston Public Library's Community Engagement Team. She began her library career at the age of 16 as a children's page and has been working at HPL since 2008. She enjoys working with teens and technology, reading sci-fi and fantasy novels, and playing video games. She is convinced that she has the best job ever.



CET is not currently located at a library building at all but shares office space (and more importantly, parking lot space!) with the Houston Parks and Recreation Department (HPARD). Most of CET's 11 staff members have a particular section of the community that they feel especially passionate about serving. This has led to many of CET's most popular programs, as staff members will take the initiative to design and implement new programs in the areas of their expertise or passion. For many staff members past and present, this area of interest has been teen services.

### Reaching Teens After School

The first program specifically geared toward teens actually predated the formation of CET. A request was made to staff for suggestions for new teen programs, and two staff members suggested LEGO MINDSTORMS. As no one else had heard of LEGO MINDSTORMS, the staff members provided an enthusiastic description of how fun LEGO MINDSTORMS were, and were thrilled to come into the library one day and find stacks upon stacks of LEGO Education kits of all kinds. These kits form the basis for some of CET's most wildly popular programs.

The original suggestion of LEGO MINDSTORMS as a teen program has had its greatest success in HPL's partnership with the Citizen Schools after-school program. In this program, Citizen Schools invites members of the community into middle schools to teach after-school apprenticeships to sixth graders in their areas of expertise. This has been an extremely valuable partnership as almost every course that CET offers for teens has been the subject of an apprenticeship, and the 10-week format of this program has allowed CET to spend more time with students than would otherwise be available.

As part of this arrangement, as with any of their projects, CET provides all staff and equipment, which are transported to the partner locations using one of the vehicles from CET's fleet. For the MINDSTORMS project, this includes LEGO kits and laptop computers. CET staff members teach the students about how robots are used in the real world, and help them construct and program their own robots in teams of three or four who then present their work to their parents and peers at the end of the semester. Together with a Citizen Schools staff member, they make college to career connections for middle school students as part of their outreach efforts.

This is not to say that schools are the only place that CET has engaged teens with LEGO Education classes. Many other community organizations frequently request LEGO Education classes for their teen groups, and the Community Engagement Team is happy to oblige. CET has LEGO Education kits for a variety of audiences and class periods. One of their most popular small projects is a LEGO alligator that can be built and programmed to bite fingers in a little less than an hour, which is ideal for a class period in most schools. CET also uses TETRIX® kits, which combine LEGO MINDSTORMS kits, metal parts, and the ROBOTC programming language for a very complex and lengthy project especially for high school students.

Another popular program that CET offers for teens is video making. Born of HPL's long-standing Reel Teen Film Festival contest, the video making project started as a way to help students from a single school that lacked access to the necessary equipment to create videos to enter in the film festival. Since then, it has become a popular project in its own right. This program is almost always a multiweek event, with sessions devoted to learning about storyboarding, scriptwriting, filming,

and editing. By the end of the project, teens will have their own videos to share.

The video making tends to be a popular request from schools wishing to have their students create a video for some particular project. One such project was created by Booker T. Washington High School in Houston, where CET assisted the students with creating videos for the White House Student Film Festival competition. Many other teens create videos for school projects or other student film festivals, though CET always encourages them to enter their work in the Reel Teen Film Festival as well.

### Video Games Too

Many kids, teens, and adults in Houston are video game fans, and CET staff members are no exception. They bring this love of video games to teens by teaching video game design. The video game design class has two sections, one designed for a single one-off class and one designed as a multiweek course. The single-class section is based around the video game *Portal 2*, which was not originally designed as an educational game but features physics puzzles as its main game mechanic. Using this game, CET teaches a single-session class on video game level design. Teens discuss what makes a video game level fun to play and then create their own levels that the entire class will get to play. Some of the teens have played *Portal 2* before, and may have even previously designed a level, and so will create sprawling levels in a very short amount of time. Some teens have never played the game before, and so will create smaller levels with fewer elements to the puzzle, but almost everyone has a good time. "Just a few minutes longer!" is a frequent request when CET teaches this class.

The longer course uses *Kodu* and takes several weeks to complete. It was first presented at the Texas Library

Association Conference in 2012 as part of the conference's hands-on labs hosted on board the HPL Mobile Express. In this course, middle and high school students learn how to create their own video game from scratch. In the first week of the classes, teens are asked to come up with a concept for their game. Recreating *Minecraft* or *Call of Duty* using Kodu is a frequent suggestion, but staff try to encourage them to think of their own original ideas instead. After nailing down a concept, the teens work together as teams to design their level and program each object in it. Lest you think that HPL just hired a software development firm and called it their Community Engagement Team, Kodu is a very easy program to learn and use. It utilizes icons representing instructions that can be given to objects in the game, rather than written lines of code; this makes it easy for students that have never had any experience writing code to program their video game.

## Camp STREAM

The Community Engagement Team's most ambitious program to date is their "Camp STREAM" project. This project came about as part of a discussion regarding how CET could best promote HPL's John P. McGovern Foundation Summer Reading Program (SRP). The focus for SRP at HPL for summer 2014 was "STREAM" (Science, Technology, Reading, Engineering, Arts, and Math). Over the course of a single phone call, a vague idea that CET would provide STEM programs at various locations blossomed into a grand plan to run a free day camp for kindergarten through twelfth grade at the HPL's Central Library in downtown Houston. Since this all took place roughly two months before the beginning of summer, CET knew that creating a successful program would be a challenge.

