

Cooking up Library Advocacy

SEFLIN Libraries Step up Campaign

Meagan Albright, Rachel Perry Taylor,
and Brock Peoples



Meagan Albright is the manager of youth services for Cambridge (MA) Public Library. She has authored articles on literacy and library services for notable library associations and serves on several national committees, including ALSC's Early and Family Literacy committee and Public Awareness and Advocacy Committee. She previously chaired the Southeast Florida Library Information Network's Library Advocacy Committee.



Rachel Perry Taylor is director of library resource sharing at Southeast Florida Library Information Network (SEFLIN, Inc.); she facilitates resource sharing and consortia services for a service area of more than 6 million patrons.



Brock Peoples is SEFLIN's executive director. He advocates for the interests of SEFLIN members at the local, state, and federal levels, and remains committed to promoting the value of libraries.

The Southeast Florida Library Information Network (SEFLIN) Advocacy Committee is composed of library staff from around the region, representing many different types of libraries. Each year, the committee compiles a list of current legislators, sets appointments for face-to-face meetings on or around Library Day in the Florida Capitol, prepares customized reports regarding important library budget items up for appropriation, meets with as many legislators as possible for allyship and awareness, raises the visibility of emerging library contributions in Florida communities, and lobbies for continued support of libraries.

This year, we sought out a partner of a different and critical group for the sake of advocacy—library patrons. Our goal was to discover which library services were most meaningful to our communities and to elevate the realities of how libraries impact everyday lives and benefit their communities.

A Good Recipe Is Timeless

In 2023, the committee identified the need to develop an awareness campaign that would let us bring the voices of our patrons to the state capital. When researching and searching for advocacy inspiration, we discovered Libraries Step Up—a collaboration between Outagamie Waupaca Library System (OWLS) and other library systems—which included a toolkit of plug-and-play and customizable communications resources for library advocacy. Their marketing coordinator kindly and enthusiastically granted us permission to borrow their look/logo for our own campaign! This resource is available to you, too, and it is a good place to get started: <https://graphics.owlsweb.org/content/libraries-step-advocacy>.

Our Unique Spice Blend

We developed Libraries Step Up, a collaboration between the SEFLIN Advocacy Committee and Southeast Florida libraries, to draw attention to the importance of the library to our communities. We selected a diverse range of libraries—including academic, public, and special—in total nine libraries across the region received toolkits containing materials to encourage patrons to respond to the prompt, “I love my library because . . .”

Postcards with patron responses were collected from libraries, the responses were recorded into a spreadsheet, and tags were assigned to each entry. This process yielded an insightful report regarding libraries' impact on their communities, highlighting multiple reasons patrons value their libraries, including cost benefit, safe spaces, self-improvement, studying, a sense of community, lifelong learning, a plethora of resources and, of course, amazing customer service.

One patron noted, “I bring my two-year-old to storytime once a week, and she works on early literacy skills and social skills. Very important as a stay at home mom to have this resource!” Holding the cards in your hands and seeing the

careful and thoughtful handwritten notes makes the patrons' stories very real. Read the full report: <https://bit.ly/4dPwMgU>.

Active Ingredients

Brock Peoples, SEFLIN executive director, brought the physical postcards, along with copies of the report, to their meetings with state representatives. He said, "The notes were exceptionally well received. All thanked us for providing evidentiary support of how libraries impact their communities . . . [legislators] were keen to note their support for our budget line—as well as the State Aide line."

The initiative was so well-received that Peoples, along with Jorge Perez (the incoming Florida Library Association president), traveled to Washington, DC, to participate in Voices for Libraries, which featured library advocates from every state, and to meet with members of congress about the importance of libraries and the need for support.

The Tasting Menu

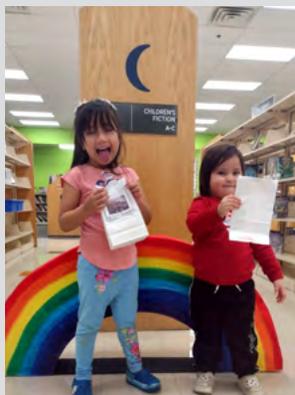
SEFLIN presented their findings, along with process documentation showing how other libraries can replicate Libraries Step Up, at Florida International University Libraries Peer Review and Research symposium in a presentation titled "An Absolute Necessity: A Patron's Story." View the presentation: <https://bit.ly/4cLWEco>.

Up for Seconds

Based on the success of the campaign, SEFLIN will repeat and expand the initiative in 2024–2025. The Library Advocacy committee has designed fun coloring pages to provide young children and their families an opportunity to participate in advocacy for their library. Also, SEFLIN has allocated increased funding in 2024–2025 to enable more members of the committee to travel to Tallahassee and to Washington, DC, to amplify the voices of our communities and demonstrate the tangible impact our libraries make in US citizens' lives. &

How to Make Kids Like You: One Big Way (and Three Super Simple Tricks)

Laura Raphael



How do you "make" kids like you? *Like, really, really like you?*

I love asking my children's staff this question, and I'm always fascinated to hear the answers, which both vary and fall in predictable line.

Invariably, what seasoned children's librarians say is that the one big way to get kids to like you is obvious but necessary:

you treat them like people who matter. You ask them questions and then really listen to their answers. You pay attention to what they like and don't like. You match your emotional tone to theirs.

This can look different for different kids, of course, but in general, if a child is hiding behind their parent's legs, you don't yell, "Hello! What is YOUR name?" Conversely, if a child starts talking about aliens, don't clam up!

Laura Raphael, MA, MLIS, started her professional career as a middle school reading and language arts teacher before turning to public libraries. Since 2001, she has worked in public libraries in a variety of capacities, most recently as children's services coordinator for the Tulsa City-County (OK) Library System.

Treating kids like full human beings (which they are) is an absolute must, so put that attitude in place first.

Then use these three simple tricks, and kids will be your biggest fans:

1. **Comment on their shoes.** Honestly, this works for kids AND many adults because shoes can say a lot about a person! It can be something as simple as a descriptive, "Wow, there are little purple stripes that go from here to here" to a more complimentary, "What I would give for such sparkly shoes!"
2. **Ask the magic question: "Do you have a pet?"** (Follow-up, if the answer is no: "What kind of pet would you want if you could have a pet?") Our connection to animals—real and imagined—runs deep.
3. **Offer a sticker or hand stamp.** Simple magic, every time. My favorite moments were at outreach events or even just out at dinner near my library, when a little one recognized me. Zip, zap, zop, I'd pull out the stamp and ink pad from my purse and my new friends went away with a smile and a star on their hands.