Where We Are Now

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Where Do We Go From Here

by Danielle H. Miller

I imagine none of us thought we would find ourselves still living and working in these challenging times by March 2021, but here we are. Over the past year, library workers have done incredible work in adapting to the challenges of the pandemic. The value of libraries as essential community centers is more evident than ever. Libraries are a key part of social infrastructure and can play a major role in ensuring access to information in equitable ways, offering solutions to the injustices people in our communities face.

At the Washington Talking Book & Braille Library (W’TBBL), where I work as the library director, equity and accessibility are integral to our mission. We provide information and reading materials in audio and braille to Washington residents unable to read standard print. For persons who are blind, visually impaired, or with other disabilities that make reading print difficult, there are many barriers to traditional library services and collections. We do everything we can to minimize or remove these barriers.

One of the primary ways our patrons receive their books is through the mail, by physical circulation. Last year, during the initial “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” order issued by Governor Inslee, we were unable to circulate our books for over two months. A large number of our elderly patrons living in retirement homes and care facilities were suddenly more isolated than ever. For many of them, our audiobooks are their lifeline and connection to the world. To be without their books was devastating to their wellbeing. We worked very hard to encourage patrons to use our download service or mobile app, but access to broadband and the ability to use it was still a significant barrier for many patrons. Through an outpouring of advocacy efforts from our patrons and their families, we were able to resume circulation of our books in early June.

So where are we now? We have more patrons downloading books and using our mobile app, and we are able to mail books to all patrons who need and want them. We are physically closed to visitors, but operating to the fullest extent we are able without our volunteers (we miss them so much). We have also pivoted our multisensory storytime to the virtual realm and added a virtual book club.

Elsewhere, libraries around the state are providing virtual services and are even increasing engagement with their patrons by offering online storytime, redirecting funds for increased digital book collections, providing virtual reference service, encouraging curbside pickup of library materials, supporting teachers with virtual curriculum and remote education, and more. Many libraries, schools and school libraries are also tackling the significant planning and implementation of safety measures associated with a safe reopening for staff, patrons, and students.

Many of the lessons we have learned and the new programs and services we have introduced during the pandemic will stay with us and may, in fact, serve our communities in more equitable and accessible ways. As president of the Washington Library Association, I am committed to continuing our focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion and supporting library workers as we move forward. One of the ways we can do this is to ensure EDI is a focus of all our committee work, is a component of all of the programming and events we offer, and to look at our resources and presence with an accessibility and EDI lens.

I am also excited to see more programming, resources, and events throughout the year offered by the WLA office and the Divisions, Sections, and Committees. The more we can share our expertise with each other and challenge our thinking, the more we can grow as an association. I very much look forward to working with you all and am eager to see the places we can go together.

Danielle Miller is the director at the Washington Talking Book & Braille Library and the current WLA President.
As I write this, I want to acknowledge that I am on the land of the Coastal Salish people, the traditional home of all tribes and bands within the Duwamish, Suquamish, Tulalip and Muckleshoot nations. I recognize their elders past and present for their ongoing efforts to sustain tribal sovereignty, preserve their culture, and care for this place. We are thinking of ways to structurally incorporate a land acknowledgement into permanent practices of Alki, recognizing the multitude of tribes and bands within Washington state.

I am lucky to be a part of a beautiful, vulnerable, and caring community of readers in a book club on my campus where we recently finished Randy Ribay’s *Patron Saints of Nothing*. I wanted to share a quote that resonated with me: “That’s not how stories work, is it? They are shifting things that re-form with each new telling, transform with each teller. Less a solid, and more a liquid taking the shape of its container.” That quote stayed with me for a long while, not only because of my own background as a folklorist, but because the idea of transformation is integral to our own work: we keep on learning, unlearning, and hopefully growing.

Ribay’s quote was timely as we navigated many of the shifting stories in this issue of Alki. We began with a theme—“Where We Are Now”— to offer space for reflection on a year that cannot be summarized or really yet be understood. Yet, in the weeks since the call for submissions came out, I have more than once heard from friends and colleagues that reflecting is still too hard, too raw, too much to ask, and thus “Where Are We Now” began a process of transformation. The container remains the same—Alki—but we offer you a variety of stories in this issue, many of which are rich examinations of integral library work that, intentionally or not, shy away from centering COVID.

Perhaps we are not quite ready to center COVID, because it has been the center of our existence for a year, alongside tremendous social reckoning and political turmoil and change. I am grateful to have spent this year in community with my colleagues on the Editorial Committee, a truly wonderful group of library professionals who inspire and push me to learn. (I am sad that two colleagues, Kelsey Smith and Lauren Pressley, have finished their time with Alki; we will miss them both!).

I am glad we can center the work being done in our communities across the state. I am glad we can center our communities in this state, our patrons and essential workers, and, indeed, our library workers that are at the heart of the services we provide. I trust you will find inspiration, hope, and collegiality among these pages: one day at a time, and in gratitude for your contributions, thoughts, and readership. 🌻

Yours, Johanna (she/her/hers)

Johanna Jacobsen Kiciman

works at the University of Washington, Tacoma as Coordinator, Research Help and Instruction Services Librarian. She also loves reading Young Adult novels and may be found with a parrot (or two) on her shoulders.
I had just started my work as a Library Page in the Tacoma Public Library System when my organization published a statement on antiracism and a supporting statement of the Black Lives Matter movement. I was so excited! In all of my years as a public school teacher, I have never experienced such a bold social justice position from any administration. I read it multiple times and then wanted to know exactly what the library’s vision and mission were, along with their strategic plan for the next five to ten years. How did this public organization have the bravery to choose a side in the national argument about privilege and bias? Then I saw an email inviting staff to participate in a Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ) committee. I was so new, just a Page; but I applied to be a part of the committee anyway. And I was asked to join! My library career has begun with work I thought I had left behind with my teaching career, work that I adore: social justice work.

I miss teaching immensely. I retired early due to personal health issues. I loved teaching young minds how to think independently and conduct research to support their opinions. Social justice issues are favorite topics for persuasive essays, narrative stories, and research reports. Why? Because “issues” are invigorating and important to young people trying to figure out the world. As the students studied and verbalized ideas, they learned about the world and themselves. Why didn’t I know that my local library was a partner in this exploration?

I know that we are just starting our work. Forming a committee initiates the brainstorming and prioritizing of ideas and projects. Our committee is still getting to know each other and building trust in our biweekly meetings. One project our Director and Assistant Director began is called “Normalizing Conversations about Race.” Without an official equity leader, we have built communities within our organization that discuss race issues once a week. We currently have three active discussion groups: the BIPOC Affinity Group, the Cross Cultural Affinity Group (CCAG), and a drop-in conversation group. We are hoping to create a White Ally Affinity group as well.

What I found interesting about the affinity groups is that they were met with a fair amount of resistance. I think the push-back was mostly about “segregating” groups of people by race. The CCAG was formed by staff members who didn’t want to be separated into two racial groups. These members proposed that

“ If racial equity in our library and in our city is to grow, then we have to make some huge changes. If we want to be a leader of social justice in our city, we have to continue to change and adapt to the needs of our community.”

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a group of multiple racial identities can engage in courageous conversations about race using specific guidelines for respectful conversation as well as the library's current meeting norms. The fact that every staff member is not a part of an affinity group, even the multiracial CCAG, is one reason why we also needed to offer a drop-in conversation group. Some staff are able to discuss the week's topic during a branch staff meeting, but such discussion can be limited based on the number of items on the Branch Manager’s agenda. The discussion groups have at least a half hour to share and hash out ideas.

With all of the pros and cons of our setup, the conversations are thriving. Staff are getting to know each other in a way that is more meaningful than during an actual microaggression; they are learning about each other before a racial altercation occurs. Groups are building trust and becoming communities of open dialogue. The exchange of definitions, ideas, values, beliefs, traditions, identities, and cultures is what keeps me wanting more! This work is also quite a feat since we are doing all of this on Zoom with masks on. To other libraries who are having difficulty starting affinity groups or equity committees, it is crucial that your administrators support your mission and purpose. Without our Director and Assistant Director’s foresight and expertise, we would have never made it to where we are.

We have much work to do to achieve our strategic plan goals. If racial equity in our library and in our city is to grow, then we have to make some huge changes. If we want to be a leader of social justice in our city, we have to continue to change and adapt to the needs of our community. Our RESJ committee is planning to conduct a staff survey, a needs assessment of racial equity and social justice issues. We continue to look for interesting and relevant videos/readings for normalizing race conversations. We want to organize training for de-escalation techniques and understanding of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), as well as provide physical space for social services and literacy groups. We created an Excel chart of all of the projects that we want to sponsor, too many to list. It feels like we have a lot on our plate, and we should, because there is much to do.

I am proud of our beginning. I am enjoying my work as a newly promoted Library Assistant and as a Social Justice Warrior! 

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Anti-racism, equity, diversity and inclusion (AEDI) work is a core, guiding principle for Alki and the WLA. In an effort to highlight AEDI, Alki now features a permanent column dedicated to these themes. In creating this column July 2020 and launching it this November, we do not intend to limit the conversation to this space.

Each Alki issue is a dynamic collection of submissions from library workers and students across the state; the content is dependent upon those who choose to share their voices. Due to the justice-focused nature of libraries and library work, AEDI themes may naturally show up in the pieces we receive and believe that it will be reflected across many of the feature articles that are published. However, they are not always guaranteed. We, the Alki Editorial Committee, intend for this column to ensure that justice-focused work and stories are consistently elevated and that conversations are sustained.

We are energized to call on our entire community of library workers—in any role—to submit articles for this column by emailing alkieditor@wla.org. Please include the article in your email and a brief biography. The deadline is rolling, and we will consider all articles that are submitted that address AEDI themes.

Articles can be about, but are not limited to:

- accountability
- equity and social justice
- anti-racism
- dismantling existing structures and examinations of power
- community-led engagement

For examples, check out our November 2020 issue for work by Dr. Michelle Martin, and our current March 2021 issue for an article by dindria barrow.

Questions? Please reach out to the Alki Editor by emailing alkieditor@wla.org. 
Reflecting on our Practices: Alki’s Commitment to Antiracist Writing and Editing (Part I)

By The Alki Editorial Committee

In reflecting on recent events in the library publication world, we at Alki want to examine our publishing workflow for any issues of bias that may and will occur in our publication. We commit to being an inclusive journal that continues to actively dismantle racism.

As such, we are spending time working through our existing editorial policy and in-house style guide (modified Chicago style), and formalizing our editing processes. In the past year, we have added some best practices into our workflow (e.g., two or more readers per article, with edits in suggestion mode only). We want to document these transparently so that contributors are aware of how we work with their submissions and that we bring a philosophy of care when we handle people's work and ideas... Once these are updated, we will, in a follow-up article, inform our readers of our updates and our rationale for making these changes.

Next Steps

Some of our next steps, in addition to the revisions discussed above, are as follows:

1. Creating a checklist that will allow editors to check for bias in our submissions;
2. Creating a feedback form with options for modes of response (i.e., published like Letters to the Editor or responded to privately); identifying information will be opt-in;
3. Exploring new avenues to ensure that calls for papers are reaching our BIPOC colleagues.

