

Public Libraries as *Partners* in Youth Development

Lessons and Voices
from the Field

by Nicole Yohalem
and Karen Pittman

Prepared by

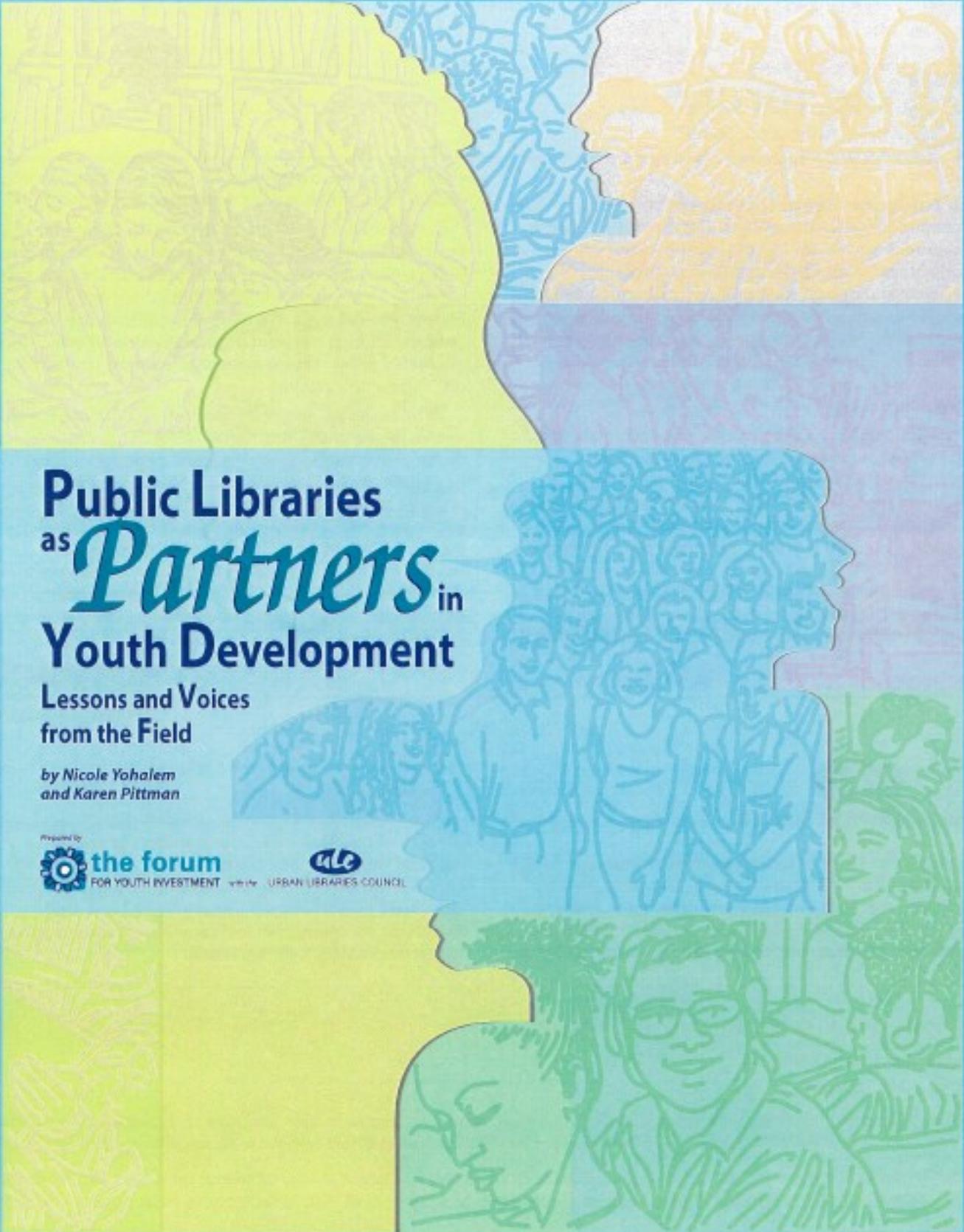


the forum
FOR YOUTH INVESTMENT

with the



URBAN LIBRARIES COUNCIL



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Helping organizations that invest in youth, invest in change

The Forum for Youth Investment (the Forum) was created to increase the quality and quantity of youth investment and youth involvement by promoting a "big picture" approach to planning, research, advocacy and policy development among the broad range of organizations that help constituents and communities invest in children, youth and families. To do this, the Forum builds connections, increases capacity and tackles persistent challenges across the allied youth fields.

Relationships are at the core of the Forum's work. The Forum builds connections by developing relationships with organizations and individuals throughout the allied youth fields, and by identifying, facilitating and brokering relationships among these contacts. The Forum builds capacity by offering tools, training, advice, presentations, papers, commentary and international perspectives. The Forum tackles challenges by offering fresh ways of looking at old issues, synthesizing information about current efforts

and creating neutral forums for diverse leaders to share experiences, develop joint strategies and align efforts.

Communities are where change really happens. The Forum believes that the information, tools and insights generated at the national level must be shaped by and useful to local communities and practitioners. The Forum also believes that all of these efforts are best undertaken by a range of organizations who are interested in increasing collective learning and action on "big picture" issues.

To help realize this commitment, in 2003 the Forum joined forces with Community IMPACT!, a national organization working with a small network of local nonprofits that involve young people in community change, to form Impact Strategies, Inc. Impact Strategies, Inc., is dedicated to moving ideas to impact in neighborhoods and across the nation. Also committed to bringing international lessons into U.S. conversations, the Forum is a member of the International Youth Foundation's Global Partner Network.

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URBAN LIBRARIES COUNCIL

Founded in 1971, the **Urban Libraries Council** (ULC) is an association of public libraries in metropolitan areas and the corporations that serve them. Believing that thriving public libraries are a result of collaborative leadership, the trustees, library directors and corporate

officers of member institutions work together to address shared issues, grasp new opportunities and conduct research that improves professional practice. Governed by a 16-member executive board, ULC maintains an office staff in Evanston, Illinois, to serve its approximately 140 members.

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Public Libraries as Partners in Youth Development: Lessons and Voices from the Field is available online at the ULC Web site, www.urbanlibraries.org, and the Forum for Youth Investment Web site, www.forumforyouthinvestment.org.

The ***Youth Development and Public Libraries Tools for Success Toolkit*** (see page 17) can be ordered through the ULC Web site at www.urbanlibraries.org.

Philadelphia; Molly Krukewitt, Fort Bend County Libraries; Peren Lopez, Oakland Public Library; Gina Macaluso, Tucson-Pima Public Library; Michael Megason, Washoe County Library System; Hedra Peterman, Free Library of Philadelphia; Theresa Ramos, Free Library of Philadelphia; Eric Rowe, Enoch Pratt Free Library; Deborah Taylor, Enoch Pratt Free Library; Melanie Townsend, Enoch Pratt Free Library; and Allison Wherry, King County Library System.

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INTRODUCTION

Schools have their agendas, parks have their niche, YMCAs have their angle. The library is viewed as neutral and can serve as the perfect link for all of these in a community. No matter what neighborhood the library is in, it gives kids the tools they need at their fingertips to be proactive about what they are learning. They have staff that can direct them to resources and help them find answers to the questions they have. Libraries are perfectly situated to be leaders in supporting youth development.

— Darryl Bego, former project coordinator, Public Library of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County

Building connections among the full range of organizations that invest in children, youth, families and communities has never been more important. There is unprecedented support for increasing the quality and quantity of supports and opportunities available to children and youth, and a growing sense that community resources must be enlisted to support young people's education and development. Public libraries are among the most valuable institutions in this mix. And as they have in the past, libraries are stepping up to rethink their relevance and renew their commitment at a critical time.

While many libraries have been providing high-quality, innovative services to youth¹ since their inception, many have not fully realized their tremendous potential as partners in supporting young people's learning and development. The Public Libraries as Partners in Youth Development (PLPYD) initiative, a four-year, \$6 million effort sponsored by the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds, offered an unprecedented opportunity for libraries to work collaboratively with teens and community partners to understand and strengthen their commitment to the positive development of young people.

