



Library Midlife Crisis?

Now that the Baby Boomers are getting older, how are they changing the face of public libraries? We all know about this demographic group of Americans, born from 1946 to 1964, who are now heading into retirement. As they get older, Boomers may well want new and different services from their public libraries. How can libraries plan for and serve their patrons aged 50-plus years? What issues should we take into account? What models are available? This new book presents several areas of interest as well as examples of programs currently being carried out by libraries.

Author Diantha Dow Schull is an advisor to libraries and other cultural institutions. She was president of the nonprofit organizations Libraries for the Future and the Americans for Libraries Council. She also previously worked in educational and administrative positions at the New York Public Library and the Library of Congress. She is co-author with Pauline Rothstein of *Boomers and Beyond: Reconsidering the Role of Libraries* (American Library Association, 2010). Although not a librarian by training, Schull has written about issues relating to Baby Boomers and cultural institutions, including libraries, for a number of years. She points out that by 2030, at least 18% of the U.S. popu-

lation will be 65 and older, with many more 50 and older. In this volume, she presents background on library services for those 50 and older, as well as documents a multitude of library programs directed at or used by them.

According to Schull, libraries started widely considering services to the 50-plus crowd, also known as “midlife adults,” in the early 2000s. These users are distinct in many ways from the senior populations traditionally served by public libraries, who are often homebound, disabled, or frail. Midlife adults have often finished active parenting but may still be working full time or part-time. The library profession is in the process of recognizing midlife adulthood as “a new life stage that merits focused attention from librarians similar to other life stages.” We have children’s librarians and teen hangout spaces. Why not special staff and physical areas devoted to midlife adults? These active adults are often interested in a wide variety of services and programs. Schull identifies several state libraries as leaders in developing programs for midlife adults, including Arizona, Connecticut, California, and Massachusetts. The first chapter of *50+ Library Services* focuses on these four state library agencies and their programs, including innovative uses of federal Library Services and

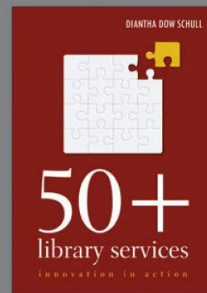
Technology Act (LSTA) grant funds to promote 50-plus services. The following chapter profiles 11 individual libraries in seven states, describing their multiple programs aimed at midlife adults as well as their funding sources and keys to success.

The next nine chapters describe various subject areas/cultural trends of interest to the 50-plus crowd. Each chapter includes a discussion of the topic as well as specific implications for libraries, followed by examples of national and local level programs in that subject area. The subject areas range from social media to creativity to financial planning. This format allows readers to skip to a section of particular interest and read up on programs in that area, or to gain an overview of the topics by reading the whole book. While many of the chapters cover topics of interest to a variety of library users, such as work and careers, the focus is on applications for the 50-plus age group. I found several of the chapters to be particularly interesting. Health and wellness are topics of increasing importance to midlife adults, including insurance issues and health aspects of caregiving, which they may be undertaking for their aging relatives. Librarians should be aware of services from the National Network of Libraries of Medicine and the importance of information literacy regarding health information. Intergenerational programs and services can kill several birds with one stone, serving both adults and younger users at once. While these can be

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purely recreational, they also can provide mentors or tutors for young people or enable “cultural and historical transmission” between generations. Libraries are already centers for young audiences; thus they are well-positioned to link up various age groups. The final chapter focuses on creating a physical place for 50-plus users. Libraries should take this group into account in planning physical spaces, as they do for teens and toddlers.

50+ Library Services provides numerous models for working with these users. As public libraries begin to focus on the specific needs of this age group, this book will serve as a resource for inspiration, highlighting successful programs already being carried out across the United States. There is no index by state, so if you are interested in all programs in a given state, you will need to flip through and find them one by one. Even with this limitation, public librarians interested in expanding services for midlife adults will find many exciting program ideas here.



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