Resources

As we begin this process, we would like to share some of the resources that we have found useful in helping us work towards revamping our editorial process.

Anti-Oppression Resource & Training Alliance (AORTA) Resources

AORTA is a cooperative of consultants and facilitators whose work is based on “an intersectional approach to liberation.” They offer tailored resources like webinars, handouts, reading recommendations, and toolkits that are freely shared.

Inclusive Citation: How Diverse Are Your References? by Maha Bali

A short essay asking us to collectively consider how inclusive our citations are when writing and presenting.

Doing Anti-Racist Academic Work by Letitia Henville

This article explores the concepts of supporting antiracist work in academia through a series of tweets from BIPOC faculty and academic staff. University Affairs is a Canadian magazine with robust online content that describes itself as “Canada's most authoritative source of information about and for Canada's university community.”

How Do We Language So People Stop Killing Each Other, or What Do We Do About White Language Supremacy? Presentation by Asao B. Inoue, #4C19 Chair’s Address

A fascinating and powerful presentation addressing teaching and the problematic dominance of White language, presented at the 2019 Conference on College Composition and Communication.

Antiracist Teaching Resources/Readings, curated by Megan McIntyre

A thorough roundup of links related to antiracist teaching, broken into categories including History, White language supremacy, students' rights to their own language, Black language pedagogy, and more. Megan McIntyre is the Writing Program Director and Assistant Professor at Sonoma State University.

Simon Fraser University Inclusive and Antiracist Overview

Simon Fraser University Complete Inclusive and Antiracist Writing Guide with Expanded Definitions

This extremely useful reference tool is composed of a concise overview of inclusive and antiracist writing tips and information (first link), plus a longer, more comprehensive document that has a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International license (second link). The overview site includes an excellent glossary, and also outlines some concrete examples of

continued on next page
sentences that have problematic language coupled with suggested alternative phrasing to make the writing more inclusive. Simon Fraser is a Canadian university, so it does include some references that are specific to Canada. Of all the references listed in this article, this pair of resources are perhaps the most directly useful and applicable to our current process.

**Writing With an Antiracist Lens** by Lila Tublin

This article is a concise and accessible overview of points to consider when approaching writing with an antiracist lens. Copywriter Tublin includes some great links to other resources to learn about antiracism, race relations and history in the United States. Big Duck is a business that assists nonprofits with communications and fundraising, so this article is particularly useful for writing on behalf of a business or organization with a more general audience.

**Moving Forward Intentionally**

Creating an inclusive Alki requires intentionality. We have a responsibility to examine our own practices and biases so we can address them. We recognize that the goal of producing an antiracist professional journal is a process that we will be continuously working on for the duration of Alki’s existence. We commit to taking feedback with open hearts, and commit to acknowledging our missteps. We hope that our work continues to encourage positive change in our Washington library communities.

Want to help? We would be glad to receive any recommendations of resources, especially avenues for better reaching BIPOC writers and colleagues. Send recommendations to alkieditor@wla.org.
Where Are We Now - A Public Library Perspective

By Millissa Macomber

We are certainly somewhere new.

Physically we are in the same spot. Burlington is located in northwest Washington, just south of Bellingham and the Canadian border and north of the Marysville outlet mall and Everett. Skagit County is famous for breathtaking tulip fields and is one of the last remaining counties in Washington state that does not have a county-wide system. We are not the biggest library in our area but we certainly are not the smallest. Our city limits include around 8,000 residents and we have a collection of about 41,000 print materials in our 10,000 square foot building.

Virtually, we are definitely in a new arena. In the last year, our staff members have stepped up to create new programs and features for patrons. We are so thankful for the library community at large and the information, program ideas, and procedures that we have been able to adapt and use at our building. Here are a couple of new things we implemented at our library.

One of the biggest highlights for me is what we call "Express Holds." Several years ago I visited another Washington library with a wonderful drive-through window for patrons and I daydreamed about a drive-through option complete with a menu board and staff headsets with microphones. Sadly, our building did not have the layout to make this feasible. However, to counter the pandemic limitations, we made a version of this a reality. We do a Burlington Public Library version of curbside by delivering materials to our front doors. Patrons meet us there and get their items. I am excited to see how this evolves when we open our doors to patrons again. Maybe there is still hope for a headset with a microphone.

The pandemic also brought To-Go Kits for kids and teens. Each week, our Children’s Librarian Jennifer Bell and Teen Librarian Jenny Cole create projects to distribute to our community. Projects have ranged from 2-year-olds building small engineering works to meditation methods for teens. These have been a huge success with the community. In fact, our Candy Sushi teen kit ran out just hours after its release. For the younger kids, “anything with catchy words like rocket or bomb in the title tend to do well,” Bell commented.

Book Grab Bags also made their appearance this year. We ask patrons—of all ages—to submit an online form with likes, dislikes, interests, etc. We use that information to put together a handful of items they collect through our Express Holds system. The idea is to replace shelf browsing. Bell noted that she really gets to know the kids who use the program on a regular basis. The program is particularly beneficial for teachers or homeschooling parents who, instead of submitting holds on a lot of individual items, can simply submit a topic. Bell’s easiest Grab Bag has been pulling all of her favorite picture books for an extremely appreciative caregiver at home with a 2-year-old. One of the more amusing Grab Bag assignments was finding mysteries with no murders, according to Public Services Associate Anne Booker.

An unexpected interest during the pandemic has been virtual volunteering. Cole has created opportunities for teens to help out from home by creating Spotify playlists, book reviews, LGBTQIA+ booklists, life-during-the-pandemic reflections, facemask selfies, and leading their own virtual clubs. Contributions are shared via the Teen Voices page on our library website. (Hours volunteering at the library also count towards a Varsity Letter in Volunteerism at our local high school.)

How do we know if these programs are working? The best measure has come from our patrons. In our January board report we needed an entire page to report all the comments and support from library users. While our services are reduced, we feel that our impact on the community remains very strong.

…”My colleagues at Burlington Public Library are shining examples of going out of their way—within guidelines—to assist our community however we can.”
In the past year, I have become unusually acquainted with data tables and epidemiologic curves. Preoccupied with this imagery, I cannot help but imagine the activities at my library in the recent period expressed on a line chart: exponential growth over the past years, a drastic dip at the start of COVID-19 and lockdown, and in 2020, a dramatically flattened line that is perhaps now just slowly back on a steady upward trajectory.

In this extraordinary year, what about “productivity” matters? We need reflective time to make assessments and plan with intention. We need periods of slowness and restoration to build resilience, sustainability, and avoid burnout.

I work as a solo, multipurpose employee dedicated to my organization’s various operations related to digital asset management (DAM), library, and archives. A year into the pandemic, and six months into my position, I recognize that the past year has forced a transitioning time on all of us. The enormity of multiple planned and unplanned, concurrent changes required us to carefully evaluate our paths and the resources we had. And perhaps it afforded us an opportunity to take stock of the recent rapid growth leading up to this point.

My organization, a mid-sized broadcast media nonprofit, has experienced impressive growth over the past several years—in staff size, operating expenses, content output and platforms, data storage needs, collection items, and audience communities. It was an exciting period full of creative energy and possibilities. The digital asset management system (DAMS) implemented five years ago has seen successful adoption, and it now supports an expansive range of user and operation needs and workflows, which include 24/7 on-air broadcast, a music library collection that is growing daily, live music production and publishing, and more. It now holds approximately 1.24 million items related to day-to-day, production, and archiving workflows, amounting to an estimate of over 400 terabytes of data.

The pandemic shuttered live music, disrupting its ecosystem (of which my organization is part), and it demanded immediate shifts on the ways we broadcast, utilize studio spaces, allocate financial resources, and truthfully everything. At the same time, our on-air staff continues to play from approximately 473,000 titles in the digital Music Library, and still hundreds of new titles are added every week. As the newest member of the organization and the new Media Asset Manager, all of this is breathtakingly impressive and, at the same time, overwhelming.

In addition to the extraordinary public health and economic challenges of 2020, there was significant knowledge transfer—and inevitable gap—with the departure of my predecessor and subsequent vacancy. We also underwent a major DAMS upgrade and data migration. (As I plunged into this project already in motion, it reminded me of when a library I previously worked at migrated integrated library systems to Alma/Primo.) Moreover, with the halt of live performances and subsequent transformation

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*Joan Hua is the Media Asset Manager at KEXP 90.3 FM in Seattle, where she also serves as the in-house librarian and archivist. Her professional experiences include oral history, cultural heritage research, and digital scholarship. She holds a Master of Library and Information Science from the University of Washington.*
of streaming “live” performances, we took a pause on the high-speed train generating dozens of terabytes of media files every year that must be managed, stored, archived, and accessed; at the same time, variant content types and media formats called for workflow modifications.

This series of changes on workflow, expectations, staffing, expertise, technology systems, and infrastructure forced us to slow down. It also has become an opportunity, in my opinion, to examine and bring new intentions into how we want and plan to grow. For example, questions I ask are: How are we practicing knowledge management and documentation? What resources do we have to sustain and anticipate the growth of DAM collection and workflow needs, taking into account questions of labor and fairness? How do we balance the requirements of production and preservation, which can have very different priorities? How do we conduct strategic planning to identify the library/archives stakeholders?

Each of these questions has so many layers to unpack. In my mind, elevating the work on documentation would be important for not only effectiveness of operating procedures, but also our organizational change management, as well as preparedness for working with new groups of people—a fundamental part of equity and inclusion efforts. While our DAMS serve the needs of internal operations, the library/archives may also have a role in serving our communities. If we define the archives’ mission and stakeholders to include serving communities, not just internal users of DAMS, then we must ask: who are members of those communities—and more importantly, how can we make them more welcomed and included? Who are we leaving out, and who gets to exercise curatorial authority, control, and access?

While I am devoting most of my time to supporting the everyday DAMS needs and library access needs, I am pondering these broader, high-level questions. We must be able to articulate our answers and use them to guide our paths forward. Remote work communication as well as personnel turnover reveal clearly the value of documentation and knowledge management—which perhaps for us information professionals is an adjacent if not familiar territory. At a radio broadcast organization working 24/7, nothing ever stops. The pandemic and pause on in-person performances is a rare occasion that seems to get us close to a moment of restoration and re-assessment.

On a personal level, I relate to everyone who has expressed the numerous reasons and circumstances over the past year that have made the constant shifting ground, prolonged isolation, public health emergency, and the crises of social injustices staggeringly challenging. I also happen to be in a role that demands attention on wide-ranging areas and often competing priorities. This is not uncommon for solo or small-team professionals in the library and information science field, and it underscores the importance of capacity building, resilience, and sustainable practices. We may work solo—but are in this community together.

View of a CD shelf at KEXP’s physical library. Photo by Joan Hua.
INTRODUCTION

In the past fifty-two weeks and counting, zoom conversations have generally been meeting-based and agenda-following. It was a refreshing and inspiring change to speak to current and graduating MLIS students about the state of the field and their vision for it as they move into their professions. Themes of equity, access, social justice, and the value of the degree stand out, as well as thoughtful conversations about supporting our patrons, caring for ourselves, and more.

