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# "A space for myself to go:" Early patterns in Small YA spaces

Anthony Bernier
*San Jose State University*, anthony.bernier@sjsu.edu

# A SPACE FOR

# Myself

## TO GO

## EARLY PATTERNS IN SMALL YA SPACES

**ANTHONY BERNIER** is Assistant Professor, San José (Calif.) State University; abernier@slis.sjsu.edu. He is reading *Little Brother* by Cory Doctorow.

While young adults (teenagers) are routinely recognized as constituting nearly 25 percent of the nation's public library users, the vast majority of libraries devote more space and design attention to restrooms than to young people. Worse, there are currently no consistent or established metrics, no evaluation criteria, few conceptual standards of best practices, and little consistency in the methods by which we collect empirical evidence about young adult (YA) spaces. This study is the first systematic attempt to both collect and analyze empirical data on libraries' recent trend toward providing greater spatial equity for YA library service.

Library buildings, like all public spaces, represent and manifest community ideals about who counts and what activities matter. In particular, American library buildings and resource allocations are championed as symbols of broad and open democratic access. The theoretical foundation of this study is the notion that young people should be considered part of the civic community and that libraries should express this value in the designs of their public spaces.

One result of longstanding de facto institutional preoccupation with collections is that conventional library standards continue to conflate YA space with the mere shelving of YA materials. These practices rely most commonly on a meager allocation of shelf space within or adjacent to children's sections or on repurposed paperback racks relegated to out-of-the-way corners and alcoves. Sometimes YA magazines and other materials appear in the children's section, sometimes they are interfiled with adult materials, and frequently the criteria (if any) for these assignments are obscure. Such ad hoc practices have existed in libraries for decades.

Meanwhile, the demand for YA services is rapidly changing. As increasing numbers of young people gravitate to the more adaptable "spaces" of virtual and immersive worlds, as well as to ever-cheaper, ever-smaller, ever-more-versatile communication and information devices, libraries will face keen competition to attract them into their public spaces.[1]

The study in this article examines the experimental practices of ten small library YA spaces to identify patterns and establish what they can teach us about their relatively early adoption and design. Examining these pioneers reveals that libraries have increased the variety and access to resources and invite more youth participation in the process than was evident in young adult services of the past. This study also finds, however, that libraries still dedicate a proportionately small amount of space to young adults and demonstrates

the need for establishing more sophisticated methodological practices in executing, measuring, and evaluating these spaces in order to move beyond institutionally defined and privileged aesthetics.

## Literature Review: YA Spaces in the Library Context

While early strides in the evolution and description of YA spaces have been beneficial in terms of awakening the field to a historic inequity, there exists no systematic, evidence-based research, guidelines, methods, or metrics to facilitate developmentally appropriate YA spaces. There is no scholarly research connecting young adults to the civic spaces libraries represent for their communities.[2]

Historically, libraries have considered young adults entitled neither to space for their needs nor an equitable share of common environments. Classic Carnegie buildings, for instance, are simply bifurcated: children on one side, adults on the other. Service barriers for young adults can be seen in the physical aspects of generation after generation of new and refurbished library buildings, policies, and procedures, and in the ways in which young people socially experience libraries, "as aristocratic, authoritarian, unfriendly and unresponsive."[3] Unfortunately, the consequences of policies and design—underutilized resources and negative youth perceptions of libraries—are then interpreted as reflecting youth apathy, or even antipathy.

Even so, there is growing consciousness of the decades-long inequity toward young adults as libraries begin to explore ways to enhance their value to the public by providing young people with age appropriate spaces.[4] The Los Angeles Public Library's landmark TeenS'cape project (2000);[5] the subsequent introduction of "YA Spaces of your Dreams," a feature in every issue of *Voice of Young Adults* (*VOYA*) (see appendix A);[6] the appearance of a guide to redecorating YA areas;[7] and the very first "post-occupancy study" of any young adult space in library literature appearing in 2006[8] have all prompted greater realization among libraries that YA spaces represent an essential part of the broader continuum of uniquely democratic and age-integrated public spaces that libraries offer their communities. Indeed, the most recognized YA services practitioner, Patrick Jones, noted that the emergence of YA-specific spaces ranked among the most exciting innovations in the field: "libraries . . . are saying this service is important, and they want to profile it. This is a huge change."[9]

Nevertheless, most libraries have been slow to take into account the spatial implications and opportunities for youth inherent in this swiftly changing landscape. What fledgling efforts have been made to date proceeded without data or history, systematic guidelines or evaluation methods to establish best practices, skill capacities, institutional infrastructure, or theoretical grounding. Even under the best circumstances in which libraries attempt to advance the recent service paradigm of "youth development" involving some degree of youth participation, the results are seldom distinguishable from conventional institutional designs.[10] Libraries may, for instance, ask architects or designers, librarians, and sometimes young people to come together as a team to create a spatial solution. However, a kind of "uninformed triangle" then develops. Architects frequently know little about the functioning of libraries or how young people enact public space; librarians generally do not possess architectural backgrounds and do not know a great deal about young people and spaces; and young adults usually know little about the functioning of library design or architecture. What develops from this triangulated ignorance, even under the best circumstances, seems destined to produce mediocrity.

Thus, lacking YA spatial knowledge, libraries frequently design and enact spaces in ways that contradict or conflict with nearly every aspect of normal and developmentally appropriate young adult public behavior. The consequences of these institutional deficits are that libraries, inadvertently or not, create what I have elsewhere described as a "geography of no!"[11] Libraries create spaces in which youth are told no for doing or wanting things entirely appropriate for young people, such as sitting convivially in small groups. Instead, libraries enforce one-to-a-chair policies and then hold youth responsible for breaking rules.

This lack of capacity with regard to YA space nests within a much larger research problem in YA librarianship. As pointed out in her seminal historical review of youth services research, Christine A. Jenkins states, "If . . . library programs and services for children is insufficiently studied . . . programs and services for young adults is nearly nonexistent."[12] Accordingly, and informed by predominate and erroneous media representations (that is, the routinely exaggerated, inaccurate, and unsupportable claims about youth in adult nonfiction literature, popular culture, and the media), libraries *institutionally* convey a belief that young people present more problems than they are worth.[13] Given these circumstances, it should come as no surprise that librar-

ies have, for a variety of reasons, rather ignored the spatial needs of youth.[14] Libraries need and deserve research on how to better serve young adults.

