



So you're a librarian...

Moving beyond the stereotype

Picture yourself at a party... A glass of your favourite beverage is in one hand and you are surrounded by people that you are unfamiliar with. The host ushers you towards a circle of people, does the basic introductions and then drifts off to welcome other guests. After comments about the host's new house and the dead pot plants in the corner, the conversation within the group turns to the topic of work. The woman opposite you — who works in a bank, asks — 'So what line of work are you in?'

'I'm a librarian' you reply. A look of excitement develops on her face and she exclaims: 'Oh... it must be lovely to read books all day, I would love your job!'

We have all been in this situation at least once... and it is not surprising that some of us have developed some snappy and informative replies that challenge the librarian stereotype. We asked new graduates to share their best response to this regular social situation, with the added incentive that the best entry would win a free registration to the 2nd ALIA New Librarians' Symposium, thanks to the generosity of Thomson Gale.

With more than 100 entries received, it became clear that Australia's new librarians are a positive and proactive bunch, committed to changing public perceptions about who librarians are and what we do. Most of all, new librarians want to move beyond stereotypes with style and a sense of humour.

Some of the highly-commended entries were:

'Oh, I don't read the books, darling, I became a librarian for the money, power and prestige! Yes, thank you, another Bolly would be marvellous!' *Catherine Doran*

'...don't forget I stamp them too, just like you.<laugh> No really, I'm just a passionate combination of teacher, information therapist and computer hacker.' *Lesley Ngatai*

'Books? No, too busy managing, collaborating and initiating. Love this song — lets start a dance floor — show them what bankers and librarians are really like!' *Kate Watson*

'Being a librarian isn't about reading books all day. It is about empowering people to access information and expand their knowledge. Truly a rewarding profession!' *Kelly Glossop*

'Read... I wish! Between, the web, user information needs, innovative service delivery, change management and information literacy, I listen to my books in the car.' *Scott Cadoo*

But the winning entry came from *Elizabeth Beales* from the Barossa Council Public Library (SA) with (to be said in the very best Carson from *Queer Eye* voice):

'Oh no, we've so moved on from there. It's not just about books any more. We're into jzschuching your mind, not just shushing your mouth.'

Our competition judge Lee Welch said: 'Our winner not only made me laugh out loud, this particular "25 words or less" seemed to me to sum up everything about breaking stereotypes with positive humour and considerable elegance. It is a classic one-liner with broad appeal, it makes use of a mass media phenomenon, and I cannot wait to try it out at the next 'do' I go to that is infested with anyone silly enough to put down a partying librarian on the loose.'

So forget the 'Shhh', get out there and 'jzschushz' — yeah, baby!

New librarians, technicians and students will have the chance to 'jzschuch their minds' at the 2nd ALIA New Librarians' Symposium. *Beyond the stereotype* will examine the many ways libraries and librarians are moving beyond traditional stereotypes — not only the 'bun and glasses' image, but what libraries do, how we do it, the services that we offer, and the way that we market ourselves — all the issues that impact upon new professionals.

The symposium program has three streams:

- *Career and life planning*, which will include personal and career development activities, work/life balance and associated issues, as well as personal success stories from your new librarian peers.
- *Libraries and the future*, which will encompass the latest innovations and ideas in our profession, predictions and possibilities for future skills, developing careers and new industry directions.
- *Libraries and the world*, which will address issues of activism and social responsibility, working overseas and the experience of international 'new librarians'.

Do you want to know more? Whether you are an employer of new graduates or a potential delegate, you can register your interest now by completing the form on the NLS2 website. For more information on the 2nd ALIA New Librarians' Symposium, check out <http://conferences.alia.org.au/newlibrarian2004/> for news, program information and more competitions. We look forward to seeing you soon in Adelaide! ■

Kate Sinclair

Convenor, New Librarians' Symposium

**Energise >>
Enthuse >>
Inspire!**

...gives a voice to the new generation of library and information professionals. If you have any suggestions or topics for this column, please contact the column coordinator, Kate Watson, k.watson@cqu.edu.au.