

How often during the day do you hear talk about the economy? The topic is the focus of many people these days, and it doesn't look as if it will change much for a while. As the country tries to bolster itself to get through financial hardship, libraries need to continue to find ways to remain viable, even while budgets are being cut. *Good Morning America*, CNN, and other news outlets feature stories about the increase in library usage across the country, but what is happening in the world of young adult services? It's turning out that it is no exception.

At many libraries, the lament has often been "Where are the teens?" However, as parents lose jobs and teens struggle to find summer work, the library is becoming not only a place for free entertainment but a safe haven as well. Teens are coming to libraries to find work, to volunteer, or simply to hang out. "Teen patrons' lives are, indeed, heavily affected by the state of the economy," said Angela Campbell of the Davenport (Iowa) Public Library during a recent interview. "Some of their parents have lost their jobs, another family faced eviction, and I think that plays a huge role in why the library is a main place teens go to unwind and connect with their peers."

For Joe Marcantonio of the Plainfield (Ill.) Public Library, an immense indication of the current economy and its impact on libraries came when he reviewed the library circulation statistics for June. In an e-mail, Joe mentioned the trends he's seen: "In the entire month of June 2008, we circulated 58,728 items. In 2009, from June 1 to June 15, we have circulated just over 55,000. Basically, we've doubled our circulation, which has been crazy for all departments."

With many teens lacking the disposable income they have had in previous summers, the depth and breadth of media and materials provided by public libraries fills a pop-culture gap. As Shari Fesko of the Southfield (Mich.) Public Library said, "My CD and DVD

Making the Best of It

YA Librarians Share How They're Coping in a Tough Economy

By Christine Ayar

collections are a huge draw, and my graphic novel collection circulation stats continue to rise and rise with every comic book movie that comes out!" Sharon Colvin of the Scituate (Mass.) Town Library also confirmed the trend, noting that magazines are immensely popular: "The kids love magazines. They don't even care that some issues are lost or nearly disintegrated from use."

An influx of teen volunteers, many of whom cannot find work in the current economy, is another noticeable trend. Christie Vogt of Davenport (Iowa) Public Library has been overwhelmed by the response from teens. "I'm consistently amazed by the number of teen volunteers that I have. Basically I don't have enough volunteer opportunities to go around," explained Christie. "I get the impression that they're full of great ideas, energy, and surprisingly even the motivation to make

positive contributions to their community and just aren't connecting to or finding the opportunities to do such." For some teens, volunteering doesn't just help them pass the time and help the community—it helps them keep fines down. "My 'work off your fines' program has been a hit, particularly with those who need to check out their summer reading books," Alissa Lauzon of Haverhill (Mass.) Public Library explained. For teens and their families counting every penny, being able to work off fines has been an immense help.

Across the country, the costs associated with attending college or university is being scrutinized by teens and their parents as graduation draws near. The same teens who may have gone away to college just last year are opting instead to go to local community colleges to start their education. Many young adult services librarians are seeing the shift as an

CHRISTINE AYAR is the Coordinator of Customer Experience at Evanced Solutions. She has worked in public libraries, theological libraries, and a high school media center. She was a member of the 2009 Class of ALA Emerging Leaders.

opportunity to increase library usage and court teen library users into adult library users. For Angela Campbell, the movement toward embracing a new generation of college students didn't require a lot of thought. In fact, the Davenport Public Library almost immediately started working the community colleges when they realized the trend. "I think this trend might be a way for us to capitalize on having the teen demographic around the region much longer," she explained. "It will also give the public library an opportunity to act as their information resource for assignments. In planning future programs, we may shift our teen programming to balance both entertainment and information literacy. We have some ideas in the works with our local community college, which will probably end up being a great partnership."

Throughout the interviews, a common comment was that library technology is being utilized to the max, with computer labs being full from open to close. In Davenport, the staff has started to offer one-on-one computer assistance for adults in the area. Sharon Colvin took the idea a step further and has started a training program to teach teens to be computer tutors to adults, thus helping adults become proficient in technology while providing additional opportunities for a small army of teen volunteers.

After speaking with several librarians from across the country, there is no consistent answer to the question "How is your budget holding up?" While some librarians are breathing a sigh of relief that their budgets have been untouched, their peers just miles down the road are

struggling with massive cuts and increasing use. A saving grace for some has been Friends groups. Most mentioned that their Friends groups have always helped out with costs associated with teen programs; others mentioned that their Friends groups are just starting to add what they can to ensure that teen events go on. Pay freezes and limited ability to travel to conferences and training is a sacrifice library staffs are making to not lose employees and to allow library collections budgets to remain untouched, or at least minimally touched.

During a June 9 chat on ALA Connect, YALSA members voiced their concerns about being unable to participate at conferences because of diminishing travel budgets. Sarah Debraski, YALSA's immediate past-president, discussed how the association is reviewing ways to help those who can't travel by making grants available and by offering more opportunities for virtual interaction. YALSA offers more than \$35,000 in grants and awards annually, many supporting costs associated not only with annual conferences but symposiums and other learning opportunities. A complete list can be viewed at www.ala.org/yalsa/awards&grants.

Navigating a career course and planning the future of their libraries led many to mention the need for mentoring through the association. YALSA is a step ahead of the game and is already in the process of working with a mentoring task force that is providing recommendations for an established mentoring program. The chat transcript can be read online at [http://yalsa.ala.org/blog/2009/06/10/yalsa-chat-on-the-economy-libraries-yalsa-the-](http://yalsa.ala.org/blog/2009/06/10/yalsa-chat-on-the-economy-libraries-yalsa-the)

transcript. To ask questions or comment on how YALSA can help during these economic times, YALSA members are encouraged to e-mail the association at yalsa@ala.org. ALA Connect (<http://connect.ala.org>) also offers forums and chats to allow young adult librarians to share and interact.

Economic instability has been bittersweet for the library profession and for teen services in particular. Many libraries are struggling to keep their budgets intact and their doors open, despite the fact that the communities that need them are losing jobs and tax dollars. Instead of facing the current situation with worry or dread, the majority of library professionals are moving forward and looking at the struggles as a way to shine and to demonstrate to their towns, cities, and states just exactly what libraries can do to help their communities and support their teens.

ALA/YALSA Economy Resources

Slow Economy Fuels Surge in Library Visits Press Kit: www.ala.org/economynews

Advocating in a Tough Economy Toolkit: www.ala.org/tougheconomytoolkit

YALSA Advocacy Wiki: <http://tinyurl.com/YAadvocacy>

2009 State of America's Library Report: www.ala.org/2009state

Know Your Stimulus: www.ala.org/knowyourstimulus

Library Value Calculator: www.ala.org/libraryvaluecalculator

Add It Up: www.ala.org/additup YALS