

ANTHOLOGY IN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE

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Library Advocacy: A Strategy to Sustaining Library Services in the 21st Century

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Introduction

Libraries in the 21st century have taken different dimensions from what it used to be. There is a shift from face to face services to online services. The use of card catalogue, flipping through several cards to the use of online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) through the use of computers. Libraries also are gradually moving away from hard copies of books, journals, students' projects, etc. to electronic version. The fear today from all the emerging trends is that, many people out there seem not to know the rate at which the libraries have evolved.

There is the need for libraries to speak up and speak out on the services, value of libraries and librarians in this era, for the sustenance of library in this ever-competing knowledge economy and digital literacy period. Librarians build communities, provide access, promote literacy, protect our rights and innovate. All these may not be known by people out there but for advocacy.

Advocacy, may be a new topic in librarianship, but it has come to stay because it will sustain the libraries in the 21st century, among other competitors of knowledge and literacy drive. The people through advocacy, will be aware of the activities of the library as information managing sector. Libraries, today need volunteers, task forces and other active librarians to 'speak out' to the society on what the libraries are capable of doing. This will better and bring to notice the functions and duties played by libraries and librarians in information dissemination and retrieval in this century. The need for the people to know that the librarians are the ultimate search engines according to Schuman (2017), calls for advocacy, which is an act of arguing in favour of something.

The need to acquaint the people on the development of the libraries is important, because this will aid and bring the libraries and all their performances to the limelight.

The 21st century is characterised with skills which shows how important it is for librarians to have skills, and efficiency in their day to day activities in order to be able to lure the already waiting public on what the libraries and librarians are doing. The period also, has

created avenues for talking up the libraries. The social media like the Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, WhatsApp, LinkedIn and much more, are some of the strategies used. In support of this, Akporhonor and Olise (2015) stated that social media is a modern and contemporary new media for effective promotion of library and information services in the 21st century, characterised by information technology. There is also the use of fliers, mass media such as the magazines, newspapers, radio, and television. During the library weeks also, the libraries use the opportunity to talk to the users. The users are taken round the library, in order to expose them to the resources in the library. Libraries also organize talks, where professionals in the library field will be invited to talk or deliver lectures. According to Lubet (1997), advocacy adds value to one's trials and brings about insight from the outside, and so must be pursued through different angles.

The essence of advocacy is not just for users to visit the libraries and study. Advocacy and library advocacy can be for several other reasons as, advocating in a tough economy on how the libraries could be of help or assistance through the information they provide. This means they are part of solutions when a nation is struggling economically or pursuing to achieve a goal. In order to achieve this, the use of social media, such as twitter and Facebook pages are used. It can also include media campaigns, public speaking and lobbying, which is a form of advocacy where a direct approach is made to the legislatures on an issue which play a significant role in modern politics. In times of funding as well, the libraries also speak up to well-meaning individuals, organizations, and institutions the need to fund the libraries.

A Brief Overview on Advocacy

Advocacy may look tedious in carrying out its activities but they are better yardsticks to the public enlightenment and an eye opener to the library users and the nation at large on why the libraries should be valued. According to Robinson and Davidson (2007), advocacy is an "active support of an idea, a cause or a policy. The active support of the ideas of the field of librarianship and librarians, this is advocacy in relation to library.

Advocacy is an activity that brings brightness and upliftment to what a sector, an organization, a profession or any other business do. It is an idea of talking up the value of what a group or profession stand for. Ndlovu (n.d.) defined advocacy as the act of pleading or arguing in favour of something. Advocacy in relation to libraries and librarians, Ndlovu stated that it is an awareness of and support for the profession. The *Cambridge English Dictionary* (2016) defines advocacy as a means of publicly supporting or suggesting an idea, development, or way of doing something. To Aloysius, Ekanem-Esang and Chinyere (2017), advocacy is all about repositioning the library through advocacy strategies which will help for improved services, attract students, researchers and generally, information users to libraries and prevent the wave of technologies in the 21st century.

