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**Bridging the digital divide:
libraries providing access for all?**

“Beyond Access, Beyond Literacy: Peer Mentors as Agents of Change in a Juvenile Detention Center Library”

Joe Coyle

Graduate School of Library and Information Science

Champaign, Illinois, USA

coyle5@illinois.edu

Presentation type

Paper

Purpose of this paper

Partnerships between libraries, community organizations, and Juvenile Detention Centers (JDCs) can build communities of (digital) literacy and can increase the life chances of incarcerated youth. The purpose of this paper is to explore the roles of youth peer mentors in this community building process, focusing on the Illinois based organization “Peer Ambassadors.”

Background

Little research has been published on the importance of establishing sustainable relationships between library and information science programs, libraries, JDCs, and peer mentor organizations. The literature that does exist most often limits its discussion to the ways singular libraries can extend their services to youth in the juvenile justice system. Youth are rarely discussed as agents of change in the literature.

Methods used for the study

The researcher spent a semester volunteering with Peer Ambassadors on their JDC library project and conducted a review of the existing literature on JDC libraries.

Findings

The youth led organization “Peer Ambassadors” provided a unique approach to JDC programming that went beyond a focus on literacy and good decision making, developing a more holistic model of youth empowerment. This model extends previous research on restorative justice in JDCs related to library work and can be implemented by other community partnership arrangements.

Importance and interest of the study

More research needs to be conducted about the diverse methodological strategies of establishing meaningful connections between libraries, LIS programs, JDCs, and youth community organizations. Because this research was conducted over only one semester, future longitudinal studies can explicate more concretely the impacts of peer mentoring on incarcerated youth.

Value of paper

This paper illustrates best practices in forging sustainable connections between LIS programs, JDCs, libraries, and youth mentoring organizations. It also fills a gap in the literature on the ways youth empower other youth in JDC settings.

Joe Coyle (coyle5@illinois.edu) is a first year Master's student in the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois. He is interested in community informatics, digital inequality, participatory action research, academic libraries, and gender studies.