

InULA 1998 Scholarship Awards

The Indiana University Librarians Association (InULA) congratulates Lisa Marie Julka and Brianne Williams, the winners of this years' 1998 InULA Scholarship Awards. The amount of each award is \$1,000. The purpose of the InULA Scholarship is to encourage and reward the potential for excellence in the library and information science profession.

The next application deadline is March 1, 1999. For more information visit InULA Web at <http://www.indiana.edu/~inula/>. Following are the winning essays, enjoy!

Emma Dederick-Colón

Philosophy of Librarianship and Career Goals

by Lisa Marie Julka

Librarianship can be summed up in one word: service. While job descriptions for individual librarians may vary greatly, service lies at the heart of what all librarians do. Whether devising new ways to reach the public, developing records for library resources or working with children to instill in them a love of reading books, all librarians share service as their main focus. As a reference librarian, I see my job as serving library users by providing the best possible instruction on how to access relevant information and use the wealth of resources contained in the library. Providing quality reference service requires knowledge of the users and collections, good management skills and a commitment to education.

Since reference librarians work the "front lines" they have the advantage of having daily contact with the users of the library. Because of this, they are able to be constantly gathering useful information about what types of materials are being used by patrons and with what degree of frequency. This knowledge or expertise can be very useful to the library if reference librarians actively take part in purchasing decisions. With the abundance of both electronic and paper resources on the market today, deciding how to develop the collection has become increasingly complex. Library managers are faced with the task of selecting resources from a myriad of possibilities. Numerous questions arise. Is it better to select an item in paper format, electronic format or both? If an electronic resource is selected, will it be mounted locally on the network, will it be a stand alone CD-ROM, or will remote access be provided? What type of licensing restrictions exist when purchasing access to remote databases? How will these electronic resources be archived and preserved? All of these issues must be examined, the tradeoffs considered, and then decisions made. Reference librarians should work hand-in-hand with library managers to provide answers to these questions and make wise purchasing decisions.

A reference librarian must also be able to effectively manage a staff of assistants. I am fortunate to have had a supervisor whose managerial style really inspired me. She took an active interest in

uncovering the existing talents of her staff and fitting their personal goals with the goals of the library. She made us aware of what needed doing in the library and then encouraged us to tackle those tasks which were of greatest interest to us. As the assistant working under this manager, I experienced great job satisfaction as I knew that I was improving the library's services while being accountable for both my successes and failures. Within certain boundaries established by my supervisor, I had the freedom to handle the project in the best way that I could. Library managers must be able to delegate responsibilities, allow their employees to accomplish these tasks to the best of their abilities and be prepared to step in if some further guidance or direction is needed. Encouraging participation in library operations and decision making is the key to success. It builds acceptance of change and a commitment to the direction of the organization.

A commitment to education is another important part of being a reference librarian. In today's rapidly changing library environment, it is crucial to be pro-active in promoting information literacy in library users. Offering workshops, training sessions and one-on-one instruction are ways in which reference librarians can assist users in learning how to use electronic resources. The lack of standardization in interfaces and the need to know a variety of access strategies, search commands and protocols make user instruction a challenge to librarians working in an electronic environment. Concentrating on designing and conducting user education programs which are informative and fun is an important goal. In conjunction with offering training sessions, reference librarians must continue to provide one-on-one instruction. Users possess varying degrees of computer skills and often require this type of individualized instruction. Preparing guides and other user aids and making these available in the library is another strategy for promoting user education. Having confidence in our role as educators is crucial towards supporting our goal of serving as a bridge between the user and the enormous amount of data that is available.

Finally, in addition to educating others, it is equally important to set aside time in the week dedicated to self-education and professional development. I believe that embracing lifelong learning is the key to a successful career in the library profession. As an aspiring professional librarian, I am determined to make it a priority to attend workshops, conferences and seminars to keep my skills updated, stay abreast of new technologies, and retain close professional contacts. Reference librarians need to set priorities and make efficient use of their time in selecting materials and spending the collections budget wisely.

Upon entering the School of Library and Information Science (SLIS) at Indiana University, my specific career goals were uncertain. Consequently, my strategy when registering for classes was simply to take those courses which appealed to me the most. Three areas of librarianship soon emerged and have continued to be of interest to me: reference work, library management and library technology. I took as many courses as possible in these areas and hope to put the knowledge I have gained to some use upon graduation from SLIS. With this in mind, my immediate career goal is to gain a few years of library experience in the reference department of a college or research library. This experience as an academic reference librarian will serve as the stepping stone for future positions. I hope to continue my formal education while continuing to work in a library. As my educational background is in languages and literature, I intend to pursue a second Master's degree in either Comparative Literature or Japanese which would allow me to work as a branch manager and bibliographer in one of these content areas.

I think it is an exciting and challenging time to be a librarian. I look forward to being able to pursue my goals and make a personal contribution to the library profession.

