

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.

Louise Segafredo
Senior Manager, Knowledge Management
Brotherhood of St Laurence.
library@bsl.org.au

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,



which include a newsletter and monthly coffee mornings where a staff member usually gives a talk to volunteers followed by time for general discussion.

Our volunteers are rich in experience, enthusiasm, and commitment, and are integral to the culture and development of the organisation. As ambassadors of the library they display enormous passion for the collection and great dedication to their work.

Kerrie Burgess & Helen Clark
State Library of New South Wales
 kburgess@sl.nsw.gov.au
 hclark@sl.nsw.gov.au

What on earth is a satellite library?

Cairns Libraries has established a unique service delivery mode to aged and isolated readers. Cairns Regional Council serves a population of 150 000 with 9% being 65 years and over.

Commencing in 2005, Cairns Libraries embarked on a partnership with a number of aged care facilities in the region to establish Satellite Libraries, so-called because they are small and revolve around our larger established libraries. These new facilities have proved to be very popular with residents and complement the Homebound Service operated by members of Friends of Cairns Libraries. Five satellite libraries are now running from aged care facilities in the Cairns Region. Each of the libraries offers a slightly different service which is dependent on the amount of care required by the residents.

With the establishment of libraries for residents unable to travel to one of the nine libraries in the Cairns Regional Council area, Cairns Libraries has been able to expand services to those in our community who have long cherished libraries and reading and fulfil its mission to build and enrich community capacity across the region.



Val Mellick (Volunteer), Val Potter (Resident), and Thelma Tregenza (FOCL) at Glenmead

Cairns Libraries would not be able to offer these enhanced library services were it not for the selfless and enthusiastic assistance of the members of Friends of Cairns Libraries. The Friends, who work at the satellite libraries, offer aid to the readers and help to search for just the right book. It is a great, fun place to be when a bevy of walking frames and wheelchairs head to the library. There is so much laughter and enjoyment.

The benefits to the members of Friends of Cairns Libraries are manifold. The ladies who work at the aged care facility libraries have a wonderful time sharing their love of literature with the residents and take time out of their busy lives to search the branch libraries for titles that will interest the residents. Friends who deliver to residents in their own homes say that they receive personal satisfaction in enabling fellow lovers of literature to continue to read and listen to books well into their twilight years.

Members of Friends of Cairns Libraries receive continued support from library management and recognition for their efforts with small gifts as well as invitations to major library receptions and author lectures. Friends feel as though they are an integral part of the library service, are on first name terms with branch librarians and library staff, and are always welcomed when they arrive for their deliveries. Indeed when a Friend has to cease deliveries because of family or job commitments both the Friend and branch staff are very disappointed.

Lee Finkelstein
Special Services Librarian, Marketing
Cairns Libraries
 l.finkelstein@cairns.qld.gov.au

The necessity of volunteers

I wrote a paper in 2001 for the 11th National Library Technicians Conference (see <http://conferences.alia.org.au/libtec2001/papers/dyer.html>) as the result of an action research assignment. I am pleased to report that we have been using this volunteer program ever since in our high school library and have now gone one step further. We have initiated a volunteer library 'train the trainer' program so that our senior library monitor volunteers, who have been with us since Year 7, can be given school leadership roles as part of their volunteer library duties. In order to achieve this, the Teacher Librarian and I have trained our senior student library monitors in supervisory roles using a 'buddy system' so that they, in turn, can train our new junior library monitors. This has given them an added responsibility of service in the school and all the volunteers have taken to this concept remarkably well. This then leaves the Teacher Librarian and I to oversee the training that is being carried out, and also allows us to be free to pursue our other numerous tasks at recess and lunchtime.

The setting up of a volunteer system does take patience, and changes often need to be made in response to the different situations that arise, but in the longer term, it is a very worthwhile exercise and we have reaped many rewards. We also involve our senior volunteers in a multitude of library tasks over and above their designated core library training. Not only do they train their junior peers in circulation desk duties, shelving, shelf checking, and workroom duties, but also carry out tasks related to the process of cataloguing books, writing library reports for our school newsletter, engaging in our library cultural weeks, presenting skits and poetry for our annual Book Week celebrations, assisting students with Premier's Reading Challenge queries, and generally assisting in the smooth running of all library activities. These students are not chosen from the high academic levels of our school but from students who are dedicated to serving our community – a community of learners as leaders. They represent a vast array of nationalities and it is very encouraging to see them all working together in such an amicable environment.

We have waiting lists of students wanting to join our library volunteer community but those who are involved are very hesitant to leave, especially now that we have added another dimension to our library monitor training. Their experience is invaluable to our needs and so each person is respected for the contribution that they make. There are certain defined rules that apply to all our tasks, but policymaking has to be flexible in order to achieve the highest outcomes possible.

Our motto is 'None of us is as good as all of us' and we are indebted to our band of volunteers for their invaluable service to our school community.

Jennifer Dyer
Library Technician
Birrong Girls High School
 jennifer.dyer@det.nsw.edu.au