

## Creating a standard of positivity

At age 9, I was asked to draw a picture of what I was going to be when I grew up. I drew myself smiling in front of a shelf lined with all my favourite books, and at the end of the day I was standing in front of my year 4 class explaining why I wanted to be a librarian.

When I think back now I wonder if it wasn't only a love of books and the adventures they could take me on, combined with a love of learning that I relayed enthusiastically to my classmates with their dreams of pirates and ballerinas. It was a love of my school librarian and my primary school library as a space. Why? It was the experience of visiting the library. It was wonderful.

Fast forward through high school and university and I was always in the library. Though my need was no longer adventures but knowledge, I had positive experiences over and over again with wonderful librarians who seemed to know everything. I realised there was much more to librarianship than meets the eye, though it took me a while to remember my childhood dream.

It's funny where life takes you – at age 12 I decided that I was going to be an environmental scientist and stop pollution and save the whales and let everyone see the light. So when it became time to head off to uni, I enrolled in a bachelor of science at Newcastle University and embarked on my quest to save the planet.

It didn't take me long to realise that I much preferred being in the library doing the background research than knee deep in dirty water taking samples. I completed my degree and the inability to get a job in the profession allowed me to look at further study. It was then I remembered the dreams of my nine-year-old self. After a couple of years of travel, I enrolled at RMIT in 2006.

When telling people that I had to have postgraduate qualifications to be a librarian, I was commonly asked, "why do you need a Masters to put books away?" I'd cringe and then calmly explain that putting books away is probably something I'd never really

have to do unless I worked in an OPL – then watch their eyes glaze over while I explained the concepts of information literacy, collection development, and controlled vocabularies. I felt strongly that there had to be a way to communicate to people that finding high quality information in the information age is more important than ever, and fight against the prevailing attitude that libraries and librarians are obsolete because information is digital and therefore more accessible.

Throughout my library studies, I always thought that I'd work in a government or special library and still save the planet by providing information to the researchers who were saving the planet. The way it happened, my first professional library job was in a university as a reference librarian and I realised that my passion lies not in providing the information but in teaching these valuable information skills to students so that in their professional lives they will make well-informed decisions based on quality information.

As Faculty Librarian for Health Sciences at La Trobe University, I am often taken aback by the strong support given to the library from the faculty until I remember that these academics really understand the role we play in guiding students to high quality information. The challenge now is how to get the students to understand that the library is more than a place where the books are, Wikipedia is not a source for scholarly information, and that no, they can't "just Google".<sup>1</sup>

I tell my health sciences students to stop thinking like students (just get the assignment done) and start thinking like professionals in a clinical setting. Would they go to a doctor if they knew that the doctor based all decisions on results from a Google search? At this stage I introduce the concepts of finding information to support evidence-based practice. I invite these students to come to the library at anytime with questions and remind them that it is our role

to help them with finding the right information for their assignments, not to judge them for not knowing.

I wonder if ensuring our future success lies in creating positive experiences for our patrons, not only in primary school and public libraries, but especially in higher education institutions. The more positive a library visit, the more a patron returns, the more likely they are to understand the vital role librarians play as educators, and the more they are going to fight to keep libraries in the future.

I believe in creating positive learning experiences and providing high quality service to my students because I understand that all through their professional lives they will be relying on information gleaned from hospital and medical libraries to save lives. If they really understand the importance of high quality information, then they will really understand how important it is to have a qualified professional assist in finding such information. I believe that equipped with this understanding, these people will be libraries' and librarians' most important supporters in the future.

Hopefully one day the information profession will get to a stage where we are appreciated for the role we play in education, rather than having to constantly justify our role in the information age. Wouldn't it be great to one day shift the perception of librarians as highly educated people who "just put books away"?

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<sup>1</sup> In 2009, La Trobe University Library created a cartoon explaining why just Googling is unacceptable in university assignments. All of La Trobe's first year students are encouraged to watch.

La Trobe University Library (2009) *Why can't I just Google* [streaming video recording] [http://latrobe.libguides.com/health\\_sci\\_google](http://latrobe.libguides.com/health_sci_google)

## Public Library Standards Project Update

In conjunction with the Project Reference Group and the Queensland Public Library Standards Steering Group, Libraries Alive! is now extending the evidence-based methodology developed for the NSW Standards and Guidelines to apply to national standards. Baseline and enhanced or aspirational targets are being worked out for the first draft of the national document. For example, a baseline target for membership might be 47% of residents. The baseline represents

what most libraries have achieved. An aspirational target represents a performance improvement, and in the membership context this might be expressed as a 3% improvement per annum sustained for three years, or 51% membership by the end of the third year. Such targets are now being worked out for a selection of fundamental indicators such as expenditure per capita, loans, physical visits, virtual visits, turnover on inventory, and program activity. ALIA's

new national standards and guidelines for public libraries will shortly be available as a draft for comment.

To follow progress on the project, regular updates are posted to: [http://www.librariesalive.com.au/Aust\\_PL\\_Standards\\_Project.htm](http://www.librariesalive.com.au/Aust_PL_Standards_Project.htm)

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