



# NEVER TOO LATE TO LEARN

*Megan Smith and her decent cup of coffee. Taken at home. Yep, it's a shelfie.*

**N**ot every LIS professional starts their career as soon as they graduate from university, and if, like MEGAN SMITH, you come to the library sector later in your working life, then professional development is more important than ever to keep your career on track.

I have to admit to being pretty new to working in libraries. I am a sea-changer, a mid-life career convert who arrived at librarianship after a decade-long stint in clinical research and an inescapable desire to try something new. I had always wanted to be a librarian but had no real understanding of what that entailed or what a librarian's working life was like. But, as with most people who embark on a long-anticipated journey, I didn't really care about the details; I was just itching to get my show on the road.

My new journey began with returning to university as a mature-age student. I was surprised to discover that I enjoyed studying much more than I remembered, and after two years I had earned my Graduate Diploma in Library and Information Management. I found that my time at university, coupled with my untarnished optimism for my new career, had sparked in me a fervent enthusiasm for learning. I was like the generic internet cat fixated on chasing the red dot. I energetically bounced from article to idea to forum to blog and then back again; my only goal was to be 'the best librarian I can be', whatever that would involve. I was completely without direction, and although I felt I was learning, I didn't feel as if I were making any progress. I am, thankfully, marginally smarter than your average internet cat, and I soon realised that the red dot is an illusion. It bounces back and forth and uses up a lot of your energy and enthusiasm, but ultimately the dot takes you nowhere. You end up chasing your tail. It was time to formulate a plan. A cunning plan.

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The first step in my cunning plan was to join ALIA. I realised that, as a new kid on the library block, I needed to seek guidance from the long-term locals, those who had the experience and knowledge to help me determine which path to take and how to manifest my nebulous goal of 'being the best librarian I can be'. I spent a couple of weeks checking out the neighbourhood and soaking up the general ALIA atmosphere, wandering around the streets and back alleys, dipping my toe into various forums and publications. I discovered that ALIA was pretty switched on and I felt I was in good company. If ALIA were a cafe, they would definitely serve a decent cup of coffee.

Now that I was familiar with the lie of the land, the second step in my cunning plan was to sign up for the ALIA Professional Development (PD) program. In so doing I agreed to earn at least 30 points towards my PD per year. The biggest step upon committing to PD is completing the ALIA Career Development Kit, a surprisingly in-depth and thought-provoking means of highlighting your professional strengths and weaknesses that reveals where your true

career interests lie. It took a lot longer than I expected, so I strongly suggest completing the kit with a few cups of the aforementioned decent coffee on hand.

I have taken only a few tentative steps along the PD path, but I am already finding it worthwhile. I see PD opportunities everywhere and my inner obsessive op-shopper streak compels me to amass PD points. An additional unexpected benefit is that it has helped me feel more connected with my career, despite my newbie status. My PD plan also helps me to identify experiences and information that assist my short- and long-term goals, and no longer do I randomly chase down everything I see. Putting PD at the forefront of my career consciousness has made me a focused learner.

Joining ALIA and embarking on a journey down the PD road has transformed my enthusiasm from frenzied to focused. If you're a new librarian like me, I encourage you to constructively channel your enthusiasm and give PD a go. If you're a seasoned librarian I also encourage you to try PD. It may help you to revitalise your enthusiasm, discover new skills and send you down unexpected and interesting paths. You might be surprised at just how enjoyable and stimulating PD can be. Just like a decent cup of coffee. ☕

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