

A Philosophy of Library Service for Children and Young Adults

Young people deserve our highest commitment to the best in library service. They especially deserve our advocacy as youth services librarians, since their needs, interests, and special talents are all too easily overlooked or simply dismissed by the adult world (including, sometimes, library administrators). The best in library service means materials, programs, reference, reader's advisory, support of formal and informal education, and development of information literacy. It includes full access to library services, which entails developmental and socioeconomic accessibility as well as physical—and leads to the difficult issues of intellectual freedom and parental jurisdiction (not always in harmony). It calls for dedication not only to young people and their needs, but to the adults who care for them. It is most effective when it pursues partnerships with other organizations as well as with its patrons, to extend its reach and achieve more than could possibly be done by youth services librarians alone.

The best in library service requires youth services librarians to continually renew their ongoing investment in knowledge and understanding of 1) child and adolescent development; 2) the communities being served (and those not being reached); 3) literature and other materials produced for children and young adults, along with their popular culture influences and interests; 4) technologies affecting information access, as well as media developments; 5) funding sources and collaborative opportunities; 6) the standards of professional librarianship. Its goals include promotion of 1) literacy, especially literacy preparation for the very young; 2) a love of reading, books, literature and knowledge (and love of the library!); 3) the skills and interests needed to support lifelong learning. Underlying these goals is a values system that celebrates children and young adults, and desires to encourage them to reach their fullest potential not only in terms of skills development, but in terms of delight in the world.

Professional development and goals of service both benefit from informed evaluation and attention to outcomes. In other words: know the people you're serving and keep up with how best to serve them; stay aware of how well you are meeting your goals of "best service", and of how effectively you are reaching the people you care about. This, of course, implies that you care—or you wouldn't be doing this. And if it is to mean anything in the real world, it has to allow for change, as children and their communities change over time and standards of service must evolve along with them in order to remain relevant.