

Give it a go!

After 8 years of studying full time, working part time and raising 3 children, I was exhausted. I resigned my permanent hours at Yarra Plenty Regional Library (YPRL) Service and travelled overseas with my family. While sitting in a coffee house in Ireland, I received a phone call from the YPRL Human Resource Manager asking if I would be interested in a short term contract to help in the administration of the collaborative Statewide Learning 2.0 Program, to be run by the State Library of Victoria together with Vicnet and administered by YPRL. Though nervous at the magnitude of the task, I was extremely lucky to work in partnership with a wonderful mentor Lynette Lewis, Co-ordinator of Online Services, who was supportive and generous with her knowledge, experience and time.

By now most staff in the information field will have heard of Helen Blowers' '23 things' program, an online exploration of Web 2.0 technologies. Given its vision and 'thinking on the horizon' ethos, YPRL was the first library in Australia to offer the program to its staff in 2006. This training initiative led to YPRL being asked to administer the program for all Victorian public library workers teaching participants about blogs, wikis, RSS feeds, podcasts and other online tools. The program saw Lynette and myself setting up 136 blogs for 45 different library services across Victoria. Over 1000 participants registered for the 13 week program.

It was an extremely challenging undertaking that offered great personal and professional rewards. There were the usual technological stumbling blocks with some libraries experiencing slow, restricted or sporadic access to the internet. Having staff with varying degrees of experience and knowledge, from those with IT proficiency to complete novices, worked well with the more confident staff becoming mentors for their colleagues. The program also saw staff from remote regional areas connect with their urban counterparts, posting comments on each other's blogs and offering tips and support. It would be fair to say that some staff enjoyed it more than others; some will take these skills and use them on a daily basis whilst others will never revisit any of the technologies explored. But on completion almost all participants, whether fully satisfied or not, said that they were glad to have participated in the training as it offered something for everyone.

In my relatively short career, the time spent involved in the Statewide Victorian Public Libraries Learning 2.0 Program has been by far the most rewarding. Personally, my confidence has grown and I have now attended the Aurora Leadership Institute, presented at workshops and seminars, co-authored papers, attended conferences and become an integral part of the training that YPRL offers its staff. I have created new networks, met fascinating people from around the country and become more involved in ALIA. I have trained private corporations in Web 2.0 technologies and presented at numerous institutes that are considering running their own version of the Learning 2.0 program. Through YPRL, Lynette and I are now gearing up for the implementation of the program to all staff in Victorian public school libraries. It's an exciting time and one I would not be enjoying if I hadn't actively participated in the initial training.

Mentoring is an important activity for new graduates; one that is often missing. I was fortunate to find a fantastic mentor, but I advise all graduates to watch their colleagues, ask their advice and take every opportunity that presents itself to explore and learn. The people you work with are an invaluable learning resource. Keep abreast of what's happening in the information world, be participative and most of all, when the opportunity knocks 'give it a go'.

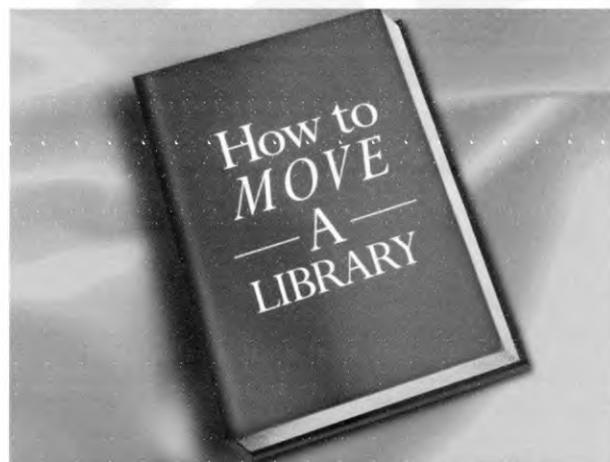
I will be finishing up a second contract at YPRL in June, and then, who knows? After this experience, I know I have the skills, confidence and ability to do anything.

"Opportunities are usually disguised as hard work" ... Chinese Proverb

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