

The Gift of Advocacy

Turning Passive Support into Educated Action

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Everyday Advocacy empowers ALSC members to embrace their roles as library advocates by focusing on their daily efforts to serve youth and families. Each lighthearted column features easy-to-implement strategies and techniques for asserting the transformative power of libraries both within communities and beyond them.

If you were in Las Vegas for the 2014 ALA Annual Conference, I'll bet those 112 degree temperatures didn't have you thinking too much about the winter holidays. Swimming pools, frozen treats, and the bliss of convention center AC, maybe. But Hanukkah, Christmas, and Kwanzaa? Probably not.

Leave it to a square peg like me, though, to find Christmas in July at the joint meeting of ALA's Advocacy Coordinating Group and Committee on Library Advocacy. That's where ALA Office of Library Advocacy Director Marci Merola gave me the best present ever—a definition. Here it is: Advocacy is turning passive support into educated action. (I know! It really sets your toes a-tingle, doesn't it?)

Think about what that means for us as Everyday Advocates. Doubtless we go the distance every day to make a difference for children and libraries. We wake, we rise, we do, and that's awesome.



But when it comes to being Everyday Advocates for each other, let's be honest. How often do we say we support our AASL, ALSC, and YALSA colleagues compared with how often we actually do something that shows it?

Let's change that this holiday season. Put advocacy on your gift list. In ink, even. Quicker than you can say, "Ho, ho, ho!" you'll be more popular than the jolly guy in the red suit.

From Passive Support to Educated Action

Since last fall, I've focused this column around simple, effective ways you can advocate for your library, your library services to children, and yourself. Taking things a step further to advocate for our professional association colleagues can seem scary, but it doesn't have to be.

Here's how to use the five tenets of Everyday Advocacy to turn your passive support into educated action.

1. Be Informed

My seventh-grade teacher, Sister Berna, was fond of saying, "Think before you act." Her heart would swell with pride if



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she heard me telling you now how a little homework can go a long way.

Get your finger on the pulse of issues affecting our colleagues serving youth. Check out the latest issues of AASL's *Knowledge Quest* and YALSA's *Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults*. Spot trends in school and public libraries by following the association blogs. Find out how you can get involved with your state library association.

Better still, have a great conversation with a school library or teen services colleague. There's no more direct way to find out what's most important, relevant, and immediate to him or her. Ask to hear his stories. Listen to her concerns. Be the person who wants to know what many others don't.

2. Engage with Your Community

Once you've boned up on the current issues affecting our colleagues, get out there and mingle.

Attend a school board meeting and stay afterward to talk with parents, teachers, and administrators about the state of school libraries in the district. Subscribe to a YALSA electronic discussion list and dive headfirst into no-nonsense conversations about the latest topics affecting teens and teen librarians.

Feeling a little more adventurous? Nab a few colleagues and take a trip to the alderman's office together. Introduce yourselves to staff members and tell them you're interested in improving outcomes for community youth. Let your faces be the ones policymakers remember when library issues come up at city council meetings.

3. Speak Out

If you're nervous about any aspect of turning your passive support into educated action, I'm guessing it's this one. Speaking out publicly can feel daunting, but trust me, it's really empowering, too. Remember, you're the expert here. You know better than anyone why it's important to effect lasting change for our colleagues and the youth they serve.

Start small and work your way up as your confidence grows (and it will). Write a letter to the editor of the local newspaper listing all the ways school librarians shape twenty-first-century learning. Follow @yalsa on Twitter to get involved in Thunderclaps that spread the word about the importance of library services to teens.

When you're ready for the whole shebang, join colleagues in Washington, DC, for National Library Legislative Day on the first Tuesday in May. There's nothing more exhilarating than passionate advocates uniting their voices for a common purpose. Be loud. Be proud. Show 'em what you've got!

4. Get Inspired

Naturally, I hope you'll always turn to the ALSC Everyday Advocacy website whenever you need a little inspiration. But I can't resist this chance to brag about another rich advocacy resource: the AASL/ALSC/YALSA Interdivisional Committee on School/Public Library Cooperation (SPLC).

Throughout 2015, follow the AASL, ALSC, and YALSA blogs for quarterly SPLC posts filled with ready-to-go ideas for reaching across ALA's youth divisions. We're powerhouses on our own, but collaboration is key to crafting core messages and taking educated action. Advocates, assemble!

5. Share Your Advocacy Story

You've flexed your Everyday Advocacy muscles. You've turned your passive support of colleagues into educated action on their behalf. Now it's time to tell the rest of us all about it.

Share your successes and challenges at a staff meeting, networking event, or conference. Write a brief feature for an upcoming issue of the *Everyday Advocacy Matters* e-newsletter. Author an article with a colleague for publication in a division journal.

Helping others strengthen their skills is another important part of the Everyday Advocacy equation. Be generous with your wisdom, and your colleagues will surely return the favor.

Deck the Halls with Ad-vo-ca-cy

The hard part's over, folks. We already know what our colleagues across ALA's three youth divisions want this holiday season. It's not a bunch of stuff in shiny boxes with fancy bows. But our time and effort invested in meaningful action on the issues that matter most to them? Ding-ding-ding! Now there's a gift that's always a winner (and no malls or gift receipts required). 🎁

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