The initiative was timely. Like all public institutions, libraries operate under constant pressure to demonstrate their relevance by adapting and responding to pressing social issues of the day.² In addition to infusing neighborhoods across the country with new supports and opportunities for young people, the PLPYD initiative gave nine public library systems a valuable opportunity to reflect, retool and reinvent their commitment to young people.

The national conversation about youth has shifted significantly in the last 20 years. The 1980s saw a proliferation of policy agendas, programs, public awareness campaigns and large-scale research focused squarely on keeping teens out of trouble (and protecting communities from dangerous teens). Today's public discourse, policy context and programmatic landscape reflect a more balanced interest in helping young people avoid risks and preparing them to be fully engaged citizens, workers, parents and partners.³

States and localities are increasingly focused on the need for youth to have not only safe but engaging opportunities during the out-of-school hours. Libraries can

¹ Libraries have traditionally used the term "young adult" to refer to youth ages 12–18 (as defined by the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA)). This report uses "teen," "youth" and "young people" interchangeably to refer to roughly the "second decade" — ages 10–20.

² Whalen, S., & Costello, J. (June 2002). *Public Libraries and Youth Development: A Guide to Practice and Policy*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children, University of Chicago.

³ Pittman, K., Irby, M., Tolman, J., Yohalem, N., & Ferber, T. (2001). *Preventing Problems, Promoting Development, Encouraging Engagement: Competing Priorities or Inseparable Goals?* Washington, DC: The Forum for Youth Investment. Available online at www.forumforyouthinvestment.org/workingpapers/preventproblems.pdf.

play a significant role during these hours through several strategies. As consistent employers of young people in roles ranging from book shelving to technology assistance, libraries represent an ideal first job and a gateway to a respected profession. As they increasingly position themselves as indispensable bridges “between democratic values and technical progress,”⁴ libraries offer ideal settings for young people to identify community issues they care about and access knowledge and skills that enable them to act on them. And as free, respected and accessible neighborhood-based facilities that are in the information business, libraries are ideally positioned as hubs for formal and informal learning.

The current emphasis on out-of-school time is occurring in the context of broader reform and system-building efforts to create extended learning opportunities, link community resources with schools in meaningful ways and strengthen community-based supports and learning opportunities for young people.⁵ Whereas preventing problems was the shared focus of youth organizations in years past — a focus in which the role of libraries is less than clear — learning and engagement are increasingly topping the agendas of local, state and national youth organizations. This shift brings a new urgency to dialogue between youth organizations and public libraries.

It is in the best interest of libraries themselves and of communities and youth organizations to take a fresh look at libraries as settings that can and do support young people’s development. Like schools, youth organizations, community centers, parks and other settings, libraries contribute in significant ways to the positive development of young people.⁶ At times, they do so through specific programs and services designed to appeal to young people’s interests and support their development. But they also do so at a more basic level, as intentionally safe and supportive environments that are rich in developmental nutrients — offering oppor-

Public Libraries as Partners in Youth Development

GRANTEES

Brooklyn Public Library, NY
www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org

Enoch Pratt Free Library, MD
www.pratt.lib.md.us

Fort Bend County Libraries, TX
www.fortbend.lib.tx.us

Free Library of Philadelphia, PA
www.library.phila.gov

King County Library System, WA
www.kcls.org

Oakland Public Library, CA
www.oaklandlibrary.org

Public Library of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County, NC
www.plcmc.lib.nc.us

Tucson-Pima Public Library, AZ
www.lib.ci.tucson.az.us

Washoe County Library System, NV
www.washoe.lib.nv.us

Urban Libraries Council, IL
www.urbanlibraries.org

tunities to build skills, to belong, and to connect with peers and adults in positive ways.

So what happens when an established, much-loved institution full of traditions has a unique opportunity to work in new and different ways? What happens to the library as an institution? What happens to librarians? Youth? Communities? A formal evaluation of the PLPYD initiative, being conducted by the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, will help to answer these questions.⁷ The purpose of this report is to capture highlights from the initiative, locate the work that libraries do to support teens in a broader picture of young people’s development, and summarize the key challenges and corresponding lessons of the initiative.

⁴ Whalen, S., & Costello, J. *ibid.*

⁵ The Forum for Youth Investment. (2002). *Learning Opportunities for Children and Youth: Expanding Commitments, Blurring the Lines*. Available online at www.forumforyouthinvestment.org/workingpapers/blurringthelines.pdf.

⁶ Virginia Walter and Elaine Meyers explore the history of young adult services in public libraries and the role of libraries in supporting youth development in their upcoming book *Teens and Libraries: Getting It Right* (working title). American Library Association Editions, Fall 2003.

⁷ Spielberger, J., & Whalen, S. (September 2002). *The Public Libraries as Partners in Youth Development Initiative: An Interim Report of the Evaluation of a Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds Initiative*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago. Available online at www.chapin.uchicago.edu.

The story that results is a hopeful yet realistic one. It includes libraries that enhanced existing services and libraries that changed the way they do business. It includes encounters with institutional barriers and compromises based on limited resources. The challenges can perhaps best be summed up in terms of balancing tensions and bridging worlds. Libraries that participated in the PLPYD initiative struggled to strike the right balance between innovation and tradition, between breadth and depth of services, between program development and policy change. They worked to build bridges between the perspectives of libraries and other community agencies, between youth workers and librarians, between teens and adults.

In the end, several lessons stand out that speak to challenges faced by the PLPYD sites and other library systems across the country:

- **Challenge #1: Balancing innovation and tradition.** Making changes in library systems takes time and patience. Framing changes in ways that connect to the overall mission and help to meet other institutional needs, such as public relations, outreach or human resources, is critical.
- **Challenge #2: Balancing breadth and depth of services.** While most libraries are not well suited for intensive work with large numbers of youth,

they can work with limited numbers in the context of employment, for example. And this commitment can be leveraged to change the face of the institution and improve the quality of overall services to teens.

- **Challenge #3: Engaging youth as partners.** Truly listening to young people — shifting the focus from working “for” them to working “with” them⁴ — improves not only the quality of specific programs and services, but the institution as a whole.
- **Challenge #4: Rethinking staff recruiting, roles and development.** Finding staff to manage and champion youth work within the library system is difficult and often means looking beyond library professionals. At the same time, training and support can help employees who are not comfortable working with teens develop professional practices that lead to successful relationships with youth and carry over into other settings.
- **Challenge #5: Building community partnerships.** Forging partnerships with local organizations and municipal government can be helpful in deepening library programs and services for youth. But partnerships also allow libraries to be understood as entities with youth development knowledge and resources that can be tapped at the community level.

⁴ The idea of working “with and not for” youth emerged during training provided to PLPYD sites by the National Training Institute for Community and Youth Workers/AED in early 2000. This theme resonated with those working on the project and was formalized in the basic model used for training and technical assistance.

THE PLPYD INITIATIVE: AN OVERVIEW

The PLPYD initiative challenged nine public library systems across the country to develop innovative, high-quality educational, cultural enrichment and career development programs for low-income youth during the non-school hours. The participating libraries differed dramatically in terms of size, staffing, constituency and organizational structure. The Brooklyn Public Library has 60 branches within roughly a 100 square mile area inhabited by 2.5 million residents with diverse racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds (35 percent of the residents are white, 35 percent black, 20 percent Hispanic and 7 percent Asian).⁹ The Washoe County Library System, on the other hand, consists of 12 branches spread out across a 6,600 square mile area of Nevada, home to a more homogeneous population of 350,000 residents (80 percent white, 16 percent Hispanic and 4 percent Asian).¹⁰

As different as they look and feel, these libraries came together around a common challenge and pursued a range of similar strategies during the initiative. To begin, they were challenged to listen to young people and to incorporate their ideas and leadership in meaningful ways from the outset. One-year planning grants awarded in 1998 allowed sites to seek input in an intentional, sustained way from a variety of youth. Among the frank advice teens offered

during the planning year, the importance of youth involvement in transforming not only the image but the services offered by libraries came across loud and clear through comments like “let us help you” and “kids must be involved.”¹¹

Three-year implementation grants, which ended in December 2002, allowed the libraries to develop new partnerships, expand youth employment efforts, provide staff development opportunities, and build and refine a range of programs, including after-school programs, mentoring, homework assistance, technology training and career development. While the programmatic emphasis and the details of the work varied across sites, each site pursued a combination of outreach — the library reaching out to young people and local partners and young people reaching out to the community — and what we will call “inreach,” which involved the library and young people working together to create professional development opportunities and new attitudes, roles and policies within the library system itself.

