

MLIS 7260 Leadership Case Study
Teen Angst and Money Woes

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Introduction

The newest addition to a rural public library is the Library Director, Brenda Johnson, who was hired less than one month ago upon the unexpected retirement due to illness of the previous director. During the interview process it was made clear to Brenda that she had two main directives to address immediately: oversee and manage the imminent RIF (Reduction in Force) brought on by the unforeseen loss of donations and funding due to the new economy; implement more effective Youth and Teen Services to better serve the growing population and its needs. The Director answers to a very active and involved Library Board which will be engaged in the decision making process.

Case

The library already runs with a small staff: director; assistant director; children's services manager and two part-time assistants; circulation manager and three part-time assistants; reference manager and four part-time assistants; genealogy/adult services manager and one part-time assistant; one cataloging/technology assistant; four branch managers. All other staff needs are filled by permanent and seasonal volunteers. Currently, the children's services manager and assistant have worked only with young children and have not developed any programs for children over the age of twelve. Both have a background with working solely with preschool age children and it has been a stretch for them to work with children over the age of six. The services that have targeted children between the ages of nine-twelve have been limited to what a local volunteer middle school teacher has provided on a limited basis after school and a couple times a month in the summer. The tween/teen population of the community, and thus the library's, tween/teen population has grown. There have been rising conflicts with noise and

vandalism in the library due to the growth of this population, the lack of oversight this population receives, and the lack appropriate programming for this population. The circulation and reference managers are highly efficient in their work and the management of their assistants, but are stretched to their capacity. The genealogy/adult services manager has been with the library the longest and was integral in the inception of the department which is very popular and brings in patrons from the entire region. The cataloging/technology manager is the go-to guy whenever something isn't working properly, but admittedly does very little in-house cataloging.

Brenda understands that resources are limited and that the library must conduct a RIF while still implementing Youth and Teen Services. It has previously been decided by the Board of Directors and the former Library Director that one full-time staff position must be eliminated. However, which position should be eliminated has yet to be decided. Brenda believes that before eliminating any position that she should quickly develop a better understanding of the community needs, the library's overall and departmental needs, and of the history, strengths, and qualities of each staff member. She also believes that she will need to restructure the library by evaluating and rewriting job descriptions in order to both reduce the work force and implement Youth and Teen Services. She would like to conduct an evaluation using the participatory management strategy so that everyone is involved in the process of restructuring and rewriting job descriptions and implementing/assigning Youth and Teen Services responsibilities. However, Brenda worries that it is inappropriate for one of the team to be asked to restructure the elimination of their own job. Furthermore, if she does not involve the staff, Brenda is concerned that conducting the RIF and restructuring job descriptions to include Youth and Teen Services without staff input will make it impossible for her to develop trust and mutual respect with them.

It is apparent that to be able to increase Youth and Teen services that a staff member needs to be identified that is effectively able to work with this specialized population, that an area in the library needs to be designated for this population, and that after-school and summer programs must be implemented to serve this population. Most of the local funding/donations that support the library currently are earmarked for the very popular Genealogy Services department – which takes up a generous portion of the library. This department is highly supported by local foundations and the Board of Directors as they have a personal interest in genealogy. This department has thrived, while the other departments have depended solely on the basic funding from the regular budget. Brenda would like to tap into the local foundation support in order to implement Youth and Teen Services programming, but is concerned that she will not have the support of the Board on this issue as the Board Chairperson has been the Genealogy Services department's greatest supporter since its inception.

Questions for Discussion

How can the new Library Director best identify which full-time staff position should be eliminated? How should she conduct the restructuring and the rewriting of job descriptions? Can the Library Director implement Youth and Teen Services without funding or should she find a way to tap into the current local support for the Genealogy Services department to implement Youth and Teen Services? Should the new Library Director follow a traditional bureaucratic style or should she use a participatory management team approach?