

Librarian Amy Trulock works at Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall in Los Angeles County.



Not all educators stand at the front of a class. In each issue, we interview an outstanding educator who works outside the classroom.

## An Ambassador for Libraries

Amy Trulock is the librarian at Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall, a short-term detention facility in Los Angeles County, and the library is part of the County of Los Angeles Public Library. Trulock strives to show Los Padrinos residents that their library—and the public library system on the outside—is a place where they can find a teen-centered community space, resources and enrichment opportunities. In short, she's an ambassador for libraries.

### **The Los Padrinos Library opened in August 2016, and you're its first librarian. What inspired you to work at a youth detention hall?**

I took a class in correctional library management [in grad school], and it was there that I really thought that I could be suited for a juvenile hall

library. But I was also still really drawn to the public library. ... I was a teen librarian at two different [county] locations, and when I saw this transfer opportunity [to Los Padrinos Library] come up, within the hour, I had talked to my current supervisor and also submitted my name to be on the transfer list to be interviewed.

I just think it's the best of both worlds; I get to be a teen librarian in a public library that's embedded in a juvenile hall facility. So, by doing that, I get to not only supplement [residents'] academic work—to supplement what they're doing in the school, provide them with recreational opportunities—but I also get to be an ambassador so that they can see the library as a place that they want to continue to go to when they're released.

### **How does the library collection support the residents' literacy and personal growth?**

We're not just providing recreational reading material but a nonfiction range: on things such as health, including mental health and addiction; stories of kids that have survived ... foster care, gotten out of gangs; books on teen parenting, searching for jobs and applying for college.

We're working on building a collection that *truly* has something for everyone, that has diverse characters and that also covers a range of reading ability. We do have a small Spanish collection that we've been building, and we're looking to also add a story-time and parenting collection so that those [who are] teen parents ... will be able to practice reading to

**“It’s more than just books. The library is a valuable resource for the rest of their lives.”**

their children for when they’re out. That way, we can encourage literacy not only in the teen residents, but then work toward making a difference in the next generation.

It’s more than just books; it’s important to introduce them to everything we have to offer. The library is ... a valuable resource for the rest of their lives. All of the students, when they leave the system, are given a [Los Angeles County] library card. ... It’ll already be filled out for them. There is nothing that they have to do other than be released and continue on their journey and then to start enjoying that [library access] on the outside.

**What’s a common barrier in your daily work, and how do you tackle it?**

Honestly, I think one of the main barriers is that this is a very transient population. ... I think that’s definitely a positive on one end because if kids aren’t staying in the system long and they’re getting released, that’s wonderful. But it does take some fine-tuning because each week it’s different; each week we’re meeting new people.

I think it’s very important that we, both Elsa [the library assistant] and I, come here from a very

nonjudgmental place. ... Whatever they’re struggling with, whatever [in] their past has brought them here, we can find a book that can help give them hope and give them some guidance or find something they can relate

to. I think that’s also very important when you’re dealing with such a diverse population and when you’re dealing with children. They need to feel safe; they need to feel respected at the same time.

**What’s one of your early successes with residents?**

Every time someone says that they don’t want to get a book [or] they don’t really like to read and we still find a book for them, that’s a success. That’s been happening at least once a day since we’ve been open.

One girl came in and mentioned that she had a headache, and I asked if it was because of allergies from the winds, and she said that she had been crying. And another one of the girls asked her why she’d been crying, and she said because she realizes she’s all alone in the world. The other girl said [something like], “But you’ve got books.” The fact that they see [the library] as something that is a positive in their life, that’s a real win for us.

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Students explore the idea that where people come from is one part of their identity, not their entire identity.

**Exploring Young Immigrant Stories—Diversity (Elementary School)**

Teach students about diversity in their classroom and around the world with hands-on exercises and youth stories.

**STEM by the Numbers—Justice (Elementary School)**

Students use data and statistics to examine the underrepresentation of women and people of color in science and engineering careers.

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[endzerotolerance.org](http://endzerotolerance.org)

A Silent Epidemic, a data-driven visual app from NPR, explores the disturbing lack of counseling and treatment opportunities for public school students with mental health disorders.

[apps.npr.org/mental-health](http://apps.npr.org/mental-health)

Teach This Poem, from the Academy of American Poets, provides K-12 teachers with interdisciplinary tools and activities for bringing poetry into classrooms.

[poets.org/poetsorg/teach-poem](http://poets.org/poetsorg/teach-poem)