

TEEN PROGRAMMING IN NORTH TEXAS LIBRARIES



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Best Practices for Teen Programs

This report was commissioned by the North Texas Regional Library System to provide examples of best practices in teen programming for public libraries. It includes background on how to provide programming, as well as examples from North Texas libraries and libraries around the state.

Teen Programming in North Texas Libraries

PURPOSE

This report was commissioned by the North Texas Regional Library System (NTRLS) as part of a series of reports to offer guidance for member libraries in planning or expanding their programs for teens. It also serves to provide regional models of programs that can be replicated in other libraries.

METHODOLOGY

A wiki (<http://libraryandteens.pbwiki.com>) was established for NTRLS member libraries to share programming ideas. The wiki will remain available for continued input so that NTRLS member libraries may continue to benefit from local successes. Continued contributions to the wiki will enhance and maintain the value of this report and continue to provide rich ideas for programming.

Input was also solicited via several electronic lists. Local library websites were surveyed to glean information on advertised programs. Literature, including recent issues of VOYA and Young Adult Library Services, was also reviewed for best practices in serving teen patrons. A list of further readings that offer additional information about programs and even more potential programs is provided at the end of this report.

INTRODUCTION

Public high school enrollment was expected to increase by 13% between 1997 and 2007. This increase has a great impact on all types of libraries that serve young adults, ages 12 through 18. “The best libraries will seize the opportunity to cultivate the increasing numbers of young adults as lifelong library partners and users.” Often a major part of cultivating young adults involves providing programs for them at the library.

According to a 2007 USA Today Harris Poll, twenty percent of youth ages 8-18 who visited a public library during a specific week in June 2007 reported that they had attended a library program or event during the previous year. Additionally, 32% reported that they would use the public library more often if there were more activities and events scheduled for them. In many libraries teens are the most visible and active group of users. Often this activity and visibility is perceived as a burden, however there are many opportunities for libraries to channel that activity into appropriate and supportive programming that results in teens who become strong advocates for libraries.

For many NTRLs libraries staffing is a great challenge and while programming for teens may be considered as important, staff—especially staff that are specifically trained to work with teens—is limited. This report assumes that the library has already made the decision to provide programs for teens as part of its services. Library staff that needs help in making the case for initiating or expanding programs will find help and support from a variety of sources.

The Search Institute

www.search-institute.org/assets/

This organization’s developmental assets establish a framework based on research that identifies critical factors in a young person’s growth and development. Public library programs support many of these assets.

Young Adult Library Services Association

www.ala.org/yalsa

For more than 50 years, this division of the American Library Association has supported library staff who work with teens. Many online resources support programs and provide access to best practices.

TEEN PATRONS

Whether we refer to them as teens, young adults, or youth, generally we are discussing those children who are ages 12-17. They often come to the library without parents looking for something to do. Be direct about appropriate behavior and rules but always be pleasant and welcoming. Remember that teens are very self-conscious and even unintentional negativity can turn them away from the library.

PROGRAMMING

More than anything else, teen programming has to be flexible. Try to provide programming that is suggested by the teens or that they can participate in developing. Don’t be discouraged if the mood swings another way and your program that was packed one month is ignored the next.

Teen programming generally fits into broad categories. Following each category description, examples of specific programs that have been successful in North Texas and other public libraries are provided. Libraries frequently focus on one or more types of programs that best match the library’s mission. Each type of program also allows for both passive (or low-maintenance) programming and active programming.

Passive programming, also sometimes referred to as “low-maintenance” programming, and is great for libraries with small or non-existent meeting space. It allows the library to provide programming without having to set formal times for events and activities. Teens interact with the library and staff, as well as other teens, in more casual ways. This type of programming can be ongoing (such as blog reviews) or for a predetermined period of time (such as a come-and-go craft program). After the initial planning, passive programs are generally self-directed and require little staff time other than monitoring submissions or replenishing supplies. For statistical

reports, count participation based on the number of submissions or the use of supplies left out. Keep in mind that most passive programs could also be executed as an active program with staff or guest presenters coaching the teens.

