

ALIZDAIR SEBASTIEN RAY, Hope Mills, NC
Freshman (9th grader) Cumberland International Early College
NC Congressional District 9

Today's Libraries are more than traditional books available for reading or borrowing. Some of the innovative programs the library of today offers include games for toddlers, computer classes, DVD's, teen programs, Wi-Fi and so much more. If you haven't visited a library in a while you may want to head there because libraries have expanded with innovative technology. Libraries are important to both my classmates and me because it is a place where we can always go to get information for our projects, to study, programs and of course borrow books.

My family & I, have used the library as a big source for homeschooling & projects for ten years. I currently use it for my classes at the early college. My library journey began as a toddler at Alvin Sherman Library at Nova South Eastern University in South Florida. This library paved the foundation for my love of reading books. As I mentioned before, our society is full of technology, and yes, the library has embraced it, but the library will not be overrun by it, librarians are still needed for assistance and to lead and create the programs offered to the community. While the library continues to use technology to make it run smoother, people are still needed to shelve books. And while the library offers eBooks, for me reading on an electronic tablet just isn't the same as reading a book. I have to say that I do love using both. Libraries have personally impacted me in so many ways, including the opportunity to meet new people, learn new things and gain service and leadership skills. The library has offered me so many opportunities throughout my childhood and continue through my fourteen years of life.

Libraries are important to the future of the world because the programs they offer are usually free. Most people don't think of the library as a place to learn computer skills or as a place to look for a new job or apply to college, but they should. The library is now a community center that offers programs for members of the communities. My hometown library, The Hope Mills Branch Public Library offers an abundance of programs for adults and children. The programs offered range from story time for children, book clubs for teens, and technology classes for high school students & adults. Libraries need to continue to market themselves as a place of learning with and without books.

I want to mention a great project that I was able to be a part of in 2017 in behalf of promoting libraries. I'm the 2017 4-H Youth Council President for Cumberland County. My 4-H agent & I, applied for a mini grant from AARP earlier this summer. We were happy to receive news this Fall that we were awarded \$500.00. Our goal is to set up a number of Little Free Libraries in our county. In November, we used the money to get a carpenter to construct the little houses and we had a lot of donation of books. I added books to the donation from my personal library. We decided on five locations

and they are all at the Parks and Recreation Centers: Clark Park, Stedman Park, Lake Rim, Cumberland Garden & Fayetteville Cumberland Youth Council. The idea is simple: A book reader takes one, and return later with a replacement. What a great way to promote reading! A lot of families will be able to utilize the little free libraries because they're not close to a regular library. This is great for the community and the families. It's great that I was able to be a part of this great 4-H project to promote libraries. I personally went to all five locations and added the charter label and books at each little house. A bonus is that the local newspaper(Fayetteville Observer) heard about the project and I was interviewed for an article. I was surprised that the article made the front cover of the Sandspur newspaper. This will greatly promote exposure for the project. For example, my Mother, Angela, was the at local print shop picking up an order. The staff mentioned that they had books piling up by their kids and was wondering what to do about the books. After seeing the article, they were heading out to the nearest location to drop off the books. I was happy to hear the news and that the little free libraries are being utilized by the community.

To conclude I believe that the future of North Carolina libraries is in no way being diminished, but they are losing funding every day. They are continuing to be a part of our lives and we should continue to keep them as a vital part of our community. I would like to promote the benefits of libraries to others and I believe the NCLA Student Ambassador Program can offer me that opportunity.