The first step was creating curriculum for a five-day-long summer camp. After some thought, it was determined that splitting the campers into groups of roughly three grades apiece would provide the best experience overall. Each senior CET staff member was responsible for developing a curriculum for all ages in a single subject. Some staff members chose to combine their curriculum with another staff member's, such as Technology and Engineering, and Reading and Arts. Each group would focus on one or two subjects per day, with a different activity for each. During their Technology and Engineering days, middle and high school teens would both create and program LEGO MINDSTORMS robots. CET used a modified LEGO MINDSTORMS model that could be built quickly, leaving plenty of time in the afternoon to program robots. They created robots that were able to drive around on their own, avoid obstacles, and follow lines. During the other days, technology was hardly absent. On their Reading and Arts days, teens created book trailers based on *The Hunger Games* and *Holes*, using Windows Movie Maker and the expertise of CET staff to create short trailers that were later shown at the end-of-camp ceremony, all in a single day. During the Science and Math days, teens did things like make slime out of borax and glue to take home, and also origami of all kinds. CET staff suspected that parents were probably happier about the origami than the slime! At the end of the day, each camper also received a badge to take home representing that day's subject(s). A camper that attended all five days would receive six badges as well as a prize on the last day.

For the Community Engagement Team, Camp STREAM was very exciting, as it was the first time that the public was invited to their program, rather than CET going out to the public. However, it was also very challenging,

logistically speaking. The foremost challenge was finding the money to pay for it all! Therefore, CET reached out to area businesses requesting their help to make Camp STREAM a reality. As a direct result of these sponsorships, CET was able to fund the entirety of Camp STREAM, including supplies, prizes, camp T-shirts, and a pizza party on the last day of camp. To feed nearly 100 campers, CET partnered again with HPARD, using their Summer Lunch Program to feed every child. The Community Engagement Team also partnered with a large number of volunteers to help wrangle kids, serve lunches, check in campers, help with bathroom breaks, and so much more.

After the success of Camp STREAM at the Central Library, it was requested that CET take their show on the road. Calling this new project Camp STREAM *Reloaded*, CET ran the camp four more times at HPL's large Regional Libraries: Collier, Scenic Woods, Henington-Alief, and Park Place. These camps were smaller, with younger teens participating as campers and older teens participating as Official Camper Wranglers. Without their invaluable assistance with instruction and projects, the success of Camp STREAM *Reloaded* would have been impossible to achieve.

Switching gears from CET's more typical outreach efforts, during the summer they were also able to offer employment opportunities to five teens through the City of Houston's Grow Your Own Workforce program. CET's summer interns were students, but they got to do practically everything CET's permanent employees do, including staff events, maintain CET's extensive electronics inventory, speak to contacts, help with Camp STREAM, and the infamous "other duties as assigned." They were treated just like regular employees and got a great opportunity to participate in a professional work

environment. But the benefits were not all one sided. The Community Engagement Team's teens were a great addition to the team, and they brought many good ideas to the table. By having a ready source of teenage opinions so close at hand, CET staff were able to bring many improvements to the way they work with teens.

### CET and Outreach

After all the classes CET offers for teens, one might think that there is no time left for classes for kids and adults, let alone outreaches, but outreaches form a significant fraction of CET's activities. The Community Engagement Team attends many events geared to attract families, as well as outreaches specifically for teens. HPL offers many services that are enticing to teens, such as online comics, e-books, and tutoring, which makes it so much easier to pitch everything the library can offer to teens successfully. HPL prides itself on having programming for all areas of the community, so even if teens cannot make it to a CET class, they can still visit their local library for things like crafts, video games, and homework help.

Obviously, a table filled with library literature is not going to be the most attractive thing to a teen, so CET lures them in with something fun to do. At some events it is a big messy project, such

as at Tweens Read and TeenBookCon, two Houston area conventions highlighting tween and teen authors, where CET brings out a button maker and discarded comic books to allow attendees to make their own buttons. Having done this project for so long at these two cons, teens will now seek out the HPL table in particular to get a button or two and geek out with staff about their shared love of YA fiction. Sometimes it is a combination outreach and class, such as at Comicpalooza, a Houston comic book convention where CET taught robotics as a panel and staffed an HPL table in the dealers' room.

For events where less mess is called for, the Community Engagement Team will bring out some demonstration LEGO MINDSTORMS models, most of which move or can be programmed in some way to lure in visitors. Many kids and teens are attracted by something that looks cool standing out in a forest of paper and are eager to come over and take a look, just as staff members are eager to demonstrate the shiny toy they brought out. A frequent attendee of CET's outreaches is "Number 5," a LEGO MINDSTORMS robot built by staff as a demonstration for the corresponding classes. He is programmed to avoid obstacles and can also be controlled by the Bluetooth radio on a staff member's phone. There is no easier way to get the attention of anyone, young or old,

than to offer to let them drive the library robot!

As veteran library conference attendees will know, one of the very best ways to get people to stop at your table is to give out swag. CET has all sorts of HPL-branded goodies, including tote bags, Frisbees, T-shirts, and umbrellas to give away in conjunction with library card sign-ups, or just as a random giveaway. CET also created promotional videos for each class they offer and posted them on their website and YouTube. By playing these videos on a tablet at outreaches, it is easy to show off both instructional and technology offerings at the same time.

