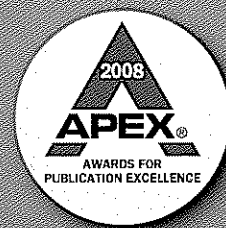


young adult library services



VOLUME 7 | NUMBER 2

WINTER 2009

ISSN 1541-4302

\$12.50

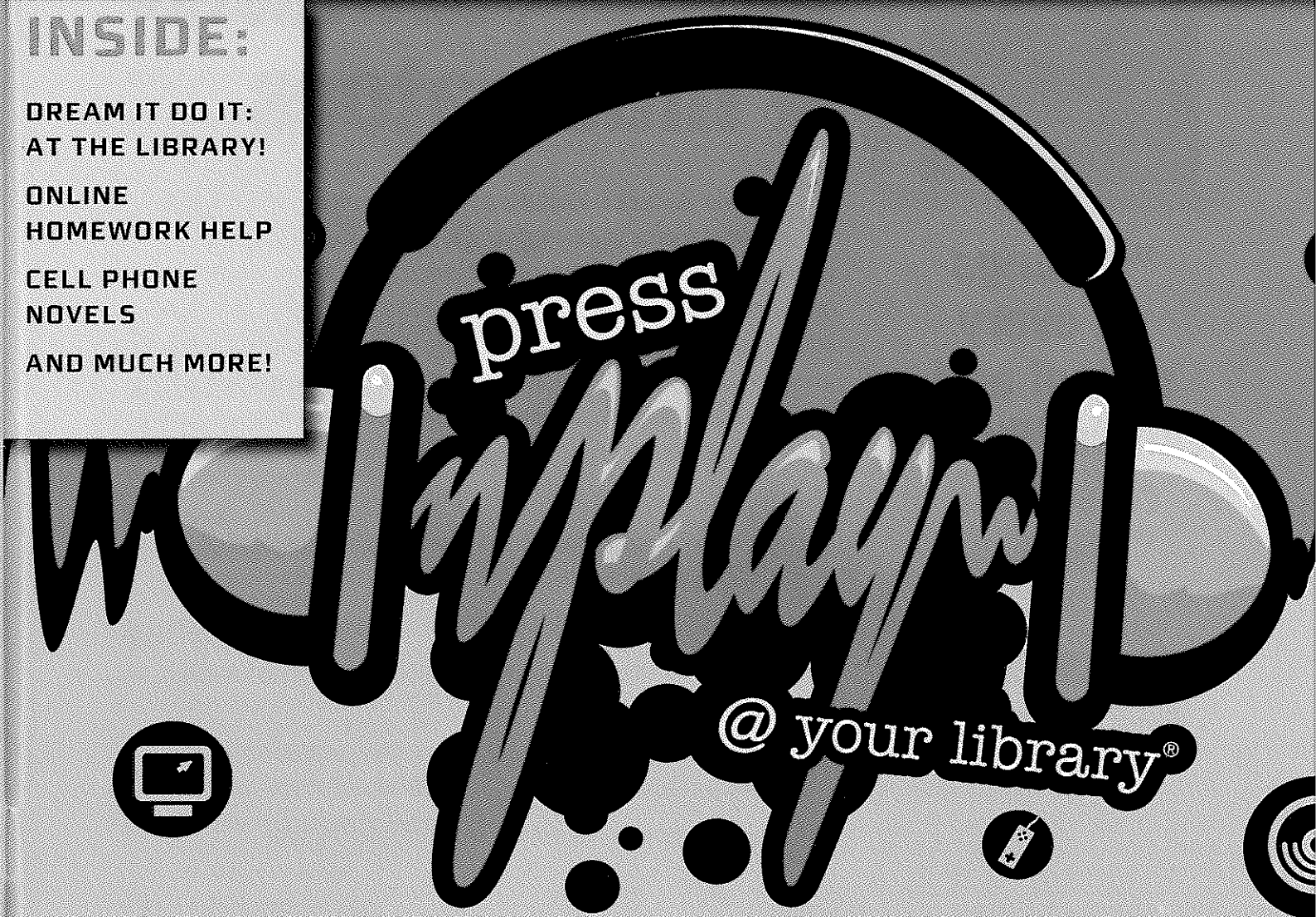
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TEEN TECH WEEK™
ISSUE!

feature

Best Practices

Dream It Do It: At the Library! Technology Outreach at a Juvenile Detention Center

Kelly Czarnecki

Imagine being in the library amidst conversation where youth are eagerly tossing ideas back and forth about ways to improve their communities. "I want to get people to volunteer and help clean up." "I would like to make a music club to help teens explore their talent." "I want to have a plan for making bag lunches and deliver them in downtown Charlotte to help the homeless." Wow! What enthusiasm and interest in making a positive contribution to their neighborhoods!

