

Issue Brief #1: Adolescents Need Libraries

Libraries provide many benefits to all who use their services and resources, but in many libraries the lion's share of programs and services are geared toward age groups other than teens. In the 2012 survey conducted by the Public Library Association, only 33% of public libraries had at least one full time position dedicated to serving teens¹, which leaves thousands of libraries without a professional on staff to provide programs and services geared specifically toward adolescents. Teens, even though they enjoy more independence than elementary age children, still need guidance and adult supervision to help keep them safe, in school and on the path to success in life. They also need age-appropriate resources and activities that meet their unique needs and interests.

Teens need access to a wealth of print and online resources that meet their needs and interests.

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, 17-year-olds who indicated that they read for fun almost every day had higher average reading scores in 2004 than those who said that they never or hardly ever read for fun. Studies also show that the single biggest indicator of educational attainment is how many books can be found in a child's home.²

- Eighty-one percent of teens visited their public library in 2006, and averaged 14.5 visits per year. Of those who use their public libraries, 78% borrowed books for their personal use, and 67% borrowed books for school assignments.³
- Sixty percent of teenagers who go online use the public library for Internet access.⁴

Teens need programs that target their unique needs and interests.

The bulk of library programming is designed for younger children, such as story times, and simple arts and crafts. Yet these sorts of activities do not appeal to older teens who see themselves as young adults and who can vote with their feet. Many older teens have adult responsibilities, including part-time jobs and caring for younger siblings, so libraries need to remain open on evenings and weekends to accommodate these schedules, as well as design programs that speak to the needs and interests of adolescents who are transitioning to adulthood.



Photo courtesy Atlanta-Fulton Public Libraries

Perhaps the most important aspect of creating library programs and services for older teens is including them in the process. Many libraries create

Teen Advisory Boards as a means of providing teens with a structured way of helping to shape how the library approaches serving the needs and wants of the teens in its community.

- Participation in library programs for those under 18 rose from 35.6 million per year in 1993 to 54.6 million a year in 2005.⁵
- In 2010, 55% of urban libraries reported funding cuts. One-quarter of urban libraries reduced their operating hours. Fifteen percent of all U.S. libraries (roughly 2,400 libraries) cut the number of hours they're open.⁶ When hours are reduced, they are usually on evenings and weekends, the exact time when teens need libraries the most.

Teens need additional help preparing for college and the workforce.

Today, 80% of jobs are classified as “skilled,” and employment growth is expected to be fastest for positions that require some type of formal postsecondary education.⁷ However, only 32% of high school graduates are prepared for college coursework (i.e. they require no remedial classes).⁸ Libraries and the programs they offer provide time beyond the school day for career exploration, skills development, and even jobs and internships that will prepare teens for life beyond high school.

- After School Matters (ASM) in Chicago is a partnership between the city, the Chicago Public Schools, the Chicago Park District and the Chicago Public Library that offers apprenticeships and other enrichment activities to more than 20,000 teens.

Teens need guidance and access to resources to envision and pursue a positive future.

14.3 million young people in the U.S. take care of themselves after school; 51% of them are in grades 9-12.⁹ Many adults believe that by the time youth reach high school, they are old enough to take care of themselves without adult supervision. However, if left entirely to their own devices, many teens might not make the best use of the free time they have during out of school hours.

- The rate of juvenile crime triples between 3 and 6pm, and youth are more likely to become victims of crime.¹⁰
- Self-care and boredom can increase the likelihood that a teen will experiment with drugs and alcohol as much as 50%,¹¹ and ages 12-15 are the years in which youth develop their patterns of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use or nonuse.¹²
- Research shows that adolescents with higher amounts of unsupervised time can lead to risky sexual behaviors, and that teens who believe they have future opportunities have incentives to postpone sexual involvement, use contraception more consistently, and avoid unwanted pregnancies or births.¹³
- 24 states reported cuts in state funding for public libraries from fiscal 2009 to fiscal 2010. Of these, nearly half indicated that the cuts were greater than 11 percent. At the same time visits to U.S. public libraries have more than doubled to almost 2 billion per year. Service cuts often result in reduced hours, reduced materials for teens, and reduced activities.¹⁴

1 “2012 PLDS Statistical Report,” Public Library Association, 2012.

2 “Books in Home as Important as Parents’ Education in Determining Children’s Education Level,” *Science Daily* (May 21, 2010) .

3 Harris Interactive poll for the Young Adult Library Services Association. *Youth and Library Use Study*. June 2007. <http://www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/HarrisYouthPoll.pdf>.

4 Lenhart, Amanda et al. *Writing, Technology and Teens*. Washington, D.C.: Pew Internet and American Life Project, April 24, 2008. http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Writing_Report_FINAL3.pdf

5 “Public Libraries in the United States,” National Center for Education Statistics, 2006.

6 “State of America’s Libraries Report 2010,” American Library Association, 2011.

7 “2002-12 Employment Projections,” Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2004, www.bls.gov/news.release/ecopro.t04.htm.

8 “Careers for the 21st Century: The Importance of Education and Worker Training for Small Businesses,” Beth Buehlmann testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Small Business Committee, June 2, 2004.

9 “America After 3 PM: A Household Survey on Afterschool in America,” Afterschool Alliance, 2004.

10 Ibid.

11 National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse VIII: Teens and Parents, 2003.

12 Bailey, William J., *Critical Hours and Critical Years: Precision Targeting in Prevention*, Indiana Prevention Resource Center, 1998, www.drugs.indiana.edu/publications/iprc/newsline/indiana_data.html.

13 “A Good Time: Afterschool Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy,” Jennifer Manlove, et. al., The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2004

14 Ibid. ALA.