

I Love My Librarian!

2018 Award

Lindsey Tomsu

Algonquin Area Public Library District
Algonquin, Illinois

Nominators: Elena Feiza, Audi Blann, Keyahna Wood, Huyen-Yen Hoang, Sarah Kreber, Peyton Banks, Becca Russell, Eric Pham, Haley Christensen, Maddy Lakeman, and Mary Bergeson

1. Please tell us in 2-3 sentences why your nominee should win this award. What sets them apart?

We, members of the former TAB at the La Vista Public Library in La Vista, Nebraska, and members of the current TAB at the Algonquin Area Public Library in Algonquin, Illinois, are working together to nominate Lindsey because she is loved in multiple states! Many factors set Lindsey apart—she’s not afraid to be goofy with us; she puts us in control of our programming and gives us freedom to try things; she gets us involved in the community to show that we can make a difference; she defends us and sticks up for us; she treats us like children when we want to act like children and like adults when we want to act like adults; she isn’t afraid to give us responsibilities and expects us to not let her down; and she listens to us talk about our lives. At first, for many of us, she was our librarian, then role model, then older “sister”, and, eventually, lifelong friend. We are glad the Algonquin teens understand what an important person they’ve “inherited” because La Vista didn’t give her up willingly! Below we will share some of the memorable ways Lindsey has forever impacted our lives.

2. Please list a few ways in which the nominee has helped you and made your experience of the library a positive one. For instance, did the nominee inspire in you a love for literature; assist you in a project or finding other information?

Lindsey has impacted all of our lives by making the library a special place for us.

Audi –One day Lindsey found me in tears because I thought, as a graduating senior, I was going to lose my library family. I have a lot of learning disabilities. The library was my home. She went to the TAB and asked them if they had a problem with me still participating. Everyone unanimously said the library wouldn’t be the same without me

which made me feel so wanted. Lindsey then made me her unofficial assistant. Whatever she needed, I was there—help with a homeschool teen program, help shopping for summer reading, etc. She even got me honored as Volunteer of the Year by the Nebraska State Legislature on National Library Day one year. What I didn't realize was this was her way of giving me the experience I needed but couldn't get from a real job. She gave me experience to place on my resume to show that I was capable and more than my disabilities.

Haley – One of my favorite moments was when we switched the nonfiction from Dewey to subject classification. The multi-month project showed us teens mattered. Lindsey had been saying NF was languishing with little checkouts. She came to us with possible options for improving circulation. We voted to get rid of Dewey. Lindsey went to her director with our reasons who, despite grumblings from other staff, gave us her blessing because it was what we, as patrons, wanted. What made the change memorable was getting to make an executive decision and helping implement the change. We weeded books, shifted shelves, retyped new labels, applied the new labels, etc. Within a year the circulation of the collection increased by 30%! The nonfiction area wasn't this dank, dark aisle anymore. It was bright and cheerful and a place to go for fun books!

Eric – Lindsey makes everything positive. Whenever someone's down she brings them back up to enjoy the program without any force. She does it discreetly and you never even know until you find yourself no longer sad but tempted into enjoying the program. I know I was a rambunctious kind of annoying kid when I met her at 11. But she never made me feel unwelcome. In fact, she saw something in me and encouraged my participation, and I soon found that I was a beloved and valued member of the group.

Keyahna – My favorite memory is when I got the lead in my school play and the performance was going to be a Tuesday night. Tuesday was a library day! I asked Lindsey if there was any way we could do a field trip and instead of laughing she started the concept of TAB Field Trips, special events that TAB members go to that allow us to bond beyond the walls of the library. About 10 teens joined Lindsey at my play and we went out to dinner. Lindsey even got me a pair of Monster High sunglasses as a gift for a great performance! Together the TAB would go to other plays, band concerts, and comic conventions together. I don't know many librarians out there who would be willing to go such an extra mile like Lindsey did for us.

Sarah – Lindsey encouraged my interest in librarianship. She would show me how to shelve books and sometimes she'd even let me check in books! In fact, her nationally-recognized (by SLJ) TAB Internship program was started because of my interest! She learned about an intern grant and asked if I'd be interested in a 10-week summer college-

intensive internship. There'd be lectures, discussions, readings, and assignments but I'd learn all about working in libraries. She spent months creating its curriculum for what felt like just me! In four years at La Vista, she had ten "graduates", and I am ecstatic to hear that she has adapted the program to a year-long option for an Algonquin teen!

Maddy –The library has never worked with my high school's internship class before. I was surprised by Lindsey's enthusiastic offer to be my supervisor! She wasn't required to say yes, but she is willing to work around her schedule and spend six hours a week with me! My classmates have commented on how bored they are, but I'm the opposite! Lindsey has created knowledgeable lectures, interesting readings, and engaging assignments for me. She has so much positive energy and shares real-life stories to help me connect with the material. She has made a difference in my life and I've only known her for a month! I've never been so excited to come to the library before.

