Increasing Conservation Goals and Programming in the Memphis Public Library System

Angie Price

Miami University

Global Field Program 2014

Memphis, Tennessee

Spring 2017

Abstract

Modern libraries offer a vast variety of experiences, opportunities, and assistance to their patrons. They provide equitable service and are increasingly engaged in community outreach and involvement in a variety of projects and programs. My own library system in Memphis, Tennessee revived a library leadership program for 2016-2017 that aimed to identify, cultivate, and support new library leaders among the staff. I was accepted into this program, and over the course of six months met with the other participants as well as numerous people on library staff and in library administration to learn more about leadership in general, library leadership in particular, and most specifically library leadership in the Memphis Public Libraries system. To that end, we engaged in lectures, workshops, and several hands-on projects throughout the course of the leadership series. The end of the program culminated with a final "vision presentation" that each individual gave to the system managers, directors, and administrators. From there, multiple projects and programs could be developed to impact the overall library system. My presentation was on the increasing and improving conservation policies, practices, and programming within the library system (presentation slides in Appendix B). As of the writing of this paper, preliminary actions have been taken in addressing these topics.

Introduction

The library as an institution has always been a repository for knowledge and intellectual growth throughout history. Modern public libraries, however, offer more services than ever before and remain as vital pillars for equitable access in society (Gilton, 2012). Today's public libraries offer far more than books; in them, one can find an enormous variety in offerings: job fairs, legal assistance, social work in action, citizenship classes and naturalization ceremonies, fun programming for all ages, literacy programs, research assistance, classes on a variety of topics in continuing education, and more. Additionally, they offer sorely needed technological access in tech deserts, or places where populations do not have consistent access to technology (Vasquez, 2013), from urban inner cities to remote rural areas (Barniskis, 2014; Dugmore, Lindhop, & Jacob, 2014). This can include general access to computers and beginning computer classes all the way up to high-level technological access to tech labs and makerspaces (Brady, Salas, Nuriddin, Rodgers, & Subramaniam, 2014; Moorefield-Lang, 2015). They often act as community pillars and gathering points for ideas and the development of programs that benefit the community and society at large.

The Memphis Public Library & Information Center (MPLIC) or Memphis Public Libraries system consists of 18 branches located throughout the city of Memphis, Tennessee. MPLIC's mission is "Satisfying the Customer's Need to Know". MPLIC has been on the cutting edge of library programming since its inception in 1893, from its children's library offerings in 1905 at a time long before most libraries even considered children's needs to the national attention it received for anti-censorship practices in 1969, to their trailblazing practices with LINC (Library Information Center) and JobLINC, and even to their most recent addition of a teen tech lab called Cloud901 in 2015 (W. Dowdy, personal communication, December 8, 2016). Innovation in the library field is something that MPLIC has committed to from the start, and has remained a theme throughout their mission and history, and innovation in libraries is a theme in the field for the future (Molaro & White, 2015; Doucett 2015). Additionally, with the creation of a new strategic plan that was released in 2013, MPLIC committed to five key strategic organizational goals, including ensuring technological access, engaging in creative partnerships in the community, taking on a leadership role, serving as a center for literacy, education, and jobs

help, and advancing a culture of excellence (MPLIC, 2013; the full list of strategic goals can be found in Appendix A).

As part of the new strategic goals, MPLIC instituted a new library leadership program in 2016 which sought to identify and groom the next generation of library leaders. Twelve candidates were selected from a pool of applicants to participate in the program. All activities completed through this program were over and above normal professional duties, and with the understanding that participation in future leadership projects would be assumed as well. The library leadership team met once a month for six months to explore various topics through the form of lectures, workshops, and active projects to garner information from the community and build new networks with other individuals and organizations. Each month a new topic was explored, and the general agenda was set by current library leadership team, with plenty of flexibility built in to allow for creative growth and pursuit among participants. The culmination of the library leadership program consisted of each of the participants creating a "vision presentation" for library administration: a high-level conceptual proposal for the library system's future use and improvement, in keeping with strategic goals and organizational values and mission. There were very few limitations or directions given for the presentations, as leadership wanted to encourage creativity and high-level thinking.

