What is iREAD?

iREAD® is a flexible, nonprofit reading program designed by librarians featuring appealing incentives, compelling and adaptable themes, and a comprehensive resource guide chock full of ideas and reproducibles.

STORYTELLER
by Joshua Mangeshig Pawis-Steckley
for iREAD® Summer Reading 2023

A special “thank you” to Joshua Mangeshig Pawis-Steckley for allowing iREAD® to reproduce his painting “Storyteller” on T-shirts and hoodies in the 2023 iREAD® catalog. This graphic will not be included in the 2023 Resource Guide.

2023 iREAD® Summer Reading theme will be

Find Your Voice!

To learn more, visit
ireadprogram.org

MANGO ©2015 by Angela Dominguez, from MANGO, ABUELA, AND ME by Meg Medina, illustrated by Angela Dominguez.
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### ON THE COVER

DESIGN BY ALA PRODUCTION SERVICES
From the Editor

Kathleen M. Hughes / khughes@ala.org

As we get to the end of the year, many of us are thinking about and planning for 2023. It is easy to have a bit of a disconnect when planning, often focusing on the short term, leaving the long term unexamined. This restricted view can be dangerous for organizations like libraries. For an example, think about climate change—we know global warming is wreaking havoc on the planet, yet we ignore the signs of change that are everywhere since it isn’t affecting most of us in any major way yet. (Speaking of climate change, check out Lanecia Smith’s article on p. 38 to see how some libraries are taking action.) But for libraries, ignoring the signs of coming change can be dangerous, possibly rendering your library irrelevant.

It is important to consider how to adapt and prepare for the constant changes of the modern world and what the future portends. To that end, PLA is hard at work distilling and translating trends and innovations with the annual PLA Surveys. In this issue, you’ll find a report of the Public Library Staff and Diversity Survey (p. 24). Read the report to learn about the latest nationwide trends in beginning library and library director salaries; traditional and emerging staff roles; staff diversity, recruitment, and retention efforts; and information about public library equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) goals and activities. The survey is the second in a rotating series of three national surveys exploring public library roles, services, and resources, to provide actionable data for decision-making and advocacy. We’d love to hear your thoughts on the survey, or anything PLA offers.

THANK YOU!

This is the last issue for our “Best Practices” columnist, Krista Riggs. Thank you for several years of excellent columns, Krista! We appreciate your consistently relevant, thoughtful, and informative columns. We will miss working with you.

We are seeking a new columnist to take over from Krista. Interested? See more information on page 22.
PLA recently published its Public Library Staff and Diversity Report, which provides information on beginning librarian and library director salaries; documents traditional and emerging staff roles; explores staff diversity, recruitment, and retention efforts; and captures information about public library equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) goals and activities. The survey is the second in a rotating series of three national surveys exploring public library roles, services, and resources to provide actionable data for decision-making and advocacy.

The survey results highlight both opportunities and challenges for the future of public libraries and provides an essential baseline for measuring progress over time. It is important to understand these issues are a work in progress. As stated in the report: This report is neither the first nor the final word. There is no “finish line” here. We are striving for excellence, and library workers are stepping up in big and small ways every day as the needs in our communities grow and shift. I am proud of our work in this journey—and I also know there is more important work ahead that PLA is committed to doing with and for our members.

In addition to sharing results, the report on the survey data includes possible starting points for libraries to act and additional resources that library staff may find helpful as they engage in further work. The data is an opportunity for the field to learn and grow, considering best practices to recruit, hire, develop, compensate, and retain the library workforce.

Key Findings

- Virtually all (95%) public libraries report they engage in at least one type of EDI activity. More than a quarter (27%) of public libraries have formal EDI plans, and 25% report they have dedicated EDI staff roles.
- “Traditional” library staff roles, such as youth and adult services, are the most common, but the prevalence of roles that...
incorporate social media and digital outreach (74%), workforce and small business development (18%), and social work (8%) illustrate a growing range of programs and services in public libraries.

- In 2021 the median annual salary of a public library director reported was $79,022, and the median annual salary of a beginning librarian was $41,864. When viewed with historic PLA salary data, beginning librarian salaries have been virtually flat, and library director salaries have not recovered to pre-Great Recession levels.

- More than a quarter (27%) of all public libraries report they lost staff positions in the prior twelve months. City (32.7%) and suburban (33.2%) libraries were slightly more likely to have lost staff positions than town/rural libraries (21.1%). This is a grave concern, as we know that libraries continue to be asked to do more, often with little or no more resources. These issues of salary, adequate staffing, and meaningful continuing education opportunities are priorities for PLA and ALA.

- Staff demographics of the library sector do not reflect those of the US population. Not all libraries or local governments, however, collect data on staff representation, and not all libraries were able to accurately report it. About 92% of libraries report using at least one strategy for hiring staff from underrepresented groups.

**My Takeaways**

In some ways I was surprised by the data and in other ways not at all. I knew a lot of libraries would report that they were getting started on EDI work, but I was surprised by the 95%+ factor. I think it is a step in the right direction that almost all respondents report some EDI activity. I encourage you to keep on going, even if at times it is difficult. Equity work is challenging and humbling but is essential work that goes hand in hand with our mission.

This work includes recruiting, hiring, promoting, and retaining a qualified and diverse workforce.

In Cambridge, we use a combination of strategies including diverse representation on hiring panels, posting in a variety of outlets to reach various populations, refreshing job descriptions and interview questions to make sure we are focused on the skills needed to do the specific job, broadening our idea of excellence, being willing to invest in training, and making sure selected candidates support diversity and EDI efforts in libraries.

The job market is very competitive, and it is unfortunate that library salaries are flat or at pre-great recession levels. This report is useful for surfacing the latest salary findings and I hope that PLA members will share it with their boards and civic leaders as they grapple with trying to attract and keep a talented workforce.

I am proud of the EDI work that the PLA Board of Directors is doing. At our June board meeting, the board adopted our 2022-2026 strategic plan, which centers EDISJ in all aspects of our work. At each PLA Board meeting, board members explore a topic related to EDISJ and we intentionally try to hold inclusive meeting practices. This survey with report is one example of this commitment, as well as our professional development programs and resources like Justice at Work in Public Libraries: Understanding Power, Oppression, Resistance and Solidarity (https://bit.ly/3fpG7TD). PLA, with our ALA colleagues, also are striving to continuously improve to meet the needs of our members and expand resources and support for them. One recent example is the Cultural Proficiencies for Racial Equity: A Framework, which is also referenced in the report (https://bit.ly/3ffzdjr). Thank you, readers for all you do to support equity work in your libraries, and really for all you do!

Editor’s note: You can read the Public Library Staff and Diversity Report starting on page 24.
PLA EARLY LITERACY CALENDAR AVAILABLE

PLA’s Annual Early Literacy Calendar is back! Based on the Every Child Ready to Read Practices of reading, writing, singing, talking, playing, (and now counting), the 2023 calendar contains twelve months of learning activities, book lists, nursery rhymes, and more. On one side is a calendar with a fun skills-building activity for each day, and the other contains supplementary content like nursery rhymes, early literacy tips, song lyrics, or suggested reading materials. The calendar pages are also customizable with each containing a designated spot to add your library’s logo and contact information and is available in both English and Spanish. Share these calendars with your patrons to help them engage in early literacy activities every day of the year. To purchase visit the ALA store, alastore.ala.org.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES THEMES AND DEADLINES FOR 2023

Public Libraries, published six times a year, is the official publication of the Public Library Association. ALA’s only journal devoted exclusively to public libraries, the magazine offers important industry news, PLA/ALA updates, and columns and feature articles that offer strategies and ideas that can make a difference in your career and your library. Article submissions are invited and encouraged. Here is the list of themes for the upcoming year:

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*Query editor Kathleen Hughes (khughes@ala.org)

Outside of articles focused on the themes, manuscripts are considered on a rolling basis in the order in which they are received. Upon acceptance and author notification, articles are slotted into the production schedule for the next available issue.
WRITING FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES MAGAZINE

Interested in submitting a feature article? Here are some tips to help plan your article.

PITCHING EMAIL

Get in touch with editor, Kathleen Hughes, khughes@ala.org, to discuss your idea. Include answers to these questions and also a short outline of your idea.

- What type of piece are you proposing? There are a lot of options here, so just describe your idea. Will you be writing a profile of a library or a library practice? A round-up of proven practices? A How-To article? A review of research? A review of products or books? Personal Experience? An Interview?
- What issue are you hoping to publish the article in?
- Include a bit about yourself. Do you have expertise or relevant experience in the arena?

Don’t forget a short outline! This should include at a minimum: The Idea; Key Points; Key Points Expanded; Conclusion.

GENERAL

- Our readers are PLA members, public librarians, public library workers, trustees, vendors, and the entire public library world.
- All contributions should be the original work of the author.
- Feature articles must be 3,000–5,000 words.
- Send 2–3 recommendations for further reading to go in a box at the end of the article.
- For each author, send your name, title, email address, and what you are currently reading, as well as a current, high-resolution head shot.
- Include a headline.
- Save articles in Word format and send to Kathleen Hughes (khughes@ala.org) as an email attachment.

ARTICLES SHOULD:

- be interesting, well-written, and thought-provoking;
- include information that readers can incorporate into their libraries (preferably right away); and
- inform a reader’s perspective of the topic.

TONE

- A conversational tone should be used; lean toward informality rather than being formal.
- Use the inverted pyramid style of writing with the most important information prioritized at the beginning of the article.

PHOTOGRAPHS/IMAGES

- Send as separate files. (Do not embed them in the Word file.)
- Photographs should be high-resolution at print size.
- Include a caption and identify the owner of the photograph.

STYLE

- Use Webster’s for spelling.
- Use the Chicago Manual of Style (latest edition) for questions of style.
- Do not use embedded footnotes. Rather, if you are using citations, add a number in the text [1] and follow it up with a corresponding list at the end of the article.

COPYRIGHT

- Copyright is vested with the author.
- PL retains the right to publish the article online, in compilations, etc.

Questions? Email Kathleen Hughes, khughes@ala.org.

RACIAL EQUITY WEBINAR AVAILABLE ON-DEMAND

Brave Voices, Brave Choices (BVBC) is a public promise to learn, grow, and act on our collective commitment to move past anti-racism statements, engage residents and local systems, and advance equity. In this on-demand webinar, participants will learn how the Howard County Library System provided the data-informed foundation needed to lead and drive change through their BVBC initiative. Register to access the on-demand webinar. Get more information here: https://bit.ly/3B91oYI.
Public Library Services for Strong Communities

Take PLA’s annual survey to help the field better understand current trends in how public libraries meet the needs of their communities. Participate now at librarybenchmark.org.

