

Staff still need help with the not-so-terrible teens

EVER SINCE THE government's *Framework for the Future* was published in 2003 the view that teenagers and libraries are incompatible has been waning. Teenagers have been actively encouraged to use libraries. A number of local authorities have added teen sites to their library web pages and created special collections aimed at teens, teenage reading groups (TRGs) have been started, and teenage librarian posts have been created.

Unfortunately, unlike initiatives aimed at babies and children, such as Bookstart and SureStart, there is no overarching support network for librarians engaged in teen work. There is information on courses, literacy programmes and basic 'how-to' knowledge in a variety of places, but you have to search fairly hard to find it. You can find links for teenage reader development on the CILIP website, the British Council encompassculture website (www.encompassculture.com) has a site dedicated to starting and running TRGs, and The Reading Agency features several projects aimed at teens. However, there is no one place where all this information is gathered together.

With the support of my local authority, I created a site dedicated to teen-oriented

Library authorities are making great efforts to serve the difficult client group of teenagers, but **Matthew Imrie** calls for a national scheme focusing on improvement to be rolled out.



Teenagers at the refurbished Sighthill Library, Edinburgh

librarians. The site (www.teenlibraryserviceuk.bravehost.com) contains sections on TRGs; information on manga, anime, weblogs, graphic novels and online games; links to local authorities that have teen sections on their library websites; and a list of people involved in working with teenagers. I aim to include a training section, 'how-to' articles written by librarians who have completed successful projects, and a bulletin board for discussion. I am hoping it will ultimately become a collaborative effort governed and nurtured by the librarians that it serves. In Bexley the information

gathered from the site is being used to improve services to teenagers. An important question to look at is how can an improvement of teen services be rolled out nationally? This is perhaps a future project that can be looked at by organisations such as the Society of County Librarians or the Department for Culture, Media & Sport. Offering a service to teens is difficult – they are not a homogenous group and their tastes and reading abilities vary. Stock selection should be handled by a librarian who has an idea of what the teen readers in a particular branch need, not suppliers. Currency is a

bankable factor in stock popularity and libraries should attempt to have a selection of hot new titles in their teen collections, and be prepared to move them on when they go stale. When consulting the teens they should, however, be properly prepared prior to selecting titles. Explain to them that you are trying to create a collection for a broad teenage community so that they avoid just choosing books about their own interests, or ones they think would fit into traditional library collections. It may not always be possible to have a teen section with couches, snack dispensers and listening posts, but a clearly marked teen area with decent stock – including graphic novels and pop culture magazines – can work wonders. There are a number of dynamic initiatives taking place but many authorities are struggling to connect with their teenagers. They have been enticed into libraries with the offer of free internet access but many are unsure of what to do next. Bexley has introduced a code of conduct to limit anti-social behaviour and programmes are being planned to keep them using the service. We cannot risk losing an entire generation of potential library users. Matthew Imrie is Assistant Librarian, London Borough of Bexley.