Management of Youth Services: Political, Financial, and Social Implications

Why is it so hard to convince people—adult people—that children are important and that they are the brightest and need the best? Why do we continually undervalue those who serve children, those who teach children, and those who care for children? Why must libraries, schools, and other educational institutions beg for crumbs while society force feeds the bloated military/industrial complex? Why do aging leaders forget that youths die when nations fight? Why is the future mortgaged to pay for the fantasies of the past?

Implications of the Management of Youth Services

It is interesting to note the order in which these implications are presented. Five years ago we might have seen the fiscal side head the list. Ten years ago there was a fascination with social implications and societal changes. Today politics takes first position. That observation is not meant to imply that political considerations are more important than those of the budget or those of the surrounding communities, but it is the juxtaposition that interests this author.

For decades youth services librarians have been missionaries in the most generic sense. Our foremothers worked long and hard to establish the importance of library services to young people, to establish patterns and methods of serving youth, to communicate a strong sense of commitment, and provide a solid philosophical base. For many years these dedicated individuals toiled hard in the fields nurturing, pruning, weeding, and tending the garden. They made it possible to develop means and methods for today. Youth services librarians owe them a very large debt.

The only way that debt to our foremothers can be paid is to guarantee that quality library services to children and youth continue to exist and, in fact, continue to grow and develop. We know that children are the future of
the world. We know that just as there is a debt to the past, there is an equal
debt to the future. This debt must be repaid in the form of a legacy of
superior library services, of humanistic and careful administration, and of
institutions which respond easily and quickly to user needs. It is important
that we work hard to pave the way for the librarians who will follow; the
librarians who will continue the job after we are long gone.

Political Implications

The political implications of life in the 1980s and 1990s force us to
recognize where funding responsibilities lie, how these can be understood,
how these can be affected, and how best to position youth services so that
adequate financial resources allow the provision of superior services. Lots
of folks say that they don't want to be bothered with political activity, that
it is too time-consuming, that it doesn't have anything to do with their
chosen field of endeavor, etc.

Youth services librarians serve the most visible and most vocal client-
tele in all of libraryland. Children are the most photogenic of library users.
They are cute and just about everyone agrees that children are important.
The job is to get people to put their money where their mouths are and
establish priorities that serve youth well. That requires political
considerations.

So often it appears as though we forget what truly useful skills youth
services librarians possess. It is easy to use publicity skills and promotional
abilities. To begin with, see to it that flyers announcing programs are
always sent to library management trustees, city councils, and other
governmental agencies. Invite politicos to awards ceremonies. Be sure to
have a photographer there to take pictures, and be sure that the politicos
are aware that a photographer will be there. Don't forget the effectiveness
of the kissing babies syndrome. Post the photographs and send them to the
media. It is assumed here that you know what to send, where to send it, and
who will help to get it published.

Lobbying and political strategies are mostly common sense. Remember that strength is in numbers and that real strength lies in
affiliating with others who have similar interests. When E.J. Josey used
coalitions as the theme for his ALA presidential year, he really had the
right idea. It is important that legislators, no matter at what level—local,
regional, state, or national—see that there is a community of interest and
broad support for the issues we champion. There are the obvious cohorts
such as child care providers, schools, recreation centers, and the not-so-
obvious like senior centers, health care providers, social workers, book-
sellers, local chambers of commerce, and the like. You can find common
ground with just about all these folks, they can support you, and you can
support them. That is what coalition building is all about.
It is also important that we keep ourselves well informed, that we inform allies, and that we speak, if not always with one voice, then at least in the same key. Be logical, know the issues, and know the interests of your legislators. Don't worry if, when you call, you speak to an aide. It is often a legislator's aide that makes decisions, assists in making policy, and advises the boss.

Be more than a single issue person (you will find yourself doing this as you build coalitions). It is important that you watch and read so you are aware of where your legislator stands. It is helpful to be able to refer to some earlier action of the legislator that you liked, some issue on which you agree with her/him.

If a legislator does right by you, send thanks. Let the legislator know that you appreciate the help and that you recognize the good he or she has done. Remember that we often complain and rarely compliment elected officials. They are human too and certainly appreciate knowing that somebody likes what they are doing just as you would if you were in that position. A brief note will do.