Project Details

I applied for the library leadership program (eventually named iLEAD for *L*eadership *E*xperience, *a*nd *D*evelopment) without knowing exactly how I would utilize the experience. I knew I wanted to pursue further leadership opportunities over and above my duties as a cataloging manager for the Memphis public library system. I also knew that I wanted to incorporate my leadership challenge for the Project Dragonfly program into this program and experience, although initially I was also unsure how I would do that. I was accepted into the program in 2016, along with eleven other candidates, all spread through a variety of departments and positions.

Starting in October 2016 and lasting through April 2017, participants met for one day each month to pursue various topics related to leadership. Topics included: effective

communication, history of the library and forces at work in our city, mentoring, economic assessment of library demographic communities and community engagement, and connecting with collaborators and stakeholders. We completed several projects during that time; one activity consisted of going out into various library branches to complete economic assessments, speak with community members in each branch's coverage area, and speak with managers of branches as well as other contacts in the community. In another project, each individual was assigned a mentor in the library system - generally someone who was in management, or had been in the library system more than ten years, or had been a part of the previous leadership program (or all three). Individuals shadowed their mentor, and then created a presentation on the mentoring experience and what they learned (slides from my Powerpoint presentation can be viewed in Appendix D). A third project consisted of dividing into groups of three and reaching out to a collaborator or stakeholder organization in the community that did not previously have a relationship with the Memphis public library system; our group pursued Youth Villages, and was able to make substantial progress on building a mutually beneficial relationship for the future of both organizations. Following the stakeholder meeting and tour, we gave a presentation to the leadership team members back at the central library; attendants considered our presentation highly engaging and spent more time than any other group in follow-up interest (slides from the presentation can be viewed in Appendix E).

All of the activities of the preceding six months were meant to help prepare us for the final vision presentation, which was a high-level conceptual idea for an improvement in the library system. This presentation was scheduled to occur in April 2017, in front of an audience of all system branch managers, administrators, the deputy director, and the library system director. Action from that meeting was dependent upon the consensus of library management and administration, but it was assumed that action would be taken as a result; the extent of the action was to be determined, as the viability of ideas would be evaluated by the managers and administrators after hearing the presentations.

My presentation was on improving and expanding conservation policies, programs, and projects within the library system (slides from the presentation can be found in Appendix B). My presentation outlined first why we as a library system should care about conservation, as many

may not immediately see the connections and benefits of such an endeavor. As I pointed out, there are a variety of reasons.The system has some precedent for conservation initiatives; in 2013, the Recycling Committee/Green Team was created to standardize and improve recycling efforts, first in the central building and then throughout the branches. We were active from 2013-2014 and undertook activities such as making sure every floor had ample standardized and labeled receptacles with clear signage, we oversaw purchasing for bins, and then worked on publicizing the push to recycle for staff; we also looked into other possibilities for recycling events. Although the committee was eventually disbanded, they made strides in pushing the overall system towards a better and more complete recycling experience. Our Friends of the Library group uses recycling services extensively as well, both through national and local means. Service to the community, materials/energy conservation, pursuing the library's strategic goals, and pursuing the city mayor's goals (important for us as a city organization) were all additional reasons given for conservation value.

