

Mentoring success stories

Paul Genoni, ALIA WA Mentoring committee

Interest in mentoring in Western Australia first became apparent in 1990 when the Specials Section brought the issue to the attention of the Branch Council. Specials members were concerned at the lack of support that was available to some new members of the profession who found themselves at any early stage of their careers in demanding positions, but without having had the opportunity to establish a network of colleagues who they could rely upon for independent advice and support.

As a result a committee was formed to implement a mentoring scheme in Western Australia, and the ALIA (WA) Mentoring Program was launched in 1991. The program has functioned since its inception as a means of promoting and facilitating one-to-one mentoring partnerships.

Ideally, the committee believes that a crucial aspect of mentoring which differentiates it from other professional development roles such as coaching, is that it is a long-term relationship, and that in order to encourage partnerships that are ongoing and productive requires skills training for both mentors and mentorees.

The mentoring committee has therefore attempted to assist participants by offering both informal support (through social meetings as a basis for the exchange of information and ideas), and more formal support through structured training sessions. Both of these means of support have been the outcome of monitoring the progress of the mentoring partnerships and talking with participants about their needs.

Currently the ALIA (WA) Mentoring Program operates with the following mission 'To facilitate the creation, development and maintenance of mutually satisfactory mentoring relationships between members of the Australian Library and Information Association.'

The committee has instituted a second form of mentoring, which we refer to as group mentoring. The idea for group mentoring arose from an identification of the particular needs and problems faced by newly graduated students. It had become apparent that some of these new entrants to the profession were reluctant to undertake a one-to-one mentoring partnership as they felt they would be impinging upon the time of a 'senior' member of the profession. It was therefore believed that they might be more inclined to accept some ALIA support which

involved them in a less direct form of mentoring. The Group Mentoring Program was therefore devised and run as a trial in 1996. It has involved a group of eleven graduating students from 1995, meeting monthly for twelve months, with the meetings facilitated by two experienced members of the profession. The meetings have focussed on the skills needed to establish oneself as an information professional. In the early stages this involved meetings which concentrated on job seeking skills, but over the course of the year as most of the group have found employment, the focus has moved to issues related to the establishment of a personal and professional profile within the workplace. The exact issues to be covered are decided by the participants, several of whom are then given the task of organising and managing the meeting. During the course of the year they have called upon a range of established professionals to meet with them and discuss their selected issues.

At the same time, the two facilitators of the group mentoring program have remained available to meet individually with the participants, thereby maintaining the personal contact that is an important aspect of mentoring.

The program has resulted in an increase in ALIA membership from graduating students who wished to join the program; job opportunities becoming available to participants as the result of ALIA members being aware of the program; and a continuation and extension of the peer support networks which new graduates create during their time as students.

The ALIA (WA) Mentoring Committee is also looking at other means of extending the concept and benefits of mentoring. Another recent initiative has been the implementation of what we currently refer to as 'e-mail mentoring'. The method involved here involves (as the name implies) a mentoring relationship conducted using e-mail. This is being trialed as a means of conducting a partnership when the mentor is a very senior member of the profession who would not otherwise be available for meeting with the mentoree. Two such partnerships have recently been negotiated, and are being monitored. E-mail mentoring may also be a means of assisting those who are located in the more isolated reaches of our vast state who wish to avail themselves of the advantages of mentoring.



The first time I thought about becoming a librarian was in London where I worked as a library assistant for one year. When I saw the diverse and interesting work that the librarians performed, I thought to myself, 'I can do that', and so when I returned I signed up!

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