All libraries have free access to Benchmark to complete surveys and view their library’s past PLA survey data. As a bonus, survey participants will be entered into a drawing to win free PLA 2024 Conference registration! Participants can also take advantage of a 10% discount on upgraded access to interactive dashboards in Benchmark.

Learn more about PLA annual surveys at ala.org/pla/data/plasurveys.

If it is your first time logging into Benchmark, or you need assistance resetting the password for your library, please contact plabenchmark@ala.org.
Because I began my library career as a children’s librarian, it remains an area of librarianship I am deeply interested in. Despite moving into administration, I still enjoy keeping up with the latest trends in youth services. In 2015, I published an article in *Public Libraries Online* titled “Ten Things a Children’s Librarian Needs to Know.” Although it has only been seven years since the article’s publication, recently I’ve found myself wondering what else I would add to the list given my additional years of experience and the changes to libraries and society as a whole since 2020.

The original article combines traditional librarian skills such as conducting reference interviews, knowledge of early literacy best practices, and technological know-how with soft skills like creative problem solving, networking skills, and time management. Other items include a basic knowledge of pop culture, best practices for promoting library services, how to most effectively communicate with children, and understanding the needs of all levels of readers. I developed the list based on my own personal and educational experience, as well as the experiences of numerous other librarians. While each of the skill sets listed is still entirely valid and important, the last three years have added even more concerns for librarians—especially those in youth services. Thanks to the pandemic and the increasingly polarized state of American politics, there are several additional areas of expertise that are more important than ever.

**Flexibility.** The pandemic has been a high-profile reminder to expect the unexpected. In March 2020, we all had to pivot quickly to continue services virtually as our libraries closed. In youth services, this might look like shifting in-person programs to take place online, investing more than usual in digital collections, and reimagining our spaces and events to accommodate social distancing. It’s vital that today’s children’s librarians understand that things often may not go as planned, and that’s okay. While it’s not feasible to plan for every possible hiccup, being open to last-minute changes is necessary in order to flourish in the new
normal. Although the worst of the pandemic is hopefully behind us, these lessons on flexibility are still useful going forward. Even in the absence of a true emergency, kids can be unpredictable!

**Diversity, equity, and inclusion.** Does your collection represent your community? Are your programs truly inclusive of all? As the importance of representation has become more widely spoken about in both librarianship and the world at large, it’s important to make sure you’re doing the work as well. If you haven’t yet conducted a diversity audit of your collection, now is a good time to think about it. Kids especially need to see themselves portrayed in the books and media they consume. EDI should be an ongoing focus for youth services librarians that informs all collection and program choices, not just a one-and-done project.

**Collection development.** Understanding the ins and outs of collection development has always been a cornerstone of good librarianship, but with the increased frequency of book bans and challenges, it’s more important than ever to develop and stick to procedures for selection and weeding of materials. Children’s librarians must have an understanding of professional review sources and how to justify their collections. It’s also vital to understand and stick to your organization’s policies around collection development and know the steps involved in handling questions or complaints around materials. Having a solid rationale and procedure to back up your choices will make your collection much easier to defend if the situation arises.

**Where to go for support.** It’s not an easy time to be a librarian, especially one that works with kids. Amid high profile book challenges, disrespect, and even threats, it’s natural to feel burned out, angry, frightened, or some combination of all of these. One of the things I love most about our field is how willing librarians are to help each other. Think about the people you can best rely on if and when things get hard. Having a trusted support system to talk to is vital. Ideally, it’s a good idea to have a combination of colleagues or managers who will back you up at work, as well as confidants you can talk to off the clock. Be gentle with yourself, and know when you might need to enlist the help of a professional.

**Boundaries and work-life balance.** If you’ve read any content around workplace trends this year, you likely already know that “quiet quitting” is a term frequently tossed around business publications. Quiet quitting isn’t a new phenomenon, and its name is not truly descriptive of what it really is. Typically, it’s defined as no longer going above and beyond at work. This can look like not taking on extra hours or responsibilities, passing on unpaid committee work, or staying off email outside of work hours. I’m not sure why it took a pandemic to make people realize this is not necessarily a bad thing; in fact, it’s necessary to practice appropriate boundaries in order to avoid burnout. I encourage all children’s librarians to be mindful of maintaining an appropriate work-life balance. Without one, serving young patrons and their families can quickly become a chore. Getting into good habits and establishing appropriate boundaries early on will help serve you for the rest of your career.

Youth services is one of the most rewarding and important areas of librarianship. Collections and programs for kids and teens are what many patrons think of first when they think about the library. By developing these core competencies, in addition to my original list, librarians can provide the best service possible to their communities.

**REFERENCE**


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**Things a Children’s Librarian Needs to Know / The Big Idea**
While often used in rural areas, mobile libraries are also useful in urban communities where, for whatever reason, getting to the library can be difficult. This is especially true for patrons under the age of 18 who don’t have the ability to venture outside their neighborhoods alone. A too-distant branch is a challenge for patrons of any age.

Hoboken, New Jersey, has a population of more than 60,000 despite being but one square mile in size. While one might think such a densely populated city would not require a mobile library, the opposite is true. In such a small but concentrated area, where nearly everything is but a few blocks away, many residents aren’t always able to leave their neighborhood to visit the library that is literally in the center of the city. (As with other libraries in dense urban areas, parking is not an option.) The challenge faced by the Hoboken Library was that if people don’t come to the library, then the library must go to them. The Hoboken Library addressed this challenge with its own version of a mobile library: The BookBike.

The BookBike was introduced in summer 2019. The intent was to create a mobile library where customers could borrow and return books, sign up for library cards, and use free Wi-Fi; it was intended to also serve as an eye-catching rolling promotion for the library and its products and services. Since its launch, the BookBike has become central to the library’s outdoor programming and has enabled the library to introduce services to both new and existing patrons throughout the city.

One particularly effective use of the BookBike is the partnership between the library’s Youth Services and Community Engagement departments wherein library staff members hold Story Times for children. This has proved so successful that the service has extended to community events, schools, and local summer camps. As the BookBike has a distinct appearance not unlike an ice cream truck, lately the teams have taken to giving out ice pops.

Many children aren’t able to dictate their own schedules to
make time for visits to the library. In other circumstances, some might not be allowed to travel through the city on their own in order to come to the library. Staff witnessed this when a local summer camp came to visit the library and showed the kids’ desire for library cards and books.

By coordinating with Community Lifestyles Camp—a free or subsidized summer camp for kids and families living in Hoboken—the Youth Services team was able to arrange for the BookBike to visit the camp. This provided a great opportunity for kids to sign up for cards since they typically visit the library without their parents or guardians. It also provided an even better chance to make the library a part of their weekly schedules by giving the kids an opportunity to browse the stacks, place requests, and return books.

Since instituting BookBike visits, there has been a dramatic increase in attendance at youth programs, both in the community and at the library’s three branches. The mobile library has been an effective way to reach kids and teens who otherwise cannot come to the library. This past summer, HPL’s BookBike was able to serve nearly 1,500 patrons, 77 of whom became new card holders.

Hoboken’s success can be applied to other urban areas. A mobile library is a fun and engaging way to make an impact within the local community and attract new patrons along the way!

About the Hoboken Public Library
Founded in 1890, the library is a cultural and educational centerpiece of the City of Hoboken, New Jersey. Its mission is to connect people with each other, ideas, and opportunities, and to support lifelong learning, personal growth, and community development. Full details on the library, its programs, services, and collections—including a renowned Local History Collection—are available at www.HobokenLibrary.org. The Main Library building at 500 Park Avenue is listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

For more information about the BookBike, please contact the author at valerie.coughlin@hoboken.bccls.org, or visit HobokenLibrary.org/bookbike.
Connecting with Young Readers

Laura Raphael / Laura.Raphael@tulsalibrary.org

As a public library lifer (21 years and counting), I have always viewed my top goal—and what I think of as the prime directive of public libraries—as connecting readers with books. I’ve been fortunate to do this in a variety of roles at the Tulsa City-County Library. Not to brag (but also: totally bragging), but years ago I introduced a very reluctant 8-year-old boy to try out the Lunch Lady graphic novel series . . . and now he’s a college student who eagerly awaits the next Zadie Smith novel. I count it among my greatest achievements in life. I’m not always that successful, of course, and I have made plenty of readers’ advisory mistakes (alas, still do), but I have learned a thing or two about connecting readers with books—in particular, kids and teens. Here are just a few pieces of advice for anybody wanting to find the right book for every youth reader.

They are Listening
Kids and teens listen to adults—and take our suggestions—way more than you realize. This completely contradicts everything we are told about young people, especially teens. It’s all around us. Someone will say, “Well, kids today are just so different from when I was young; they don’t care about what adults think.” Or a sitcom will show a teen wrapped in layers of hoodies and headphones, ignoring their parents and teachers. But there’s an important caveat hiding under these sometimes-true stereotypes: Kids and teens care about what you say to them when they know and trust you.

They may pretend not to, and hoodies and headphones are a definite teen defensive strategy, but if they only roll their eyes 2 out of 3 times (not 3 out of 3) at what you say and maybe even crack the smallest smile in the universe? Then, my friend, you just might have an actual relationship, and they are DEFINITELY listening.

When kids and teens know you—and, more importantly, know that you know and care about them—they hear you when you complain about parking or presidents or paying taxes. They notice when you get a haircut.
(especially if it’s not flattering) or wear new shoes. And they 100%, no question, absolutely pay attention when you talk about a topic or a TV show or a book or a movie or an author that has you really hyped.

My husband has been a high school teacher for the last 20 years, and it still surprises him when one of his students casually drops that they watched that 6-hour silent movie from 1924 that he raved about in between classes. (It also surprises him when they track the shirts he wears and say things like, “Mr. Raphael, you wore that green polo two days ago; did you wash it in between?”)

So trust me: you have the power to influence what the kids and teens in your library orbit are reading, or might read, or are thinking about reading. They may even eventually become Zadie Smith superfans, if you play it right.

Offer the “Hard” Books
This is a related corollary to #1 in that the common wisdom isn’t always right. We hear that kids and teens only want easy books, short books, books that have more pictures than words. And while that can absolutely be true, the opposite is just as likely. You only need to find the right magic combination of relationship, interest, and book.

The esoteric Victorian meanings of botanical flowers, you say? I will long remember a mother and her 10-year-old excitedly bounding onto the research floor of my downtown library for books in storage on just such a topic. The books were not child-friendly at all, or, honestly, even very reader-friendly. Huge blocks of text, hardly any art (mostly tiny, fuzzy, black-and-white photographs), and lengthy indexes. This child devoured every word. She returned again and again, fascinated by Victorian culture. That’s the most extreme example, but I’ve been surprised and delighted to see a similar voracity in young readers who become obsessed about a topic or era and will not only tolerate “hard” books but will seek them out.