Programs can also be expanded to become events or workshops. Sometimes we are splitting hairs in the terminology, but generally an event will cover several hours and may include a variety of activities geared to different interests or be a kick-off for something like summer reading. Workshops are generally lengthier programs, usually lasting 2-3 hours, or a series of programs spread out over a period of time that allows teens to become proficient. Short school breaks, like Spring Break, allow for multi-day workshops. While registering participants helps the library be prepared, teens may need multiple reminders and you should be prepared for drop-off in attendance with multi-day workshops.

Educational Programs

Educational programs that offer support for curriculum needs and help teens prepare for higher education, job training, and careers. Examples include SAT workshops, college application and financial aid workshops, career programs, and research skills training. These programs are often most successful when held early in the school year in partnership with local high schools, trade schools, and colleges.

Alternative Teen Fashion Show

This program is both educational—teens are learning about careers in the fashion industry—and recreational. Teens learned to sew their own clothes using alternative and non-traditional materials—duct tape, plastic wrap, recycled clothing—and then modeled their new fashions at a fashion show hosted by the library. The idea for this program originated in Fayetteville, Arkansas and has proven to be a big hit across the country.

Food Fun

Many teens are interested in learning to cook or are considering a career in the food service industries. Invite a local chef or restaurant owner to demonstrate how to prepare a simple meal. Let the teens practice adding artistic touches to a meal through plate presentation and decoration.

Photography

Digital cameras make this an inexpensive program. Teens can learn the basics of photo composition and how to get good shots. Couple this with a program on printing where teens can learn to add special effects to make their photographs more artistic.

Loop It Up! - Knitting for Teens

Fort Worth Public Library found that knitting programs have really worked with teens. The library makes pattern books available for check-out and provides yarn and a few knitting needles or crochet hooks for the beginners to use in the library. Staff has found that there is always a great core group that participates, but new teens participate all the time because it's a program where teens can socialize and be productive.

Informational Programs

Informational programs support lifelong learning needs and provide knowledge about or inspire interest on a variety of subjects. They may help teens learn how to handle problems or issues they may face, help them learn more about a personal interest, or inform teens about civic issues. Examples include craft classes, forums on legal rights or advocacy for causes, or programs on how to be certified as a lifeguard or babysitter.



Job Fair for Teens

Fort Worth Public Library hosts a job fair that involves getting together with Texas Workforce Solutions (<http://www.twc.state.tx.us/twcinfo/twsolutions.html>). Staff contacted every business they could think of and advertised heavily. Nine companies and 192 teens showed up for the fair. Wylaina Hildreth attributes the success of the program to its relevance to information teens are always looking for, but have trouble finding.

Valentine's Movie & Craft

For Valentine's Day, Nicole Galindo of Euless Public Library showed the movie "Can't Buy Me Love" and served heart-shaped donuts. She provided lots of paper, buttons, stickers, and other craft supplies to let the teens make their own cards.

Craft Fair

Take a tip from some of the DIY (do it yourself) television shows and sponsor a teen craft fair. Teens sign up to demonstrate their talents, showcasing finished products but also teaching other teens how to do it yourself.



Create an Everyday Life Survival Kit!



Teens at Arlington Public Library made wonderful goodie bags full of gifts to brighten someone's day. Depending on the resources available, this can include making a box or bag using a die-cut machine or using purchased bags. Arlington provided each teen with a Chinese take-out box to decorate. The box was then filled with candy (to sweeten the day), candles (to brighten your life), and small items with cute sayings to bring a smile. Originally, this program was scheduled to allow teens to make gifts for Father's Day but it could be presented in conjunction with almost any holiday or just to provide a "random act of kindness."

Goth Sock Puppets

Grapevine Public Library, along with others, has taken the lowly sock puppet craft to the height of cool! Provide low cost socks and a lot of odd craft supplies—neon colored trim and fake fur, plastic sunglasses, old earrings—and cloth scraps.

Bathing Beauties

Provide all of the supplies to let teens make their own spa products, such as soaps, lotions, and bath salts. Books like *InSPAration: A Teen's Guide to Healthy Living Inspired by Today's Top Spas* provide all of the details for easily making a variety of products. If there is a local business that sells bath and beauty products, invite the owner to demonstrate how to use the products and reduce stress through relaxation.

