

0:12 Shauna Anderson: I'm here because we've done a lot of work here to rethink how we deal with young adult suspension in our library building, particularly around the idea of suspensions and when it's okay to use them, how are they helpful, and just rethinking that whole process.

0:30 So, hopefully by the end of this webinar you guys will come away with a really great starting point for whether or not you think this is helpful. You'll know how to continue your research, and we'll get a couple of pointers for how to get started if that's something you're interested in.

0:48 I am going to start here, because I get a lot of questions about why—why are we even thinking about this in libraries? And I want to start with why we do what we do for young people. At Skokie Public Library, we use this phrase that we grow curiosity into action with young people, regardless of where they are on the path to adulthood, because our influence will make a difference even if we don't see the results.

1:08 I think this speaks to a lot of what Young Adult Librarians are really hoping to do for young people. We know that in this stage in their lives, they are so excited to explore new things and gain a ton of knowledge, and their interests are really important to them. They learn best in environments that correlate with their interests, and the library is one of the best places for them to explore, and continue that kind of growth, because they're alongside tons of resources and knowledgeable mentors who can point them to new opportunities.

1:40 So this is kind of the place that we're starting from. I hear from people, you know, if they're kids that are in the library, and they're not reading, and they're not doing homework, why should they even be in there? And this is the reason why. We really strive to have a really proactive, positive influence on all young people in our community.

2:00 I think when you're working with teens, you are inevitably working with behavior as well, because even though this is an immense time of opportunity, our young people often act in ways that are counterproductive to everyone else's use of the library space. And that's just a fact, they're really testing boundaries, and trying on what seems like new personalities every other minute, and that's a really tumultuous time in a young person's life.

2:27 So we're stuck then with the challenge of, we've got these great kids, but they don't always behave the way that we want them to, so how can we set them up for success in our library building and give them the tools so that they can be successful out in the public sphere, in the rest of the community, with regards to their behavior?

2:48 I started thinking about this at our library, and I think that one of the things that we lean on a lot in libraries to deal with behavior is suspensions, or asking people to leave, or banning people, when there are significant behavioral concerns. But I am really here to talk about why that's a huge problem.

3:12 There's not a ton of data about the effects of library suspensions on young people, but there is a ton of data about the effect of school suspensions on young people. The ACLU of Pennsylvania has a really great End Zero Tolerance website with lots of resources about this. What they've discovered through looking at the data is that black students are five times more likely to be suspended from school than their white peers. Latino students, three times more likely to be suspended from school than their white peers. And students with disability are twice as likely to be suspended from school than their neurotypical peers.

3:49 And when we see statistics like that, we really have to rethink why we're doing the things we're doing. Skokie Public Library, when I first got here, we did not have a vibrant after school environment. There are a lot of kids around the larger community, but none of them wanted to spend time in the library, and I really had to do some digging to figure out, why is that the case?

4:07 One of the data points that I found early on is that we had a pretty long suspension list, and on that suspension list were predominantly young boys of color who were suspended for minor infractions. There was a young boy who was suspended for littering, leaving a ton of Tootsie Roll wrappers somewhere, and was never really welcomed back into the life of the library. It was way too easy for that to happen, and so we had to really rethink, why are we doing this? How is it helpful? Are we really getting what we want out of that?

4:40 I think that the way that schools are thinking about suspensions, they're realizing that the way that they deal with rules and behavior ends up mirroring the same issues that flood our criminal justice system. I don't know if you've heard the phrase "School to Prison Pipeline," it's that we're sort of setting so many young people up for the same sorts of situations they might experience and injustices they might experience in the criminal justice system, which also predominantly affects men of color.

5:14 And so restorative justice is an approach to rule-breaking or criminal behavior that emphasizes the need to repair harm, address trauma, hold the harm-doer accountable for repairing that harm, and involve everyone in restoring relationships. That means that there are a couple of hallmarks of restorative justice. All parties are included in any post-situation follow-up that happens, and you are finding opportunities for victims and offenders and everyone in between to see each other as humans and to recognize the effects that behaviors have on other people. You are finding opportunities for people to make amends for the harm that they've produced, and that it is important to reintegrate everyone back into the life of the community.

6:06 So when we think about that here at the library, we think about, you know, when there's a fight at the library, bringing people together who are involved in the fight, bringing together staff members who witnessed the fight, where everybody can talk about their perspectives and find ways for the young person to make amends for their harm, and that doesn't always look like a suspension. When we're being honest, it doesn't need to look like a suspension. And then finding ways to reintegrate all of the parties, so victims of the fight or kids who were involved in the fight, back into the life of the library so they know we are a supportive place for them, we are a trusted place for them to go and spend time, that there are adults here that they can trust to

help them solve problems as they arise. And hopefully they come out of the situation much more emotionally literate and socially literate with their peers.

7:02 Another piece of this is restorative practices. This has sort of grown—the idea and framework of restorative justice has grown to other areas, such as public health, social work, organizational leadership, education, and it's this idea that you can build social capital and achieve social discipline through participatory learning and decision-making.

7:28 I love that last piece of this definition, “through participatory learning and decision-making”. I think that really mirrors a lot of what we want to achieve as teen librarians. Working with young people, we want to see participatory learning and decision-making, and here at Skokie we're thinking about ways to create participatory learning and decision-making processes that aid in social discipline. There's a quote from the International Institute On Restorative Practices where they say, “The use of informal restorative practices dramatically reduces the need for more time-consuming formal restorative practices and the systematic use of informal restorative practices has a cumulative impact and creates an environment that consistently fosters awareness, empathy, and responsibility in a way that is more effective in achieving social discipline than a reliance on punishment and sanctions.”

8:22 And that's sort of our goal in thinking through all of our services, how we staff our after school spaces, the kinds of programs that we provide. We want young people to be involved in making decisions and being agents of change. We want young people to feel like they have a say, and that in and of itself creates a climate in which there is better social discipline, and when we can resolve conflicts easier.

8:51 Another thing I want to point to is this idea of a social discipline window. When people think about how we deal with discipline, people often make this false dichotomy, that either you're being punitive, or permissive—if you're not punishing kids, then you're not providing any discipline at all. And that's just not the case. The social discipline window is used widely in areas of social work and education. It's really a function of the level of support you provide and the level of control which you yield. So, a punitive situation requires high control, but does not provide a ton of support, whereas a permissive environment provides tons of support but not a lot of control.

9:37 There's also two other ends of that spectrum, that you can provide no control and no support, and that's just neglect, where everybody can do whatever they want all the time. But restorative models really seek to provide a high level of control tied to a high level of support, so in my eyes, and in a lot of people's eyes, that's the idea sort of situation that we want to come from.

10:02 I will say, sorry, kind of going back, I like to think of restorative justice as reactionary, so after something happens you'd be using restorative justice practice and processes to respond to a situation or an event, and I think of restorative practices as being preventative, as building a

climate and giving young people tools before anything happens so that they're better able to handle themselves in social situations.