

to be much better resourced and are held in higher regard than those in the UK, and their library buildings are well maintained and modern. Mackay Regional Council Libraries run a sleek, dynamic, customer-focused library service and I've been very impressed with the level of professionalism and commitment displayed here. The libraries here always come out top in any satisfaction survey of council services, and I can see why that is. My job at the DWP is purely desk-based – we have no face-to-face contact with our customers. I spend a lot of my working day cataloguing and working on the computer; any enquiries we get are dealt with via e-mail. Working here in a public library means being out on the floor with customers for a large portion of my day and this has been a challenge and also a joy! I hadn't realised how much I missed the dynamism of working with customers. Of course difficult situations always arise when dealing with the public but these are balanced out by the positive feedback you get from the majority of library customers.

#### 4. What challenges have you faced?

##### DONNA:

- Navigating around Quarry House in Leeds where I'm based. It's HUGE, and there must be thousands of people working here. I still get lost if I take a wrong turn.
- Understanding that different methodologies and approaches to tasks are not necessarily inferior to my own. (I can sometimes be a bit of a 'bull at a gate').
- Encouraging colleagues to get enthusiastic about the expertise they possess and the services they do, and can provide. As in Australia, promotion of our profession is an area where we have to be constantly vigilant.
- Trying not to look like a twit when I can't understand what someone is saying due to the accent.
- Getting my head around the UK Public Service, which I don't imagine is that different to our own. The DWP is just one of many government departments and employs over 100 000 people!

**GRAHAM:** Before I arrived I didn't realise that my inability to drive would prove such a hurdle. Mackay is a small town in regional Queensland and does not have anything like the access to public transport that I enjoy in Leeds and the UK – and everyone drives here! Thankfully, Mackay does have an airport so I have been able to see other parts of the country, and I have been blessed with an obliging set of colleagues and friends who have been very kind in offering to take me to places that are only accessible by car, such as the beautiful hinterland of the Pioneer Valley near Mackay. My lack of personal transport, which has been one of my frustrations since arriving here, has ironically enabled many of my friendships to blossom because people have offered to take me to all sorts of wonderful places. I have had some great experiences that would have been quite different if I had gone off driving on my own, so really it has been a blessing in disguise!

#### 5. What has been the biggest benefit of the exchange so far?

##### DONNA:

- Confidence in my ability to adapt to a variety of systems, requirements, and enquiries has been boosted enormously.
- Also more confident socially. If I can mix it in Yorkshire, I can mix it anywhere!
- I feel my previous library experience has been of some benefit to the DWP and I also feel that the knowledge I am gaining will serve the Mackay Regional Council when I return. Sometimes a fresh perspective on things can make all the difference.

- Have met some truly lovely people both professionally and socially, and think I can add to my list of 'life-long' friends.
- Gaining an in depth experience of a different (although similar) culture, and seeing all the places I never thought I'd get to see.
- Seeing my daughter grow with similar experiences and generally 'drink it all in'.

**GRAHAM:** My last experience of working in public libraries in the UK was not a wholly positive one so I was nervous about coming back to public libraries, but I am pleased to say that working in Mackay has really restored my faith in public libraries. The library service here is positive, committed, and forward-thinking with strong leadership and clear goals. I have learned so much and also feel that I have contributed a lot to the service. As Donna says, a fresh perspective is very valuable for the host organisation and I think that my different experiences have offered an alternative solution to some of the challenges that Mackay faces.

The biggest benefit by far has been meeting some wonderful people. The staff at Mackay libraries have been so kind and welcoming and I have already made some great friendships that will endure long after I return to the UK. I have also met some lovely locals outside of work – Australians are so up-front and friendly that it's impossible not to! The fun times we have shared and the memories I have made will be the most valuable things I will take home with me.

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## An American tale

In early 2007 I received a letter that would quite literally change my life – I had won a Green Card in United States Green Card Lottery. In August 2008, after a year and a half of background checking, form submitting, a consular interview, and wrapping up my Australian life, I immigrated to the United States and set up a home in New York City. I did not place much importance on job hunting beforehand as I wanted time to settle in and, from what I had been monitoring for eighteen months prior to my move, the United States library market did not seem too bad. I had just resigned from six years in a wonderful role at the Victorian Parliamentary Library, participated in the ALIA Professional Development Program and had many years of ALIA service behind me, and completed an MBIT from RMIT University – so I saw myself in good stead.

But if you remember it was in August 2008 that the economic crisis spun out of control. As the Australian dollar plummeted against the greenback, I saw my job prospects evaporate into dust.