Among the many relevant questions the field needs answered, this study inaugurates only a first step by assessing what some early adopting libraries have attempted to do when they have redesigned and reallocated a portion of their existing public spaces to serving young adults. In particular, this study examines the self-reported spatial outcomes of ten of the smallest YA spaces (as measured by square footage) profiled in *VOYA* between 2001 and 2008. Studying the small YA spaces is a logical beginning for systematic analysis because it is more likely how a larger number of libraries would begin experimenting.

## Methods

Since 1999, the most important independent journal in young adult librarianship, *VOYA,* has published a regular feature entitled "Young Adult Spaces of Your Dreams" profiling YA spaces in libraries across the county. The journal has used a common and consistent submission guideline required of all profiles (see appendix B). These profiles thus serve as a qualitative source of comparable data during the years in which libraries first began to experiment institutionally with spatial considerations specifically for YA library users. The six additional supplementary questions asked of the participating libraries were intended to deepen and update the information contained in their published profiles. The categories of analysis are derived from the original published spatial profiles and are critically engaged in the discussion section of the study. Both the data presented in the published space profiles and in the follow-up survey are self-reported by respective library staff, rather than by an outside evaluator.

As a condition of publication in "Young Adult Space of Your Dreams," *VOYA* has consistently required specific data about published profiles on specific YA space, including the following information:

- description of the library's location;
- the size, shape, and layout of the YA space;
- décor;
- unique attributes;
- types of seating and tables;
- types of shelving units;
- presence of computer workstations and technological resources;
- collection size, types of resources, and

arrangement of and housing of the collection within the library;
- circulation and YA traffic statistics;
- description of the community and YA population;
- hours of operation;
- staffing levels;
- the date the library opened and the date of the YA renovation/redesign;
- description of teen participation in the design process; and
- illustrative comments from young adult library users, if any.

Libraries furnishing the appropriate data may opt either to draft the profile narrative or have the journal develop the final narrative for library review.

The ten libraries reporting the smallest YA spaces by absolute square footage in profiles published from 1999 through 2007 were selected by the author.[15] These ten libraries were sent a brief, supplementary follow-up survey,[16] which included the following topics:

- square footage of YA space and of entire library facility (including YA space);
- description of YA collection scope (i.e., range of content and format);
- does the library provide dedicated staff (yes/no); if so, provide description of staff;
- provide specific breakdown of seating options (table and chairs, couch, ottomans, beanbags, booths, stools);
- did the library collect benchmark (service) statistics prior to YA space upgrade?; and
- did the library conduct a post-occupancy study or other outcome measures?

## Findings

The data summary gleaned from the *VOYA* survey, together with the supplementary survey for this study, shows the average YA area measures approximately 500 square feet; is open to some degree for 52 hours per week; has one "dedicated" staff member; and is evaluated by various benchmark, circulation, and traffic statistics (discussed later) (see table 1).

### Spatial Proportionality

Each library's allocation for YA spaces was calculated by dividing the square footage of the YA space by the square footage of the entire library. Based on these proportionalities the averages were calculated for the

ten subject institutions. The proportion of YA space ranged from just under a half percent (0.45 percent, Schaumburg, Illinois) to a high of nearly 4 percent (3.84 percent, Fortuna, California) of total facility size, yielding an average of YA spaces of 2.22 percent of total facility square footage (see table 2).

The eight-fold range in YA space allocation proportions emphasizes the degree to which no accepted or empirically based practices have yet emerged. In fact, there appears to be something of an *inverse* relationship between a library's overall size and the square footage reported in these YA spaces. That the smallest of the facilities reported allocating the largest proportion of space to young adults, while the largest facility reports allocating the least amount of square footage, may indicate something either about economies of scale or other, unknown priorities in the allocation of YA space.

## Resource Allocation

Resource dedication was examined in two ways. First, the study examined "material resources," constituted by collection size and scope, as well as the availability of computers and televisions. The "operating resources," on the other hand, were constituted by the reported hours of service and an assessment of the level of dedicated staffing (see table 3).

With respect to "material resources," collection size ranged from 500 to 4,500 items.[17] In narrative responses most libraries reported YA spaces housing varied collections including fiction, nonfiction, magazines, and multimedia items. One library indicated that YA materials were housed outside of the YA area in response to youth preference. None of the subject libraries reported YA spaces featuring a television or video monitor. And due to the wide variation in the reported number of computers libraries made available in their YA spaces, a pattern was difficult to discern from these

data. Fully one half of the subject libraries reported that no TV, video monitors, or computers were available in their YA spaces.

In terms of "operating resources," the subject libraries reported hours of youth access to the YA space ranging from 17 to 81 hours per week (see table 4). The unit of measure used in the *VOYA* profiles employed the term "staffing" to identify personnel

**Table 1.** Data Summary for Ten Libraries with Small YA Spaces

| Data Category | Average for Responding Libraries |
|---|---|
| YA space size (estimated square feet) | 495 |
| YA collection size (material holdings) | 2,457 |
| Hours of access to YA space (weekly) | 52 |
| Dedicated YA staffing (in FTE, from supplementary survey)* | 1 |
| YA staffing (in FTE, from data) | 0.75 |
| YA circulation (annual materials moved from shelves)** | 12,245 |
| Traffic (average daily visitation) | 24 |

 * based on an average of eight numeric responses, excluding mere "yes" responses.
** average of seven libraries providing numbers

**Table 2.** Library Square Footage Allocation for Ten Small YA Spaces

| Library (Ranked by YA Allocation) | YA Space (Square Feet) | YA Space As Percent of Total Library Space |
|---|---|---|
| Fortuna, Calif. | 96 | 3.8 |
| Wayzata, Minn. | 272 | 2.8 |
| Georgetown, Ky. | 800 | 2.8 |
| Orrville, Ohio | 612 | 2.5 |
| Blue Island, Ill. | 569 | 2.5 |
| Pinellas Park, Fla. | 750 | 2.4 |
| Cass City, Mich. | 170 | 2.3 |
| Leominster, Mass. | 768 | 1.7 |
| Swampscott, Mass. | 162 | 0.9 |
| Schaumburg, Ill. | 750 | 0.5 |
| **Average** | **495** | **2.2** |

assigned to the YA space. The supplementary survey used the more specific term "dedicated staff." Library size did not correlate with YA staffing resources.

