



Young People and Public Libraries

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THE PUBLIC LIBRARY INQUIRY revealed startling facts as to the extent that public libraries were actually reaching the public. R. D. Leigh makes the following significant statement: "In the last fifty years library schools and libraries have developed children's librarians of great skill and personal effectiveness, with an expert knowledge of children's literature. . . . Not only are the children's librarians expert but also in the community they are recognized as such. Thus, children's rooms and children's librarians have been the classic success of the public library."¹

This achievement, the result of the work of skilled children's librarians over the years, is due to the philosophy of these librarians in the firm belief and interest in the individual child and his development. Leigh continues—children and young people in school use libraries in larger proportion than do older persons, about one-third as compared with one-tenth of adult users. Library registration of juveniles usually averages 50 per cent of the population as compared with the average 25 per cent registration of adults.²

According to the findings of the Survey Research Center, 1948, more than half (56 per cent) of the adult population indicated that they had used the public library more when they were younger, most of them when of school age. In Chicago 90 per cent of a sample of recent high school graduates (girls) who were nonusers of the public library had used the library while in school but had allowed their cards to expire. There is a sharp drop in library use when young people leave school. The public library carries over only a small percentage of its younger readers into adult use of library materials. Although libraries are used less by children after they leave school, still the major body of adult library users consists of the younger adults. Bernard Berelson³ states that under present conditions the

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public library attracts a progressively smaller proportion of people in each successive higher age level. Perhaps half of the adult library users are under thirty-five years of age.

These are hard facts. If work with children constitutes the public library's classic success, the classic failure is the lack of the public library to meet the needs of young people with the best at its command. It is essential to use the keenest minds to study and analyze this situation, to experiment in technique and methods, to provide specially trained young people's librarians to work with youth, to provide space and materials to develop adult use of the library's facilities, and to work and plan together with all community agencies for youth and young adults, a program for the better development of youth into mature responsible citizens.

Has the public library lost out in adult areas because of the weakest link in the chain of developing readers—work with adolescents and young adults? In many libraries, even today, is there not a lack of interest, apathy, misunderstanding and even irritation when work with youth is discussed? Basically this attitude is prevalent because of lack of knowledge, the insufficient awareness of the needs and characteristics of young people which fosters defensive attitudes and accounts for many drop-outs of youthful library users.

Work with young people is definitely an outgrowth of work with children, and the philosophy of librarians working with youth is an extension of that of the children's librarian, the urgent belief in the individual and the need to help develop young people into mature and responsible citizens. The beginning and terminal points of work with young people, if the word "terminal" may be used when the continuity of reading is the chief factor, is specialized service to the high school group and to the young adult group to the age of twenty. This period in the life of teen-agers and young adults, the middle and later adolescent years, is the time of change and growth which causes conflict both within themselves and in their outside world. It is the time when help and understanding are most needed for they are involved in many personal, social, and economic adjustments in their everyday lives.

The purpose of work with young people is to stimulate and direct reading interests of youth into adult reading on as high a reading level and into as many fields as possible. The reading interests developed in the children's rooms are carried over, and the teen-agers are introduced to a broad selection of adult books chosen with their interests and reading abilities in mind. Of equal importance is the de-

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velopment of the readers at the other end of the age limit, those in their later teens. These young adults, when their capabilities and interests are discovered and tapped, are ready and often eager for the best in adult literature. Here is the spot where the greatest knowledge and imagination are needed by the young people's librarians, for the door for future adventures and growth in reading is open wide for that individual. Here, too, it should be said that the young people's librarian acts in an introductory role to the resources of the entire library.

The philosophy is that of leading out, not that of holding back. The time when a young person becomes an adult cannot be stated in chronological age, but only by individual growth and development. Reading guidance is of paramount importance and the extent and the height of this art is controlled by the reading background and imagination of the librarian. The common ground of work with young people is the merging at two points in reader development: from children's reading, bridging the gap through interests of the younger adolescents, and from the reading of the young adult to the mature adult use of library materials.

A brief backward look is necessary for background, to understand present problems, and to clarify future trends. In an effort to give guidance to older boys and girls, small collections of books for "intermediates" were developed in some children's rooms in public libraries as early as 1906 in the Brooklyn Public Library, in Buffalo in 1910, in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1911. The New Haven, Connecticut, Public Library was one of the first libraries to place a special collection for young people in the adult department to introduce adult books to children leaving the children's room.⁴

These pioneer projects pointed up the need for service to young people in the public libraries and opened the way for further experimentation and study. Important facts were discovered from these early experiments: that the philosophy of work with this group must be forward looking, leading on with vision and understanding; that the place of special collections must be in the adult room and not in the children's room; that specially trained librarians with understanding of adolescents and with wide reading backgrounds were essential to the success of any project for youth. The New York Public Library made a great contribution to work with young people when in 1919 a Superintendent of Work with Schools was appointed. "One of her functions was to train in each branch library a member of the adult staff to aid young people in their reading and reference work."⁵ This

necessitated the development of a program to train librarians for work with young people and to institute a committee to evaluate books for this group. Mabel Williams caught the spirit of youth, and the continuity and development of this service was expressed in the article "A Book Committee Comes of Age" in 1943.⁶

