

## **Our Children, Our Families Council**

### **Summary of the San Francisco Public Library Board of Advising Youth (BAY)**

*(Last updated 5/28/15)*

#### **Goals of the Effort**

The San Francisco Public Library's Board of Advising Youth (BAY) is an advisory body of roughly 25 high school students, and it was initially created in 2012 to give teens an opportunity to directly engage in the process of designing the new teen center, called The Mix, at the main public library. BAY participants were to have an authentic leadership opportunity by working directly with architects and professionals to create a meaningful space for teens at the Main Library. Now that The Mix is up and running as a teen-friendly space, BAY continues to meet, though the goals of BAY have shifted; now, BAY functions as a planning and outreach body to improve teen programming and participation at libraries in SF.

#### **Focal Population of the Effort**

The Board of Advising Youth is open to any teen, but preference is given to high school students in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades.

#### **Impact**

BAY's largest accomplishment was helping to create the teen-friendly space at the public library, called The Mix, which is now open to teens across the city. More broadly, they helped foster the wider understanding that the San Francisco Library is a resource for teens that goes beyond being "just a library," but rather is a place for positive youth development. BAY attributes these successes to the fact that their group gives teens a direct voice in the planning and outreach process.

#### **Challenges**

BAY's greatest challenge relates to participation of its youth members. BAY is intended to give a voice to diverse teens, so the group has been flexible about participation and schedule conflicts with sports, theater, etc. This has led to attendance issues, however, which causes strain on the group as a whole. BAY is still trying to find the best approach to participation.

#### **Origins of the Effort**

In 2012, the San Francisco Public Library (SFPL) received an Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) MacArthur Foundation grant for \$100,000, along with 24 other museums and public libraries in the United States to build digital media learning labs for teens. SFPL used this grant for a conceptual design for a new teen center at the Main Library that would be designed by teens. The grant was used for the conceptual design and to pay the 19 members of the BAY a stipend. Since the grant ended in 2013, SFPL has been able to continue to pay stipends to the youth. The BAY now acts as SFPL youth ambassadors, promoting The Mix at SFPL (new name for Main Library Teen Center) at library programs and community events. SFPL wanted to have teens more actively engaged in creating programs and spaces for teens at the library.

#### **Leading the Effort**

Two library staff members have taken on responsibility for supervising BAY activities. The first, Jennifer Collins Greenlee, is SFPL's Teen Service Coordinator, a position that is out of SFPL's Community Programs and Partnerships Division, and she oversees community engagement for teen services collaborators with SFPL. The second, Cathy Cormier, works as the Main Library Teen Center Manager, and she also coordinates directly with The Mix at SFPL.

#### **Members of the Effort**

The Board of Advising Youth currently contains 25 active members, all of whom are high school students in San Francisco. The previous cohort of BAY members was 22 teens.

**Structure of the Effort**

Cathy Cormier, the Main Library Teen Center Manager, coordinates the Board of Advising Youth's activities, and this work is supported by the Main Teen Center librarians and the SFPL system-wide Teen Services Coordinator. BAY members meet for an hour and a half at the library each week to discuss upcoming programming and outreach events. They also attend certain teen-centered outreach events together. Roughly 70% of the 25 BAY members attend any given meeting, and BAY supervisor Cathy Cormier is contemplating switching to biweekly or even monthly meetings to improve attendance and respect teens' other commitments. BAY also collaborates with other networks serving teens, including DCYF's Youth Advisory Council, WritersCorps, Youth Speaks, California Academy of Sciences, Bay Area Video Coalition and SEO Scholars, and more.

**The Role of Data**

At the end of the initial grant in 2013, BAY participants completed a survey. Attendance data is also tracked at all library programs as part of overall library performance measures. The Mix, the new teen center at the main public library, will use short surveys after each program to track a broader spectrum of data beyond attendance (e.g. if teens like the programs, and what programs they want to see at The Mix).

**Related Documents**

- SFPL's Board of Advising Youth website < <http://sfpl.org/index.php?pg=2000680201>>
- The Mix website < <http://sfpl.org/index.php?pg=0200006401>>