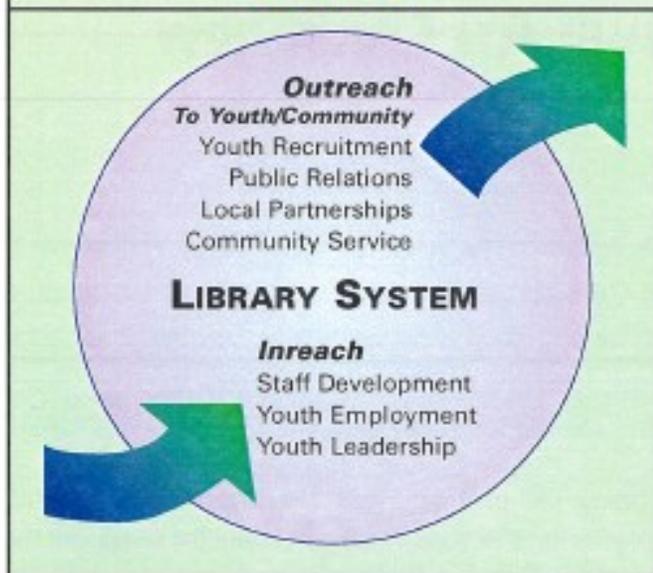
Support and coordination from the Urban Libraries Council (ULC) included networking, training, technical assistance and a range of opportunities for adults and youth from the sites to come together for national leadership and professional development opportunities.

⁹ Brooklyn's Population by Race and Ethnicity. (2002). Retrieved January 22, 2002, from www.bedc.org/popbyrace.htm.

¹⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, State and County QuickFacts, Washoe County, Nevada. (2002). Retrieved January 22, 2002, from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/32/32031.html>.

¹¹ Meyers, E. (1999). “The Coolness Factor: Ten Libraries Listen to Youth.” *American Libraries* (30)10.

**Figure 1:
Common Strategies Across
PLPYD Sites**



Because ULC worked with sites early on to develop sustainability plans, many of the efforts described below and many of the project staff quoted throughout this report have continued on beyond the December 2002 project closing, sometimes in different organizational manifestations. The snapshots that follow offer a brief sampling of efforts undertaken by each site.

At the **Brooklyn Public Library**, young people ages 12–18 participated in a variety of special programs at five of the library system's 60 branches during the PLPYD initiative. The Teen Advisory Group helped develop and run these programs and found ways to improve teen services overall and make the library more teen-friendly. The B*Ten team designed a Web site to explore happenings at the library and publish original writing and reflections.¹² The Book Buddy program allowed teens to serve as mentors. The Teen Explorers mapped local organizations, businesses and community centers that are available to young people. Recognizing the need for structured time and space for youth to simply relax, Teen Time was an informal opportunity to get together on Fridays and socialize, play games and spend time with peers in a safe environment. Other resources made available through the initiative included homework help drop-in centers and career training.

¹² You can visit the B*Ten Web site at www.geocities.com/brooklynbten/.

The **Enoch Pratt Free Library** in Baltimore, one of the oldest free library systems in the country, includes 24 branches and serves as the Maryland state library. The Youth Internship Program, developed with funding from the PLPYD initiative, reaches out to young people in four low-income Baltimore communities. Participating teens are involved in a range of experiences, including working with the summer reading program, developing library public service announcements, providing homework assistance and assisting others with library use. Participants gain skills in technology, leadership, customer service and mentoring and receive community service credits recognized by the school system.

At **Fort Bend County Libraries**, just southwest of Houston, young people have been involved in a range of technology training and after-school programs in libraries and outreach sites in low-income rural communities. Low-income youth took on leadership roles to help guide the library's services and programs for youth through the development of advisory councils. Participating youth also earned money by tutoring other young people in technology as Tech Teens. Partnerships with youth-serving organizations and local churches help the library reach underserved communities by providing staff and permanent space for library computers with Internet connections, books and after-school programs.

The **Free Library of Philadelphia** includes 55 branches, all of which offer the LEAP program — a cultural and educational enrichment after-school program for low-income youth aged 6–18, which is supported by a range of public and private funding sources. LEAP programs include homework assistance, technology support, recreational programs, cultural and educational enrichment programs, and career development workshops. In addition, teens plan and implement an annual youth summit which offers leadership roles and opportunities. Teen Leadership Assistants employed to work in the LEAP program complete an intensive training unit including customer service and career development. They also serve as advisers to library staff, publish a Web site and mentor younger children at branches across the city.

King County Library System (KCLS) is the fourth largest circulating library in the United States. Located in the Seattle area, it includes 42 branches and a traveling center which serve more than 1 million residents. The Techno Teens program, developed during the PLPYD initiative, offered extensive training in employment, career development, technology and life skills for low-income youth at 16 community branches. Unlike other library staff, Techno Teens performed a wide variety of tasks including shelving books, assisting at the reference desk, providing computer assistance and working with the children and young adult librarians. In addition to creating new employment opportunities, the Techno Teens program helped library staff see the value of exposing youth to a range of areas within the library system, and the contributions they made to diversifying the overall system. KCLS is currently funding 25 new positions that offer a range of educational, personal and career development opportunities system wide.

The **Oakland Public Library**, part of the City of Oakland since 1878, includes 15 branches as well as a main library, an adult literacy program, a bookmobile and a new African-American Museum and Library. With support from the PLPYD initiative, Partners for Achieving School Success (PASS!) operated at eight branches, providing bilingual after-school homework help to children and youth. Teens recruited from the public schools were hired to mentor, assist, instruct, read to younger children and encourage library usage. Teen mentors receive ongoing training in career development and interpersonal skills. Plans are in place to develop opportunities for teens to teach computer and Internet literacy to other teens and adults.

The **Public Library of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County** has more than 500 staff countywide who operate more than 20 libraries in the Charlotte region of North Carolina. The PLPYD initiative led to the creation of the Teens Succeed! Program at two branches, where teens have opportunities to work in the library, plan and implement programs, socialize with peers, give back to the community, and develop leadership, career and life skills. In a particularly innovative aspect of the program, youth plan, staff and run their own business, a copy center that offers design, color copies, faxing and lamination services. The creation of a full-time youth entrepreneurship position now supports a

range of educational and leadership opportunities for youth across the system.

The **Tucson-Pima Public Library**, which serves the city of Tucson and neighboring Pima County, focused its work under the PLPYD initiative around the idea of better marketing the library to teens by creating specialized spaces that reflect their needs and interests. These teen centers, located in libraries, were designed with youth input and direction to be welcoming and to provide positive educational and career development opportunities. The centers, designed to serve approximately 3,300 youth over the next three years, will offer technology training, employment opportunities, job skills and positive adult role models. Opportunities for young people to advise library staff, advocate for the library and participate in parent education are also central to the plan. Another important role the Tucson-Pima Public Library plays is working closely with other city and county departments to promote positive youth development practices.

The **Washoe County Library System**, which serves the growing area in and around Reno, Nevada, developed youth action teams to reach out to other teens in high-risk neighborhoods in a variety of ways. In addition to employing teens at 8 of the 12 branches, the Spanish Dial-a-Story team recorded stories in Spanish for children to listen to over the phone. The Wizards helped young people and adults use technology, which in turn impacted the public's perception of teens. A video team created public service announcements about the library. And a youth-adult partnership group created opportunities for young people to communicate with librarians about the needs of young patrons.