The next step in development was the organization of the Robert Louis Stevenson Room for Young People in the Cleveland Public Library in 1925, which was the first room devoted entirely to work with youth with a trained staff and a collection of adult books selected with the interests of young people in mind. Originally planned primarily for the recreational and personal information needs of youth, as indicated by their preferences in a preliminary survey, it soon became apparent that material to supplement the school curriculum was essential. In a large library organized on the subject division plan, the bringing together of material in one place is almost imperative to assure service to the uninitiated and the timid. It is the starting point for reference service, as well as the place for expert reading guidance and serves as an introduction to the whole library. Liaison relationships have been developed with all subject divisions. The book collection is composed of approximately 85 per cent adult titles, and the books are read and reviewed from the point of view of use with young people. The Stevenson Room has almost doubled its floor space, and it celebrated a "Coming of Age Party" in 1946 by adding an informal browsing alcove.

In this experimental period Brooklyn Public Library converted the second floor of the Brownsville Children's Branch into a department for youth. Along with the organization of the Young People's Reading Round Table in 1930 at the conference of the American Library Association in New Haven, Connecticut, there developed important extension service to youth; the appointment of a young people's librarian to head the work at the main library and at branches in the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore; the opening of the Skinner Memorial Room in St. Paul, Minnesota; work in Portland, Oregon; a special room in the Rochester Public Library; and in 1941 a department for young people in the new Brooklyn Public Library. In Sacramento, California, the Ella A. McClatchy Library, a luxurious old home, was transformed into a beautiful library exclusively for young people, and another transformation of an old building was the Nathan Straus Branch of the New York Public Library, which has become a center for work with youth in New York.

A survey conducted by the Standing Committee of the Young Peo-

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ple's Reading Round Table shows great increases in work with youth during the period of 1937-47, but also shows great diversity in policies and procedures. From 165 replies to the questionnaire only twenty-nine reported no specialized service for young people between ages thirteen to twenty-one. Seventy-three libraries center their services in the adult department, sixteen in the children's department, and five have special departments. Forty-two libraries have special rooms; sixty-five, alcoves; four have lounges; and the balance of approximately fifty have special shelves. The majority of libraries have permanent book collections varying in size from one hundred to fifteen thousand, with the average figure around two thousand. Sixty-eight libraries have no special budget. Only thirty-five libraries record having book reviewing groups or committees to help in the selection of books.⁷

The need for a statement of philosophy, objectives, standards, techniques, and methods of work with youth was recognized by the American Library Association, and a subcommittee of the A.L.A. Committee on Post-War Planning was appointed. *The Public Library Plans for the Teen Age*, published in 1948, is the result of the work of that committee. It is an excellent beginning volume on services, standards for book collections, suggestions about space and equipment, standards of personnel, types of administration, and the training needed. It is time now to study and analyze work with youth in relation to present statistics, present needs, and selfishly, the potential value of youth in each community. The value of youth is high and many organizations and agencies compete with each other to reach them. Libraries have been slow to see these values. Churches have their special group activities; department stores spare no expense to bring together items from all departments and place them in the best locations to entice young people to buy; banks have special quarters; big business is sponsoring Junior Achievement; political parties promote youth programs. And the public libraries are still struggling on the fringe of specialized service without any dynamic, vital program.

In the New York survey 65 per cent of the readers in the Circulation Department were under twenty and almost 80 per cent were below the age of thirty. In New Rochelle more than 50 per cent were under twenty.⁸ A similar pattern is found in other libraries. It is important now to make a study to discover what causes drop-outs in libraries about the time children are ready for adult cards—what factors are involved in keeping young people as readers and what factors deter the use of the library by young people. There has been enough experimentation now in some of the larger public libraries to be able

to secure data and to analyze the facts to find out the reasons why some young people continue to use the public library even when they are not obliged to and others do not. On the basis of such information constructive programs might be devised. Such a study has been recommended by the Public Library Inquiry.⁹ A study in reading guidance techniques is another important area for research.