Say something like, “Look at how much is packed into this book! It’s for kids who have a keen interest in [ninjas, animal behavior, the Civil War, or whatever it’s about] and want to learn even more. Do you think your brain is ready for that?” The answer might be “no,” but you won’t know (and neither will they) if you assume you shouldn’t ask.

Thumbs Up/Thumbs Down
Social psychology posits that humans are pack animals, so we like to follow each other. And when you give a fellow pack animal a friendly request, especially when it involves movement of some kind, they are likely to acquiesce—and take an instant liking to you. When we comply with requests for simple movements, something interesting happens in our brains that makes us both trust and pay more attention to the person we are complying with.

As it relates to readers’ advisory with children and teens, this can be put into practice by thinking about simple actions you can ask them to replicate and show you.

When they return a book, put your thumbs up high and then down low and ask, “What did you think of this book? Like this [thumbs up high] or like this [thumbs down low]? Show me!”

When they are checking out that really hard book that you found for them (see #2), put your hands on the top of your head and say, “You’re going to need all of your brain cells to read this one! Can you get your brain ready by massaging it? Show me!” (This is the kid version; for oh-so-cool teens, you can say, “I’m going to ask you to do something SUPER corny, OK? Do you want to hear it, even if it’s just to tell me how corny it is?”), then “You’re going to need all of your brain cells . . .” etc.)

Not only are they likely to give you thumbs up or down or massage their heads (or at least laugh at the notion), they will like you more when they do so, and you’ll strengthen that special librarian-reader bond even more.

Be Your Authentic Self
Kids and teens are human, and humans respond when other humans don’t hide who they really are. Maybe they will tease
you about your obsession with sloths and your brightly colored sloth socks, or maybe they will ask you where they can get some too and start sharing their own obsession with snakes. It doesn’t matter: both are excellent ways to establish a line of communication and let young readers know you are safe for them to be their weird and authentic selves.

I had an English teacher in high school, Mrs. Blessing, who confessed to me that, try as she might, she could never finish William Makepeace Thackeray’s Vanity Fair and actually preferred The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy. I was so shocked that she admitted this (Vanity Fair was on our AP list! Hitchhiker’s definitely was not!) but also absolutely thrilled because it was a window into her fallible and unique self. Also, it meant it was okay if I didn’t like a revered author or book! That was an amazing gift, and even when I read Vanity Fair (and loved it) years later, I appreciated that tiny glimpse of who she really was, under her outwardly proper exterior.

**Reverse Psychology**
Playfully try to “hide” a book behind your back and say, “Oh! You weren’t supposed to see this!” (Who in their right mind wouldn’t be instantly curious?) And then talk about the book. That works best with children, but it can be surprisingly effective with teens if you have a good relationship with them and they are used to a back-and-forth teasing.

Otherwise, try, “This is a dangerous book. Only readers who want to expand their consciousness should try to read it. Do you think you’re ready for it?” (Make sure the book has some element of “danger”—a story or message that will make them see things in a new light.)

**Make Connections**
My first career was as a middle school English teacher, and while I very much wanted to be good at it, I was not. My failures were legion, including an ill-fated experiment that combined rapping and explaining similes. (Rapping in front of a group of 12-year-olds!) The one tiny part that I had some success with was connecting with my students, one-on-one, over books and looking back, I realize I was already using the tips listed here.

Here are some ways TCCL connects with kids and teen readers:

**Build A Reader App**
We promote this easy-to-use app as a “storytime in your pocket” because of the short videos of our children’s librarians and staff demonstrating songs and fingerplays, but its readers’ advisory superpower is in the curated and frequently updated lists of books related to the Every Child Ready to Read activities of talking, singing, reading, writing, and playing.

**Kids Read Curious World Website and Book Lists**
Reading education research shows—and common sense confirms—that the more you know about a topic, the better your comprehension when reading about that topic. To create both curiosity and knowledge in kids, this website collects original and secondary resources, including book lists, about a variety of high-interest topics, from Archaeology to Insects.

**Your Next Great Read for Teens**
A companion to Your Next Great Read (which is for adults), this survey-based readers’ advisory service takes answers from teens and turns them into a personalized reading guide that lists 3 to 5 authors and 8 to 10 titles chosen just for them by a professional teen librarian or associate.
Kanopy PLUS unlocks the library world’s best video streaming access with pre-curated subscription packs that will delight every patron. Pay upfront for the year and we manage the rest.

PLUS Packs

PLUS Packs are themed collections each with 250–300 unlimited use titles. Patrons will discover in each Pack the most engaging and quality curations found only on Kanopy.

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To get a quote for your library, please contact your account representative, or visit [lib.kanopy.com/PLUS](http://lib.kanopy.com/PLUS).
It’s bittersweet to write my last Best Practices column for Public Libraries. I have loved being part of this wonderful publication and writing the column has connected me with so many great people and ideas from public libraries across the country. It seems fitting to write about youth services, as I started in public libraries as a children’s librarian more than 18 years ago and my primary passion is still children’s programming and services. From this background and experience, I firmly believe one of the most important purposes of a public library is to create positive first experiences for children with libraries, library staff, and materials to form lifelong, lasting relationships within the community.

This also requires forming positive, lasting relationships with the parents or caregivers of young children. One of the best trainings I’ve ever taken was a multipart workshop hosted by the California State Library on using Brazelton Touchpoints principles to improve relationships, customer service, and family engagement for young children and their caregivers in the public library setting. (Recognizing that “parents” and “families” come in many shapes, sizes, and configurations.) Touchpoints is a strengths-based, culturally responsive approach that recognizes the parent/caregiver as the expert on the child, with library staff supporting this role through positive, observation-based conversation starters. Professional training with Brazelton specialists allow for a more thorough understanding of the theories and their practical application to library settings through group discussions, opportunities to practice techniques in a safe environment, and guided support. Touchpoints works best in a library setting when the entire staff shares an understanding of the principles, creates a working shared vocabulary, and adopts a common mindset for transforming children’s services and family engagement in the library.

**Touchpoints Assumptions and Principles**

Brazelton Touchpoints is a research- and evidence-based technique focused on the practices of pediatrician T. Berry Brazelton. It includes “a set of values,
principles and practices for professionals committed to creating strong partnerships with families of young children.” Hospitals, childcare centers, preschools, and other youth-serving organizations implement the model throughout the country. Touchpoints-influenced interactions are built upon “Parent [or Caregiver] Assumptions” that recognize the parent as the expert on the child, rather than viewing the service provider as expert. The seven assumptions include notions that all parents have strengths; parenting is a trial-and-error process; parenting is rooted in cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences; and that all parents want to do the best they can for their child. Practitioners combine parent assumptions with the Touchpoints Guiding Principles to create a novel approach to children’s services. The Guiding Principles include the following:

1. **Recognize what you bring to the interaction.** No matter how neutral and nonjudgmental we strive to be as library professionals, everyone naturally brings their own life experiences to an interaction. Before starting a conversation with a parent, it helps to pause and assess what thoughts or feelings we might be bringing that could unintentionally lead to (expressed or unexpressed) judgment or criticism.

2. **Look for opportunities to support mastery.** Based on the assumption that the parent is the expert on his or her child, each interaction becomes an opportunity to encourage parents along the journey of child development.

3. **Acknowledge and respect each family’s culture.** In relation to Guiding Principle 1, this principle recognizes and values that the families we serve also bring unique aspects to the interactions, such as individual backgrounds, cultures, and experiences that may be different from our own.

4. **Use the behavior of the child as your language.** Touchpoints-influenced interactions often begin with verbalizing positive observations to the parent about a child’s behavior to start a conversation and build a trusting relationship. For example, if a toddler is running in the library, a standard reaction might be for library staff to say to the child, “No running in the library.” While it might stop the behavior, this approach can also potentially embarrass the child and/or parent and shut off future communication and trust. A Touchpoints-influenced response would be to instead approach the parent with a positive observation such as, “Your child seems to have a lot of energy, how old is he/she?” This interaction can open a conversation, help build a relationship, and find ways for the library staff to support the parent through their child’s stages of development. (An exception would be if a child’s behavior puts them in danger of immediate harm or injury, or would cause harm or injury to others. The library staff should then do what’s necessary to keep the child and others safe.)

5. **Value disorganization and vulnerability as an opportunity.** I’m in the middle of interviewing over thirty candidates for library assistant positions in my system. Already, multiple candidates have mentioned organizational skills as a strength they would bring to our library. Touchpoints, however, teaches us to also value disorganization and vulnerability as opportunities to learn, grow, and strengthen relationships. Child development can be messy and chaotic, often in moments of growth and learning. As children learn new skills they often also regress in other areas, and everyone has good and bad days along the way. A Touchpoints-influenced approach for library staff would be to recognize that disorganization or vulnerability as a foundation for growth, think of a conversation-starter from a nonjudgmental, positive observation of child behavior, and seek ways to support the parent along their journey of mastery. As Brazelton writes, “When seen as natural and predictable, these periods of regressive behavior are opportunities to understand the child more deeply and to support his or her growth, rather than to become locked in a struggle.”
6. **Value and understand the relationship between you and the parent/Focus on the parent-child relationship.** These are two separate principles that I’ve combined into one. The first means again understanding that the parent is the expert on his or her child and valuing that expertise while embracing our role as supporter. The second means to use each interaction to support the parent along their journey of raising their child while also strengthening their relationship with the library.

7. **Be willing to discuss matters that go beyond your traditional role.** Part of supporting the parent along their mastery journey may include answering questions outside of the typical role as librarian or library staff. As a children’s librarian I often had questions from parents as to whether their child’s behavior or stage of development was “normal” or age appropriate. While I tried to comfort each parent that children all learn and develop at their own pace, I also didn’t want to diminish concerns that were beyond my expertise and might better be answered by a medical professional. As librarians, we’re well-equipped to help parents find the information, resources, and services that can answer these questions if they fall beyond our own credentials.

8. **Value passion wherever you find it.** This is my favorite Guiding Principle, and one that I’ve also found helpful in interactions with adult patrons and staff that I supervise. Passion doesn’t always manifest as joy, sometimes anger or tears can also be signs that someone cares deeply about something. Recognizing that passion and acknowledging that it comes from an emotional place of feeling very strongly about something, can help soften conflict and open doors for conversation and mutual understanding even when the two sides of an interaction don’t necessarily agree on a topic.\(^5\)

By forming an approach to children’s services based on the Guiding Principles, libraries can create welcoming spaces that support parents and caregivers in being the expert on their children and attaining mastery during the journey of child development. As the Brazelton Touchpoints Center describes, organizations that implement the Guiding Principles create ideal conditions for family engagement. Such conditions create environments that

- welcome you and your child with respect and understanding;
- value your questions about your child and your care giving;
- listen without judgment as you share concerns about your child’s behavior;
- treat you as the most important person in your child’s development;
- respect and value your family’s culture and experiences;
- share with you the excitement of your child’s development;
- join you in advocating for the best care and services for your child and family;
- help you find community resources for your child and family;
- work with you to discover and meet your child’s needs; and
- offer guidance and support to help you understand and respond to the predictable ups and downs of your child’s growth and development.\(^6\)

In a public library setting, this implies finding moments to talk with our patrons and get to know them beyond a prescriptive or transactional level. The goal is to build trusting relationships and foster conversations. As a children’s librarian, I found the best moments for engagement and conversation with parents came during “stay and play” sessions after story times. For example, after our infant/toddler program we would bring out tubs of safe, age-appropriate toys to keep the little ones interested, giving the adults time to talk with each other and our library staff. The play time also provided opportunities to start conversations based on positive observations of behavior, such as, “Your baby really likes the egg shakers, does he enjoy music at home, too?” Parents gained support from each other and formed stronger relationships with library staff during these informal play sessions than might have been
possible if only seeing us during
the program or from behind the
desk.

