

Angela Pashia and Annie Bélanger

Becoming a Coach to Continue Our Library Goals

A Year of Exploring Why We Choose Librarianship

Academic Library Workers in Conversation is a *C&RL News* series focused on elevating the everyday conversations of library professionals. The wisdom of the watercooler has long been heralded, but this series hopes to go further by minimizing barriers to traditional publishing with an accessible format. In past issues, authors proposed the topics. However, during 2026, this feature will focus on the authors' stories of librarianship. How they got here, why they stay, and even why they consider leaving or transitioning at times. During this time of great upheaval in higher education, exploring our many "whys" is a worthy venture. — *Dustin Fife, series editor*

Angela Pashia (AP): Can I start by echoing the last line of that intro? Exploring our "whys" is incredibly valuable and is an important part of what I help library leaders do now.

I was an academic librarian for twelve years. Like way too many of us, I went through several low-morale experiences (shoutout to Kaetrena Davis Kendrick's research¹ in this area). Eventually, I reached a point when I was just done and started exploring what else I could do with my life.

And then I learned about coaching, and it just clicked. So I took a couple of years to complete training and make the transition, and now I'm self-employed as a professional coach. I get to continue contributing to librarianship from the outside by helping library leaders use curiosity to confidently manage change and conflict in their libraries.

Annie, what brought you to coaching?

Annie Bélanger (AB): As a consultant with DeEtta Jones, I stumbled into leadership coaching. Working with a large R1 library on leadership development and team cohesion, I led 360s and provided coaching for individual leaders. I was hooked!

The values that brought me to libraries were deeply present in my coaching: care, asking hard questions, connectedness, and sparking new knowledge. Much like a librarian, to be a coach is to be in partnership with and in service of the learning journey.

Angela, what's your "why" for working with librarians?

AP: Even though I needed to leave traditional library employment, I couldn't bring myself to just walk away from libraries.

Angela Pashia is a leadership development coach who works with library leaders, email: coach@angelpashia.com. Annie Bélanger is a senior librarian at Grand Valley State University as well as a leadership and transition coach, email: belange1@gvsu.edu.

I work with library leaders to get in touch with their “why” so that they can become more confident leading in a way that’s aligned with their values instead of letting their fears and insecurities run the show. I see that as a space where I can help make libraries at least a little less toxic.

What about you, Annie?

AB: Angela, I understand how deeply rooted libraries can be in journeys. To weave my commitment to libraries with my coaching made sense to me.

As I work with library leaders, I focus on deepening self-awareness. Who we are is how we lead. Coaching helps leaders manage their strengths and act with greater intention. This in turn has a positive impact on their teams. We can oscillate between discovering solutions to a pressing tactical problem, increasing resilience and capacity, and facilitating transformational change.

Libraries have a leadership succession gap. My hope is that coaching enables leaders to be better and to remain in leadership sustainably. And then enable an improved working experience in libraries, for all levels.

It sounds like we both see coaching as a way to nurture leadership that is more human and values driven. What do you wish more library leaders understood about coaching?

AP: Annie, the thing I find myself highlighting most often is that it’s a specific technique that’s different from, and complementary to, a lot of other types of support that you need in your support net. When I first started researching this path, I envisioned a coach as a combination of a mentor, teacher, and trainer. But coaching is actually distinct from all of those roles.

As you mentioned, partnering is a crucial part of the definition of coaching. So I’m an expert in the process, while my client is an expert in their own context. Coaching is a strengths-based practice, designed to help the client build on their strengths to maximize their potential.

Mentoring is a different type of support because the whole premise is that a more experienced colleague is sharing their expertise with a less experienced colleague. The focus is on the mentor sharing what worked for them in similar situations and giving advice, though some may use a coaching approach here. As coaches, we’re there as equal partners. We may share examples as a place to start brainstorming, but we don’t give advice about what the client *should* do. What worked for you or me is not going to work for everyone, so we coach people through finding their own paths.

Coaching is also distinct from training or teaching. We may help clients get a clearer idea of what training they need and figure out the best way to get that training, but actually delivering that training is a different type of interaction.

And I always have to add that coaching is also not therapy.

What would you add here?

AB: Angela, your overview is spot on. As you said, in coaching we are equal partners. This highlights a key concept that distinguishes coaching from mentoring and counseling: The individual is fully resourced and able to succeed. The coach provides the individual with a safe space to surface insights and experiment to advance their growth.

