



Guidelines for Library Services for Young Adults



Section 1

Introduction

Audience for the guidelines:

- Practising librarians in all types of libraries and communities, urban and rural areas around the world, professionals, assistants and volunteers
- Library administrators and decision-makers
- Professional educators and students in library schools

Each public library has a different community to serve and therefore different priorities and needs. Although special library services for young adults have not been well established in all countries, these guidelines are created in the belief that young adulthood is a unique life stage. Young adults are entitled to the same quality of library services offered for other age groups in the population. So every library should start services for young adults as part of basic library services. Library services for young adults should be developed in the context of library services in general and in co-operation with other institutions.

Mission and Goals

“The public library, the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision making and cultural development of the individual and social groups”

(UNESCO/IFLA PUBLIC LIBRARY MANIFESTO, 1995)

The UNESCO MANIFESTO proclaims the belief in the public library as a living force for education, culture and information.

“Teenagers need special attention since many abandon voluntary reading at this stage in their lives. Their introduction to a wide array of books, compatible with their changing interests, should be encouraged by librarians and others who are aware of their psychological and emotional growth”

(CHARTER FOR THE READER, INTERNATIONAL BOOK COMMITTEE AND INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHING ASSOCIATION 1992)

Libraries can be an important force for the individual in achieving a successful transition from childhood to adulthood by providing access to the resources together with the environment that will foster intellectual, emotional and social development and offer a positive force for an alternative to societal problems.

Goals for Services for Young Adults

- Provide a transition from children's services to adult services
- Encourage lifelong learning through the library and reading promotion
- Motivate lifelong reading for information and pleasure
- Promote skills for information literacy
- Provide library collections and services for all young adults in the community to meet the following needs:

educational

information

cultural

leisure

Goals of the Guidelines

These guidelines are a list of ideas from an international perspective that can be helpful as an inspiration both for trained and inexperienced librarians who have the responsibility of serving young adults.

Section 2

Definition of the target group

The target group (young adult) can be defined as a group of people in-between childhood and adulthood. The target group includes all members regardless of race, religion, cultural background, intellectual or physical ability.



Needs of the target group

The library must be open to everybody and therefore must respect different cultural needs. Cultural needs have their roots in both oral and visual traditions, in the changing of society and social status, in cultural diversity and in visions and dreams. These needs should be reflected in the provision of the library resources, services and programmes and in the physical environment of the library.

It is important that the services for young adults should be designed not only by librarians but in co-operation with representatives of the target group. The young adults must be treated with respect, acceptance and a willingness to realise that their choices could be different to those that libraries traditionally offer. They should be actively involved in planning, implementing and evaluating resources, services and programmes.

Materials

As the needs of young adults vary greatly, the resources have to reflect their needs. The library therefore has to have resources for all groups including young adults with disabilities, and social and linguistic minorities for:

- Information and education
- Leisure/recreation
- Cultural diversity
- Different languages

The form and content of the resources has to acknowledge the different types of users, their interests, their intellectual skills and cultural background. Consideration should be given to providing a wide range of comic books, romances, popular series and current popular music.

The collection may consist of material such as:

- Printed material
- Books
- Magazines
- Collection of clippings and brochures
- Posters

Non-printed material

- Audio cassettes
- CDs
- Multimedia (CD-ROMs, CDI)
- Computer software
- Video-cassettes
- Board and electronic games
- Access to local, national and international electronic networks

The library must have the support of the necessary equipment to cater for users' needs, ie. adequate number of computers, videos and headphones.

Services and Programmes

The goal of services and programmes is to meet the changing needs of young adults, including all cultural groups and young adults with special needs.

Continuous assessment of the needs of young adults is a basic responsibility of each library. It is necessary to involve young adults in planning services and programmes (short and long-term advisory groups, feedback mechanisms such as wall charts, notebooks, computer bulletin boards).

If any space is provided for young adults, furniture and decoration should reflect the preferences of the users and it should be located separately from the children's area.

The library should provide staff trained and willing to respond to the specific needs of young adults.

Examples of Recommended Services

- Providing reference information (including homework support)
- Conducting library tours
- Training literacy and information skills (using print and electronic resources)
- Offering readers advisory services (individuals and groups)
- Encouraging the use of the collection in all formats
- Facilitating access to resources outside the collection e.g. referrals, inter-library loans
- Increasing public awareness of young adult library services
- Co-operating with other information and service providers in the community
- Providing services to special groups (young adults with disabilities, teen parents, education in prison and hospitals)

Examples of Recommended Programmes

- Book talks
- Storytelling
- Discussion groups and clubs
- Information programmes on special topics (health, careers, current issues)
- Celebrity visits (authors, athletes)
- Performances (music, art, drama)
- Co-operative programming with community institutions and groups
- Young adult productions (drama, publications, TV, video and magazines)
- Workshops

Section 3

Co-operation with other institutions



The quality of library services for young adults demands a good network with other professional or voluntary institutions in the local community. The young adults' activities in culture, education and social life must be co-ordinated so that the local institutions do not compete but co-operate for the benefit of the young adults. Many librarians have the resources and the know-how to be the professional co-ordinators for the benefit of young adults.