**Touchpoints for Staff Development and Engagement**

When the Touchpoints training
came to my previous library, I had
already moved from children’s
librarian to supervising a few
centralized departments.
Although I was no longer working
directly with young children and
their caregivers, the Touchpoints
assumptions and principles influ-
enced my approach as a supervi-
sor in supporting my teams. For
example, when applied to super-
vision, Touchpoints assumptions
teach us to assume our staff are
the experts on their own jobs,
within the overarching mission,
vision, and priorities of the orga-
nization. Approaching supervi-
sion this way minimizes micro-
managing, and instead implies
trust that our staff know what
they’re doing, and can success-
fully prioritize tasks and work
fairly independently, depending
on the position. Our job then
becomes finding resources to
support staff along their journey
to mastery and professional
development. And finally, Touchpoints has taught me
to recognize what implicit biases
and previous experiences I may be
bringing to each interaction, while
respecting that my staff bring their
own cultures, backgrounds, and
experiences as well.

**Conclusion**

Looking back over my 18 years in
public libraries, the training I
had in Touchpoints in Public
Libraries is probably the most
influential to how I interact with
my staff and our patrons, even
spilling over into my personal life
and interactions with family and
friends. The observational con-
versation starters are also similar
to the language-rich and dialogic
interactions promoted in early
literacy practices. Using the
Touchpoints principles has made
me a more patient, understand-
ing librarian and supervisor, and
has changed my mindset to a
more supportive role encourag-
ing others on their journey
through self- and professional
development to mastery.

And in closing, one more thank
you to all who have contributed
ideas and information to this col-
umn, to all who have read and
responded with feedback and
conversation, and a huge thanks
to Kathleen Hughes at ALA for
her support, encouragement, and
patience with me over the past
few years. It’s been a joy and
honor to write this column and
I’ve learned so much in the pro-
cess. We have a wonderful profes-
sion full of smart, generous, and
helpful people. Thank you! [2]

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Let’s Talk about TikTok

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Emily is TechLab Manager at Sherwood (VA) Regional Library.
Emily is currently reading The Rabbit Hutch by Tess Gunty.

TikTok is a growing app with substantial potential for outreach. Yet, like any other social media app or site, it can be confusing to navigate and even daunting in our digitally overwhelming world.

What is TikTok?
TikTok is a short form video mobile app with the mission to “inspire creativity and bring joy.” A simple mission with big impact. In September 2021, TikTok celebrated its milestone of one billion monthly global users. And a new Pew Research report shares that 67% of American teens have used TikTok at least once. With such a large reach into an underserved teen population, some libraries are joining the TikTok conversation.

Milwaukee Public Library TikTok
The Milwaukee Public Library (@milwaukeepubliclibrary) has an active TikTok with over 18,000 followers and a total of 912,700 likes shared across their videos, as of this writing. Many of their videos have significant views but one video created in June 2022 has gone viral with 2.8 million views. The video depicts an edited-in clip of a skydiver jumping into a book drop. The video is making an amusing joke about the journey of a returned book, a journey similar to the adrenaline heavy experience of skydiving. The TikTok is nine seconds long and is tagged with only two simple hashtags: #fyp and #bookdrop.

“For You” Page
The hashtag #fyp refers to the app’s For You page, one of the main components of TikTok. TikTok users can scroll through their own curated For You page or view a more controlled content feed from creators they follow. Both feeds have their merits, but TikTok is well-known for its For You page. The For You page is constructed by a strategic algorithm, presenting videos to users based on several interrelated factors. TikTok weighs data gained from user interactions, video
information, and account settings such as a user’s language preferences and creates a unique feed for each user. TikTok elaborates about the algorithm on their blog, “A strong indicator of interest, such as whether a user finishes watching a longer video from beginning to end, would receive greater weight than a weak indicator, such as whether the video’s viewer and creator are both in the same country.” Therefore, for example, the more a user interacts with videos about horror films on the app, the more likely TikTok is to present related content to them on their For You page.

TikTok Features
Other features of TikTok besides the unique For You page are quite appealing to audiences. TikTok is known for its extensive filter and video editing options that allow for creativity in content creation. Users on TikTok can create videos and customize their creations with filters, sound clips, unique editing features, and trending hashtags all on their phone. When the app first launched, TikTok videos were limited to 15 seconds, a time limit reminiscent of the now defunct video app Vine. TikTok has incrementally increased the maximum video length throughout its lifetime, most recently to a maximum of ten minutes per video. There are also extensive social features of the app. Users can comment on videos, duet videos with their own content, tag other users, and send private messages. Some communities or subcultures have formed on the app, connected by the content of their videos and, oftentimes, a related hashtag. One such community is #BookTok.

#BookTok Community
#BookTok is a group of book enthusiasts, authors, libraries, and booksellers that has formed on TikTok. #BookTok video creators and users bond over reading recommendations and all things book related. Videos range from informational clips, such as a detailed book review, to pure entertainment, such as a video series dedicated to organizing books in rainbow order. While the books discussed on #BookTok range in genres and audiences, young adult literature is frequently discussed. For example, Sarah J. Maas’ novel *A Court of Thorn and Roses* has gained popularity on the app. A hashtag acronym of the title (#acotar) is often used to indicate a video talking about the novel. This hashtag currently has over four billion total views on TikTok.

Glendale Public Library
In February 2021, staff at the Glendale (AZ) Public Library (@glendaleteenlibrary) posted a TikTok taking part in the #BookFaceChallenge. The video begins with a library staff member standing in the stacks. Another library staff member then aligns a book within the frame, making it appear like the staff member is part of the cover. The video garnered over 47,500 views and...
5,918 comments. The video balances function and form by connecting viewers with young adult novels in a creative, playful way.

Why a particular TikTok may gain more views than another cannot be conjectured in this article. However, clever use of hashtags and trending sounds can increase viewership on the app. TikTok allows users to use sound bites, referred to as “sounds,” from other videos created. The original sound used in this TikTok comes from Lorena Pages (@lorenapages), and has been remixed on the app into other videos within varying contexts and with varying content.

**Entering into the Conversation**

While TikTok does make video creation more accessible, it can still be daunting considering the time needed to create content. When thinking about how TikTok fits into your community and outreach goals, know that there are varying levels of engagement. If diving into the app to create content, an understanding about trends and the data behind the For You page can really make a difference. Maybe, though, an active TikTok account isn’t something that would serve your community best, but simply using the app to keep a pulse on trends could be. Use TikTok to check out what YA novels are trending or what type of challenges are viral. By understanding who is on TikTok, and why they are on TikTok, libraries can reach new audiences in a creative way.

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**PL Magazine Seeking Columnist for Innovations Column**

The PL “Innovations—New and Better Practices” (formerly “Best Practices”) column explores new and better solutions for library world challenges. We are seeking a writer who has the public library experience and knowledge to identify and explain the most efficient and effective techniques, methods, processes, and procedures, for reaching desired outcomes. Column length is 1,200-1,500 words.

You will be responsible for six columns per year, starting with the March/April 2023 issue of the magazine. The deadline for your first column will be early January 2023. This is an unpaid, volunteer position. You must be a member of PLA and able to turn in six columns a year either by writing the column or finding someone to write it for you (columnist on a specific subject).

If interested, please email PL Editor, Kathleen Hughes at khughes@ala.org. Include information about your library experience and writing samples or links to writing samples. The PL Advisory Committee will review applications and select the new columnists. Deadline is Monday, December 12, 2022.
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PUBLIC LIBRARY
STAFF AND DIVERSITY REPORT

RESULTS FROM THE 2021 PLA ANNUAL SURVEY

Sara S. Goek, PhD / sgoek@ala.org
Sara is Project Manager, Data and Research, at the Public Library Association.

Sara is currently reading Floating Coast: An Environmental History of the Bering Strait by Bathsheba Demuth.

With Larra Clark, Deputy Director, Policy, at the Public Library Association; Katina Jones, Program Manager, Evaluation and Assessment, at the Public Library Association; and the invaluable support of PLA’s Measurement, Evaluation, and Assessment Committee.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Public Library Association (PLA) 2021 Public Library Staff and Diversity Survey focuses on this most important public library asset by updating information on beginning librarian and library director salaries; documenting traditional and emerging staff roles; exploring staff diversity, recruitment, and retention efforts; and capturing information about public library equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) goals and activities. These are among the most frequent questions PLA hears from our partners and members, and they are urgent ones as the profession seeks to be representative of our diverse communities and advance equity and inclusion for all.

The survey results highlight both opportunities and challenges for the future of public libraries. While there are different levels and capacities in libraries of varying sizes, virtually all (95.2%) of public libraries report that they engage in at least one type of EDI activity. More than a quarter (26.6%) of public libraries have formal EDI plans, and a similar percentage (25.1%) report they have dedicated staff roles for equity, diversity, and inclusion.

“Traditional” library staff roles, such as children’s services and collection development, are the most common, but the prevalence of roles that incorporate social media and digital outreach (74.0%), workforce and small business development (18.2%), and social work (8.1%) illustrate a growing range of programs and services in public libraries.

However, we face significant challenges. Beginning librarian salaries have remained virtually flat for more than a decade, and library director salaries have fallen and climbed but not recovered to pre-Great Recession levels. In 2021 the median annual salary of a public library director was $79,022, and the median annual salary of a beginning librarian was $41,864.

Furthermore, more than a quarter of all public libraries report that they lost staff positions in the prior twelve months. For libraries that lost positions, more than half report that this primarily stemmed from staff leaving the workforce and not being replaced.

Like all surveys, these results captured a snapshot in time. PLA invited all US public library administrative entities to complete the survey in fall/winter 2021. In total, 773 libraries completed the survey, a response rate of 8.4%. Unless otherwise noted, survey results are weighted to account for differences between responding libraries and the universe of all US public libraries.

