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ILS 503

Internal Organization

I am in an interesting position. I currently volunteer to assist the part-time YA librarian with the Teen Advisory Board and YA programming.

Through this opportunity, I have been able to observe some of the inner workings and politics of the library. On the other hand, I have been a patron of libraries since I was too young to read. I remember when I signed up for my first library card at age 6 (they had special cards for younger children at the time). My mother chose that library because they allowed us to get library cards earlier than any other local libraries. I did a lot of volunteering at my local library when I was in elementary school and junior high. During that time, I was able to see some of the library's organization and politics.

One of the things I remember being a real issue was the relationship between the library director and the board of directors. It was a struggle for her to convince the board of the necessity of things that were vital to the library but cost a lot of money. It was an on-going frustration for her and the other library staff. There was an uneasy peace at best, though on the surface they were courteous and gracious to each other.

The library I currently volunteer at has raised some red flags in my mind. I grew up patronizing this library throughout my teen years. I remember hating and fearing the adult librarians at the library because they treated me like annoying trash. I was a good kid and a bookworm and they still felt the need to harass me and cause trouble because of my age. I learned very quickly that the adult librarians there didn't like adolescents, period. However, they have a very nice children's library area and I spent most of my teen years there. They did not get a teen room until 2-3 years ago and didn't have very many YA books when I was a teen. The children's librarians liked me because I was book-oriented and didn't cause trouble. I would wait an extra fifteen minutes in line at the children's desk to check out my books just so I wouldn't have to deal with the adult librarians. However, only 5 short years later, they are talking to me with respect about the evil teens and expecting me to sympathize with them. They clearly don't recall that they used to treat me like trash and I haven't forgotten. I have to wonder what they think they are accomplishing with their prejudiced attitude towards people based solely on their age group.

To me, this is a serious concern. I know that many teens cause trouble at libraries, especially when they're traveling in packs. The library is located right across the street from the town's high school so there are a large number of teen patrons. Perhaps they aren't the model patrons of a librarian's day dream but they are patrons, regardless. The library only just

started a Teen Advisory Board this September and had non-existent teen programming until this fall. What do the librarians expect teens to do when provided with no structure or activities? Teens are patronizing the library in droves and the adult librarians are continually kicking them out. The teen room has glass walls, no doors, and is right next to the computer stations with an adult librarian skulking around. If one teen acts up, they are all kicked out of the library. The furniture is over a year old and is falling apart because it's from IKEA and not meant to stand up to teens' hard use. The librarians blame this on the teens' bad posture and refuse to replace it. The attitude the adult librarians have is that the teens should be glad they have anything, even if it's a tiny glassed-in room that used to be the reference room.

Even the children's librarians have very negative attitudes towards YAs. They're always like, "wow, you're so brave working with those teens." No one appreciates how hard it is to be a teenager. They don't see that these teens will be adults out of college in 5-10 short years. Maybe some of them will forget the librarians' behavior toward them but most of them will remember. That memory will forever taint their view of libraries in general.

Some of the reason may be that the library has not had "new blood" for a while. All the librarians have been there 10+ years (other than the new, very part-time YA librarian). They are used to the status quo and have dismissed teens in their minds as stereotypes. I read somewhere that while

teens are more ego-centric, as people age they become less ego-centric and more group-focused. I think that is partially true. I think as people age, they tend to conform more to what society expects of them; they feel the pressure of many generations requiring them to fit the mold. They are expected to be calm, contributing members of society. Most of them have raised children and sent them out into the world. Teens are all about breaking molds and being new, different people. This threatens the very core of people who are living "for the greater good." Ironically, many librarians and teens are simply in very different places developmentally. They clash because their goals seem very different and they can't relate to each other. If only librarians could see that while teens can be annoying, they are similar to children: teens are the future and librarians can help mold them into responsible, functioning adults.