Once the importance of conservation in the library system was established, I outlined a number of possible partners that the library could collaborate with on conservation initiatives. I named twenty specific partner organizations as starting points, some of whom had worked with the library before, some who had not. Then I outlined some specific programs, policies, and projects that the library could engage in geared towards improving a conservation focus. These included a community garden (or gardens, as we have 18 branches), strengthening and possibly diversifying staff recycling programs, introduction of a public recycling program or initiative, and offering conservation-specific programming for children, teens, and adults. I gave specific examples of programming in each of the three age groups. For children, programs such as recyclable container planting, animal conservation programs, recycling activities, and a variety of hands-on activities were suggested. Because many of our teen programs have a tech component as a result of our teen technology lab Cloud901, technology was emphasized in teen programming, looking to implement more interactive ideas such as building and exploring alternative energy forms, practicing inquiry on energy in general, and even programs looking at maximizing organic nutritional value in food. Adult programming focused more on practical

offerings, such as energy conservation practices, organic food growth, and alternative energy forms available.

Reflection & Conclusion

My final vision presentation and graduation ceremony occurred on April 11, 2017, along with eleven other library leadership program graduates (photos can be found in Appendix C). I can say that so far I have learned a great deal throughout the process of completing the library leadership program. I met numerous people in the system that I had not met before, and worked with them, as well as working with people I had met but had never worked with in an extended capacity. I also reached out and met people outside of the library system in the community and in different organizations, and started relationships with them that may ultimately benefit both parties. The Youth Villages organization, for example, was very excited about the possibility of working further with the library for the future; they had never worked with the library in any capacity, so our interaction with them created a new stakeholder and new outreach opportunities for the library system. I was part of completing assessments for communities, which led me to learn that at least one of our branches resides in an urban food desert.

Researching the final vision presentation led me to look at the history of what the library has completed in a conservation arena, as well as reseach what we might do in the future, including what other libraries across the country are doing to address the issue. I hope to extend my reach much further with the completion of my presentation and the development of further programs and projects with management and library staff. I feel that I now look at the library system with a stronger sense of vision, a better concept of the library as a part of the local community, and a more complete idea of what we all can accomplish together - employees, patrons, volunteers, citizens - to improve our community through further action.

Next Steps

There will be a number of next steps for the continuation of my project. Because our vision presentations were intended to be high-level conceptual ideas, there will be a lot of facets to their final and continuing implementation. For example, learning about the food desert in our

library community led to the idea of a community garden; another graduate of the program went into more detail about a community garden idea, and at the meeting one of the managers spoke up about creating a community garden project; within the next year, there will be a community garden in at least one, and possibly up to three library branches.

How much I am involved in the continuation of other aspects of the project will be somewhat up to administrators and higher-level managers. Obviously I will not be involved in every single iteration of every single program that emerges from this enterprise, but I have already laid the groundwork by working with some of the organizations in the past. I have connections in children's, teens, and adult services departments to reach out further on programming ideas. Throughout the process of the leadership program, I have made a number of new contacts and worked with previous contacts in entirely new capacities. I will be able to utilize this network to achieve some aspects of the project.

I have also already researched some of the specific program ideas already preliminarily, and would definitely be interested in assisting with the creation and implementation aspect of that. The system is actually in the process of hiring 15 new programming specialists; they should finish the hiring process and install the new employees within a matter of months. These new teams will help to implement STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) programming for instance, and hopefully will be able to incorporate conservation programming as a part of that as one of the future focuses that the library system hopes. There are other aspects of the project that I can help facilitate as well, such as the strengthening of staff recycling programs, and possibly connecting the library to further grant opportunities.

As a result of both the leadership presentations and a recent customer service circulation conference, the administration has now decided to create a Project Team. This team will have a single coordinator, with changing committee members. It will focus on projects such as those offered during the leadership vision presentations. This is a completely new task force that has never been utilized before in the library system. They are even considering creating a new paid position for the project team coordinator, which is a big deal in a library system where it can be difficult to get new positions added at any time. Changes in the system have already started to

occur as a result of the library leadership program, and I believe they will only continue to expand with time.

Literature Cited

Barniskis, S.C. (2014). STEAM: Science and art meet in rural library Makerspaces. *iConference 2014 Proceedings*, 834–837. Doi:10.9776/14158

Brady, T., Salas, C., Nuriddin, A., Rodgers, W., & Subramaniam, M. (2014). MakeAbility: Creating accessible Makerspace events in a public library. *Public Library Quarterly, 33*(4), 330-347. DOI: 10.1080/01616846.2014.970425

Doucett, E. (2015). *New routes to library success: 100+ ideas from outside the stacks*. Chicago, IL: American Library Association.