This report exists alongside ongoing research by the American Library Association (ALA) and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), to name a few. It is neither the first nor final word in this vital
space. The data provide an opportunity to learn and grow as libraries and all workplaces consider how they can best recruit, hire, develop, compensate, and retain a diverse workforce—particularly in the competitive labor market we see in 2022. To that end, the report includes not only a summary of the data collected, but suggestions of possible starting points for taking action with the results and additional resources that library staff may find helpful as they engage in further work. PLA is committed to supporting data-driven decision-making in public libraries and advocating for the needs of libraries and library workers as they continue to grow and innovate.

**ABOUT THE SURVEY DATA**

PLA fielded the Public Library Staff and Diversity Survey in fall/winter 2021. It is the second of PLA’s new set of three topical surveys, administered on a rotating annual basis starting with the Technology Survey in 2020. The 2021 survey was designed in response to requests from the field for better data about staffing and diversity trends. This first year of results provide a baseline so that when we ask these questions again in 2024, we will see how the field has evolved.

PLA invited all US public libraries (at the administrative entity level, as defined by IMLS) to participate in this survey. It opened in October 2021 on our new data platform, Benchmark: Library Metrics and Trends (librarybenchmark.org). In total, 773 libraries completed the survey, a response rate of 8.4%. Unless otherwise noted, the results presented below are weighted to account for differences between the responding libraries and the universe of all US public libraries. All questions on the survey were optional, and the tables in the Detailed Results section of the report include the number of respondents for each question. The percentage estimates reflect the percentage of respondents for a particular question, rather than the percentage of the full sample. See appendix A of the report available online (https://bit.ly/3RFlosT) for further details of the sampling and analysis methodology.

The charts below highlight responses for public libraries overall and by locale type. Locale indicates the level of urbanization of a given location, with libraries divided into the categories of city, suburban, and town/rural.

**SALARIES, ROLES, AND STAFFING TRENDS**

Public library staff are essential for the development and delivery of quality services and resources to patrons. Questions on this survey asked about the roles staff fulfill, salaries, opportunities for advancement, and hiring and retention strategies.

The Public Library Data Service (PLDS) survey, administered through 2018, asked two questions related to staff salaries: the annual salary of the library director and beginning librarian (defined as a new hire with an MLS degree and no prior professional experience). PLA retired the PLDS in 2019 and adopted these questions for the 2021 Staff and Diversity Survey. In 2021 the median annual salary of a library director was $79,022, and the median annual salary of a beginning librarian was $41,864.

Figure 1 shows the trend for salaries from 2002 to 2021. However, data from 2018 and earlier has not been weighted and is subject to bias based on the nature of the sample. Nonetheless, the trend shows the impact of the Great Recession post-2008 on directors’ salaries. Salaries for beginning librarians have remained fairly consistent over time, with a slight decline from pre-2008 levels. In 2021, city and suburban libraries report significantly higher median salaries compared to town/rural libraries.

The annual Public Libraries Survey (PLS) administered by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) asks libraries to report their number of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff. PLA chose to ask about the number of staff rather than FTE both to complement existing data and to center people rather than positions or hours. The survey also asked about temporary staff and volunteers. Our findings show that, unsurprisingly, the numbers of staff differ significantly by library type, with city libraries reporting an unweighted median of 45 full-time staff members and 28 part-time staff members, compared to 11 full-time and 14 part-time for suburban libraries and 1
full-time and 3 part-time for town/rural libraries (figure 2). In terms of FTE, the results from the FY 2020 PLS show that overall public libraries had a median FTE of 3.9, with medians of 43.6 for city libraries, 11.0 for suburban libraries, and 2.2 for town/rural libraries.\textsuperscript{2}

The Staff and Diversity Survey asked responding libraries to indicate whether they have staff whose job title or description falls under certain specified roles (figure 3). Overall, the top roles represented in public libraries are children’s services (91.2%), collection development (82.3%), adult services (81.6%), and youth/teen services (81.0%). Roles in children’s services rank first for all libraries by type: 83.6% of town/rural libraries have staff dedicated to children’s services, as do 97.7% of suburban libraries, and 100% of city libraries. Among town/rural libraries, collection development and public programs rank as the second and third most common roles. Among suburban libraries, adult services and youth/teen services rank second and third. For city libraries reference services replaces youth/teen services in third place (see table 6 for details). Emerging areas include roles in equity, diversity, and inclusion (25.1% of libraries overall), workforce and small business development (18.2%), and social work (8.1%).\textsuperscript{3}

Two open-ended survey questions asked respondents what new types of roles the library hired staff to fill in the previous twelve months and what new types of roles the library would like to create if funding were available. In the first question, 41% of libraries (out of 234 responses) report hiring staff in core service areas and support services (access, collections, reference, and technical services, and other support staff and paraprofessional roles). The responses also show an emerging staffing trend centered on community engagement, outreach, and public-facing work, a need perhaps tied to

\textbf{Figure 1.} Median salaries of library directors and beginning librarians in the United States, 2002–2021 (in 2021 dollars). \textit{Note:} Data from 2002–2018 is from the Public Library Data Service (PLDS) and is unweighted. 2021 results are weighted. All dollar amounts from 2002–2018 have been converted to 2021 dollars using the consumer price index (CPI). No data was collected in 2019 or 2020.

\textbf{Figure 2.} Median numbers of full-time and part-time staff (unweighted).
encouraging patrons to return to the library after the changes and challenges of the pandemic. 41.9% of respondents report hiring for new roles in those latter areas. The roles the library would like to create, if funding were available, follow similar trends. 40% of libraries (out of 467 responses) want to hire for roles in core service areas, and an additional 4.7% specified managerial or leadership roles. 67% of libraries would like to create new roles in community engagement, outreach, and public programs.

While this survey did not explicitly ask about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, it did include a question about whether the library lost staff positions in the prior twelve months. 27.2% of libraries overall report having lost staff positions. City (32.7%) and suburban (33.2%) libraries were more likely to

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**RESULTS FOR ACTION: ADVOCATING FOR STAFF**

**Result:** 27.2% of public libraries lost staff positions in the previous year.

**Why It Matters:** Libraries depend on people to provide vital resources, services, and programs to their communities. The uncertainty of the pandemic combined with factors including budget cuts and hiring freezes has had a negative impact on public library staffing levels. The demands of other responsibilities, including caregiving, also likely had an impact on staff leaving the workforce.

**In Practice:** At the local level, libraries will need to make the case to their stakeholders, including the board and/or local government, about the necessity of filling vacant positions and opening new positions to meet current needs. Peer comparison data can help with this. Use this report and the data available in Benchmark (librarybenchmark.org) to explore how your library’s staff numbers, roles, and other metrics compare to those of your peers. For example, if your library has fewer staff and lower salaries than other similar libraries, that could help you make the case for hiring additional staff. You can also show how reduced staffing has affected the library’s offerings and outputs if you are seeing a reduction in the number or types of programs compared to pre-pandemic years. Engaging in advocacy at the state and national level can help garner support for libraries and library funding at a larger scale. Providing better support for staff to reduce burnout, increasing flexibility, and creating opportunities for growth at your library can also improve the work culture and environment, mitigating some of the reasons staff leave.

**Limitations:** The decision to fill vacant positions or open new ones may be outside the library’s control and subject to budget constraints.
have lost staff positions than town/rural libraries (21.1%). For libraries that lost positions, 55.3% report it was primarily due to staff leaving the workforce and not being replaced. Other contributing factors include staff budget cuts, reduced service hours, and the consolidation or restructuring of staff positions.

Public libraries are not alone in facing staffing challenges: many library staff are local government employees, and municipal employment fell by 4.5% between March 2020 and March 2022.6 Looking at postings for open positions provides additional context for these findings. The number of ads for jobs in public libraries posted on ALA JobLIST dropped by 43% in 2020 compared to 2019.7 New job ads posted in the first three months of 2022 suggest the possibility of a recovery, as the total number posted surpassed prior records.

Offering opportunities for staff to develop their skills and advance within the field can both help libraries thrive and improve retention. A recent study from the Pew Research Center found that low pay and no opportunities for advancement were the top reasons why US workers left a job in 2021.8 Figure 4 shows the formal programs for staff advancement that libraries report offering. 97.9% of libraries overall offer at least one type of advancement opportunity. The most common is time during work hours or paid time off for...
professional development activities, which 97% of libraries overall offer (99.1% of city, 96.2% of suburban, and 92.3% of town/rural libraries). While 88.5% of libraries provide funding for professional development, other programs for advancement that incur costs—including tuition reimbursement and funding for professional association memberships—are less common.

STAFF HIRING AND RETENTION

Strategies for staff hiring and retention are critical to sustaining, growing, and diversifying the library workforce. This matters for our nation’s public libraries to continue to meet the needs of our communities now and in the future.

While library workers have become more diverse over the past few decades, the current demographics of the sector do not reflect those of the US population. Figures 5 and 6 show demographics of full-time and part-time public library staff, as reported on the 2021 survey. Data from the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey provides another source of information on the demographic make-up of library workers nationwide. While the exact results and methods used differ, these data consistently show that the demographic makeup of library workers does not reflect that of the larger population. Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) are underrepresented in the library workforce, while white people—and white women in particular—are overrepresented. That is not a judgment, simply a statement of fact. For community members visiting the library, it’s important for them to see themselves reflected in the people and collections they find there. For the library as an organization, research has shown that more diverse teams are better, more creative problem-solvers. The team benefits when its members can bring different perspectives to the table.

Not all libraries or local governments collect data on staff representation and not all were able to accurately report it. 153 libraries shared reasons for being unable to report this data: of those, 59.6% said they do not collect the data, 16.0% said they do not feel confident about its accuracy, and 14.8% said the data is collected, but they do not have access to it (for example, if it is collected at the city or county level). Other reasons for not reporting included not being able to break down the data by full-time and part-time staff or having only incomplete or outdated data.

Diversifying the profession will take continued purposeful effort. Nor is this a new issue: a 1985 report noted “a major crisis exists in the recruitment of minorities to the library profession.” At the time, the report found that 88.5% of the library workforce was white. While the profession has diversified gradually, many of the same problems and recommendations identified in 1985 do not sound out of place today: a focus on recruitment to the profession, the need for upward mobility within
the profession, and the importance of support for staff development and growth.

To further this work, the 2021 survey asked about strategies for hiring and retaining staff from underrepresented groups, including but not limited to gender, race, sexual orientation, or ability (figure 7). 91.7% of libraries report that they use at least one hiring strategy. The most common strategy is posting the position to a diverse range of audiences (73.6%). 50.9% of libraries offer implicit bias and/or cultural competency training for staff, but this is much more common among city libraries (78.4%) and suburban libraries (65.9%) than town/rural libraries (28.4%). 44.9% of libraries conduct blind reviews of application materials, and 42.5% include explicit EDI statements in their job postings. In the open-ended responses about other strategies used, three libraries mention working with local schools, colleges, and other local organizations as ways to both create a more diverse pool of applicants and strengthen community partnerships.

