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## Press Release

**Renee Grassi, Youth Services Manager of the Dakota County Library System in Dakota County, Minnesota, is the 2017 recipient of the Illinois Library Association's Alexander J. Skrzypek Award. The award is given to a person who has made an outstanding contribution to the advancement of library services for the blind or physically disabled in Illinois.**

Before relocating to Minnesota, Renee was most recently the Youth Department Director at the Glen Ellyn Public Library, where she was involved in redesigning the youth space using the concept of universal design to amplify the principles of inclusion and flexibility in use. While in Illinois, Renee worked tirelessly in the area of mentoring and empowering library staff to be disability advocates and equipping them to serve children with disabilities at their libraries – work that will have lasting impact on Illinois library staff and communities. Renee started Sensory Storytime at Deerfield Public Library when few libraries in the area were offering the program, and her belief in the program and in her colleagues helped the Sensory Storytime movement spread across northern Illinois. Because of her encouragement, barriers have been broken down and children on the autism spectrum and those with other special needs are included in their library communities.

In addition to providing one-on-one mentorship, Renee has trained librarians to provide inclusive services through workshops, conferences, and webinars, at the local, state, and national level. She is a co-founder of Special Needs and Inclusive Library Services (SNAILS), a networking group that brings Chicago area library professionals together to support one another's efforts to provide specialized services and programs to youth and young adults with disabilities through collaboration and training. SNAILS has equipped and inspired its members to launch new library programs, services, outreach initiatives, and collections that have benefited children and young adults with disabilities throughout the state. As an accessibility leader and SNAILS founder, Renee has also played a key role in the award-winning Targeting Autism Initiative developed by the Illinois State Library.

Beyond the Illinois library community, Renee has been actively involved in the ALSC Library Service to Special Population Children and their Caregivers Committee and wrote a series of posts on the ALSC Blog on the topic of special needs services. She uses her social media presence to change the face of libraries to the disability community, and her writing has appeared in numerous publications, including ILA's *The Reporter* as well as *American Libraries* and *School Library Journal*. She was also honored as a *Library Journal* Mover and Shaker in the Advocacy category in 2012.

The Alexander J. Skrzypek Award will be presented at the Awards Luncheon held on Tuesday, October 10, during the 2017 Illinois Library Association Annual Conference in Tinley Park.

For further information, contact the Illinois Library Association.

For Immediate Release