It is often said that those from the Millennial Generation (born between 1980 and 2000) have a high rate of volunteerism. According to the article "Managing Millennials" by Claire Raines, the message of "serve your community" has a profound effect on these youth and that 50 percent reported volunteering in their community.¹

Five incarcerated males, ages 16–17, located in the United States, currently have the opportunity to put this characteristic of their generation to use through a program called the Dream It Do It

Initiative (DIDI). The partner organizations involved in this program include Global Kids, Ashoka's Youth Venture, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, and a jail facility.

What Are the Goals of DIDI?

The goal of DIDI is to have groups of youth (ages 13–17) develop and launch their venture. A group can be made up of two people minimally. A venture, as defined by Youth Venture (www.genv.net) whose subheading is "Building a Global Movement of Young Changemakers" includes the following tenets:

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1. The project must be a new club or organization. In other words, even though there are plenty of organizations in communities that are already doing great work, the youth are required to be truly entrepreneurial and develop their own goals and how they want to achieve them.
2. The project must be youth driven. While the youth can work with adult allies that can help guide them, the adults helping with the project are not making the decisions for the youth.
3. The project is sustainable. It is not meant to be a one-time workshop or event, but something that will be ongoing and able to grow with up to \$1000 in seed money provided by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation per group.
4. The venture benefits the community in some way.²

Who Are the Partners?

Exploring the fourth tenet a bit further will help the reader understand who the organizations involved in DIDI are and why they are involved in the first place. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation: Health and Healthcare Improvement (www.rwjf.org) is involved in this project and funding it from a healthcare angle. The ventures must improve the health of the community. While some people might automatically think that means the absence of disease, it encompasses a much broader definition. According to the World Health Organization, "health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."³ So

far, the guys involved in the project totally get this. In some ways, perhaps more vividly than others who might not be exposed to the same social conditions that they are in their neighborhoods, schools, or the jail itself. For example, in discussing the issues in their neighborhood, they not only identify drugs as a problem but the drug dealer. Several of the teens share the same interest of not wanting younger kids to make the same decisions they did to end up in jail and thus relate their venture ideas around providing more productive activities for the youth to be involved in. A project called the Chicago Project for Violence Prevention (<http://tinyurl.com/3gbkl2>) spearheaded by physician-epidemiologist Gary Slutkin and funded in part by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, took the approach that violence is a public health issue and worked to develop community-based task forces, particularly including those who were ex-offenders themselves. An initiative of the program called CeaseFire (www.ceasefirechicago.org) has also used Second Life as a medium to learn anger management issues.

Ashoka's Youth Venture is an organization with locations throughout the United States. They have been involved in supporting youth to address social needs for fourteen years by providing tools and support to help make their dreams a reality. Global Kids (www.globalkids.org) is an organization based in New York City that works with urban youth to help make them successful students and global leaders. Their online component of youth leadership involves youth blogging, initiating and discussing current-events topics, and participating in the virtual world of Teen Second Life (<http://teen.secondlife.com>) among other virtual worlds, where youth have raised awareness on many global issues including sex trafficking, AIDS, the Holocaust, and social networking, and have worked with youth from all over the world to do so.

How Does the Library Fit In?

Chances are, while your library might not be a direct partner of any one of these organizations, you and your teens are probably engaged in similar work. Many public libraries look to the Minnesota-based Search Institute (www.search-institute.org), which has a list of forty developmental assets that can help youth grow into healthy and caring adults and can often provide justification of many youth programs in libraries in the first place. Assets DIDI particularly address include:

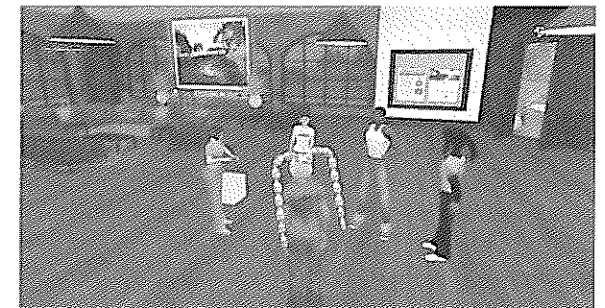
- Other Adult Relationships: Young person receives support from three or more non-parent adults
- Youth as Resources: Young people are given useful roles in the community
- Positive Peer Influence: Young person's best friends model responsible behavior
- Constructive Use of Time (Youth Programs): Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school or in community organizations
- Commitment to Learning: Young person is motivated to do well (in school)
- Caring: Young person places high value in helping others
- Planning and Decision Making: Young person knows how to plan

- ahead and make choices
- Positive View of Personal Future: Young person is optimistic about his or her personal future⁴

The Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County has been involved in outreach services with the jail facility for several years. I started in 2006 with an existing book club for youth. I met with the



Partners and youth meet to go over the guidelines of the workshops: participation, one mic, and safe space.



