



# VOLUNTEERS

By the end of that year, we had all the new records back on the system and had performed a stocktake to remove old records for withdrawn stock.

The volunteers' commitment varied. Some only stayed for six weeks, others ended up staying for over 18 months. I found that short-term commitments weren't beneficial to us so the following year I developed a set program covering the full range of school library tasks. I created a detailed instruction manual which was given to each volunteer on their first day. Volunteers had to commit to a minimum of 10 weeks with one four-hour shift per week. Each shift I would spend 30 minutes teaching them a new skill one-on-one and they would then have time to practise it as well as skills they had learned previously.

I kept detailed records for each volunteer, noting what they did and how well they did it. This helped immensely when I was called on to act as a referee.

I was over the moon when my first volunteer got her first paid library position. It was her 'dream job' and I was called as her referee. It was the most in-depth referee interview I have ever encountered but I think I was just as excited as my volunteer was when they offered her the job the next day.

Throughout the program I supervised three TAFE work placement students, three Work for the Dole participants, and about 15 library students and recent graduates. Most of these volunteers ended up gaining paid employment in libraries after participating in our program. One job-shared my position for six months when I took up another short-term contract. Another gained my position when I left the school.

The program allowed us to not just fix the initial problem, but also begin a number of new projects which we would never have had the manpower to do before. This included adding additional subject headings and comments to items in our specialist collections and providing a more extensive reference service. It also freed up my time to begin running information literacy classes for our year 7 and 8 students. It was a win-win situation as our volunteers gained the real-life experience they needed and our library became a much better asset to the school community.

Now I work as a TAFE teacher continuing my work in developing students' skills to work in libraries. Although our course is very practical, our students still need real-life experience so I encourage other libraries to open their doors to volunteers as it truly is a mutually beneficial relationship.

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## Volunteering at Sia'atoutai Theological College Library – Tonga

In 2005 I spent six months volunteering in the Library of Sia'atoutai Theological College (STC) near the capital Nuku'alofa, Tongatapu, Kingdom of Tonga. This library holds the Kingdom's most significant collection of religious texts. My placement was through Uniting Mission's partner, the Free Wesleyan Church (FWC) of Tonga.

TAFE colleagues donated a set of Dewey, and the National Library of Australia gave temporary access to the National Database for any new additions. Well-founded advice was given not to set high expectations, but I did have many positive experiences.

I was soon in contact with the Tongan Library Association (TLA) when a delegation of New Zealand high school librarians came to distribute donated resources from their 'Adopt a Tongan Library' program. I also assisted with training workshops at the local campus of the University of the South Pacific. Prior to leaving I presented my experiences at STC Library to members of the TLA.

At STC, the card catalogue was the only collection access point beyond library staff personal knowledge. Staff, if religious ministers, could be sent away to fulfil pastoral duties for up to three years. Two of the four library staff were reallocated to other important duties within the campus during the year. It was difficult to train library staff who may lack interest, could be moved, or were selected within a week of my departure.

My main projects were to run workshops, make recommendations, and write reports. I documented procedures and left instructions for staff training on disc, USB, and printouts. I supervised the digitising of lists of Tongan, Pacific, and Thesis special collections held at STC. However, a more rewarding project was working with each faculty member to upgrade their computer skills (web, e-mail, Word, Excel).

Telecommunications and electricity supplies were haphazard, making computers and internet unpredictable and restricting access to student PCs. Tropical environments aren't kind to equipment and insects often set up home inside computer hardware! I was reliant on my laptop when confined to our house due to regular bouts of ill health.

Another project investigated an online library system. I discovered MUSAC (from NZ) had once been introduced but due to a lack of training or support, never implemented. After negotiation across four countries, I introduced part of the Library Management module. Library membership cards were produced for the first time, though barcodes hadn't arrived by the time I departed.