Advocacy is the most important and crucial tool we use for others or the public to know about our profession. It should be carried out consistently in simple and comprehensible manner. The message to be advocated should be repeated over and over again, until it is stuck to the public and becomes part of their thinking. Tebu (2014) called advocacy a 'bullet' that goes through a stony heart. The essence of this is to often bring the heart to a compromise of what is pleaded for. It is to solve problems, to bring to notice, to bring to door steps and to enlighten intelligently, the happenings on the issues/cases advocated for. When advocacy is mentioned there is a pleading to an activity. This pleading brings the course and the people pleaded closer, creates understanding, enhance insight on the issues on ground and finally, there will be justification to the subject matter(s).

Advocacy is an activity geared towards achieving goals, set by the libraries and librarians in order to get maximal growth on the importance of libraries in our entire society, in the 21st century. The basis to which the libraries and librarians are heard with whatever burning desire they decide to achieve, hence is to 'speak up' and 'speak out' about the value of our profession, and ensure that libraries are for development. In terms of needs, like finances, raising alarm on health issues, alerting the society on both ills and the benefits of what could grow or stunt the society, advocacy is an indispensable tool.

Library Advocacy according to Tanoh, (2015) should start early and address issues from foundation, before it gets out of hand. The basis of progress on any organization is simply 'early arrest', he concludes. Most organizations delay or wait until problems are out of hand before speaking out, it should be a routine activity to always drive home points, and awaken the public. Advocacy therefore, is a strategy to gain control over the work that we do, and thus, it keeps or survives our work. It is through advocacy that libraries build their pillars, for the sailing through of all the emerging trends, and quick knowledge development of the users and patrons in this era. The relevance of what advocacy will do in every organization led to a famous librarian by name Seth (1977), who stated that:

If you don't tell them, who will? So the earlier we (librarians) tell the users, patrons, and the public about what we do, work and practice; the better for us. Advocacy is also a planned, deliberate and sustained effort to advance an agenda for change which goes with educating and influencing decision makers to enlist their active support to libraries of all types.

Types of Advocacy

Advocacy is an activity that is carried out putting in mind the type of organization or firm that needs it, and so, it demands the type that will suit it. According to Sandwell (n.d) there are nine types of advocacy, they are:

- **Citizen Advocacy:** This type of advocacy is based on trust, commitment and loyalty. It involves a one to one partnership between two people. The citizen advocate is a volunteer who forms a long term advocate with their partner just to put him right on information. This type of advocacy, is emotionally geared and friendship supported.
- **Issue-Based Advocacy:** this is also called independent advocacy. This type of advocacy is often provided by paid advocates, and it's usually a short term one. This is similar to citizen advocacy because it is one to one partnership between two people. The relationship here is time bound. Partnership is terminated when advocacy is done, but comes up again when the need be.
- **Self-Advocacy:** This is the most ideal type of advocacy. In this type, people speak out for themselves, with their needs as priority. Most times, the learning disable people, are taught to use this form.
- **Group Advocacy:** Number of people come together with common interest in order to offer support, teach skills and fight for a common goal to be achieved. The libraries in this 21st century fall under this group, trying to create awareness on the values of libraries or the valuable resources waiting for people there.
- **Peer Advocacy:** This is advocacy from group of friends who are experienced on how to use a particular service. e.g. Services for learning.
- **Legal Advocacy:** This is a group for legally qualified advocates. This is made up of barristers or solicitors.
- **Professional Advocacy:** This is an important form of advocacy. It is the representation by members on services involved in a person's life. In this group, we have social workers, health workers etc. Averil stated that social workers and health workers within the library system helps those struggling with homelessness, mental illness, and much more. This advocacy type is very crucial as it is needed in the libraries.
- **Statutory Advocacy:** This is an advocacy where there is a statutory duty to provide advocacy following government legislation such as independent Mental Health Advocacy (IMHA) and Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy (IMCA).
- **Family and Friend Advocacy:** This type of advocacy is where a person's family member or members or friend(s) play a part in advocating on their behalf. Sometimes we get involved in this type of advocacy knowingly or unknowingly.