Throughout this time I learned a lot about finding a job in United States. The main points of advice I can offer are:

- The job application process is a drawn out affair, and much longer than in Australia (as well the UK from my experience there.) It is not unheard of to hear back from applications that had been submitted more than five months earlier.
- Working in an academic library is a lot different to the academic libraries in Australia. It is worth examining these differences if you are in that field and wish to engage in the American experience. Many librarians here work towards tenure and at many institutions two Masters degrees are required.

# INTERNATIONAL LIBRARIANSHIP

- Attending professional development and networking events has been surprising as I found that a lot of the issues and feelings that would be bought up on ALIA e-lists/at ALIA Victoria meetings or at the NLS were very similar here.
- Temporary work has almost disappeared in the current market.
- If you work in the legal field, many local library associations and library schools offer law librarianship training in US law as either seminars or by studying a few subjects. Although, for many positions, a law degree or Juris Doctor are required.
- Searching Craigslist for a job can be a huge time waster...but could also land you a dream job! Nevertheless be forewarned. I am comfortable stating that many, if not most, of the job listings on Craigslist are fraudulent.
- A willingness to move for a job should be seriously considered. While the siren song of the American Big City experience may be luring you here, it may be advantageous to forestall these dreams and spend a year or two in a regional area to get US experience on your CV.
- Learn how Americans expect their job applications. I did not apply for one position that expected key selection criteria to be addressed as is traditionally done in Australia and changed my resume completely to a format appropriate for the US market.
- Expect to provide a detailed explanation of your qualifications – especially if you worked in a government department in Australia. Be prepared to describe what that work involved and what the department actually is.

- Public libraries are struggling for funding and dealing with massive cutbacks in the US. In order to earn a living wage in New York City, I could not consider a job in one. If I was in a regional area, this would be a different story.

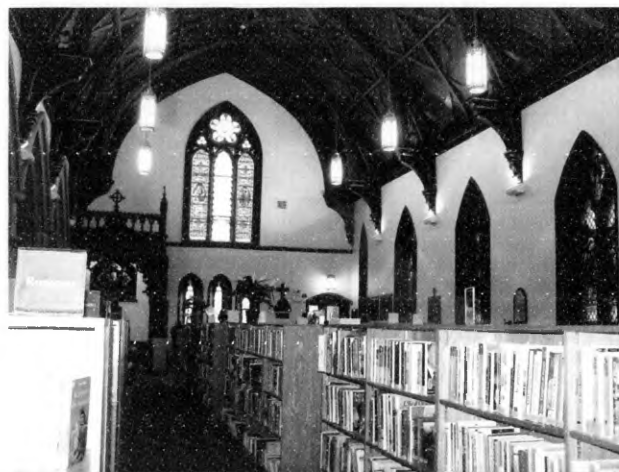
In the end I opted to look outside the traditional library environment that I was accustomed to and was extremely fortunate to find employment at the American Australian Association as Technology Associate. I monitor and maintain the membership database, the website/content management system, and provide general IT assistance. There are days where I still long for the library environment that I called "home" for so long (and yes, I do miss reference requests!), but in times like these, when I work one block from Wall Street and can see firsthand the effect that the economic crisis has had on the American workplace, it is a blessing to be employed. Another bonus? Being able to work in an environment where there are always Tim Tams in the fridge!

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## Librairie ou bibliothèque?

Supported by a phrase book and an inadequate memory of high school French, it was going to be interesting to try to locate and navigate libraries in Canada and France. What would be different, what would be the same in the very small sample that I visited?

In Quebec, the task was made easier by the hospitality and patience of colleagues at the IFLA Congress in August 2008. The first library I visited was a well-signposted branch public library a block or so away from the Congress centre, in a deconsecrated church complete with graveyard. Inside, the Bibliothèque Saint Jean Baptiste is easier to recognise with low shelving, children's area, reading tables, and a bank of internet PCs receiving a pretty good work out from members and itinerants such as the IFLA delegates. The collections looked fresh, if somewhat uniform due to standardised processing, the staff friendly and skilled in identifying the verbally challenged like me before they opened their mouths to unwittingly mangle French.



*Bibliothèque Quebec*

Next stop the Montreal bus trip. This meant that I could see some of the Quebec countryside and enjoy the company of librarians from national, state, and university libraries in Europe and North America. The BANQ tour comprised the state library of Quebec and the main archives building. The archives are housed in an aggregated building which brings together a former mansion, a former technical college, and a modern extension that links it all together with an exhibition space, cafeteria, and offices.

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