



Left: Melanie Mutch and Megan Tolnay

What does career success look like? Is there a blueprint for it – or is it just a southern suburb of Perth? In part one of a three-part series, GREG BELL asks innovators and industry leaders about their measures of success and what it means to them.

It's Australian Library Week 1974. A lack of funding for regional library services in the western suburbs of Adelaide means that 214,000 residents rely on the small West Torrens Library to provide for them. Only six municipal libraries exist in the whole of South Australia. Enter librarian Arthur Mortimer from the South Australian Institute of Technology (SAIT) and his radical group CROW (Concerned Residents of the West). Arthur, along with his friends and family who form the bulk of CROW, have turned the SAIT library into a community library, getting 300 Port Adelaide residents to travel to it and contrast their local offering with the luxury of a funded and well-appointed library.

For Library Week 1975, Arthur and CROW rent an old shoe shop in a busy retail street and fill it with books and resources. They get thousands of signatures on petitions and send them to the federal government, pleading for more funding and resources. The result?

Nothing.

In 1976, the Horton report into public libraries in Australia is delivered to parliament. No response. For Library Week 1977, Mortimer and CROW threaten to borrow every book and resource from the State Library of South Australia. Taking inspiration from the Horton report and the Dr Seuss character who hatches an egg, Arthur and CROW send origami elephants filled with egg powder to all federal candidates for the upcoming election. They follow up with chocolate Easter eggs and even fertilised and illustrated duck eggs to some. The newly re-elected premier of South Australia, Don Dunstan, pledges two million dollars on this proviso: '... take \$2 million for your public libraries, but get Arthur Mortimer off my back!'

We'll hear more about Arthur later, but let's turn to two librarians having success now. Melanie Mutch and Megan Tolnay both work full time in Sydney public libraries, and together they are the co-founders of Librarians' Choice, a not-for-profit association launched in 2016 that provides a monthly list of the top ten new-release titles in Australia, as voted by library staff.

Megan has been a librarian since 2003. She first worked in photography and studied to be a psychologist, but became fascinated with the digital era of information and the developing role for libraries to play.

Asked for her tips on making an impact in the

information profession, Megan urged LIS professionals to take every opportunity, particularly those outside our comfort zones. 'Careers aren't necessarily a linear trajectory. There are detours, corners and side lanes, and sometimes this is where your professional gold will be. Also have the courage to fail. It means that you tried.'

Melanie was inspired to become a librarian while working as a library assistant during her undergraduate studies. Like Megan, throughout her career Melanie has made sure to take every opportunity, including participating in leadership programs that inspired and challenged her to rethink what she was capable of achieving professionally.

Melanie's advice for success is to take control of your professional development. While this might include paying to attend conferences and training in your own time, professional networks and free webinars can provide exciting ways to increase your skills and exposure.

Inspired by LibraryReads, a similar program in the US, Melanie and Megan realised that librarians working together are a powerful group that could be harnessed to benefit libraries nationally. Developing Librarian's Choice has required many hours of hard work and determination, but it's work that they love and which allows them to

use their combined skills to achieve a positive impact. Megan and Melanie continue to build partnerships with publishers and the library community, and encourage each other towards greater success.

Let's return to 1978 and Arthur Mortimer, who has just received unprecedented funding for South Australian public libraries, on the condition that he keep quiet from now on. He didn't, of course. Arthur petitioned politicians and wrote letters to the editor about library funding for at least 30 more years.

In 1996, Arthur received a Merit Award from ALIA for his lifelong devotion to libraries. In return, he provided a recipe for success to all information professionals, an outlook similar to that embraced by Megan and Melanie decades later: work hard and with inspiration. Gather your supporters and lead them with ambition. Face obstacles with wit and persistence.

Sometimes success requires that we put our hopes and hard work in an egg and ask someone else to sit on it. But often we can hatch them ourselves. 🐣

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