

# B E Y O N D B O O K C L U B S

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Many libraries have been successful in getting youth involved with teen advisory groups. Coshocton Public Library in Coshocton, Ohio, is no exception; for more than eleven years I have relied on our teen advisory board (TAB) to give us the necessary feedback to do our jobs well. Our group has helped plan programs, completed volunteer projects, and promoted library services to other teens. They help me choose music for the collection and select magazines from the ever-changing titles available. TAB has demonstrated sustainability with little publicity, mostly by word-of-mouth to siblings, cousins, and friends. TABs have shown us that teens can and do meet to participate in library activities.

Teen participation and the TAB's ownership of YA services have proven to benefit the teens, the library, the community, and the young adult librarian. The benefits for teens are supported and encouraged by the Search Institute's "40 Developmental Assets" as well as the research about resiliency in teens and children covered in the VOYA article, "Somewhere to Walk and Someone to Walk With' Resiliency Experts Discuss How Libraries and Librarians Strengthen Youth" by Dr. Jami L. Jones, assistant professor in the Department of Library Science and Instructional Technology at East Carolina University. Jones notes that although the study wasn't looking for what libraries can do, library programming gives teens opportunities to build these protective factors and developmental assets. Libraries and librarians can do it by providing safe and inviting environments, having books and other materials teens want and need, connecting with youth by spending time with them, sharing the love of reading, providing opportunities to develop problem-solving and social skills, and offering support to develop hobbies and interests. Clubs that focus on teens' favorite activities can find a home in your library, as they have in mine.



## ANIMANGA CLUB

In the spring of 2006, we hosted a series of manga-drawing workshops for teens. Russell Merritt, an artist from Newark, Ohio, led the workshop classes for three Saturdays. The teens who came to the workshops were from different schools and were elated to find each other. Several made comments like, "I thought I was the only one around here [who loved manga and anime]!" After the last class, two teens asked me to start a club. I hesitated at first because I knew very little about manga or anime but then said, "Sure, why not?" I already had a list of teens to invite from the drawing classes' registration.

▲  
CHEF MICHAEL CICHON DEMONSTRATES HOW TO PROPERLY CUT VEGETABLES FOR SUSHI-MAKING AS STUDENTS TRY THEIR HAND AT IT.

More than twenty teens and I met the next month, and more than a year later we've had as many as thirty-three teens at every event. The Animanga Club members have taught me a lot about manga and anime, have helped with collection development, and have given me many related programming ideas. Our regular meetings incorporate previewing anime from **Operation Anime** (<http://www.operationanime.com>) or **Anime ADVocates** (<http://www.advfilms.com>), sharing Web sites with anime videos and fanzines, browsing catalogs, and eating refreshments. Besides the regular monthly meetings—which now last more than two hours—we have also had anime marathons and special events. We invited Merritt back for a Japanese language lesson and Michael Cichon, a chef from the Coshocton County Career Center, for a lesson on making sushi and spring rolls. A teacher from the Japanese Exchange program spoke to us about life and schools in rural Japan. The local museum director made a presentation about Samurai soldiers, complete with a Samurai sword and armor. We've played **Anime Jeopardy**, **Manga Pictionary**, **Naruto**, and other video games. We've held one cosplay event and plan to hold more in the future.

This club's success can be credited to the teens' direction. They knew what manga and anime fans wanted and were able to communicate that to me so I could help them. They asked me to



▲ THE TEENS HAD SUCH AN AWESOME TIME AT THE COSPLAY EVENT THAT THEY CAN'T WAIT FOR THE ANIMANGA CLUB TO HOST IT AGAIN!

start a **MySpace** page, which is a convenient medium to deliver news and connect the club members. We also have a club listserv and use word-of-mouth to communicate with teens who do not have **MySpace** or Internet access.

With the success of the TAB and Animanga Club, I decided to try more of this programming style: Gather a small group of teens together who have a specific common interest and, with their guidance, see what develops in terms of programming.