In order to carry out the objectives of service to youth, a major step in planning in any public library, large or small, is the necessity for the entire staff to have common understanding of the purpose of the work with youth in the over-all library program. The fact that work with young people crosses departmental lines brings up administrative problems, and is a deterring factor in some libraries. Any specialization crosses departmental lines to some extent, but does not duplicate services, and a clear understanding of the value and function of any special service in relation to the library as a whole is necessary. *The Public Library Plans for the Teen Age*¹⁰ discusses various methods of administration. Whether the organization is that of direct supervisory authority or that of a coordinator, the success of both is assured only through working cooperatively, with understanding and broadmindedness. Whatever administrative plan is used, there must be definite responsibility and authority worked through the director, and when situations cannot be resolved through conferences, the director makes whatever decision is best for the entire library. Flexibility in organization and a free interchange of ideas and plans is essential to healthy growth. Staff recommendations, promotions, and changes should be the responsibility of both coordinator and direct supervisor. The Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore is the best example of organization on the "coordinator" plan.

In Cleveland the Supervisor of the Youth Department directly supervises youth services in the main library and acts as a coordinator in the branches, integrating and developing work in this area for the whole system. One assistant in each adult subject division at Main is designated as a special young people's representative, attending occasional meetings of the Committee of Young People's Reading and being advised of current policies and activities. Insofar as possible, young people are sent directly to this liaison person when their first contact with the division is made.

Every public library has the potential for special service to youth. First comes the interest and understanding of the needs of young people by the librarian. Since young people are already in the library to some degree, it is desirable to capitalize on the interest of the

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leaders and give them an opportunity to participate in the planning. They have many ideas and the energy and capacity to carry them out. The best talented, trained staff member should be given the responsibility to develop the work. Space will be needed, specially allocated, not necessarily additional; books already on the shelves need to be brought out, displayed by interest and supplemented by new titles; furniture will need to be rearranged, probably repainted and probably by the young people themselves; activities planned by youth leaders and even responsibility for "order" in the corner, alcove, or what have you, will be accepted by the young people. Additional funds will be needed as the work progresses and the influence is felt in the community. Here, too, young adults can help in the interpretation of the place of the library in the community.

An attractive illustrated brochure prepared by the Young People's Reading Round Table, now the Association of Young People's Librarians of the American Library Association, entitled *A Youth Library in Every Community*¹¹ cites many examples of different kinds of youth library centers and many youth activities. In all of these youth had a share in the planning which was essential to successful work. There are young people's book discussion groups in many libraries that would compare favorably with most adult groups and surpass some. There is considerable use of films both for recreation and for discussion purposes. Vocational evenings are popular with films and with specialists who are invited to talk and to answer questions. Two libraries experimented successfully with the Great Books program. Sports and hobbies are represented by seasonal interests; there are music, chess, dramatics, poetry, and nature groups. "Personality programs" are popular, and so are "Listening Posts." There are World Politics groups and Junior Town Meetings. Book reviewing groups often use the radio as a medium, or write their reactions and comments about books in a news bulletin like New York's *Circulatin' the News*.¹² The most noteworthy example of a youth radio program is the "Young Book Reviewers Broadcast"¹³ presented over a New York City radio station Saturday mornings over a period of years. Margaret C. Scoggin is the master of ceremonies and skillfully brings out the opinions of her young reviewers.

The Cleveland Public Library is just completing the ninth year in the "Roads to World Understanding" program¹⁴ for young people, a series jointly sponsored by the Cleveland Press World Friends' Club, the Junior Council on World Affairs, the Cleveland Art Museum, and the library. Programs are planned for young people of high school

and early college age to further their understanding of other countries and other people and the problems of living together in "one world." A Young People's Planning Committee, composed of representatives from schools and youth organizations, helps in the planning and assists at the meetings, ushering, taking registration, interpreting exhibits, and participating in choral groups, nationality dances, and music.

"It's Our America"¹⁵ is a program for young adults between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one initiated in the fall of 1952 as part of the American Heritage Project of the American Library Association. Discussion groups are set up for young people to meet and talk about events and ideas which have helped to build America and to draw parallels with today's problems. Fiction and biography and documentary films form the basis of the discussion. Leadership training courses are given and book discussion guides have been prepared for leaders.

It should be noted that all these programs and activities are linked to young people's interests, that they all tie in with library materials, and that they all provide valuable group experience and an opportunity to relate personal interests to broader social and educational goals.

The success of work with youth is dependent to a high degree on the librarian assigned to develop the service. He should be a graduate of a library school, preferably with special training in work with young people which should include standards in book selection for young people, and a critical evaluation of the books and their use, discussion of reading interests, guidance techniques and methods, background for the understanding of adolescents and the relationship of service to youth in the library with other youth agencies in the community. The two most important factors are the personality of the librarian and his reading background.

The extent of influence can only be measured in terms of knowledge of books, knowledge of young people, and the imagination of the librarian in bringing them together. Book collections must reflect interests and needs of youth with a vision of the potential growth of individuals. These collections in no way restrict but are recommendations and an introduction to the rest of the library. Young people are free to use any part of the library. There are many young people who read magazines, and most collections have as wide a selection as the budget allows reflecting again the many interests and hobbies

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of youth. Magazines with their bright attractive covers are frequently the first to appeal.