Cultural networking

Cultural networking is an effective way of focusing on the identity in a multicultural society so as to meet the needs of young adults. The public library, working together with other cultural institutions and young adults, can plan cultural programmes such as:

- Literature festivals
- Music and film festivals
- Carnivals
- Ethnic theatre productions
- Photo exhibitions
- Dance performances
- Street dancing

Educational networking

Schools are the most important partners for public libraries serving young adults. In many countries and regions of countries, there will only be a school library, a public library or sometimes a combined library to serve the public.

Co-operative planning between school libraries and public libraries can more adequately meet the needs and interests of young adults. A formal agreement is recommended to ensure the implementation of the plan of co-operation.

Other educational institutions with library services could work together with public and school libraries in an electronic interlending network. Such educational institutions could be:

- Colleges
- Universities
- Technical schools
- Art schools
- Schools for youth with disabilities
- Schools in prisons and in hospitals

The co-operation between the educational institutions could provide:

- Interlending
- Programmes for library training/user education
- Campaigns for reading promotion
- Programmes for information literacy
- Cultural programmes

For educational institutions without school libraries, outreach library services are necessary to give the students education in library use so that they can work more independently with the library system.

Social networking

In order to ensure that library staff co-operate with young adults in professional ways, it is important to co-operate with agencies such as:

- Social agencies
- Employment agencies
- Welfare agencies
- Law enforcement authorities

In order to have information on new trends and developing social problems, a network should also be created of professionals, volunteers, parents, library friends.

The library staff must find their own way of working with other library colleagues. The library should co-operate with different partners in local networks in order to make observations and draw up a strategic plan.

Section 4

Planning

The library should develop a commitment to young adult services by such methods as:

- Encouraging a positive attitude for all library staff
- Establishing policy statements for young adults including policies to provide access to all resources and information sources available; respect for rights of others and for library resources; intellectual freedom; and to provide equal and appropriate services for all young adults.
- Providing a focal point or a space for young adult services
- Appointing one individual to be responsible for services is the most effective way of serving young adults



Desirable characteristics for staff

- Understand and respect young adults
- Be knowledgeable about resources both print and non-print
- Be familiar with the collection and with community resources
- Be willing to learn
- Be flexible enough to accept and introduce change
- Be able to provide information services from all appropriate sources
- Be an advocate for young adults

Education and training for staff working with young adults

- Basic library practices
- Evaluation and selection of print and non-print materials
- Developmental characteristics of young adults
- Information policy and issues
- Print and electronic methods of providing information

Planning services

- Create a collection management policy
- Plan with young adults, a programme of services that best meets the needs of their community
- Establish a budget with prioritised goals
- Undertake fund-raising for programmes for young adults
- Develop evaluation criteria

Evaluation of services

Evaluation of library services for young adults should include both qualitative and quantitative measures of effectiveness. The collection of statistics should be done in the same way as statistics for general library services.

Some suggested measurements of use of the library by young adults:

- Library visits as a percentage of the young adult population
- Building use by young adults
- Registration as a proportion of the population
- Numbers of items for young adults
- In-library use of materials
- Library borrowing figures
- Reference services per young adult population
- Success rate of information transactions
- Average attendance at young adult programmes
- External groups visiting library
- Visits to outside groups by librarian
- Anecdotal evidence of the success of programmes and services

Evaluation can provide a good basis for marketing library services. One way to learn what young adults want is to ask them by questionnaires (quantitative) and interviews (qualitative).

Section 5

Marketing

Inform the young adults about the existence of a new special service for them within the library by:

- Giving the information in places where they meet and where they congregate, for example cinemas or cafés
- Making the information attractive perhaps by enlisting young adults to design it

Focus the interest of young adults:

- Make clear that staff want them to come, to stay and to come back
- Show that the library is alive and welcomes change
- Focus on one successful event to organise a promotion campaign

Services are nearly totally dependent upon satisfied customers telling others about the quality of the services.



International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)

Section of Libraries for Children and Young Adults

If you are interested in the work of the Section of Libraries for Children and Young Adults become a member of IFLA and register for the section.

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