### TEENS TALK BOOKS

The next group we started was the Teens Talk Books Club. I have never had great success with a traditional book discussion group, in which every teen reads the same book. The feedback from the teens made it sound more like homework, and I was trying to promote reading as a fun thing to do. Our TAB meetings always began with one member giving a booktalk and the other members chiming in with what they've been reading. The teens enjoyed our booktalking activity, sometimes spending twenty minutes in conversation, so I decided to expand the idea further and create a new group. I added pizza as an additional incentive to attend.

Although the group remains small, we have been meeting steadily for almost a year. We talk about our favorite books and what we are currently reading. I take a few notes and post their opinions to the teen news blog. We often play "Pass It On" with new books that haven't been put on the shelves yet. To play, each teen (me, too) gets two new books to review for six minutes. Then we pass the books to the person on our right to review for a few minutes. After that, we go around the table and talk about the two books we've reviewed. The teens have learned to talk about the settings, characters, and plot, and to tell what kind of reader might enjoy the book. They also tell us if they would like to read it, which results in several new books going home with the teens at each meeting.

This group also enjoys stories from conferences and journals about YA authors and book awards. I pick up advanced reader copies for them at conferences, and they feel "in the know" to have access to books not yet published. I ask for their feedback about the books and whether they think I should purchase them for the collection. They also like to recommend books to me.

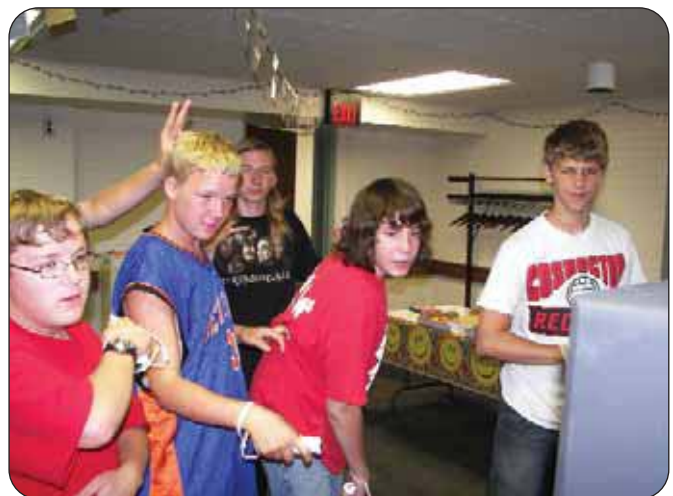
### TEEN TECH CLUB

Editing **Get Connected: Tech Programs for Teens** for the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), a division of the American Library Association (ALA), gave me the opportunity to read about programs involving teens and technology in other libraries. My problem was deciding which of these excellent program ideas would resonate with our teens. Luckily the program ideas included a very practical starting point: Establish an advisory group for technology programming. So I started a Teen Tech Club. I needed input from the teens about what kinds of gaming and other computer-related programs they might like. Meeting times were spent sharing gaming Web sites, and the teens enjoyed showing me how to play some of the games. For events, club members helped track down gaming equipment and spread the news.

The club's first program was to host a **RuneScape** event after-hours. **RuneScape** (<http://www.runescape.com>) was a smart choice for us because it was free on the Internet and several teens already knew how to play, enabling them to help new players. Our teen page assisted with the program and started a wiki for the **RuneScape** players to share their playing tricks.

The club then planned a summer-long series of gaming days called **Plugged and Unplugged @ the Library**.

▼ SINCE THE LIBRARY HAS APPROVED THE PLUGGED AND UNPLUGGED AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM, YOUTH COME WEEKLY TO GET A DOSE OF NINTENDO Wii.



The teen page helped set up equipment each week and ran the program by himself when I was absent. Our initial program offered Internet access on laptops, board games, and dancing on a free dance pad I ordered from Kraft. The dance pad could be used with a PC and a video projector. For the six dollar shipping charge, we have had endless hours of fun!

