YALSA Board of Directors Meeting
ALA Midwinter Meeting, New Orleans
June 22 - 26, 2018

Topic: **Position Paper on Continuous Teen Services**

Background: **Last year, YALSA member Izabel Gronski was recruited to write a position paper about the need for sustained, year-round teen services. This effort was the result of a board discussion about Teen Read Week™ and Teen Tech Week™ that took place in June 2017 as part of board document 32 (http://bit.ly/2peG3rV). The Board discussed the draft paper in March 2018 who recommended changes to focus the document and modify the language to make it inclusive of both school and public libraries An updated draft of the paper, which attempts to address the Board's concerns, is provided below for the board's consideration.**

Action Required: **Action**

Continuous Teen Services: Position Paper

Abstract.
As a key member of the larger community, school and public libraries play a fundamental and essential role in helping teens prepare for and move successfully into adulthood. Healthy adolescent development requires creating opportunities for teens to engage in year-round high quality formal and informal learning experiences. While many public libraries ramp up teen services in the summer, or for special programs such as Teen Read Week™ and Teen Tech Week™, many do not provide intentional and sustained year-round teen programs and services. All teens have the capacity to learn, grow, and develop into knowledgeable, caring, and contributing adults, but to do this they must have access to the very best services and programs libraries can offer all year long.

Problem Statement
Supporting teens through the formative stages of adolescence is a critical role that many school and public libraries have embraced; however, several societal factors have emerged that impact this role. Libraries, then need to rethink their current service model and be intentional in providing continuous learning experiences for and with all teens.

- The demographics of teens has shifted. There are over 25 million youth ages 12-17 in the United States. Forty-seven percent of them are youth of color or indigenous youth. (Annie E. Casey, 2017).

- Nineteen percent of youth in the United States live in poverty. The numbers are higher for youth of color and indigenous youth. (Annie E. Casey, 2017). This growing economic disparity limits teens' extracurricular participation, which has a significant impact on later outcomes and achievements (Wong, 2015).

- There is a growing gap in access to and use of digital media between privileged youth and non-dominant youth, including youth of color and youth who belong to lower socioeconomic groups (Ito et al, Connected Learning, 2013).

- Approximately 6.7 million youth ages 14-24 are disconnected; that is, homeless, in foster care, involved in the justice system, or are neither employed or enrolled in an educational is youth ages 14-24 who are homeless (Belfield, Levine & Rosen, 2012). These youth often do not have strong support systems from school and/or home. Schools nationwide are hostile environments for a distressing number of LGBTQ students, the overwhelming majority of whom routinely hear anti-LGBT language. LGBTQ students who experience victimization and discrimination at school have worse educational outcomes and poorer psychological well-being (GLSEN, 2015).

- Teens are leaving school unprepared for the 21st century workforce, as well as other responsibilities associated with adulthood (Twenge, 2017; Denizet-Lewis, 2017).

- For every young person enrolled in an afterschool program who lives in a community of concentrated poverty, two more young people are shut out of the program, due to lack of resources to meet the demand (Afterschool Alliance, 2016).

Many school and public libraries struggle to support teens and to address the challenges they face with intentional and sustained year-round activities and services that help them thrive. Frequently school and public libraries:
- Tolerate negative staff attitudes towards teens.

- Plan programs without first seeking teen input, which often leads to low attendance.

- Struggle to create formal and informal learning experiences for teens that amplify youth voice, incorporate community engagement, and focus on high quality outcomes.

- Overlook the positive impact year-round services has on teens' learning, engagement, and life outcomes, as well as on the library's perceived value by community members.

Additionally, many public libraries in particular tend to
- Focus the majority of their resources, including staff time, for teen services in the summer months.

- Schedule programs to take place in the library, thus limiting participation to those teens who have access to reliable transportation.

- Lack intentionality in program planning by not first considering desired learning outcomes.

Position
Providing continuous teen services is essential for teens and their families and positively impacts teens by giving them access to the resources and services they need to thrive and grow into productive adults. Year-round services enable library staff to build ongoing relationships with teens, develop multifaceted formal and informal learning experiences that move away from one-and-done experiences to a seamless continuum of learning, and provide opportunities that expand beyond the library walls.

YALSA's report, the "Future of Library Services for and with Teens: A Call to Action" offers a framework for shifting approaches to teen services that school and public libraries can leverage to provide intentional and sustained, year-round services for and with teens to meet teens' passions and needs that, for whatever reasons, are not being fully met by schools or other institutions. In adopting a continuous, year-round approach to library services, school and public libraries can give significant value to their community by supporting healthy adolescent development, providing safe spaces for teens to explore their passions, and preparing teens for college, careers, and life.