In terms of strategies to improve retention of staff from underrepresented groups (figure 8), 74.8% of libraries report they work to foster an inclusive workplace culture, and 52.7% report working to dismantle systemic racism in their organization. These are, however, relatively broad ideals, and far fewer libraries report concrete programs to support these staff members. Only 4.8% report creating action plans for employee retention, and 8.6% have a formal mentorship program for new hires. Other hiring and retention strategies respondents mention using or considering include the creation of affinity groups among staff, active support for professional development, and expanding the candidate pipeline through community partnerships, student internships, and fellowships for recent graduates.

**EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION**

Improving equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) for the profession supports the efforts of libraries to better serve their communities. Overall, 26.6% of public libraries report that they have formal, written goals related to EDI. The proportion is higher for city libraries (46.0%) and suburban libraries (28.8%) than for town/rural libraries (17.0%). Figure 9 shows the focus of the formal EDI goals for
libraries that have them. More than 90% of libraries with formal EDI goals have goals related to fostering an inclusive climate for library users, library collections, improving the workplace culture for library staff, and library events and/or programming. While in the majority of the areas specified city libraries are more likely to have formal goals, when it comes to accessibility town/rural libraries are more likely have goals in that area (a difference of 12%).

The survey also asked libraries to report the types of activities they engage in related to EDI (figure 10). 95.2% of libraries report undertaking at least one type of activity. The most common are focusing collection development on better representing diverse authors and perspectives (87.9%), supporting staff participation in EDI training or professional development (78.5%), and analyzing the demographics of local communities for use in planning (76.0%). Other types of EDI activities mentioned, beyond the specified list, include partnerships with community groups and renovations to improve accessibility to library buildings.

Intentional work to further equity, diversity, inclusion, and access in public libraries is an ongoing, iterative process. No library answered “yes” to all of these questions—nor would we have expected that. However, none of these questions received all “no” responses either. The results presented here reflect the range of engagement at libraries of all types across the country at one moment in time. Small, rural libraries face more challenges when it comes to staffing and capacity. One director at a rural library in the Far West staffed primarily by volunteers wrote, “Some of these more formalized EDI initiatives are simply beyond our organization’s ability. However, we are working to promote EDI in

RESULTS FOR ACTION: JOB INTERVIEWS

**Result:** While 50.9% of libraries overall report offering implicit bias and/or cultural competency training for staff, only 18.8% explicitly train search committees on best practices for inclusive hiring.

**Why It Matters:** In job interviews, perceptions of candidates may be affected by affinity bias—our tendency to like those with whom we share identities or characteristics, whether we attended the same school or follow the same sports team. While that may create a feeling of rapport in an interview, it is not a reliable means of evaluating a candidate’s skills or ability to contribute to a team.

**In Practice:** Have a clearly structured interview, use the same set of questions for all candidates, and follow a standard rubric to guide how the responses are evaluated. Train staff and search committees to be aware of potential implicit biases and make discussion of bias an explicit part of a hiring process. Ruchika Tulshyan recommends beginning an interview debrief with the question, “Where could bias be showing up in this decision?” While potentially awkward at first, it opens space for honest discussion of where perceptions of a candidate originate.

**Limitations:** Raising awareness, discussing bias, and having a structured interview process in place may all help disrupt bias among search committees. However, training alone may not be enough, and certainly not if it’s treated as a one-and-done item.
small ways, such as diversifying our library collection.” Over time, a rural library director from a Plains’ state wrote, “I trust that many of the ‘no’s’ in the survey will become ‘yesses’.” That hope is shared by counterparts in libraries of all types. A city library director in the Great Lakes reflected, “The work is humbling. And important. We have a lot of change in front of us and for those items that we marked “no,” we are hoping to be marking “yes” or at least “in progress” in the coming months and years.” The types of questions asked on the survey may change over time, too, as our understanding evolves. PLA’s hope by asking these questions is to prompt introspection—What is the field doing? What could we do better?—and to create opportunity and accountability for change.

CONCLUSION

The results of PLA’s 2021 Public Library Staff and Diversity Survey capture essential information
about the people who empower the nation’s libraries to thrive and efforts to ensure equitable service to our communities. Libraries are wellsprings of potential, offering vital resources and support that drive literacy, education, access, innovation, and so much more. However, like many public services today, libraries face significant challenges. These include persistent difficulties filling vacant positions and offering competitive salaries. Challenges also include those faced by our society at large addressing the legacy of persistent racism and taking steps to counter its effects. Libraries are not alone in this, nor will we solve these problems on our own.

We all have a responsibility to our profession and our communities to engage in this work, and the results of this survey show that it has already begun.

In the words of one respondent, “reckoning with where we’ve been (as a library and profession)” is an “ongoing process.” To make progress, we must be willing to “move past defensiveness and fear to be courageous.” Going forward, ALA and PLA will continue to work closely with our members and partners to continue to support and advocate for library workers, and to strive for libraries as more inclusive and accessible places.

LEARN MORE
The full report—including detailed tables and methodology—is freely available on the PLA website: https://www.ala.org/pla/data/plasurveys. Explore the data further in Benchmark: librarybenchmark.org.

REFERENCES AND NOTES
1. Another source of data on salaries is the ALA-APA Salary Survey Database, which includes a more detailed breakdown of salaries for different types of positions: https://ala-apa.org/salary-survey/.
4. ALA, Advocate’s Toolbox: https://www.ala.org/advocacy


FYI PODCAST: PUBLIC LIBRARY ASSOCIATION SURVEYS

In this episode we discuss the results of the Public Library Association’s 2021 Public Library Staff and Diversity Survey and the current 2022 Public Library Services for Strong Communities Survey. Our guests are Sara Goek, Project Manager, Data and Research, at PLA; Dan Hensley, Co-chair of PLA’s Measurement, Evaluation, and Assessment Committee (aka MEAC) and Coordinator of Adult Learning at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh; and Katina Jones, Program Manager, Evaluation and Assessment, at PLA and former member of MEAC. Listen at https://bit.ly/3Dxp8ae.
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Funded by the Government of Canada
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Acting on Climate Change

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Lanecia is a Library Assistant-Computer Emphasis at Cleveland Public Library, Glenville Branch.

Lanecia is currently reading *Monster: a Graphic Novel* by Walter Dean Myers.
As you are likely aware, climate change is one of the most overwhelming challenges facing the world today and the largest threat to humanity and the natural world. According to NASA, “effects that scientists had long predicted would result from global climate change are now occurring, such as sea ice loss, accelerated sea level rise, and longer, more intense heat waves.” Today we are witnessing global warming happening at a rate not seen in the last 10,000 years. Greenhouse gases produced by the oil, gas, and coal we use to operate our vehicles and buildings are contributing to the warming of the planet.

The heightened progress of climate change has caused devastation wrought by drastic atmospheric changes and extreme weather events (during which public libraries often play a central role providing essential services). These changes drive irreversible damage to the environment, which limits vital resources needed for sustaining life. Climate change also poses serious health risks and causes complications for humans and animal life. According to the MGH Institute of Health Professions, increasing allergens, air pollution, and extreme heat can cause health issues such as asthma and cardiovascular failure. The effects of climate change are wide reaching and increase the severity of violent weather events, causes the displacement of people living on coastlines, reduces the quality and abundance of food, contributes to the spread of disease, and disrupts the health of ecosystems on which our communities rely. Hundreds of animal species continue to be negatively affected by climate change. So much so that it causes disruption and premature death for species who typically thrive in colder temperatures. As the environment continues to get warmer, there will be an ongoing challenge to sustain a healthy environment on earth.

**EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES TO ACT**

While climate change continues to be one of the most pressing issues of our time, there is a lot that libraries can do to educate their users and empower them to make sustainable decisions. As information institutions, we can inspire our communities to utilize climate change resources and commit to ways of acting on this issue. We can provide programming and events that focus on combating climate change and prioritize environmentally centered events focusing on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. We also can examine the sustainability of our buildings and operations. Today, libraries across the globe are offering initiatives and working to provide access to climate change resources and information. Here is a look at how some libraries and other institutions are responding:


- **The Massachusetts Library System** held programs for their second annual “Climate Preparedness Week,” where libraries offered exhibits, storywalks, panels, and more to get the community prepared for weather related events. Find out more here: [https://guides.masslibsystem.org/ClimatePrepWeek](https://guides.masslibsystem.org/ClimatePrepWeek).

- **The Boulder (CO) Public library** is working to bring a climate change artist/activist-in-residence to the library. Among other requirements, the library asks that applicants be working in the field of climate change, with a focus on climate justice. They are asked to focus their proposal on climate change/justice to create a climate-related exhibition at the library. Read more at [https://bit.ly/3DW2Xf7](https://bit.ly/3DW2Xf7).

- **Mill Valley (CA) Public Library**’s program, Borrowed Time, helps to bring awareness to important issues regarding climate change. With a new topic each month, they are aiming not to change the minds of users who are skeptical, but to engage them in critical discussions to make...
positive change. More information about the Borrowed Time project is available to empower library staff to create initiatives to drive climate change awareness. Read about it at https://borrowed-time.org/mill-valley-public-library/.

- **The Anchorage (AK) Public Library** is committed to sustainability and its Mountain View Branch is one of the first LEED Gold buildings in Alaska. It hosts programming such as panels, forums, and other programs focused on climate change issues. The library also offers charging stations for electric vehicles. Find out more about these initiatives here: https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2020/09/01/ready-for-action-climate-action-plans/.

- **The Daniel Guillard Public Library in Cali, Colombia**, winner of the 4th IFLA Green Library Award in 2019. According to the IFLA award page, the library’s initiative “involves all ages and all the community in generating awareness on sustainability and green practice with visible impact. Thus, the library has innovative projects for all ages, from babies to seniors, including vulnerable people, and these projects combine information literacy, eco-literacy and reading. The library is focused on empowering their community that faces many social and economic problems to help rebuild the neighbourhood to make it eco-friendlier, while also improving social and economic conditions.” Read more at https://www.ifla.org/news/ifla-green-library-award-2019-winners-announced/.

- **Seattle Public Library** is using virtual reality to envision the rising sea levels of the South Seattle waterway. Through the Our Future Duwamish project, community groups such as the Boys and Girls Club and other youth groups can check out Oculus Quest 2 goggles to listen to informative presentations about the Duwamish River throughout the years.

- **The Lindenhurst (NY) Memorial Library** has several sustainability initiatives:
  - The library has installed solar panels and hosts a dashboard on their website so viewers can see how much power they are generating via the solar panels.
  - Hosted a bee hotel project for the Lindenhurst Public Schools Summer STEAM Camp. Here they created safe places for bees to rest and lay their eggs.
  - Offers a seed-lending library with an emphasis on pollinators.
  - Created a community garden.
  - Established a metal and e-waste recycling program.
  - Set up a self-service bicycle repair station.
  - Provides a comprehensive sustainability collection for the library community to borrow.

