Programming Ideas for Teen Librarians: Spotlight on Makerspaces

By: Katie Blythe

It can be hard enough to come up with new, exciting, and relevant programming for teens in libraries, let alone in the societal climate we live in now; Technology and social trends are fast-paced and ever-changing, and it's all about the next new thing. In this article, we hope to help with this by giving our readers a spotlight on a trending type of programming in public libraries today: Makerspaces, also known as Hackerspaces or Fab Labs.

What are Makerspaces?

Makerspaces are what the name suggests – spaces that emphasize or facilitate the act of making – and are as vague as they sound. Lam (2015) describes makerspaces as "informal learning spaces in which teens can create, invent, socialize, and work with mentors and peers." Slatter and Howard (2013) describe makerspaces as "a place where people come together to create and collaborate, to share resources, knowledge, and stuff."

Makerspaces have emerged as if in response to the shifting societal landscape and role of public libraries (Lam, 2015) and while they tend to have a focus on technology, creation in general, whether it be through digital or traditional media, is the central focus of these spaces (Slatter and Howard, 2013). Makerspaces, both big or small, provide informal spaces for teens to explore and cultivate social learning, creativity, learn new literacy skills, and gain access to tools, tech, and mentoring opportunities that would otherwise be financially unavailable to them (Lam, 2015).

Slatter and Howard (2013), in their study of the state of makerspaces in Australian public libraries, identified five main goals of makerspaces: (1) expand library services, (2) encourage community engagement, (3) provide a participatory learning environment, (4) provide equitable access to equipment and technology, and (5) to challenge traditional conceptions of library services and spaces.

Libraries with Makerspaces

Moncton Public Library

The Moncton Public Library boasts their makerspace as "a place where people gather to share resources and knowledge learn new technology, build new skills, work on projects, network, and MAKE pretty much anything!" ("Makerspace," 2019). They have multiple tools that can be used to borrowed including a 3D printer, sewing machine, button maker, Lego Mindstorms, a Circuit expression, and an iMac Workstation ("Makerspace," 2019).

Hamilton Public Library

Hamilton Public Library's makerspace emphasizes the use of technology, encouraging patrons to "visit any of our collaborative Makerspaces to explore, learn and make something great with our high-tech tools," ("Makerspaces," 2019). They promote a space in which users can create video projects, use 3D printers, digitize media, learn computer coding, and even play or record music ("Makerspaces," 2019).

Stratford Public Library

Similar to the Hamilton Public Library, the Stratford Public Library also promotes their makerspace with an emphasis on technology, but also includes broader types of making as well, describing their space as a place "where people can come together to learn about technology, crafts and other kinds of making, to share knowledge and skills with others, and to apply this knowledge and skill by creating things," ("SPL makerspace," 2013). Their equipment includes a 3D printer, a Silhouette Cameo 3 Vynil Cutter, Ozobots, LEGO Mindstorms, a VHS to DVD converter, Adobe Creative Suite programs and more ("SPL makerspace," 2013).

Sudbury Public Library

Sudbury Public Library's makerspace includes 3D printing, 3D scanning, sewing machines, a green screen for movie making, various tools and more ("Equipment and resources," n.d.).

Further reading and resources

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Egbert, M., & ProQuest. (2016). Creating makers: How to start a learning revolution at your library. Santa Barbara, California: Libraries Unlimited, an imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC.

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Makerspace. (2019). Retrieved from https://monctonpubliclibrary.ca/makerspace/

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