

---

# MAKE YOUR POINT

---

Opinions on Issues in Library Service

---

## Billions of Books

---

*A focus on youth, libraries, and reading will propel youth librarians into a win-win situation in their communities.*

---

Despite all of our efforts, many children in communities and schools across the United States cannot read, and they leave school illiterate. Others can read, but, by the fifth grade, they stop reading for enjoyment and do as little as possible beyond school assignments.

We can put the blame on television, on poor teachers, on the lack of librarians working with youth in public and school libraries, or on any other convenient reason or excuse. But it is ultimately our problem, as librarians, to find an answer.

The solution to a literate society is so obvious that it has often been overlooked. The simple fact is that youth learn to read by reading. Any youth librarian who succeeds at getting children to read contributes to their reading comprehension, their spelling, their grammar, their writing, guaranteed! (Krashen, Stephen. *The Power of Reading*. Libraries Unlimited, 1993.) It is not surprising that the Colorado study just published (Lance, Keith Curry, Lynda Welborn, and Christine Hamilton-Pennell. *Impact: School Library Media Center*. Hi Willow Research and Publishing, 1993) revealed that the best predictor of academic performance is the existence of a large elementary school collection and a librarian actively involved in the curriculum. The same evidence exists for public librarians who engage in read-

ing initiatives (Heyns, B. *Summer Learning and the Effects of Schooling*. Academic Press, 1978).

With this in mind, the American Library Association is considering the feasibility of a program that will empower the youth librarians of this nation for a century of literacy. That program proposal is "Billions of Books and Billions of Bucks" (BBBB). President Marilyn L. Miller is working with a National Committee, cochaired by the two authors of this article and including Nancy Bolt, Pamela Bonnell, Hardy Franklin, Rhetta Patrick, Christie Tyson, Diana Young, and ALA staff members. Our committee representing public and school librarians is seeking your support, your confirmation that youth, reading, and our youth libraries are of vital importance.

"Billions of Books" is a challenge to the youth of this nation to read at least 4,000,000,000 books over a two-year period. This program will link *all existing* reading programs into a single umbrella program that will have enough time and enough reading to guarantee a rise in literacy.

This focus on youth, libraries, and reading will propel youth librarians into a win-win situation in their communities. At the present, those who develop budgets for schools and public libraries give short shrift to libraries for youth, in book and materials budgets, and in staffing. School library media center budgets are always among the first reduced. Although youth represent the highest circulation in public libraries, the proportion of book budgets for children's and young adult collections is far less than for adult materials.

While high schools may have a full-time library media specialist, elementary and middle school libraries are likely to have part-time or no professional help. Furthermore, many small public libraries have persons designated "children's librarian" who have none of the formal education or experience required for those working for adults. We are considered

more as supplementary rather than as active partners in the effort to help youth learn to read.

School district administrators and public library trustees are only now beginning to see the need for trust funds and endowments. Only when these are established, however, will library programs for youth become a more important priority than the maintenance of circulation systems, the business reference collection, and the bestsellers.

Our plan will change the reading habits of youth and will strengthen our relationship to the reading program. We can move our library programs for youth to higher priorities in our schools and public libraries. We can refocus our image and our energies, to become aggressive proponents of library services to youth.

Is there opposition? You bet there is! Some comes from other librarians who know that focusing on youth and their libraries will shift the nation's attention to this neglected segment of public library and private school budgets.

Youth librarians will learn how to establish endowments and trust funds for their libraries. These accounts will insure materials for their youth in public and school libraries, private and public schools, home schooled children, in libraries in the summer and when schools are closed. A national collection point will also be established to gather the statistics on how many books youth do read through existing summer reading programs, author choice programs, as well as new experiences initiated by BBBB.

This proposed program will focus on youth and their reading in a way that will bring help to EVERY reader and nonreader in this nation. We believe it can happen! We want you to join us for one or two years to make this vision reality.

For more information about "A Billion Bucks For A Billion Books," contact members of the committee at P.O. Box 266, Castle Rock, CO 80104.

---

David V. Loertscher is Senior Editor, Libraries Unlimited (Englewood, CO); Blanche Woolfs is Professor, SLIS, University of Pittsburgh.