## Youth-Friendly Features

The summary of efforts by libraries with small YA spaces to use youth-friendly features to attract young people and offer a more youth-centric atmosphere shows that seven of the ten subject libraries reported some degree of display exhibits and merchandizing of library materials in such a way as to be appealing to YA audiences in YA spaces (see table 5). It is assumed that these practices can range from simply mounting ALA "READ" posters, or commercially available graphics containing images assumed to be of interest to young people, through a more active and systematic approach to promoting and merchandizing library materials to young readers.

In terms of decorating YA spaces with artistic expression, six of ten libraries reported exhibiting some kind of art, while four reported that they currently do not. Of those that do, most exhibit what was considered to be "teen produced" artwork. While none of the subject libraries specified their definitions of what constituted youth art, this form con-

ventionally ranges from posting youth poetry and other writing to more elaborate exhibits of graphic artworks and even youth-curated displays.

Only three of the subject libraries reported working from a specific design "theme" when building their YA respective spaces. Of those that did report enacting their YA spaces with particular themes, the Schaumburg (Ill.) Library designed a sports theme, the Leominster (Mass.) Library designed a space to honor YA fiction author Robert Cormier, and the Blue Island (Ill.) Library utilized the functional tech and multimedia space design. Larger libraries tended to be more likely to adopt design themes but were not more likely to report other features.

## Youth Engagement/Leadership

For the purposes of this analysis, youth engagement is broadly defined as any purposeful attempt to include young people in the development of spatial redesign. As reported both in the original *VOYA* profiles and in the follow-up surveys, most libraries now attempt to involve young adults in the design project at some point and to some degree.

All subject libraries reported youth participation or engagement in the design process (see table 6).

## Table 3. Summary of Material Resources in Ten Small YA Spaces

**Blue Island, Ill.:** 4,500 items, nine computers, no TV. Books, videos, and magazines, including popular fiction, series, assigned high school titles, animé, manga, graphic novels, YA/FIC/DVDs, books on tape, nonfiction.

**Pinellas Park, Fla.:** 4,200 items, no computers, no TV. All YA fiction is in the room. YA nonfiction is shelved with the adult collection.

**Georgetown, Ky.:** 5,200 items, two computers, no TV. Fiction, including graphic novels, magazines, audiobooks.

**Leominster, Mass.:** 3,700 items, one computer, no TV. Fiction (hardcover and paperback), nonfiction in specific areas of teen interest (including sexuality, substance abuse, college prep, graphic novels and comics, sports, poetry, and biography; Japanese manga and animé on DVD), music CDs, magazines, popular series, romances, horror/suspense, classics.

**Orrville, Ohio:** 2,521 items, no computers, no TV. Fiction, nonfiction, graphic, CDs, books on tape, books on CD, magazines.

**Schaumburg, Ill.:** 6,000 items, two computers, no TV. Books, graphic novels, magazines, nonfiction browsing. Teen multimedia is in the AV section, which has more formats.

**Wayzata, Minn.:** 1,450 items, three computers, no TV. Hardcover, trade, and mass-market paperbacks, audiobooks, nonfiction, graphic novels, browsing material and magazines, including television and music tie-ins, craft books, college, health/body, jobs, dating, poetry, biography.

**Swampscott, Mass.:** 1,200 items, no computers, no TV. YA fiction, graphic novels, nonfiction, including section covering health issues and other more controversial topics.

**Fortuna, Calif.:** 500 items, no computers, no TV. Books, DVDs, BCDs, zines, magazines.

**Cass City, Mich.:** 500 items, no computers, no TV. Paperbacks, graphic novels, audiobooks, hardcover books, special new titles display.

All libraries reported soliciting either Teen Advisory Group (TAG) or individual youth input in the design process, though only one library reported using both. More specifically, six libraries reported involvement of a formal youth leadership body in the design process, and five reported soliciting individual youth input in the design process.

While much more detail could be learned about the nature, scope, and intensity of the youth engagement noted here, the prevalence of reported youth participation in these library space projects marks a significant achievement among the recent innovations advocated by the field's chief professional association, the Young Adult Library Services Association. While the call for increased youth participation in the delivery of youth services has deep historical roots in the field, it has only been since the late 1990s that professional YA specialist practitioners have officially adopted it as a standard of practice.[18]

## Seating

Because seating options and variety provide young people the largest amount of potential freedom and creativity in a given library space, they contain important implications for how youth envision and enact space and spatial behaviors. Also seating has been found to repre-

sent one of the most conflicted spatial features with respect to young people and institutional aesthetic preferences.[19] Thus, seating was examined in detail as a summary illustration of YA space development. Libraries were asked to report on the presence and range options that appear in their YA spaces from among the following choices: table and chair combinations, couches, ottomans, beanbags, booths, and stools (see table 7). While the traditional table and chair option remains by far the dominant seat-

**Table 4.** Summary of Operating Resources of Ten Small YA Spaces

| Library Name (Ranked by Hours) | Hours of Access to the YA Space/ Week | Staffing (FTE) | Dedicated Staffing (FTE) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Schaumburg, Ill. | 81 | 1.0 | 1.5 |
| Orrville, Ohio | 75 | 0 | Yes |
| Georgetown, Ky. | 70 | 0 | 0.5 |
| Pinellas Park, Fla. | 62 | 0 | 3.0 |
| Cass City, Mich. | 60 | 0 | 0 |
| Swampscott, Mass. | 55 | 0.5 | 0 |
| Wayzata, Minn. | 40 | 0.5 | 0 |
| Fortuna, Calif. | 35 | 1.0 | 0 |
| Blue Island, Ill. | 28 | 3.5 | 3.0 |
| Leominster, Mass. | 17 (after school only) | 1.0 | Yes |

**Table 5.** Youth-Friendly Features of Ten Small YA Spaces

| Library (Ranked by Size) | Displays/ Merchandizing | All YA Materials in YA Space | Art/Teen Art | Design Theme |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Schaumburg, Ill. | Yes | No | Yes/Yes | Yes |
| Leominster, Mass. | Some | Yes | Yes/Yes | Yes |
| Pinellas Park, Fla. | Some | No | No/No | No |
| Georgetown, Ky. | Some | No | Yes/Yes | No |
| Orrville, Ohio | Some | Yes | No/No | No |
| Blue Island, Ill. | n/a | No | Yes/No | Yes |
| Swampscott, Mass. | Some | No | No/No | No |
| Wayzata, Minn. | No | Yes | Yes/Yes | No |
| Cass City, Mich. | Yes | Yes | No/No | No |
| Fortuna, Calif. | n/a | No | Yes/Yes | No |

ing option currently reported for YA spaces, subject libraries also reported considerable variation in their respective approaches. Nine of the ten subject libraries reported offering standard tables and companion task chairs as might be found in traditional library furniture supply catalogs. Nevertheless, ten libraries also reported offering YA library users either stools or booth seating options. Unlike tables and chairs, which limit users to sanctioned numbers and postures, stools and booths offer young people a wider array of flexibilities to reconfigure their interactions to support various individual, arranged clustering, and collective social experiences.

