

I used the 2019-2020 WLA Professional Development Award to help pay for a graduate course titled, "Planning and Delivering Young Adult Services in the Public Library" last fall. One of the first reports I read for the class, *The Future of Library Services for and with Teens: A Call to Action*, talked about recent changes that are impacting libraries and their ability to effectively serve teen patrons. The YALSA report cites a 2013 Pew survey that found that a whopping 72% of 16- to 17-year-olds used a public library in 2012!

While this is excellent news, library closures, limited hours, decreasing number of staff, and insufficient resources are jeopardizing teens' access to the library resources they need. The skills teens need to succeed in the workforce have changed dramatically over the past few decades, and libraries play a key role in helping teens acquire skills they may not be able to work on at school. While the current COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these issues and made it harder to use libraries' physical resources, creative teen librarians have kept their patrons engaged by offering new services like virtual programming and "take and make" kits. Not all teens have Internet access or the latest technology at home, so it is important for libraries to provide access to those resources as well. Because of COVID-19, Wi-Fi hotspot and laptop lending are becoming more and more commonplace at Westchester public libraries. This is great news for teens who are attending school remotely right now.

Another change the report mentions is demographic shifts in the United States: In 2010, there were about 74.2 million children under the age of eighteen in the U.S. and 46% of them were children of color. I myself was a part of that cohort! I am also the child of immigrants, which is becoming more commonplace: A 2019 article from the

Urban Institute states that one out of every four children in the United States has at least one immigrant parent.

These changing patron demographics have implications for library staffing and services. In 2006, former ALA president Loriene Roy said, "If libraries are to remain relevant to all of our users, our staffs must reflect our country's demographics." But based on current data, a disproportionate number of librarians in America are White. For example, in 2010, 87.5% of librarians identified as White even though White people made up 76.3% of the U.S. population.

Differences in age, in addition to race, can lead to conflict among patrons. In a book chapter titled, "Tribalism versus Citizenship: Are Youth Increasingly Unwelcome in Libraries?", Mike Males wrote:

"Young adult spaces, which are populated by racially and ethnically diverse youth, challenge the assumption that libraries can accommodate only traditionally narrow 'tribal' uses. This chapter addresses the question of whether these generational divisions between young adults and elder society members are so irreconcilable that libraries must physically separate young people from older patrons, perhaps to the point of restricting or banning youth from library spaces. In addition, this chapter explores how the fear-based movement in the larger society creates barriers between older Americans and young people and complicates notions of library citizenship."

I have seen adult library staff treat young patrons negatively, both when I was a teen patron and as a library staff member. I believe I can use my experience as a person of

color and as a child of immigrants to make public libraries a safer and more welcome space for BIPOC teens. My background has given me insight into patron needs before and helps me connect with young people. I also hope that I and other organizations (like the Westchester Library Association) can do more in the future to encourage people of color to become librarians and provide meaningful assistance to help them become credentialed.

While the YALSA report and other assigned readings were great sources of information, so were my classmates. Many of them, like me, worked in public libraries and we shared best practices with each other in our class's Google Chat. For instance, we talked about using statistics and other "evidence" (like photos) to bolster support for teen programming and services. I had experience running programs for teens both in and outside of libraries, but I had never proposed and implemented a new teen library program before. I had a chance to learn how to do so by writing an eight-page proposal for an escape room event. Doing research and typing up mock proposals helped me hone my research and grant writing skills. In the paper, I conducted a literature review to see where the program had been tried before and how successful it was. The review was not restricted to peer-review articles, so I could source program ideas from email lists, blogs, discussion boards, and other sources. I then had to adapt the program to meet the needs and interests of my hypothetical library's teens. In the paper, I had to explain how the program would benefit the patrons and how the event would contribute to the library's overall mission. I also had to describe the event's activities, intended participants, planning timeline, appropriate budget, publicity plan, means of evaluation, and materials needed.

The goal of my escape room program was to teach teen patrons skills like how to use library resources and to draw more high school-aged female patrons to the library (a demographic group that did not come to the building as much as other groups). In my research, I discovered that “gaming develops skills in inquiry, critical thinking, adaptability, creating new knowledge, cooperation, and self-confidence”, which were all benefits I wanted my patrons to gain. My proposed program had a strong information literacy component to bolster the teens’ digital literacy and academic skills. The event also had the potential to strengthen the relationship between teen patrons and staff, as the escape room would have tasks where the teens would practice asking staff reference questions. This, in turn, would allow the patrons to feel more comfortable using the library in the future.

This class reinforced my opinion that public libraries need to be doing more for our teen patrons and as a future teen librarian, I accept that challenge.