A range of strategies to engage youth are embedded in these descriptions — after-school programs, mentoring, youth employment, community service and more. The thread weaving these potentially disparate strategies together locally and nationally is a commitment to the youth development approach. As Melanie Huggins, youth services director at the Public Library of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County, put it, "Youth development principles have provided a language to describe what it is many of us have been trying to do for a long time." Whether it was the conceptual shift to the idea of building on strengths or assets, the principle of youth participation or the notion of providing a

combination of supports and opportunities to young people, staff at the participating libraries were hungry for the philosophical and practical coherence the approach offered. Through training, technical assistance, networking and ongoing support, the grantees

received a steady stream of information and tools to ensure their work reflected a commitment to basic youth development principles. The next two sections summarize these principles and explore their applicability in the public library context.¹³

¹³ *New Directions for Library Services to Young Adults*, written by Patrick Jones for the Young Adult Library Services Association, lays out YALSA's new framework for developing services to teens and draws heavily on youth development ideas and strategies as fundamental to the work that libraries do.

HOW LIBRARIES CONTRIBUTE TO YOUNG PEOPLE'S DEVELOPMENT

I think there's a lot of capacity within libraries to do this work. If you have people with the flexibility and vision to see that there's a new way to work, you have capacity right there. It's a new way of doing business.

— Elaine Meyers, former PLPYD project director

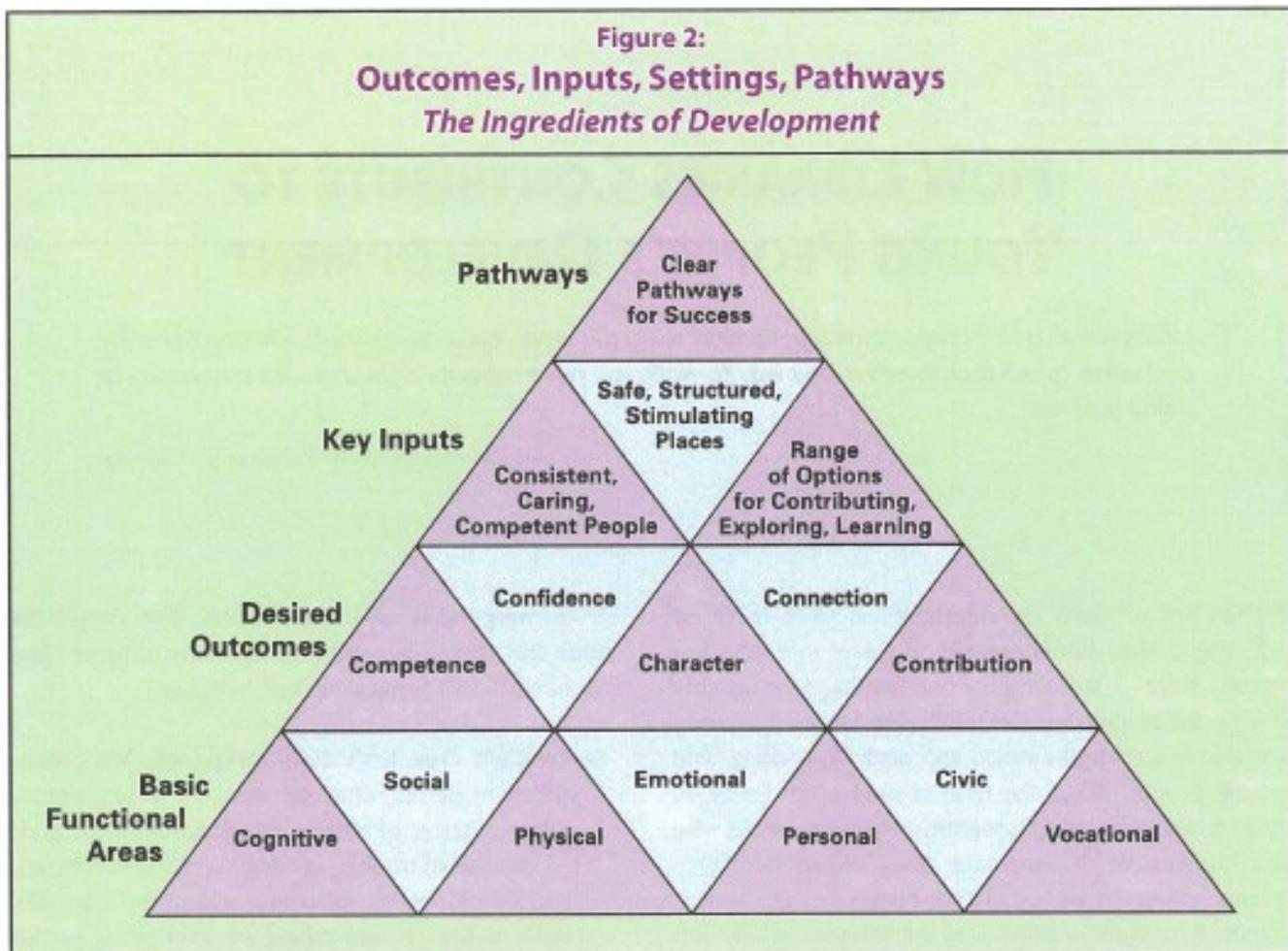
The term “youth development” is used in many ways. Most fundamentally, it refers to a developmental stage — the complex one that happens roughly during the second decade of life. The term is also used to refer to a strengths-based approach to working with young people. When the term is used a third way, to refer to a specific set of programs or organizations who are big fans of the approach (e.g., after-school programs, youth centers or clubs), things can get murky. Youth development principles are relevant in any setting where young people spend time. Likewise, the accompanying practices are relevant for any professionals or volunteers who work with youth. So libraries, along with museums, recreation departments, parks, juvenile justice centers, health clinics and schools, are all critical parts of the equation.

Behind the various uses of the term are a set of linked ideas about the who, what, when, where, why and how of development. Together, these ideas describe a deliberate approach to working with young people. Many organizations (e.g., the Search Institute, the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research, the National Collaboration for Youth, Public/Private Ventures) have described the basic elements of this approach. Most, if not all, share a common commitment to push beyond current thinking about what outcomes, inputs, settings, strategies and actors are needed to help young people address problems, build skills and pursue opportunities

for learning, work and contribution. The Forum for Youth Investment has summed up many of these ideas in a handful of “bumper sticker” phrases:¹⁴

- **Problem free isn't fully prepared.** We cannot afford to define what we want for young people solely in terms of what we do not want them to do — stay out of trouble, off drugs, off the streets, etc. We should be as articulate about the attitudes, skills, behaviors and values we want young people to have as we are about those we hope they avoid. Defining our hopes for youth in positive terms, with as much force and precision as we define the negatives, is critical.
- **Fully prepared isn't fully engaged.** Young people don't wait until adulthood to engage in work, family, community and a range of other settings. Just as it is insufficient to define all our goals for youth in terms of problems to be avoided, it is not enough to say that we want young people “ready by 21,” prepared for adulthood and the like. Our hopes for youth should include active engagement in the here and now.
- **Academic competence, while critical, isn't enough.** Cognitive development is absolutely essential for full preparation. But in the drive for academic achievement, other key areas of develop-

¹⁴ Pittman, K., et al. (2001). *Preventing Problems, Promoting Development, Encouraging Engagement: Competing Priorities or Inseparable Goals?* Washington, DC: The Forum for Youth Investment.



ment can get overlooked. Understanding the interconnections between them, we have to demonstrate respect for development across a range of other key areas — vocational, social, physical, civic, emotional and moral (*see* “Basic Functional Areas,” Figure 2).

- **Competence itself, while critical, isn’t enough.** We have to underscore that competence (skills, knowledge and behaviors) is only one measure of success. Young people can be good at certain tasks and know a great deal, but still lack what it takes to be good citizens, workers, family members and human beings. Confidence, character, connection and contribution are key outcomes — along with competence — that affect young people’s overall ability to function (*see* “Desired Outcomes,” Figure 2).
- **Services alone aren’t enough.** Young people need affordable, accessible care and services (health and

transportation), safe and stable environments, and high-quality instruction and training. But they also need supports — relationships and networks that provide nurturing, standards and guidance. And they need opportunities to learn, earn and contribute by trying on new roles, mastering challenges and actively participating in family and community (*see* “Key Inputs,” Figure 2).

- **Programs alone aren’t enough.** Young people do not grow up in programs. They grow up in families and communities composed of a range of formal and informal settings for learning and development. Programs — intentionally structured activities and supports designed to address specific needs and outcomes — are critical. But they are offered within a broader context of intentional and natural supports or barriers in multiple settings. This means linking experiences and settings that might otherwise seem disconnected into developmental pathways.