While the *VOYA* profiles and the supplemental survey did not exhaust the full range of possible seating options (floor seating and carpet-covered risers, among others, were not offered as possible options) the subject libraries collectively did report the presence of at least five different possibilities. One library reported offering users only tables and chairs in its YA space. But fully eight offered at least two or three different seating options. The least frequently reported type of seating offered was beanbag chairs.[20]

## Outputs and Evaluation

The present study attempted to gain insight into how libraries defined and evaluated the degree of success their respective YA spaces achieved. Subject libraries were examined for their attempts to evaluate their redesigns through the collection of materials circulation or "traffic" statistics. Libraries were also probed for measurements taken prior to the redesign of their YA space (so-called "benchmark statistics") as well as for any systematic consideration of young adult evaluation at some

**Table 6.** Youth Leadership in YA Space Design and Operation

| Library (Ranked by Size) | TAG Group Involved in Design | Other Youth Input |
|---|---|---|
| Schaumburg, Ill. | Yes | No |
| Leominster, Mass. | Yes | Yes |
| Pinellas Park, Fla. | Yes | No |
| Georgetown, Ky. | No | Yes |
| Orrville, Ohio | Yes | No |
| Blue Island, Ill. | No | Yes |
| Swampscott, Mass. | No | Yes |
| Wayzata, Minn. | No | Yes |
| Cass City, Mich. | Yes | No |
| Fortuna, Calif. | Yes | No |

**Table 7.** Seating Configurations in Ten Small YA Spaces

| Libraries (Ranked by Seating Options) | Tables/ Chairs | Couches | Ottomans | Beanbags | Booths | Stools | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Leominster, Mass. | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | 5 |
| Cass City, Mich. | Yes | No | Yes | No | No | Yes | 3 |
| Blue Island, Ill. | Yes | No | No | No | Yes | Yes | 3 |
| Orrville, Ohio | Yes | No | No | No | Yes | Yes | 3 |
| Pinellas Park, Fla. | Yes | No | No | No | Yes | Yes | 3 |
| Swampscott, Mass. | Yes | No | No | Yes | No | No | 2 |
| Wayzata, Minn. | Yes | Yes | No | No | No | No | 2 |
| Schaumburg, Ill. | Yes | No | Yes | No | No | No | 2 |
| Georgetown, Ky. | Yes | No | No | No | No | No | 1 |
| Fortuna, Calif. | No | No | No | No | No | Yes | 1 |
| **Total** | **9** | **2** | **2** | **2** | **4** | **6** | **avg. 2.5** |

point after the redesign of the new spaces (so-called "post-occupancy") evaluation.

Probing the data for even the traditional output measures (circulation and traffic), however, proved problematic (see table 8), as did more advanced metrics such as benchmark statistics and post-occupancy studies (see table 9). These standard approaches to assessing YA space usage proved inconclusive due to the current lack of precision in the definition of terms. Libraries reported circulation activity of YA materials in small YA spaces both in raw numbers and in percentages. In raw figures, for instance, circulation activity in the ten libraries ranged from 8,280 to 18,977 and bore no discernable relationship to library size. Two libraries reported circulation as a proportion of total circulation. But what does the term "circulation" measure?[21] Does it mean materials borrowed on the library card of a young adult, materials borrowed only from those shelved in the YA space, or any materials the library had designated as "young adult" or even "youth" shelved anywhere in the library? Further, there is no standard in determining the length of time over which circulation is measured.

The term "traffic" was similarly problematic. Traffic could indicate the number of youth in the library at any given time, the aggregate total of youth in the library over a period of time, the number of youth sitting only in the YA space (ignoring youth in other parts of the library), and various other interpretations. Nor does traffic delineate hourly, weekly, or seasonal fluctuations in use. Tables 8 and 9 display some typical statistics as they are reported by libraries, reiterating the difficulties in interpreting some current measures.

With respect to terms such as "benchmark statistics" and "post-occupancy study," the methodological challenges prove even more complex. Benchmark statistics include the imprecision mentioned previously that afflict circulation and traffic statistics as well as potential confusion about what is being used as the benchmark—that is, the status of youths' library patronage prior to the design or redesign of the YA space. For example, if the library in question did not offer young adults a space prior to the library redesign, then benchmark statistics could conflate the respective experiences of a brand new library, an existing library without a prior YA space, and an existing library with a prior YA space. To be meaningful, each of these scenarios would require different kinds of benchmark statistics and precisely qualified interpretations that were not possible within the scope of the present study.

Finally, the concept of conducting post-occupancy studies is entirely new to YA space evaluation. To date there has been only one conducted on any YA space, and that was for a new branch library building designed with a purpose-built YA space.[22] Thus the profession would appear to be in need of developing clear protocols if it is to meaningfully evaluate the experiences of the intended users of new YA spaces.