In conclusion, the Houston Public Library's Community Engagement Team is continually changing the way HPL does outreach. New classes are always in the works: "Raspberry Pi Programming," "Librarycraft: Minecraft for Everyone," and "3D Printing Basics" are poised to roll out. They feel that reaching out to teens in particular is very important, especially as they are beginning to make their own decisions about what they want to do and be. CET wants to make the library and learning to be something that teens associate with fun and not drudgery. With every new class, the Community Engagement Team changes the way the community interacts with the public library and makes it relevant in a brand new way. **YALS**



Late in the summer of 2014, a representative from a company called Aldebaran visited our library with a robot named Nancy. Nancy was a “Nao” model robot, and it was immediately clear she was different from other robots. While you wouldn’t ever mistake her for being human, she could carry on a basic conversation (“What day is it?” “Do you like animals?”). Her movements were more fluid than most robots and standing at two feet tall, she was almost childlike. Nancy could walk, talk, dance, perform tai chi, and recognize faces. More importantly: Nancy could teach people how to code. Our Development Department put together some proposals and before we knew it, we had grants to purchase two robots.

A small group of staff members spent two full days with a company representative in which we learned how to operate and program the robots. Nao robots are programmed through a software called Choregraphe, which is a visual coding language, much like Scratch. Users can string together basic commands in order to get the robot to speak or perform basic movements. The software also has a function for deeper programming using Python.

The Westport Library became the first public library in the country to have humanoid robots. Before we even had time to figure out how we were going to use our new robots, we were entrenched in a media blitz. *The Wall Street Journal* wrote a story about us, followed by local media, NPR, the BBC, and more. We officially premiered the robots at Star Wars Reads Day to a room of 150 people. While the robots have piqued the interest of the entire community, the most notable reactions have come from children and teens.

While most adults seem to be hesitant about the idea of robots (we have seen *Terminator*), teens are enchanted. Teens have been excited to interact with the robots, which means there are a number of

creative uses to pursue, including robot-based contests and dance parties.

Due to the popularity of our library’s MakerSpace, we have a group of tech-savvy teens at our disposal whenever we want to try out a new tool. Our MakerSpace functions almost entirely through the volunteer work of teenagers. A variety of students are 3D printer coaches who train people of all ages in how to use the machines. Since our library’s teen space consists of bookshelves and a table, many teens have taken to hanging out in our MakerSpace to socialize and tinker. When we introduced the robots to these volunteers, many expressed initial frustration. They shouted commands at the robots and were upset when they didn’t obey. However, when they found out that they were the ones who were going to be programming the robots, they got really excited.

### What We Want to Achieve with the Robots

We have identified the following goals:

#### Level 1 Programming Classes:

To meet demand, we are planning on having a Level 1 training class every day

for a month. Level 1 classes will meet for an hour and will be for ages 8 and up (younger children will be welcome if they are accompanied by a parent). Patrons will download Choregraphe software (the software required to program the robots) to their computers and two staff members will team up to teach a few basic commands, such as getting the robot to speak and wave hello. 15 minutes of class time will be instruction, and 45 minutes will be an open lab.

#### Level 2 Programming Classes:

Level 1 class will be a prerequisite to Level 2. We expect these to be popular with our more tech-savvy teens. We will teach basic Python coding so that users can do more advanced functions with the robots, such as games of “Simon Says” based around vocal commands and facial recognition. We’ve had limited success with teaching teens coding, and we think that this set of classes will help to get the tech-oriented teens excited about the possibilities in learning to code.

**Open Labs:** After users have taken both Level 1 and Level 2 classes, we need to schedule regular meeting times. If people have Choregraphe installed on their

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JAINA LEWIS is a Teen Librarian at the Westport Library in Connecticut and the Chair of the YALSA Teen Tech Week Committee.

## Libraries are for Making: Robots

personal computers, they can write robot coding at home, then bring it to the library to try out on the robots. The software has a “virtual robot” function to test code, but it is hard to see if it actually works until you have access to a physical robot. For example, your virtual robot may move with the grace of a ballet dancer, but you may find that the movements cause the physical robot to lose balance (luckily the robots have sensors which cause them to fall safely). Also, the virtual robot is incapable of speaking or playing sound, so you won’t know how the robot will pronounce certain words until you hear it come out of the physical robot.

**Basic Robot Viewing:** After premiering our robots, the most popular question became “Where are they?” Patrons came flocking to the

library to get a glimpse of Nancy and Vincent (we named our robots after the family foundations who supplied the funding). While the robots are indeed impressive, they are not advanced enough to simply walk around the library without supervision. A trained staff member needs to be present to give basic commands, make sure they are handled gently, and also to make sure that they aren’t stolen. While many people are interested in learning how to use the robots, a large number simply want to see them. We are having a basic viewing every weekend.

Teen Tech Week will become Teen Tech Year for our library. While our robots will be used for all ages, we plan to do the following exclusively with teens:

- We are going to train a high school robotics team to help us teach classes. They will gain community service, Python coding experience, and will have regular access to our robots (which they are obviously excited about).
- Our robots will visit middle schools and high schools in the area so that after-school robotics and technology clubs can see how they work.
- We will teach a series of Choregraphe workshops in our weekly Maker Mondays program for grades 6 through 9 and will challenge students to write Python code for our robots.

We are hoping that our robots will jump-start a love of coding in our community, especially with teens. YALS

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feature

Hot Spot: Libraries  
are for Making...

# Libraries are for Making: Making Connections That Is

By Christie Gibrich

One of the most important roles that libraries play for teens is to be a space for making connections: a space to meet friends, a space to hang out after school, a space to call their own, or a space where someone welcomes them. Every teen is different, but all teens need connections, whether they admit it or not. While we try to serve every teen equally, it can be hard to do so with time and money spread thinly across systems, branches, and library departments especially when teens are so often seen as an “outside” and “unwanted” demographic. That is where teen specialists come in to advocate for our patrons, who need programs just as much, if not more, than the cute three-year-olds learning to read, or the older folks learning to mulch.

