



# get with the program

VOYA readers have spoken! In the most recent reader survey, many of you asked for more articles on the single, most effective way to lure teens into the library—programming. From now on, in each issue, you will find this column devoted to all aspects of programming for teens. Not only will advice be dispensed and battle-tested wisdom shared, but also some of the best programs by the most innovative and creative YA librarians in the country will be given the chance to shine in the spotlight.



## THE FOUR S'S

Although I have yet to reach “Jonesian” numbers (I’m the guy who people hire after they have heard Patrick Jones twice!), I have been presenting workshops all over the country about a method of creating, administering, and facilitating programs for teens. This method has been perfected at the Kalamazoo Public Library, where since 1999, more than 11,000 teens have attended programs sponsored by the library. At each workshop location, I am always asked the same question: “How do I begin?” The answer is not simple. At times it resembles a *Choose Your Own Adventure* novel. (If your director likes teens, turn to page 35. If your director does not like teens, turn to page 59.) After years of spending taxpayers’ money to find a solution, I have boiled down the secrets of successful teen programming to the four “S’s” that follow: Staff, Space, Support, and a Stash of Cash. Despite my dislike for the outdated term “YA,” this introduction serves as VOYA’s basic *YA 101* programming mini-course.

## STAFF

How many full-time Young Adult/Teen Services Librarians do you know in your state? Can you count them on one hand? On average, across the country, teens constitute 25 percent of a library’s patronage. Many libraries do not even have part of a person providing services to patrons between the ages of twelve and eighteen. Can you imagine standing at the front door of your library and shaking the hands of the first three people who walk in and then kicking the fourth? When libraries choose not to hire someone to provide an exceptional library experience to teens, they are effectively kicking those teens, who are in midst of the most tumultuous years of development. A professional librarian devoted to giving teens a topnotch library experience is an absolute must when building an active programming slate. In all but the smallest libraries, try to avoid the half-time YA/Teen Services Librarian—half-time equals half the effort, half the care, and half the quality.

DANCE DANCE  
REVOLUTION AT  
KALAMAZOO  
PUBLIC LIBRARY.



PHOTO: CREDIT: BETH HENNING

## SPACE

Producing teen programs without a devoted space for teens is like a middle school dance without a disc jockey—a whole lot of teens standing around wondering where to hear the music. My experience as a summer camp director showed me that when teens are given a space to call their own, they are more likely to participate and be respectful of their surroundings. Have you ever been to a library without a children’s area? Very few public libraries lack a space for children to learn how to become lovers of the library. Constructing programs that teens will attend requires an area in which teens will feel safe and welcome. Devoting three shelves to teens in the children’s area doesn’t cut it. What works best is not only a space separate from both children and adults, but an open area in which to host active and entertaining events.

## SUPPORT

Planning and implementing programs for teens is so much easier when everyone in the library is on board. The most important support should come from the top—your Board of Trustees and/or Administration. If the higher-ups rank services to teens at the bottom of the list, then the process becomes more difficult, but not impossible. Also seek out support from staff in both children’s and adult services. As a children’s librarian, I would be disappointed if I spent years of attention on a child just to see her receive no specialized help when she reaches the age of twelve. Likewise as an adult reference librarian, I would be thrilled if a college student asked just the right questions because he learned how to use the library as a teen. Teens sense when caring adults have a vested interest in what they are doing, whether attending a swing dancing lesson or finding a good book to read. When the staff supports the goals of the Teen Services Librarian, everyone wins.

## A STASH OF CASH

When your program is well funded, it is much easier to begin and maintain a regular schedule of quality, innovative events for teens. I hear many stories of library directors stating that hiring a Teen Services Librarian demonstrates their care for teens in the library—while budgeting no money to build these services. Teen librarians without reasonable budgets spend most of their time seeking money (grants,

Friends of the Library, selling their souls), and not enough time planning events and interacting with teens. An underfunded program places undue stress on the programmer, resulting in ineffective events with poor attendance.

Library funds must be spent on teens, just as money is allocated to genealogists, adults, and children.

## BEGINNING A LONG PROCESS

The Kalamazoo Public Library currently averages twelve teen events a month with an attendance of twenty-five teens at each program. These

numbers took more than six years of cultivating the “S” seeds listed above. The bottom line is that building active teen programming is not an overnight process. When starting a teen program, the biggest mistake that librarians make is giving up after a few failed attempts. Overcoming years of neglecting teens in public libraries takes dedicated individuals years of hard work.

Administrators must also realize that investment in the four “S” reaps benefits in both the short and the long term. In cities where free outlets for pent-up teen energy are needed, the implementation of fun programs at the library will attract the attention of the media and voters. Circulation will increase; once a teen is in the library, he is more likely to check out available resources just by using his library card. A teen who has a great library experience is probably a “yes” vote when your library seeks new funds from the public. The teen who never misses a Teen Advisory Board meeting might be the future Bill Gates or Andrew Carnegie. The benefits of a teen library program are endless.