Our conversation is reproduced here with some edits for flow, and we hope that it is as enjoyable to read as it was to think and talk. If you want to hone in on particular areas of interest, please feel free to make use of the bolded headings as a guide.

THE CONVERSATION (3/6/2021)

Welcomes

Johanna (she/her/hers): My name is Johanna and I use she/her/hers pronouns. I am the current editor of all Alki, and this is the second of our conversation series that we’re publishing and are very excited to have some current and graduating MLIS students to talk about library work: looking forward. I’d love for them all to introduce themselves and then we’ll go around with a set of [...] guiding questions.

Addy Ascencio: I can go first. [S]o my name is Addy Ascencio. I use she/her pronouns. I am a second year MLIS student and it's my final year in the program as well. I’m also a graduate student reference specialist at UW Seattle. And I specifically work in the government publications, maps, microfilms, and newspaper department.

Elexa Moore: I'll go next: my name is Elexa Moore, she/her pronouns, and I'm in my second and final year of the MLIS program at UW and my interest lies in academic librarianship, specifically with reference and instruction. And I work in a public and an academic library currently.

Sierra Jorgensen-Bartlett: My name is Sierra Jorgensen-Bartlett, I use she/her pronouns. I started in the MLIS program after studying education for my degree in interdisciplinary studies, but I knew that I wasn't interested in being a teacher. I was really interested in entering a teaching and learning field with possibilities to disrupt structures and feel like I had an impact. And that’s how I ended up in librarianship. I’m interested in academic librarianship, especially as a first generation college student and definitely having experienced that sense of library anxiety.

Em Craig: And finally me. My name is Em Craig, she/they pronouns. I’m a second year online MLIS student, and I got my start working as an intern in special collections at Nashville Public Library, which inspired me to follow the LIS path after that. I’m primarily interested in archiving, special librarianship, and special collections, acting as a conservator of culture in physical form.

Johanna (she/her/hers): Thank you everyone and we didn’t quite finish going around talking about interest in the library world. Addy, beyond [ the current job...] that you do, do you have a passion in the library field? And that actually is a question for all of y’all.

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Addy Ascencio: Yeah, I am really interested in children and youth services in the public library sphere and how we can leverage social media for interactive programming. Overall interests include collection development and reference; I do some reference work now and I genuinely love it.

Elexa Moore: I would say, for me, beyond just general academic librarianship, I'm really interested in connecting with people and really uplifting voices of different marginalized groups. That's very important to me in my work moving forward, so I'm hoping to integrate that somehow into my job, and not just make statements about it, but actually have action behind it as well.

Graduate School during COVID

Johanna (she/her/hers): Thank you for all of that. I wanted to create the space [to talk about] about what learning in an MLIS program has been like during COVID. I don't want to make statements of like: “we've all pivoted, we're all resilient.” I get really frustrated with the jargon, because it sort of minimizes experiences. What has this year been like for you all? How do you think it has impacted the quality of the work you're able to do or the quality of the instruction you're receiving?

Em Craig: Without sugarcoating it, getting a degree during pandemic times has sucked. There's a certain level of comfort and understanding, knowing that we're all on this ride together and everybody is sort of similarly exhausted, going through navigating these changes. But last year was my first year in the program, and to finally sort of get a feel of how that's supposed to work with my work-life balance and my home life, only to have it thrown out the window... All of these stressors which were already making life difficult, in tandem with mental health issues, made already bad things worse.

So sometimes it feels like I'm running on a deficit of energy, with nil motivation or drive and I feel like, while I am still reaping what I can out of the education, I'm losing out on what I might have been able to gain from this experience under normal circumstances. Not only am I struggling to engage with materials, but at the same time our professors and the people running the program are also feeling the same stresses. That's nobody's fault, but it does feel like we're losing out on the best possible experience because of it.

Johanna (she/her/hers): I just want to specifically thank you for calling out the mental health aspect of this pandemic and its effects on students and faculty. As a follow up question, [...] is there an acknowledgement of the difficulty of this? I'm still curious about Elexa and Addy's experiences as well.

Elexa Moore: I would say, for me, as a student, it's been challenging in many ways. I think at the beginning of the pandemic, when I think back, there was a lot of uncertainty of when this was going to end [...]. I was a residential student and so shifting into fully online work along with actually working and then just being home and having responsibilities at home, it was really difficult. And there was no outlet, because we were all on lockdown. A lot of the outlets I have outside of school were going places like museums and all these different spaces. And while I’m better equipped right now than I
was when I first started, it's still been really difficult to concentrate on school and still try to perform at this very high level that I feel is still expected of us, in some ways. [...And] then there [are] a lot of major events occurring in our nation and our world that are just difficult to deal with and at some points [it] felt more important than [...] what we're doing in school at that moment. And I mean I've learned to give myself a little grace in some of these situations, especially with school, because I know it's been so mentally and emotionally draining and what we're going through is not normal at all.

Addy Ascencio: I [...] I definitely echo Em and Elexa's sentiments about just how difficult it's been. I have the trouble of logging off, I feel like I'm always plugged in, because of the responsibilities of staying connected with all aspects of school which includes school work, classes, [and connecting] with colleagues. And then it's staying connected with your family and friends, too. And having that interaction as a coping mechanism, because as Elexa was saying, alot of the coping mechanisms that we had while going to grad school and working, was going to other places, and potentially meeting other people that were outside of your life as a student. [...]that was taken away from us so having to shift to find new coping mechanisms has been really hard.

To go back to the subject of school: Luckily, a lot of a lot of our professors have been very understanding and compassionate. But others have kind of forgotten that we're still living in an unprecedented time. And still expect us to to perform at this very high functioning and intellectual level and I think that it's really important to reexamine that, and [...] to emphasize[ e] that maybe we have normalized this state of our lives but it's still difficult and we shouldn't be normalizing it.

Johanna (she/her/hers): So I am quite fond of the sociological concept of third place, that you have home being a first place, then school or work being a second place, and [...] your third places really is the place that fills you up; it could [... be a bookstore it could be hiking in the mountains. And our first, second and third places have all been kind of conflated into one these days. And I think it's gotten harder as time has gone on. And [...] there is extra burden on folks with children, or who are taking care of older relatives. I know you all work one or two jobs on top of going to school and so there's all that juggling. And then we live under a specter of productivity, which is awful. I mean it is, it is draining and [...] pretty darn systemically rooted.

The Role of the MLIS Degree in the LIS World

Johanna (she/her/hers): [...T]here is a pretty robust debate right now in the field, about the value of the MLIS and whether it serves as a gatekeeper function. Given these experiences that you all just shared, I'm curious what you think of the role of the MLIS in our chosen profession.

Addy Ascencio: I just want to say that that's a big question. There, there is a lot to consider.

Em Craig: [...] I wrote down some of my thoughts beforehand, because these were such big questions. [...] I think that there is a lot of value in what we're learning. I don't regret my decision to get the MLIS degree. I don't think the timing is great, but it happened the way that it happened and I'm not going to discount the value of what I've learned or my professors in this time. [...] I absolutely believe that library experience is greatly devalued because of the MLIS and the sort of standard of preference that has been put on it. It is fundamentally gatekeeping in and of itself, because it functionally eliminates the possibility for people to rise higher in the library field who can't afford to dedicate the time means and resources to going to graduate school.

I am in an incredible place of privilege to be able to afford this degree and to be able to make the time work with my work life balance, and even then I'm living with my family in order to be able to afford it. It is impractical to expect that everybody has the option to go to graduate school, even people who have very valuable insights and abilities to share with the LIS field. I've met a great deal of people in my experience working in public librarianship who are longtime library staff, and they have so much experience and so much insight, I know that these individuals are better equipped to be a librarian as they are now that I will be when I leave this program. They know how to do it, but they [...] are not allowed to by these job descriptions (you must have this degree to be able to do this). I think there is a lot of value in how diverse of the experience we get to have in this degree process, how many different things we get to put our hands on and that's really valuable. If somebody has been working in a specific path for as long as they have, and they cannot advance, it doesn't make sense to me.

Elexa Moore: I want to say, I wrote some notes too, and I feel very aligned with you and all your thoughts. I feel like I wrote every single thing that you did. And I also feel like I don't regret getting this degree, I am very grateful for the connections that I've made and, like Em said, being able to put my hands on different things and learn which path of librarianship I'm actually interested in rather than thinking it's all the same. And I think in some ways it's taught me to think about the larger picture and the LIS world and think of [...] the overarching topics that are going on and issues in the field.

I also wish there was some way that people who do have that lived in-library experience could move up. Like Em said, [...] there's a lot of barriers, I think, [and] cost is a huge barrier for people. And [...] the field itself is not super diverse and that can be a barrier for people as well, not feeling like their community is visible within the field. So I think there's a lot of barriers that exist and it's unfair to have these people, who have worked in the libraries for 20 years and

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really understand the organization and the community that they’re serving, and who are very involved in the community, and not let them move up because they don’t have this education. So I wish there was some way that they could move up and that there would be other ways for them to gain education, either through their organization or whatever that might look like.

Addy Ascencio: I feel the same and I definitely echo Elexa and Em. I’m extremely grateful that I was accepted into an MLIS graduate program. [...] The reason I even considered graduate school was because I couldn’t get a job in a public library, and I felt like going to grad school would be a way for me to not only gain valuable and practical experience in a library but also [...] learn more about librarianship in general. And I have learned so much and Elexa was [...] saying: there’s just so much I’ve learned like considering rural librarianship and corporate librarianship, which were areas of librarianship that I never considered. I was always more attuned to public librarianship and academic librarianship. So learning those different avenues of librarianship has been really great. And the experience that I’ve had in these last-nearly two years has been very valuable in learning a lot of practical skill sets on the job but at the same time, since we are setting ourselves up for a lifetime of debt, at what costs are we taking up this great experience?

Em Craig: — or two lifetimes of debt, baby!

Addy Ascencio: And I think that there definitely has to be a restructuring of librarianship, and how people can enter the field without accumulating a massive amount of debt. And I think that there are ways that we can combat this and break down those barriers, especially when there are such things as certificate programs that give you [...] access to librarian titled roles in the library world but not many states have those same opportunities. So I think there definitely needs to be discussion as a whole organization about implementing these programs on a national level.

Johanna (she/her/hers): I want to thank you all for that. I remember walking away from [graduate school] angry. Because the job market was abysmal three years ago (it has not gotten significantly better), and I remember being so angry that there had not been an institutional push or [...] an effort to create opportunities [for lived library experience], especially for online students. The hard bit is that you need the degree and you need three years of experience and if the degree [does] not [make...] experience an explicit part of its requirement, [then what]? I mean, as you said, then you’ve got this growing debt burden.

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-Addy

Current Challenges in the LIS World

Johanna (she/her/hers): In your views, what are some of the other issues that are front and center as you embark on finishing the degree and are looking for jobs? What are your thoughts on the biggest challenges facing the LIS world at the moment?

