

## LIBRARIAN IN TRAINING

Library assistant CATHERINE TRACEY recounts how short stints of volunteering can boost your LIS career when you're starting out.

For my 50th birthday present to myself I applied for a Bachelor of Information Studies course via distance education at Charles Sturt University. As I clicked the send button to accept the offer of study, little did I know – some 35 years after graduating from high school – that I was in for the ride of a lifetime. I have been working as a school library assistant for over 10 years and all that time I was quietly yet constantly prodded by my two teacher librarians to take the plunge and study for the qualifications I craved.

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Now into my second year and surprising myself by successfully passing subjects – with the odd credit or distinction thrown in for good measure – I decided to venture out of my comfort zone and become a volunteer. First cab off the rank was the 8th International Evidence Based Library and Information Practice Conference (EBLIP8), to be held in Queensland in July 2015. I was to be a tour guide – to meet and greet and assist where needed. I was as eager as a school student on their first day at school and keen to chat to delegates and learn. What I wasn't aware of was just how much information and knowledge would be shared at such conferences and that I would be able to sit in on lectures, keynote addresses, chats, workshops and general mentoring. Knowledge was traded between the experienced, the novice and the well-travelled librarians.

I witnessed empathy between author and publisher in conversations that revealed the promise of more support and understanding for each other in the submission process. I heard the passion of keynote speakers for literacy and the importance of research. I listened to the chatter over coffee at morning tea and lunch about how important these conferences are and how the sharing of ideas promotes confidence and eagerness to get back to one's own library to start putting new ideas into practice. Twitter further enabled the



Catherine Tracey gained valuable experience and knowledge by volunteering at a conference.

sharing of ideas and #EBLIP8 ran hot. This excitement about collaboration became infectious, even for the volunteers. We were all so eager to listen and learn. We took notes, photographs and, like sponges, soaked up as much information as possible.

Even though I had worked in libraries for 10 years, I came to the conference as a novice university student, wondering what the world of libraries, literacy and learning could offer me. I paid attention and revelled in the knowledge that I had chosen the right path. While the future of libraries can sometimes seem bleak, I believe that the enthusiasm of the people at this conference will only support and communicate the importance of libraries to anyone who is willing to listen. Libraries are not just important to community, school or collegial environments – they're a necessity.

I went to this conference as a volunteer to meet and greet but I came away with future contacts and hands-on experience through the workshops. I discovered a joy in research and a knowledge bank that increased through exciting collaboration. I am keen to continue volunteering, but more importantly, I am eager to become the librarian in me and fulfil my desire to make literacy available, accessible and enjoyable for all. 🌟

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