Utilize library support groups like Friends of the Library. Everybody needs friends, and thank God that libraries have them. Friends of the Library are often listened to better than librarians because they are not perceived to have a vested interest. Local officials therefore consider them to be concerned and motivated citizens and pay attention to them. Don't ever underestimate the power of a vocal, well-informed citizenry on any elected official. Therefore be sure that your Friends of the Library are well-informed and are kept up to date. They are extremely valuable to any library. If you think all of this takes a lot of work, you're right. If you think you may not be able to do it on work time, you're right. If you think it is a long row to hoe, you're right.

Two heartening victories in California demonstrated how important all these lobbying efforts are:

1. In Berkeley after Proposition 13 we passed a local tax measure to support the public library. It was a massive effort with much work from the library staff, the Friends of the Library, and many interested local folks. We passed the measure with 68 percent of the vote. It's good for ten years and during the life of the measure it will bring in over 30 million new dollars to the library. Not bad for a first effort. We are now planning for the renewal and continuance of the library tax in 1988. We have begun the effort to involve the Berkeley community at the primary planning level and are in the process of identifying critical issues and long-range needs for the library and its services.

2. In 1983 California's legislature created the Public Library Fund, an act which gave per capita support to the state's public libraries for the first time. In 1983 it was $6 million, in 1984 $12 million, in 1985 $18 million,
and we anticipate approximately $20-22 million in 1986. All for public libraries.

Neither of these efforts could have been achieved without massive efforts on the part of those involved. They would have been impossible without the help and support of the citizenry at large who perceived that public libraries were a public good and believed that the state had and continues to have a statewide responsibility to public libraries. State support of libraries—public, academic, and school—is critical to development, growth, networking, resource sharing. Youth services must be involved in these plans and represent the needs of their clientele.

There are a couple of questions for you. How many of you know: Who your mayor is? Who the members of the City Council are? Members of County Boards? State Assemblyman? State Senator? U.S. Congressperson? U.S. Senator? It is good to know who these people are and how to reach them. Also, how many of them know you? Think about that for a moment.

We are aware of the past, know the present, and must be ready for the future. Because of special skills, knowledge, and abilities, we have a debt to the future that cannot be minimized. People do what they want to do. We achieve what we want to achieve. Our potential is truly boundless. We have the resources and the intelligence. We also have the drive and the need. All we need now is to go out and do it.

Financial Implications

Budgets are compilations of numbers. They are meant to help, to assist, and to guide. They are often used to distract, to restrain, to compel, and to obstruct. Budgets can be what you make of them. Remember that while numbers may not lie, numbers don’t always tell the whole truth.

A budget is a true test of priorities. No matter what people might say about how important something is, you must always look at how they spend their money in order to get a clear picture of what is really important. Just take a look at the federal budget and see how much importance the present administration places on education, the ecology, and defense. Your library’s budget will demonstrate clearly the library’s priorities no matter what the stated objectives may be. As the budget is examined in this light, many will recognize that this is an uphill battle. It is here that internal coalitions and internal political activity develops between library units, divisions, and departments.

Just as we use intelligence in the external political arena, so it is necessary to know how things work internally—i.e., inside the bureaucratic institutions. The same rules apply. No matter what the library setting is like, it will have its own set of internal political considerations. It is important to develop the ability to lobby, form coalitions, understand
climates, communicate effectively, and work within your own bureaucracy.

No one can afford to be isolated, or to be perceived as being isolated or aloof. Today the team or task force approach to problem solving lends itself well to increased multilevel participation in the quest for solutions. Recognize the inherent truth in the old adage that if you are not part of the solution you are part of the problem.

Gathering information, building bridges, and communicating needs are activities that help. You must know who to talk to and when, you must understand how to present your needs, how to defend them, how to justify them, and how to relate them to the overall goals and objectives of the library.

As you enter this arena you need to know how to play the game, the lingo, and the rules. You need to know the box scores, the batting averages, the handicaps, etc. Learn the rules. When I first became an administrator, I was often asked why. Why did I leave the front lines of library service and ensconce myself behind a desk protected by a secretary and inaccessible to the public? Why indeed? I became an administrator because I thought I could do the job and because I felt I had a mission, a challenge, and a goal of superior service. I hoped to make the library responsive, user-friendly, and an integral part of the community it serves. I also hoped to enable the staff to provide the highest possible level of library services.

This is not a challenge that can be met in a single summer but rather takes a lot of winters, autumns, springs, and summers. It takes time, effort, energy, persistence, tenacity, and sometimes sheer dumb stubbornness. A good manager must not be afraid to make mistakes or be controversial. As my mother once said when I complained about controversy and hassle: if you don’t have controversy, maybe nothing vital is happening. You’re doing nothing new, no changes are taking place. Nothing risked is nothing gained.