In addition to the "yes" or "no" responses

## Table 8. Examples of Reported Evaluation Statistics for Small YA Spaces

| Library (Ranked by Size) | Circulation | Traffic | Benchmark Statistics | Post-Occupancy Study |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Schaumburg, Ill. | 10,800 | 18 | Yes | Yes |
| Leominster, Mass. | 16,660 | 25 | Yes | Yes |
| Pinellas Park, Fla. | 8,280 | 35 | No | No |
| Georgetown, Ky. | 10,000 | 45 | Yes | Yes |
| Orrville, Ohio | 18,977 | 16 | Yes | Yes |
| Blue Island, Ill. | 11,200 | 54 | Yes | Yes |
| Swampscott, Mass. | n/a | 15 | No | No |
| Wayzata, Minn. | 9,800 | 18 | No | No |
| Cass City, Mich. | 15 percent* | 10 | No | No |
| Fortuna, Calif. | 40 percent* | 5 | No | Yes |

* circulation numbers not provided.

requested in the supplemental surveys, subject libraries also were asked to provide brief narrative descriptions of their benchmark metrics or post-occupancy studies. Only half of the subject libraries responded to this question in the supplementary survey. This low response rate adds to suspicions that the category or term itself might be unconventional for libraries in the midst of a space redesign.

The libraries that did furnish narrative responses ranged widely in their comments, further suggesting the need for more methodological precision.

Definitions differed for circulation metrics, traffic patterns, and even seemingly standard measures like constituency demographics. In the larger sense, it was also clear that a great deal of confusion reigns regarding what post-occupancy evaluations do. The responses reported here concentrated largely on quantified library output measures rather than on any research conducted among the YA space users themselves.

**Table 9.** Examples of Benchmark Statistics and Post-Occupancy Summaries

| Library (Ranked by Size) | Benchmark Statistics | Post-Occupancy Study Summary |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Schaumburg, Ill. | Number of teens in building at particular times; circulation | We do this on a continuous basis |
| Leominster, Mass. | No description. | No description. |
| Pinellas Park, Fla. | Not collected. | Not collected. |
| Georgetown, Ky. | Circulation statistics and census statistics | Circulation statistics and teen programming/attendance statistics |
| Orrville, Ohio | I wasn't here at that time. Our library was been remodeled and before the remodel there was no YA space. | Statistics are now kept—until the remodel there was nothing—we do output studies and monthly/yearly stats on circulation/use. |
| Blue Island, Ill. | Not formal stats, but we knew the young adults didn't have a space to work on collaborative/ group projects or learn 21st Century and critical-thinking skills. We felt this was doing a disservice to our young adults. | We take a count each day of the number of teens who use the space. Statistics: Approximate teen head count in Tech Annex for 2008: 1,974 with a breakdown in population of: 24 percent white 25 percent Hispanic 51 percent African American Held 117 programs in the Tech Annex and 830 teens attended. |
| Swampscott, Mass. | Not collected. | Not collected. |
| Wayzata, Minn. | Not collected. | Not collected. |
| Cass City, Mich. | Not collected. | Not collected. Just viewing the usage was more than validation that we did the right thing. Also the comments about all of the new YA materials has been great. Another benefit has been the young adults that use the area feel very comfortable in coming into my office and suggesting new titles or series. |
| Fortuna, Calif. | Not collected. | We looked at circulation statistics (YA) and people count. |

## Discussion

This study represents the first attempt to develop an assessment of current library practices in offering YA space. The decision to study the smallest YA spaces in terms of square footage was made because it is likely that more libraries mirror these smaller efforts than much larger YA spaces. Also, in surveying small YA spaces the profession collectively gains a preliminary peek into the early experimentation that has thus far accumulated in this relatively new dimension of young adult services.

While the experimentation with YA spaces has begun only recently, some early patterns are clearly discernable from examining the smallest ones:

1. **Spatial proportionality:** The average small YA spaces represent only 2.2 percent of their hosting library's total square footage, the largest occupying less than 4 percent. Larger facilities did not necessarily assign or reassign a larger proportion of space to young adults. The average size of small YA spaces was 495 square feet.
2. **Resource dedication:** Subject libraries reported dedication of both material and operating resources to YA spaces. Collection size varied greatly, though all libraries reported offering a variety of materials. Many small libraries reported not having computers, video monitors, or televisions dedicated to young adults, and the number of dedicated computer workstations varied widely. There was also a large range of dedication of staffing and hours of operation.
3. **Youth-friendly space:** Libraries reported conscious efforts to appeal to the interests of young adults, including displays and exhibiting art in YA spaces and, in two cases, consistent thematic designs. Narrative descriptions indicated that libraries attempted to build, offer, and make accessible library materials based on YA preferences. YA collections, for instance, can be found both within the YA space and in the library's larger holdings.
4. **Youth participation:** All subject libraries reported being sensitive to the need for youth participation (however defined) in the design of YA space, from advisory groups to individual input.
5. **Seating options:** Most subject libraries emphasized traditional table/chair seating and reported relatively little variety in available seating options.
6. **Impact and evaluation:** While the majority of libraries reported being aware that their efforts to reassign space to young adult users should be evaluated, there is little consensus about appropriate assessment tools, practices, and methods or even consistent definitions of terms.

## Possible Futures for YA Space Research

Given that the development of purpose-built YA library spaces is still new to the field, we are learning a great deal from the early practices of libraries' small YA spaces. This study identifies a considerable number of issues we need to address. The data presented within the scope of this inaugural attempt to collect and assess new library practices generate at least three additional sets of questions and concerns that suggest parameters for subsequent research on YA spaces. First, greater precision and consistency is needed in the measures used to evaluate new YA spaces; second, a broad range of daily and practical issues deserves identification and further study; and third, research methods require more precise specification and execution. These parameters are detailed next.

### Imprecise Metrics

We need to identify, define, and consistently measure library use and evaluation metrics. As mentioned previously, what we call "spatial metrics" currently suffers from variance and imprecision. What does "hours of operation" actually mean? Are "materials circulation" statistics or patron head counts sufficient or adequate? What are the best "benchmark" statistics from which to compare and contrast new YA spaces with previous YA spaces or lack thereof?

What post-occupancy measures tell libraries what they need to know after a space has been created or redesigned?

Similar ambiguity is evident with respect to assessing YA space staffing patterns. What do libraries' numbers quantifying YA "staffing" mean? Staffing FTE estimates can range from paraprofessional being "available," to professional staff assigned to "cover" that area of the library, youth-service professionals for both children's and YA services, or a fully trained YA specialist with full-time responsibilities dedicated to YA services. Nor do we learn from current data how a new YA space impacts the services, development, and responsibilities of staff serving young adults.

Imprecision is likewise apparent with respect to how library materials are displayed and merchandized. These practices can range from permanently

posting commercial images (such as advertising posters) through more elaborate and constantly changing youth-produced artworks and exhibits. Merchandizing can mean everything from a 1950s hardwood book "trough" through more sophisticated shelving and display practices.