Dugmore, P., Lindhop, H., & Jacob, B. (2014). Making the makers: An exploration of a makerspace in a city library. *LIANZA Conference 2014*. Retrieved from http://www.lianza.org.nz/sites/default/files/Dugmore_P_Making_the_makers.pdf

Gilton, D. L. (2012). *Lifelong learning in public libraries: Principles, programs, and people.* Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc.

Memphis Public Library & Information Center (MPLIC). (2013). The City and its Libraries: Increased Need and a Vital Future. Retrieved from http://www.memphislibrary.org/about/strategic-plan-for-the-library/

Molaro, A. M. & White, L. L. (Eds.). (2015). *The library innovation toolkit: Ideas, strategies, and programs.* Chicago, IL: American Library Association.

Moorefield-Lang, H. (2015). Change in the Making: Makerspaces and the ever-changing landscape of libraries. *Techtrends: Linking Research & Practice to Improve Learning, 59*(3), 107-112. Doi: 10.1007/s11528-015-0860-z

Vasquez, J. (2013, May 6). L.A. is a technology oasis for some, a tech desert for others (map). *SCPR News: Education*. Retrieved from http://www.scpr.org/news/2013/05/06/37115/la-is-a-technology-oasis-for-some-a-tech-desert-fo/

Appendix A - MPLIC Strategic Goals

Strategic Goals

Goal 1: Memphis Public Library and Information Center ensures that all Memphians have access to technology needed to increase knowledge, learning, and access to the economy.

Goal 2: Memphis Public Library and Information Center reaches beyond its walls with creative partnerships that make a difference in people's lives.

Goal 3: Memphis Public Library and Information Center communicates in ways that move libraries from a supporting player to a leadership role that is highly valued in today's public space.

Goal 4: Memphis Public Library and Information Center is a platform for three overriding purposes: literacy, education accelerator, and jobs center.

Goal 5: Memphis Public Library and Information Center advances a culture of excellence in operations and outreach.

Appendix B - Conservation in Libraries/Final Presentation Slides

(slide 1 of 18)

(slide 2 of 18)

(slide 3 of 18)

(slide 4 of 18)

(slide 5 of 18)

(slide 6 of 18)

(slide 7 of 18)

(slide 8 of 18)

(slide 9 of 18)

(slide 10 of 18)

Who are some possible partners?

- City Parks & Neighborhoods
- City Public Works (Recycling)
- Wolf River Conservancy
- Shelby Farms Park
- Overton Park Conservancy
- Boy Scouts of America
- Girl Scouts of America
- Memphis Botanic Gardens
- Grow Memphis
- Memphis City Beautiful

- The Elephant Sanctuary in TN
- Memphis Zoo
- Sierra Club – Chickasaw Chapter
- Conservation Through Art
- Riverfront Development Corp.
- Bluff City Canoe Club
- Pink Palace Museums
- Lichterman Nature Center
- Neighborhood organizations
- Community garden organizations

(slide 11 of 18)