The theme for Teen Tech Week 2015 is *Libraries Are for Making*, and while makerspaces are the current flash, libraries have been centers for “making” and “creation” for as long as we have been having crafts, programs, and classes! Everyone seems to think that a makerspace needs to be high-tech and technology driven, but all it really needs to be is a program or a space that enables and encourages teens to explore, create, and share. Take what is already successful in your library and run with it, or try a new idea. Expand and explore to show the world what your teens are *Making* this Teen Tech Week!

## Libraries are for Making Connections

Lots of teen specialists are pressed for money and time, and Teen Tech Week often falls during spring break, when it seems every teen is at the library and every staff member has asked for time off. If this is the case for you, and you are trying to figure out what to do for Teen Tech Week, then think about offering some self-directed programs.

These are programs that you can leave out on a table or a bookshelf for a few hours and let the tweens and teens work through the activities themselves. While these programs do require preparation ahead of time, and support to assist tweens and teens as needed, they are not as labor-intensive as full-out programs. These types of programs can include scavenger hunts (plan one around a theme like *Alice in Wonderland* or robots or QR codes), craft creations (clean out the craft closet and have teens create monsters or robots), or interactive displays (all you need is Post-its, writing utensils, and an empty space). These types of programs encourage tweens and teens to make connections by sharing experiences, forming teams, creating bonds, and sharing information, whether they are sharing their favorite books, creating crafts with each other, participating in scavenger hunts in teams, or reading what others recommend. You may even find that the shy teen that

doesn't say anything turns into one of your most ardent participants—I have.

Another way to make connections is through structured programs, especially those that involve teamwork, which is in itself a way of making connections. Teens split into groups with others they might have never met before, and learn new things about others and themselves, and form bonds—which last outside the library, and can grow if nurtured—via the goals and challenges through which a structured activity guides them. Games naturally provide such structure and challenges; many teens love gaming programs and there are tons of ways you can make them interesting. Do you have gaming console systems? Hook them up and have free play. Games like *Super Smash Brothers Brawl*, *Mario Kart 8*, *FIFA 14*, and *Just Dance 2014* are perfect for tournaments, and prizes can be as simple as additional computer time or fines waived, or as complex as gift cards to a local store, all depending on your budget

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**CHRISTIE GIBRICH** is a Senior Librarian in the Grand Prairie Library System in Grand Prairie Texas, in Youth/Teen Materials and Services. She is currently serving on the Teen Tech Week Committee, blogs at a Geek in Librarian's Clothing, and is co-blogging on Genre(Queer)y on Tumblr.



and donations. Want to go lower tech? Have a retro night and bring out board games like *Monopoly*, *Sorry*, *Clue*, *Trivial Pursuit*, and others and have teens break up into teams, or assign the teams if you want to scatter the cliques completely. You'll be amazed at how competitive teens can get, and how involved they will be after the first moans of "OH MISS, what is THIS?!?!?" Or, set up space and have a Yu-Gi-Oh! or Magic night, with yourself as the monitor and the teens as the players. You don't have to know how to play, just make sure everything is on the level.

Want card games? Games like *Munchkin*, *Killer Bunnies*, *Hack*, *Uno*, and *Fluxx* can be wonderful fun, and incorporate cooperation, reading, and learning all in one. If you get bored of traditional *Uno*, take it for a spin and add math to it (teens have to add, subtract, multiply, or divide to get the previous number). *Fluxx* comes in a host of different varieties, and each has different themes and cards to play.

### Libraries are for Making Content

Many teens love to make things, physical or digital. The connection they feel when creating something is often unique. It is Teen Tech Week, so get your geek on, delve into the world of digital creation, and make content with your teens! Explore sites that allow you to create GIFs (computer image files that can be static or dynamic) from videos—there are a number of free resources that can be mastered with a little investment of time on your end. Hold a create-a-meme contest on social media such as Tumblr or a best picture contest, with or without filters, on Instagram. Take some time and poll your teens ahead of time to find out what social media they're using; while mine are on Keek, yours may be on Vine, for

example, and gearing a program towards the right media will set you up for success.

Teen Tech Week is a perfect time to start a series of programs on digital life lessons, or life hacks. Some teens do not realize what they publish on social media (such as Twitter) can affect their opportunities for college or future job prospects. Start a class on the do's and don'ts of social media, using real-life examples of teens whose social media usage made a positive difference, and those whose social media content has been detrimental to their futures. Add in classes on how to create a website, how to turn the site into a personal online portfolio to showcase classwork, and how to add to the site they create for future use when applying for a job.

Highlight creative apps that work on both iPhone and Android platforms, such as Animoto, MixBit, Procreate, and Evernote. This is a perfect time to feature library apps which teens might not know about, like your ILS hook-up, Overdrive connection, or YALSA's Teen Book Finder.

### Libraries are for Making Strides

Teen Tech Week falls right at the beginning of March, when spring is just starting. What better time to launch a new series of programs? Revamp your tech savviness by offering some tech-heavy programs. Reach out to the local science teachers, technical colleges, science and industry museums, or robotics clubs in your area, and bring in speakers and workshops to teach how robots and computer coding actually work—and how teens can do it themselves. Search around on Make.com and find ideas on how to create simple robots like brushbots and others that need few parts, and let the teens loose with the robot kits and their imagination.

