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Interviewee: community outreach/adult service librarian (small city) ('Bethany' is pseudonym.)

Interviewer: So tell me what devices you have in the library and what you see parents and kids using in the library.

Bethany: So what we have in the library are iPads, computers, I think it's just iPads and computers.

Interviewer: Okay.

Bethany: Mm-hmm (affirmative) and we see people bringing in tablets and phones and laptops all the time.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative) and so who makes the decisions about what hardware to buy and what software to buy?

Bethany: So I think all of that happens initially when either branches are remodeled or when there is a need to upgrade, I think there might be room for librarians to give feedback on that but I think that is very much so optional and depends on the librarian's interest and ideas on that topic. I have never been asked anything about hardware or software.

Interviewer: Okay so the apps that are on the tablets.

Bethany: It could be because I'm an adult services librarian-

Interviewer: Okay.

Bethany: But never had any interaction with that decision making process.

Interviewer: Okay, and have you set up, there's a sign that has a tip for screens-

Bethany: Nope I'm guessing that would have been Janelle most likely.

Interviewer: Okay, okay so in what ways do you help parents and caregivers with decisions about screen media practices?

Bethany: Usually it's somewhat limited, a lot of the times the only time that I'm called over is when there's a technical problem so I, but a lot of the times I'm biased in which apps I think are better and not so sometimes I might point parents to a specific app-

Interviewer: Okay.

Bethany: Or if the kid seems a little bit young for that I might point them to something earlier vice versa.

Interviewer: Okay. Okay so you are curating the apps in a way.

Bethany: Yes.

Interviewer: You're suggesting and monitoring a little bit.

Bethany: Yes.

Interviewer: And sharing, do you ever share programs or apps?

Bethany: Yeah a little bit and that's something where I think it's interesting in this position because as you might know our youth services are almost 100% outreach so they're very rarely in the library and on the desk and interacting with children and parents in the library so I think there's a huge opportunity for adult services librarians to become much more versed in the media for the kids and the collections as well because often I'm scrambling and I have three kids so I fall back on that a lot but anyone who doesn't have that experience or doesn't investigate those things I think are not serving our patrons in the best way that we could be.

Interviewer: Okay that is such a great point, that's super helpful. So you said apps specifically, do you think about video games in the library that people are checking out or any other kinds of-

Bethany: So that is all selected by (name) from what I know. We don't, usually the people that are asking about the video games are older teens and younger adults and a lot of the time they have an idea of exactly what they're looking for and the question we most often get are "are these all the video games?" And we say no you can look them up in the catalog and it usually it stops there.

Interviewer: Okay but you haven't had parents come into the desk saying what video game is appropriate or anything like that?

Bethany: No I think probably because they're over by the teen section, none are in the kids area, that could be a reason.

Interviewer: Oh good point.

Bethany: They're also a newer collection here so I don't know how many people know about it, it's a lot of times people who are in that area and happen to see it "oh I didn't know the library had video games."

Interviewer: Yeah, okay great. Okay so the next question is, do you intentionally address the topic or do you just discuss it when they come up and ask you?

Bethany: It's usually when they come up and ask. For me it's usually a little bit different than this question which is that a lot of our parents here are under attentive of their kids and so a lot of times I see very young children propped up with cellphones while the parents work or do other things and so that breaks my heart a little bit. I understand that sometimes that needs to happen but I always try to come over with one of our free books or I try to encourage some of the play that happens here because I think that I'm cognizant of screen time and limiting that and honestly I usually don't even promote the educational screen time because I'm making the judgment which could be very inaccurate that if I'm seeing this kid right here and they're on the phone the entire time they're here they're probably getting significantly more time also when they're not here so maybe we can do something different and read or play with the toys.

Interviewer: So you're modeling alternative activities basically.

Bethany: Yes, the best that I can yep.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay so do you know in any of the programs that are here are, is screen media integrated into them?

Bethany: Yes, Minecraft [day of the week] we have-

Interviewer: Oh okay.

Bethany: So that's huge. There's also a lot of the teen programming does, they play video games, they do audio production on laptops. (Name of literacy program) is our literacy program through the literacy network and that's both computer and

Interviewer: Oh yes.