Programs, Projects, & Policies

(slide 12 of 18)
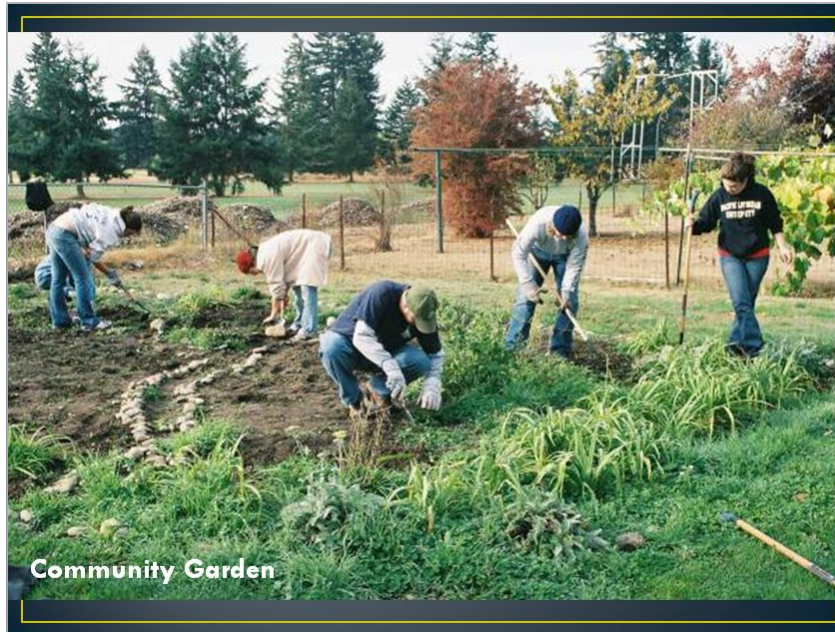
Community Garden

(slide 13 of 18)

"We Recycle!"

Strengthening recycling programs for staff (and the public)

(slide 14 of 18)

(slide 15 of 18)

(slide 16 of 18)

(slide 17 of 18)

(slide 18 of 18)

Appendix C - Photos from iLEAD vision presentations & graduation ceremony - 4/11/17

Receiving my graduation plaque from Library Division Director Keenon McCloy

List of presenters for iLEAD final presentations/graduation ceremony

Graduation plaque received for iLEAD library leadership program
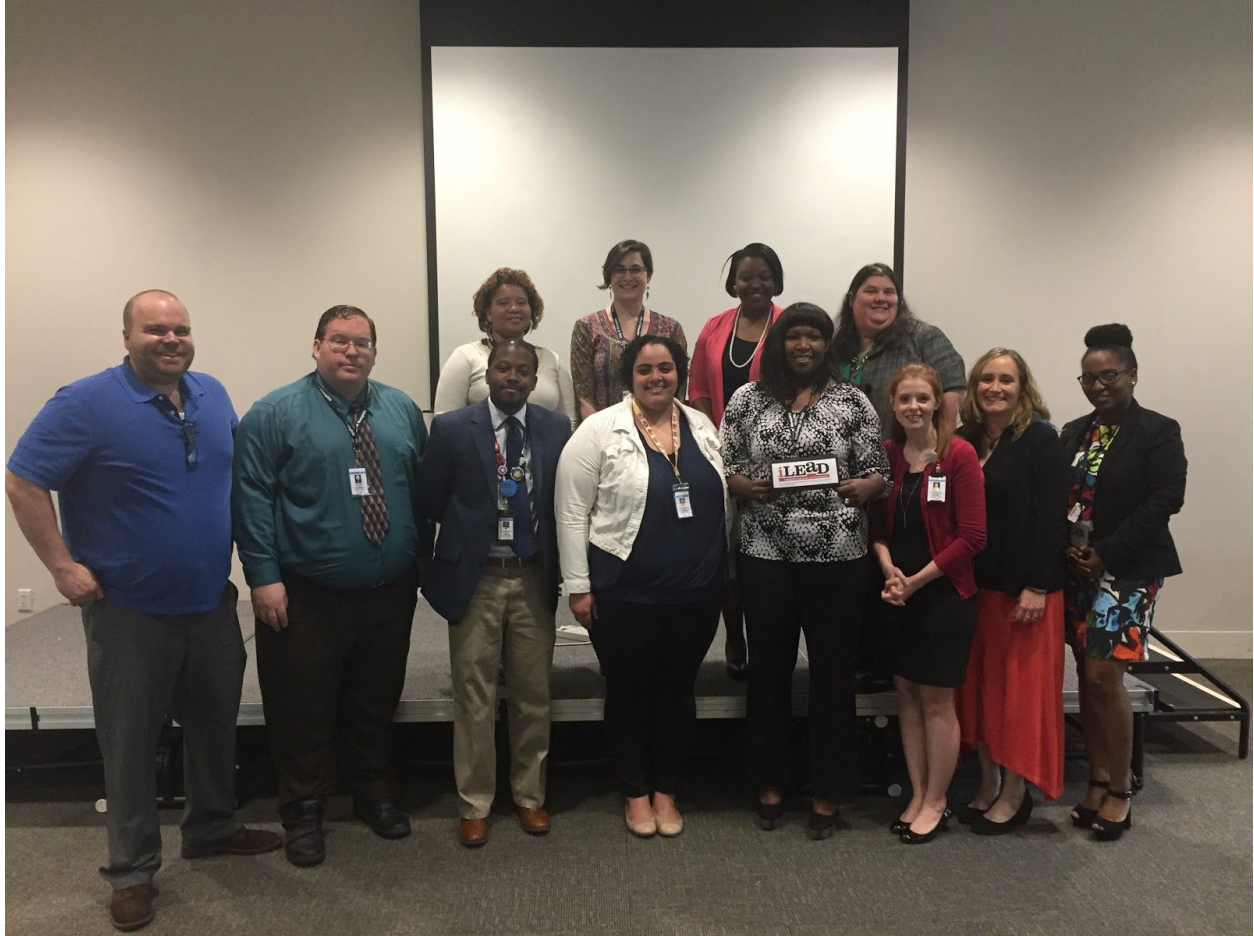
Group photo - iLEAD graduating class of 2017