- **Public libraries across the US** are acting as cooling and warming centers for users who live in areas affected by extreme temperatures. When the city of Philadelphia declared a Heat Health Emergency, public libraries around the city became available as a safe shelter for many residents. Libraries in Chicago, Detroit, New York, and other cities also provide these services.

- **Toronto Public Library**’s “Environmentalist in Residence” serves as an industry expert in the area of conservation and sustainability, offering programs, workshops, and community consultations as part of the library’s Our Fragile Planet program. Check it out at https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/programs-and-classes/featured/environmentalist-in-residence.jsp.

Whether moving toward green buildings, planting community gardens, helping the bees, or educating the community, the efforts mentioned above show that libraries and related institutions are acting on this crucial imperative.

**ALA RESOURCES**

Not only can we look at other libraries to become inspired to act, but we can also turn to the American Library Association (ALA) and its abundance of resources targeting climate change. According to ALA, library leaders can feel overwhelmed or paralyzed about where to start when it comes to developing initiatives to fight climate change. ALA’s Resilient Communities: Libraries Respond to Cli-
mate Change grants (https://www.ala.org/tools/programming/climatechange), is a pilot program that provides support for public and academic libraries who wish to engage their communities in programs and conversations that address the climate change crisis. The $1,000 in grants will help to “fund in-person and virtual film screenings, community dialogues, and related events based on local interest; provide instruction and support for libraries to act as centers for community education and support during extreme weather events; and offer free climate change programming resources for the library field.”

In “Sustainability in Libraries: A Call to Action” (https://bit.ly/3BkxlNL), the ALA Council Committee on Sustainability created a briefing that details how libraries can deepen their understanding of ways to act on climate change and sustainable efforts. The document shares the idea of the “triple bottom line” as a core value of the profession, as well as what libraries can do to lead, how climate justice operates, and recommendations on what libraries can do to bring out climate awareness. The briefing recommends focusing on climate mitigation and climate adaptation/climate justice, which will prioritize decarbonization efforts as well as community collaboration and engagement. It also suggests several ways libraries can get started in the effort to fight climate change. Some ways include:

- Joining the ALA Sustainability Round Table.
- Joining the Sustainable Libraries Initiative, or at least reviewing their resources and downloading the Road Map to Sustainability app (https://sustainablelibrariesinitiative.org/contact). The stories on their website of libraries that have gone through the Sustainable Library Certification, may also be instructional.
- Utilizing a copy of the ALA’s “Resilient Communities: Libraries Respond to Climate Change: A Programming Guide for Libraries” and checking out ALA Editions titles on climate change.
- Checking out the ALA Resolution for the Adoption of Sustainability as a Core Value of Librarianship (https://bit.ly/3dimNqG).

**LIBRARIES LEADING THE WAY**

As leaders in the fight for climate sustainability libraries should champion open access to information, research, and resources; facilitate programming on the topic, including respectful discussion; look for ways to green their own environments and practices; and help to foster resilience in our communities.

Unfortunately, these initiatives may be cause for controversy in some communities. If that is the case for your library, try to find common ground to gain an understanding of what is causing the skepticism. Knowing your audience helps to create ideas centered around their needs, which may lead to greater buy-in.

Most importantly, we have the resources and an abundance of knowledge gained from research and our communities which prepares us to take the leap. As public service institutions in the community, we are inherently tasked with and expected to lead important conversations and establish awareness about climate change.

**REFERENCES**

ANDREW BOMBACK ON
THE CULTURAL SHIFT IN PARENTING
In Andrew Bomback’s illuminating new book, *Long Days, Short Years: A Cultural History of Modern Parenting*, the physician and writer investigates the factors that have made parenting so incredibly hard at this particular moment. The father of three candidly admits to oftentimes having felt unprepared to meet the challenges parenting placed in front of him, and set out to analyze the various stressors that have emerged for parents in the twenty-first century. The result is an enlightening, insightful, and self-effacing book that will prove useful to parents and non-parents alike. Critics have praised *Long Days, Short Years*, with Library Journal noting that Bomback’s “empathy and frankness shine through on each page. This book is enjoyable to read and likely to be validating for many parents of young children.” Bomback spoke with us about the origins of the book, why he chose to be so transparent in his own shortcomings as a parent, and the unexpected revelations writing the book provided.

**PL:** At the beginning of the book you make it clear that this book isn’t about giving advice on parenting. Can you talk about the purpose of the book and what inspired you to write it?

**AB:** The purpose of the book, for me, is to generally dissect and analyze why parenting has become such an anxiety-inducing, pressure-filled, stress-button issue for so many of today’s parents. From a personal standpoint, I started writing it because I was dealing with so many of these issues and I wanted to figure out why this was happening to me. As I explored the subject matter, I realized that this was something that’s not unique to me, but that this is really a shift that’s occurred in parenting over the last forty or fifty years that’s made it a twenty-four/seven, three-sixty-five job. Obviously it always has been that way, but it’s never felt the way it does now: the fact that it’s become something that parents today are recognizing is not what they thought they were getting into. I was trying to explore the evolution of parenting—specifically what factors drove that evolution—and in the process maybe find some clues or answers that might help my own parenting.

**PL:** One of the things I really liked was how you share so much of your and your wife’s experiences with parenting—

**AB:** You can say struggles. (laughs)

**PL:** Struggles and triumphs! But you write early in the book that parenting wasn’t your noble calling and that it’s something that you consciously work at to get better. Why was it important to include that in the book?

**AB:** I felt like that level of transparency is really important. I think that’s actually one of the things that would really help parents today, is if everyone is as transparent as I try to be or aim to be in the book. I feel like there are a lot of parents like me who are having difficulties, who feel like we’re just not naturally inclined to do this right, whether it’s the way we were raised or just the way we’re wired. It can be a very distressing thing to feel that way, to say, “This is something I’m not inclined to do well, but I think I can improve upon if I work at it.”

I had a similar epiphany with my career as a doctor. I felt like I was a good doctor, but I
wasn’t by any stretch of the imagination the exceptional doctor that I wanted to be, that I wanted to present for my patients. I had plenty of role models—including my own father, who’s a legendary doctor—who really felt like they were born to do the job. I didn’t feel that way. I actually spent many years working on a book about doctors, and I felt like that research and writing about it led to me being a better doctor. I look at the way I doctor now and it’s so heavily influenced by the work I did writing a book about doctors. I think there was a little bit of a hope that if I worked on parenting the same way—if I dove into it, explored it, looked at all of the things I’m doing wrong, all the things I’m doing right, looked at all my peers who are also parents, who’s doing it well, who’s doing it right—I could improve upon my own parenting. That quest began with a very harsh look in the mirror to say, “You’re not doing it the way you really should be doing it, and you’re not doing it the way you want to be doing it.”

I got a little bit of a push from my wife because she called me out on it as well. (laughs) The way she phrased it which really hit home was, “You’re a better doctor to your patients than you are a parent to your kids at times. You would never say that kind of thing to a patient. You have these kids who are equally—if not more—vulnerable, who are looking to you for that same sort of help. You should be doing that same sort of healing and mentoring and teaching that you do so naturally now with your patients.” I think she knew also that I had worked on that. It was sort of a push to work on my parenting.

PL: So how did your outlook on parenting shift through your research and writing of the book?

AB: To some degree I lowered the bar, which is maybe the most important thing I got out of it. (laughs) I realized that it’s virtually impossible to be the perfect parent, and that quest for perfection itself is part of the plague of modern parenting. That helped a lot, to say the goals that parents today are setting for themselves are really unobtainable, especially if you’re doing it by yourself. I think that was a very important lesson. But also just sort of opening my eyes to things like how much money we spend on our kids for activities and cultivation of their skills that really feels like it’s being driven by this anxiety of keeping up with the Joneses, but also keeping up with what you expect of your progeny, what you think the next generation should be. That competitiveness with other parents and your own vision is very injurious to the process of being a parent who enjoys the job.

I also learned a lot about gender differences. I think every male who’s involved in parenting has an idea about basically the different expectations that we have versus female parents, and that dads are often given breaks, often given lower expectations, and often exempt from some of the drudgery from parenting. I think we have an inkling of that, but until we dive into some of the narratives that moms have written—often reserved for other moms, that moms don’t always share with people outside of motherhood circles—it’s hard to really appreciate just how different the expectations are for moms than they are for dads. That also opened some of my views of parenting.

One of the things that was eye-opening to me was when you examined how pop cultural representations of parents have changed, and also the very gendered differences of
parents in terms of how the struggles of motherhood are portrayed in TV and books versus the struggles of fatherhood are portrayed.

AB: There is sort of a new micro-genre of amazing novels written by women exposing the nightmarish qualities of motherhood. They seem to come out one after another after another. I remember about a week after I turned in my final proofs for the book this novel, The School for Good Mothers by Jessamine Chan, came out. In it, women with varying degrees of parenting mistakes are sent to this jail-like reform school where they have to practice mothering dolls in front of a state supervisor to earn back the privilege of raising their kids. I was just like, “This is so up the alley of what I was writing.”

One of the things that’s interesting to me about modern parenting is that it’s so difficult, but there’s also this relatively new accepted practice of talking about the difficulties. I don’t know if that’s from a shifting demographic to younger parents who are more used to sharing because they grew up in the internet age and grew up with a lot more transparency in their lives so there’s not a lot of secrets to be kept. I feel that people are much more open about how difficult and how sometimes awful, how very often boring, and just how tedious parenting can be. I feel like there’s a lot more openness about that in pop culture than there was a decade ago. I feel like parents today—mostly women—are feeling more and more empowered to share this with the general community.

I personally love reading these books. I think part of the reason I love reading them is they empower you and make you feel seen with some of your impulses as a parent. In Night Bitch, for example, there’s a point in the book where the narrator gets her son to fall asleep by having him sleep in a dog cage next to her bed. If you just said, “There’s a mom who has her kid sleep in a dog cage next to her bed,” you’d be like, “That’s abusive.” But you’re following the narrative so closely and you’re following the way she’s processing everything so it feels completely natural. It also feels like a completely loving gesture to this boy to have him sleep in a cage and have him feel protected and safe. He gets his first great night’s sleep and all of a sudden he becomes a great sleeper.

These books feel so genuine, even though the premises are so out there. All these books have really sci-fi or speculative fiction or even horror tropes about them. They’re not really grounded in a hundred percent realism, but the parenting component is one hundred percent realistic. That’s why these books, I think, really work for readers in general, but especially for readers who are parents.

PL: Can you talk about the shift that’s occurred in parenting books? Today we’re more likely to see parenting books from experts in game theory, statistics, neurobiology. What is significant about that?

