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Downtown library picks up third tenant

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Business First by Tracey Drury, Buffalo Business First Reporter

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Young Audiences of WNY will become the third independent, nonprofit educational group to move into the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library downtown, following library board approval Thursday.

The library board voted to enter into negotiations on a space allotment agreement with YAWNY that will see the arts education group lease the former teen room on the library's second floor, a 1,350-square-foot space. The move is slated to take place by Feb. 24.

[Mary Jean Jakubowski](#), library executive director, says the partnership also helps grow the library's visibility as a place for cultural entertainment and education.

"We really are looking forward to having them involved with the cultural arts, and also some components of literacy, which is important to both of our missions," she says.

Two years ago, Literacy Volunteers of Buffalo & Erie County moved into space on the second floor, while Project Flight LLC moved into space on the ground floor, bringing staff and programs inside the library. That partnership was developed in part from the library's literacy services master plan, designed to help address the needs of the community.

YAWNY gains administrative and programming space, as well as performance space in the library's 324-seat auditorium as needed.

[Cynnie Gaasch](#), YAWNY executive director, says the move will help the organization grow its programs and become more visible.

"We have not had facilities of any kind for public programming," she says. "We see it as a really big opportunity."

YAWNY contracts with arts professionals to provide programs in music, multi-media arts, theater, dance, and visual and literary arts. In 2010-2011, the organization served over 60,000 young people throughout the Western New York region. Founded in Buffalo in 1962, the agency has revenues of about \$480,000, up from \$420,000 last year. It is one of 30 Young Audiences affiliates across the country.

Plans for the move arose during conversations last year between the library and the new Art Services Initiative of WNY and the John R. Oishei Foundation to explore additional collaborative opportunities as part of the library's "Reimagine" strategic planning process.

The library has also had initial discussions through the Arts Initiative with other potential partners in the cultural arts arena to develop a center for cultural activities at the central library. But the hope is also to expand programs out throughout the library's branch network.

"It's all of us working together to meet the needs of the community," Jakubowski says. "The (central branch) is sort of the central hub, but the tentacles will reach out to all of our locations."

Though the final dollar amounts still need to be finalized, board members are considering annual rent of \$2,400, with YAWNY providing in-kind services and programming valued at \$3,000-\$14,400 per year for the benefit of library patrons. Already, the organization has begun hosting performances, including a slam poetry event held on Jan. 17.

The agreement also calls for including YAWNY's future space needs in the library's space-use assessment and renovation planning. The two groups would also collaboratively plan and implement fundraising endeavors.

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The arts group will move from Linwood Avenue in Buffalo, where it has leased space in the back of the Church of the Ascension. The current space, where the agency has resided for 15 years, cannot host a meeting larger than eight people, making it difficult to bring together the board of directors, artists and teachers. The space is so small that interns come in on opposite days, Gaasch says.

"We've been located in the back of a church where no one ever happens upon us," she says. "This is a much more public location where even just having signage where people are walking past is a good thing."

Plans call for expanding with at least another one to two employees, including bringing in more interns from the **University at Buffalo** School of Arts Management. Programming will be offered at both the central library and at other branches, including Merriweather and Niagara. The organization also hopes to expand its scope through its affiliation with the new Arts Services Initiative, including adding more programming for the downtown professional workforce.

"It's an opportunity for us to connect with people who work downtown," Gaasch says. "We're this well-kept secret that educators know about, but no one else."

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