Another aspect I love is that we look forward to what could be. Once we have the awareness of where we are (without judgment) and what's driving us to enact behaviors, we can begin to move forward with intention. For some, that future is clear, and the focus is outlining ways to move toward it. For others, the future is murky as they find themselves in transitions. Some transitions are small—think changing jobs within the field for a new challenge. Some transitions are massive—exploring whether to stay or go in a profession, what meaning making is now, and shifting our identity.

I certainly found myself at a crossroads after twenty years in the field. At first, I thought that maybe I needed a new challenge as I had grown restless—cue small transition of rehabbing a house. However, as I dug inward with my coach about what was driving that restlessness, I realized it was time for a professional sabbatical. I needed space from being a senior leader to ascertain who I wanted to be rather than what I wanted to be.

AP: Annie, that talk about massive transitions is hitting home for me.

Unlike you, I didn't experience being coached until I was actually in a program to become a coach. Before I started exploring this path, I knew someone who is a psychic medium, tarot card reader, and life coach. I made assumptions and didn't see coaching as a valuable investment for myself.

That changed when I was exploring my options for my transition out of my traditional library role and stumbled across a video about becoming a book coach.

That led me to research the various credentials and certifications and training programs. Like in libraries, there are professional organizations that accredit training programs, and there are unaccredited programs. And you can work as a coach without any formal training at all.

There's a lot of debate within libraries about whether we should require an ALA accredited degree. But it's still a norm to look for that ALA stamp of approval on a formal training program because that signals a certain baseline knowledge about the fundamentals of librarianship. Your mileage may vary, of course, and we can also discuss how those programs could be improved, but that's the reasoning.

There are also library science programs out there that aren't accredited but that may still qualify a person to seek a teaching credential from their state.

And similarly, that explains why my first impression of a professional coach landed the way it did.

So I started my transition by enrolling in a training program that's accredited by the International Coaching Federation (ICF). There are a couple of other major professional organizations for coaches, but the ICF is the biggest name in the US right now.

And I've always been an overachiever, so as soon as I completed all of the requirements, I also earned my ICF Associate Certified Coach (ACC) credential. A credential from a member-led professional organization, like the ICF, is a good way to identify who has that foundational knowledge of the field. It's not the only way someone can become a great coach, but it's the simplest way for someone who isn't a coach to start to narrow their search.

Annie, I know you started coaching with DeEtta Jones and are now enrolled in an accredited program. What differences are you noticing in how you approached coaching before and what you're learning now?

AB: Earlier you mentioned that you first thought of a coach as a mentor and teacher. I think that I also brought this misconception into my early efforts as well as consulting. I focused a lot on skills development (teacher). I shared my experiences to normalize or validate their experiences (mentor). I sought to understand a lot of nuances to help diagnose (consultant).

Now I focus on my ability to challenge with care and uplift insights out of what appears like disparate information to consider the deeper changes. Thinking of self as coach, I am deepening my presence and awareness to slow my pace and intensity while being grounded. I empower the client to develop the agenda, the outcomes, and the associated action plan so that they can develop resilience, adaptability, and capacity for future evolutions. This approach draws a parallel to information literacy instruction to support new habits of mind and self-sufficiency.

AP: Annie, that connection to teaching information literacy hits home for me. As a librarian, I focused heavily on using critical pedagogies in teaching critical information literacy. I looked for opportunities to share power with, instead of holding power over, students. So shifting into coaching felt like taking that approach to the next level.

My favorite part of this work is seeing the difference coaching makes for library leaders. Just like with a lot of reference questions, the surface issue they come to me for help with is often not the real challenge we need to address. Bringing this back around to our ongoing contributions in libraries, I love that I get to continue doing that work to uncover and address the real challenge while doing what I can to help make libraries a little less toxic.

I think we're just about out of space here. How do you want to wrap this up?

AB: Angela, I really appreciate your clear purpose in engaging in the profession from your new vantage point. I see parallels between the transformational process and why I led within academic libraries. Coaching, like libraries, is often quiet enough to hear yourself becoming who you will be and loud enough to know you are not alone in the journey. Both seek to invite curiosity, knowledge creation, and meet people where they are.

I would like to close with an invitation for readers to take some time to reflect on these questions:

- What is your big aspirational goal?
- How is this goal important to you?
- What do you have to help you reach it?
- What are one to three behavioral changes that will help you reach and sustain the goal?

And remember that it's not perfection but rather presence, courage, and a commitment to growth that supports our ongoing development. *zz*

Note

1. This body of work examines a range of contexts, from public to academic libraries and from librarians to library leadership. You can find a list of published articles on this topic at <https://renewalslis.com/published-low-morale-studies/>.