Altered Books

An altered book is any book that has been recycled by creative means into an object of art. Altered books can be rebound, collaged, painted, folded, added to, adorned, or modified in any way that strikes the artist's fancy. Provide old, discarded books or invite the teens to bring their own. Offer an assortment of trinkets, craft supplies, and tools. Austin Public Library hosted twenty altered book programs that allowed teens to express their interests creatively. The success of the programs lie in the flexibility of collage art, which is intuitive and allows even teens who don't feel they can be creative with traditional arts to succeed. Why stop at books? Almost any product can be altered.



Recreational Programs

Recreational programs are presented purely for entertainment, although they may also be informative or experiential. These programs may encourage creativity or physical activity, offer opportunities to show off talent, or provide competitive opportunities. Examples include game tournaments, sports clinics, concerts and talent shows, and movie viewings.

Monopoly Tournament

Use Monopoly or any other popular board game for a round robin tournament. Hasbro offers a tournament guide online at http://www.hasbro.com/games/kid-games/monopoly/content/News/PDF/tournament_guide.pdf. Register players in advance, serve refreshments for observers, and provide prizes and tournament certificates for players. This is a great opportunity to put the teens "in charge," allowing them to establish the procedures and monitor play.

Teen Murder Mystery in the Library

Debbie Raindl of John Ed Keeter Public Library of Saginaw bought a boxed game and enhanced it with props. Several vendors sell mystery games that are designed specifically for teens, but try one of the "Anyone's Guess" sets designed for teens that are available from Highsmith. The program was held for 25 teens while the library was closed but other libraries have done this type of program during library hours. Participants receive the rules in advance and set a specific amount of time for solving the mystery. Be sure to serve snacks and provide inexpensive prizes.

Free Comics Day

Held in early May, this is a great partnership opportunity. Local comic stores give away comics. Often they will partner with the local library and provide free comics in exchange for publicity (or offer to share costs if you can). Encourage teens to help with the comic giveaway at the library; their enthusiasm for reading is contagious. Also be sure to display graphic novels and other comic related materials near the giveaway table. Debbie Raindl of John Ed Keeter Public Library of Saginaw has had great success with this program and uses it as an early opportunity to promote summer reading.

Chess Time

Keller Public Library and many other public libraries have discovered that chess is a big draw for teens. Chess is an intellectual game that helps develop self-esteem. An additional benefit is that it draws together teens who might otherwise believe they had nothing in common. Let the teens self-direct games and tournaments.

Funniest Teen Competition

Fort Worth Public Library had teens compete at their local branch library to find the funniest teen in Fort Worth. Each teen was asked to do a stand-up routine and the winner from each location had the opportunity to perform at the finals. A Grand Prize Winner and two runners up were chosen. Each tryout program had good attendance and about 35 audience members came for the finals.



Cultural Programs

Cultural programs involve young adults in literature and the arts. These programs may be experiential—involving teens in the creation of art or in discussions about literature—or audience based, whereby a guest speaker presents a topic. Examples include art shows and exhibits, poetry slams, improv, author visits, book discussion groups, and workshops for writers and artists.

Post Secret

A number of libraries have created programs based on the book *Post Secrets* by Frank Warren. While the book features postcards that reveal personal (often intimate and painful) secrets, library programs have been adapted to create postcards in the spirit of *Post Secret* that promote a favorite book, a hobby or other personal activity, or a specific subject. The library provides a copy of *Post Secret* for inspiration, markers and other craft materials, and cardstock or index cards. Cards can then be displayed in the library. (Photo courtesy <http://zeesays.blogspot.com>)



Animanga Poster Contest

Denton Public Library sponsored a contest where teens designed posters to promote the Animanga Club. The club meets weekly so this program actually encouraged interested teens to participate in two activities. Hurst Public Library also hosts a monthly Anime Club. During the two hour evening meeting, snacks are served as teens gather and

have an informal discussion about anime. During the second hour anime is viewed. Rosalyn Reyna-Rodriguez sends out flyers and uses screen shots from the films on the high school monitors to attract kids, but word of mouth has proven to be the most effective interest generator.

