

First impressions

Coming to terms with a new career. In 1996, while a student at Curtin University, Kay Saunders responded to *inCite's* call for impressions of the library industry. We catch up with Kay three years after her graduation...

In 1996 I graduated from Curtin University as a librarian. In May 1997, after some temporary work with a law firm, I applied for and was offered a three day a week position as librarian with a mining company. I was also given responsibility for records management. The library was already established, having been purchased from two sources and supplemented by several hundred in-house reports as well as several thousand maps. Resources had been catalogued according to three different classification schemes. Bibliographic description had been done by various secretaries and geologists to no particular format. Maps and in-house reports had not been catalogued at all. Consequently the online catalogue was almost unusable and much of the collection was inaccessible, as the database did not indicate location, and shelving was erratic.

In the first month or so, I frequently thought of resigning and my near despair was exacerbated by a lack of subject knowledge in the areas of geology and mining. However, a timely one-day geoscience information seminar at Curtin gave me a clearer perspective on the types of information in the industry. I persuaded the company to purchase an updated thesaurus, brought in my own copy of AACR2 and acquired a donated set of DDC 20 through a listserv appeal. Leisure reading for quite a while consisted of geology textbooks from work.

My prior experience as a library officer proved invaluable in procedural matters. However my studies gave me the knowledge to assess the collection, identify user needs and formulate strategies to create a quality library service. Establishing priorities has proven a difficult aspect of my job, due to constantly changing needs. Another aspect I initially found difficult was establishing networks in the industry, something

which I believe is especially important for a solo librarian. I have found that belonging to the appropriate sections of ALIA, joining other relevant groups (including listservs) and attending functions has helped.

As much of what I do is not visible, I write a monthly library newsletter listing recent acquisitions and indicating which section of the library is being catalogued and reorganised. I also include in-house 'news' items, such as staff birthdays, humorous items and useful websites. Shortly after I started here, the company set up internet and e-mail access and I created an 'internet address book' of links to relevant websites which is on the PC desktops of all staff. I believe in being proactive and so I approach managers to inform them of new information sources and whether it was cost effective for the library to acquire access to these sources. In addition to expected library duties, I have also been called upon to administer first aid, run urgent errands when short-staffed, book concert tickets online, and even find the room rates for a particular pub in a remote village in the United Kingdom!

My appointment had occurred near the beginning of a serious downturn in the mining industry and although I was aware of increasing redundancies I had to deal with the conditions of my employment, having been told that I was not entitled to paid leave. My legal experience came in useful here as I checked out employment legislation, contacted government departments for relevant information and prepared an 'evidence package' supporting my claim for leave entitlements. Following a review of my submission by our interstate office, I was given a revised 'conditions of employment' letter, with retrospective leave entitlements, and an immediate pay rise!

So far, my library career has exceeded my expectations!

From librarian to legislator

Bruce Davidson, parliamentary librarian, Parliament of Victoria

Like most Australian parliaments, the Parliament of Victoria until not so long ago had an over representation of farmers, lawyers and union officials. In more recent years new Members were more likely to have had backgrounds in academia, journalism, teaching and public service.

At the general election in September 1999 the voters of Victoria returned candidates with even more diverse occupational backgrounds. Along with those already mentioned, Members listed among their occupations prior to entering the parliament: vineyard owner, tourism operator, abalone diver, veterinary surgeon, aircraft refueller, police officer, radiographer and librarian. In fact three librarians were returned at the last election.

Judy Maddigan MLA (ALP) was first elected in 1996 as the Member for Essendon. Prior to her election Judy worked as a librarian with Moonee Valley Regional Library, Sydenham Catholic Regional College Library and the Footscray Library. Judy served as a Member of the Parliamentary Library Committee from 1996 to 1999. Last November Judy was honoured as the first woman to be elected Deputy Speaker and Chairman of Committees of the Legislative Assembly.

Andrea Coote MLC (LIB) was elected for Monash Province in September last year. Andrea trained with the National Library of Australia before working as a librarian with BHP. More recently she was the director of the State Library of Victoria Foundation. She has also worked as a ministerial adviser and as a business development manager.

Jo Duncan MLA (ALP) was elected to represent Gisborne at the last election. Jo trained as a teacher/librarian at the Melbourne College of Advanced Education and was in-charge of a school library prior to her election. She has also worked as a union organiser. Jo is currently a member of the Parliamentary Library Committee.

All are agree that their training as librarians and their experience as information professionals was vital to their success in the party, campaigning and in being successful at the election. Their training and experience has also proved advantageous in their work with constituents, pressure groups, community organisations and in their ability to quickly come to grips with issues before the House. ■