



Volunteering advice from the ALIA Retirees

At our recent Retirees committee meeting we shared stories about our experiences with volunteering, which may be of interest.

Several of us had gained paid employment as a result of volunteering in an organisation that interested us, so we recommend anyone looking for work to consider it, regardless of age. There is a need out there for people with interest and commitment. It certainly beats sitting at home waiting for opportunities to come along!

The ALIA Retirees group is an example of volunteers who give their time to maintain a connection with other ALIA members, who wish to keep in touch with the profession even though they are no longer formally involved. As a result we have made many new online friends and established a presence on the ALIA website and through our Retirees e-list. Most of us are also volunteering in other capacities too and finding it an enriching and rewarding experience.

Through e-lists I discovered that Ausdance WA needed help reorganising its small library collection and two of us have now become involved in a project that we believe will help an organisation doing good work with young people, but without funds to support a paid position. Ausdance ACT also needs assistance if anyone in Canberra is looking for a similar project. Its collection is already well set up, so it may need only occasional assistance.

It is important to realise that some organisations are unable to take volunteers because they cannot commit time to the supervision and training now required.

There are many ways to get involved, including checking the e-lists such as ALIA Volunteers e-list, assuming you wish to volunteer in a library-related field. There are organisations in each state which coordinate volunteers, but it may be more productive to target a particular organisation that interests you, demonstrating your enthusiasm in their aims.

Volunteering can enrich your life and lead to developing new friendships and interests.

Give it a go!

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Editor's note: All of the e-lists to which Pat refers are available <http://www.alia.org.au/alianet/e-lists/>

Adventures in volunteering – Beyond the Hype Symposium

I participated as a student volunteer at *Beyond the Hype 2008: Web 2.0*, an ALIA hosted symposium held at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) in February 2008. This was a great experience that allowed me to see both sides of a professional event: the public face of a symposium and behind the scenes.

There were six student volunteers, drawn from various LIS courses around Australia. We participated in planning committee meetings and shared duties at the symposium. We also had plenty of time to attend sessions and chat with delegates during breaks.

Despite the good planning of the committee, there were some behind the scenes dramas, as at any such event. Computers

crashed, workshop lists were mislaid, and weather interfered with catering plans, but organisers and volunteers pulled together, and no one even seemed to suspect that we were running around like headless chickens at times.

The symposium itself was very enjoyable and I was impressed by the enthusiasm of delegates and the level of interaction in discussion and workshops. The speakers that I saw all gave different perspectives on the role of Web 2.0 in libraries and provided much food for thought. Networking elements of the event were also embraced; there was lots of chatting over morning tea, lunch, and drinks, and I got to meet a great many interesting LIS professionals.

The great thing about volunteering, as a student, for an event like this is the opportunity to 'play with the grown-ups'. As a volunteer, you meet established members of the profession you are entering and see how they do things. You participate in something you may be asked to do yourself in the future. I greatly enjoyed this experience and found it very worthwhile.

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Library students as volunteers – a mutually beneficial relationship

A major disaster at a Melbourne secondary school library led to the creation of a very successful volunteer program.

Between August 2002 and July 2006 I worked part-time as a library technician at a northern suburbs secondary school. I had been there less than a year when I received the news that our entire library catalogue / database had been accidentally deleted from the school intranet.

Upon investigation the computer technician discovered our automatic back-up system, which was meant to back up all files every night, hadn't been working for two years. We had lost two years' worth of data – hundreds of new catalogue records were gone and hundreds of withdrawn items were still on the system. We also had no way of telling which items were out on loan.

I was distraught. I couldn't bear the thought of having to do it all again on my own. In desperation I tried to think of other solutions. It was then that I remembered that several of the people I had graduated with from my librarianship qualification, seven years earlier, had found it difficult to get paid employment due to lack of experience. I realised there might be current library students or recent graduates who would appreciate the chance to gain real-life experience.

I contacted the Melbourne TAFE's and universities that taught library studies. I told them about my dilemma and asked if they could advertise for students and recent graduates to join our library as volunteers.

I was inundated with responses from unemployed recent graduates and current university and TAFE students. Initially I took on eight volunteers, two per day. I focused on teaching them how to download records off SCIS and re-catalogue as much as possible. I printed instructions and talked my volunteers through their first couple of attempts and then let them try it on their own. Most were working independently by their second shift.