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1. I am a volunteer/casual/permanent/contract or temp worker at a library. ☐
2. I am an Australian Citizen/Permanent Resident 25 years or older. ☐
3. I have not completed Year 12 or any certificate II or above. ☐

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Volunteer in the Spotlight

Gemma Siemensma

What led you into library work?

I know this sounds like a cliché but the love of books. I went through the university guide in year 12 and had no idea what I wanted to do. I liked reading, saw the word 'library' and ticked the box. Obviously I have learnt that libraries are so much more than books!

Tell us about your involvement with ALIA.

I am a committee member of the Victorian Library Technicians Group, and I co-edit their newsletter *Technotes*; I am also a committee member of ALIA Victoria; I am the Social Program and Events Co-ordinator for the 4th New Librarians Symposium, to be held in 2008; I am a member of the ALIA New Generation Advisory Committee and I hope to be involved in the rejuvenation of a local ALIA Group in Ballarat. Many of these things I can do from a regional area. I write articles, participate in teleconferences and organise events without having to leave my office. Committees are very appreciative of the effort I put in as they know it can be more difficult living away from the city. I offer to do those jobs that don't require direct presence (like printing up name tags, certificates, taking RSVP's etc).

What are some of the important issues for ALIA members living in regional areas?

Distance would have to be the main one! Plus, another issue is the lack of library-specific events. Sure, you can learn some things in your own time and via e-learning, e-lists, other talks, short courses, distance education or the internet. But for me, networking and meeting other colleagues face-to-face is an essential part of developing myself professionally. Even though you may catch up with colleagues locally, there are no other medical libraries in town to discuss specific work issues with.

What do you think are the best sales points for people considering moving out of the capital cities and into a large regional town like Ballarat?

To begin with, we aren't THAT far away from a capital city. Also, major regional cities and towns tend to have everything that you need anyway. The shops sell the same thing as in the city; we still have swimming pools, sports groups, the movies etc. Communities are generally welcoming and open – plus you only have to travel through a few sets of lights (if any) to get to work! There is also so much more open space, beautiful national parks and gardens, fresh produce and good old clean country air! Housing prices are also much cheaper!

You've always placed a high emphasis on your studies. What's your professional development plan for the future?

I do enjoy studying and have worked my way through courses beginning as an LT, then Librarian and this year will see me finish off my Masters in Librarianship. Next year I plan to start an MBA – I figure I may as well keep going while I'm still young!

Your contribution to ALIA takes up a lot of your time. What is it that drives you to volunteer with ALIA?

I have learnt and continue to learn so much from my involvement in ALIA. I have developed many transferable skills including marketing, events management, public speaking, committee work, budgeting and strategic planning. I also have opportunities to work with library peers from a wide range of sectors and differing levels of experience and seniority. Most importantly I have made some wonderful friends throughout Australia whom I can turn to for advice and help whenever required. Overall, I get out much more than I put in.

Interview by Margie Anderson

As Sue Hill Recruitment move towards 10 years of placing travelling ALIA members in work in the UK, we extend our warmest congratulations to ALIA as they celebrate 70 years.

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