

ALSC Member Profiles

Marisel Matthews, Head of Patron Services, Long Beach (NY) Public Library



What prompted you to join ALSC?

Initially, one of my favorite graduate school professors recommended that I become a member of both the American Library Association (ALA) and ALSC because of the numerous resources that ALSC offers. Additionally, I strongly align with the mission and objectives of ALSC in supporting and advocating for the needs of children and young adults through the provision of high-quality library services and resources.

What made you want to work in children's services?

In a previous professional life, I served as an educator. When transitioning to the field of librarianship, I found a natural fit for children's services. My prior experience working with youth ranging from kindergarten through twelfth grade provided a solid foundation for this shift. The transition from lesson planning for a traditional classroom setting to planning for a storytime was relatively seamless.

What are you most passionate about in children's services?

I am most passionate that all children, no matter their socioeconomic status, have access to books and really dope librarians. I support children being supported with their learning literacy journey.

What is your favorite library event, program, or outreach initiative and why?

I love signing children up for a library card. I love explaining all the free perks that they now have access to. Why? For some children, the library is the only place they will have the ability to access so many books and tech.

Melissa Sokol, Children's Services Librarian, Dayton (OH) Metro Library



Why did you join ALSC?

Each December, Dayton Metro Library's children's librarians, led by Tish Wilson, used to get together for day-long Mock Caldecott and Newbery discussions. This piqued my interest in becoming a member. Then I attended my first ALA annual conference in Chicago in 2017 with my co-worker and friend Allison Knight. After hearing about her experiences serving on the Notable Children's Recordings committee, attending ALSC 101, and the ALSC leadership meeting at the conference, it cemented my decision to start submitting volunteer applications to work on committees.

What made you want to work in children's services?

I am the youngest of four children in my family, and I grew up wishing my parents would have a fifth child so that I could show my older siblings how a fantastic older sibling should treat the younger ones. I never got my wish, but I poured that passion into babysitting, being the fun cousin at family reunions, and eventually getting my undergraduate degree to become an Intervention Specialist. After teaching for six years, I started my MLIS and knew that I would be most at home sharing my enthusiasm for reading and literature with the youngest of patrons.

I love providing spaces and opportunities for our young patrons to find: stories they love, facts that fascinate them, learning opportunities for new skills, and avenues to share their creativity. Being a children's services librarian at a branch allows for so much one on one interaction with children and getting a sense of current interests and trends that can lead to creating fun programming and dynamic displays.

What is your favorite library event, program, or outreach initiative and why?

The program I am most excited about is one I started about two years ago, called the What's New Book Club. I started reviewing books for the South Western Ohio Young Adult Media Review Group in 2010. I enjoy getting to read new children's books and hearing other librarians' reviews and recommendations.

One winter break I was visiting family in Virginia and my 11-year-old nephew started reading one of the books I had just finished. When he was half way through I asked him if he also found it annoying that the author kept describing characters with the same analogy or simile every time they entered the story, such as "Felix, who was smart as a whip" or "Carrie, who was tough as a lion." He disagreed with me and said no, he liked it because it helped him keep track of who people were in the story and make a stronger picture of them in his mind.

That was a real "Aha!" moment for me. I realized that I and the other librarians that reviewed these books, were well intended and enthusiastic readers, but we were not and never could be the intended audience for these books. This led to me trying to find a fun way for kids to get their honest book reviews to authors and publishers. As COVID restrictions were winding down, I decided to start a book club, where members ages eight through fourteen could read newly published books, write reviews for the ones that they loved, and record their voice reading the review. Then they get to make a sock puppet and we record a video of them acting out their review as it is played back to them.

Our social media specialist then takes the audio and video files and edits them together into videos for the library's social media pages, mainly Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. This format allows for the kids to engage in social media without having to show their faces or even use their real names. The unexpected aspect of this club is the fact that it has made a safe space for tweens to become close and supportive friends while sharing their love of reading.

What are you currently reading?

Well, the honest answer to this question is that, after having just finished a two-year commitment to the Notable Children's Books committee, I'm mostly reading books for adults. However, professionally I just finished *The Observologist: A Handbook for Mounting Very Small Scientific Expeditions* by Giselle Clarkson. It's an engaging book with fun illustrations and ideas for utilizing sidewalks, yards, and puddles to practice many scientific experiments. I also just finished *The Five Impossible Tasks of Eden Smith* by Tom Llewellyn. It is an enjoyable fast-paced adventure with puzzles that have enough clues in the text that the reader will be able to predict how Eden can complete the smithing tasks that will set her grandfather free!

Megan Jackson, Youth Librarian, St. Louis (MO) County Library



What prompted you to join ALSC?

When I began my professional library career, I was looking for any opportunity to learn as much as I could within my new field. At that time, joining ALSC seemed like a very straightforward path toward finding interesting ideas and learning new skills. What I didn't expect (but was thrilled to find) was that ALSC is also an avenue toward professional fellowship as well! I've found so many opportunities to make connections with other youth services librarians, and I relish them all.

What made you want to work in children's services?

I have always enjoyed reading and working with youth. Originally, this set me on the path to becoming a high school English teacher. After a few years of both teaching and working part-time at a public library, I decided to combine those passions in a new way.

Now in my current position, not only do I get to still talk about my favorite books with teenagers, but also sing along with toddlers at storytime, gush about kids' cool creations at LEGO club, and try out new art techniques at Tween Crafters. And, I no longer have to grade any papers!

What are you most passionate about in children's services?

I feel very strongly about the library's role as a community-building resource and its potential as a "third place" for children and families. Post-lockdown, I think many of us realized the need for more community and support in our lives, and yet we continue to see a lack of community-building spaces that are not tied to commerce.

From new parents trying to find camaraderie among others, to teenagers desperate for face-to-face socialization outside of the pressures of school, the resource many are missing is simply a free place to gather. I feel most successful in my role as a youth librarian when I see a group of children, teens, or adults fostering connections and, frankly, making new friends. If we are here to support our community, perhaps one of the best ways to do that is to simply hold space for them. &