

WHERE WOULD LIBRARIES BE WITHOUT OUR VOLUNTEERS?

ALIA couldn't do what it does without the hundreds of active member volunteers in the Groups and on the committees throughout the organisation and many libraries also have a cohort of faithful community volunteers who make a significant contribution to their success. South Australian-based member Lisa Preston has some tips on the work volunteers can do in libraries and what makes a good volunteer manager.

Have you ever thought about the volunteers in your organisation? The volunteer provides the extra special community services to any organisation without the expectation of monetary gain. Having good volunteers is an advantage to the library and the community.

Volunteers in libraries add free community connection, taking on a wide variety of very important internal and outreach tasks. Many libraries use volunteers to shelve items, repair books, coordinate book discussion groups, run English classes and deliver resources to home-bound clients. The State Library of South Australia volunteers make the collections more accessible to researchers and provide services that would otherwise not be possible.

“These are the people in your communities that do advocacy work on your behalf. What better way to connect to the community than supporting and encouraging volunteers?”

The *National Survey on Volunteering Issues 2010* reported that people volunteer because it gives them a sense of belonging and making a difference to the community (www.volunteeringaustralia.org).

According to VolunteeringSA, volunteer activities provide personal development, social interaction and development of skills. Volunteers expect to share their skills and knowledge in return for gaining experience and networking. Volunteers also volunteer to network in areas of interest or keep connected to their profession. One example here in South Australia is the Royal Geographic Society of SA, which runs completely on volunteers, many of whom are retired librarians who want to continue making a contribution but without the pressure of paid employment.

It's important for volunteers to have a meaningful role, enabling them to not only provide a welcome service to the library but also be an advocate for these services of the organisation. If you are setting out to attract, or retain, volunteers for your library or information service, a great place to start is ALIA's policy of volunteers (www.alia.org.au/policies/volunteer.workers.html)

The next step is to make it easy for volunteers to find out what roles and benefits there are for volunteers in your organisation. Too often this information is buried deep in the organisation website. But probably the most important resource to have is a good volunteer manager. It is their job to enthuse and encourage the volunteers, making sure the tasks are appropriate and relevant to the organisation and each individual.

They also need to make sure that all volunteers are valued and recognised.

Volunteering is also beneficial to new graduates of library programs. Many small research libraries would welcome new graduates and appreciate the extra knowledge that new graduates can share. This is a good way for new graduates to connect to the professional community and learn about different kinds of libraries without the pressure of a placement or paid employment.

Many libraries use volunteers to promote and provide services that would not otherwise be available for the public. These are the people in your communities that do advocacy work on your behalf. What better way to connect to the community than supporting and encouraging volunteers?

Lisa Preston

lisa.preston2@bigpond.com

National Volunteers Week runs from May 9 to 15 – How will you celebrate your volunteers?

www.volunteeringaustralia.org

Quality volunteer management means:

- Comprehensive induction processes
- Daily interaction with staff
- Recognition for achievement
- Ensure tasks are meaningful to the organisation
- A good balance between the needs of the volunteer and the organisation

INNOVATIVE MANAGEMENT WINS AWARD FOR YARRA PLENTY

Yarra Plenty Regional Library (YPRL) has won the innovative management initiative award at Victoria's annual Local Government LGPro Awards for Excellence.

YPRL won the award for its involvement with the *Being the Best We Can* project, delivered in partnership with the Public Libraries Victoria Network and the State Library of Victoria, with advice and support from the Australian Continuous Improvement Group.

YPRL Chair, Councillor Jenny Mulholland says the *Being the Best We Can* evaluation enables public libraries to understand the effect they have on individuals and communities and how well their service meets users' needs.

“Being the Best We Can has enabled us to identify and understand our strengths, as well as pinpoint areas for improvement,” Councillor Mulholland said.

“We are continually working towards making YPRL

the best it can be so we are delighted to receive this recognition.”

The Innovative Management Initiative award rewards initiatives that demonstrate new ways of leading, facilitating, administering, controlling or ensuring a particular outcome is achieved in the local government sector. These are initiatives that make positive changes to the management of organisations, processes, practices or projects.

The library undertook extensive self-evaluation and focused on quality assurance for the pilot project, and was awarded a four-star accolade out of a possible five stars by external reviewers.

The audit found YPRL to be an innovative industry leader with an excellent range of programs and services, and ground-breaking in the e-library area.