3. How has the librarian made a difference in the community? Please be specific.

Lindsey's number one priority is to make teens' voices be heard. She's not scared to tell us she doesn't care if we don't enjoy reading—she wants us to know that the library is more than books. Because of her, she's helped bring to life our programs from the unusual (Bacon Club, Tea Time, Teen Storytime, and Pool Noodle Kendo Club) to the technological (grants to start a Teen Makerspace, Media Club, and BUILD Collective) and everything in-between.

Haley – I remember what Lindsey said to us during the first TAB meeting—we could make the library anything we wanted it to be. That's empowering.

Huyen-Yen – Lindsey aims to show other people that teens matter and care about their communities too. When I joined the teen program I had no idea that a few years later I would be the TAB representative on the actual library board. I certainly was shocked when, at age 16, I was voted the president of the library board. I made national library news for that achievement.

Audi – The point of TAB is to get our input. She wants teens to take ownership of the library. She said to never think any idea was too stupid or impossible—if there was a way to do it she'd find it. Plus, she would never turn a teen away. Many of the teens lived in other cities who started coming because Lindsey made the library the place to be. They came to the library, saw all the awesome stuff Lindsey offers teens that many other libraries don't, and stuck around.

Peyton – My grandma belonged to the library and took me there one summer. I got hooked, so hooked in fact that my grandma would transport me the 45-minute drive from my house to the library twice a month during the school year to attend programs.

Keyahna – Lindsey single-handedly put La Vista on the map nationally. Whether it be writing about programs we did or winning grants, she is a force to be reckoned with. I had the honor of presenting with her at local library conferences and events. Not only did it help show adults that teens matter, but many librarians came up to us and thanked us for presenting from a patron's point-of-view.

Mary – I am shocked at how many grants Lindsey was awarded for her Nebraska teens! She brought in more than \$25,000 to do programs the teens wanted that could not have been made a reality on city-approved budgets alone. If that doesn't show how passionate she is about the teens of her communities, I don't know what does. I can't wait for her to start investigating large-scale projects for Algonquin!

Peyton – My favorite community-related program Lindsey created was the BUILD Collective, which she funded by being the 2016 recipient of the ALA Fyan Award. It started with the idea of a club that went “beyond” LEGO Club. We wanted to create a multi-purpose program that would allow tweens and teens to “play” with educational “toys” based around building that would foster our imaginations and help us become more creative individuals. I'm proud that I created the name—Building to Uphold Imagination and Learning Daily! We had traditional building toys, like Lincoln Logs and LEGOs, and STEM-related ones, like robotic dinosaurs we had to build from scratch and snap circuits. It was fun to learn by acting like a kid again. BUILD Collective not only was used by regular library teens, but in homeschool teen programs and offsite at the schools.

Haley – As a former TAB President, I have to make the obligatory stats comment. Before Lindsey was at our library we were lucky to have one program a month for teens during the school year and one program a week during the summer. By the time she left eight years later, we were having 20-25 programs a month during the school year, 100 programs for teens during the 10-week SRP, and an additional 20 programs in a tween-only SRP. In her first summer in 2009 only 79 teens participated. By her last summer in 2016, nearly 1,900 teens and 700 tweens participated. In her first school year of programming in 2009-2010 only 115 teens participated. By her last full school year of programming in 2015-2016 we had nearly 1,600 teens. I hate to say it but the library is not the same without her. It immediately reverted to the same offerings it had before she came and improved everything. I know some teens who've stopped going. They told me Lindsey made them lifelong library supporters but it's no longer fun without her. Many

of us didn't come for books. We didn't come for programs. We came because of Lindsey. We're spoiled and no one can replace her in our eyes.

4. How has the library, and the nominee, improved the quality of your life?

As we said before, Lindsey started as our librarian and is now a lifelong friend for many of us. We are glad her Algonquin teens are building relationships with her and see how special she is. Below, a few of us share personal stories of how Lindsey improved our lives.

Keyahna – I moved to Nebraska when I was 12. I have always been extremely shy, but Lindsey helped me come out of my shell. Participating in TAB helped me gain leadership skills I never thought possible as I helped suggest programs, brainstorm grants, and more. The number one way she helped me overcome my fear of public speaking was by presenting at library conferences. In total, I presented at five different events. When we presented on our BUILD Collective I found myself in front of a room of 100-plus librarians confidently demonstrating and recommending items.

Becca – I am a graduate of the TAB Internship. It was fun learning about libraries behind-the-scenes. One memorable assignment was purposefully water damaging a book and repairing it. Fast forward to my first semester in college. I'm in my dorm studying when I spill a bottle of water on my textbook! I ran around demanding paper towels, a fan, to make room in the freezer! My quick-thinking saved my book's life! No one could tell I spilled water on it! The internship also gave me the courage to apply for a library assistant opening at my college!