See if your Friends of the Library or other partners will spring for LEGO MINDSTORMS kits, so your teens can build robots from scratch with mechanics and bricks. Give teens the chance to command their robots via laptop or smart device. You could also take your already existing LEGOS and match them up with robotic kits, and see what teens can come up with on their own.

Do you have some really talented staff or volunteers you can tap to help out? Create a coding club! Platforms like Scratch and Alice are web-based and visual, so they are perfect for tweens and teens who might have no clue where to start, need the absolute basics of programming, and want results immediately. For those who can wait for results, Codecademy is a resource where anyone can learn languages such as Ruby, Python, HTML, and JavaScript. These are all languages that teens can mention on applications for college or for a job. You will be amazed at how quickly many teens understand these languages, and how amazed and proud they in turn are at their own prowess.

### Libraries are for Making a Future

Teen Tech Week is the perfect time to focus teens on their future, whether they are figuring out what they want to do in college, what colleges they want to try for, or what they want to do after high school graduation. By now older teens have applied to college or for a job, or are thinking about summer. Help get them started in their life after high school with some specific tips and information.

A lot of teens do not know the basic life skills so what about hosting a lifehack workshop? Invite a local banking agent or financial advisor to go over not only how to open a checking and savings account, but also what happens when teens sign up for

those oh-so-tempting credit card offers that will start to come in, as well as how to handle the student loans that they are offered.

Bring in a nutritionist from a community college to show how to create easy, cheap, tasty, yet nutritious meals in the dorm or apartment so that teens can stay healthy and active, and not subsist on ramen noodles like some of us did in college. Bring in a mechanic or other expert to show teens how to change a tire, how to check the oil, and other basic maintenance on a vehicle as well as when to take a car in for inspection or repair, and when to call a purchase off. (This is a great program to invite parents to as well.)

Show teens how to rethread a bicycle chain, how to sew buttons and hem a pair of pants, how actually to DO laundry instead of spraying themselves with Febreze. Bring in a health expert to discuss when it is OK to self-treat (and with what), and when it is time to call a doctor.

If you have a lot of different companies in your area contact them to see if they are hiring paid interns or have summer jobs for teens, if so put together a summer job fair for teens. A lot of times teens think they can only work in fast food because that is the only option they see. Getting a job during the summer helps

teens gain leadership and work experience that they can use their entire lives.

### Libraries are for Making a Difference

Library staff members working with teens have always been uniquely positioned to make a difference in the lives of the tweens and teens with whom they work. Teens know who has their interests at heart, and their attention and time will reflect that. Delve into the world of making with teens and show them that you care. Help teens make the connections they need to succeed in life. YALS

## Guidelines for Authors

*Young Adult Library Services* is the official publication of the Young Adult Library Services Association, a division of the American Library Association. *Young Adult Library Services* is a vehicle for continuing education of librarians working with young adults (ages twelve through eighteen) that showcases current research and practice

relating to teen services and spotlights significant activities and programs of the division.

For submission and author guidelines, please visit <http://yalsa.ala.org/yals> and click on "Submissions."

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# the YALSA update

## ASSOCIATION NEWS

### 2014 Teens' Top Ten Titles Announced

**Y**ALSA announced the official titles of the 2014 Teens' Top Ten.

Teens all over the world voted starting Aug. 15, with voting lasting through Teen Read Week™ (Oct. 12–18, 2014). Altogether, over 12,000 votes were cast for the 25 nominees.

The official 2014 Teens' Top Ten titles are as follows:

1. "Eleanor & Park" by Rainbow Rowell (Macmillan/St. Martin's Griffin)
2. "Splintered" by A.G. Howard (ABRAMS/Amulet Books)
3. "The Rithmatist" by Brandon Sanderson (Tor Teen)
4. "The 5th Wave" by Rick Yancey (Penguin/Putnam Juvenile)
5. "Monument 14: Sky on Fire" by Emmy Laybourne (Macmillan/Feiwel & Friends)
6. "Earth Girl" by Janet Edwards (Prometheus Books /Pyr)
7. "The Testing" by Joelle Charbonneau (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt)
8. "Steelheart" by Brandon Sanderson (Random House/Delacorte Press)
9. "Siege and Storm" by Leigh Bardugo (Macmillan/Henry Holt Books for Young Readers)
10. "The Eye of Minds" by James Dashner (Random House/Delacorte Press)

The Teens' Top Ten is a "teen choice" list, where teens nominate and choose their favorite books of the previous year. Nominators are members of teen book

groups in 16 school and public libraries around the country. Nominations are posted on Celebrate Teen Literature Day, the Thursday of National Library Week, and teens across the country vote on their favorite titles each year. Learn more at [www.ala.org/yalsa/teenstopten](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/teenstopten)

### 2015 YA Services Symposium in Portland

Join YALSA for the Young Adult Services Symposium! The Symposium, previously titled the Young Adult Literature Symposium, and held every other year, will now be held annually and cover the entire spectrum of topics related to providing services for and with young adults. The 2015 Symposium will take place November 6–8, 2015 in Portland, Oregon at the Hilton Portland. The theme of the 2015 event is: Bringing it All Together: Connecting Libraries, Teens & Communities. Registration opens April 2015. Learn more at [www.ala.org/yalsa/yasympoium](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/yasympoium)

### Join YALSA at ALA Annual Conference!

YALSA has big plans for Annual 2015 – be part of the action in San Francisco, June 26–30.

There are plenty of interesting programs and ticketed events to attend such as the Margaret A. Edwards Brunch, Geek Out!: The Importance of Pop Culture in Libraries, YA Author Coffee Klatch, Odyssey Award Presentation and Program, Diversity Dynamism: Mixing Resources and Making Connections, and many more.