What do you need to know about administration in order to survive and to become more vital and viable? First, you have to know the ropes. You have to become aware of the atmosphere, the milieu, the vibes. It is important that you have the ability to speak the language when you visit foreign climes, or you’ll never be understood by the natives, and for sure you’ll never find the secret passageways to the treasure vaults. Budget processes generally run throughout the year and it is not unusual for administration to be working simultaneously on three or even four fiscal years. It is important that the library’s budget cycle is clearly understood and that the calendar of events and deadlines are kept.

When dealing with justifications, keep in mind that statements need to be phrased in the boiler plate used inside your bureaucracy. Trends exist in budgeting just as they do in fashion. Relate cause to effect, effort and
person hours to quantifiable goals and measurable results. Develop proposals which enhance, enable, and extend while demonstrating a clear understanding of relationships within the bureaucracy.

Allocation of scarce resources (our resources are always scarce) is the single most important activity of library management. Personnel resources, more commonly known as people, are the most valuable resource of any library as well as the largest single expenditure—often up to 80 percent of the budget. Extreme care must be taken so that precious time is not wasted so that people are allowed to go about their work efficiently. Wasting personnel resources is like throwing money into a dustbin. In preparing proposals, take care that the right people are doing the right things at the proper levels.

There is no special club for managers, no secret handshakes, no Egyptian robes to wear. Management is a constant exercise in coping skills. The real secrets lie in understanding where you are going, how you are going to get there, what needs to be done, who will do it, and when to make your move. It is always necessary to be fair, direct, and honest and to treat others as you like to be treated. Common sense, imagination, and empathy serve any manager well.

Many librarians serving youth complain that they aren’t taken seriously by their administrators, managers, or supervisors. It seems that we still suffer from some of the myths about youth services librarians. Following are some common myths stated in negative terms. A later discussion will show how they can be turned around and made positive. Sadly, some of these are self-perpetuating. Youth services librarians: are childlike, overly identified with client group; are incapable of seeing the big picture; don’t see beyond their own services; are emotional; can’t be reasoned with—are stubborn; live in an Ivory Tower; are inflexible; fluster easily; don’t understand budgets; don’t know how to justify requests (because they only ask for what is right, true, just, and good); can’t estimate or forecast; refuse to listen to reason—won’t compromise; and won’t set priorities because everything is important.

Are any of these familiar? Do you recognize yourselves? It is hoped not. These myths can be turned around and viewed on the positive side and then transferable skills can be recognized as being possessed by those serving youth.

For example, anyone who can manage twenty hyperactive children in a story hour can work easily with a group of reasonably docile adults. Anyone who can produce flyers, bibliographies, and prepare weekly or monthly programs has already figured out how to deal with media and promotion. Anyone who can coordinate and produce summer reading programs, visits, and do booktalks to classrooms full of “spring-filled” young adults has organizational skills. Anyone who can evaluate and
review thousands of books and relate them to thousands of others in the collection can certainly understand the “big picture.”

It is important that we all understand and use the language of administration in order to get our points across. Fie, you may say, “don’t want to learn gobbledy-gook like that.” You had best learn this game because it’s the only one in town. If you want to get what’s best for your department, you really must be able to present its needs carefully, in the best possible light, to those who make the decisions.

It is equally important that you know what is going on in your own local situation. You should be aware of the political context which surrounds your library. It is important that you be cognizant of changes in income levels, education levels, population changes, things which can become predictors of future trends. We are an aging society. Population forecasts show that by the year 2000 we will have more people over sixty-five than under eighteen. These changes in population do not negate the need for quality library services to youth. You must be prepared with your justifications, your arguments, and your persuasive forces because hard questions will be asked. You will be expected to come up with the answers.

I am convinced that youth services librarians have underestimated themselves and have not recognized the transferable skills they possess. These skills make people eligible for advancement. They enable and empower, but only when the particular skills, knowledge, and abilities are recognized, are translated into the appropriate jargon, and are presented positively. It is endemic to society that those who serve children and youth are undervalued. Somehow serving children and youth is seen as less important than taking out the garbage. Anyone can do it—after all they’re only kids. What a false and fruitless attitude. However, this attitude persists because we allow it. We don’t sing our own praises or shout our accomplishments. If we don’t care enough to take care of ourselves, how can we expect someone else to do the job for us? A skilled and talented librarian can easily have a dramatic effect on the rest of a child’s life.