Young people's development can and must be supported by families, communities and institutions, but, in the end, young people shape their own futures. Libraries are valuable and valued resources for youth who are committed to their own development. They house information on every functional area described above, allowing youth to enhance their own competence through learning. Equally important, they are, by design, places that expect character, nurture the confidence that comes through self-directed learning, facilitate connections to people with similar interests, and graciously solicit and accept the time and resource contributions of their patrons.

At times, libraries support young people's development through specific programs and services designed to appeal to their interests. But they also do so at a more basic level, as intentionally supportive environments that are rich in developmental nutrients. "The public library can be a place for interpersonal experiences and independent learning. A place to ask hard questions, a place to be with friends and just be. Nobody seems to want to give kids that," noted Mary Kay Chelton, associate professor in Library and Information Studies at City University of New York.¹⁵

The National Research Council¹⁶ recently conducted a thorough, interdisciplinary synthesis of the literature about what specific characteristics — regardless of setting — support the development of social and personal assets in young people. Their framework mirrors and expands upon our list of key inputs (Figure 2). In Table 1 (page 12) we provide concrete examples of what each feature looks like when present or absent in libraries.¹⁷

Throughout the course of the PLPYD initiative, the nine sites undertook focused work to strengthen or deepen their capacity to provide supports and opportunities in specific areas. Sometimes, as is discussed in the next section, these efforts pushed against library

traditions and systems. It is important to emphasize, however, that it is well within the purview of every library to provide these developmental nutrients at a basic level.

Physical and Psychological Safety

Safety and stability are clearly key strengths of libraries. Libraries are accessible, neutral spaces that are open to the public and free of charge. As Hedra Peterman of the Free Library of Philadelphia put it, "The goal of libraries is to help build youth, not label them." Serving as a safe haven in communities is not a given, however, and does not come without tensions. When the accessibility of libraries is interpreted too broadly, it can ultimately detract from their ability to maintain a safe, positive environment. As Melanie Huggins noted, "It's a tough one. We want to be seen as safe places, but we don't want parents to assume we're responsible for their children." Many libraries have found ways to step up in recent years and provide more structured activities and more adult staff and volunteers during the non-school hours as they are increasingly recognized as positive places for children and youth to spend time when they are not in school.

Appropriate Structure

Levels of appropriate structure and supervision vary significantly over the age range. Libraries are ideal settings for youth in that they provide basic structure and consistency and yet are designed to encourage autonomy and promote self-directed learning. In school, youth are placed into a variety of groupings for a variety of reasons. Typically, they have control over neither the groupings nor the activities. Libraries and other community and youth organizations are, on the other hand, places where young people can determine who they want to hang out with. In libraries, they are doing

¹⁵ Dewitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds. (May 1999). *Public Libraries as Partners in Youth Development*. New York, NY: Dewitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds.

¹⁶ National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. (2002). *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*. Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth. Jacquelynne Eccles and Jennifer A. Gootman, eds. Board on Children, Youth and Families, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

¹⁷ We have adapted the National Research Council list slightly. We added the term "library" to the category on the importance of institutional integration, and we added the last category, "basic care and services." Our changes are italicized.

Table 1:
Libraries as Positive Developmental Settings

BENEFITS ZONE	FEATURES	DANGER ZONE
Physical space is safe; youth feel comfortable and welcome; building is open weekends and evenings.	<i>Physical and Psychological Safety</i>	Physical hazards are present; youth feel unwelcome; building hours are inconsistent.
Some spaces and activities are designed with teens' needs in mind; activities managed consistently with mutual respect for youth and adults.	<i>Appropriate Structure</i>	Spaces and activities are too restrictive (e.g., not allowing for groups to meet, talk); activities are inconsistent, unclear or change unexpectedly.
Designated areas are available for youth to interact with peers; youth feel supported by staff.	<i>Supportive Relationships</i>	Youth do not have opportunities to interact with peers; youth feel ignored or not supported by staff.
Youth are encouraged to join groups and activities; programs, activities and materials reflect youth interests.	<i>Opportunities to Belong</i>	Youth are excluded from activities; programs, activities and materials do not reflect youth interests.
Library staff have high expectations of youth and encourage and model positive behaviors.	<i>Positive Social Norms</i>	Library staff allow negative behaviors to go unaddressed or make some teens feel unwelcome, rather than helping them understand expectations.
Youth-focused programs and activities are challenging and based on youth input; youth are encouraged to take active roles in the overall functioning of the library.	<i>Support for Efficacy and Mattering</i>	Youth input is not considered; activities are not challenging; youth are not offered leadership roles.
Staff help youth identify interests and opportunities to develop and practice skills in the library and the community.	<i>Opportunities for Skill Building</i>	Youth do not have opportunities to develop and practice skills in areas of interest.
Library offers opportunities for families; homework help is available; space is available for youth and community meetings and activities; library works with schools and maintains information on local resources.	<i>Integration of Family, School, Library and Community Efforts</i>	Library does not offer opportunities for family activities; homework help is not available; library does not partner with schools and community organizations; no information on local resources available.
Library offers information on health and social service resources, helps assess options, may make referrals; transportation, snacks, small stipends are available for special programs.	<i>Basic Care and Services</i>	Library is not equipped to make social service referrals; snacks, transportation are never available.

so in a rich environment where they have access to a range of options, adults, resources and information. According to Robyn Gertner, a youth council member from the Brooklyn Public Library, "The library has a lot of programs for youth, like Book Buddies and Teen Time, but it's also a place you can just go and hang out."

Supportive Relationships

The quality of relationships between youth and adults and among peers is a critical feature of any setting. Youth and library staff we talked to emphasized over and over again how important mutual respect was in

determining the success of their programs. While in the context of their every day work library staff have opportunities to interact positively with youth, ongoing relationships and one-to-one connections require resources and time.

In addition, the traditional role of librarians may in some ways discourage the development of strong connections. As Melanie Huggins explained, “Most people are in this profession because they want to help people. We care about getting people what they need. But we have been narrowly focused on that need being information, which can lead to a standoffish approach. We’ll have one interaction, find you what you need, and you’ll go away happy. So we have had to tap that innate sense of wanting to help people and turn it into something a little deeper.”

Opportunities to Belong

Because they are accessible, open to the public and generally safe, libraries can be uniquely comfortable places for youth to spend time without having to audition, apply, sign up or pay a fee. Agnes Griffen, director of the Tucson-Pima Library, underscored this point, “Libraries are the one place people can come and find whatever they want without any judgment.” Research has emphasized the protective power that a sense of connectedness to school, family and other institutions has for youth.¹⁸

According to Mike Megason, a youth employee at the Washoe County Library System, “Most librarians don’t get that instant negative vibe that teenagers are punks. They see us working hard and think, ‘Let’s give them a chance.’” In our increasingly multicultural society, the question of belonging and the challenges facing institutions like libraries are complex. Teens, like all people, feel comfortable when they walk into a place and see other people who look like them. Many libraries are working hard to diversify and train their staff and otherwise ensure that they are culturally competent settings in which all patrons feel comfortable.

Positive Social Norms

Libraries are places where adults hold teens to high expectations, and teens respond by taking responsibility. A combination of high expectations and clear boundaries is critical. Offering meaningful employment opportunities is one way libraries bring out the best in teens. Tapping their creativity and comfort with technology, many libraries employ youth as computer assistants and, in the process, debunk stereotypes held by library users (including other youth) and staff about what teens are capable of. According to Darryl Bego, high expectations were critical to the Teens Succeed! Program, “We give them [youth] the idea that we expect success from them and that they can achieve it. Most importantly, we give them a model of how to get there.”¹⁹

One challenge libraries face is that they still suffer from the perception (and, in some cases, perhaps the reality) that they are basically un-cool. “The first thing I think of when I think about libraries is ‘SHHHH!’ Libraries are so-o-o-o quiet — they are creepy,” said one teen during a focus group.²⁰ Robyn Gertner, a youth leader at the Brooklyn Public Library, described recruiting for an event this way: “When we had our Teen Expo, we had to actually pull people inside, telling them we had free food. It turned out amazing, but it’s hard to get people to come. My friends joke with me about it, because the library is stereotyped as boring.”