Appendix D - Mentoring Presentation Slides

(slide 1 of 14)
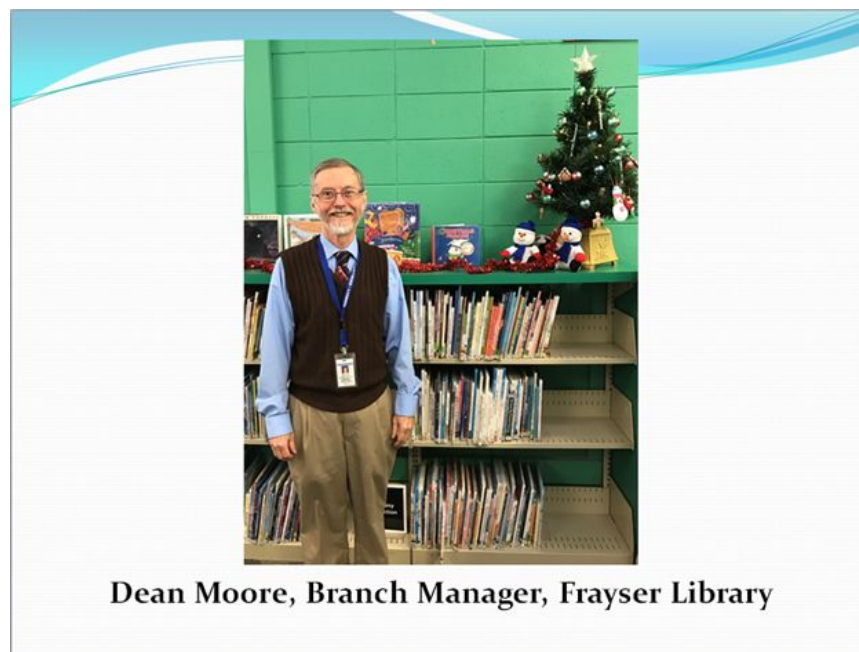
(slide 2 of 14)

Frayser Branch Library

(slide 3 of 14)

Frayser Branch Library

(slide 4 of 14)

(slide 5 of 14)

(slide 6 of 14)

