

# Library technicians

## Twenty-five years old and still going strong

First, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome you to the first regular column for library technicians. Over the coming months we will be looking at CPD, mentoring, group profiles and award winners. I would encourage members and groups to contribute.

Last year, the ALIA National Library Technician's Group celebrated twenty-five years as a recognised group of ALIA, along with the South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland Groups. This year, Tasmania celebrates twenty-five years as an organised group of library technicians. We all know of our achievements since our beginnings, but what of our future?

After the formation of our section in ALIA, our numbers grew from 42 in 1979, to 238 in 1990, and then to 420 in 1997. Until 2003, membership has held steady at around 426, unfortunately, over the past year numbers have dropped to 392. This is a small number compared with the ABS 2002 census which shows there are 5900 people who consider themselves library technicians. Where are these people and what are their reasons for *not* joining ALIA?

There has been much discussion over the past few years, and I imagine it will continue into the future, as to the value of ALIA membership for library technicians. There are the obvious benefits, but there are other reasons which many may not be aware. Reduced fees for conference attendance are desirable, but what are some of the other benefits?

The Library Technician of the Year Award recognises the achievements and contribution of library technicians to our sector and profession. The 'Dunn and Wilson Scholarship' provides the recipient with the opportunity to in-

crease his or her professional occupational experience by undertaking a project of interest that relates to the practice of library technicians. If you ask the previous winners, I am sure they will tell you of their honour in winning such awards, and the benefits that they have gained at both a personal and a career level.

Some of you may be unaware of ALIA's industrial services program. This service can be accessed by ALIA members who have a problem in the workplace: for example, those needing help with employment contracts or employment terms and conditions. Depending on the nature of the problem, ALIA can make representation to a range of bodies from employer or government agencies, to trade unions and other professional bodies. Many of the problems that arise may be resolved after a short discussion, but some may be more complex and require careful and detailed consideration. It is useful to keep this service in mind, particularly with the changing nature of our employment environment.

In the area of education, ALIA has ensured that library technician courses remain relevant to the needs of our profession. We may grumble about the constant changes in these courses, but these changes have meant that we are at the forefront of meeting the changing needs in the library workplace. How many of you have been in the unfortunate situation of moving between states, particularly in the early 1980s, and finding the only course on offer was not recognised by our Association? I have had this experience, twice! Through ALIA's support it is now easier to move around between states and territories and to continue our education.

Another benefit of ALIA membership is its Continuing Professional Development (CPD) program. There are a number of areas within this program that may be of some benefit to the newer library technician graduate:

The *ALIA Career Development Kit* is designed to assist you to build your professional knowledge and skills, and to set objectives to meet your career needs. This kit can also help you to keep track of the knowledge, skills and experiences that you have gained, and to determine your professional development priorities.

The Continuing Professional Development (CPD) scheme has been designed to assist you to maintain and

broaden your knowledge and skills. It will allow you to develop the personal qualities that will help you to enhance your career-long professional development, and have that commitment recognised by others.

Other benefits, like the 'aliaLIBTEC' and 'employLT' e-lists are services to which even those who are not ALIA members can subscribe.

How can we retain our current membership in ALIA and attract new members? Is it unrealistic to aim for a library technician membership of 1000 by 2007 and 1500 by 2009? It is possible? Imagine the voice that such a membership level would give us within ALIA. This is my goal as national convenor; it is what our committee needs to work towards.

There is some fun in all this. Working out what we would like to see this plan achieve for us can lead to increased membership, professional development specifically related to library technicians, opportunities to be more pro-active rather than just reactive, and developing links with non-ALIA groups.

Other ideas have been mooted, including a national mentoring scheme specifically for library technicians where new graduates can link-up with existing members to discuss things like career goals, and how to solve problems at work. This can be much like the mentoring group that currently exists in Western Australia. There is also a suggestion of a new graduate kit that could contain information on ALIA and its services, the local and national library technicians' contact details, Library Technician Day, employLT and aliaLIBTEC information.

Our group, and ALIA as a whole, are only as strong and successful as we, the members, make it. The old cliché of 'you only get out of it what you are willing to put in' is just as true now as when it was first coined. I would like to challenge you all to think about the next twenty-five years and what we can accomplish, as well as reflect on what we have achieved over the last twenty-five years.

**Rebecca Evans, convenor, ALIA National Library Technician Group.**

*Please e-mail your suggestions or comments on this new column to [rebeccaevans@bigpond.com](mailto:rebeccaevans@bigpond.com).*

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