



ILLINOIS LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

Because Libraries Matter

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Press Release

Laurel Johnson, Young Adult Services Supervisor at Skokie Public Library, is the 2020 recipient of the Illinois Library Association’s Young Adult Librarian of the Year Award. The award, presented by ILA and the Young Adult Services Forum, recognizes an Illinois Young Adult Librarian who is making an outstanding local contribution in library services to young adults in their community by creating and implementing library programs and services that identify and meet the needs of the teens in their community. The award is sponsored by Sourcebooks and honors the positive impact Sharon Ball has had on Illinois librarians and teens.

For over four years, Laurel Johnson has spent her time at Skokie Public Library fostering an inclusive environment for teens through programming and a commitment to building a thriving library community for patrons that may typically be the most underserved. Her work is felt throughout the community and her dedication to anti-racist work inspires her coworkers to rethink and reexamine their own biases. In Laurel’s nomination letter, Jarrett Dapier, Young Adult Librarian at Skokie Public Library wrote, “Libraries talk a lot about equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI). I truly believe that much of Laurel’s work can be described as what EDI looks like in practice. Her understanding of EDI in information services is wide.”

Laurel advocates daily for teens and for library spaces that meet their needs, while also recognizing the challenges they may face outside library walls.

She took Skokie's weekly program called Neutral Zone, which focused on creating a safe environment for middle school students to share their emotional struggles, learn coping techniques, and destigmatizing teen mental health challenges, and pushed for all after-school spaces in the library to permanently become Neutral Zones so that teens know library safe spaces are always available to them.

A dedication to those with disabilities is another hallmark of Laurel's exemplar library service. "Laurel is dedicated to ensuring young adults with disabilities have opportunities to participate in programs and other events alongside their peers. The monthly Friend Squad program is a prime example of Laurel's approach to supportive, inclusive programming; in this program, now in its fifth year, teens with disabilities and peer mentors engage in a variety of social and hands-on activities.

Laurel works with school social workers for Friend Squad events to ensure that the needs of all participants are met. Laurel also ensures that all library event offerings are accessible for teens with disabilities," wrote Amy Koester, Learning Experiences Manager at Skokie Public Library.

The Young Adult Librarian of the Year Award will be presented at a ceremony that will be held in conjunction with the 2020 Illinois Library Association Annual Conference, which will take place virtually in October.

For further information, contact the Illinois Library Association.

For Immediate Release