AB: I feel like this influx of outside experts on the parenting field is a signal that we’re trying to approach it in a similar way to how a consulting firm would come into a company. Where basically a company is saying, “We’re not working well, but our traditional tools won’t fix it. We need someone who’s completely external to give us an unbiased look at the problem and give us answers.” To me, the fact that these outside experts who really don’t have parenting credentials are writing bestselling parenting books and using the tools of their trade rather than typical child development tools signals there’s a part of parenting where they’re throwing up their hands and saying, “We’ll take anything that works! We’re more invested in the outcomes than the process. Whatever can get us to the right answer and the best version of our kids, we’ll do it.” What I think is funny is that if you take the Emily Oster books, which are runaway bestsellers, part of the reason why I think those books work so well is that they give a very reassuring message. To some degree there’s not a huge difference between what Emily Oster is telling her readers than what Dr. [Benjamin] Spock was telling his readers seventy or eighty years earlier: basically, you should listen to your instincts and inclinations. Spock was basically saying you should do that based on trust and confidence, while Emily Oster says, “I’ll give you the data to back up your instincts.”

For modern parents, that’s a more comforting presence alongside them. Rather than saying, “I’m not going to go in to the crying baby, I’m going to let the baby cry it out. Not because I think that’s the...
right thing to do, but because I have a study that shows me that kids who were allowed to cry it out for three nights in a row, by night four were sleeping the night all the way through.” It’s a more comforting reassurance than just to say, “I trust myself.” Spock was all about trust yourself. Some of these newer parenting experts are either trust the data or trust what we’ve learned from behavioral economics or trust the neuroscience. I think people are looking for guideposts and beacons of light. They’ll look for it in any source they can find, but I think the more exalted the source, the more likely it is to gain a following.

PL: What do you hope readers will come away with from your book?

AB: I hope readers come away with the realization that a parent in 2022 faces a set of issues that no parenting generation has faced before. The changes that have occurred in parenting over the last forty or fifty years are more rapid and pronounced than ever before. Today’s parents have an abundance of resources and far more potential sources of help than were previously available, but that menu of options is actually part of the anxiety of parenting. Parents have more tools than ever to do a “good job” of raising children, but having all those resources raises the stakes. If you don’t do it as well as you think you should, to some degree you feel like you don’t have excuses. I hope readers come away with more sympathy for the modern parent. Having all of these resources available to them may be more of a burden than a blessing to some parents.

That’s what I get into the last chapter, which I call “Precision Parenting,” which is a way to tie it all together. What I’m trying to say there is—this is where I say it’s a little bit of advice in the last chapter, but it’s not conventional advice. It’s more like here’s a general philosophy, which for me would be just like in medicine. With precision medicine, you’re now given more data than you could ever need for a patient, where you get multiple imaging scans, every lab under the moon, and a whole genome readout. Your job is to take the data and figure out how it applies to the patient right in front of you. With parents, your job is to figure out with all these resources and all these things I have at my disposal, which of them are actually going to work for the child that’s in my house. The way to get to answer that question is to start by getting to know the patient if you’re the doctor and getting to know the child if you’re the parent. The idea of doing a deep dive into your children the way I did a dissection of medicine and I did a dissection of parenting. You have to analyze and study and want to know everything about this child in front of you before you can start thinking about which resources you’re going to use.

PL: And finally, what role has the library played in your life?

AB: The public library is the most frequented place for my family. Very few families in my town know the upper limit of books you’re allowed to check out from our public library, but we do. Our town has an amazing public library that fits right above our train station, right on the Hudson river. It’s a place we go to get books, to rent movies, to work, to study, to seek out air conditioning, to play chess and checkers. Our public library is probably the most essential building in our community for my family, other than our home and our schools. When COVID shut it down, it was as big of a blow to our family as any shutdown. I use our library every day. People check their emails, I check my hold queue. It is such an integral part of my life I can’t even express it. I will say I use it much better as an adult than I did as a child. As a child I really used libraries more for school and school related projects. It’s only as I got older and a much more voracious reader that I really got to appreciate what the library could give to me. Fortunately both my wife and I were huge library users and huge readers by the time we had kids, so our kids have grown up with this idea that it’s all about the library. I would say a quarter of their shirts are public library t-shirts or reading t-shirts. You know how when authors talk about how exciting it was to see their book in a book store? To me it’s a thousand times more exciting to see my book in a public library. To me that is the dream come true.
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Ask just about anyone what their fondest memory is of the library, and you’ll often hear “going to story times when I was young.” Not only does this critical programming help to instill strong and early connections to literacy, it also helps prepare children for school success, develop a love of reading, and build a foundation for a lifelong connection to libraries.

Being able to capture the attention and imagination of your listeners of any age is a critical skill to develop in staff. According to editor Janice Del Negro, sharing stories isn’t just a skill—it’s an art and a technique that can be learned. In a recent conversation, she offered some insights for upping your storytelling game.

PL: How would you describe outstanding storytelling?
JDL: First I want to differentiate between storytelling and storytimes. Storytelling is the presentation of narrative orally, without a text, to a listening audience. Storytimes are early literacy programs, usually for pre-reading children, consisting of a variety of elements, including picture books, fingerplays, songs and other developmentally appropriate learning activities. Outstanding storytelling—and an outstanding storytime—requires commitment to both story and listeners, and real joy in the material being presented.

PL: If you were designing training for a new member of the children’s department staff, how would you teach them to offer great story times?
JDL: If I was training new staff to do early literacy storytimes I would start with a discussion of child development and the unique needs and talents of individual preschoolers. Exposure to developmentally appropriate resources—songs, fingerplays, flannel boards—is crucial to give new librarians a toolbox of elements from which they can draw. Shadowing an exemplar, observing, designing, and participating are all helpful. A broad knowledge of available picture books for young children—fiction, non-fiction, wordless, concept—is crucial to the success of early childhood storytimes.

Training new staff in storytelling is a different task. The intended audience can range from preschool through senior citizens, and the stories can be
traditional, literary, personal, or historical.

Starting with a base in traditional stories helps teach narrative structure, which is necessary for any story one wants to tell, so I might begin there. But the trick is getting people on their feet telling as quickly as possible, so through practice it becomes second nature.

**PL:** How can storytelling support a library’s intention to support equity, diversity, and inclusion?

**JDL:** Program design and content must intentionally and deliberately strive for inclusivity, and that means taking a broad number of variables into consideration, from story selection to accessibility. The growing number of own-voices picture books, for example, offers increasingly diverse choices. Storytelling in and of itself is a community-builder and can be used as an advocacy tool both inside and outside the library.

**PL:** How can we pick books and stories that will work best for storytime and/or storytelling?

**JDL:** When selecting picture books for storytimes start with reading them aloud. How do they sound? How do they scan? Where are the page breaks? Look for books that have elements known to appeal to the intended audience—rhythm, rhyme, action. Connect with colleagues doing storytimes for ideas and support. Take advantage of quality online resources, of which there are many. Learn from people who have been successful. Never use a story you don’t like.

That goes for storytelling too. Never tell a story you don’t like. Select stories first by how they resonate with you and then by appeal to audience, whatever age. Telling folktales from a variety of cultures offers a path to more inclusivity, but careful selection and an understanding of where the story comes from is part of the process. Numerous titles by librarian storytellers such as Margaret Read MacDonald and others are hugely helpful here.

**PL:** What can be added to the book to enhance a story time?

**JDL:** Storytime elements include developmentally appropriate songs, fingerplays, games, and other activities that extend the experience of the picture book. There are dozens of available resources, digital and print, available to help with this, including YouTube videos.

**PL:** You include a chapter on storytelling to Young Adults. How is that different—or the same—as working with young children?

**JDL:** What is developmentally appropriate for preschoolers is a long way from what is developmentally appropriate for young adults. The early learning extension activities drop away, and the concentration is on the best possible story selection and deliberate, straightforward delivery.

**PL:** What are some tips for storytellers working with persons with disabilities?

**JDL:** A working understanding of universal design can help create programs that meet the needs of all audience members.

**PL:** Given our recent safety challenges, a lot of storytelling is now virtual. Can these events be successful and, if so, what is required?

**JDL:** The rapidity with which Youth Services librarians took their programs from face-to-face to virtual was astonishing. The military wishes it could mobilize that fast. There were levels of success at first, of course, but most librarians achieved success quickly not just through trial and error but through sharing ideas and resources with other librarians. The variety of approaches were many, and the learning curve steep. Once there was an understanding of how virtual space delivery differs from real space delivery the programs really took off.
PL: How should Children’s Department leaders advocate to administrators in order to get adequate staffing and funding?
JDL: Do a great job. Keep track of successes both quantitatively and qualitatively. Understand the mission of youth services within the library mission and speak to it always. Tell the story of what quality youth services can do and tell it consistently.

PL: Can you describe your most amazing storytelling experience?
JDL: Years ago, I told stories with Augusta Baker at the dedication of the Charlemae Hill Rollins Storytelling Room. That was very memorable.

PL: What advice would you give to someone brand new to storytelling?
JDL: Listen to a lot of storytellers. Find a support group, guild, or other people interested in storytelling. Tell stories for critique and listen to advice. Read. Tell. Listen some more.

PL: This is the 5th edition of your book, which means storytelling must be evolving. What are the newest trends that you’re excited about?
JDL: The most fascinating thing I’ve noticed during the pandemic is the internationalizing of virtual storytelling. I have met and heard numerous tellers from around the world these past two years and it has been a transformative experience. The number of international young adults telling stories was also heartening. I don’t think zoom storytelling and programming is going away, I think it will just be absorbed into the mix.

PL: Is there anything else you’d like to add?
JDL: Telling the story of what libraries do is more crucial than ever. We cannot let others tell our story. We must control the narrative of the library in its community—what it is, what it does, and what it can do—in order to ensure our ability to best serve our communities.

We trust individuals to make their own decisions about what to read.
COVERING TOPICS THAT MATTER MOST TO PUBLIC LIBRARIES

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In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) added questions about changes to library services to the annual Public Libraries Survey in fiscal year 2020. While different libraries have different fiscal years, and therefore different dates for which they are reporting data, we can broadly compare findings for libraries whose reporting period ended from May through December 2020.

These charts focus on electronic materials and services. Overall, 70.8% of public libraries reported that they added electronic materials during COVID-19. The map shows the breakdown by state. Libraries provided many technology-related services before the pandemic, including electronic library cards (31.2%) and external Wi-Fi access (88.7%). During COVID-19 many libraries increased these services to meet patron needs for resources and access. 68.5% of libraries offered electronic library cards and 74.3% of libraries added and/or increased their external Wi-Fi access during COVID-19.

Compiled by Sara Goek, Program Manager, PLA

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Explore an online dashboard with these charts: https://tinyurl.com/IMLS20-COVID.
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