Bethany: Traditional literacy, so a lot of times people are learning computers but that's primarily adults. For kids I'm not sure, there aren't any other regular programs I know of that use-

Interviewer: Story time, does the story time person ever?

Bethany: I don't think [name] ever uses anything digital for that, no.

Interviewer: During story time. So does the library disseminate information advice to parents about screen media?

Bethany: We just have a larger issue here at this specific location which is that patrons don't come up to us a lot as staff and honestly I think that's because there was a lot of

staff turnover so maybe they don't have a trusted source that they know is good. I think part of it too, I think maybe if Janelle was on the desk and those same parents that see her at story time and things like that would see her as someone they know and maybe more trusted and maybe come to her. So unfortunately a lot of people don't come to us and when they do I'm happy to answer, sometimes those conversations lead into those things but we don't get a lot of people coming to the desk.

Interviewer: But I say one sign that's out there that was like the [crosstalk 00:06:41]-

Bethany: Yeah I think all YS maybe did that at all locations, I think that might have been centrally coordinated because I know there are some concerns about the cultural diversity of those images that were used for those and so I know that there was a change but that's the dept of my knowledge on that.

Interviewer: Okay and [name] I think has-

Bethany: Yeah.

Interviewer: She updates the website-

Bethany: Yes, yes I am familiar with that, I just again no parents have ever asked me but maybe at other library's parents see the librarians more as someone for that and maybe I just haven't experienced it but-

Interviewer: No it's really important, it is library specific-

Bethany: Yeah exactly.

Interviewer: And even branch specific so I think that's a good point. Okay so what about children, do you ever help children with decisions about their screening [crosstalk 00:07:30]-

Bethany: Yeah definitely, again I'm always called over when there is a technical problem "why isn't this working? Unlock this. Blah blah blah," and then again I do that curating words like "oh you should check out this one," because it has a little bit more educational content to it.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative) and how do you make decisions about what's apps to recommend, what counts as educational?

Bethany: Right, I guess for me I like the atmosphere more interactive, less of the passive watching and more of the actively doing something. I like things that have more to do, I'm definitely biased more towards the traditional educational things such as words and numbers and shapes and all of those things versus some of the, I mostly think about those two older computers there, some of the games are I don't

know, and I know that I have some of these apps at home, and my kids love them. So for example, I can't think of the name, but it's like the monsters and putting the words together and so there's the syllables, and you put them together, or they learn I think it's [inaudible 00:08:43] or something like that. So I always love that one for young kids, I think it's a great app so.

Interviewer: Yeah so you're drawing on your own experience really and observations of what's going on here and things like that.

Bethany: Yes, yep and it's yeah a lot of it is really from my own experience definitely because I know how kids get sucked into YouTube. I'm not a huge fan of YouTube for really young kids because some of the content I think that directs kids to is inappropriate both developmentally and just I don't want to say morally but it's for adults.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Bethany: That it's cartoons but it's adult cartoons and things like that and some of it I've seen and it just blows my mind, it's beyond mindless it's very just tons of potty humor and just yeah so that's my whole thing, I don't think that's a good use of screen time for kids to just, especially young kids.

Interviewer: Right, so have you observed that here at the library?

Bethany: All the time and especially on the computers and kids and even some of the games that the kids play, it's for the girls it's become a superstar and they're kind of the Bratz style thing.

Interviewer: Still.

Bethany: Yeah it's huge, it's what the girls play a lot of times and these weird, to me it's very odd and I'm not used to it and-

Interviewer: I'm just amazed because that's, when I was [inaudible 00:10:06] we searched ten years ago, it's the same thing, really?

Bethany: Yeah really-

Interviewer: Wow okay.

Bethany: So that's what a lot of the girls do and then from what I see a lot of the boys doing it's, I don't even know what it is. Some of the games it's like a ball and it has a picture on it and then it connects to other balls, I don't know what it is, I think it has some kind of social aspect but a lot of them yeah I can, and even the boys will play some of those high school, I have my avatar and we're in this other world and I'm chatting with you, so there's a lot of that and a lot of it seems to be appearance

based, I hear them "oh that avatars cute you should talk to her," and stuff like that so I get there may be some merit to it but for the most part I'm like oh my god Minecraft or something like this would be better.