Support for Efficacy and Mattering

Public libraries across the country offer a variety of roles and opportunities — short-term and ongoing — for young people to be actively involved in policy and decision making, program development and employment. Youth participate in collection development, help plan specific programs and events, and design and produce public awareness campaigns. They work as technology assistants, peer tutors, public speakers, trainers and reference assistants.

¹⁸ Blum, R.W., McNeely, C.A., & Rinehart, P.M. (2002). *Improving the Odds: The Untapped Power of Schools to Improve the Health of Teens*. Minneapolis, MN: Center for Adolescent Health and Development, University of Minnesota.

¹⁹ Community Affairs Office of the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond. (2000). “Teaching Teens the 3E’s to Succeed.” *Marketwise*, Issue 3.

²⁰ Meyers, E. *ibid.*

Comfort Jidenma, a youth leader from the Free Library of Philadelphia, described the “huge” impact that leadership opportunities had on her: “I’m more outgoing, I’m more comfortable with public speaking, and I’m more aware of things going on in the world beyond Philadelphia.” Libraries also make an excellent hub for local community service and organizing efforts. Youth in Baltimore receive school service-learning credits for work they do in the library and surrounding neighborhoods. Having opportunities to make a real difference is not only a developmental imperative; young people’s input has proven indispensable to libraries in the PLPYD initiative.

Despite many success stories, there is still plenty of room to grow in this area. As Peren Lopez, a youth leader from the Oakland Public Library, shared, “There are still some people in the library that don’t want to include teens in decision making. They have a stereotype of us and make decisions based on that.”

Opportunities for Skill Building

In addition to helping youth develop research and information technology skills — increasingly critical in today’s society — many libraries provide opportunities to access tutoring and homework help, learn life skills such as financial management, and develop interests that can lead to careers and hobbies.

Libraries that are successful in providing enrichment opportunities for teens are in touch with what they care about. Deborah Taylor, school and student services coordinator at Enoch Pratt Free Library, said, “When we asked, teens told us they wanted real classes. They said ‘we want to learn how to do real stuff.’” A group of Baltimore youth, through a partnership with a video production company, learned video production and editing skills that they used to produce PSAs about the library. At the Tucson-Pima Library, youth employed as computer aides received 40 hours of specialized technology training for which they earned community college credit. The challenge, of course, is that intensive enrichment opportunities and focused instruction require dedicated staff and resources.

Integration of Family, School, Library and Community Efforts

Libraries are community hubs where youth can find out about and get connected to organizations, classes, social groups and service projects. They can facilitate access to local businesses, colleges, professional networks, employers and role models. And libraries are places where families can find activities to participate in together or individually — programs geared specifically at families — as well as looking for CDs or books, reading the newspaper, surfing the Web or participating in a workshop.

Libraries can also help create continuity across what are often disparate learning experiences for young people. Darryl Bego spoke directly to the importance of these connections: “Youth working in the Copy Center here do everything — bookkeeping, record keeping, customer service. Skills that help bridge the gap between what they are learning in the classroom and real life.”

Basic Care and Services

All youth need access to information and services that help them meet their basic needs. Ideally, such needs are addressed primarily by families, but this is not the reality for many young people. While libraries are not and should not become providers of basic social services, they are well positioned to serve as hubs of community information and resource referrals, and they provide a safe haven for youth to confidentially access information about subjects such as reproductive health or substance abuse.

More broadly, libraries are indeed equipped to help young people become healthy, functioning adults; many of the libraries in the PLPYD initiative offer skill development in areas like basic financial literacy, college and career awareness, voter registration and other life skills. Tensions do arise, however, when libraries get tasked with inappropriate social service roles.

KEY CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

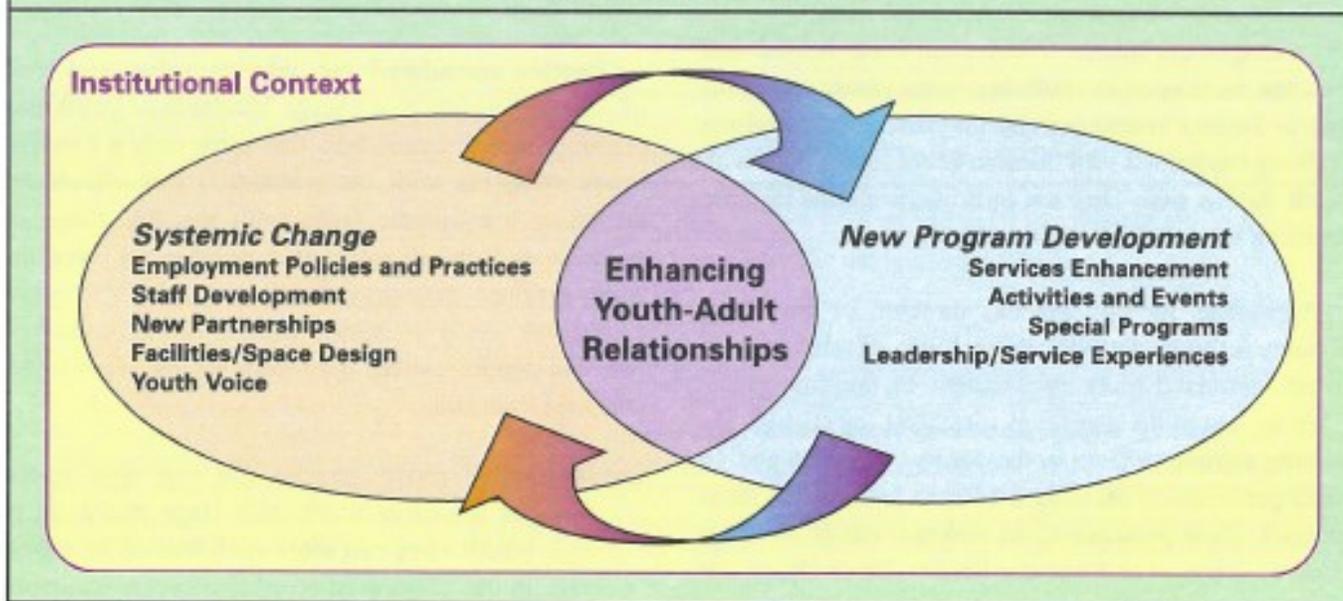
The project got us pushing the envelope a little to do some special things for teens, but it also triggered things all over the system. Changing the system will take a decade, but every time we open a branch, we will incorporate improved services to young adults as a mainstay which will normalize it across the system. It's like technology and the Internet, which have now become mainstream services.

— Bob Cannon, director, Public Library of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County

While the institutional agility of participating libraries varied, systemic changes in the way libraries think about and support youth was considered the ultimate goal of the PLPYD initiative. On a more practical level, however, the initiative provided a range of concrete tools and strategies designed to support the creation of new programs and activities.²¹

At sites where the focus, for a range of reasons, remained largely on new program development, efforts to shift basic policies or infuse youth development ideas throughout the system were slower. Yet in some cases, successfully engaging teens through new programs was necessary to encourage the library to move in the direction of overall change. Enhancing, and in

**Figure 3:
Balancing Systemic Change and New Program Development
in the PLPYD Initiative**



²¹ ULC compiled a toolkit, "Youth Development and Public Libraries: Tools for Success," that includes training materials, assessment tools, job descriptions and other resources developed at each of the nine PLPYD sites over the course of the grant. It can be ordered in hard copy and CD-ROM by calling or emailing ULC at info@urbanlibraries.org (see *Youth Development and Public Libraries: Tools for Success*, page 17).

some cases totally rethinking, relationships between young people and adults sat at the center of the work that all of the PLPYD sites engaged in.

In addition to the overarching challenge of balancing systemic change with new program development, libraries participating in the initiative struggled to strike the right balance between reaching large numbers of youth and engaging a small group intensively. They also dealt with a range of staffing challenges, from rethinking roles and training to integrating youth workers into the library profession. Finally, they focused on the idea of partnerships — between young people and adults and between libraries and other community agencies.

Challenge #1: Balancing Innovation and Tradition

The Techno Teens helped the libraries erase a line in the sand that had kept workers from doing different jobs.