Public Libraries and Youth Services: Empowering a Generation at Risk

by Brianne Williams

Before I came to librarianship, I began my graduate studies in English literature with an emphasis on contemporary writing and gender studies. While I pursued my master's in this field, I developed skills in writing and textual analysis, and an appreciation for the importance of multiple perspectives. I learned to communicate these strategies to students, and to motivate them to read critically and express themselves. Helping students to empower themselves was the most rewarding part of my experience in the English department, and it is also what drew me to public librarianship, particularly youth services. To me, children's and young adult librarians have an opportunity and a duty to lay the foundation for the education and well-being of American youth.

The two years I spent teaching elementary composition here at Indiana University gave me a keen understanding for the problem of information illiteracy. I was amazed at the near-universality of this plight among my students. Most were unaware of the proliferation of resources available to them and unsure of how to differentiate between them. The explosion of data over the Internet has of course magnified this problem tenfold. The need for a functional awareness of information quality is now a requisite for academic success and necessary for life after college, as well. Yet these skills are rarely taught in school. As a primary information access point, libraries are uniquely situated for this task.

The earlier young people learn how to determine information quality, the better equipped they will be as citizens, consumers, and students. This is one reason I've chosen to pursue children's and young adult librarianship. On the road to information literacy, young people must be exposed to a wide variety of viewpoints, and political, moral, and intellectual stances. As Masha Kabakow Rudman writes, "we have to communicate that we only get at the truth if we are comprehensive and wide-ranging in our search for it."⁽¹⁾ Finding creative and effective ways to teach information literacy is one of the primary responsibilities of youth librarians today.

But this marked need for information literacy is not the only reason I plan to specialize in youth services; I also have a deep concern for the psychological health of young people today. In the December issue of American Libraries, a library media specialist from Georgia wrote of her encounter with a suicidal fifth-grader. With quick thinking and care, Jan Rice McArthur averted potential tragedy, talking the young boy into contacting his father and talking to a

counselor. ⁽²⁾ Problems such as this are no longer so uncommon among youth. In fact, teenage suicide rates have climbed 200 percent in the last forty years and one out of every ten teenagers now attempts to kill her- or himself. ⁽³⁾

The public library has an important role to play in the amelioration of this problem, and as a youth services librarian, I believe I do too. There are certainly agencies that serve youth at risk more directly. But the library is unique in its ability to provide a wide range of preventive medicine. Children and young adults make up a significant percentage of public library patrons (young adults alone account for 25 percent of library patrons across all sizes of public libraries ⁽⁴⁾). We have the ability to reach these children and young adults before they enter a crisis, and offer them a variety of protective services, all without judgment. This protection may take the form of information about community services, stories about young people who have been in their predicament (no matter what that predicament might be), or connections to people willing to listen. At most libraries there are programs that foster self-esteem and personal development in a dozen different ways: through literacy and homework help, involvement with community and government, and dazzling displays of the potent world of knowledge.

I'm convinced such programs do make a difference. I've seen it in my own life, where access to learning played a huge role in building my sense of self. But it's not only my own experience that gives me such faith in the power of the connections between people and information. I have seen the same effects on the lives of others in crisis: I spent a season reading aloud to children whose parents were inpatients at a substance-abuse program. The great delight and fulfillment the kids derived from the books we read together seeped into the rest of their lives. Especially when they found echoes of their own struggles (in Harriet the Spy's quest for self-reliance, for example), they seemed to learn as much about themselves as they did about the characters with whom they identified.

At the Family Housing Library, too, where I serve as a Graduate Assistant, I've seen the library make a difference on a daily basis. The friendships my staff and I form with our young patrons help us provide them with programs and resources they need and desire. We've worked hard to increase their access to all kinds of information. Because there is stiff competition to use the CD-ROM resources on our computer terminals, we started a circulating collection of CD-ROMs. When we discovered that more boys than girls were utilizing these resources, we worked to broaden the appeal of our collection, and found products that target a female audience. By being sensitive to patron needs, we've increased our educational potential, reaching more children more effectively.

Every public library has a great contribution to make in the lives of its young patrons. And while I look forward to working directly with the children and young adults of whom I write, I plan to argue the case for their importance from other positions as well. Too few library directors today have experience with young adult services. Both as a significant current population and as future patrons and community leaders, they are an extraordinarily important user group. Though many children's librarians advocate vociferously for young adult services, there is a limit to what they can accomplish. As a library director I hope to ensure service to all patron groups, making a place for young adult programs in the tightest budget. After all, the issues of information literacy and general well-being apply to all patron groups. Making these concerns central to a library

increases its vitality and relevance to the entire community.

Notes

¹Masha Kabakow Rudman, "An Educator Speaks," Journal of Youth Services in Libraries (Winter 1994): 171. [back](#)

² Jan Rice McArthur, "When an 11-Year-Old Wants to Take His Own Life," American Libraries (December 1997): 45-46. [back](#)

³Harry F. Waters, "Teenage Suicide: One Act Not to Follow," Newsweek (18 April 1994): 49. [back](#)

⁴Survey Report: Services and Resources for Young Adults in Public Libraries. (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, 1988), 1 (ED 301 199). [back](#)