Interviewer: So how do you navigate that territory where you're like cringe cringe, can't say anything [crosstalk 00:11:03]-

Bethany: I usually don't say much, maybe if I had a more of a relationship with the kids I might say something and as time goes on but a lot of times it's a kid I've never seen and she's plopped on the computer and I'm like "huh," and I don't feel like approaching them-

Interviewer: Yeah totally, that's makes sense yeah yeah. Okay so what devices are mentioned by parents in any way shape or form?

Bethany: Well I guess I should mention we do get questions about [local software platform] in tablets a lot and then but parents are often, I'm trying to think what, parents almost never talk to me about this stuff so it's really a stretch for me to even remember it. I've had people ask about [local software platform] so then usually they're saying they're using an iPad or something like that.

Interviewer: For audio and eBooks or?

Bethany: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

Bethany: Yeah.

Interviewer: And parents for their kids or?

Bethany: Yeah sometimes for their kids, a lot of times the conversation goes that way though because I'm looking up "hey do you guys have this book?" "no we don't but we have it on [local software platform], do you know how to use that?" And then there's that piece of it.

Interviewer: Oh okay.

Bethany: So that's usually the way it goes or sometimes people will ask questions specifically about [local software platform] or those digital audio players as well.

Interviewer: Oh yeah, yeah yeah yeah. Okay. So what do you think parents most struggle with in making decisions about their kids use of screen media?

Bethany: I think that a lot of parents, I'm biased and I'm twisting the question a little bit, I think a lot of parents struggle with knowing what's appropriate use of media for

kids. I think a lot of parents are partially put into the position but also consciously make the choice to use a screen as a babysitter and it to me is heartbreaking when it's a very young child, like infant to even toddler and that to me is really sad, I try not to make any judgements of the parent but at the same time I feel bad for the kid that this is the interaction that they're getting and I know a lot of times when I see what that media is, mindless videos on YouTube. It would be different if it was educational of some degree to help these kids out but I think parents struggle with knowing what kind of content is age appropriate.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative) okay but you don't get those questions?

Bethany: I don't get those questions.

Interviewer: So that's the question-

Bethany: Exactly

Interviewer: That really is how, when to intervene-

Bethany: Yes.

Interviewer: What's appropriate-

Bethany: Yes.

Interviewer: What would be most useful for parents and yeah how to draw them into that conversation I guess right?

Bethany: Yes, yeah.

Interviewer: Can you think of any other questions around that?

Bethany: I just keep coming back to I think these parents must not know that there should be limits on screen time or what those limits should be.

Interviewer: Okay.

Bethany: And I think that there's, I don't think there's a lot of thought about the interaction with it, the mindless viewing versus doing something and working on something and problem solving and learning something which can sometimes happen just from viewing but for those very young kids I think much less so. I'm trying to think of what other questions might be related to that.

Interviewer: That's fine. So parents have never told you about what resources they're using to help?

Bethany: Sometimes maybe when we're talking about homework help and things like that-

Interviewer: Oh yeah, yeah yeah.

Bethany: I might say "oh have you tried Duolingo," or one of those things or we have Mango Languages on the computer or we have the Vox audio books but other than that.

Interviewer: And do you feel like they are using [local software platform] and Duolingo and are they helpful to them?

Bethany: I think so, I have definitely had parents say that they really appreciate that [local software platform] doesn't have fines, you don't have to worry about lost books-

Interviewer: Nice.

Bethany: It's really nice that way, kids can get it immediately, they don't have to come to the library, when they're done they're done especially for voracious readers and things like that. As far as for Duolingo and Mango it's always been like "oh I'll have to check that out," you don't know whether or not they do.

Interviewer: Okay sure sure, yeah yeah. So what information do you think you need to best advise parents?