Em Craig: I think, going directly off of that— I feel very discouraged, at times, because [...] a couple of times a week, or once a week, at least I go and I searched through LIS jobs that are currently available across the nation or even some internationally. I was very lucky to get a job working in a library as soon as I got out of my undergrad. So I’m getting some experience (I’m not getting the supervisory experience that half of the jobs ask for), but I’m also very blessed to be making a decent amount of money in my current job. I don’t want to focus too much on the financials but at the same time, the amount of pay escalation, the valuation of the jobs that I am likely able to get with an MLIS degree, is not [...] steep enough to offset the amount of debt I’ve taken on and money I have paid to get this degree. And it’s like, man, what am I what am I doing here [...] if my pay is only going to go up by three dollars from what I’m earning now. You look at librarian positions and some of them are paying like fifteen or eighteen an hour [...] In what circumstance would I be able to not only pay for my basic living expenses, but also make a dent in the debt that I have accumulated from graduate school, (and undergraduate school before)? It’s so discouraging. It just—it hurts sometimes; it’s like I thought I was doing this to set myself up to get better jobs that would make this attainable for me. [...] And that’s if I’m able to find any job that’s relevant to my specialization after [the coursework is] over because it feels like it’s the same 30 jobs across the country that are available at all times and then it’s just like, well, I guess I’m going to have to go outside of the library with my degree.

Johanna (she/her/hers): I just want to pause and say: listen continued on next page
up information schools, listen up future employers. This is so important, and it needs to be fixed yesterday, but I'll take it being fixed today or tomorrow.

Addy Ascencio: Pay is a definite issue in the library world. I wanted to talk about fighting for universal wi-fi especially right now, when that is a huge barrier to access, when there are so many students that don't have that kind of accessibility to be able to do their schoolwork, to hop online when they don't have reliable wi-fi or when people don't have the money to pay for wi-fi because of cost. [...] here are just so many [...] issues with that and it just creates a greater digital divide. We need to have more conversations about it and I do appreciate how some Internet companies have stepped up and provided hotspots to a lot of communities, but I think that still leaves out a lot of communities, like in rural places that don't have those same opportunities [...] for reliable points of access.

Elexa Moore: Yeah, I agree with, of course, the pay, yes it really frustrates me to be looking at jobs and just seeing that the pay difference isn't much in a lot of places. It's like you work so hard for this degree and spend so much time on it, but it doesn't make sense.

I also made a note about accessibility. Right now, I have younger siblings and I just know the difficulties that people [...] have faced with not having access to wi-fi. [...] when I was thinking about this, I was thinking about the people in libraries I've worked with [...] that just need to use the computers to do resumes or to work on schoolwork or you know—that's their place. That's like their entertainment place or just a place to be and stay warm [...] I don't know how to reconcile that, when places are closed and we're in this pandemic and you want to keep people safe. But then, you also have these people who you're not serving, who are really struggling at this time and so yeah, I agree with expanding the wi-fi signals.

Em Craig: But I am also thinking about how we can continue to create service for those people we're not reaching and think about how to reach them. Our library, the location that I work at, we circulate a lot of books and we circulate a lot of materials, but the most prominent thing that people [come...] in for is all of our computers. And it has made me ache to realize the number of regular patrons who I would be working with, helping, who just can't get what they need from the library. We've just recently opened one of our locations again to limited capacity in our communities that have the highest technology need, but even then it's, you know, by appointment [...] for a specific amount of time. The technology divide breaks me up so much because it feels like... at this point, with how crucial it is to finding a job navigating the social world as it is today—it feels like it should be like a basic human right to have access to that. That lack of access isolates people from information and from opportunities, and from just being able to function as part of this digital world.

Social Justice in Libraries

Johanna (she/her/hers): [...]o when I got the MLIS degree, there was one class that looked at social justice issues in the LIS world. One class. One faculty member. I recognize that that has changed a lot—maybe not enough. So I'm curious for you all to reflect on the role of social justice in the LIS world.

Em Craig: [...] I would say that the biggest thing on that topic, working in public libraries, is that there's been a lot of discussion about the fact that in a public librarianship role you take on this level of being a social worker and dealing with highly sensitive issues. It's not that I don't want to do this, I want to be able to provide this help, but I am not equipped for it. I didn't get a social work degree, I didn't get training and experience in de-escalation and knowing how to navigate high stress situations. [...] a huge cause of emotional burnout for public librarians. [...]You care about people that [...] you see all the time, but you're taking this on every day. [...] it becomes this huge thing that pushes people out of public librarianship or out of the service, because it is too much.

The fact is we need better social [...] care and social work integration into all of these public facing fields in order to be able to navigate this. And people need to have better access to those resources.

“[The MLIS [...]] is fundamentally gatekeeping in and of itself, because it functionally eliminates the possibility for people to rise higher in the library field who can't afford to dedicate the time means and resources to going to graduate school.”

-Em

Sierra Jorgensen-Bartlett: One thing that I have noticed and that I have read inspiring articles about is approaching librarianship from a caregiving perspective. But I have also heard a lot of conversations where that feels like a massive burden to a lot of people, especially in public libraries. Somebody else can speak to that a lot better than I could but, I think there's a tension there and that's definitely rooted in justice work. We have very vulnerable people coming to our spaces.

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One of my co-workers who I’m very close to worked in social work before she made the transition to librarianship, and the diverse applicability of her previous skills here shows how valuable that is. So I think it’s definitely something worth paying a lot of attention to because, yeah, it is a huge emotional burden of wanting to do these things for your community but not having the equipment to do so.

**Johanna (she/her/hers):** [T]here is not a model of holistic care for patrons and library workers that is [...] being modeled in ways that I find satisfying.

**Addy Ascencio:** I don’t think our current curriculum addresses social justice adequately; I’m just thinking back about our 520 class and how diversity is [covered in] only one week. And I think that’s just a huge disservice, because you can’t lump all marginalized groups into one week. There’s just so much to cover and I don’t think we have enough time to delve into all the issues. I think that there needs to be a better structure in integrating social justice and everything that we do versus an afterthought for diversity.

**Elexa Moore:** I agree that I don’t think it’s adequately addressed in our courses. And it frustrates me that diversity is just one week; it’s just like there’s a washing over it onto the next thing. And I think social justice is something that [...] is so important to the LIS profession. I mean we are working with people who are coming from a variety of backgrounds and experiences and carrying their own traumas and everything, and so we need to be cognizant and respectful of the places people are coming from. And I think that our curriculum —yes, we are not social workers, that is not what we were taught to do—but I feel like we also don’t fully receive the skills needed to [...] take on this care piece of our job. And yeah it’s something that’s not taught [...] and so then we have to figure it out when we go out into the job world, and then we have to figure out boundaries. I don’t feel as equipped for that as I’m moving out into the world: yes, I’ve had my own experiences like working one-on-one with students, for example, and hearing what they’re coming to the table with but it’s something I think that needs to be talked about a lot more.

**Looking Forward**

**Johanna (she/her/hers):** [...] I’m curious how you would steer the course of the field moving forward if we all had mad superpowers. I also actually firmly do believe that the work that you all will be doing moving forward will exactly do that, steer the course.

**Addy Ascencio:** I’m hugely inspired by my Youth and Children’s Homelessness: The Role of Libraries course, which mainly looks at how public libraries can better serve patrons experiencing homelessness. I’ve liked learning and discovering the programs and organizations that address housing and food insecurity, and how by knowing these programs exist, we are able to provide additional care and help in conjunction to what already is available. I recently came across the concept of Host Homes programs, and there is a program in Seattle. I feel like knowing that this resource exists is so powerful for libraries to know because it’s information that could literally save someone’s life. I would advocate for this work to be part of every library’s mission as it would also emphasize partnering with community organizations. This issue cannot be addressed alone, and it’s something I’m also learning throughout the course.

**Johanna (she/her/hers):** [As] I’m listening to you, it really speaks to reframing library work as centering communities. And [...] centering relationships, not only between library workers and the individuals we work with, but with folks who have expertise and knowledge. I am sort of inclined to think that libraries are in a spot of being able to amplify. [P]erhaps our work becomes more about amplifying what already exists in the community, but to do that, we have to build relationships with organizations and individuals.

**Sierra Jorgensen-Bartlett:** I would love to see library leadership support engagement and outreach as new librarians are and really “institutionalize” those relationships that are being built with community members. What we see is that you have somebody who does the work, who’s passionate about community building, who makes connections with other local organizations. That person leaves, and it’s a vacuum and it’s all gone. I think that falls on library leadership. Making those connections concrete can’t just be on a personal level exclusively.

**Johanna (she/her/hers):** I’m glad we’ve tapped into structure and library leadership. This also taps into funding, [...] we’ve talked about the personal financial burdens that folks studying bear but so...
much of this is the structural problems that exist. So I’m grateful for you, bringing that language to the table, Sierra.

_Elexa Moore:_ I’d like to focus my energies, because I’m interested in academic libraries, on making libraries feel more welcoming and inclusive to populations who may not see [that] the library is that space for them. I know academic libraries cater a lot to students and the staff and faculty but even through the work I’ve done, I noticed that there are also community members who are interested in those resources as well. I think there’s just some invisible barriers that exist, sometimes in academia, and I just want to make things more accessible for people. I just know [that] people [...] have these ideas of what libraries are and they can be these very intimidating spaces and so just continuing to create those inclusive places for people. And just treating everyone with respect and being there for them is important to me.

_Em Craig:_ Libraries have to go out of their way to connect with people who don’t have access and who are not being represented. You’re not even going to have a firm grasp on who those people are unless you go looking for them, because the whole point is that their voice isn’t heard, and so you don’t know not to count them just as much as you don’t know to count them. And I think not only reclaiming that space and making it more available to more diverse communities, making sure that people’s voices are highlighted, but also [...] reclaiming the histories and the past of these communities and understanding and representing how that has happened in LIS practice [...]. I think preserving and actively going back and examining how we’ve preserved, or how we’ve represented those communities is really important.

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I will say that in listening to you all speak [I feel an] interesting sense of, like a tight rope line between hope and hopelessness, and [...] maybe it simply indicates the field is at a watershed moment. [B]ut then there is so much that you all care about and are passionate about that you’ll bring moving forward, and yet the tremendous amount of work that lies ahead is just very visible to me when I’m listening to you all.

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Help Washington Achieve Statewide Broadband Access

by Caitlin Wheeler

As any library worker can attest, fast and reliable internet has been crucial to accessing basic education, health, business, and other equitability necessities for many years now.

In a world affected by COVID, the effects of poor broadband availability have been even more stark: children without home internet may not have access to education. Workers who could otherwise work from home may be forced to risk their lives because they cannot perform their duties over their unreliable home connection. Folks in need of tax help must seek out in-person assistance when access to a website could have provided them the information they need. Patients without internet who could have received remote healthcare must instead choose between the risk of in-person care or the risk of going without.

Despite the clear evidence that reliable broadband is an equity issue, many are still without: here in Washington, and around the country.