Huyen-Yen – All my life I had straight As in school, I was in all the AP classes, and I was going into medicine. It was a shock when I realized just how different college was and how hard a double major in biology and chemistry is. I felt stressed, overworked, and worthless. Lindsey was just getting settled in Illinois. Even though she was miles away and no longer my "librarian" she was there for me. I was able to vent my frustrations to an adult who wasn't my traditional Vietnamese parents who believed I was in college to earn a medical degree or find a husband. She spent hours listening to me, helping me explore my options. She helped me through my early mid-life crisis as I changed my major to biology and library science (medical librarianship?). I felt like a weight had been lifted. I am enjoying a lighter academic load and the fun nature of the library classes offset the heavy science. I know I can always turn to for Lindsey for advice.

Anonymous –Lindsey gave me a safe place to explore my sexuality. During our lock-in one summer, the TAB decided to record a reality show that was half ANTM and half Project Runway. I told her that I wanted my "persona" to be a girl. She asked, "Are you

asking my permission to do drag?" I said yes, and she said as long as I was respectful to drag culture she had no problem. For one glorious evening, I was allowed to experiment without the fear that my parents would come bursting through the door. One of the teens brought makeup. Another brought a dress and heels for me. Yet another let me borrow a bra and helped stuff it. It was a safe environment in which to explore gender norms as my other male friends asked quietly, "Um, can I try it next?" The boys walked away with a greater appreciation for the crap girls have to go through to feel they are "pretty" enough. From that moment on I knew that the library would be a place I could go and not worry about being who I am.

Mary –Lindsey has helped me get out of my comfort zone, become more assertive, and figure out where I want to go with my career. I know she had a few libraries competing for her which is why every time I asked, "Is the new librarian hired yet?" I was told no. But let me tell you—the wait was worth it. I immediately clicked with Lindsey and got involved TAB. I suggested a book club and she made it happen. She also introduced me to cozy mysteries. I enjoy how she takes the time to talk to me after every program. She could sneak into the back the minute it's over but she chooses to stay and talk to me for another hour about the books I've been reading and more. She sees establishing meaningful relationships with teens as part of the job. I'm hoping with the opening of our new Teen Center she can meet more teens who will come to love her just as much!

5. How does the nominee make the library a better place? Please be specific.

La Vista Teens – Before Lindsey the library was not welcoming for teens. She struggled with a declining program for a year, but eventually made the changes that breathed new life into it! We believe it is a testament to her skills as a librarian and a person who genuinely cares about teens that she made the La Vista Library the place for teen services. Through word-of-mouth, teens came to her programs from not only La Vista, but surrounding areas of Papillion, Millard, Cedar Creek, Bellevue, and even across the state from Iowa. She never turned anyone away. She created a haven for book lovers, book haters, nerds and geeks, athletes, popular kids and misfits, teens questioning their identities and orientations, diverse teens, rich and poor alike, and more. We were disgusted when we learned our city classified her job not as a librarian but as a circulation clerk. We love our circulation clerks but the jobs are two different things altogether! While circ clerks help answer our questions and check out our books they certainly aren't expected to do what Lindsey accomplished in her time, such achievements as offering more than 100 programs each summer, creating programs that were talked about nationally, bringing in more than \$25,000 of grant funds, and writing about her programs, her teens, and her library which put the city on the map nationally among awesome youth-serving libraries. We believe the city failed to truly value what they had with Lindsey for eight years. If she was just a "clerk" she clearly went above and beyond her required job duties to make the library the place for teens throughout all of the Omaha-Metro area. Teens entered the program in fifth grade and they stayed until they graduated

because of Lindsey. She was the program for many of us. We are firm in our belief that our library has lost one of its best people by not valuing her and it really is not the same since she's been gone. While her leaving left a hole in all our hearts, we knew the time was coming and her worth was proven when a number of libraries all wanted her. While she may not be our librarian anymore, she is still in our lives and is just a phone call, a text, an email, or a Facebook message away when we need her.

Algonquin Teens – While we have only known Lindsey for a little over a year, we are glad that our library “fought” for her to choose us as the next step in her career. We understand that it will take time to get our program to the same level La Vista achieved, but we are along for the ride for the whole trip! In the short time she has been with us she has already implemented changes for the better. For example, we only had a few programs each month for teens and they were all repeats. While she isn't quite able to do as many programs as she'd like right now, she has added more fun options for us, especially crafts and DIY projects. Our teen program was heavily volunteer-focused. She has introduced us to the concept of the TAB. Instead of just earning hours by completing busy work, the members of TAB get to actually make a difference and take a leadership role in the library's offerings. We have helped plan three reading programs so far and have a say in the logistics, the events, and the prizes. Our library has a branch location that many feel is often ignored and overlooked but it is close to one of the high schools. She began to offer monthly teen programs there for these teens and is working to build up the participants. She's building a relationship with the high school librarians to help spread the word and collaborate on even more things for us. We hope with the opening of the new Teen Center word will spread, teens will come, and more teens will meet Lindsey, see that libraries are more than books, and slowly grow our program to one day rival our La Vista peers!