

## Case Studies: Talking to Librarians

Librarian Paula Brehm-Heeger is a big fan of original content. The Teen Services Coordinator at the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County made a compelling pitch in a recent *YALS* article for more original content on libraries' young adult Web pages. Original content is content created by local teenagers or library staff, and may consist of photos, artwork, writings, or music.

*"If you want teens to read it, it can't be too sanitized. Even school literary journals that I've seen have included some swearing and edgy material--I guess it's the editors' job to figure out where to draw the line."*  
~ Paula Brehm-Heeger, Teen Librarian

Brehm-Heeger's observation is that many YA Web sites on the Virtual YA Index (<http://yahelp.suffolk.lib.ny.us/virtual.html>) focus too much on links and notices, and too little on substance. She acknowledges that although librarians may be too busy to create new content, teens themselves could "provide meaningful original content about themselves, their world, and teen culture" ("A Case for Making

Original Content Part of Your YA Web Page". *YALS*, Winter, 2005, p. 33).

Librarians who decide to include original content on their Web site or other publications face a few interesting issues:

- ❖ Privacy: Should you post teen complete teen names, or just the first name?
- ❖ Selectivity: Do you want to accept all submissions, or only select the best?
- ❖ Censorship: How much and what type of profanity or controversial content will be permitted?
- ❖ Visibility: How will you promote the site?

In March, we emailed questions to two Young Adult librarians in Maine who have published young adult original content: Biddeford's McArthur Library's Sally Leahy who has published a poetry anthology, and Brunswick's Curtis Library's

Melissa Orth, whose TeenZone Web site hosts artwork and poems.

**YA Hotline:** Do you post the teen's full name?

**Sally Leahy:** I'm wary of posting full names, but that may be too conservative. I notice that *Portland Press Herald's* 20 Below uses full names, whereas *TeenInk* does not. It just seems that there's more likelihood of unsavory contacts resulting if full names are used. On the other hand, kids' full names appear all the time in newspaper stories, yearbooks, etc. So it's probably no big deal.

**YAH:** Do you winnow submissions by quality?

**SL:** It depends on the purpose of your project. If you want to give teens the opportunity and affirmation of being published, then quality may not be a deciding factor. On the other hand, if you want it to be a real honor to be published, that will only be meaningful if material is juried (according to clear criteria).

**YAH:** Do you allow any profanity, or provocative content?

**SL:** In my opinion, if you want teens to read it, it can't be too sanitized.

Even school literary journals that I've seen have included some swearing and edgy material--I guess it's the editors' job to figure out where to draw the line. And it probably depends on whether the sponsor is a school, church, public library, or individual.

**YAH:** Did you face any unforeseen challenges?

**Melissa Orth:** I faced some technical challenges of transferring submissions onto the website. Teens would give me an acrylic painting on canvas board and expect me to put it on the website overnight. Well the scanner isn't big enough or wouldn't talk to the computer that has Dreamweaver or what have you. So at first we faced technical problems that we've since worked out.

**YAH:** Can you suggest any resources that helped you in the

development and conception of the Teenzone Web site?

thanks to Melissa Orth and Sally Leahy who shared some of their experiences with us.

**MO:** Linda Braun (leonline.com) and I designed our website with LOTS of teen input. Teens are the BEST resource. We set up a few mock sites and had them vote on each one and then also set up a quiz survey such as "rank what you think is important on a library website: links to school info, homework info, local news, etc. " and got input that way too. Very very helpful.

**YAH:** Anything else you have to share is welcome!

**MO:** The hardest part is getting teens to check out the website. We have it as the homepage on some computers in the library but I am not sure anyone sees it. Getting teens involved still doesn't guarantee that they'll use the site. You got to print it on every bit of press and publication possible and keep it up to date.

Brehm-Heeger's request for more teen content and participation is a welcome call for action. Special