In accordance with the Second Substitute Senate Bill 5511, the Washington State Department of Commerce (DOC) is working to provide all Washington residents with access to affordable broadband. In order to provide affordable, reliable access, however, the DOC must first identify which services areas are currently receiving low or no services.

This is where you come in. What follows are a set of steps to help the state identify gaps in Broadband access.

1. Simply go to this page and fill out the one minute Washington State Broadband Access and Speed Survey.

2. Enter the address of the building from which you are accessing the survey, and it will test the efficiency of your access.

3. If you are aware of a service area, such as your home or workplace, that has no available broadband access, you can click “Enter an address with NO AVAILABLE SERVICE”.

The state needs thousands more entries in order to have a thorough picture of statewide access, so it is helpful to fill out this test from any location you may visit.

This is a first step in the collaborative process to provide universal broadband access by 2024.

To learn more, you can visit these sources:

- Access and Speed Survey
- Current Access and Speed Survey Results Washington State Broadband Infrastructure Policies, Goals, and Investment Priorities

You and your library can help.

“‘To provide affordable, reliable access the Department of Commerce must first identify which services areas are currently receiving low or no services.’”

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Caitlin Wheeler is the library supervisor for Moran Prairie Library, in the Spokane County Library District. Only bring up educational podcasts with her if you want a twenty-minute breakdown of her latest favorite.
Beyond Bookmobiles and Storytimes: Strategies for Youth Engagement via Mobile Outreach

by Rachel Beckman

The distinctive, iconic, and ever-loved bookmobile is not just a book delivery service. Operating outside the boundaries of a physical building, mobile outreach visits create opportunities to build connections with children, parents, and caregivers within your community who might never step foot in a traditional library. Providing materials circulation or performing scheduled storytimes, however, is just one of the myriad of ways outreach services can build relationships with youth. Engaging children by going above and beyond the regular library "menu of services" allows for deeper connections to patrons themselves—forging lasting relationships with communities and bringing excitement and freshness to a traditional bookmobile visit. By presenting first-hand research, this article examines some of the ways in which designated outreach staff engage with children beyond traditional bookmobile and/or storytime programming. Sharing these community building strategies empowers library systems to think outside the box when building meaningful relationships with youth, and illuminates the value of outreach staff who work to personalize connections between libraries and their communities.

Mobile and bookmobile-focused outreach is generally considered its own department of a library organizational structure. Many libraries focus their mobile outreach on homebound patrons or those who reside in assisted living communities, but some also include mobile outreach to children. Mobile outreach to youth, in turn, usually consists of scheduled, recurring stops to visit schools, preschools, in-home daycares, community sites (like public or low-income housing communities), and family shelters. These visits might use a bookmobile, or mobile carts, for browsing the collection or delivering holds. Some library systems utilize designated Children's Librarians for outreach service, but it is important to note that many others mainly employ non-librarian-level staff (and sometimes volunteers) to provide this exceptional service with a personal touch. While circulation and reader's advisory is a large part of these outreach visits, there are many opportunities to build lasting relationships with individuals and communities while also providing exceptional library materials service.

These scheduled, consistent visits allow for a special connection between libraries, their staff, and patrons' communities. When bringing colorful and vibrant outreach vehicles into a community, the library as an institution can be visible in ways that a building cannot. Library buildings can act as essential "third places" in communities, but bookmobiles bring libraries to a child's first or second place—their homes and their schools—and are therefore provided with an opportunity to engage with children on more holistic and personal levels. Erin Antes, Children’s Librarian for Pierce County Library’s outreach program, explains this connection between scheduled visits and meaningful relationships:

“You learn who has a new dog, who is taking a road trip, who watched fireworks, who is getting a new baby in the house... We become a constant adult in their lives and something for them to look forward to.”

It is important to recognize that outreach visits act as an essential piece of library community engagement practice. Every community has its microcosms, and the service or engagement strategy that works for one particular community may not work for others. By getting to know your community via mobile outreach visits, libraries can gauge the needs, wants, and passions of their patrons while providing strategic service that goes beyond...

Rachel Beckman, 2020 graduate of the University of Washington's Master in Library and Information Science program, works as an Outreach Services Specialist for the King County Library System.
the menu of library services. It is also important to note that sometimes, these specific needs might not be material or even educational. By engaging with youth in your communities, you may find they desire more opportunities to create art, or need homework help. They may want a space to dance, or advice on how to unlock their new locker in middle school.

When it comes to building relationships with children outside of library walls, mobile outreach staff can be a library’s greatest asset through their experiences and strategies for engaging young patrons. Initiating, building, and maintaining these personal connections goes beyond basic customer service and should be recognized as tangible community engagement strategies, while acknowledging the staff that do them as essential community builders. Going beyond bookmobile and storytime programming allows outreach staff to build trust, cater programming beyond the tried and true menu of library services, and build lifelong relationships between patrons, their communities, and the library.

The Research

In order to learn more about the specific ways in which outreach staff engage with children at their visits, I attended the 2020 Association of Bookmobile and Outreach Services (ABOS) virtual conference. I also posed the question to the ABOS Google listserv, gathering nine responses from outreach staff across the country. Finally, to gather a more regional Western Washington perspective, I corresponded with children’s librarians at Pierce County Library System and Sno-Isle Libraries. The following results are correlated into generic levels of funding and support from budget-neutral opportunities to multi-organizational, large-scale programming.

Working from the Ground Up: Personal Connections

The following examples of youth engagement strategies from the research are both individual and group activities structured to build relationships and create opportunities for connection between patrons, the library, and each other. Libraries’ most valuable asset is their staff, and many outreach employees find their own fun and innovative ways to foster lasting relationships. Kendra Wight, Children’s Librarian for Sno-Isle Libraries’ Books on Wheels program, has many talking points. For younger children, she employs a scavenger hunt style game that takes place on the bookmobile, asking children to find books that match a chosen animal or character. Wight also has talking points that challenge older readers, like her “Spoilers” game.

“It goes like this: a kid chooses, takes home and reads a book. The librarian [or staff person] gets a copy of the book for themselves and reads half of it. The kid comes back at a subsequent visit and tries to trick the librarian...by telling the librarian two endings: one is the real ending and one is an ending that the kid has made up.”

Wight explains that this works best with children 8 and up, and that this discussion challenge builds a connection between the library, literacy, and the individual, encouraging youth to “…speak critically and creatively about what they’re reading.”

As many children’s librarians already know, crafts are an easy way to engage children during outreach visits. Patrick Crowley, chair of Street Books ATX uses color-in bookmarks to engage children on the streets of Austin, Texas. Children choose a bookmark, color it in, and place it in their favorite book for others to receive when they choose their book. Michelle Fernandez and the New York Public Library offer cardstock origami bookmobiles for patrons to create—Fernandez also mentions this craft is a hit with adults as well. Many different outreach departments use games to engage children during busy visits. At the King County Library System, I use sidewalk chalk for art contests, and then designate an older teen to be the contest judge with free books as prizes. Ashley Folgate with the Salem Public Library enjoys pick-up-and-go games like bean bag toss, Legos, and oversized lawn games; but may also tailor games to events, as in the case of pumpkin bowling for a Halloween Trunk-or-Treat event. Folgate has also set up a large-scale splatter paint canvas and paint-covered balls in plastic swimming pools, allowing the community at large to contribute to art pieces. Many others utilize general low-budget crafts, including button makers, henna, puppets, leaf art, and cup telephones to keep children engaged and entertained during a bookmobile or outreach event. These examples offer an easy way to connect with children, bring excitement to scheduled outreach visits, and build trust between the library and its community.

COVID Creations: Take-home Services

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many mobile outreach departments have increased their focus on providing service through take-home engagement kits. Joyanne Huston-Swanson, Bookmobile Operator and Community Engagement for...
Michigan’s Kent District Library, checks out Pre-K STEAM activity bags as well as Literacy Boosterpacks filled with Big 5 concept games and books. Kent District Library has also partnered with a local production company to produce a storytime-like show called “Wimee’s Words” that broadcasts online every day at 1 pm EST. Frances Owens with the Iowa City Public Library also has take-home, mainly one-time-use craft kits which contain everything needed to finish the craft. The kits are reserved online and can be picked up at a regularly scheduled outreach visit. Owens mentions that this has served as a way to connect people in the community that may not be able to physically gather, like families that each receive craft kits and do it together over Zoom. Utilizing the literal mobility of outreach service to engage with children during COVID-19 allows libraries to reach patrons more effectively.

**Bigger Connections: Expanding Relationships**

Designated programming budgets for outreach departments—an arguable need, but not necessarily an industry standard—allow for deeper connections during outreach visits with other youth-based organizations. Expanding beyond the boundaries of regular storytimes, the City of Santa Barbara Library is looking towards implementing a mobile Stay-and-Play program, aimed at both English and Spanish-speaking communities (with the assistance of a translator). The program includes songs, books and activities, as well as early literacy information for caregivers. The most vital part of the program, however, is the availability of toys and activities to foster playtime; this opportunity to play (for the kids) and talk (for the caregivers) is the payoff. Providing this space for community engagement places the library at the center of relationships between neighbors, communities, and individuals.

Erin Antes with the Pierce County Library System has also brought major partnership programming to community spaces during mobile outreach visits. Pierce County has partnered with organizations like the Pacific Science Center, Pierce County Environmental Educators, and Idea Hatch STEM programs to bring summer activities to children’s homes, summer schools, and camps. Utilizing mobile outreach community connections and a departmental programming budget, Antes brings high-engagement programming to children who may not otherwise be able to attend similar events in a physical library branch.

**Conclusions**

These engagement strategies employed by outreach staff may seem conventional when taking place in a traditional, static library building—but the joyful engagement and catered programming that outreach staff bring to patrons’ first places are vital in creating lifelong supporters of libraries, especially when reaching those who do not have means to access physical branches. These examples of youth engagement listed above go beyond “regular” bookmobile or storytime service, but providing out-of-the-box service is not unusual for outreach employees. By supporting outreach efforts, libraries transcend the static building; mobile service visits create space wherever we go—space for learning, connection, and community partnerships. Too often, mobile outreach departments are forgotten in the day-to-day life of a library system. Bookmobiles are a great photo opportunity and public relations novelty, but the real value of outreach is the depth of service, knowledge of community, and meaningful relationships with patrons. Library systems can look to their mobile departments as models for community engagement strategies that are innovative, responsive, and grounded in personal connections.

**NOTES**


This article was written with strong support from Dorcas Hand.

ONE VOICE for Washington can become a powerful tool for collaborative library advocacy. Effective advocacy for libraries sparked my interest and involvement in our association. First as an independent school librarian and now as a public school librarian working in our state’s largest district, I have come to appreciate how library advocacy calls for ecosystem thinking about the interrelated role of libraries in our communities. I learned from WLA leaders before me that leadership relies on seeking out and giving a platform for many voices and perspectives to coalesce into ONE VOICE for all libraries in Washington.