Library Advocacy and the Advocate

Libraries need advocacy and they need advocates. In terms of libraries and the advocates (librarians), according to Ndlovu, it is the awareness of and support for our profession. Library advocacy according to him is about;

- Promotion of ourselves and our services
- Respect for the library profession
- Sympathy from our publics

- Informing our publics
- Involving our publics
- Getting the library's message across
- Creating relationship, partnerships, coalition
- Creating conditions that stakeholders can act on your behalf
- Information marketing
- Confirming your identity
- Potential and future survival of libraries
- Expanding someone's consciousness

For advocates, the above listed messages, are tasks to continue in the act of persuasion to all that it may concern. It could be students, government, service providers, funders, civic societies, business community and so on.

Library advocates according to American Library Association play a key role in educating our communities about why libraries and librarians are essential in an information society. Advocacy in all its forms seek to ensure that people, particularly those who are most vulnerable in society are able to have their voice heard on issues that are important to them. To Aloysius, Ekanem-Esang and Chinyere (2017), advocacy is the act of recommending, promoting, supporting the library services and practices for continuous sustenance of the library.

Libraries are fountains of knowledge, empowerment centres, power houses, knowledge centres and information centres. And in the words of Professor John Harris, the founding Head of Department of Library and archival studies, University of Ghana, "libraries are instruments of power, potent with all explosive thought of mankind and all powerful instrument, they must be handled with respect, understanding and caution. Therefore, to him, library advocacy is awareness created by the libraries to sell the above-mentioned qualities, publicly(Ndlovu, n.d.).

In carrying out advocacy on issues that concerns the libraries, the advocate (librarian) does not just take steps into the street, there are preparations and action plans created. Through these action plans, the librarian is guided on what to do, and how to go about it. In advocacy, it is important to get a good number of librarians that could work as taskforce for better chances of results. American Library Association (ALA), listed some action plans before engaging on an advocacy.

These are:

1. Set your goals
2. Strategies for determining your message
3. Team building/ name your network
4. Determine who your audience are
5. Develop your talking points

6. Strategies to get the message out through
7. Create a coordinating committee who would make sure that the advocacy efforts is not in vain.
8. Then speak up.

At the end of these action plans, achievement of goals are guaranteed. In support of this, ALA further stated that advocacy is calm but a sure way to achieving ultimate goals. Therefore, to become an advocate of libraries, you must be a believer in the value of library (ies) (Sullivan, 2010).

Why Advocacy is Important

Library advocacy is geared towards achieving massive return of library users to the intellectual hub of the society, the home of knowledge and citadel of learning, (Aloysius Ekanem-Esag & Chinyere, 2017). The advantages of advocacy are:

- Building of bridges and filling of valleys of information.
- Value of the library profession will be at the top
- There will be positive development of the libraries on the rate of financial attention given, increase of users' attendance and use of the library, change of notion of the public concerning libraries and respect for librarians.
- It will awaken the government, NGO, and other stakeholders on the importance of the libraries, which could lead to collaboration, partnership and frequent communications, to bridge the gap on what should be done by the library(ies).
- Advocacy will also help the librarians in the 21st century skills, e.g. efficient use of computers in sending messages, chatting, and online conferencing.
- It will enable the profession stand firm and fearless among other professions.
- It helps in educating our communities about why libraries and librarians are important in an information society.

Conclusion

In conclusion, library advocacy is used to inform, speak up and make case for libraries. The advocates (librarians) are the pillars of this strategies and its sustenance. Library advocacy is a strategy which remains the basis for speaking up for the library profession for its values to be heard. In carrying out advocacy in our profession in various libraries, it is hoped that with this work, libraries, librarians and other professions will note the importance or benefits of engaging on advocacy, as it is a calm way for libraries to influence decisions within political, economic, social systems and institutions using some strategies as social media, library talks, library weeks, library tours etc. in the 21st century.

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