

The room is hushed. You could hear a pin drop. San Francisco Bay Area Young Adult (BAYA) librarians are meeting, and we have come to the part of our meeting dedicated to discussing budget cuts. I ask our members to share their situations with the rest of the group. There's a shift in the energy as we prepare ourselves for unpleasant news. Our usually lively energy simmers down into hushed commiseration. Materials budgets, staff, open hours, training—all downsized. There are some bright spots—recently hired librarians, new library branches opening, grants providing much-needed funds. But overall, most of us are tightening our belts with no light visible at the end of the proverbial tunnel any time soon.

This scenario isn't really anything new. We often feel that we stand in line behind children's and adult services and get the short end of the stick when it comes to materials and space. Besides working with small budgets, fiscal responsibility demands that we look for the most cost-effective way to provide services. We are always looking for ways to save a buck. Times are always hard for Teen Services. But YA librarians are nothing if not resourceful. Here are five ways to serve teens effectively despite hard economic times.

Build a Support Network

If you are a new librarian with little or no experience you can get the help you need from experienced professionals. New hires often find there is no one to train or mentor them at their own location, or that existing staff is counting on them to develop programs with teen appeal. Take every opportunity you can to network with other YA librarians in your state or local area. Start a support group if one does not already exist. Get online with YALSA's electronic lists and meet other YA librarians virtually, if not physically.

No Staff, No Money, What to Do?!?!?!?

Improving Teen Services in Hard Economic Times

By Elsie Okada Tep

Fight Feelings of Isolation

You are not alone. You may feel that way—you may be the only one reading YA lit, the only one doing programming for teens, the only one who actually likes working with teens. Connect with other professionals who are serving teens in your area. Being around others with the same interests can really lift your spirits and invigorate you. When you are with other YA librarians, it's a given that teens are important. Everyone has had a lousy turnout or no-show program. Everyone has booked a less-than-stellar presenter. Everyone has gone through the warming up period of getting to know a community and building rapport with local teens. Everyone has had the deer-in-

the-headlights experience of being stumped at readers advisory. Everyone is fighting for more funding and space for teen materials and programming from the ever-shrinking pie. But these same things may apply to school librarians (if there are any left in your area) and others providing services to teens. Investigate your local parks and recreation department and other teen-serving organizations and make connections with the people who are providing teen programs.

Seek Out Time- and Money-Saving Resources

Start a local review newsletter with other area YA librarians. (Take a look at

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www.baya.org/reviews.html for an example.) Seek out publishers who will send you recently published books for review. Publisher's editions can be added to your collection. Many publishers will send you advance reader's copies in exchange for feedback. These cannot usually be added to your collection, but they can be given to your teens.

Discuss programming ideas with colleagues, both locally and online. Find out if your state association has a listserv where you might learn about free and inexpensive presenters who live nearby. Find out if you can share programming resources with neighboring libraries. Use YALSA's electronic resources, especially its electronic discussion lists, to keep up on ideas for YA books and programs. YALSA-BK (for discussion of books), YA-YAAC (programming, teen advisory groups, and more), YA-URBAN for those in urban libraries, and YA-MUSIC (music collections and programming) make it easy to share information and pick up tips.

Develop Your Professional Skills

Don't wait for training budgets to return—seek out the training you feel you need. Find out if your state offers inexpensive continuing education training. More and

more courses are offered online. YALSA offers online courses (www.ala.org/yalsa/onlinecourses) with reduced rates for members. California's Infopeople Project (www.infopeople.org) offers on-site courses for California library workers and online courses that are also available to out-of-state residents. Keep up with library news using RSS feeds, and keep your eyes open for free opportunities. For example, Scott Nicholson of Syracuse University recently offered a course on gaming in libraries that is available to all for free (www.gamesinlibraries.org/course/?page_id=117).

Help Your Colleagues Feel More Comfortable Serving Teens

Think about ways to improve services to teens by helping your colleagues improve their skills. Many members say that they are often called on when a teen asks for help at the reference desk. Helping other staff feel more comfortable helping teens will improve services across the board. Staff reductions means that many of us will be serving all age groups at the reference desk. It will become less and less possible to call on a colleague for help.

Last year BAYA presented a workshop to help library staff as a whole

provide better readers advisory for teens. This was a concrete way to improve services to teens by raising the competency level of all staff. We know there is no substitute for actually reading YA materials. We also realize that we cannot always be there when a teen asks for help. We cannot expect everyone to immediately recognize the titles or series a teen may be interested in, but we can help our colleagues become familiar with the resources we find useful. We can share our lists, favorite databases, and Web sites. As staff is further reduced, these indirect methods of providing readers advisory will become even more important.

The continuing relevance and growth of organizations like BAYA and YALSA is a reflection of the uniqueness of the professional needs of people who serve teens in our libraries.

We have now come to the realization that improving services to teens is not solely dependent on our individual development but on the development of our library community as a whole. We can make it through tough economic times if we can share our expertise with each other to provide quality service to everyone. For more information about BAYA, visit us at www.baya.org. We would love to hear from other local organizations like ours. YALS