In 2011, I got my first glimpse of the Washington library ecosystem when cheering for our first Washington Library Snapshot Day. It showed clearly the opportunities for collaboration with WLA’s public, special and academic libraries that pointed the way to our 2016 merger of the school librarians’ association and 2020 incorporation of academic librarians of ACRL-WA to create Washington Library Association’s current “one big tent” conference for library professionals of all types. After serving as WLA president and following a two-year turn as AASL regional representative for Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Alaska, I was asked to serve as AASL school library representative with the ALA Library Ecosystem Task Force coordinated by Dorcas Hand and ALA staffer Megan Cusick.

The ALA Committee on Library Advocacy (COLA) sponsored the Task Force to develop a toolkit that we hope is useful to state and regional library legislative and advocacy efforts across the country. ONE VOICE: Building a Strong Library Ecosystem was posted to the ALA website in October of 2020 and introduced to the world in a webinar on October 29th (linked on the web page). Readers of this article will want to spend some time exploring the Toolkit in detail.

ONE VOICE offers this definition:

“A library ecosystem is the interconnected network of all types of libraries, library workers, volunteers, trustees, friends, foundations, and associations that provide and facilitate library services—for communities; K–20 learners; college and university communities; local, state and federal legislatures and government offices; businesses; nonprofits; and other organizations with specific information needs. A patron of one library is the potential patron of any other library at a different time of life or in a different location. No library exists independent of the library ecosystem and, when we stand together in mutual support using common messaging themes that demonstrate this interconnectedness, every library is stronger.”

And it envisions reaching these audiences together:

“This ecosystem effort is intended to build internal relationships among all types of libraries and their leadership/professional organizations for the purpose of strengthening advocacy to a broad range of audiences including; federal—Congress, regulators; state—legislature, boards, commissions; local—county commission, city council, governing boards, institutional leadership, Chambers of Commerce, other associations; and individual—voters, stakeholders.”

When we speak collectively to the state legislature or in advocacy efforts around more local needs, our communities can see our value demonstrated in multiple ways they can support.

Craig Seasholes is an elementary school librarian, former WLA president and served as school library representative to the ALA Library Ecosystem Task Force and as Region 8 representative to the AASL Board of Directors, and a member of the Future Ready Librarians Advisory Council. Contact him at seasholes@gmail.com or follow him @CraigSeasholes on Twitter.

Dorcas Hand is Co-Chair of the ALA Committee on Library Advocacy Subcommittee for the Library Ecosystem Initiative. She previously chaired the COLA Library Ecosystem Task Force which developed the ONE VOICE Toolkit. She is a retired school librarian from Houston TX, a former AASL Board member, Current co-chair of the Texas Assn of School Librarians Legislative and Advocacy Committee, and co-founder of Students Need Libraries in HISD (Houston). Contact her at handd51@tekkmall.com or follow her @handdtx and @HTXSchoolLibraries on Twitter.
What is in the Toolkit? The Continuum is a comprehensive rubric that offers us a chance to look at ways to see what WLA already does well and where we can build stronger working relationships for strategic library collaborations. The four main facets of the rubric are Leadership, Communication, Collaboration, and Sustainability. In each facet, there are several sub-topics defined at three levels: Beginner, Emerging, and Highly Effective. Even Ecosystems that are currently highly effective will likely discover ideas that can strengthen current efforts.

Using Leadership as our entry to the Continuum, this screen-shot shows how it is structured with three levels of achievement and reference examples.

There are additional support tools—an introductory checklist to help a group understand why they might want to dig into the process; a generic calendar to sustain efforts; a tool for Recording Progress Towards a Library Ecosystem; an Annual Assessment of Progress Towards Ecosystem Sustainability; and more. Some states may want guidance on how to gather data about the needs of the constituent organizations, so we have included a generic overview to be adapted to local needs.

All types of libraries in Washington are increasingly aware that broadband access is an equity issue that must be addressed statewide. Ecosystem-wide thinking has never been more important as we sharpen our focus on libraries’ roles in addressing digital equity for all members of our Washington communities. As Cindy Aden, our former Washington State Librarian put it in her recent “Future of Libraries” address to ALA:

“What is the future of digital equity? It lies in our hands as librarians and library staff. We can provide support to our citizens so they understand their opportunities; that is in the wheelhouse of what we already do, advocating for our community and partnering with the important stakeholders to be at the table. Our reputation as a community asset with our deep understanding of the needs of our library users, make us a credible participant. Our growing expertise in recognizing inequity, in striving to be inclusive, in building community coalitions that include all voices, these are our strengths. Our future success depends upon our leveraging these community engagement skills to bring digital equity and literacy to our communities.”

Knowing that WLA is already aware of issues requiring collaboration, we encourage you to watch the ONE VOICE web page (open to all) and the frequently updated ALA Ecosystem Connect Space (for ALA members) for new content, as well as social media tagged #ALAEcosystem and #ALAOneVoice. The COLA Ecosystem Subcommittee continues to spread awareness of Ecosystem ideas, and to develop additional tools to support stronger Ecosystem work at every level within WA state.

As we have seen, WLA’s inclusion of WLMA school librarians—and more recently ACRL-WA members—has added multiple perspectives, insights and energy that raise ONE VOICE for all libraries in our state. The Ecosystem Toolkit offers us all tips and resources to further strengthen our efforts together. I look forward to digging in with you as we identify those elements that can sharpen our efforts to strengthen our impact as advocates serving all communities in Washington’s diverse and robust library ecosystem.

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2 Ibid.

Like everyone else over this past year, Masters of Library and Information Science students at the iSchool at the University of Washington have had to be resourceful in finding ways to stay connected. We have tried a few different activities and approaches, but the most successful has been the mega popular computer and mobile game sensation, Among Us.¹

A game of Among Us takes place in a futuristic environment, typically a spaceship. As crewmates, players have to complete tasks to achieve victory. One person is secretly chosen at the beginning of the game to play as the impostor. The impostor must work in the shadows to eliminate (that is, virtually murder) the crewmates one by one. When a crewmate discovers a body, they call a meeting, and the survivors decide who to eject from the spaceship.

What separates Among Us from many popular computer games is the relative lack of mechanical skill involved in gameplay. The controls are easy to pick up, even for beginners, and the majority of the tasks are straightforward. As the impostor, killing is as simple as pressing a button, with no chance of failure. Rather than cultivating reflexes or coordination, success in Among Us requires players to understand community dynamics and the flow of information. This follows in the tradition of other games like Minecraft, where social interaction and team skills are a major part of the game’s appeal.² To win the game, you have to remember what you know, and what you do not know.

Information is a precious resource during every round. During the task period, players do not know who is alive or dead. Nobody knows for a fact what the other person’s tasks are, where they have been, or where they are going. Impostors can pretend to work on tasks and even report the murders that they commit. To survive an execution vote, savvy crewmates attempt to control the narrative. They present their own alibis and vouch for players they believe are acting normally. Similarly, an effective impostor must account for their own whereabouts, and redirect suspicion onto an innocent player. Social strategies change round by round: is it suspicious to be silent, or to talk too much? A well-argued accusation can quickly snowball into a cascade of votes, for better or for worse. The more you play together, the more you understand each other’s quirks and habits. Does someone have a reputation for deception? Is someone notorious for messing up the card swiping game? This reflects the user experience of the information marketplace. Nobody is a blank slate. We bring our past and our biases to every book we read and headline we scan, and that makes us vulnerable to what we want to hear.

Among Us is an effective introduction to the contemporary information landscape, where misinformation is deployed as a strategic weapon. In the fake news era, we have seen agents across the world deliberately target trust in public institutions, in the same way that an impostor poisons the crewmate team dynamic.³ Cooperation in the game, like cooperation in the real world, demands that we resist our worst impulses. There is always the temptation to share an article or accuse a teammate as soon as possible, and we do not know we got it wrong until it is too late.

The most underrated skill in Among Us is being able to acknowledge that you are wrong. In the early game, it is common to have a reasonable suspicion of the impostor—but that is not the same as knowing for sure. Blindly pursuing your own personal suspect can lead you to ignore vital evidence. It is common to realize you have been chasing an innocent party only after you discover their corpse. Being open to criticism and acknowledging that you only have part of the complete picture goes a long way. Likewise, we must remember that no news source has the full story on the first day of publication. In the library world, we must constantly ask ourselves where information is coming from, and who benefits from spreading it.

Jacob Lackner is a first year MLIS student at the iSchool at the University of Washington. He began his studies while working at the Los Angeles Public Library. He collects shot glasses and feels deeply uncomfortable around chalkboards.

Screenshot courtesy of the author.
Among Us could easily serve as a centerpiece of a library program about misinformation and social relationships. Libraries can play an important role in the fight against misinformation, especially by embracing nontraditional strategies in new formats that do not make people feel guilty for being duped. The game has an extremely low barrier to entry (five dollars on Steam, free on iOS and Android phones), and the relative lack of coordination required to play means that it is very accessible for new users. Simply asking your fellow players questions like, “what makes someone good at Among Us?” could result in many interesting answers and spark a lively discussion.

Among Us was the perfect game to play during our first steps in the world of librarianship. The contemporary librarian will have to face off against an information onslaught from every direction. Deception is a billion dollar industry. We have to foster community ties, hold out for solid evidence, and be aware that everyone is vulnerable to manipulation.

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Let me wrap up with a few of my takeaways from our pandemic experience:

- In-person meetings are missed and not to be taken for granted. The small conversations we had passing each other’s desks and chatting at the circulation counter helped many small ideas blossom into something greater.

- Have written directions. Many of our procedures, in the before-times, relied on word-of-mouth or direct communication with a supervisor. With limited staff at the building, we realized how important it is to have procedures and policies written and organized in a way that is accessible both digitally and physically.

- Cross train. Being able to have a second person who is able to do a task has been very beneficial. Early on in the pandemic we moved to a two team model, safeguarding staff in case one person were to become infected. This means that the person who typically does something may not always be in the building. Having a second person who knows how things work has been extremely helpful and has made our work more robust.

- Be a city supporter. As a municipal library, we rely heavily on our coworkers in other departments and the city council members. By having their support we had a lot more maneuverability when we proposed our new programs or procedures.

- Be kind. As always taking the time to smile and ask questions has helped us get through this difficult time. My colleagues are shining examples of going out of their way—within guidelines—to assist our community however we can. It is a pleasure to work with them.
We thought we would offer you a glimpse into the stacks of books that are physically or virtually piling up on our nightstands. Reading has been either a comfort, or elusive—because of an inability to focus for more than five minutes. Regardless of our relationship to those book piles, here is what some of your Editorial Committee has been reading or is hoping to read.


Pandemic time has exacerbated my addiction to self-help books, and the audio version of Tara Brach’s comforting how-to manual on acceptance is just the thing to keep me going. She fleshes out the story of the historical Buddha in a way that feels intimate, and she is generous with her own story. Her description of the sacred pause is apt, an appropriate metaphor for the way we live our lives now.

- Claire Murata


Eubanks interrogates algorithmic data analysis in this sharp indictment of what she calls “the digital poorhouse”. With 26 pages of works consulted, this book is dense, but worth the work. Eubanks uses both big data and personal accounts to expose a frightening reality: that the automated systems we use for everything—from social media to healthcare to solutions for homelessness—are further marginalizing the poorest members of our society.

