

## Brotherhood of St Laurence – volunteers

Created by Friar Gerald Tucker and established during the Great Depression, the Brotherhood of St Laurence has developed into an independent organisation with strong Anglican and community links. Today, we continue to fight for an Australia free of poverty. The BSL relies heavily on the enormous generosity of volunteers who perform a wide variety of functions across the whole organisation.

The BSL Library was established in 1974 to support the needs of the research arm of the organisation. Today, the Research and Policy Centre has in excess of 25 full-time employees and produces a vast body of research reports, papers, and submissions. These form the evidence base that underpins the direction and the work of the BSL.

In mid 2008, the role of the BSL Library was expanded from a traditional special library role to include responsibility for organisational Records and Knowledge Management – these are exciting times. The expansion of the library's role resulted in changes to staff roles and responsibilities, however a constant through these times has been our core of library volunteers, who add a vitality and humanity to our services. Our volunteers work each week on Monday and Tuesday, giving their time freely to perform a variety of tasks, as well as providing permanent staff with an excuse to set down tools and engage in stimulating conversation over a traditional morning tea.

On Mondays, Stephanie Papaleo labels our recently catalogued books adding spine labels, book pockets, loans card, and stamping our journals, and she spends time in various parts of the BSL performing a number of tasks on other days as well. Not only does the BSL Library get great attention to detail in the work that Steph performs, the library would not be the same without her vivacious presence. In a word, awesome!

Tuesdays we are joined by two very distinguished gentlemen, Cuthbert Lethbridge and Bob Southin. Cuthbert accessions the journals that arrived in the previous week, placing them all in alphabetical order ready for the production of the 'New Journals List'. He assists us with other tasks to ensure the library is kept in peak condition. Cuthbert was a long-term paid employee of the Brotherhood and post-retirement continues to offer his time and adds to the social fabric of the organisation.

Bob, a retired vet, also comes in on a Tuesday and spends his morning scanning the previous weeks newspapers locating any articles that may have been written on the topic of immigration and migration. Bob is a long-time supporter of the rights of migrants and his newspaper article list is a valuable asset to staff working in the Ecumenical Migration Centre. Not only does Bob's work assist those in the EMC, it acts to validate the experiences of many of the migrants who have used BSL services over the years.

A recent addition to the BSL Library volunteer's ranks is Moyra McAllister. For many years Moyra was a librarian of high standing within the library community, and was also the ALIA Copyright officer. After hearing from a colleague that Moyra had retired from paid employment, I made contact to see if she would be interested in helping us out. The result has the beginning of a wonderful relationship. Moyra has helped us in streamlining our library catalogue. The conversations about broken internet links and the lost electronic documents as a result are not only stimulating, but ensure such matters are kept in mind as we at the BSL begin to tackle what to do with long-term electronic storage of our own material.

Before joining the BSL, I had not worked with volunteers. Now, after having several months' experience, it is something I would encourage other workplaces to foster and implement. In my experience, volunteers are a joy to work with: generous, flexible, and, in a demanding work environment, can be very grounding. Their experiences of life and work are as varied as they are valuable.

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## Many hands make light work: volunteering at the State Library of NSW

In the NSW, over the past three years, the major cultural institutions including the State Library have experienced a 20% increase in volunteer numbers, with each volunteer on average contributing 162 hours per year. This is well above the national average of 137 hours and is indicative of the strength of volunteers' commitment.

The State Library of NSW's Volunteer Program is a well-established 25 year old service. The Program has 152 'pairs of hands', with 65% having volunteered at the library for over 10 years. The volunteers are a diverse group drawn from almost every industry and profession – science, manufacturing, education, law, music, medicine, librarianship, architecture, business, and the public service.

There are two main types of volunteer tasks: front-of-house and behind the scenes. Front-of-house tasks include guided tours, hosting exhibitions, speaking to community groups, assisting with hospitality at events, and supporting educational programs. Behind the scenes tasks include transcribing letters, diaries and oral history interviews, sorting ephemera, data entry, tidying shelves, mailing items to library clients, and providing administrative support.

Late last year the library conducted in-depth research with its volunteers in order to understand their needs and expectations of the library, provide feedback in terms of services, and explore future Volunteer Program possibilities. The project included focus groups with a number of volunteers and a survey of all volunteers. The findings along with recommendations were presented to volunteers.

Volunteers were very generous in their rating of the library – in fact they have provided the library with its highest ever satisfaction rating (96%). While satisfaction is high, volunteers gave the library some clear direction as to future volunteer services, including stronger work-place support in terms of their voluntary 'work', and ongoing training to assist with skills development.

The establishment of a mentoring program to enable a skills transfer from some of the 'old hands' to those new to the library's Volunteer Program was an important idea to come out of the research. This is a very relevant initiative considering the overwhelming majority of volunteers are over the age of 65. Mentoring provides another role for those volunteers who now hold considerable knowledge of the library, yet are no longer able to fulfil some of their previous volunteer duties. It is imagined this role will develop to meet the needs of the program and its volunteers.

The importance of the social aspect of volunteering is also highlighted in this research. The library's volunteers appreciate the communication and social activities provided for them,