Michele McDaniel and Amy Odwarka

Families Belong

Supporting Student-Parents and Library Patrons with Family-Friendly Spaces

Student-parents are a growing constituent of university students. According to Anderson et al., the 2020 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS) reported almost 18% of undergraduate students are raising children while enrolled.¹ There is a growing body of research examining how the needs of these students can be met on university campuses, including in academic libraries. The Illinois Board of Higher Education requires public universities collect student-parent data, made available in the Student Parent Data Collection (SPDC) Report; statewide, the number of student-parents hovers just under 3%.² Over the course of several years, librarians at Eastern Illinois University (EIU) Booth Library have seen this emerging need, backed by the SPDC data: In 2022–23, 325 (7.1%) of EIU students were parents.³ We knew student-parents and caregivers were visiting Booth, but we did not know the potential impact of specialized spaces and amenities meeting the unique needs of caring for children while accomplishing academic tasks. What began as a modest endeavor blossomed when members of university administration learned about our project. With their buy-in, we gained additional funding that allowed the expansion of our initial plans into a “Family Hub.” Unique to the library, EIU’s Family Hub would serve the entire campus as a place where people could go care for their children while finding support for their academic endeavors.

Community Need

University students with children face distinct challenges and barriers when it comes to utilizing library services and accessing one-on-one research help from librarians. They are often balancing school, work, and their children and have specific needs allowing for more productive work sessions at the library. Research shows small offerings, such as lactation spaces, child-friendly furniture and toys, stroller accessibility, and educational activities, all help student-parents feel welcome at the library.⁴

This project began because of an interaction with a student-parent and her baby. The student used our curriculum materials center several times per week to complete computer-based assignments, all while pushing a stroller, soliciting friends to hold the baby, or bouncing the infant up and down. The computer terminal where the student worked was near an open stairwell, so she could not set the baby down to play for fear of her crawling toward the stairs. Because we did not have a safe, clean, infant-friendly place for her child, the student could not truly settle into her work. We began to wonder, “*How could we help this student and students like her?*”

Michele McDaniel is business and education librarian at Eastern Illinois University, email: mkmcdaniel@eiu.edu. Amy Odwarka is first-year experience/student success librarian at Eastern Illinois University, email: aodwarka@eiu.edu.

A small internal grant we wrote for \$775 was funded through a university endowment, allowing the purchase of infant activity mats, screen-free audio players, activity packs for older children, and lactation room amenities. At the same time, EIU was starting to build affinity-based hubs around campus, supporting marginalized populations. Our provost felt this was an excellent match and invited us to develop a multispace hub at the library geared toward student-parents and the larger university community. The budget of \$10,000 would include two lactation rooms and additional family-friendly study spaces, appropriate for parents trying to study and care for their children.

Project Management

Once the scope of the project shifted to a multispace plan, the need for a full project management team came into view. Members were selected based on their roles within library services and relationships with university constituents. The team included librarians, the dean of library services, and members of our library administrative office: our business manager, marketing director, and events and display coordinator. We knew project deliverables would include buildout, procurement, marketing, and stakeholder feedback, but we had not anticipated concepts like library policy and systems updates.

The librarians began envisioning the necessary spaces. University leadership requested two lactation rooms, and the librarians settled on an enclosed family study room and an additional open family-friendly study area. Once spaces were selected, the librarians began working on naming the spaces; it was imperative to be inclusive so all users would feel a sense of belonging. We discussed potential names with the campus parent group and conferred with a women and gender studies faculty member. We also researched how international support groups like La Leche League International name such spaces.⁵ In the end, we selected “Lactation & Infant Feeding Room” for two spaces, along with “Family-Friendly Study Space” and “Family Study Room,” all composing “The Family Hub.”

Our dean and business manager took the lead on timelines, buildout, budgeting, and communication with the facilities planning and management department. Adding a sink was imperative for families to have a positive experience; we identified a room that could share existing plumbing for a budget-friendly retrofit. Additionally, facilities needed to remove attached shelving, repaint, remove carpeting, and refinish the existing floors with tile so the spaces could be sanitized.

Librarians were charged with furnishing the spaces. When the project grew from a small lactation room with one chair to a multispace hub, we needed to secure double the items originally planned for (e.g., glider chairs, sound machines, rugs, mirror) and source items for the family study areas. Because many people would use the furnishings over several years, we chose commercial suppliers for durability. We purchased consumables (coloring packs, plastic baggies, and cold packs) and learning activities like audiobook players through online retailers.