Women’s professions are traditionally underpaid. Where is it written that a secretary should earn less than a gardener? The concept of pay equity is being heard loud and clear in our land, and women in many jurisdictions are fighting for equality, pay parity, and a larger slice of the pie. Librarians serving youth must join in this effort.

This song rings loud and clear for librarians, 80 percent of whom are women in a traditionally undervalued market. Most of us work for government. We have been patient, calm, and soft-spoken. I believe that era is over. More and more women are speaking out or are refusing to take a pat on the head and a high sounding title instead of money. We are insisting on the value of our labor and the worth of contributions to our institutions.

All librarians who occupy professional positions within a specific
library should be paid on the same scale, regardless of their specialty. This seems almost too obvious to state. A librarian is a librarian no less because she happens to serve youth. In fact, children’s and young adult librarians must know two collections and be able to flow easily from adult to children’s materials and back again with ease; a feat not usually required of specialists in other services.

Promotion for youth services librarians generally means changing the job and leaving the specialty. I have often felt that there should be a place for advancement for persons who are expert in an area, but who do not choose to become supervisors. We are all familiar with the Peter Principle of advancement: it is almost a truism that the best person at the activity is not necessarily the best supervisor. We must begin to recognize the value of a highly skilled and trained children’s or young adult librarian. These folks are worth their weight in platinum. Why can’t public libraries develop a plan which could have a multitude of steps in the salary range of, say, 10 to 15 with advancement based on continuing education classes, workshops, conference attendance, and/or publication. Public schools have similar plans which allow teachers to advance through a deep salary range. I don’t know of any public libraries that have attempted such a system, but it surely can be worked on from existing educational parallels.

As I look at what I consider to be promotable qualifications, I am ever drawn to the skills, knowledge, and abilities I see exhibited by competent youth services librarians. When I consider what I want to see in a branch supervisor, I look for a person who can deal with the community, who will speak out, who has a basic understanding of budget, who understands the local neighborhood and the library system, who can plan ahead, who enjoys working with people, and who is eager to forge ahead. Do you recognize any of your knowledge, skills, and abilities in what I just said? Do you try to be a part of the overall library system? Do you contribute to the myriad of committees and efforts that are taking place in your library? I believe that advancement of competent children’s and young adult librarians will serve us well in the long run, putting people in charge who understand and support youth services.

I firmly believe that we must be proactive if we are to get the kind of continuing education we need and want. If what you feel is important to you is not there—seek it out. Investigate all the resources at your disposal. Talk to your colleagues and see if your system might be willing to do some in-house work and make suggestions as to the continuing education subjects in which you are interested. Monitor the activities of your local library association, your state association, and ALA. If you identify a course that you wish to take, be prepared to show how that course will help in your daily work (if you wish your library to send you and/or give you release time to attend). Also be prepared to share what you learn with your colleagues.
It is important to avoid attending the same kind of workshop or program year after year. It is tempting to attend the author luncheons, storytelling workshops, or booktalking sessions. I also know and understand how stimulating and refreshing they are and how you can return to your library re-energized, renewed, and revitalized. However, I submit that much can also be gained from things outside one's specialty. Workshops and courses on time management, budgeting, supervision, and evaluation will also give fresh insights and new approaches. You can adapt what you learn to your specific situation.

A brief word here about adaptability. Adaptation, in my opinion, is one of the great skills librarians possess. Background and training allow us to examine what others do and organize the activity to suit various situations. Concrete examples of this can be seen in the use of paperback book racks, in use of graphics, in the design of open spaces, and in the ease with which we become accurate reflectors of community's needs. I have seen librarians examine literature racks in a bank carefully and then create an adaptation for the library that works better. It is not unusual for young adult librarians to take a commercial product and fix it so it works for them. It is not only those obvious adaptative skills that are impressive, but also the constant search for better ways and improvements that has always convinced me that this profession is much more than the sum of all its parts. It is also one of the reasons that the average library is the best managed department in a city, county, or district.

I've said this before today and now I say it again. No one blows your horn accurately but you. You know all these things already. We live in an age of assertion, an age of self, and an age of proactivity. It is important that one is assertive in support of your own efforts and in support of the client group served. No one else can do it better; few others will do it at all. It is vital that management be informed of how great your service is and how wonderfully you perform your duties and meet your objectives. It is also important that youth services coordinators become part of the library's management team and take part in the decision-making process.