Detailed information on all YALSA has to offer at Annual 2015, can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/YALSAan15>.

Find more details about registration and housing at the ALA Annual Web site, [www.alaannual.org](http://www.alaannual.org). For the latest details on YALSA's Annual schedule, visit the YALSA <http://tinyurl.com/YALSAan15>.

### Teen Tech Week™ 2015: Libraries are for Making...

Teen Tech Week 2015 features the theme "Libraries are for Making..." and takes place March 8–14, 2015. The theme encourages libraries to promote themselves as places for teens to pursue their interests via hands-on activities and where learning can extend beyond the classroom. YALSA calls on school and public library staff across the country to use Teen Tech Week as an opportunity to raise awareness in their local community about the digital resources and services the library offers to help teens succeed in school and prepare for college and careers.

New this year, individuals who join the Teen Tech Week site will have access to free, themed digital downloads of mini-posters, bookmarks and more. The themed posters and bookmarks feature four different interpretations of the theme. The main artwork features a blank space after the tagline "Libraries are for Making..." that allows library staff to write in a word or phrase that describes their library's making activities.

Designs of the remaining three posters and bookmarks feature artwork

that corresponds to the taglines “Libraries are for Making Connections,” “Libraries are for Making Futures” and “Libraries are for Making Innovations.”

Library staff are encouraged to utilize any or all of the themed art to suit their library’s needs, as well as share images and their own interpretation of the theme by tweeting @yalsa and using the hashtag #TTW15 or by sharing photos on the Teen Tech Week site. For more information about Teen Tech Week, visit [www.ala.org/teentechweek](http://www.ala.org/teentechweek).

## Promote the Best of the Best @ Your Library

Just after this issue of YALS mails, YALSA will announce its award winners at the Youth Media Awards. The announcement takes place Feb. 2, 2015. In addition, YALSA will announce its selected book and media lists for 2015 the week of Feb. 1st, as selection committees submit their final lists to the YALSA office.

Beginning in mid-February, visit [www.ala.org/yalsa/best](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/best) to find downloadable tools to promote winners at your library, part of YALSA’s Best of the Best set of resources. You’ll be able to download customizable bookmarks featuring the winners of the 2015 Alex, Edwards, Morris, Nonfiction, Odyssey, and Printz Awards. We’ll also offer press releases, which you can customize and send to local publications to let teens know that award winners are available at your library. You can download logos to use on your website or in marketing materials in your library, spine labels to apply to titles that appear in the Best of the Best, and other tools to promote the awards, as well as YALSA’s annual lists: Amazing Audiobooks for Young Adults, Best Fiction for Young Adults, Fabulous Films for Young Adults, Great Graphic Novels for Teens, Popular Paperbacks for Young Adults, and Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers.

## Have Fun While Building Your Professional Skills!

Update your skills, get leadership and networking opportunities, be a part of

moving YALSA forward and have a great time by joining one of our strategic committees! President-Elect Candice Mack will be appointing committee members to 2015–2017 strategic committees that help the association advance its mission and the profession. Interested in being more involved? Read on to find out how.

## A Guide to Strategic Committees

YALSA has two types of committees: selection committees, which select specific library materials or choose YALSA’s awards and strategic committees, which help carry out the work of the association. Strategic committees include:

### JURIES

- Books for Teens Jury
- BWI/YALSA Collection
- Development Grant Jury
- Conference Travel Scholarships Jury
- Frances Henne/VOYA/YALSA
- Research Grant Jury
- Great Books Giveaway Jury
- MAE Award for Best Literature
- Program for Teens Jury
- Volunteers of the Year Award Jury
- Writing Award Jury

### BOARDS

- Continuing Education Advisory Board
- JRLYA Advisory Board
- Publications Advisory Board
- The Hub Advisory Board
- Website Advisory Board
- YALS Editorial Advisory Board
- YALSAblog Advisory Board

### COMMITTEES & TASKFORCES

- Division and Membership Promotion Committee
- Financial Advancement Committee
- Joint School/Public Library
- Cooperation Committee
- Legislation Committee
- Annual Conference Marketing & Local Arrangements Taskforce (seeking members in the San Francisco area)
- Organization and Bylaws Committee
- Research Committee
- Teen Read Week Committee
- Teen Tech Week Committee

- Teens’ Top Ten Committee
- Mentoring Taskforce
- National Guidelines Oversight Committee
- Summer Reading & Learning Taskforce

## What to Know Before You Volunteer

Before you volunteer to serve on a committee, advisory board or jury, you’ll want to learn what the group does and what your responsibilities will be. Check out the Committee FAQ at [www.ala.org/yalsa/committee-faq](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/committee-faq)

On the YALSA website you’ll also find information about each of the group’s functions, size, and more. Start your research at [www.ala.org/yalsa/workingwithyalsa/yalsacommittee](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/workingwithyalsa/yalsacommittee). Lastly, be sure to read through YALSA’s Handbook, especially the sections that list responsibilities for committee members. It’s online at [www.ala.org/yalsa/aboutyalsa/yalsahandbook](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/aboutyalsa/yalsahandbook).

## Complete the Volunteer Form

To be considered for any committee or jury, you need to fill out a volunteer form. It is available online (go to [www.ala.org/yalsa/aboutyalsa/yalsahandbook](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/aboutyalsa/yalsahandbook) and choose “Committee Volunteer Form”). When you fill out a form, please be sure to include the name of the groups on which you’d most like to serve. If you don’t indicate a few that you’re particularly interested in, it is very difficult for the President-Elect to find the best fit for you. Forms are only kept on file for one year, so it’s important that you fill one out each year that you would like to serve on a committee or jury.

