Teen Summer Camps:
Challenging Traditional Programming for Teens

Molly Garrett
Programming Librarian
Cedar Rapids Public Library
A Little History

• Previously, teen summer programming was an one-hour program every week
  • Very little attendance and engagement
  • Teens weren’t interested or around
• Started with two week-long camps
  • One at each library location, morning and afternoon
• Evolved to having four week-long camps
  • Two at each library location, all in the afternoon
• Traveled to residential facilities offering condensed camps
  • Reached four facilities
Camp Format

**Regular Camps**
- Open to 12 - 18 year olds
- Fifteen person limit
- Run from 12:30 - 4:30 pm Monday through Friday
- Presented at both library locations

**Offsite Camps**
- Presented at residential facilities
- Run for two hours for two sessions
• A focused theme
• Activities that fit that theme
• A detailed outline
• Embedded lessons
  • Creativity
  • Cooperative skills
  • Self-discovery
• Group and independent work
• Snacks and breaks
Camp Theme: Italy
Day Theme: Storytelling
Amount of Time: 4 hours

- Introduction and expectations
  - Telepctionary - 20 minutes
  - Story Cubes - 15 minutes

- Activity 1
  - Elements of Fiction - 30 minutes
  - Free Read/Write - 30 minutes
  - Optional Share/Feedback - 15 minutes
  - Round Robin Story Telling - 10 minutes

Break
  - Break - 10 minutes

- Activity 2
  - Story Prompt - 15 minutes
  - Discussion of writing process - 30 minutes
  - Free Write - 30 minutes

Break
  - Break - 15 minutes

- Discussion or Workshop
  - Discussion on character development - 30 minutes
  - Free Write - 30 minutes

End of Day
Camps Offered To Date

• Digital Direction
  • Introductions to different technology including 3D printing and movie making
• Game Generation
  • Create a board game with a team from concept to playtesting
• Escape Room Project
  • Design and construct an escape room from scratch with a team
• Storytellers
  • Explore a variety of writing styles and participate in peer review
• DIY Dare
  • DIY projects including clay, pixel art, and Little Free Libraries
• How to Survive
  • Eco-friendly projects that might help you and your team survive
What Works

• Rotating camps
• Group size
• Registration
• Mixing group/individual work
• Exploratory projects
  • Problem solving and teamwork
  • Low staff involvement
• Library as camp location
• Camp release forms
• Swag
  • Lanyards
  • Water bottles
  • Bags
What Doesn’t Work

• Mornings
• Presenters/Partners
  • Coming into an established atmosphere
  • Difficulty connecting with teens
  • Knowledgeable but distant
• Planning everything to the minute
  • We never get to everything, but it’s better to be over prepared than not have enough to fill four hours.
• Small spaces
• Being too elaborate
Challenges

- Length
- Two locations
- Age differences
  - Different maturity levels and experiences
- Different learning abilities
- Peer engagement and group work
- Keeping it fresh
- Parents
- Staffing
So Why Camps?

• Freedom to be creative and innovative
• Learn life/soft skills to help in the future
• Staff involvement in a profound way
• Teens as library advocates
• Showcase library equipment and services
• Reach new and/or underserved members of the community
• Bigger impact for area teens
Bigger Impact for Community

- Filled a need for our community
- No cost to participants for camp
- Convenient times for working parents
- Offered at each library location for better access
- Opportunities with emerging technologies
- Able to accommodate many skill levels and abilities
- Reach teens with barriers to library access
Interview with Juni and Paul, Campers

I chatted with Juni and Paul to learn their thoughts on the camps. They were full of heartwarming comments and helpful ideas.

- Loved Storytellers
- Wanted longer camps
- Had a great time with peers of all ages
- Created DIY Dare based on their feedback
- Felt a sense of pride and accomplishment
- Appreciated a chance to experience, grow, and “finding something in me”
Importance

- Teach problem solving and critical thinking through project-based learning
- Develop self-esteem and confidence in a safe setting
- Remove economic barriers
- Create opportunities for teens to engage with community
- Provide a way for teens to become leaders and innovators
- Allow librarians to act as mentors and cheerleaders of creative expression
- View the library as a welcoming, safe place
Adapt a Camp Experience for Your Library

- Adjust the schedule
  - 1 day, 2-3 hours
  - 3 days, 1-2 hours
- Focus on one or two complex projects
- Plan and execute with another organization
  - Share the creation and responsibilities with a community partner
- Keep a theme to make everything feel cohesive
- Rebrand to make another program seem fresh and new
Questions?
Molly Garrett has worked in libraries all of her professional life. She works at the Cedar Rapids Public Library and has been their teen librarian for six years. From live action Minecraft to the annual Renaissance Faire, Molly shies away from the typical and loves a challenge.

Email: garrettm@crlibrary.org
Phone: 319.739.0416