

Four years ago when I moved to North Carolina in seventh grade, I had to face the biggest challenge of life. I was afraid of the new school and making new friends. I was the most reticent introvert kid to share, participate, or respond to anyone at school and in this new, unknown community.

Noticing my awkward shyness, my parents decided to take me to our local public library to meet new people in a friendly, informal environment. There were numerous interactive games, activities, workshops, and reading sessions for me to choose from. When I joined a reading discussion, I saw a group of students from my new school. Still incredibly shy, I forced myself to meet them. To my surprise, they quickly welcomed me! During various youth programs we interacted more and more, together browsed through our favorite books, discussed about our favorite super heroes, and even enjoyed hanging out in our favorite corner of the library that had the most comfortable chairs. After a few weeks, those kids became my closest friends and I often talk to them at school today. My reticence gradually began to disappear, and I developed an incredible sense of self-confidence to get along with other kids at school.

Since then Mooresville Public Library became one of my favorite place to visit. It has been contributing a lot to my academic achievements and personality development. I attribute my social skills, computer skills, and of course, my love of reading to libraries. Without my local library I could have never stayed committed to participate in science fairs. It has a large collection of study materials that support me while working on science projects. I get utmost satisfaction when I find the right resources to boost my knowledge on a specific subject. I successfully competed up to state level in the NCSEF and NCSAS science fairs in 8th and 9th grade.

I cannot forget the day when I got the first chance to volunteer at the library. I was excited because I now had the chance to help librarians organize and shelve books which I enjoyed watching as a kid. After a few months of volunteering I joined the Teen Advisory Board, a group of teenage students who collaborate to improve our library environment and motivate more kids to participate in library activities. This was the perfect opportunity for me to show my dedication to this library and give back to my community. I continue to volunteer to this day and serve as Vice President of the Teen Advisory Board.

Libraries have always been known for anchoring awareness in communities. It is a place for people of all ages to visit, interact through various programs and gain vast amounts of knowledge. Access to the plethora of information helps us know more about ourselves and the world around us. But libraries need not be a place just for books, computers, and printing. Unfortunately, there are several serious social concerns, like physical and cyber bullying, in communities around us. Since libraries establish the essential connection between information and individuals, it is the perfect place to address those social issues. We can raise public awareness by holding information sessions, discussions, and even plays or skits to convey clear messages on how to prevent social problems from arising or worsening. As Vice President of my

library's Teen Advisory Board, I consider it my duty to not only commit myself to serve the library but bring positive changes in my community. We can tackle these problems by boosting morale, building self-confidence and courage within our people. This is just one of the ways why our local libraries are so important for our lives and our future.

I am positive that public libraries must have impacted everyone's life in some way or other. They have given some of us the chance to earn true power and wisdom to stand strong. I am absolutely convinced that libraries of North Carolina will play a vital role in providing the right values to support more individuals like me, make them proud, and celebrate their uniqueness. Never have I ever felt so energized and motivated to volunteer and serve the community through libraries.