— Justin Carton, King County Library System Techno Teen

For the Techno Teens program in King County to be successful, policy change was necessary at the onset. The library did not generally target specific populations, particularly for jobs. Ushering through this change took a tremendous amount of time and energy, but the results spilled over to other areas. As Allison Wherry, the project manager, explained, “The Techno Teens helped staff become more open to youth in general [those not working as Techno Teens] coming into the library. And the training has helped staff become better supervisors with adult staff as well. They are carrying over what they are learning when working with teens.”

According to Bill Ptacek, director of the King County Library System, these kinds of changes are what motivated their involvement in the first place. “We looked at the project as a catalyst for change. By having a group of teens in the library, we began getting their perspectives on what it takes to better serve teens overall. Their presence alone makes it easier for other kids to come in and use the library. Diversifying our workforce and helping us reach new populations were unintended consequences of the project.”

Lesson: Making changes in library systems takes time and patience. Framing changes in

ways that connect to the overall mission and can help to meet other institutional needs such as public relations, outreach or human resources, is critical.

Challenge #2: Balancing Breadth and Depth of Services

Working with limited groups of young people intensively informed us about how we could improve services to all teens.

— Deborah Taylor, school and student services coordinator,
Enoch Pratt Free Library

Libraries have historically provided tailored services such as baby times for infants, children’s story hours, and outreach to the homebound and geographically isolated. Library funding and policy, however, rooted in an institutional commitment to serving the public universally, has not necessarily supported the targeting of services or the recruitment of specific populations. While the road was rockier for some than for others, participating libraries were successful in creating the necessary changes or exceptions to allow the PLPYD initiative to prioritize the needs of low-income youth. But navigating the natural tensions that result from providing both targeted and universal services also played out on the programmatic level throughout the initiative.

Libraries considered the relative value and cost of one-time events that engage hundreds of youth and ongoing intensive programs that serve only a handful. Many struggled with the realization that effectively providing low-income teens with the full range of supports and opportunities they need — or even the basic services necessary for them to be successful employees — is a costly, time-intensive endeavor, one that agencies other than libraries are often better prepared to pursue.

Lesson: While most libraries are not well suited for intensive work with large numbers of youth, they can work with limited numbers in the context of employment, for example. And this commitment can be leveraged to change the face of the institution and improve the quality of overall services to teens.

Youth Development and Public Libraries: Tools for Success

Kurstin Finch Gnehm, Editor
Urban Libraries Council, 2002

One important concrete result of the PLYD initiative was ULC's compilation of promising practices in a toolkit that is now available to support libraries that are interested in bolstering their work with teens. The toolkit includes a wealth of specific resources that were developed by sites during the initiative such as focus group protocols, written surveys, staff training handouts, job descriptions, recruitment flyers, performance evaluations, volunteer application forms, youth advisory council bylaws and more. They are provided both in hard copy and on CD-ROM, and users are encouraged to adapt the tools as necessary to enhance the work they are already doing.

EXCERPTS FROM THE INTRODUCTION TO THE TOOLKIT:

While librarians have been fruitfully designing teen services for decades, PLYD staff saw themselves as pioneers in a new, youth development-directed approach to these services and to teens themselves. This publication reflects their belief that one of their roles in the initiative was to share the best-of-the-best strategies, tools and information they created or discovered. The goal is not to prescribe a unilateral approach to library youth services; instead, we say, "These tools have worked for us. Take them, adapt them, see if they work for you."

You and your staff will not use this toolkit in a vacuum. You will use it in a busy, staff-short, budget-stretched library, in which long-term, laborious planning and scholarship is a luxury. In this context, PLYD staff ask you to keep a few issues in mind as you use the toolkit.

First, you don't need to have a grant to do youth services. While additional funding has an impact on the size and depth of programming, the "with, not for" philosophy can be carefully used for programming and mission overhaul even on diminished budgets. Think of it as changing what you already do — collection development, career classes, customer service — and not adding to your current charge or augmenting current expenditures. In fact, bringing youth on board as volunteers can actually improve your efficiency and capacity.

Second, you are already doing good work with teens in your library right now, even if you don't call it "youth development." When you help with homework or research, assist teens in choosing enjoyable books, develop programming around teen issues, or even smile at teens entering the library, you are part of youth development. Our purpose here is to suggest ideas and philosophies to enhance these services, to streamline and strengthen current plans, and to provide resources for the future so that you can develop services, not just at the starting gate, but when you're already half-way around the ring.

Finally, even in a well-planned endeavor, you will run into problems. We hope this toolkit will help you avoid some of the major crises, but working with people is always unpredictable. If possible, offer your staff a chance to reflect in a group setting on these moments that did not go as planned.

We have provided tools from PLYD libraries that have been tested and retested and have value. We recommend that you combine these tools with the other excellent youth development material available and construct or build a program that is unique and vital to your community — use these tools as you need them, but incorporate other useful approaches that resonate with you, your staff and your teens. We particularly suggest partnering with local youth development organizations for training, recruiting, and feedback on programming.

In the end, remember that these tools work in an integrated fashion — each supports another aspect of your overall teen services plan — just as the many pieces of a kite ensure the kite can fly. We invite you to dip into the toolkit where you need it and to use the pieces helpful to you, but if possible, try not to skip straight to the part you need and ignore the other pieces. At the beginning of each chapter, there is a list of lessons we've learned, and we encourage you to peruse these lists before you pull tools from that section to adapt and use.

The toolkit can be ordered from the Urban Libraries Council by emailing info@urbanlibraries.org.

Challenge #3: Engaging Youth as Partners

In library school we're taught that we know what the patrons want. The idea of kids coming in and telling us what they want was radical. It shouldn't have been, but it was.

— Susan Asis,
program coordinator, Brooklyn Public Library

Youth involvement was a cornerstone of the PLYD initiative from the start. Planning grants allowed sites to talk directly with young people about why they did and did not use the library and how it could be improved. But opportunities for involvement did not end once they offered their advice. Meaningful opportunities for involvement evolved throughout implementation as staff across the sites discovered the powerful impact youth could have on their efforts.

The rationale behind engaging young people evolved as well. While the importance of creating buy-in was clear from the start, the actual value of young people's contributions to the system became clearer over time. In some cases, negative perceptions of teens on the part of staff were a serious challenge. According to Michael Megason, a youth leader from Washoe County, "If libraries want to do more to support youth, respect is the number one challenge. Respecting the youth."

Each branch of the Fort Bend County Libraries has a youth advisory council that guides youth services. Molly Krukewitt described some of their specific roles: "One council just redecorated our teen area at the main library and another council is meeting with our architect to help plan the teen area in our new branch opening in 2004. Teens plan the summer reading program, meet with the director to help market our materials and make presentations to the library board to promote youth development." But the Fort Bend councils also had an unexpected result — students that were involved are now helping other organizations and municipal departments in the community create youth councils. In this way, these youth and the initiative itself helped reframe the community's perception of the library as a catalyst for youth leadership.

Lesson: Truly listening to young people — shifting the focus from working "for" them to working "with" them — improves not only the quality of specific programs and services but the institution as a whole.

Challenge #4: Rethinking Staff Recruiting, Roles and Development

If you're truly going to change the institution, you have to change the people that are the institution.

— Melanie Huggins, youth services director,
Public Library of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County

While carrying out the work of the PLPYD initiative depended on the talents and energies of hundreds of veteran library staff, leadership at the site level came from project directors and coordinators hired specifically for this work, many of whom did not have a background in library science. Integrating new staff with youth work backgrounds into the professional culture of libraries was a challenge that every site struggled with.

As Kelli Blincoe, a coordinator at the Washoe County Library System, pointed out, "Most library employees didn't go into this field to work with teens." And yet, over the course of the PLPYD initiative, thanks to a range of high-quality training opportunities, she has witnessed important shifts. "I've watched long-time library staff begin to see youth as contributors instead of problems." Gina Macaluso, project director at the Tucson-Pima Public Library, noted that while staff development is important, having youth employed as technology assistants was itself powerful in shifting the image that patrons and some staff had of teens, "from loud and boisterous to knowledgeable, friendly and helpful."

