



ILLINOIS LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

Because Libraries Matter

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Illinois Library Association

560 W. Washington Blvd., Suite 330

Chicago, IL 60661-2692

Phone: 312.644.1896

Email: tjenkins@ila.org

**Kendra Van Kempen Selected as 2025 Recipient of the
Illinois Library Association Youth Services Achievement Award**

The Illinois Library Association (ILA) Youth Services Forum presents this year's Youth Services Achievement Award to Kendra Van Kempen, Children's Services Associate at La Grange Public Library. This annual award is presented by the ILA Youth Services Forum and Brainfuse to a non-degreed (MLIS) individual working in the Youth Services Department for outstanding local contributions to library services to young people.

Individuals nominated for the award must have created and implemented library programs, services, and/or initiatives in the community they serve that promote a love of learning. The award recipient must have positively impacted the lives of children.

Kendra Van Kempen has worked at the La Grange Public Library since 2018, where she has focused on leading programming and developing collections for children ages birth through 12 and their families. After a ten-year tenure leading special events at the Steppenwolf Theater Company, Van Kempen transitioned from supporting stories on stage to sharing stories with her local community. She is a founding board member of the A.B.L.E. Ensemble and especially enjoys library programs that give her a chance to sing loudly, play different characters, and

dance full-out. She is passionate about helping to ensure the library is an accessible space for all.

Van Kempen's commitment to expansive, inclusive, and accessible programming has helped to solidify the La Grange Public Library as a welcoming place in the community. Her work with the Change Makers Club and Kid Librarian programs allows children to build self-confidence and the opportunity to understand the impact that one person can make on the world as we know it.

In 2024, Van Kempen participated in the Fred Rogers Institute Educators' Neighborhood, which helped her participate in creating standards and tenets of library programming for the La Grange Library in 2024-2025. She played a key role in the Share the Shelf grant initiative to expand the diversity of voices in her library's collection and advocated for funding with library administration to invest in library displays to promote children's programming at her library. She is also an active participant in several library committees, including the Summer Reading, Local Cataloging, Collection Management, and Programming Committees.

Her thoughtful approach to community engagement, strong commitment to access and inclusion, and boundless creativity consistently show in her work through her partnership with the Brookfield Zoo Chicago's early childhood program, ZAP!: Storytime at the Zoo, which offers conservation-focused storytimes for early childhood audiences, from preschool through first grade. Zoo staff said that coordinating a program with an external partner can be complex, but Van Kempen navigated every aspect with professionalism and ease.

Kendra Van Kempen's continued dedication to her library and community, as well as the outstanding additions she has made to her library, are why the ILA Youth Services Forum believes that she is the best choice for this year's award. Congratulations to Kendra Van Kempen, the 2025 recipient of the ILA Youth Services Achievement Award!

The Illinois Library Association Youth Services Achievement Award will be presented at an awards ceremony during the 2025 Illinois Library Association Annual Conference. The conference will take place October 14-16, 2025, in Rosemont, Illinois.

For more information, contact the Illinois Library Association.

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About the Illinois Library Association

The Illinois Library Association (ILA) is a professional membership organization that represents Illinois libraries and the millions who depend on them. Founded in 1896, it is the third-largest state library association and serves as a chapter within the American Library Association. ILA is comprised of 2,000 personal and more than 500 institutional members, made up of public, academic, school, and special libraries, as well as librarians, library staff, trustees, students, and library vendors.