One of the most delightful books to read and one filled with practical help plus inspiration is Amelia H. Munson's *An Ample Field*.¹⁶ Its broad approach to books and reading reflects experience and wisdom. Guidance is underwritten throughout, and a particularly helpful chapter is the introduction of books through book talks, one of the most important techniques in group guidance. The book lists included are good first selections for young people's collections.

Aids in selecting books are growing both in number and in scope. Current reviewing is very important and is offered through special sections in *The Booklist*, *Library Journal*, and *The Horn Book Magazine*, among others. The New York Public Library's *Books for Young People* is a basic list and includes more juvenile titles than any other similar publication as the beginning age is thirteen years. A number of larger libraries have available for a small cost mimeographed copies of the current recommendations of young people's books, e.g., New York, Baltimore, Detroit, and Cleveland. *By Way of Introduction*¹⁷ is a basic recreational list. Many libraries have short printed lists which show great individuality in approaching youth. One Cleveland list, *Personality Patterns Through Books*, has been popular with leaders of youth agencies for use with young people facing problems of adjustment. A book based on experience with young people over a period of years and planned entirely to develop reading interests of young people, *Patterns in Reading*,¹⁸ was published in September 1954 by the American Library Association. This includes over one hundred reading interests with the books placed under interest and arranged progressively to expand and deepen interests.

Young people's librarians have established close cooperative relationships with the schools and school libraries, no matter what the organizational plan is. Schools and libraries are interdependent and supplement each other. Mutual understanding of common goals and objectives in the development of individual boys and girls are recognized, and plans for interchange of information are developed. Conferences on subjects relating to curriculum needs are frequent; discussions on books and other materials of communication are continuous. Discussions on individual teacher or pupil needs or problems are part of the everyday work. Book talks in the schools are given often by young people's librarians, visits to the public library are planned for the schools, introductory talks in the use of library ma-

materials are given in both school libraries and public libraries. There is joint planning of school and public libraries in book reviewing and book discussions, in exchange of materials, and in preparation of book lists. Experiments in devices to carry over young people from school library to public library are being tried at the time of graduation and at the time students drop out of school before graduation. The school and public library clientele is the same, the school compulsory and the public library voluntary.

The young people's librarian is the key person to develop a good public relations program with all agencies and organizations serving youth in the community in order to tie in library services and resources to agency programs as such, and also to better serve the individuals who are part of those organizations. Representing the library on youth councils, serving on agency committees, working with service organizations, and taking active part in the planning of community youth projects are important in library services. Book talks, preparation of special book lists, help in program planning are part of the work; a file of speakers, a file of information about youth organizations and activities are indispensable. Cooperation with organizations like the Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A., Catholic Youth Organization, the Jewish youth groups, the 4-H clubs, the local vocational groups, the recreation and hobby groups in social agencies—they are manifold in number—offer many opportunities for service, and the results are rewarding in growth and development of individual members.

In all of these contacts, there are two points of emphasis: first with the younger teen-ager, with techniques suitable to that group; and second, with the young adult, which requires an entirely different skill. Too little is known about the latter, and a very important study with many implications for libraries has just been published by the National Social Welfare Assembly, *Young People and Citizenship*,¹⁹ which analyzes the characteristics and interests of young adults and makes recommendations for further study. Some of these parallel the needs for further study in relation to libraries.

Considerable work is done with adults working with youth—conferences with parents about many problems, work with teachers, social workers, religious leaders, club leaders, adults planning radio and TV programs, vocational counselors, probation officers, and the list grows as the library develops its public relations program.

No better statement about the future can be made than that penned by Ernestine Rose:

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. . . it is safe to predict that the future program of the library, changing to meet new needs and conditions, will include specialized service to young people on an enlarged scale.

Modern social problems hasten this action, but it is definitely in line with the social development of the public library. Moreover, there are questions involved in complete library service and in efficient library administration which can be answered most successfully only by recognizing this group as one unit in a coordinated library design. . . . There are no "larger issues" today. These young people will not receive a fair deal from the public library until they are given their own reference tools, their own space for study and conference, and their own librarians, vitally interested in the possibilities and problems of youth and qualified to deal with them. . . .

. . . there is adequate proof that in communities where for a number of years boys and girls have become accustomed to the use of books and libraries there now exists an adult group whose members possess a knowledge of the tools of education, and who turn from their academic education to the resources offered by the library with a feeling of familiarity and a sense of fulfilled desire.²⁰

Our future leaders are dependent upon the opportunities and resources of the present. Our high school graduates of 1954 will be college graduates in 1958; in 1959 some will be librarians complete with graduate training; in 1961 with still more professional training some will be scientists and doctors. These are the young people who are in our libraries today. Are they receiving the help, the encouragement, the understanding they need now in order to take their places in the adult world?

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