Unanticipated Tasks

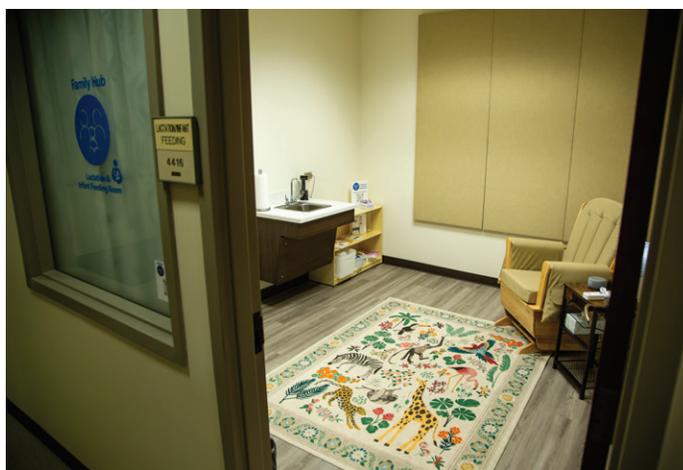
Two areas not anticipated were how policies and systems would need to be updated and library personnel would need to be trained. Working with our library policy committee,

Family Hub



Family Hub logo.

we reviewed the Children in Library policy, finding it out of date compared to current Illinois law.⁶ Once updated, this was shared widely in multiple personnel meetings and posted in all hub spaces. We also discussed which spaces would be part of our room reservation system and which would be open for public use. The decision was three spaces would be added to the current reservation system (both Lactation & Infant Feeding Rooms and the Family Study Room) while the Family-Friendly Study Space would be open on a first-come, first-served basis.



Lactation & Infant Feeding Room with sink.

The reservable rooms follow the same protocol as any other study space in the library, with one caveat: The lactation spaces are open to both the EIU community and the general public visiting campus. With thousands of visitors to campus each year, it was important to make sure campus partners like New Student and Family Programs, Events and Catering, and Enrollment Management could publicize that family-friendly spaces are available to campus visitors. Lastly, multiple activity pack items were added to the catalog for patron checkout for in-building use only.

The new spaces also meant library personnel needed training. We created a frequently asked questions page that was circulated via email and Microsoft Teams and discussed at the monthly all personnel meeting. Additionally, personnel were instructed on helping patrons without reservations and patrons who are not part of the university system. We also trained staff to show patrons to rooms on other floors, which spaces would remain locked when in use, and reminded personnel how to handle unattended children. Lastly, research, engagement, and scholarship librarians were asked to meet students in these spaces, if called upon, as signage in these areas welcomes student-parents to call the Research Help Desk for research assistance. Detailed training put library workers at ease and allowed all to take ownership of the new spaces.

Marketing

Strategic marketing of the Family Hub was critical; previous lactation spaces had little use by patrons due to a lack of signage and clear communication. Working with our library marketing director, we developed a marketing plan consisting of branding and identity, messaging for leadership, and outreach to library patron groups. Like the naming conventions, it was important the branding be inclusive; our marketing director and exhibits and events coordinator created a logo, in the university colors, symbolizing two adults with a child. The logo is used as signage to identify the four Family Hub spaces and acts as branding on promotional fliers, webpages, and social media posts.

With the logo in place to visually represent our work, developing messaging for university leadership was our next step. Talking points, including draft statements for faculty syllabi, university events, and visitor messaging, were delivered to key constituent teams to share around campus. Additionally, our marketing director worked with human resources and university marketing and communications to ensure promotional materials were included

in new hire packets and displayed at relevant event and that new spaces were identified on campus maps. Lastly, a specific plan for a social media rollout for the first month of classes was designed and implemented.

Outreach to library patron groups was crucial for spreading the word to students, faculty, staff, and the community at large. We identified multiple campus leadership units, setting up short in-person presentations at their regular meetings. These included the provost advisory group (all deans and directors), council of chairs, faculty senate, employee unions, and student government. The feedback from these teams was overwhelmingly positive. Although it took more time than email communication, the in-person presentations helped convey the need of working together to promote these new, essential spaces and services. Lastly, a ribbon-cutting celebration allowed the entire community to see the new Family Hub. In addition to university members, the Chamber of Commerce and other community partners attended. With more than seventy-five guests in attendance, word about these spaces spread through the campus newspaper, two local news outlets, and the university television and radio broadcast.



