

# Youth Services Forum: Past, Present, and Future

by Shanna Hollich, Allyson Lauer, and Amanda Liss

**T**he Youth Services Forum (YSF) plays a prominent role in the Virginia Libraries Association (VLA), promoting quality library programs and services for children and youth across the Commonwealth. The Forum advocates for information access on behalf of Virginia's young people; fosters the exchange of ideas and information among those who serve this age group; and presents awards to children's book authors for outstanding writing in historical fiction, biography, and American history. YSF promotes reading as a year-round, life-long activity that is both enjoyable and essential for children of all ages.

## The Past

Although the Youth Services Forum has existed for a long time, in some form, its name changed as the VLA continued to evolve. In November 1996—the earliest date for which meeting minutes are available online—the Forum was still known as the Children's and Young Adult Round Table (CYART). Although it was the early years of web development, CYART created its own webpage in 1997–98 and was fully present when the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) sponsored its first Teen Read Week in 1998.

In 1998, the VLA Council decided to do away with round tables, and the name of the group was changed to the Youth Services Forum. This was the same year

that the VLA Council and the Volunteer Management Round Table decided to begin awarding a Youth Volunteer award for an outstanding volunteer working in the area of Youth Services. During the late 90s and early 2000s, YSF also provided meaningful support to those working on the Virginia Young

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Readers Award, which eventually became the Virginia State Reading Association's Readers' Choice lists.

Arguably the most visible work of YSF is the Jefferson Cup Award program, and this was no different in the past. The Jefferson Cup, which has been awarded annually since the 1982 publishing year, was an important way for a state rich in history to encourage historical children's literature. It also provided a chance for librarians to meet authors at the annual conference. The original focus on works of history and biography was soon expanded to include historical fiction. Though the program started small, over two hundred specialists in youth and children's literature have been involved in the selection process, and the Jefferson Cup

Award Committee now reviews well over two hundred books a year. The Jefferson Cup has been awarded to such distinguished authors as Margaret Rostkowski (1987), Jim Murphy (1994 and 2001), Gary Paulsen (1999), and Katherine Paterson (2000).

The year 2008 saw the advent of the YSF wine and cheese social reception at the VLA annual conference—now a staple of the event and an excellent opportunity for librarians working with children and teens to meet, network, and compare notes. Also in late 2008,

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the decision was made to specifically include children's and young adult (YA) literature reviews in the reviews section of *Virginia Libraries*, another nod to the importance of youth services.

Over the years, CYART (and later, YSF) did much in the way of outreach—supporting children's and youth librarians all over the state; conducting letter-writing campaigns to increase awareness of children's and YA services; leading workshops and programming at VLA annual and regional conferences to foster ideas and promote professional development; collaborating with the Library of Virginia's youth services librarian; and providing support for Read Aloud Virginia programming.

Looking through the *Virginia Libraries* archives, it is clear that the importance of youth services programming has been long recognized within VLA. Articles have been published, some quite recently, on topics such as internet filtering in Virginia public libraries; fostering literacy in very young children; book clubs for young adults; interviews with popular YA authors such as Elizabeth Scott; how to support GLBT youth; the development of children's and YA collections, with a focus on new media such as comics and graphic novels; moral and ethical issues surrounding children's and YA literature, including book banning, censorship, and the increasingly blurred line between YA and adult literature; and partnerships between public libraries and public education, including how to reach at-risk youth such as those incarcerated in juvenile corrections facilities. Clearly, YFS/CYART has been an important part of VLA for many years, and it continues to be a lifeline for youth services librarians in Virginia.

### The Present

Today, the Youth Services Forum has an email list of over 120 and an Executive Committee of six. We are working hard to answer our most frequently asked question: *What is it that you do?* Goal number one of today's evolving Forum is to have a membership full of people who will actively help to further our mission of promoting "quality library services and programs for all children and young people throughout the Commonwealth." As such, we would like

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to not simply answer the question about what we do, but to inspire others to do it with us.

We are steadily moving toward this goal. With the creation of a Social Media Committee to help maintain our newly formed Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest pages, we are reaching a wider audience than ever before. Using our page on the VLA website as a hub, we are linked up and tuned in, and you can find us regardless of your social media site preference. Our Wiki, also linked through [www.vla.org](http://www.vla.org), is our central portal of information. There, you will find meeting dates and locations, meeting agendas and minutes, upcoming projects, calls for representatives, and so much more. The current face of the YSF is one that strives to use technology as a tool for inclusion.