## Timeline

Applications will be accepted through March 1st, and once submitted you should look for an email confirmation from YALSA. Appointments will be made by the President-Elect in March and April 2015. Please do not expect to hear from Candice before March. For updates on the appointments process, check the YALSAblog. If appointed, your term begins July 1, 2015.



## The Fine Print

All of YALSA's strategic committees are virtual appointments, meaning you do not need to attend the Annual Conference or Midwinter Meeting to serve on a committee. Appointments are two-year terms for advisory boards and committees, and one year terms for juries. Some groups are very popular and may receive dozens of volunteer forms for just two or three available spots. Your membership in YALSA must be current in order for you to be eligible to serve on a committee or jury.

Questions? Please contact Candice Mack, YALSA's President-Elect, at [candice.yalsa@gmail.com](mailto:candice.yalsa@gmail.com) or YALSA's Membership Coordinator, Letitia Smith, at [lsmith@ala.org](mailto:lsmith@ala.org).

For other ways to build your professional skills and/or get more involved in YALSA, please visit [www.ala.org/yalsa/getinvolved/getinvolved](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/getinvolved/getinvolved).

## YALSA announces Johana Orellana as its 2015 Emerging Leader

YALSA has chosen Johana Orellana as its 2015 Emerging Leader. Orellana will receive funding to attend the American Library Association's Midwinter Meeting and Annual Conference in 2015. YALSA's participation in the Emerging Leaders program is through the Friends of YALSA (FOY), which since 2005 has funded more than \$100,000 in member awards, grants, stipends and scholarships.

Orellana is a community services librarian at the San Mateo County Library in California. She is an ALA Spectrum Scholar and a Pew Research Library Series Advisory Board Member. In addition to YALSA/ALA, Orellana is also a member ALSC, CLA, and APALA.

The ALA has selected 50 individuals to participate in its 2015 class of Emerging Leaders. The program is designed to enable library staff and information

workers to participate in project planning workgroups; network with peers; gain an inside look into ALA structure and have an opportunity to serve the profession in a leadership capacity early in their careers.

## Giving Tuesday Raises Funds to Send YALSA Members to National Library Legislative Day

December 2, 2014 was Giving Tuesday. YALSA's Financial Advancement Committee raised a total of \$2,566, which will be used to send two members to National Library Legislative Day in May. Members can apply online through Feb. 1st at [www.ala.org/yalsa/awardsandgrants/yalsaawardsgrants](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/awardsandgrants/yalsaawardsgrants). Thanks to committee members Franklin Escobedo, Dora Ho, Gretchen Kolderup, Amanda Margis, Jack Martin (chair), Melissa McBride, and Lynda Salem-Poling. YALS

## Get in the loop with YALSA!

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



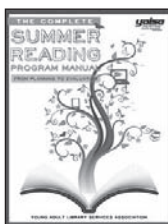
### Practical Programming: The Best of YA-YAAC | \$40/\$36 for ALA members

Young adult enthusiasts around the world coalesce at YALSA's discussion list, YA-YAAC to chat about cool craft ideas, share teen programming successes, and solicit suggestions for challenges. YALSA's newest title provides librarians and library workers with a wealth of tried and true programming ideas for teens.



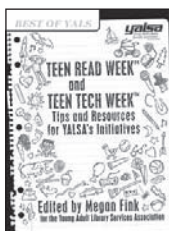
### Cool Teen Programs for under \$100 | \$35/\$31.50 for ALA members

Producing engaging, innovative programs for teens on a tight budget is a challenge that many librarians face. With *Cool Teen Programs for under \$100*, YALSA offers an inspired new guide providing a wealth of fun, creative programming ideas sure to entice teens into the library, all easily replicable and easy on the bottom line.



### The Complete Summer Reading Manual: From Planning to Evaluation | \$40/\$36 for ALA members

Summer reading programs are a mainstay of public library services; whether you're embarking on your first or you think you could plan one in your sleep, you're sure to find helpful advice, sources, idea and programs descriptions in this manual.



### Teen Read Week and Teen Tech Week: Tips and Resources for YALSA's Initiatives | \$35/\$31.50 for ALA members

This manual will offer guidance to librarians planning their annual events, with advice on best practices, collection development, outreach and marketing, program ideas and more.

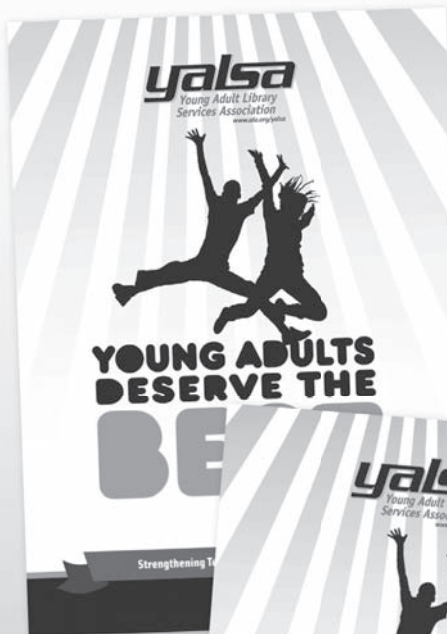
Visit [www.alastore.ala.org](http://www.alastore.ala.org) or call 1-866-SHOP-ALA to order today.