The "Future of Library Services for and with Teens: A Call to Action," is a guide for the changing roles that librarians and library workers should play in teens' lives, and its follow up publication, *Putting Teens First in Library Services: A Road Map*, provides comprehensive information on how to implement the changes at the library level. This includes a shift from the librarian as an expert on all teen interests and technologies to a facilitator who co-learns alongside teens and empowers teens to co-plan and implement programs. In addition to this changing role, the report emphasizes the importance of connected learning as a driving factor for programming and services. Connected learning is defined as learning that is "socially embedded, interest-driven, and oriented towards educational, economic, or political opportunity" (Ito, Gutierrez, Livingston, and Penuel, 2012, p. 6). Embracing connected learning as the primary motivation for continuous, year-round library services enables librarians and library workers to be responsive to teens' interests and meet community needs as well as develop ongoing experiences that allow teens to delve deeper and deeper into what engages them the most.

Another key to success with year-round teen services mentioned in YALSA's report, is to partner strategically beyond the library's walls. This complements the first change in transitioning from expert to facilitator. By identifying and building relationships with community partners (individuals, groups, and institutions) that are equipped to provide necessary services for and with teens, libraries expand their reach and impact without stretching their resources too thin. In loosening the role of information keeper and expert, library staff bring community partners into the work of the library, go to community partner sites to work with teens, and/or connect teens to partners outside of the library. In a year-round cycle of teen services this helps to enable activities and services throughout the community on an ongoing basis.

The final two recommendations in YALSA's report worth noting include creating a whole-library and whole-school approach to serving teens and supporting library staff in gaining new skills. Whereas the traditional way of teen library services typically focused on a single dedicated staff person charged with serving teens, the recommended approach outlined in the report calls for library staff to tap into the resources and skills of their fellow staff members, volunteers, community experts, and teens to provide services for and with teens. This also requires all library workers to gain new skills that go outside the scope of traditional library services (e.g. readers' advisory and reference interviews). YALSA's "Teen Services Competencies for Library Staff" outline the knowledge, skills and dispositions all staff need to engage successfully with teens and their families. The future of library services for and with teens depends on library staff that is skilled in understanding of the needs of 21st century teens and in connecting to resources both within and without the library to serve them.

When school and public libraries choose to focus only on specific, short-lived events like summer learning, Teen Read Week™, and Teen Tech Week™, they are not providing the sustained services that meet the passions and interests of teens or that they need to grow into productive adults. Scattered opportunities for learning and engagement do not give teens the ability to build understanding and skills over time, or to apply the knowledge they've gained. As a result, many teens, especially those from marginalized communities and low-income families, lack the experiences they need to thrive today and to be successful in the future.

Recommendations

School and public libraries are a place for formal and informal learning opportunities that support healthy adolescent development, teen interests, and work to help mitigate the issues teens face by providing year-round teen services. To achieve this, libraries must:

- Identify common teen needs and pinpoint when the need is most likely to arise
    - Seek feedback from teens, parents, educators and other adults who interact regularly with teens to learn what teen needs are at different times of the year, and use that information to inform program and service planning. For example, if high school students take college entrance exams in the spring, offer test prep courses in the winter.
    - Engage with community organizations that support youth to find out the time(s) of year they offer programming to identify gaps the library could fill or opportunities for collaboration.
    - Communicate with the school library and vice versa to share calendars and plans to avoid overlap and identify points of need. For example, if schools will be closed for a teacher in-service day, the public library should plan for an influx of teens.
    - Track teen library use to identify hours and times of the year that are busiest. Work with administrators to use this data to deploy staffing, funds and resources.
- Address barriers to access
    - Collaborate with school systems and/or appropriate community agencies to secure transportation for teens to the library. For example, a public library can connect with the school district to see if it can be added to the afterschool bus route.
    - Advocate for the library to be open evenings and weekends, as year-round teen services require the library being available to teens when teens are able to use it.
    - Arrange for activities and services to take place at locations out in the community where teens spend their out-of-school hours.
    - Provide and promote robust online resources for teens so those who have Internet access at home can take advantage of library resources at any time.
    - Review library policies and procedures to
        - Ensure that they do not put up barriers to access by requiring teens to show an ID or sign a behavior contract before using library resources.