**Families Belong at
BOOTH LIBRARY**

Visit the
**FAMILY
HUB**

Family Hub amenities:

- 2 Lactation & Infant Feeding Rooms
- Family Friendly Study Spaces
- Changing Stations

Activities for children:

- Take-home coloring packs
- Loanable engagement activity sets

Available to all EIU students, employees, and visitors.

Connect with us:

- eiu.edu/booth/services/familyhub
- Booth Library- EIU Campus
- 217-581-6071

Booth Library

Marketing materials.

Results and Next Steps

We were pleased with inaugural usage during the fall 2024 semester: fifty-seven bookings for all our reservable spaces for a total of 4,260 minutes of use. Of these, twenty-six reservations were for the Family Study Room, and thirty-one were for the lactation rooms. We were excited that thirteen unique patrons returned to the Family Hub, with two patrons returning more than ten times each. Results showed that Wednesday was our busiest day of the week. The Family Hub activity kits were checked out five times.



Family study room.

As part of our evaluation plan, we created a brief survey for Family Hub users to complete. Three users responded, with two providing free-form feedback indicating that they loved the space but would be more comfortable if the lactation room locked behind them. We took this as an opportunity to change our procedures and retrain our personnel appropriately.

As we think about the future, we recognize marketing will be an ongoing process. We plan to advertise the Family Hub at our summer new student and faculty orientation programs and meet with our new human resources director to help raise awareness among our faculty and staff that the Family Hub is for them too.

Recommendations

For anyone seeking to make their library more family-friendly, here are three customizable ideas.

- (1) Think about any small spaces that are underutilized in their current form, such as large closets, unused faculty study carrels, or vacant offices. We repurposed existing study rooms and faculty study carrels for our lactation rooms and Family Study Room. Also consider where your patrons with children tend to gravitate. Examine whether there are any amenities, such as soft seating, or activities you can add to the spaces to make them more comfortable, friendly, and safe for families.
- (2) Lean into partnerships both within your organization and with family agencies in your community. Invite community partners, such as lactation professionals, birth to five programs, WIC, or hospital educators to advertise their programs for families in your library.
- (3) Finally, do what you can. You do not need a large budget to make your library more friendly. Purchasing a purpose-built, parent-child study carrel was out of reach for our budget. We scoured educational furniture companies and saved money by creating our own Family-Friendly Study Space for people with small children using connective furniture panels and foam flooring. The computers added to study areas were repurposed from around the library, also saving costs.

Conclusion

Family-friendly spaces around academic libraries support patrons as they juggle the responsibilities of being a parent/caregiver and student. Acknowledging this need and making an effort eases the burden for these student-parents seeking to use our resources and expertise to succeed in their university coursework. The Family Hub at Booth Library, with new lactation/feeding rooms and study spaces for those with children, allows student-parents to feel they belong at the library, just like their traditional student counterparts. Through the generous support of Eastern Illinois University administration, we had the opportunity to take a small project and grow it into a multispace service point for the entire EIU community. We understand not all schools have the monetary resources to create these special spaces, but we have learned that a little goes a long way. As students, faculty, staff, and community members continue to learn about the facilities, our hope is the program will grow and attract more patrons who would not otherwise seek out the library as a hub of support for their academic work. ≈

Notes

1. Theresa Anderson et al., “Who Are Undergraduates with Dependent Children? An Updated Overview of Student-Parent Characteristics Using 2020 Data,” *Student-Parent Action through Research Knowledge (SPARK) Collaborative*, September 2024, <https://studentparentaction.org/resources/who-are-undergraduates-with-dependent-children-2020>.

2. “Student Parent Data Collection Act Annual Report | Institutional Research,” *Eastern Illinois University*, accessed June 3, 2025, <https://www.eiu.edu//ir/student-parent-data-collection-report.php>.

3. “Student Parent Data Collection Act Annual Report,” *Eastern Illinois University*.

4. Rachel E. Scott and Brannen Varner, "Exploring the Research and Library Needs of Student-Parents," *College & Research Libraries* 81, no. 4 (May 5, 2020): 598, doi:10.5860/crl.81.4.598.

5. "Policies and Standing Rules," *La Leche League International*, accessed June 5, 2025, <https://llli.org/about/policies-standing-rules/>.

6. "Public Act 90-0239 of the 90th General Assembly," accessed May 8, 2025, <https://www.ilga.gov/legislation/publicacts/pubact90/acts/90-0239.html>.