If you are a librarian who finds that your pleas for attention to teens fail to reach the ears of the people who make decisions, point to your library’s mission statement. Does it read “The Anywheresville Public Library provides services only to adults and children”? Or does it state that your library provides services and access to individuals of *all ages*? It’s about time that public libraries get with the program, servicing teens properly with knowledgeable and creative staff, attractive and inviting space, full support from every staff member in the library system, and the proper stash of cash to fund events and materials that give teens a reason to darken our doors. It’s time to shake out the buns and put away the “shushy” fingers. Let’s open the library doors and invite the future inside.

### THIS COLUMN NEEDS YOU!

Great programs require collaborating with all sorts of parties—teens, patrons, staff, administration, presenters, and more. This column also will require the mixing of creative juices—yours and mine—for the two features described below.

• **Program Spotlight:** Send me your fabulous program successes. I will use them to emphasize the tools and procedures needed to craft an effective event that draws teens to your library like a librarian is drawn to free stuff at an ALA conference.

**VOYA’s Most Valuable Program (MVP)** this year—*Stuck on the Library* from the Ephrata Public Library in Ephrata, Pennsylvania—is a stellar example of the type of program that will stand in the spotlight. The “Empress of Hip,” Penny Talbert, is doing it right in a small town—and with a very small budget. Talbert’s amazing rapport with teens has allowed her to program events that are interactive, entertaining, and definitely not LAME! This success sparked a dedicated group of teens to do a living exhibit to get the public to vote for more library funding. Talbert’s devotion to serving teens the right way bred a sense of activism that money cannot buy. (See the full description of this year’s MVP from Pennsylvania, complete with duct tape, on page 277 of this issue.)

If you have ever planned a truly awesome event for teens that you want to brag about, but don’t know where to brag, look no further! Use the new online program submission form on VOYA’s Web site (<http://www.voya.com>); find its link under the site’s Submissions tab at the top of the front page. Be sure to fill in all the blanks, including your own contact information. If you don’t wish to submit the form online, you have two options. You can create a Word document based on the form to attach to an e-mail headed “Get with the Program” and addressed to kevinarking@yahoo.com. Or you can print out and fill in the form, mailing it to Kevin King, Kalamazoo Public



▲ TEENS DANCE TO THE MUSIC OF THE HIGH STRUNG AT KPL’S SUMMER ROCK CONCERT.

PHOTO CREDIT: KEVIN ARKING

Library—Teen Services, 315 South Rose Street, Kalamazoo, MI 49007. If you wish to ask me any questions before submitting your program, query me at kevinarking@yahoo.com.

Our highly trained staff of programming experts (me) will sift through your submissions (dartboard), and contact you to inform you of the kickback required to print your idea! I also might ask you for further details. If I choose your program for VOYA

publication, I will then ask you for photos, flyers, or other graphics to illustrate it. If your program is published in the Program Spotlight, you will be showered with praise from your peers and eligible to win VOYA’s coveted **Most**

**Valuable Program (MVP)** Award, announced in each year’s October issue. If your program is not selected for the Spotlight, you will be ridiculed by all and posted on VOYA’s Web site as a big LAME-O!

Just kidding. All programs submitted, even those not spotlighted in this column, have a chance to become VOYA’s MVP of the year. Don’t be afraid of the spotlight! It is time for all good Teen Services/YA Librarians to step out of the shadows, stand up on the reference desk, and scream, “I am doing something to get teens to come into this library! Respect me!”

• **W.W.K.D?** *What would Kevin (or Kalamazoo) do?* Certainly that is the first question that comes to your mind when faced with a problem in planning a program for teens. Every month, I receive tons of e-mails (in addition to all the Viagra and Casino spam) from other teen librarians asking questions about a particular program or about how Kalamazoo’s Teen Services staff tackles the process. Often these e-mails turn into great discussions on how best to create, administer, and facilitate an innovative program. In each edition of this column, I will answer a question from you, the reader, about any aspect of teen programming. Go ahead, ask anything! I will either espouse my usual wisdom or fake it. A great philosopher once stated, “There are no stupid questions, just stupid people.”

Send your W.W.K.D. questions to kevinarking@yahoo.com. The *Stupid Committee* will screen all questions before they are analyzed, answered, and/or printed. All bribes will be considered (hey, I have two daughters to feed).

### NEXT TIME

Teen Advisory Boards are an absolute must when creating innovative library programs for teens. In the next issue, I will discuss the role of TABs and why they serve as the creative lifeline of any quality teen event. ■

*Kevin A. R. King is the Lead Librarian in Teen Services at the Kalamazoo Public Library, where more than 11,000 teens have attended programs since 1998. In ten states, he has facilitated high-energy, interactive workshops for librarians on many aspects of teen services in public libraries. King is a past chair of the Michigan Library Association’s Teen Services Division. For the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), he served on the 2005 Margaret A. Edwards Award Committee and is currently a member of the Teen Read Week Committee and the Graphic Novels Committee. He spends quality time with his daughters, Abigail and Rachael, and enjoys reading comic books, obsessing over the Detroit sports teams, and trying to be a good minister’s “wife” for Katbleen, a Campus Minister.*

▼ THE COLUMNIST WITH ONE OF HIS MOST ANIMATED FANS.



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