

Welcome

I had the fortune to grow up within two blocks of my neighborhood library. It had one of the only photocopiers in town! Though my childhood friends and I used the library regularly, we probably didn't fully appreciate what a substantial asset it was to our lives.

Our reasons to go to the library then do not much differ from what draws children and youth to libraries today—access to technology (now the computer instead of the copier), magazines (now online and much more plentiful than we could ever have imagined), book research and background for reports (from the card catalog to the Internet), activities, and socializing with friends. Though the concept of a library dates back thousands of years, its purpose—to provide a repository of our history, thinking, and experiences—is no less relevant today. That my friends and I found a branch right there in our own neighborhood foreshadowed the current thinking that the library should be a vital part of a community and not just a venue for borrowing books.

In this issue of *Afterschool Matters*, Nia Imani Fields and Elizabeth Rafferty describe the partnership between the Baltimore County Public Library System and the Baltimore County 4-H. Together the partners developed a teen afterschool program that has offered experiences in workforce readiness, science, nutrition, community engagement, and leadership. Fields and Rafferty uncover a truth that goes beyond their particular setting: “[B]oth partners realized that, if we worked together to combine program resources and strengths, the impact of our initiatives would be far greater than if we worked alone.”

Libraries, along with other community organizations, can be important contributors to and partners in the out-of-school time program arena. As Fields and Rafferty mention, with libraries come some major ingredients for supporting community and youth development—facilities, youth participants, and, above all, librarians. National Library Week begins April 8. It's a perfect time to explore partnership and make some noise (at library level, please) in your local branch.



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