The YSF of today seeks to brand its work. We want people to be able to point to our specific accomplishments and activities and say, "I want to be a part of that."

In the program for the 2012 VLA Conference, nine different session descriptions close with the line, "supported by the Youth Services Forum." These programs were either presented directly by our members or a contact willing to share the fact that we stand behind their endeavors. We were also responsible for the 2012 pre-conference program featuring Saroj Ghoting, an early childhood literature expert.

The VLA Conference was a huge focus for us over this past year and will be again in 2013. We endeavor to present programs featuring new ideas and viewpoints, both from our members and our contacts, and we are open to all ideas from those who have yet to see something in particular that they want featured.

In November of 2012, as this article was being written, we were on the precipice of putting two major plans in to action. First, our Pinterest page (<http://pinterest.com/ysforumvla/>), which is the location of "Pin a Program," our new virtual program-sharing opportunity. Participants will also be able to provide links via our Wiki, which will allow users to replicate successful children's and teen programs. Site users can upload craft instructions, program outlines, booklists, and one or more pictures.

The second idea set for launch is "Fun Functions," an informal event-hosting program. Participants will be able to sign up to host a gathering of youth/teen services professionals and paraprofessionals in their area. These gatherings will provide an opportunity for socializing and exchanging ideas while enjoying informal activities such as bowling, dinner, hiking, or wine tasting.

We expect the spring of 2013 to bring a regional program to the Virginia Beach or Williamsburg area. At the time of this writing, we are booking a venue for

a large-scale craft swap program featuring craft demonstrations and other activities during a half-day event. We hope this will be like the first of a scattering of seeds, and that other regional programs will grow throughout the Commonwealth.

### The Future

The seeds we plant now will hopefully grow into a wonderful and far-reaching youth services organization. Here is a glimpse of what we hope will become our future: The Youth Services Forum will have a large and well-represented executive team. The expansion of our executive team is a strong priority regarding the future of the forum. (Although we currently have a fantastic executive team, we would ultimately like to have all of Virginia's regions represented.) We know that Virginia has some great youth and teen librarians and we would love to get them involved. We also know that it is often difficult to attend meetings during times of tight budgets and limited staff. We have already started using virtual meeting technology to allow those who cannot physically make it to a meeting to still be able to participate. In the future—as we become increasingly familiar with new technologies—meetings of YSF will be seamless, whether a member is present or not.

The Youth Services Forum of the future will continue to have a strong presence at the VLA annual conference. Each year we plan on building our presence as much as we can and supporting as many quality sessions on youth and young adult programming as possible. The YSF also envisions extending its social presence at the annual conference. The success of our Wine and Cheese reception has shown us that Youth Services Librarians want to meet and mingle with others in their profession!

In the future we would like to expand our reception or perhaps sponsor an activity at the conference's large Thursday Night Social.

The Youth Services Forum of the future will also have expanded its presence in other areas of VLA as well. This means that we will start to introduce and support events at the Paraprofessional Conference. The YSF seeks to be a resource for all library staff involved in youth programming, professional and paraprofessional alike.

The Youth Services Forum of the future will provide a strong regional presence. Throughout each year we would like to provide regional professional development programming, as well as social events. We plan on starting small, with just a couple of events a year. However, it is our ultimate goal to hit each region every year with either a professional program or a social opportunity and, someday perhaps, we will be able to provide each region with both.

The Youth Services Forum of the future will have a web presence that is THE #1 resource for youth and teen librarians in the state of Virginia. Thanks to our social media committee and our

current chair, our website continues to grow and be well connected to the world of the web and social media. In the future we want our web and social networking sites to provide everything from programming ideas, to networking opportunities, to professional development. When a youth programmer is stuck in a rut, has an issue to discuss, or is just looking for new ideas, we want their first stop to be our webpage. The YSF envisions our website to be a meeting ground for the community that is the youth and young adult librarians of Virginia.

Most importantly, the Youth Services Forum of the Future wants you! We want you to join the executive team or become involved in one of our committees. We want you to work with us to provide great sessions at the VLA conference. We want you to help us plan social outings and professional development trainings in your region. We want you to contribute to our website: share program ideas, help your fellow librarians solve problems, and more! We want you to help shape us and to help us continue to be advocates for youth programming in libraries. **VL**

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