- Enable library staff to connect with teens outside of the library building
- ~~Work with co-workers to review the library's overall program and budget as well as community demographics to ensure that resources, like staff and funds, are being equitably deployed across all age groups in ways that support the specific community's needs.~~
- ~~Seek input from teens and their families before planning programs. Leverage surveys, focus groups, informal conversations and more to find out what needs and interests teens have before planning programs. After gathering information, work with teens to co-plan programs based on the feedback shared by teens and their families.~~
- ~~Identify underserved teens in the community and work with partners to close the gap by providing services, resources and programs that meet their specific needs.~~
- ~~Align teen services efforts with the library's mission, goals and strategic plan.~~
- Provide opportunities for teens to deepen their learning
  - Build activities and services for and with teens that enable ongoing impact through multi-part series, recurring sessions, and ongoing engagement on topics the teens in the community have identified as high interest.
  - Incorporate connected learning best practices into year-round programs by facilitating the development of hands-on activities that support teen interests and integrate teen voice into planning and implementation.
  - Focus measurement on outcomes to demonstrate the impact on teen lives that a year-round sustained services for and with teens has on youth and the community.
- Leverage community resources to alleviate the burden of program planning on library staff
  - Actively build relationships with teens and their families and engage teens in the design and implementation of activities.
  - Identify local experts who can facilitate activities, teach a workshop, give a presentation, etc. related to their area of expertise.
- ~~Build relationships with community agencies and schools to maximize impact, share resources, and develop pathways for teens to engage in learning that leads to life success.~~
- ~~Engage the whole family along with caregivers in teen learning and development.~~
- ~~Leverage community resources (including human resources who may act as experts in particular fields) to plan, implement and evaluate learning activities for and with teens.~~
- ~~Provide meaningful leadership opportunities for teens.~~
- Commit to building your own skills in areas of need, such as cultural competence, ~~outcomes-based evaluation~~, managing community partnerships, community asset mapping, ~~digital media and learning~~, facilitating learning, and connected learning.
- Create an inclusive welcoming environment year-round
  - Work with co-workers to ensure the whole library space (physical and virtual) is welcoming to teens and uphold a whole library approach to teen services.

    o   Advocate for teen services training for all library staff to ensure all staff are willing and able to effectively serve teens

Conclusion

Public libraries serve the entire community, from "cradle to grave." Adults and young children have access to programs and services throughout the year. Teens need and deserve the same continuous service from their public library as other age groups. Today's teens, especially those from traditionally underserved communities, need more than intermittent library services and programs to thrive and grow into productive adults and engaged citizens. The paradigm shift laid out in YALSA's report, the "Future of Library Services for and with Teens: A Call to Action" promotes an approach to teen services that includes intentional and sustained year-round teen programs and services for and with teens. By moving towards a year-round model for teen library services, libraries will enable teens to transition to adulthood successfully. And in the process, libraries will add value to their community and be indispensable.

Selected Resources

Library staff who change their approach from planning teen programs and services in isolation to embedding youth voice in the planning process see more success with their efforts and with achieving positive outcomes for teens. The following resources can be leveraged by libraries to help provide year-round services for/with teens:

- Afterschool Alliance - www.afterschoolalliance.org/
- Afterschool Programs wiki page, http://wikis.ala.org/yalsa/index.php/After_School_Programs
- Calendar of Teen Programming Ideas, http://wikis.ala.org/yalsa/index.php/Calendar_of_Teen_Programming_Ideas
- Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), https://casel.org/
- College & Career Readiness wiki page, http://wikis.ala.org/yalsa/index.php/College_%26_Career_Readiness
- College Planning Calendar: a To-Do List for Parents and Students, https://www.merrilledge.com/article/college-planning-calendar-to-do-list-for-parents-students
- Cultural Competence wiki page, http://wikis.ala.org/yalsa/index.php/Cultural_Competence
- Digital Media and Learning Research Hub, https://dmlhub.net/
- A Framework for High Quality Project Based Learning, https://hqpbl.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/FrameworkforHQPBL.pdf
- Idea Book: Libraries for Families, https://globalfrp.org/Articles/Libraries-for-the-21st-Century-It-s-A-Family-Thing
- Maker & DIY Programs wiki page, http://wikis.ala.org/yalsa/index.php/Maker_%26_DIY_Programs
- Museums, Libraries and 21st Century Skills, www.imls.gov/impact-imls/national-initiatives/museums-libraries-and-21st-century-skills/museums-libraries-and-21st-century-skills-definitions

- National Afterschool Association, https://naaweb.org/
- Partnership for 21st Century Learning, www.p21.org/
- Project Outcome, https://www.projectoutcome.org/
- Ready by 21, http://www.readyby21.org/
- remakelearning.org, http://remakelearning.org/
- Serving Diverse Teens wiki page,
  http://wikis.ala.org/yalsa/index.php/Serving_Diverse_Teens_@_Your_Library
- STARnet - https://www.starnetlibraries.org/
- Teen Programming Guidelines, www.ala.org/yalsa/teen-programming-guidelines
- Teen Programming HQ, http://hq.yalsa.net/index.html
- Teen Programs How-To Kit, http://media.walkerart.org/pdf/wac_teen_kit_booklet.pdf
- YALSA's Professional Tools, http://www.ala.org/yalsa/professionaltools
- YOUmedia Network Community of Practice, http://youmedia.org/

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