- Caitlin Wheeler


Set in 1980’s South Korea, this book follows a young boy named Dong-ho after the brutal and tragic Gwangju Uprising. Throughout the book we see the aftermath from the eyes of Dong-ho, his dead best friend as his body is disposed of, an editor who is attempting to get to the bottom of the story, Dong-ho’s own grieving mother, and other interconnected characters that help us understand the true impact of the uprising. This book has taken me weeks to get through because of its prodigious intensity and violence, but I would recommend it to anyone that is passionate about history or interested in the fight for democracy around the world. I would also recommend having a more lighthearted book lined up to read afterwards.

- Maggie Crelling


If you have mental illness in your family, (and who doesn’t?), this is fascinating reading. The book follows a seemingly ordinary family with twelve children, six of whom eventually develop schizophrenia. It chronicles this ill-prepared, but not atypical family’s choices about how to deal with this very perplexing disease. Kolker traces the reactions of society and science, and helps shed light on some secrets that probably aggravated the devastation for everyone. I couldn’t put it down.

- Maura Walsh

*continued on next page*

Ali is a sweet and innocent high school junior who has finally caught the eye of Sean, the senior boy she has pined for since elementary school. When they connect at a party, though, things go too far and she finds herself in a situation where this boy she had adored sexually assaults her. Told in alternating perspectives—Ali who is struggling to come to terms with what happened and questions her role in the disturbing event, and Blythe, the girlfriend of Sean’s best friend and the one who helped arrange the encounter—this book is an honest and realistic look at rape, particularly in the world of high school students. As the two girls form a bond and grow to understand the events of that terrible night, they realize that they must find their voices in spite of the betrayal that they both feel. This book is hard to read because of the subject matter, but it is an essential read for anyone hoping to support young women through difficult situations and help them find the power of their voice in a world that is filled with noise. -Kristin Jewell


Jay Reguero's senior year of high school is not going great, and he's not excited about his plans to start college in the fall. And just before spring break, he finds out his cousin, and life-long best friend, Jun, was killed by Duterte’s drug war. He convinces his parents to let him go by himself to visit their family in the Philippines, and try to find answers to how the cousin he had been pen pals with until the last few years, could end up killed by the state. Randy Ribay's writing is phenomenal, and plays with the idea of story, acknowledging how each person's experience, interpretation, and retelling reshapes what we know at the end. -Alaina C. Bull


In a time in which it can be hard to focus on abstract essays I have found great comfort in listening to this audiobook, read by the author. The six essays that make up this book describe the COVID-19 lockdown and explore what it means to live through a pandemic. Smith discusses factual aspects of lockdown through a personal lens, at times explaining phenomena I’ve witnessed, and other times describing experiences from different places and communities. It’s been hard to connect with people for the past year, and listening to this book made me feel less alone, as though I was meeting up with a friend who was processing all of this simultaneously. I’ve already flagged it to read later, when this period is well past, as a reminder of what we persevered through. -Lauren Pressley


Looking back to the mid 1990’s, Angie Thomas explores the life of Starr Carter’s father, Maverick, when he was just a teenager. I’ve been excited for a while to read about Mav, because he is such a central relationship for Starr in *The Hate U Give*, but clearly a person with a life and a set of experiences of his own. I loved seeing younger-self familiar faces (Mr. Lewis, for example) show up, but fell in love with the relationship between Maverick and Seven, his infant son. Central to the story is Maverick’s role as a single teenage parent, negotiating day-to-day living expenses, parenthood, relationships, and stigma. Thomas creates in Maverick a character we empathize with, embrace, and triumph alongside as he navigates his experiences. I read this in one sitting, which is amazing given how hard reading has been for me during the pandemic. -Johanna Jacobsen Kiciman
Founding Member of the UW Tacoma Library Retires

In January 2021, Suzanne Klinger began her retirement from a long and influential career at the University of Washington Tacoma Library. Her early librarianship included various settings, including The University of New Mexico, The University of Illinois Chicago, Duke University, and the Pierce County Library System. After moving to the area with her partner, Suzanne interviewed for the first librarian position at the nascent University of Washington Tacoma campus, before the library even occupied permanent space and as individuals were still conceptualizing the university curriculum. She began in July 1990 as Head of Public Services.

In her interview for the UW Tacoma Founding Stories Project, Suzanne noted that the early days involved a lot of “institution building.” “We had to design the resources...And this was all pre internet days. So, we had to design the forms that students were going to use to request articles and books, ‘cause none of it could happen electronically.”

As her career progressed she grew her skillset from the paper based catalog, to early catalogs on CD-ROM, to helping students navigate the hundreds of online databases available today. As Head of Reference, she mentored dozens of MLIS students, providing them with a rich, professional experience in a supportive environment. She maintained her critical eye for, and commitment to, increasing justice, equity, and diversity for students on campus. She worked to promote lifelong learning for every individual she met with, and saw a commitment to DEI as integral to her work. She said of UW Tacoma, “I feel like when I look at the students on this campus, I see what the future of the whole country is. And that sounds kind of grandiose but it is this amazing mix of people. And that gives me hope.” Although her final months working remotely at UW Tacoma were unlike what she would have imagined or wanted, she persevered and maintained her spirit of service until her well-earned retirement.

Suzanne has also maintained a commitment to her own well-being, health, and care for the environment. She and her partner have minimized their dependence on fossil fuels by making principled choices in the way they eat, work, live, and travel. In her retirement she will continue with her daily exercise routine, observing the stars and the natural world around her, gardening, and trips to enjoy the outdoor beauty of Washington State.

Moak Retires from Mid-Columbia Libraries

Tom Moak, Branch Manager for Mid-Columbia Libraries, retired in March after over 41 years with Mid-Columbia. He was hired as head reference librarian after graduating from the University of Washington. “It was a great time for library development in the state, and our director, Shirley Tucker, was prominent in that movement, as had been her predecessor, Neva Bequette,” said Moak. “It was an exciting time to be a new librarian.”

Moak started in reference services and collection management for the system, but spent the past twenty years in branch management and nine months as Interim Director.

Within WLA, where both Bequette and Tucker were past presidents, Moak is proudest of serving as Chair of the 1999 Conference in Pasco. When the hotel could not accommodate an exhibit space, a makeshift space had to be created in an offsite brewery. The opening reception was held at the still unfinished “new” Kennewick library, an award-winning building that Moak would manage for 15 years. Moak also helped form WLA’s former Grassroots Interest Group with KCLS’s John Sheller.

Moak also has enjoyed a (mostly) successful career as a politician. He served a year in the state legislature, twelve years on the Kennewick City Council (including a year as mayor), and is in his eighth year as a Kennewick port commissioner. He also served on the boards of Humanities Washington and the Washington Trust for Historic Preservation. “Being a good librarian helped me become a dedicated public servant and community leader,” said Moak.

Content courtesy of Tom Moak.

Milestones focuses on significant moments for libraries statewide – recognizing notable new hires, transitions, expansions and retirements, as well as remembrances of those who have passed. We’re looking for submissions, of approximately 250 words, that highlight notable accomplishments in the careers of those profiled. Photographs are encouraged. Please send information to alkieditor@wla.org.
Retiring ILS Librarian Leaves a Legacy of Supporting Co-workers and Championing Patrons

Institutional Library Services (ILS), part of the Washington State Library, provides library services to prisons and psychiatric hospitals. In February 2021, one of ILS' most beloved staff members retired after 30 years of service.

Jeannie Remillard worked in libraries for more than 50 years. She began her career at the Walla Walla Public Library. Next she got a job with ILS at the Washington State Penitentiary, and then the Stafford Creek Corrections Center.

Jeannie is known among both patrons and coworkers for her kindness and generosity, earning her the ironic nickname of “Meannie Jeannie”. In her libraries she created a positive, nonjudgmental, and customer service-oriented atmosphere. She has been described by her peers as a “champion of our patrons” and “the team cheerleader.”

“Jeannie’s positive outlook is a tremendous attribute,” one librarian said. “I have gotten several out-of-the-blue phone calls from her with words of appreciation and encouragement.”

Jeannie’s contributions to the culture and values of ILS and the libraries where she worked were immeasurable. As she neared her last day at ILS, she said, “I love the job as much now as when I started.” Working for ILS has been the greatest part of her life. “I can see what we do, for their lives, for them personally. When you get up in the morning and see how you touch people’s lives, it’s a great feeling. I can’t imagine my life without ILS.” And we can’t imagine ILS without her.

Goodbye and thank you, not-even-remotely-Meanie Jeannie!

Content courtesy of Laura Sherbo.

Welcoming a New State Librarian

Washington Secretary of State Kim Wyman has appointed Sara Jones as the new State Librarian. As State Librarian, Jones will oversee Washington State Library, a division of the Office of the Secretary of State.

Jones grew up in rural Idaho where libraries were an important resource for her family, perhaps planting the seed that has made her a fierce advocate for youth services. In her previous position, as director of the Marin County Free Library, she eliminated all fines for children’s and teen materials, and issued over 9,000 library cards to students in the district.

She was instrumental in bringing 21st-century learning and emerging technologies to the library’s 10 branches. Working with the Novato Unified School District and Marin County Office of Education, she helped create a campus that included not only the library but a media lab with virtual reality, video production, and recording studios, and a large and active makerspace. Her achievements earned her the American Library Association’s Sullivan Award for Services to Children in 2018.

Washington is Jones’ second tenure as a state librarian. She was the State Librarian in Nevada from 2000 to 2007. There she oversaw the state archives, executive branch records, state record management, and guidance for all local jurisdictions.

On behalf of Alki: Welcome, Sara! We’re thrilled to have you in Washington!

For additional information about Sara Jones, see also:


While the way that physical libraries operate has changed significantly over the past year, the role of librarians has not—we still get books and other resources into the hands of our patrons, just in different ways than we are used to. With that in mind, here are some recently published books that Puget Sound Council members highly recommend.

**See the Cat: Three Stories About a Dog.**
Author: David Larochelle. Illustrator: Mike Wohnoutka
Recommended for pre K-1st
Review by Sharon Turpin

As evidenced by the title, this beginning reader contains three short stories featuring a dog as the main character. In the first chapter, titled See the Cat, the dog objects to and counters each new command until a blue cat with a unicorn comes through the final illustration. In the second chapter See the Snake, the dog decides to change the outcome of the snake biting him by editing the text with his pencil. See the Dog concludes the book, but the uncooperative dog does not want to jump or fly even with the threat of a hippo sitting on him. This fun book will make young readers giggle as they navigate these well written tales with dialogue balloons and entertaining colorful gouache illustrations. A wonderful addition to the beginning reader section, and a winner of the Theodor Seuss Geisel Beginning Reader Award for 2021.