Further, how do we evaluate the procedures by which YA-space media (in its constantly changing modes) are selected or not selected? How do libraries determine the extent to which youth are involved in establishing and executing designs of their YA spaces? In terms of youth art, how were exhibited items selected? How long do exhibits last? How were exhibits evaluated? Similar questions could be asked of libraries reporting that they designed their YA spaces with themes. Knowing specifically what libraries mean when they discuss displays and merchandizing techniques, art exhibitions, and themed designs can help identify both common practices and potential areas for future training and staff development needs.

On the topic of the need for more definitional precision, this study reveals the need for better definitions of "youth participation" in the process of YA space design. The broader term "engagement" has been used to register a variety of options. Currently, youth participation can range from one-time opportunities for individual input to substantially more intensive collaborations involving multiple interactions with professional library staff, administrators, outside funders, library support organizations, and design professionals. While this study's data find that professionals in the subject libraries report understanding the need for young people to be involved, the imprecision in identifying different approaches, levels of youth participation, and the quality of those engagements render the current concept rather ineffectual. Libraries also would be well-served by learning more about the demographic implications of what young people participate in the design and redesign process. Who were the youth involved and how do they compare with the local demographics of race, class, gender, language, and immigrant status? Each of these aspects of local youth social experience may influence how space is defined and enacted.

## Practical Issues

The second broad potential for rich research lies in helping libraries respond to practical issues as they move toward more spatial equity in young adult services. The current data do not address many of the common issues, concerns, challenges, and problems these subject libraries faced when re-designating valuable library space for YA services. We do not learn from these data, for instance, about the motivations that lead libraries to reassign or newly designate space to YA services. We do not learn about the obstacles libraries face or how they overcome them in terms of staff development, training, and professional preparation. What resources do libraries call upon for assistance, insight, and guidance? What specific training do library staff require in preparing to develop new YA spaces?

Further, because YA courses in library schools conventionally concentrate on collections, few students would have been likely to have encountered instruction on the importance of space equity or how to enact it. If libraries are to continue recognizing that young adults are entitled to meaningful and equitable spatial allocations, then engaging the complex topic of space and its connections to services, programs, building relationships with young adults, and evaluation measures would require more systematic concentration than is in evidence today.

Taken together, currently available data must be treated with skepticism. The supplementary survey the authors distributed to the subject libraries asked for the percentage of YA space compared to the square footage of the entire facility, focusing only on the smaller YA spaces. Would a better comparison of square footage be to a library's children's space? What patterns and practices might emerge if analysis turned to examples of institutions that redesigned larger spaces for young adults? We might even ask about the degree to which square footage of space represents a measure of effective service. In other words, does a YA space's larger square footage translate into more equitable and appropriate library service?

Seating options were specifically examined based on the assumption that seating was among the more important aspects of a YA space. Is this assumption true? If not, what are more important measurable features of a YA space?

This study examined only the small YA spaces profiled in *VOYA*. Thus, the subject libraries reflect self-selected institutions that could well be expected to exhibit enthusiasm about their efforts. Libraries were not selected at random to determine if, whether, or how they have enacted a separate YA space. Further, as there is growing evidence that libraries outside of the United States also are experimenting with purpose-built spaces for young adults, can we begin to ask what informs those designs and evaluations?

## Research Method Challenges

The wide variety of imprecise and ineffectual measures evident in these data point to the need for greater sophistication in the research methods libraries employ when approaching young people as legitimate sources of evaluative information. Much of the data examined in the current study rely on a comparative analysis of published, self-reported YA space profiles. Thus these data are limited to traditional top-down library input and output measures and privileged largely by institutionally defined preferences. As detailed previously, these measures (such as "circulation" or "traffic") leave a great deal to be desired when trying to assess the degree of a successful YA space from the bottom-up point of view of library users. While the *VOYA* profiles examined here serve as a source of research data, they were brief, largely anecdotal, and lacking in larger systematic contexts and circumstances.[23]

To be sure, these YA space profiles do often provide brief affirmative contributions from YA library users. But the systematic need for greater qualitative data from library staff, administration, and young people also is apparent if this research is to produce effective leadership and guidance to future design efforts. Issues in this regard encompass the changing meanings of library space for young adults, library staff, and the broader public. It also begs historical questions of meaning as well. If young adults now are being considered library users entitled to a more equitable share of library space, how were libraries perceived by young people, library staff, and the broader public before this view developed?

## Conclusion

This first systematic research on library YA spaces offers us a good deal. After a detailed examination of ten relatively small early experiments it is clear that the field is building capacity and exhibiting a higher degree of spatial equity for young adults. The question engaged here attempts to excavate what we can learn from these early adopters to further a discussion based on the analysis of empirical data. This study suggests that libraries with fairly modest spaces have focused on increasing YA access to printed materials (offering sizable collections and improving service hours) and incorporating a higher degree of youth participation (through a variety of mechanisms and promoting youth art). While these efforts represent clear advances from historic practice and legacy, this study also points out a preference for continuing institutionally determined aesthetics, a pattern of dedicating a proportionately small amount space to young adults, and the considerable methodological challenges that remain with respect to measuring practices, techniques, and evaluative procedures before broader generalizations will be possible.

## Acknowledgements

*Editor's note: The title of this article is taken from Sandra Cisneros,* The House on Mango Street *(New York: Vintage Books, 1984): 108.*

## References and Notes

1. Further, the rapid increase in nontraditional school environments also will impact library services, such as the alternative, continuation, and small school site movements, combined with the nation's growing population of homeschooled youth. See Gilbert Q. Conchas and Louie F. Rodriguez, *Small Schools and UrbanYyouth: Using the Power of School Culture to Engage Students* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2008).