As the popularity of the weekly program grew, funds were acquired to purchase a Nintendo Wii. We are in the process of acquiring grants for more laptops and a Playstation 2. Teens also like to bring their own gaming consoles, so we have tried **Guitar Hero**, a karaoke game, and more.

Rather than holding a separate Teen Tech Club meeting, we set aside an hour during the last program of the month to discuss ideas and give feedback. We play movies during the events so that the teens who are waiting to participate have something to do—it also adds to the atmosphere. The library recently approved the program as an after-school activity. The only weekly expense is refreshments.

#### TEEN WRITERS CLUB AND MORE

The newest venture at our library is the Teen Writers Club. The TAB started a quarterly short-story contest in 2006 that has attracted several teen writers. Poetry cafés and slams have also attracted teens here for several years. Participating teens asked me many times about starting a club for teen writers so I finally obliged. Currently our meetings include a writing exercise, discussion about the tips and resources handout on that meeting's topic, and sharing our writing. I search the Internet for the exercises and tips on topics, such as creating characters and plot development. Because it is a new club, it is still forming and taking shape.

Other libraries have had success with the club format for programming. Cindy Sermersheim of Pike County Public Library in Indiana started a Drama Club. Middle and high school-aged teens perform once or twice a year at a variety of locations. The

Summer Reading Program Finale and Murder Mystery Nights are two of their recent performances. Readers' theatre, costume or makeup lessons,

TEENS STRATEGIZE THEIR NEXT MOVE IN BATTLE DURING A WARHAMMER ROLE-PLAYING GAME.



My relationships with teens have grown because they know that I am listening to them and valuing their interests. The library has become their home.

and speakers from a local theatre troupe would be fun events for this club. Cindy has also had success with book clubs held at local schools during lunch hours.

Maybe the teens in your library would like a Role-playing Club that meets weekly to play **Dungeons & Dragons**, **Magic**, or **Warhammer**. Do you have a group of filmmakers who would like to get together for tips and discussion on producing films and sharing their work? How about fantasy fans who would share books, movies, fan fiction, and drawing characters? The clubs can come and go as the teens' interests do.

#### LIBRARY IMPACT

These clubs have served our teens and our library in several ways. The clubs are filling a need not met by any other agency in our community. The teens in each club advise me on programming for their group and are ready audiences for the programs related to their interests. They eagerly invite their friends to the special events. Club members also advise me in

collection development for their respective areas of interest. They feel empowered by participating in decisions that directly affect them and by planning and implementing new programs and services for themselves and their peers. My relationships with teens have grown because they know that I am listening to them and valuing their interests. The library has become their home. ■

#### RESOURCES

Coshocton Public Library Animanga Club at **MySpace**. <http://www.myspace.com/cplmangaclub>.

JET Programme. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/JET\\_Programme](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/JET_Programme).

Jones, Jami L. "Somewhere to Walk and Someone to Walk With' Resiliency Experts Discuss How Libraries and Librarians Strengthen Youth." *How Can We Help?* **VOYA** February 2007.

Russell Merritt at **MySpace**. <http://www.myspace.com/banshuwa>.

The Search Institute. "The Forty Developmental Assets for Adolescents." [www.search-institute.org/assets/forty.html](http://www.search-institute.org/assets/forty.html).

RoseMary Honnold is the Young Adult Services Coordinator for the Coshocton Public Library in Coshocton, Ohio, and the author of **101+ Teen Programs That Work** (Neal-Schuman, 2002), **More Teen Programs That Work** (Neal-Schuman, 2005/**VOYA** October 2005), and **The Teen Reader's Advisor** (Neal-Schuman, 2006/**VOYA** June 2007), all part of the *Teens @ the Library* series, and **Get Connected: Tech Programs for Teens** (Neal-Schuman, 2007/**VOYA** October 2007). Check out her Web site, **See YA Around** at [www.cplrmh.com](http://www.cplrmh.com).