

Front Line



Bev Kirby
ALIA President

**A casualty of job loss is
losing our members...
...this is the worst time
for them to abandon ALIA
and to be isolated.**

ON THE 10th of September, Victorian Branch held a recruitment evening for students and unemployed library staff. As part of their publicity campaign they placed a notice in *The Melbourne Age* aiming it at unemployed library personnel. Thirty five unemployed people responded to the advertisement.

If thirty five people see an advertisement in a newspaper and make contact, how many more are there who didn't see the ad or didn't believe it could help at this time?

We have no reliable figures on the number of librarians and library technicians who are unemployed or have been forced to take positions in other occupations. We have no reliable data on library staff in part-time employment who would prefer to be employed full time. Most of us have heard of a retrenchment or two or a contract not renewed. Moving around the country as President I have spoken to an alarming number of people who have met this fate.

It is very easy to say that this is a reasonable thing to expect in today's economic climate and that it's reasonable that employment of library staff should reflect the current economic crisis. My concern is that the trend of libraries being one of the first things to go renders them one of the last things to return. If the library is gone and the service is gone, how long will it be before someone realises a need and its reintroduction becomes a priority? Should we fear 'out of sight, out of mind'?

Can ALIA really do anything about the current crisis? Many of the people affected are our members. I say we are all affected because it works counter to promoting libraries and lobbying governments. Can we afford to wait and look back and say, 'where have all the libraries gone?'.

ALIA the Association and ALIA as individuals can do much if we collect information about the people who are unemployed, or who no longer work in the library and information field but would wish to be, or on numbers of people in reduced employment contrary to their own needs and wishes.

Through its Divisions, ALIA will offer specific programs of support to unemployed or displaced librarians and library technicians. We can encourage access to training and professional development. Divisions will use new methods of contact and find new ways to advertise activities.

Where have all the libraries gone? We will need to mark the place where library services were. Some years ago I drove the family water ski boat. I was given a long list of do's and don'ts and instructions that should I sink the boat for any reason I must tie a ski rope to a life jacket and the vessel could be found and recovered. We need to mark the place where our libraries were or where they have remained with untrained staff at the helm. We will do this so that this information can be used to accelerate the recovery of these services in the future.

A casualty of job loss is losing our members. They slip away because they no longer work in the field. They give up their membership because they have no salary. This is the worst time for them to abandon ALIA and to be isolated. Some stay to access news about the library world. Some stay, they tell me, to continue to identify with a group of people, no longer accessible through the workplace. Some stay to retain through ALIA a sense of their value as a member of a profession.

What can ALIA members do to help in this situation? May I share some ideas? We can influence unemployed library staff to join at special rates. We can lobby members to stay. We can share information and encourage their attendance at ALIA functions and activities. We can contribute to any initiative of ALIA or any other body which sets out to collect data on the unemployed and on cancelled library services.

Any of us who have contact with the unemployed or under-employed can do something.

Today, another friend lost their job. It's no fault of their own. It's too early for them to say they're glad they have ALIA—but they will. ■

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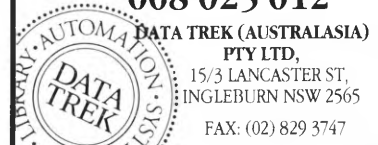
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