Social Implications

As I began to think about the social implications inherent in the management of youth services today, I thought it would be a breeze. After all, don't we always love to discuss philosophy of services, the good that these services provide, and the sheer joy with which these services are provided? I have decided that perhaps that breeze could be closer to hot air and that indeed it is time to take a new look, participate in a new vision, and bring ourselves up to speed with tomorrow.

Life in the fast lane typifies the society of the 1980s. Concorde jets
Managers and Missionaries

decrease travel time between continents. Tape recorders can speed up speech so we can listen faster. Fast forward and rewind buttons are used constantly. Commercials break concentration patterns into twelve minute segments and batter the senses with ten second messages selling images and not products. Political leaders are packaged and sold like breakfast cereals, and no one takes time to discuss the real issues. The façade has become the reality. Individuals feel powerless and impotent. Automation controls institutions that have major impacts on life.

It is easy to focus on the difficulties of twentieth-century life and the United States in particular. It is also easy to refuse to acknowledge them. Neither path is fruitful. Neither path affords a way to make the best possible of the best available.

Librarianship is a service profession. It is a profession which enables us to use our developed skills to empower and enrich others. Librarianship is a profession which opens doors, shares knowledge, and makes information public. We are knowledge brokers in the best and most positive sense. We are not power brokers. That does not, however, make us weak. The profession has the capacity to utilize valuable information for the public good. We need to develop ways and means to ensure that the public always has access to the information and resources it needs. That is truly the dilemma this service profession faces today.

I am inordinately proud of us. I never cease marveling at our ability, our consistency, our intellectual athleticism, and our resiliency in the face of threats and cutbacks.

Librarianship is also a nurturing profession. It stands for self-development, continual learning, individual achievement, and personal curiosity. Youth services librarians continually demonstrate those nurturing skills within bureaucracies. The guidance, encouragement, enthusiasm, involvement, and assistance given to youth through their libraries and their librarians bodes well for the future.

Back to the future and its social implications. As nurturers and service providers, as guides and enthusiasts, librarianship now stands at the gates of tomorrow. Whether we can make the roads clear for youth to advance easily will determine youth service librarians' value, validity, and viability.

Discussions must take place about the nature of resource sharing as it applies to children, to school libraries, and to children's materials. It is not at all uncommon to see that children and juvenile materials are excluded from interlibrary loan processes. When the formation of multitype library networks are discussed, school libraries are usually the last to be included. Generally schools are last-in because of costs, decentralization, lack of staff, and an often perceived lack of interest in the resources they can share.

The changes that affect society affect youth. How do we manage information services for youth in the waning days of the twentieth century?
How do we assure that young people have access to the information needed in this era of electronic transfer and storage of information on electronic databases? Do young people even need them? It is critical that the information needs of clients are understood. We need to be aware of how young people obtain and use information. As more information changes from print to electronic storage, we must address the needs of students at all levels and the costs of accessing the information that they need to acquire. Fees for service can make it impossible for children and young people to get desired data.

Children and young adults are creatures of their times. It is impossible to deny the impact of television on these individuals. It is also important that we recognize that a generation raised on television and computers reacts differently than one brought up without the furniture that stares back and without the appliance that interacts electronically.

I do not advocate tossing out tried and true traditional patterns of services or approaches to children's literature and interest in quality and the importance of the oral tradition of storytelling. I also believe that the level and type of library service we give to children and young people is not merely important to us; it is critical to their development and to the nation's future.

I lay before you a challenge. Assist the American Library Association to recognize and develop an agenda for the twenty-first century. This agenda will help the profession of young adult librarians to develop new service patterns for today's youth which will serve tomorrow's adult. I call upon the leadership of ALA's Youth Divisions—ALSC, AASL, and YASD—to begin a triple barreled approach to determine a road map which will help chart the course and begin to prepare for the third millennium.

Let us examine the status of youth services today, plan what it should be for tomorrow, recognize what changes have to be made, look at new service patterns, develop mission statements and goals, see how these affect library services at all levels, and provide the ALA with a position and a philosophy. I see this beginning with youth and then becoming broad based and truly representative of library services at all levels. This study must begin with youth services since these are the first to handle the diversity and complexity of the changing society through our children.

Let us walk down these new avenues together and begin to answer the questions that are only now being formulated. I know that it must be done, and I know that together we can do it.