

Nine Reasons to Save Public Libraries

Here are some reasons why our libraries are still the place where we as a nation will achieve our destiny:

Taken from article at <http://ivn.us/2012/08/08/nine-reasons-to-save-public-libraries/>

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1. **The house of the 99%:** The foundation of democracy is an educated electorate. When the economy is down, it is all the more vital that we the people have access to information, education, news... and now in modern times the internet, computers, and other sources of media tools as well. Libraries do that. For everyone.
2. **Libraries build equity:** Research shows that depressed neighborhoods and declining communities are not just culturally enriched by libraries. The institutions serve as a community focal point, like a town square, and communities that have that resource rebound.
3. **Community hope chest:** Libraries don't just curate the Harry Potter series and lend copies of the latest blockbusters on DVD, they also house special collections based on the needs and unique identities of the communities they serve. The library district where I live houses' a special collection on a World War II magnesium plant that helped turned the tide of the war (as well as establishing the second largest city in Nevada). That's living history that gets lost without a public space to keep it alive.
4. **Renewable resource:** How much do you save by being able to borrow materials from the library? How helpful is it to have this resource — especially now that even retail bookstores, movie rental shops, and record stores are closing? There's a [calculator for that](#).
5. **Literacy:** [Studies show](#) (PDF) that children's literacy is greatly improved by access to summer reading programs and preschool reading programs at public libraries. And children's literacy is a building-block of adult literacy. When I was in college I interned at a non-profit that worked on illiteracy, targeting at-risk youth. I worked in their summer reading program at an elementary school with one of the lowest rates of economic depression in the state (Oregon). This meant that most of the kids who went to that school were enrolled in summer school — even if they were good students — simply because it was a cheaper alternative to child care. At the end of the program each child got to pick out one brand-new book to keep. For all but just a few of the children, it was the first book they ever owned. Maybe you don't "own" the books at the library (although, as a tax-payer I would argue we do), but the libraries are a place where the socio-economic realities that push the starting line so far back for so many can be equalized. And that's like a small miracle in the life of a child who has already had to learn how to be hard in the face of a world that cuts them no breaks. There are very few individuals who could buy every child a book and start them on the road to literacy. (And it's been shown that access to books in childhood is one of the [biggest predictors of literacy](#).) But all of us together can buy a kid a building full of books. That is a miracle.
6. **Leveling the playing field:** Libraries offer vital resources for communities that might not otherwise be served or feel integrated. People learning English (or other languages), the elderly, deaf people, the homeless... the list goes on.
7. **Safe space:** In some communities, the public library may be the only free space available that is also a safe space. Young victims of bullying, kids who live with domestic violence, LGBT youth, and many more can [find a safe place](#) (and often a caring librarian) at the library. I know from personal experience — having spent time camped at my local library when I had no other safe place to go as a teenager.
8. **Cultural touchstone:** Many libraries showcase art — often by local artists. Likewise, the buildings themselves are often architecturally significant and enhance the beauty and character of the communities they serve.
9. **Drop in or drop out:** Libraries can also be a place that means the difference between a child's success or failure in school. Many libraries offer tutoring programs, free classes, as well as access to volumes of information and technology that a kid might not have anywhere else. Believe it or not, even in these modern times there are kids who don't have computers at home who need to type their papers for school. There are kids who can't afford the expensive private tutor to get through Algebra. Libraries can make the difference to a kid teetering on the edge. And high school dropout rates have a [direct correlation](#) to the health of a community.