Bethany: I think I would need guidance from management on when and especially youth services management on what the expectation is, one as an adult services librarian and two just as a librarian. I think that until there's more relationship building happening this just simply isn't going to happen at this location, besides that I think it would be great to know, I don't even know what apps are on all of the iPads. I know the icons and I've never played with it myself, I've never explored it, I don't know when apps come or go or if they come or go. I don't know anything about it.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative) and you're on the front line.

Bethany: And I'm on the front line yeah so I think that it'd be really great to share that information. I also think that it would be good to know, again like I said before, I think it's important that floor staff that's on the desk to know more about early literacy and childhood development, these things because we're answering those questions and a lot of times we don't have the training in that to give the best answers so it would be great to know which apps really are for these ages and which ones are really recommended and best and things like that.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay that's helpful, and so you really haven't received any training about families and screen media.

Bethany: Nope.

Interviewer: No, okay. So you've mentioned, so I'm near the end now but you've really mentioned that something that we hadn't really considered is getting as much information as possible about this very very specific context.

Bethany: Yes.

Interviewer: And I do know, I've been here for seven years now and have had students placed here so I know some of the context.

Bethany: Right.

Interviewer: But what do you think is really important for us to know about this context in relation to parenting and caregivers and screen media practices?

Bethany: That we deal with a lot of parents with high poverty.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Bethany: I think that's what it comes down to. I think that some of the behavioral issues of other patrons drive some of the more middle class patrons away, for better or worse and I think that we see a lot of people with a very strong need, okay so some of the parents without trying to make any judgment calls, some of the parents are trying to be productive and other parents are just trying to relax and whatever you would like to call that. So some of the parents are sitting on Facebook chatting, texting, doing things like that. Other parents are desperately trying to do job applications, do things like that.

We've always thought it would be great if there was somebody to interact with these kids while, basically watch the kids because sometimes we make the joke internally that this is a daycare, that this is a drop off site because that's what the parents, you'll hear parents go "go run over there," even very very very little kids and so that's something to know, that we have, that's when I say we have a lot of that kind of parenting going on, we have a lot of parents who aren't interacting with their kids. We have parents who we see come up, the kids come up to them to ask them a question on the computer and they're told to go away, the parents are not interacting, sometimes because they're doing something really stressful and high stakes, other times maybe not so I think that's a huge factor of what's going on here. As far as the other parents, I think some of the other parents who generally are either more savvy or have more resources, they tend to I think, think that they know it all-

Interviewer: Okay, yeah yeah yeah.

Bethany: Not consciously or anything like that but I don't think they see us as staff, as a resource. I think they think "I'll Google that," or "I already know what I'm doing."

Interviewer: Right, right.

Bethany: So I don't think they see us, maybe it's just us specifically, maybe they don't whatever but-

Interviewer: Okay.

Bethany: I think those are big factors so when I see the, I can usually tell because I know my kids are in bi-lingual education and I can tell the parents and they're coming here they're looking for the Spanish bilingual books, they know right where they're at, they might ask questions if there's more or a specific title or things like that, beyond that they're not interacting with us.

Interviewer: Okay, okay mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah that's super important. Okay anything else you'd like to tell us about your potential role as media mentor?

Bethany: I'd love to learn more, I'd love to get training, I'd love to be involved again I just need some guidelines on what an appropriate level of interaction and intervention would be.

Interviewer: Yeah and it sounds like we need to set up dialogue with management and have a system wide policy.

Bethany: Yes and it would be great to if there was actually some kind of projects that came out of this, like for example if there were easier things for us to get the kids to interact with either screens or not screens as better choices. I think sometimes the choices are books and for really young kids who don't know how to read it's not a great thing, they might not see that as something fun to do and sometimes they might not notice our toys or things like that so I think if there was something to, a lot of times if there was something we could give to the parents while they're on the computer and the kids locked into the stroller, the kid could play with something there which I do sometimes informally or if there was something like that so.

Interviewer: That would be as engaging as-

Bethany: Yeah as the screen yeah.

Interviewer: The phone.

Bethany: Or again where it's like, often we're out of iPads and that's the thing so they're all full and used by kids so then sometimes the phone comes out or then the kids off to his own devices.

Interviewer: Okay that's it-

Bethany: Easy.

Interviewer: Thank you so much, yeah.

Bethany: No problem.