

# Tips for Successful TABs

► LINDSEY TOMSU

**T**een advisory boards (TAB) might seem like old news to some librarians, but I still see others seeking advice about starting one or rejuvenating a struggling group.

I have a wonderful group of teens who are now part of a very active TAB at the La Vista Public Library. A main goal of a TAB should be to help plan awesome programs. When you receive input from your teens, you can better plan for successful events. I'd like to share some of my TAB's accomplishments to inspire others, along with some of my tips for starting a successful group.

For the 2011–2012 school year, my TAB was actively involved in suggesting new programming ideas. The teens created three TAB-sponsored programs that were huge hits. The first was Random Club, where you can end up doing anything. Many of our Random Club meetings end with teens playing games, coloring, or socializing. The second new program was Bacon Club. Huyen-Yen Hoang recalls, "I said I had an idea but thought it was too radical! Lindsey pressed me and I said we should have a club devoted to being connoisseurs of bacon!" Our meeting room has a fully equipped kitchen where we have tried various ways of cooking bacon and eating different kinds. For the upcoming school year, we are planning on trying new recipes (chocolate-covered bacon) and adding crafts (bacon magnets). The third program was the Pool Noodle Kendo Club. During the 2011 TAB Lock-In, some members were dueling with a plastic broom and mop. It got me thinking about having a Cardboard Tube Fight Club. Haley Christensen recalls, "We all loved the idea! I made the suggestion of using pool noodles since they are durable and meant to whack people." The idea of advertising a "Fight Club" at the local library was disconcerting, so Audi Blann suggested substituting "Fight" with "Kendo." During each meeting, teens learn kendo moves and spar with each other. When talking about PNKC, Hoang likes to tell people, "Who says library programs can't be physically demanding?" The TAB was so excited about this program that when they discovered the cost of pool noodles in winter was going to be a huge chunk of our budget, Christensen and her brother, Patrick, actually donated \$30 of their own money to the teen budget. The TAB has great ideas for this upcoming year as well, including an anime club, a media club, a Guilty Pleasures night, and teen storytime.

A TAB can also be involved in bigger library and community projects. For the past two years, my TAB has been in charge of



PATRICK "PIERRE" CHRISTENSEN, 14, TRIES TO DEFEND HIMSELF AS HE'S SWARMED BY FELLOW TAB MEMBERS DURING A MEETING OF THE POOL NOODLE KENDO CLUB

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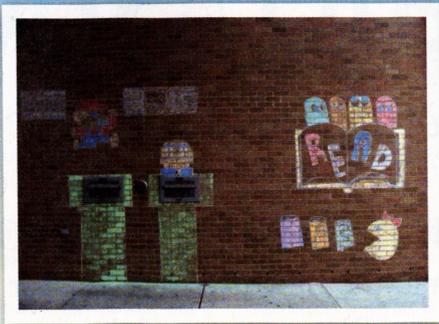
designing the library's La Vista Daze Parade float that promotes the summer reading programs (SRP). This involves picking a theme, along with making the decorations and participating in the parade. The TAB was responsible for two children's programs during the 2011 SRP. The first was a Life Size Candy Land. It involved a lot of prop-making for the game that was built to scale. The second program was a Stuffed Animal Sleepover, which coincided with the TAB Lock-In. Children brought their stuffed animals to sleep over at the library. The animals got a name tag, we

read stories, and had a craft to make beds for the animals. During the evening, the TAB posed all the animals doing various things throughout the library. We picked four pictures of each animal to print for the children as mementoes of the fun their animals had during their sleepover.

For the 2012 summer, we created a book display of teen supernatural reads, but our biggest project was a Chalk Graffiti Mural on the outside of the library. It featured video game characters promoting reading. Ms. Pac-Man was eating books instead of power pellets; Super Mario was jumping over green pipes to avoid a goomba; and the four Pac-Man ghosts were hiding behind a huge book that said "READ!" For the 2011–2012 school year, the TAB made a goal to reach five hundred participants. We had one hundred fifteen in 2009–2010 and three hundred fifty-nine in 2010–2011, so they felt they could easily get to five hundred. If they met the goal, I volunteered to dye my hair a weird color. They ended May with seven hundred ninety-six participants!