Melanie Huggins met with resistance in her initial attempt to talk with a group of regional library managers about youth assets. She now understands that talking about youth development without making it "sound like extra work" is important, as is starting with staff that are already interested in working with young people. Huggins revised her approach: "Instead of starting top down, I started training staff who were working with kids every day. They had the most reason to buy in, the most contact, the most passion behind what they were doing. I brought it up whenever I could, shared success stories, and they got excited. Once they started talking about it to their managers, I could go back and build on it."

Lesson: Finding staff to manage and champion youth work within the library system is difficult and often means looking beyond library professionals. At the same time, training and support can help employees who are not comfortable working with youth develop professional practices that lead to successful relationships with youth and carry over into other settings.

Challenge #5: Building Community Partnerships

Before this job, I didn't think of libraries as partners in youth work. They've got all these traditions, all these resources. But how do you get in?

— Eric Rowe, former project manager,
Enoch Pratt Free Library

Nearly all of the PLPYD libraries developed new relationships at the local level that contributed to the success of their programs. Partnerships were most often used to enhance recruitment and youth training. For example, partnerships with Junior Achievement and Microsoft allowed the King County Techno Teens program to provide high-quality career and technology training to all youth participants. At the Enoch Pratt Free Library, a video production company called Wide Angle provided expertise that allowed young people to develop new skills and at the same time produce valuable public relations materials for the library.

But the power of community partnerships for libraries extends well beyond the help that partner agencies can offer to enhance specific programs. Partnerships are critical in efforts to strengthen or redefine the role of the

library within the community. For some libraries in the PLPYD initiative, the increased focus on youth has resulted in invitations to sit at new community tables. Libraries are increasingly being seen as players in youth, government services, education and community development planning efforts. As Kelli Blincoe noted, "The community sees the library stepping up where schools can't be expected to handle all of this stuff. People are saying, 'Wow, the library is doing that?'"

Lesson: Forging partnerships with local organizations can be helpful in deepening library programs and services for youth. But partnerships also allow for libraries to be understood as entities with youth development knowledge and resources that can be tapped at the community level.

BEYOND INITIATIVES

The Public Libraries as Partners in Youth Development initiative afforded the Urban Libraries Council and nine library systems an opportunity to pause, listen and respond to the ideas and interests of a particular segment of their users. The fact that they were interested in doing so speaks to the readiness of libraries to, internally, take stock of their efforts and, externally, take advantage of an opportunity to participate as players in a growing movement to create strong networks of learning opportunities for youth that transcend the time and space boundaries of schools.

The youth development “movement” has, over the years, struggled to find a balance between expanding formal youth programs (structured activities for defined numbers of youth) and expanding youth pathways by ensuring that every community institution and business is intentional in its efforts not only to do no harm (e.g., not ban youth from stores or parks), but to do some good. A focus on formal programs puts libraries on the periphery of the youth development movement for all of the reasons discussed in this report. Libraries are not designed to do intensive programming for any specific population. They do not have the budget, the staffing, the structure or the mandate. But a focus on pathways, especially pathways for learning, puts libraries on equal footing with schools, recreation centers and other municipal services for youth, and nonprofit community organizations.

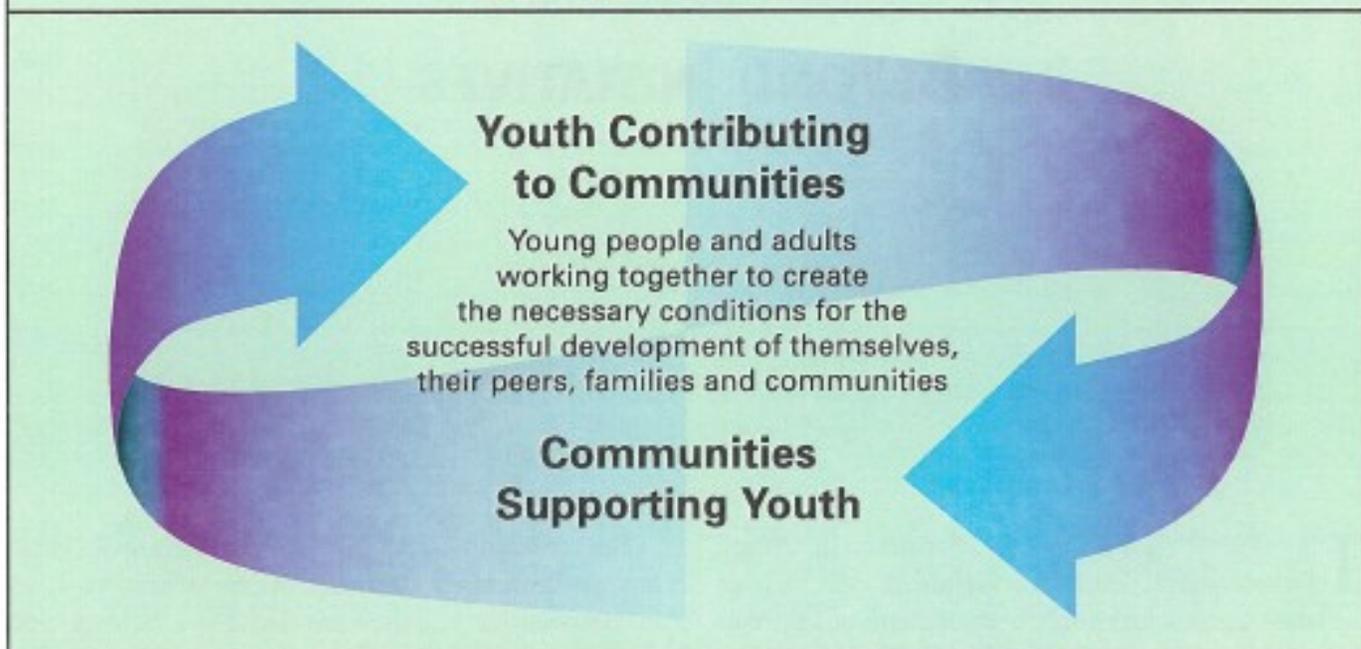
The community schools movement is currently gaining momentum in cities across the country²² — an insiders-outsiders movement led by educators and community providers who believe that school buildings can be hubs not only for academic preparation but for youth development, family support and community building. Schools, it is argued, are public institutions that are found in every community, that have resources that can be used for broader community good and have a mandate (academic education) that can be achieved only through broad community partnerships.

Is it time for a community libraries movement? Or has there been one in the making that needs to be labeled, showcased and taken to scale? Many libraries have long been functioning as critical members of neighborhood service teams within municipal government.

The PLPYD initiative demonstrated what libraries can do when given dedicated resources to develop new partnerships, expand youth employment efforts, provide staff development opportunities, and build and refine a range of youth-focused programs, including mentoring, homework assistance, technology training and career development. Some of these efforts pushed libraries into places they would not have gone without funding, cannot sustain and, perhaps, would not undertake again based on hindsight. This is the inherent danger of any initiative. Many of

²² Dryfoos, J., & Maguire, S. (2002). *Inside Full-Service Schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

**Figure 4:
Engaging Youth as Partners**



these efforts, however, pulled libraries into places they needed to go in order to fulfill their mission to young people and to residents in general. Equally important, many of these efforts demonstrated the value of engaging youth as staff and volunteers in helping libraries reach out to more children, youth and adults, and reach in to more staff and board members.

The evaluation of the PLPYD initiative will assess its impact on young people, staff and participating institutions. It is up to librarians, library administrators and boards themselves, however, to interpret the winds of change that the initiative has highlighted. Libraries can and are doing more to create programs and services that better meet the needs of their teen patrons and that attract more teens as frequent and flexible users. A growing collection of examples

can now inspire or instruct others interested in this goal.

The initiative has also, however, demonstrated how young people can be tapped as resources to work with adults to change the real and perceived roles of libraries as key institutions in their communities. As partners in the PLPYD initiative at the local and national levels, youth worked alongside adults to create changes that supported both their individual development and the well-being of their communities (*see* Figure 4).

In this way, the initiative reinforces the need to create visible, varied opportunities for youth to build skills, deepen awareness and make real contributions concerning issues that they care about. Not just because they benefit from those experiences, but because communities need their insights, ideas and energies.



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