**I Am Brown.**
Author: Ashok Banker. Illustrator: Sandhya Prabhat
Recommended for K-3rd
Review by Sarah Threlkeld

This celebratory picture book is a beautiful and empowering mirror for every brown-skinned child and an important window for white children. It opens with the statement “I am brown; I am beautiful; I am perfect” and then goes on to spotlight lots of different non-white kids acting out various professions, speaking different languages, praying in a multitude of places (or not praying at all), eating lots of different foods and wearing a variety of outfits. These kids come from every continent except Antarctica and are your friends, your classmates, your neighbors, and more. The book ends with a close-up spread of four children and the words, “I am brown; I am amazing; I am YOU.” The minimal text really packs a punch and is accessible for very young readers, and the digitally rendered illustrations are so vivid and detailed that eyes will linger on each page long after the words have been read. This book should be in every elementary library.

**Rise!: From Caged Bird to Poet of the People, Maya Angelou.**
Author: Bethany Hegedus. Illustrator: Tonya Engel.
Recommended for 4th-6th grade.
Review by Kathryn Cook.

Through both illustrations and words, the life of Maya Angelou is brought to life for the reader. From a train ride at age six with only her older brother Bailey (just one year older, her protector) to Stamps, Arkansas, and on to Washington DC and the inauguration of President Bill Clinton, we follow Maya Angelou’s tough and difficult childhood to the joy of discovering the written and spoken word. Rich and rhythmic text and lush oil and acrylic illustrations draw us into Maya’s life. We hear her emotions in the poetry of the narrative free verse “the white girls, not that much older than Maya enter the store, wielding their whiteness as a weapon,” “Young Maya loves Stamps. Young Maya hates Stamps. Hate and love, love and hate: the seesaw of the South.” The grade designation is important to

Sarah Threlkeld is the current Chair of Puget Sound Council, the head librarian at Briarwood Elementary in the Issaquah School District, a member of the Sasquatch Committee, and recovering podcaster. When she doesn’t have her nose buried in a book, she is probably baking, running, singing, or building Lego with her family.

*continued on next page*
consider as the sexual abuse she suffered as a child at the hands of a family connection leading to five years as virtual mute is told, and may need additional explanation: “One day, Maya, left alone with Mr. Freeman, is anything but free. After a visit to the hospital, Maya calls out Mr. Freeman’s name as the one who hurt her.” This is a story that begs to read aloud. Recommend for 4th-6th grade, but I wouldn’t hesitate to share with Middle School and High School students.

*American as Paneer Pie.*
Author: Supriya Kelkar.
Recommended for 5th-8th grade
Review by Anne Dame

Lekha is the only Indian-American living in a suburb of Detroit and is the only Indian-American girl at her school. She is excited when a new girl moves in across the street and she realizes that the new girl is Indian, too—and not just Indian, but also Desi! No longer will she be the only one who gets all the stares and has to answer all the questions; someone else will understand! But then Lekha realizes that Avantika has just moved to the US, and so there will actually be even more stares and more questions. Lekha loves her heritage but is truly struggling with how to balance it all without offending anyone and without being bullied. This is a heart-felt and heart-warming story about family, friendship, and being proud of who you are and where you are from. This is a perfect middle grade book for engaging in meaningful discussions about race, identity, and bullying.

*Raybearer.*
Author: Jordan Ifueko
Recommended for 9th-12th grade
Review by Eve Datisman

Debut. This was the first book talked about on NPR’s 2020 Book Concierge and it is a winner. It is an African-influenced fantasy about a young girl, Tarisai, who is raised in isolation by strict tutors and a mysterious mother. She is meant to be an instrument of her mother’s wrath, a purpose ensured by a magical wish and having a powerful chru (djinn) for a father. Only when Tarisai joins the Crown Prince’s Council of 11 and is bound to him by the powers of the Ray, does she realize that she is supposed to slay him. She fights against this and seeks a way to choose her own path. To do so, she embarks on a journey through the twelve realms of Aritsar to discover the truth about her complicated history. Ifueko’s fantasy blends Nigerian folklore with a mélange of other influences to create a multicultural world where colonization and imperialism inform the story as much as Tarisai’s own choices. Tarisai’s first-person narration offers a limited perspective, increasing suspense as she tries to guess The Lady’s motives. This is a multi-layered, complicated, nuanced story. Fans of Black Panther will eat it up, as will fans of Egyptian the web comic Qahera, the first hijab-wearing super-heroine. *BkLst, Kirkus, PubWkly*

*Fierce 44: Black Americans Who Shook Up Our World.*
Author: Robert Ball
Recommended for all ages
Review by Craig Seasholes

The Fierce 44 takes its title from the 44th president of the United States, Barack Hussein Obama. Introduced by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., this anthology is a celebration of African American culture and history, a part of ESPN’s “The Undefeated”. Each of the forty-four are given a full page portrait by Robert Ball and a page of text describing their accomplishments and significance for all Americans. Over the past few years, there has been an explosion of worthwhile biographical anthologies, and this certainly should earn a proud place in all school libraries as we seek to reflect the contributions of African Americans in all fields of endeavor. While certainly featuring sports, the ESPN site also has a strong “Culture” tab that is worthwhile being bookmarked into library catalogs at https://theundefeated.com/culture/.
Comfort Reads

On February 22, 2021, Nancy Pearl tweeted: “The last thing I want to read now is a “harrowing novel.” That same afternoon, my mom texted me looking for a suggestion for her book group. “Something light and easy,” she asked. The requests from the King County Library System’s form-based readers’ advisory service show that my mom and Nancy are not alone in their longing for a reading experience that offers a refuge from the maelstrom of current events. The news on the pandemic front is, finally, starting to be good, but “normal” is still a long time away for many of us. We are lonely. We are tired. And we want our books to relieve us of the anxiety and grief of the last year. With all that in mind, here are some comfort reads for you and your patrons.

What makes a great comfort read? Relationships, self-discovery, and ultimately, a hopeful ending even if the characters face adversity and hardship on the way. They are both funny and gentle. I don’t mean gentle in the way the word is sometimes used in readers’ advisory, i.e. without strong language or sex, but in the sense that these titles have a tenderness toward their characters. These are not just books with a happy ending. These are books that believe in the goodness of people. This is just a small selection, so please send your favorite comfort reads to me. Like many other readers, I could use them right now.

All Adults Here by Emma Straub
When the widowed Strick family matriarch Astrid witnesses a casual acquaintance (ok, a frenemy) get hit by a bus, it sends shockwaves through her life, the lives of her three adult children, and her grandchildren. What is comforting about this book is the way the family comes together to support each other when it matters most. This is a deeply life-affirming novel about people trying to do the right thing—and succeeding, most of the time.

Boyfriend Material by Alexis Hall
This cheerful British rom-com is a King County Library System staff favorite right now. It follows Luc, who is c-list tabloid fodder thanks to his absentee rock star dad. When Luc’s tabloid antics threaten his non-profit job, he decides to fake a steady relationship. Enter Oliver, a put-together barrister who is Luc’s complete opposite. Despite their differences, their fake relationship evolves into something more. In addition to a sweet LGBTQ+ love story, Boyfriend Material is full of silly, laugh-out-loud humor.

Professor Chandra Follows His Bliss by Rajeev Balasubramanyam
A minor heart attack, combined with trouble at the university where he teaches, sends grumpy economics professor Chandra from Cambridge to the United States. Chandra—smart, snarky, and deeply insecure—has difficult relationships with all three of his children, not to mention his ex-wife and her new husband. The trip leads to unexpected self-reflection that allows Chandra to think about the accomplishments and failures of his life in new terms.

Better Luck Next Time by Julia Claiborne Johnson
This fizzy historical comedy opens with an old man looking at a photo of a group of women, talking to an unnamed interviewer. Ward recounts his time as a 24-year-old hired hand at the Flying Leap Dude Ranch outside of Reno. In 1938, Nevada offered the nation’s quickest divorces, but still required six weeks of residency, so “divorce ranches” where women could stay for that
Miss Benson’s Beetle by Rachel Joyce
London, 1950: Margery Benson is middle-aged, single, and working an unfulfilling teaching job. When a student insult goes too far, she gathers the courage to quit and sail for New Caledonia, to hunt for a golden beetle her father told her about. A single woman can’t travel alone, so Margery hires beautiful, impetuous Enid Petty as a companion. The women couldn’t be more different, but they end up complimenting each other in surprising ways. Unexpected friendships are a hallmark of comfort reads, and the friendship that develops between Margery and Enid is unforgettable.

Serena Singh Flips the Script by Sonya Lalli
When Serena Singh’s younger sister Natasha gets married and pregnant in quick succession, it changes their relationship drastically, especially since Natasha’s now the “good daughter” to their Indian immigrant mother. Feeling the loss of her sister’s friendship, Serena takes on the tricky task of making friends as an adult. A new friendship and a casual fling are both threatened when a relationship from her past resurfaces. Full of likable but complex characters, Lalli’s third novel is part family story, part ode to building a life on one’s own terms.

We so greatly enjoyed the art contributed by library workers from across the state shared at the Washington Library Association 2020 annual meeting. The past three issues, we have been fortunate enough to have Alki covers featuring art submitted, well, by you!

We are energized to call on our entire community of library workers—in any role—to submit cover art as a jpeg for upcoming issues of Alki by emailing alkieditor@wla.org. Please include a brief biography with your submission. The deadline is rolling, and we will consider all images that are submitted that are in line with our editorial principles.

Questions? Please reach out to the Alki Editor by emailing alkieditor@wla.org.
### Dispatches from Swellville

**by Darcy McMurtery**

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**Deciphering Library Cover Letters**

*Photo by Thom Milkovic on Unsplash.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT THEY WRITE</th>
<th>WHAT IT MEANS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I possess attention to detail</td>
<td>There will be mistakes in my application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am uniquely qualified</td>
<td>I’m not, but it sounded good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To whom it may concern</td>
<td>I couldn’t be bothered to learn the name of the hiring manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to make reachable goals</td>
<td>I don’t know how to use a thesaurus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think you’d agree</td>
<td>I’m unable to understand other perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After 20 years in the medical industry I wanted to try a new career in a quiet</td>
<td>I didn’t read the job description and I haven’t set foot in a library in 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and studious environment and I love to read</td>
<td>years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m looking to hone my skills</td>
<td>I have no skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I endeavor to construct purposeful alliances with collaborators</td>
<td>I found the thesaurus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My studies are underway</td>
<td>I don’t possess the required endorsement or degree listed in the job description but I’m applying anyway</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Stay tuned for the next issue, where I may (or may not) write a piece about deciphering gargantuan library job posts.

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*Darcy McMurtery is a program manager for school libraries in a large district on the west side. She’d tell you she loves to read, but it’s an expectation of the job.*
WLA Thanks Our Organizational Members

Organizational Members

Asotin County Library
Bellevue College Library
Bellingham Public Library
Burlington Public Library
Eastern Washington University Libraries
Ellensburg Public Library
Everett Public Library
Fort Vancouver Regional Library District
Grandview Library
Green River College
Highline College Library
Jefferson County Library
King County Library System
Kitsap Regional Library
Lake Washington Institute of Technology
Lower Columbia College
National Network of Libraries of Medicine, Pacific
NW Region
NCW Libraries
North Seattle College
Pierce College Library
Primary Source
Puyallup Public Library
Ritzville Library District #2
San Juan Island Library
Seattle Central College Library
Seattle Public Library
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