Customer Usage Per Computer	Library Branch
3,484	Raleigh
3,395	Parkway Village
3,077	North
2,933	Frayser
2,713	Whitehaven
2,480	Bartlett
2,251	Randolph
2,242	Poplar-White Station
2,197	Cossitt
2,189	Hollywood
2,185	Central

Information from "The City and its Libraries: Increased Need and a Vital Future" at http://www.memphislibrary.org/memphislibrary/wp-content/uploads/Full_Report.pdf

(slide 7 of 14)

Dean's Background

- Master's degree in Divinity
- Master's degree in Psychology
- Started as a driver in D&D in February 2003
- Promoted to Children's Librarian
  - Frayser branch
- Promoted to Branch Manager in 2006
  - Frayser branch

(slide 8 of 14)

Reference/Circulation Desk

(slide 9 of 14)

Adult Nonfiction Section

(slide 10 of 14)

Major Challenges

- ADA compliance situation
  - Moving/reorganizing nonfiction section
- Frayser Friends
  - Presidential resignation
  - Rebuilding the group
- New building
- Staff morale and training

(slide 11 of 14)

Dealing with Change

- Serenity prayer
- Has background training to deal with change in other countries
- Change is inevitable
  - Pace of change has increased

(slide 12 of 14)

(slide 13 of 14)

(slide 14 of 14)

Appendix E - Youth Villages Presentation Slides

(slide 1 of 12)
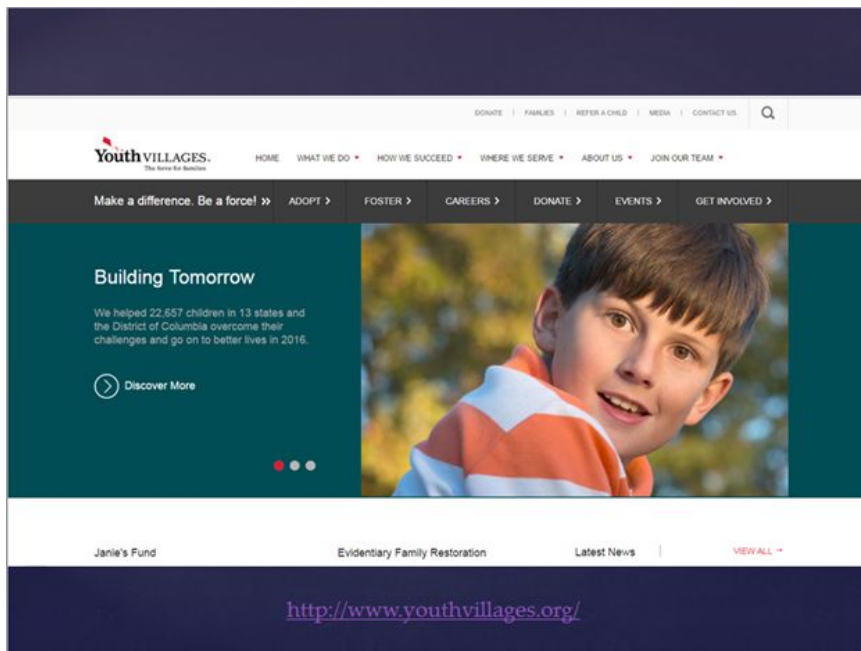
(slide 2 of 12)

Services

- Intensive in-home treatment
- Residential programs
- Adoption
- Foster care
- Mentoring
- Project Safe Space
- Specialized crisis services
- MYPAC provider
- YVLifeSet

(slide 3 of 12)

Tour of Girls Center for Intensive Residential Treatment

- Courtyards, 16 girls/courtyard
- Nurse station
- Beauty salon
- Chapel
- Gym
- Cafeteria
- Office areas
- Safe space

(slide 4 of 12)

Artwork throughout center

(slide 5 of 12)

(slide 6 of 12)

Common area

(slide 7 of 12)

(slide 8 of 12)

(slide 9 of 12)

(slide 10 of 12)

(slide 11 of 12)

(slide 12 of 12)