KAREN BALSEN TO RETIRE FROM THE NEW YORK STATE LIBRARY

Library Development Specialist Karen Balsen is retiring after ten years of service at the New York State Library effective June 1, 2017.

Ms. Balsen first joined the New York State Library’s Library Development Team in 2007. Over the past decade, she has worked closely with the 23 public library system youth services coordinators, the leadership of the New York Library Association’s Youth Services Section, the national Collaborative Summer Library Program, colleagues in other units within the State Education Department and dozens of other state and national partners to improve the quality of library services for New York’s children and teens. Her creative and effective use of online resources, social media and other communications tools and her efforts to reach out to diverse audiences and partners have resulted in increased visibility for and use of New York’s libraries.

Under Ms. Balsen’s expert guidance, participation in the State Library’s Summer Reading at New York Libraries program grew by 40 percent from 1.5 million participants in Summer 2008 to 2.1 million participants in Summer 2016. Creative programs developed by Ms. Balsen, such as the Teen Video Challenge have helped to promote summer reading not just in New York State, but also across the nation. Partnerships fostered under her leadership with the NYS Legislature, 4-H, Hunger Solutions, the New York Council for the Humanities, the NYS Reading Association and others have helped bring more visibility and resources to library programs statewide.

Since its inception in 2013, Ms. Balsen has led the development of New York State’s first statewide early literacy library program, Ready to Read at New York Libraries. Under Phase One (2014-2016) of this new statewide initiative, Ms. Balsen led the New York State Education Department Team that obtained a modest federal planning grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, chaired an advisory group of early childhood experts in developing a statewide plan for improving early
literacy library services and coordinated the first Ready to Read at New York Libraries Summit in Spring 2015. Because of Ms. Balsen’s leadership, the State Library has generated thirteen new statewide early literacy partnerships with statewide organizations such as the NYS Council on Children and Families, Head Start, Reach Out and Read, Educational Television and Public Broadcasting, and the NYS Parenting Education Partnership. These collaborative partnerships have enabled local libraries to reach deeper into their communities to find and serve young families, including at risk populations. The State Library has trained and certified a 30+ member Training Cohort of youth services librarians as early literacy expert trainers. Ms. Balsen efforts have resulted in the effective leveraging of state and federal funds to enable Cohort members to deliver the Early Childhood Public Library Staff Development Program to libraries across the State. Thus far, the State Library has partnered with the 23 public library systems to train 1,134 staff from 453 of New York’s 1067 public libraries and neighborhood branches. Training will continue through 2019.

In addition to her work with youth services programs, Ms. Balsen has provided thoughtful leadership and coordination for the State Library’s public library systems and school library systems programs in her role as the Team Leader for Library Development’s Outreach, Networking and Regional Advisory Services Team since 2015. She has managed the State Library’s Adult Library Literacy and Family Library Literacy Programs since 2014. During her ten years at the State Library, she has worked as a regional liaison with libraries and library systems in five of the nine regions - the Capital District, Long Island, North Country, South Central, and Southeastern NY regions.

Ms. Balsen’s ability to relate to her colleagues, library users, librarians, library trustees, local government officials and community leaders and their unique concerns have been invaluable assets to the State Library, to the State Education Department and to the hundreds of libraries and systems that she has worked with over the years. Her deep passion for libraries and her thorough understanding of the positive life-changing impacts that libraries and library staff can have on people from all walks of life will be sorely missed.

In addition to her work at the State Library, Ms. Balsen has also worked as Assistant Director at the Guilderland (NY) Public Library, a branch manager at Albany (NY) Public Library, a reference librarian at Sage Colleges and a school librarian at both public and nonpublic schools. She has an MLS from the State University of New York at Albany and a BA from the State University of New York at Binghamton.

The New York State Library has served New Yorkers, state government and researchers from throughout the United States since 1818. In its leadership role, the State Library works in partnership with the State’s 73 library systems to bring cost-effective, high-quality library services to the millions who use New York’s 7,000 libraries. The State Library’s Division of Library Development works with librarians, trustees, school administrators, public officials and local leaders to solve problems and find new ways of supporting the development and improvement of public, school, academic and special libraries across New York State. One of the nation’s leading library development agencies and research libraries, the New York State Library is a program of the Office of Cultural Education in the New York State Education Department. The New York Library is in Albany, New York. Information about the programs and services of the State Library is available at: http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/