

Alexander Mills



Children at Ashfield Library enjoy a big book with Alexander

Alexander Mills is the Children and Youth Services Librarian at Ashfield Municipal Council, in Sydney's Inner West. He is Secretary of ALIA Children's and Youth Services (NSW) group.

Tell us about a typical day in Children and Youth Services.

Every day is full and varied. It might include running chocolate or Henna tattoo workshops, a storytime session for tiny tots, responding to customer requests at one of our two branches or doing the home library service run. Today I spent some time tracking down a book concerning Borris the bear who won't go to the dentist and whose teeth fall out – I suspect the grandmother who asked for the book is concerned about her grandchild's dental health. Meanwhile, my manager needs attendance figures for our school holiday programs and an update on my budget expenditure. Beside Children's and Youth Services, my responsibilities also include Outreach, Home Library and Senior Library Services.

How did you get started working in libraries?

It was an accident. I'd been a library monitor at school and enjoyed it, but it never occurred to me that working in a library was something I could do professionally. I started an Arts degree but wasn't happy at uni. I was casting around for something else when my godmother (who is a library technician) phoned and told me to report to TAFE the following Monday as she had enrolled me in Library Studies. The rest, as they say, is history. One of my TAFE teachers offered me casual work at the public library where she worked, and I loved it. I've worked in public libraries now for 7 years, at first as a casual, and then as a library technician. This is my first year as a librarian.

Why do you volunteer for ALIA?

The main reason I volunteer with ALIA's Children's and Youth Services group in NSW is that I'm learning so much. The other people in the group have wonderful experiences and share generously. I gain so much from rubbing shoulders with them. I also find many of my job needs can be met through my ALIA involvement. For example, my quest to learn more about collection development sparked a seminar on the subject that NSW CYS will be holding next month.

I also volunteer with KOALA (Kids Own Australian Literature Awards) and have been asked to contribute to other groups. I'm resisting these offers because I'm still working on my degree.

So how do you juggle these competing demands? Is there life outside work, professional activities and study?

Yes, there is life outside work and all these activities, though sometimes it doesn't feel like it. Balancing all these things is very hard! I'm at the beginning of my career, and learning is my priority now. I hope the pace will slow down in the future. You have to set personal boundaries and negotiate with your partner. It varies according to where you are in life. I have a colleague who has worked in children's and youth services for more than 20 years, and who has children of her own, and not surprisingly, her priorities are very different.

What are the main activities of CYS (NSW)?

We aim to promote library services to children and youth, highlight children's literature and foster professional development of our members. We run a very active e-list that draws participants from across the globe. Our annual Pre Book Week Extravaganza is always a sell-out, as children's librarians always want new ideas for Book Week. It's always great fun, too – last year's featured a nappy-wearing librarian. We host two seminars each year, one on a management issue and one with a services focus. At the end of the year, we gather at a restaurant for a Pre-Christmas Extravaganza, and celebrate our successes. Our group meets every second month, and new members are always welcome – we need new people with new ideas to ensure our group remains vibrant. If you'd like to attend, just email me: alexanderm@ashfield.nsw.gov.au

What are you currently reading?

My uni studies this semester are in Egyptology, so I'm reading *The Pyramid Texts* written in hieroglyphics. I'm also reading a new young adult novel, *The Clockwork Forest* by Doug MacLeod. And at storytime sessions all week I've been reading *Hattie and the Fox* by Mem Fox and Patricia Mullins. Would you like me to recite it?

Interviewed by Niki Kallenberger,
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