
Given the increasing demands on librarians’ time and budgets, it is easy to take the least demanding approach, allowing children and youth outreach to remain undeveloped. This anthology of essays from librarians across the US demonstrates that this need not be the case, and it offers practical advice to inspire librarians in their professional outreach with children and youth.

The collection consists of 26 essays focusing on the experiences of US libraries in connecting with children, youth and their families through various outreach programmes. The editors have arranged the essays into six themes: community outreach, library partnerships, reaching patrons and building bridges, technology, preschool and elementary outreach, and middle school and teen outreach. The editors have chosen this thematic approach to aid in ‘joined up’ reading, but the essays can also be read as stand-alone items. The contributors, from public, academic and school library environments, share their evidence-based success stories with the hope of inspiring and guiding us in our own outreach efforts. There are many original ideas on different ways to approach and integrate children and youth outreach into regular library programming, and within varying budgetary constraints. There are innovative approaches including outreach in juvenile detention centres, laundrettes and hospitals, among the homeless, teen parents and LGBTQ youth and their families.

Despite these good intentions, there are several drawbacks to the collection. First, perhaps because of its large contributor base, the individual contributions lack connectivity, even within the thematic sections. The extensive index does provide some assistance with selection. However, if the work is approached as a reference guide from which to choose projects that motivate, then it becomes much more useful and enjoyable reading. A second drawback is the repetition and overlap across the essays, which could have been avoided with judicious editing and better connectivity among similar essays. Third, as this work’s sole focus is US libraries, there are various situations and scenarios that do not translate easily into Australian library experience. Finally, although the contributor base is large, the focus tends to be on public libraries, which may limit its value to academic and school libraries.

Despite these criticisms the essays are easy to read and relatively brief (3000-3500 words), again suggesting some value as a reference guide. It will be useful for children’s and youth librarians seeking inspiration for new programmes. The essays demonstrate that connecting with audiences, creating partnerships and making positive impacts in the local community can be achieved with considerable goodwill and less funding that imagined.

Libby Hill

Moonee Valley Library Service