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For the Book Lovers on Your Holiday Shopping List

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There’s one place that always has our back: Hennepin County Library

Libraries remain a source of strength that defend the values that allow us to move toward a better future. We are so grateful to you, our generous donors, who defend the library values—knowledge, democracy, expression, understanding, and curiosity—that make our community stronger.

Your Library: Where Dreams Come True

Empowering young adults, like Sunnie, on their path from homelessness to independence

On a gloomy afternoon in downtown Minneapolis, a haven at Hennepin County Library—Minneapolis Central is buzzing with energy.

Beats drift from a group laying down tracks in the practice room at the Best Buy Teen Tech Center. Others edit video or music in the computer lab, and still others quietly draw or write poetry at a worktable.

Unlike most afternoons, when teens and tweens fill the Teen Tech Center, this group is all young adults.

Growing up and no place to go

Five years ago, Library youth staff realized that young people who counted on the Teen Tech Center as a creative space to explore their own ideas and develop new skills - and also as a reprieve from the stresses of homelessness - were “aging out” of teen programs without alternatives. Adult programming didn’t exactly meet their needs, leading to occasional, difficult encounters with staff and security.

“The Teen Central was designed as a sacred space for kids younger than 18,” said Bernie Farrell, Library Youth Services Coordinator. “But we knew there were so many people in that 20- to 24-year-old range who were not being supported and not always having positive experiences,” she said.

Meanwhile, Library staff were collaborating with Learning Dreams, an initiative within the University of Minnesota’s School of Social Work that helps youth overcome obstacles, discover their dreams and find a path to achievement. Youth workers from Learning Dreams, Jena and Joy, began incorporating visits to the library as part of their outreach efforts to build trusting relationships with young adults from Youthlink, a drop-in center for young people experiencing homelessness. Soon thereafter, Jena and Joy were ready to formalize and intensify their efforts to connect youth and library resources.

The joint solution is an initiative known as the Emerging Adults Cohort. Learning Dreams staff identified and made young adults to participate, and library staff provide special access to the Teen Tech Center to young adults ages 19 and older on Friday afternoons. In five years, the project has grown from an initial group of 10 to over 50 youth in 2018. Participants now include Youthlink youth referred from Learning Dreams, youth “aging out” of the Teen Tech Center, and, most importantly, youth referred by past and current participants in the project.

Funding for the Emerging Adults Cohort—which includes youth workers, youth leader stipends, supplies, and guest artists serving as speakers and mentors—is provided by Friends of the Hennepin County Library.

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for what Sunnie already was.” she said. “Learning Dreams held space back row.

Every month, Sunnie and other alumni on to seek higher education, and is currently she continues to use as an adult. She’s also gone learned in breaking down a huge project into Sunnie’s dreams have evolved, but the skills to have that big dream. Let’s cut it into baby “Brune,” she said, “had a way of saying, ‘It’s OK flash mob. Realize her dream – to create a variety show or worker Brune, Sunnie mapped out steps to help.”

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