

Article for the Pine Knot

Interview with Youth Services Librarian, Justin Dinger

If you walk in to the Cloquet Library on a weekday between 4-5 pm, you'll notice the library is full of teens. Cloquet Public Library hired Justin Dinger to be the Youth Services Librarian, working especially with youth ages 10-18, in October of 2018. He immediately made an impact by instituting regular programming for youth such as Teen Reads on Mondays, where he reads aloud to the teens while they enjoy a snack, and Teen Tech Wednesdays. He has made some interesting discoveries, such as the teens really enjoy poetry and that they requested to hear famous speeches in June.

Justin's enthusiasm for technology and books is contagious. He was an English major at Gustavus Adolphus and previously worked for the Cloquet School District in their Technology Department. Here at the library he combines both interests, as well as a deep concern for the well-being of youth. Below is an interview about Justin and his work.

What do you enjoy most about working with youth ages 10-18?

For me, the best thing about working with kids is watching the lightbulb go on when they figure something out. Giving a kid a tool and direction really pays off when they are able to make a discovery. This can happen anytime, whether they figure out the hidden meaning of a poem during Monday Snack and Story or finally make it through a coding challenge they've struggled with. Seeing them happy about a problem they solved is so much fun!

What have been some of your favorite experiences working with youth?

I really enjoyed the FanCon we held in January. The kids made their own Harry Potter wand, we had snacks, prizes and an awesome Keynote Speaker, Lydia Noble. Lydia taught the kids (and a few adults) all about the frames of a comic. We had a blast! I have also really enjoyed our Teen Tech Wednesdays. Each week we tackle a different engineering, coding or tech problem. Well, sometimes we just have fun and play video games, too.

What are you looking forward to this summer at the library?

We have so many cool things planned this summer! The week of July 15th-19th we have Space Camp! NASA has given us a grant to run a Space Camp. Our main task will be to use NASA engineering skills to build a space ship that will protect our two Astronauts (or Eggstronauts) as they land on a rocky foreign planet. We also have a ton of space themed games and snacks! We also have cooking classes for teens, sewing classes and a PC building class scheduled throughout the summer. Oh, one more big event: On July 26th we've partnered with Community Ed to host a Skate Park

Grand Opening which will feature a performance from COMPAS Hip-Hop Artist DJ Kool Akiem!

What are you looking forward to most in the new library expansion?

I am eagerly anticipating everything! When construction is complete our teens will have a dedicated space! We will have movie screens, game tables, maker space, lounge chairs and some higher end gaming PCs (built by the kids in our PC building camp!)

What do your teen sons think of you being a teen librarian?

Ha! My younger son, Luke loves my connection with our weekly Dungeons and Dragons group (Tuesday afternoons). He has been able to join the campaign! My older son will ask me obscure questions to see if my reference game is on point. Sometimes I have to say "I don't know, but I will find an answer for you."

What are your favorite Young Adult books?

Since this is the summer in which we will celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the moon landing I'll say that I Love You Michael Collins by Lauren Baratz-Logsted is probably my favorite book that I've read this year. I also enjoyed Angie Thomas's recent novel On the Come Up.

If you have any questions about the upcoming Space Camp, or any other programs for tweens and teens this summer, please contact Justin. He can be reached at (218) 879-1531.