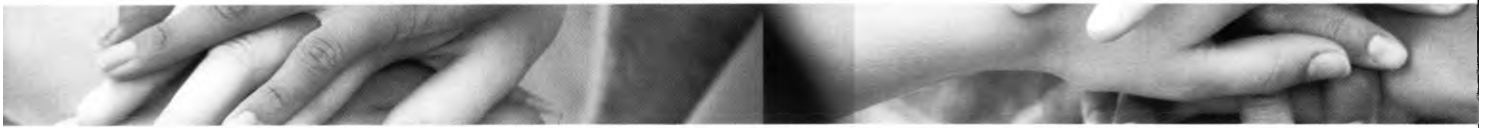
In September we celebrated the role of the library ("Laipeli") in the life of the college community, when library staff organised a Library Open Day. The entire campus participated in friendly team competitions – translating religious texts, trivia treasure hunt, composing and singing songs and poems. At my farewell function, these lovely library songs and poems were repeated.

During vacation breaks I toured other Tongan islands. On 'Eua – a two hour boat ride away – I visited the FWC High School Library. By coincidence I later met the NSW teachers and students on annual exchanges who organised resource donations. Without guidance, donated resources can often be far too advanced. Tongans treat books as precious, so wouldn't consider discarding useless materials, even if space is unavailable. Copies of texts from the NZ curriculum for Years 7–10 are desperately needed.

I also visited public libraries in Ha'apai and Vava'u and saw reliance on donations from Australia and NZ and low staffing and opening hours. Establishment of a public library in Nuku'alofa was my main recommendation to the TLA, as the largest island has no public library.

Sharing a small village house on campus with another female library staff member gave me unprecedented levels of inclusion into Tongan culture, unusual for "papalangi" (Europeans). At every event I was shown great generosity and hospitality, including attending feasts, funerals, graduations, a nine-day annual church conference, festivals, harvests, official events, presentations, and many other cultural events – all due to connections made at STC.

Volunteering isn't only about working. My time was balanced with social activities by joining the Tongan Women's International Social Club (TWISC). Joining another church group resulted in



visiting many homes, as well as scenic and historic places. I met people from varieties of denominations, cultures, countries, and levels of both Pacific and "papalangi" society.

Overall my time in Tonga at STC Library became an amazing cultural, spiritual, professional, practical, and social experience and I encourage you to think about this volunteering option. Qualified librarians are always needed as volunteers in school libraries operated by churches, government, and private interests in Tonga and other Pacific countries.

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## Volunteers – value adding in a small library

It's possibly a bit glib to talk about the social capital a library builds in a community, but the epitome of this force for good in our community is the role played by a dedicated group of library volunteers: they enhance our services and constantly renew our faith in human nature! Our storyteller brings children and parents together for fun and learning, and our computer buddies give confidence to beginners of any age who are finding their computers a challenge.

Other volunteers are a source of reliable, long-term team members who have developed particular skills in areas such as the Home Library Service. They are also the backbone of the group that runs our regular book sales. We try to give them a variety of tasks so their work remains a bit interesting, but they tend to develop their own specialties and take pride in 'their' jobs.

Of course one of the basic tasks our volunteers perform is that of re-shelving. They take a great deal of pride in keeping our collection, and consequently the library itself, looking great. They have an accurate knowledge of what's on the shelves and so can often help our clients to find things they need. We the staff encourage our volunteers to answer questions if they can and to bring clients who need more help to our attention.

There are community libraries in small outlying townships that are facilitated by volunteer groups whose members look after small 'bulk loan' collections. They choose the items to be exchanged every three months and organise them so they are accessible for the local population. These volunteers have developed a great deal of expertise in knowing the requirements of their local community and truly add value to our library service.

About a year ago the opportunity arose for the employment of extra casual staff. Two of our long-term volunteers expressed interest, gained the positions, and have become integral members of the team. They already knew how things worked and were liked and appreciated by the permanent staff and many of the clients. They have both now begun studying by distance education: one a Certificate 3 course and the other a Library Technician course. Their enthusiasm has rejuvenated our permanent staff.

The library is often one of the first places new residents visit and if they have been involved in volunteering in a library in their previous location, they are keen to do so again. It's a great way to meet people of similar interests and to feel part of the town right from the start. As we are situated in an area where the populations of retirees and 'tree changers' are increasing, this social function is quite important. It is valuable for the new arrivals and we benefit from the services of some really talented and experienced volunteers from a fascinating range of backgrounds.



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