

# Benefits of Crafting for Teens

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Young adults benefit from practicing crafts. Taking time to be creative serves as a release for their emotions. S. Perrin believes that teens who are involved in arts are more capable of meeting “the challenges of adolescent psychological development” (2004). The turmoil experienced during the teenage years can be soothed by creative pursuits. Crafts can serve as mental yoga or mental bungee jumping. Perrin writes that “the study of the arts provides young people with a constructive and meaningful outlet for risk taking” (2004). For whichever therapeutic reasons young adults approach crafting they will benefit from it.

For example, Carmella Ricciardelli, a jewellery maker, began a crafting program for the youth in crime-ridden neighbourhoods in New Haven. She started the program in hopes of keeping them safe and out of trouble. Called “Crafts on the Block,” the program draws between 60-140 kids a night and provides the kids with a sense of confidence

and motivation. Ricciardelli reports that the program has given the kids an activity they can be proud of and someone they can depend on. One of the youngsters in Ricciardelli’s group used crafting to cope with his grief over his mother’s fatal shooting (Kenney, 2007, p. 11).

Perhaps as a result of restored peace of mind, those individuals who pursue creativity have greater success in other areas of their lives. Perrin and Mandel both agree that overall performance is improved. Mandel writes “students with higher exposure to the arts are likely to succeed in school and to be civic-minded individuals” (2007, p. 59). The benefits of teen crafting extends beyond their own gain to their surrounding community. Crafts improve individual wellbeing as well as communal wellbeing.

## Crafts help young adults to:

- ✓ **Create Identity:** Their identity is both created and communicated through the artwork.
- ✓ **Embrace Community:** The universal community of arts introduces them to previously unknown like-minded people.
- ✓ **Develop Imagination and Vision:** Being creative through crafts encourages their freedom to play and explore.
- ✓ **Develop Focus:** Crafts require attention to detail and strong focus.
- ✓ **Gain Confidence:** Completing a craft from beginning to end provides a sense of accomplishment and pride.
- ✓ **Explore Possibilities:** Envisioning and planning a craft project requires an exploration of numerous possible outcomes.
- ✓ **Challenge Themselves:** Crafting can be hard, and undertaking a more complicated or detailed craft can be a healthy challenge.

# Why Libraries Should Offer Crafting

It is ubiquitous that art programs and their funding are being downsized. The limited amount of places and strained resources are eliminating places for young adults to craft. When young adults “get to high school, they often find that the arts are acknowledged, if at all, by modest requirements such as one ‘arts’ credit for graduation” (Perrin, 2004). Stringent academic requirements make it even more difficult to fit any additional arts courses into a prerequisite-filled course of study.

With the opportunities to be creative at school being limited students are looking for a new venue to craft in. Mason states that “interest in amateur crafts [is] increasing and many teenagers [claim] to be ‘making things’ at home” (2005, p. 261). When they want to get outside of their houses to craft where can they go? Answer: The Library!

Libraries and crafting fit naturally together. Mandel points out “with art-rich collections and the increasing emphasis on programming for children and teens, libraries are uniquely positioned to expand [young adults’] exposure to art, both in appreciating it and creating it” (2007, p. 59). Libraries must assume the role of creative outlet provider. Some have already heeded this call and are fulfilling the needs of their young adult patrons. Those “libraries offering arts programs are helping to enrich young adults’ educational and social development as well as providing them with a creative outlet and, hopefully, developing in them an appreciation for the library that will result in lifelong library use and support” (Mandel, 2007, p. 60).

Incorporating crafts into the library does not require an overhaul of programming. Mandel successfully got the creativity flowing in Hialeah Public Libraries (HPL) by melding the arts with existing library events. For Children’s Book Week

they held a poster contest and Teen Tech Week had teens making art from recycled computer parts. The library also uses the creativity of their young adults to beautify their space. HPL appears to be starting an annual event deemed “Cart Art.” Artists submit their book cart design to a panel of judges and the winners get to create their masterpieces.

Public libraries provide spaces for teens to explore and learn. Crafts provide a means through which young adults can discover their own identity, develop imagination, and foster a sense of community amongst their peers. As crafting becomes ever more popular, libraries should begin to consider the wide array of programming possibilities, particularly for young adults.

## All Aboard the YA Train?

The Maplewood Public Library in New Jersey decided that they had had enough of the middle school students in the library and shut both its branches from 2:45pm to 5pm to deter the students from coming into the library. The town’s mayor had to spend \$220,000 to expand an after-school program in the church and to keep the school’s gym open after hours because of the library’s policy. The library, however, could have fought for that money, hired a youth librarian and incorporated programs like crafting to keep the students occupied after school hours. Many of these youngsters will likely have negative associations with public libraries that they will carry with them into adulthood (Artistic Freedom, 2006).

## References

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