2. This current study expands upon concepts initially presented at the 2008 International Federation of Library Associations satellite meeting. See Anthony Bernier, "Making Space for Young Adults: Three Stages Toward Success," International Federation of Library Associations, Satellite Meeting, Montreal, Canada, August 6, 2008, http://ifla.queenslibrary.org/IV/ifla74/satellite-7/Presentation_Bernier.pdf (accessed Sept. 17, 2009). One recent study explicitly called for research on YA spaces, while a study just a few years prior did not mention YA space as a feature that would attract young adult users. See respectively Amy Alessio and Nick Buron, "Measuring the Impact of Dedicated Teen Service in the Public Library," *Young Adult Library Services* 4, no. 3 (2006): 47–51; Kay Bishop and Pat Bauer, "AttractingYoung Adults to Public Libraries," *Journal of Youth Services* 15, no. 2 (Winter 2002): 36–44. Nor is there even research

evident in the library design literature's general monographic treatments. See Tish Murphy, "Teen Spaces: Created from their Input," in *Library Furnishings: A Planning Guide* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2002): 136–42; Rebecca M. Wenninger, "Special Spaces for Children and Teens," in *Libraries Designed for Users: A 21st Century Guide* (New York: Neal-Schuman, 2000): 131–42; Rebecca M. Wenninger, "A Place to Call Their Own," in *Planning for a New Generation of Public Library Buildings,* ed. Gerard B. McCabe (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Pr., 2000); Sondra Vandermark, "Using Teen Patrons as a Resource in Planning Young Adult Library Space in Public Libraries," in *Planning the Modern Public Library Building,* ed. Gerard B. Mcabe and James R. Kennedy (Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited, 2003).

3. Richard E. Rubin, *Foundations of Library and Information Science,* 3rd ed. (New York: Neal-Schuman, 2004): 46. See also Tina Kelly, "Lock the Library! Rowdy Students are Taking Over," *The New York Times*, Jan. 2, 2007: 1; Mary K. Chelton, "The 'Problem Patron' Public Libraries Created," *The Reference Librarian* 36, no. 75/76 (2002): 23–32; Sherry J. Cook, Stephen R. Parker, and Charles E. Pettijohn, "The Public Library: An Early Teen's Perspective," *Public Libraries* 44, no. 3 (May/June 2005):157–61; Judy Marston, *Narrative Summary Report of Teen Focus Groups for the Young Adult Services Program* (Sacramento: California State Library: DeWitt-Wallace-Readers' Digest Fund, 2001): 8; The Wallace Foundation, *Public Libraries as Partners in Youth Development* (New York: The Wallace Foundation, 1999). For other studies on decades-old young adult attitudes and libraries, see also The Benton Foundation, *Buildings, Books, and Bytes* (Wash., D.C.: Benton Foundation, 1996).

4. One author recently observed, "While the interest in building teen places in fairly new in our library culture, the movement is undeniable." See Virginia A. Walter and Elaine E. Meyers, *Teens and Libraries: Getting It Right* (Chicago: ALA, 2003): 67.

5. Anthony Bernier, "Los Angeles Public Library's TeenS'cape Takes on the 'New Callousness,'" *Voice of Youth Advocates* 23, no. 3 (2000): 180–81.

6. *VOYA* is published bimonthly by Scarecrow Press. The articles feature examples of library space redecoration projects submitted by practicing young adult librarians.

7. Kimberly Bolan Taney, *Teen Spaces: The Step-by-Step Library Makeover*, 2nd edition (Chicago: ALA, 2002).

8. Galen Cranz, "Body Conscious Design in a 'Teen Space: Post Occupancy Evaluation of an Innovative Public Library" *Public Libraries* 45 no.6 (2006): 48–56. In this article, local youth were the study's primary subjects.

9. Michael Gorman, "'Mr. Inspiration': Patrick Jones on Knockout Teen Services, Mentoring, Librarians, and Yes, Loving Wrestling Magazines," *School Library Journal* 52, no. 8 (2006): 32–34; see also Denise Agosto, "Why do Teens use Libraries? Results of a Public Library User Survey," *Public Libraries* 46, no. 3 (May/June 2007): 55–62; Virginia A. Walter, "Public Library Service to Children and Teens: A Research Agenda," *Library Trends* 51, no. 4 (Spring 2003): 571–89.

10. For details on "youth development" see Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), "Young Adults Deserve the Best: Competencies for Librarians Serving Youth" (July 2005), www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/profdev/youngadultsdeserve.htm (accessed Aug. 19, 2009); YALSA, *New Directions for Library Service to Young Adults* (Chicago and London: ALA, 2002); DeWitt-Wallace-Readers' Digest Fund, *Public Libraries as Partners in Youth Development* (New York: The Wallace Foundation, 1999).

11. Anthony Bernier, "The Case against Libraries as 'Safe Places,'" *Voice of Youth Advocates* 26, no. 3 (Aug. 2003): 198–99; Anthony Bernier, "Young Adults, Rituals, and Library Space," *Voice of Youth Advocates* 22, no. 6 (2000): 391; Anthony Bernier, "On My Mind: Young Adult Spaces," *American Libraries* 29, no. 9 (1998): 52.

12. Christine A. Jenkins, "The History of Youth Services Librarianship: A Review of the Research Literature," *Libraries & Culture* 35, no. 1 (2000): 103–40. This thesis is consistent with more recent observations detailed in Mark K. Chelton, "Young Adult Services," in *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Sciences*, 3rd ed., ed. Marcia Bates and Mary Niles Maack (Oxford, England: Taylor and Francis, in press).

13. For a sampling of the more-received books consistent with this claim, see Mary Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* (New York: Ballantine, 1995); James Garbarino, *Lost Boys: Why Our Sons Turn Violent and How We Can Save Them* (New York: Free Pr., 1999); Rachel Simmons, *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2002); Kenneth V. Hardy and Tracey A.

Laszloffy, *Teens Who Hurt: Clinical Interventions to Break the Cycle of Adolescent Violence* (New York: Guilford Pr., 2005); Deborah Prothrow-Stith and Howard R. Spivak, *Sugar and Spice and No Longer Nice: How We Can Stop Girls' Violence* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006); Jean M. Twenge, *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled—and More Miserable than Ever Before* (New York: Free Pr., 2006). For the corresponding library responses to constructing young people see Tina Kelly, "Lock the Library! Rowdy Students are Taking Over," *New York Times*, Jan. 2, 2007: 1.

14. Indeed, libraries and other public places actively construct and are reinforced by their fears of youth in various reports and policy statements. See Mary K. Chelton, "Young Adults as Problems: How the Social Construction of a Marginalized User Category Occurs," *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*, 42, no. 1 (2001): 4–11; Michael S. Scott, *Disorderly Youth in Public Places (*Problem-Oriented Guides for Police Series No. 6), U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, www.cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/e05021549.pdf (accessed Aug. 19, 2009).