Java Makes Me Jump

Irving ISD hosts this monthly book discussion event at Barnes and Noble but a public library could just as easily be the co-sponsor with any local bookstore or host the program at a local coffee shop. Each program features one hour of book talking and discussion. While the librarian should be ready to booktalk, it is preferable to encourage the teens to lead the discussion. Keep the program active by offering books and other giveaways to those who lead a booktalk. Visit <http://www.irvingisd.net/java/> for more details.



Twilight Time

Nicole Galindo from Euless Public Library hosted a two-hour party developed around the popular series of books by Stephanie Meyer. Twenty-five “ecstatic” teens discussed the books, enjoyed snacks, and made personal buttons featuring statements like, “I Love Vampires” and “Twilight.”



The high popularity of the books is credited with the success of the program so select a series that appeals to the teens in your area (ask them to vote on the titles). Treats included customized M&M's that featured the names of two characters from the books. (Visit <http://www.mymms.com> for information on customized M&M's. They are a bit expensive but come in many colors with your personal message. You can also buy black and other “creative” colors without

special imprinting.)

You Write the Songs

Host a songwriting contest. Teens write lyrics to an original song and record it (or get a local band to record it). Submit an MP3 file or link or a compact disk. Host an “American Idol” style program where the audience votes for their favorite song.

Technology Programs

Technology programs allow teens to experiment with new technologies or become more proficient in current technologies. They focus on demonstrating and teaching new skills and offer opportunities to try hardware and software that may not be readily available in school or at home. Examples include computer game development, movie making, and digital photography.

Get Caught Reading

Take a tip from the Get Caught Reading campaign and ask teens to take digital photos of themselves and their friends reading favorite books. Host the photos on Flickr or another photo sharing website and rotate the best onto your library teen page. Check out <http://bighugelabs.com/flickr/> for some cool tools that allow teens to add interesting frames,

add a museum mat, create jigsaw puzzles, and more—all free (at least for a limited number of images). (This idea is based on a project created by Barbara Jansen, St. Andrew's Episcopal Upper School, Austin, TX)

Jeopardy

Several libraries have created Jeopardy games to play with teens. Check with your school district to see if they have a Classroom Jeopardy game console you can borrow (the console allows you to play Jeopardy on a television set, create your own answers and questions, and includes player buzzers). If the console is not available, make your own game board using PowerPoint (see instructions and templates from James Madison University at <http://www.jmu.edu/madison/teacher/jeopardy/jeopardy.htm>). Project the game board onto a screen using a data projector. Customize questions for specific books (the Harry Potter series is a popular choice) or lists of books like the Lone Star titles or use local information and general questions about popular culture.



Teen Center

Wylie Public Library sought to alleviate some behavioral problems by providing an area where teens could feel comfortable in the library and play video games. They set up an area with Playstation games, like “Rock Band” and “Guitar Hero.” Teens can hang out and participation in the library’s teen advisory board has increased. Behavioral problems also decreased. Ofilia Barrera suggests that the experience can be as simple or complex as staff and funds allow. They started with simple board games but then secured funds for a few games, crafts, and movies. Also check out Fort Worth Public Library’s new teen gaming area!

Video Game Designing

Teens love to play video games and many are interested in the nuts and bolts of designing them. Even in smaller communities you may find a professional game designer and many companies will provide speakers (check the website for the companies that create the games that are popular with your teens). More and more community colleges and technical schools are also offering classes in game design. Free programs like Scratch (<http://scratch.mit.edu>) can be used to facilitate learning.



Cross-Generational Programming

Cross-generational programs encourage teens to interact with people outside their peer group. This may include working with preschool children, helping elementary children, or learning from senior citizens. The focus of these programs is on the teens’ involvement with another group, although the topics may be cultural, educational, or technical. Examples include creating a puppet show, parent/teen book clubs, teaching basic computer skills to senior citizens, and gathering oral histories or community stories.

