

July 2014

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Recommended Citation

Cohen, R., Dunlap, J., Ludington, S., & Reich, C. (2014). Teens in the Library: Tapping Potential. *OLA Quarterly*, 9(3), 12-14. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7710/1093-7374.1652>

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OLA Quarterly is an official publication of the Oregon Library Association | ISSN 1093-7374

Teens in the Library: Tapping Potential

by Rebecca Cohen,
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Patrons, summer reading assistants, Advisory Board members, home work helpers, volunteers ... teens have many roles in the library; and whether they're wearing a Mohawk or Abercrombie and Fitch, they can be of great assistance to the staff. Just think of all that youthful energy and idealism channeled into helping you keep current, solve problems, and simply get things done. Teens are active in Oregon's libraries already, and here are some inspirational situations to spark you into harnessing even more potential for your own facility.

Teen involvement in the work of Newport Public Library

by Rebecca Cohen,
Youth Services Librarian

Newport Library depends on teenagers for three important volunteer functions: shelving in the children's and young adult departments the year round; helping with the summer programs for grade-schoolers; and serving as members of both long- and short-term advisory boards and committees. Seven to ten middle and high school students typically make up the library's YA advisory board. They offer a new perspective and are full of great, if not always practical, ideas—such as completely enclosing their corner of the library and installing surround sound!

Having teens participate in advisory capacities in a more formal manner is a new development and follows in the steps of the City, which recently added a teen advisory position on the City Council. When young adult library assistant, Jennifer Haggerty, won a \$7,500 grant from Trust Management Services in May to improve both the physical area and the collection for young adults, she wanted input from the people the grant would serve. This newly-formed committee consists of eight students, ages 12 to 17, who will spend three months serving and advising the library. The other advisory capacity currently open to teenagers is as an adjunct

member of the Library Board of Directors. Currently a high school senior is serving as the first YA representative, bringing to the Board a fresh view about libraries.

I really value the viewpoint and the energy these kids are bringing to our committees and boards. They are very serious about their tasks and I see them remaining lifetime library advocates.

Teen advisors at Lake Oswego

Submitted by Judy Dunlap,
Youth Services Librarian

Teen volunteers play an important role in collection development and young adult programming at Lake Oswego Library by serving on one of two councils: the Teen Advisory Council and ComicTalk, a graphic novel and animé discussion and advisory group. The members of these councils serve as our liaisons to the Lake Oswego teens. They let us know what their peers want from their library and how we can best serve our teen community. Their input and advice are invaluable.

Between 13 and 15 high school students comprise the Teen Advisory Council, which meets once a month and will be starting its fifth year of service in September. They have many responsibilities and serve in both advisory and participatory capacities. Members provide input on programs and events that will appeal to teens and they are very upfront about letting us know that some of our ideas are very uncool. They assist in publicizing library programs in the high schools and junior highs, create monthly bulletin boards for the young adult area, suggest CD and DVD/video titles to add to the library's collections, write and perform in an annual PSA to promote teen summer reading, and take on many one-time projects such as creating teen user surveys and assisting at teen functions. Council members also contribute book, DVD and CD reviews to the library's quarterly young adult publication, *The What's New Review*.



The ComicTalk group also meets monthly. Both junior high school and high school graphic novel enthusiasts are invited to join, and there are currently eight students who attend regularly. Most of the members are diehard manga and animé fans, and they have usually read or viewed the latest and the greatest. Their suggestions for additions of manga and animé are a tremendous help to us in building these collections.

Teens help out through the library's volunteer program administered by the Volunteer Coordinator. Teens have volunteer opportunities throughout the year that include signing up computer users in the adult reference area, staffing the children's and teen's summer reading sign up desks, helping with mailings, and a host of other projects. In addition, a teen volunteer serves on the Library Advisory Board to represent teen interests.

Our teen volunteers are indispensable to the library's effort to meet the needs of the teen community and to promote the library as a community resource they will continue to use throughout their lifetimes. We value their time, their ideas and their commitment.

Deschutes' logo contest

Submitted by Susan Ludington,

Young Adult/Outreach Services Librarian

The Teen Summer Reading Program (TSRP) at Deschutes Public Library is just a few years old. Although free books, weekly prizes, and sporadic programs were planned for both 2001 and 2002, the levels of participation and awareness for the program were disappointingly low. I knew that this year I wanted to make certain that teens would not only have knowledge about the exciting prizes and programs we'd be offering, but would also be eager to become involved and help make it their own.