Our biggest project by far was what we have come to call the Nonfiction Switch. The nonfiction section was gathering dust. Every time I asked for suggestions, I was met with the same answer: We don't read nonfiction. After two frustrating years, I finally went to the TAB with the actual circulation stats. I told them that our fiction section was doing great (90 percent) but the nonfiction had barely reached a 40 percent circulation rate. The TAB decided to do something proactive—change the area from Dewey to subject classification. My teens spent nearly two months reviewing the books in the collection, suggesting titles

to be weeded, suggesting new high-interest books to be added, and helping develop a system of twenty-five subjects. They also helped physically change all the labels on the books, shift the books around, move the graphic novels to a more prominent spot, and place new shelf labels. Right after the change, we had nearly half the total circulation of the previous year matched in just the first month alone. The teens picked subject classification because all similar books would be shelved together. Sarah Kreber said, "I hated going in and having to locate, say, books on cancer and finding that they were shelved in six different Dewey areas. Now they all are together under the 'Disease and Disabilities' section. I like the change because it makes browsing easier and teens love to browse." In October 2012, at the Nebraska Library Association's



DURING THE 2012 SRP, THE TAB DECIDED TO DO A CHALK GRAFFITI MURAL TO PROMOTE SUMMER READING.

PHOTO CREDIT: LINDSEY TOMSU

annual conference in La Vista, I did a session on the nonfiction switch and was joined by three TAB members as co-presenters. Conference attendees got to talk to actual library patrons about why such a change took place, what the end result was, and why it might be a good fit for their libraries.

Lastly, my TAB teens are supportive of each other. They like to call themselves one big library family. During the 2011–2012 school year, we implemented field trips. In April, TAB member Keyahna Wood was super excited about getting the lead in her school play. "I was so happy, but then I found out that the date of the play was on a Tuesday, and Tuesdays are a library day! So I asked the TAB if, instead of having a program that evening, they might be interested in coming to see my play," Wood said. About ten of the TAB members (and some parents) attended Keyahna's play and then went to dinner at Fazoli's. The second field trip was to the La Vista Daze carnival at the end of May. We all played games, rode rides, shared carnival snacks, and attended the first city Teen Dance. For the upcoming school year, we are looking at potential field trips to the zoo, an indoor trampoline place, and bowling. The teens absolutely love these offsite field trips, as they are a great way to hang out together outside of the usual library setting, and are a great bonding experience. Kreber, among others, said, "How often do you hear of a librarian actually taking the time to do offsite stuff like this with her teens? It's awesome and a unique experience!"

Are you ready to start a TAB and boost your teen participation?

**TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL TABS**

Serve snacks. You've heard it—if you feed them, they will come. Don't let your teens munch until the end of the meeting, otherwise there will be general chaos. Let them know that at TAB

meetings, business comes first, snacks second.

Be excited. According to my teens that were around before me, the original TAB was an epic failure. They could tell the person in charge had no desire to run such a group, and it lasted one meeting. If you are excited and it shows, your enthusiasm will rub off on the teens.

Be honest. You expect honesty from your teens, so return it. Inform your teens of the actual budget teen services gets for books and programming. Being honest with them about how things are run at your library will get them to respect you, care more about the library and what you do, and start turning into library activists.

Count volunteer hours. Let teens know that all the work they do as a TAB member will be counted as volunteer hours and make sure to keep track of

their hours. Every meeting should count as volunteering, too!

Let teens plan. Let teens take the responsibility of planning

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teen programs. Don't waste time producing a program you think is a great idea only to find no one comes. Let them help you plan and produce programs they want. Tell them that you'll try to make their requests a reality and you'll be surprised at the innovative suggestions they have.

Give real responsibility. Give TAB members responsible chores. Don't just give them busy work. Teach them how to shelve books, create book displays, and more. My TAB members feel that I trust them and expect more from them because I give them real responsibilities that help, not only my work, but the library as a whole. They take pride in the fact that they are allowed back in the staff-only areas. Many teens will begin to look at volunteering as something fun. My SRP finale preparation is a thirteen-hour day for me. Every year, I have more and more teens who want to spend those hours with me because, to them, it is more fun than work.

Give incentives. Reward them for their hard work. The biggest reward my TAB members receive is a members-only lock-in at the end of summer for TAB members who participated during the entire school year. ■

Lindsey Tomsu is the teen librarian at the La Vista Public Library in La Vista, Nebraska. She is a life-long student, having obtained degrees in sociology, philosophy, and English. She is one semester away from graduating with her MLIS from San Jose State. She loves presenting/lecturing on anything to do with teen services and her area of academic interest—becoming the leading expert in youth series fiction by promoting its importance to both the history of youth literature and American popular culture. Feel free to contact her via her series book blog at <http://inallseries-ousness.blogspot.com/> or by email at [ltomsu@cityoflavista.org](mailto:ltomsu@cityoflavista.org).



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