

Going Outside Your Comfort Zone

Emily Mroczek

Emily Mroczek is Youth Services Librarian, Arlington Heights (IL) Memorial Library and co-chair of ALSC's Public Awareness and Advocacy Committee

The ALSC Public Awareness and Advocacy Committee is calling on ALSC membership to take part in our 2024 ALSC Advocacy Challenge. Because advocacy starts with YOU!

This year, we challenge you to reach out to someone outside of your typical network.

Identify one person outside your library who shares library values like inclusion, freedom to read, equity, etc. Maybe they're an educator, counselor, religious leader, organizer, or advocate. It can be someone you already know or someone you don't know yet. Talk about ALSC, about librarianship, make a connection. Here are some examples from our committee members.



Emily Mroczek, Youth Services Librarian, Arlington Heights (IL) Memorial Library and co-chair of ALSC Public Awareness and Advocacy Committee

I started my advocacy challenge by emailing people in adjacent fields that I thought could benefit from library services. After not receiving much response, I changed gears and decided to foster connections at my children's preschool.

I brought brochures about 1000 Books Before Kindergarten and talked up storytime during preschool pickup. To my surprise, many of my fellow parents were not big library users. I told them about all the services and even attended a program with a few of them. It's safe to say, I recruited a few new library users for a library I don't even work at. Advocacy can be anywhere, at any time!



Sarah Jo Zaharako, Youth Services Librarian, Wilmette (IL) Public Library and co-chair of ALSC Public Awareness and Advocacy Committee

Discouraged by low attendance at a series I created for parents and educators, I decided to package the content and offer the program as outreach and professional development. I worked with my library's preschool liaison, who already had a relationship with many local educators, and offered to present at staff meetings. A few schools accepted, and I presented to full rooms of teachers, social workers, and administrators. After several months, the district PTA contacted me requesting to partner on the program in order to build community amongst parents and caregivers! I knew I had created a program that was relevant to our community—I just needed to get out of the library to connect with them.



Soline Holmes, Librarian, Academy of the Sacred Heart, New Orleans

Wanting to highlight the role of libraries in my school and in our local community, this past year, I continued to build on my partnership with the New Orleans Opera. Two years ago, I reached out to their education director when a colleague sent me an email about the Opera starting a children's storytime program. Without any direct connection to the Opera, from that email that I sent, I became one of their featured storytime readers; the Opera has used our auditorium for auditions; and my students got to go on a backstage tour of the Opera's scene shop. (The pictures of them holding prop swords and a giant Styrofoam pumpkin were priceless!) Through maintaining this partnership, our students and their families have received free tickets to Student Night, and my third and fourth grade students were treated to a visit by world-renowned conductor Elizabeth Askren. We are also in discussions about archiving some primary source Creole sheet music. Partnerships such as these allow me to bring more resources and educational opportunities to my young patrons . . . and they also make my job even more enjoyable!



Anne Price, Children's Librarian, North Platte (NE) Public Library

North Platte, Nebraska, is on the precipice of a lot of growth, both economically and population-wise, with groundbreaking on a new meat packing facility and industrial rail park beginning in 2024. As a result, many of our new patrons happen to be immigrants, which has presented library staff with language barriers and other challenges in connecting people with the resources they need.

I reached out to TinaMaria Fernandez at Hope Esperanza, a non-profit that aims to help immigrant families transition and find a sense of community in North Platte. We've been engaged in informal discussions about how the library can adapt some of its services to better meet the needs of this growing demographic. &

Now it's your turn! Make a connection, then share your experience with us by e-mailing your story, in 50-100 words, to alscpaa@gmail.com.