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# YOUNG ADULTS DESERVE THE BEST

**Understanding Teen Behavior for a Positive Library Experience & Strengthening Teen Services through Technology Instructional Kits Now Available!**



YALSA's training kits take the work out of putting on a workshop! Each kit provides ready-to-use training materials, including PowerPoint presentations, a script and step-by-step group activities. Trainers can adapt them for their audience, or use as-is. Each kit is broken into several modules, that can work as stand-alone mini-sessions, or they can be presented together as a full day of training. The Understanding Teen Behavior for a Positive Library Experience kit focuses on helping all library workers gain the knowledge and skills they need to have successful interactions with teen patrons. The Teens and Technology kit provides a wealth of information to help library workers keep up to date on how best to integrate technology into programs and services. Visit [www.ala.org/yalsa/young-adults-deserve-best](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/young-adults-deserve-best) to view free demos, place your order or learn more!

Cost: \$175 for digital download; \$199 for paper edition with CD containing PowerPoint presentations (binder-ready, three-hole punched and tabbed). For 20% off orders of 25 or more, mention code YUTB12 for Understanding Teen Behavior and code YTEC12 for Strengthening Teen Services through Technology.

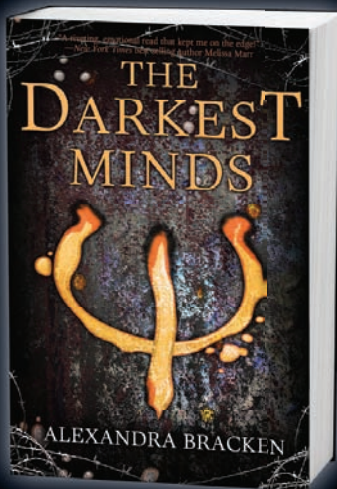
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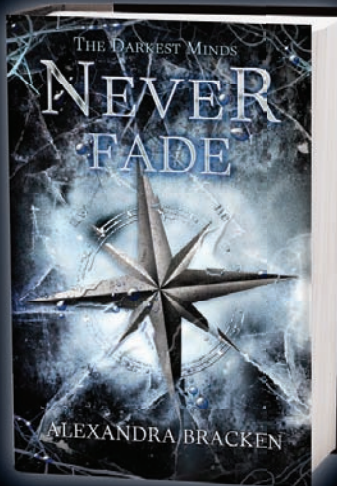


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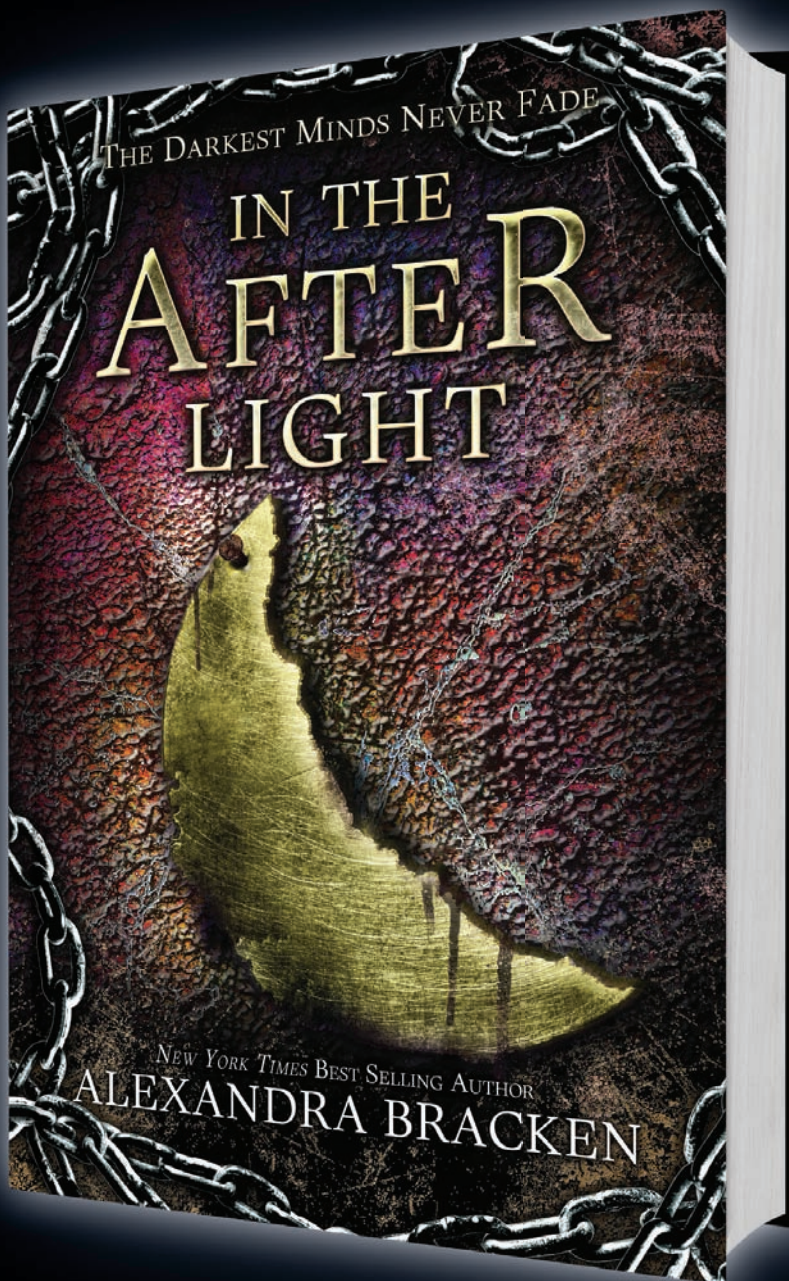
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