15. These libraries, located primarily in rural and suburban regions of the country, reported opening their new YA spaces between 1999 and 2007. The specific libraries are: Fortuna, California; Swampscott, Massachusetts; Cass City, Michigan; Wayzata, Minnesota; Blue Island,Illinois; Orrville, Ohio; Pinellas Park, Florida; Schaumburg, Illinois, Leominster, Massachusetts; and Georgetown, Kentucky.

16. Of the ten libraries originally selected, five returned the supplementary survey and five did not respond after two attempts at contact (see appendix C). The supplementary survey was then sent to libraries reporting the next smallest YA spaces until both a VOYA profile and a supplementary survey from a total of ten libraries were obtained.

17. During the follow-up surveys some libraries reported a larger collection size than was reported in the original *VOYA* article. This raises the question of whether libraries increased collection size in response to youth demand after opening a YA space or if there are other variations in the reporting of materials.

18. YALSA, "Young Adults Deserve the Best; YALSA, *New Directions for Library Service to Young Adults*; DeWitt-Wallace-Readers' Digest Fund, *Public Libraries as Partners in Youth Development.*

19. Michael W. Loder, "Seating Patterns and Improvements in a Small College Library: A Case Study," *College & Undergraduate Libraries* 7, no. 2 (2000): 83–94.

20. While libraries often anecdotally report "bean bag chairs" as problematic for durability, there are many other good reasons to avoid these as seating options. See Galen Cranz, *The Chair: Rethinking Culture, Body, and Design* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998).

21. Virginia A. Walter, *Output Measures and More: Planning and Evaluating Services for Young Adults* (Chicago: ALA, 1995).

22. Galen Cranz, "Body Conscious Design in a 'Teen Space': Post Occupancy Evaluation of an Innovative Public Library," *Public Libraries* 45 no. 6 (2006): 48–56.

23. Eliza T. Dresang, Melissa Gross, and Leslie E. Hold, *Dynamic Youth Services through Outcome-Based Planning and Evaluation* (Chicago: ALA, 2006): appendix D.

## Appendix A: Further Reading

"A Room with a View at the Wayzata Library, Wayzata, Minnesota." *Voice of Youth Advocates* 27, no. 3 (2004): 192–93.

Alessio, Amy. "Teen Center, Schaumburg Township District Library, Schaumburg, Illinois." *Voice of Youth Advocates* 25, no. 2 (2002): 106–07.

Cooper, Chris. "Tiny Space, Big Returns." *Voice of Youth Advocates* 31, no. 3 (2008): 224–25.

Pratt, Vicky M. "Teen Area: Swampscott Public Library, Swampscott, Massachusetts: Going a Long Way on a Short Budget." *Voice of Youth Advocates* 24, no. 4 (2001): 264–65.

"Rawson Memorial Library, Cass City, Michigan." *Voice of Youth Advocates* 27, no. 1 (2004): 28–29.

"Robert Cormier Center for Young Adults: The BOB: Leominster Public Library, Leominster, Massachusetts." *Voice of Youth Advocates*, 28, no. 1 (2005): 24–25.

"Tech Annex: Blue Island Public Library, Blue Island, Illinois." *Voice of Youth Advocates* 30, no. 6 (2008): 506–67.

"Teen Area: Scott County Public Library, Georgetown, Kentucky." *Voice of Youth Advocates* 26, no. 1 (2003): 32–33.

"Teen Lounge, Pinellas Park Public Library, Pinellas

Park, Florida." *Voice of Youth Advocates* 25, no. 3 (2002): 178–89.

"Young Adults Area: Orrville Public Library, Orrville, Ohio." *Voice of Youth Advocates* 24, no. 6 (2002): 426–67.

## Appendix B: *VOYA* Submission Request Data

- Location of YA space
- Size in square feet
- Shape
- Layout (including separate room, own entrance, sections, staff work space, quiet study area)
- Décor (including color scheme, windows, walls, posters, signs, display areas)
- Unique attributes
- Types of seating and tables
- Types of shelving (including square feet of each)
- Computer workstations and technological resources including catalog, databases, word processing, Internet access, and computer games, and listening/video stations)
- Collection size
- Types of resources in the collection
- Arrangement of collection (i.e. Dewey/LC)
- YA circulation
- Housing of YA materials elsewhere in library
- Description of YA population and community (including middle and high schools served)
- Hours of operation and if these hours differ from the library
- Traffic after school and on weekends
- Staffing, including title and full time/part time
- Date building opened
- Date of renovation
- Description of planning process (including how long it took and who had input)
- Date of opening and opening festivities
- Teen participation (including teen advisory council, teen volunteers, discussion groups, summer reading, website designers, homework help/tutoring, occasional/ongoing programs)
- "True Confessions"
- Teen comments

## Appendix C: Libraries Surveyed for Supplemental Survey

1. The original survey selected the ten smallest YA spaces for study, to which five libraries responded:
   Fortuna, Calif.
   Swampscott, Mass.
   Cass City, Mich.
   Wayzata, Minn.
   Blue Island, Ill.
2. The following five originally selected libraries selected failed to respond to two supplemental survey contact attempts and were dropped from the study:
   Hammond, Ind.
   Frederick, Md.
   Edmonds, Wash.
   Lancaster, Penn.
   Cuyahoga, Ohio
3. These libraries, the next smallest in the *VOYA* survey, were then selected and returned the supplemental survey:
   Orrville, Ohio
   Pinellas Park, Fla.
   Schaumburg, Ill.
   Leominster, Mass.
   Georgetown, Ky.

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### Southard Leaves the Public Library Association

Greta K. Southard, longtime Public Library Association (PLA) executive director, resigned her position as of Aug. 31, 2009. She had been PLA's executive director since 1996. Southard was selected as executive director of the Boone County (Ky.) Public Library, assuming the post in September 2009.

"Greta has been an outstanding executive director for the Public Library Association," said PLA President Sari Feldman. "We are particularly fortunate to have had Greta's leadership and relationship-building skills to foster the Turning the Page program through the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. We will work closely with the American Library Association leadership on a national search to bring an executive director to advocate for public libraries and the PLA." 🄿🄻