Fun in the Sun!

Karnes City High School offers a teen program that can easily be replicated in a public library. Teens assist with preschool programming by playing with the children who are visiting from a local child care center. Librarian Annette Kotara read books with a summer theme for storytime

and then the teens, who were dressed in beachwear (baggies, floral shirts, flip flops), distributed sun glasses, shovels and pails, and beach balls for some play time fun. Couple this with another of Kotara's programs by encouraging the teens to read in small groups with the children.

Volunteer Programs

Volunteer programs for teens support many of the Search Institute's developmental assets, including self-confidence, self-esteem and positive interactions with non-parental adults. Many teens volunteer to meet school requirements, to meet court mandated community service, or to gain work experience. Volunteer work should be meaningful even if it is mundane, routine, or repetitive. Examples include helping with summer or afterschool programs, shelving books, and preparing craft materials for storytimes.

Teen Performers

Stacy Phillips of Waco Public Library recruits 10-12 teens to help write and produce a puppet show or one-act play. After putting together the play or puppet show, it is presented several times for children to enjoy and then recorded to be shown on public access television throughout the year. Teens benefit from having something concrete to their credit and enjoy being able to produce something for the younger kids.

Teen Advisory Group (TAG)

Like most of us, teens want to have their voices heard and a TAG can provide meaningful volunteer work for teens. In addition to providing great public relations for the library, teens in a TAG can help with fundraising, planning and producing programs, maintaining the teen Web site, writing reviews, and more. The American Library Association provides a tip sheet for starting a TAG, as well as ideas for TAG activities, at <http://www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/tags/tagsresources/tagsresources.cfm>.

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Every good librarian knows that there is always more out there. These are a few resources that offer more ideas for successful programs or that provide research to support the programs we offer. Whenever possible, a link to the online version has been provided. For books, check with the NTRLS office or the Texas State Library's Library Science Collection.

- Bartel, Julie Thomas and Brooke Young. *Get Popular @ the Library: Teen Programs*. Neal-Schuman, 2008.
- "Beyond Book Clubs." VOYA. August 2008.
<http://pdfs.voya.com/VO/YA2/VOYA200804BeyondBookClubs.pdf>
- "From Playing to Creating: Teaching Game Design." *School Library Journal*, October 1, 2007. <http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/CA6484337.html?industryid=47192>
- "The Gaming Life: Ready to Rock?" *School Library Journal*, March 1, 2008.
<http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/CA6536657.html?industryid=47192>
- Honnold, Rosemary. *Get Connected: Tech Programs for Teens*. Neal-Schuman, 2007.

- Honnold, Rosemary. *More Teen Programs That Work*. Neal-Schuman, 2005.
- Honnold, Rosemary. *101+ Teen Programs That Work*. Neal-Schuman, 2003.
- Nicholson, Scott. *The Role of Gaming in Libraries: Taking the Pulse*
<http://www.librarygamelab.org/pulse2007.pdf>
- Jones, Ella Cross. *Start to Finish YA Programs*. Neal-Schuman, 2008. (Includes CD-ROM with sign-up forms, promotional posters, and more.)
- Ott, Valerie A. *Teen Programs with Punch A Month-by-Month Guide*. Libraries Unlimited, 2006.
- “Putting Your Teens in Focus with Film.” VOYA. August 2007.
http://pdfs.voya.com/VO/YA2/VOYA200708teens_in_focus.pdf
- “Successful Teen Advisory Groups.” e-VOYA. December 2005.
<http://pdfs.voya.com/VO/YA2/VOYA200512SuccessfulTeens.pdf>
- “Teenage Riot: It’s Not About You.” *School Library Journal*, April 1, 2008.
<http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/CA6545428.html?industryid=47192>
- “Video Games as a Service: Hosting Tournaments at Your Library.” VOYA, February 2005. <http://pdfs.voya.com/VO/YA2/VOYA200502VideoGames.pdf> (See also the follow-up article, “Video Games as a Service: Three Years Later.” VOYA, June 2007. http://pdfs.voya.com/VO/YA2/VOYA200706video_games.pdf)