Youth and partners gather in the DIDI coffeehouse to begin the workshop.



Youth give a mock presentation to the partners on stage at the DIDI coffeehouse.

youth in the library every other week, and we discussed a variety of books including *The Coldest Winter Ever* by Sistah Souljah and *Stuck in Neutral* by Terry Trueman. I began to get more interested in connecting to the youth through technology, as that is what we were doing at my library. When one of the guys in the group suggested making a movie of a puppet show they could show their children (some of the incarcerated youth are fathers), I was able to bring the camera to the facility to film the skits the guys created.

I have used technology with the youth in other ways, including blogging about their experiences and what they're reading, participating in Teen Tech Week™ programs such as "finger DDR" (download at www.stepmania.com), and if they are going home soon and want to sign up online for a public library card, I have assisted them in doing so. Using technology is a twenty-first-century social skill that can help youth become productive members in society. If youth aren't able to engage in these skills, "they will find themselves left behind in school and in the workplace," according to Henry Jenkins in his paper, "Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century."⁵ While it's true that many facilities won't allow online access for obvious reasons, it's fortunate that those in charge of this facility feel that access is important and that the positives of engaging in this way outweigh the potential dangers of allowing online access.

The Changemakers

The group of five, also self-referred to as the "Icebergs" (because they are so cool), meet weekly in the jail library with Global Kids and Youth Venture online in the virtual world of Teen Second Life. The island, or the space in which they meet, is closed down to others, which is frequently done

with many workshops, but particularly with this one to ensure that the only interaction occurring with the group is with the staff involved in the project. The young men are represented by an avatar, a digital representation of themselves. They each use a laptop and communicate through text chat. Workshops are designed to help the teens develop and plan their venture. They discuss an action plan and what they can do now while they are in jail to contribute toward their venture (such as create flyers or write a song to raise awareness about their project), what roles each young man in the group would like to take on, how to allocate their seed money budget, and how to present their ideas in front of a panel.

Much of their interaction takes place offline and in person as well as online, but not just on the island. They are given journals to keep track of their ideas throughout the week in addition to the blog posts they write (available at www.holymeatballs.org/second_life/didi_initiative). They often cite communication through text chat and blogging as important skills they are learning. Developing their thoughts through instant messaging, posting photos of their avatar, and even podcasting (which will be posted soon on ReZEd, a virtual worlds community hub at www.rezed.org) are all part of DIDI. As one teen, known as Icey in Teen Second Life, writes,

Getting up out of bed to attend these online meetings with second life, and teen second life was always a great pain, but I can tell you from my own mouth, it was worth it. This program is a really great way to keep a positive mind and if you're on that path, then I think you [should] really try it!!!!

Since the young men are still in the developmental stages of their ventures, we don't have any final outcomes to report.

How Can Libraries Get Involved in a Similar Project?

Perhaps starting out with access to Teen Second Life won't fly with your organization, but introducing technology in small ways to a jail facility where your library is already doing outreach would be a natural way to start. If you're able to bring in such tools as a digital camera, let the librarian keep it until he or she is comfortable that all pictures have been cleared out. If you're able to bring in gaming consoles and peripherals, take photos beforehand so the librarian can look at exactly what it is you're bringing and identify any possible materials that you might not be allowed to introduce to the facility. If allowing the youth to access a blog isn't possible, perhaps distributing journals where they can write what they want to post would be a compromise. If you sense there is a possibility the door might be open to allowing the teens to use technology, use the following resources to help develop a proposal explaining how teens' access to technology can help keep them on track with learning in the twenty-first century. YALS

Resources

- Braun, Linda. 2006. *Teens, Technology, and Literacy: Or, Why Bad Grammar Isn't Always Bad*. Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited.
- Farkas, Meredith. 2007. *Social Software in Libraries: Building Collaboration, Communication, and Community Online*. Medford, N.J.: Information Today.
- Global Kids Second Life Curriculum. 2008. www.rezed.org/group/GKscurriculum. Accessed Dec. 12, 2008.

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