In mid-February, I took the initial steps toward creating an attention-getting TSRP by first selecting a theme. Having studied

the various programs outlined in the Katherine Kan/YALSA resource manual *Sizzling Summer Reading Programs for Young Adults* (ALA, 1998), I felt strongly that there needed to be a focus and direction for the TSRP. With a theme chosen, we could then look at related programs, prizes, decorating ideas, and booklists. Motivated by the Hawaii State Public Library System's 1996 "Rock, Rap, and Read," I decided upon an adaptation dubbed "Rap, Rhythm and Read."

Since our library did not, at that time, have a professional graphic designer, I realized I would need to come up with ideas for artwork to accompany the array of promotional materials I aimed to have developed. As I wanted to get teens energized about the TSRP early on, I thought a successful way of doing it would be to conduct a "Design a Logo" contest. This inspiration, too, was based on one submitted by Jefferson-Madison (VA) Regional Library in *Sizzling Summer Reading Programs*. Just as their YA Coordinator had done in 1996, I designed a flyer to announce the program, and an official entry form which included the instructions, rules, and a 6-inch by 6-inch space where the image could be drawn.

By the first week of March, copies of the flyer were posted in multiple places throughout the five branches and bookmobile that comprise the Deschutes Public Library System. Perhaps more importantly, I hand-delivered an announcement flyer, along with 100 copies of the official entry form, to the seventeen middle schools and high schools in the county. I asked each school contact to publicize the contest as he or she best saw fit, discussing the pros and cons of identifying relevant teachers, broadcasting announcements over the school's public address system, and simply targeting students as they visited the library.

I wanted to really entice teens to enter the contest, so I approached the owners of a local art supply store, explaining to them the goals of the Teen Summer



Reading Program and how the contest fit in with our aspirations. The storeowners gladly agreed to donate a \$20.00 gift certificate in exchange for including the name of their business with other TSRP sponsors on our posters, flyers, and other promotional materials.

The deadline for contest entries was set for March 31st, as our goal was to have the majority of promotional materials ready for school visits by the beginning of May, and this deadline allowed us to have the month of April to put everything together. After four weeks of promoting the contest, I was very pleased to have received a fairly impressive 52 submissions! Teens between the ages 12 and 17 from all across the county tried their hand at developing a design. Color was not limited, so most teens used ballpoint pens, magic markers, and the like to make their unique pictures. We certainly had a difficult decision when it came time for voting; I selected the top six from the entries, and had all members of the library's Outreach Staff vote on their favorite.

Finally, one winner was chosen. We were thrilled to be able to bestow the honor on 17-year-old Travis Franklin, a resident at Bend's J Bar J Boys Ranch, a residential treatment facility for juvenile offenders and a regular bookmobile stop. Although the posters weren't yet printed when I went to make the announcement at Travis' school, I sensed he was very pleased to stand before his classmates and receive the accolades and recognition, especially when the others applauded loudly and yelled, "All right, Travis!" and "Congratulations!" I later learned that he requested transportation the very next day to go out and use his gift to purchase a complete set of fine drawing pens. Not long after, the posters were professionally printed and, as promised, two copies were given to Travis. In addition to the posters and information flyers, his design also graces the DPL Web site (<http://www.dpls.lib.or.us/>), where it alternates

with the children's SRP artwork on the homepage and appears on the TSRP introductory page in the Teen Scene section.

It was truly gratifying to have instigated such a well-received program for teens, and to publicly recognize the talent and creativity of the contest winner. We benefited from having the artwork for the TSRP imagined and created by someone else (for a very low price!), and our teens had the advantage of becoming actively involved with a segment of the reading program. I'm proud of this success, and have used it as a starting point for fostering and endorsing other forms of teen involvement in library endeavors.

Further inspiration may also be found in the February 2003 issue of VOYA, which devotes six articles to the topic "Libraries as Safe Havens for Teens" and also addresses creating YA spaces and helping teens through troubled times. Also recommended is the June 2003 VOYA which offers "Activate Your Teens to Advocate for Libraries" (<http://www.voya.com/whatsinvoya/JuneView.pdf>).



Original artwork by Travis Franklin, 17, winner of the 2003 Teen Summer Reading Program's "Design a Logo" contest

