

# WHY NOT CREATE YOUR OWN DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES



**G**hylène Palmer works at Murdoch University Library and has been a member of the ALIAWest committee for five years, enjoying the professional development, mentoring and social aspects that ALIA membership brings to new graduates as well as other library professionals. About a year ago, Ghylène heard the 2014 International Federation of Library Association and Institutions (IFLA) annual conference was going to be in Lyon, France and was looking for volunteer helpers. She decided to apply.

I initially thought the organising committee might not be interested in employing a French-speaking Australian to work as a volunteer in France, but I was determined to try my best. A few months after submitting an application and a resume, I was contacted for a phone interview (which was conducted in French and English), and a few weeks later, I was accepted as a volunteer for IFLA Lyon 2014. I was about to embark on the library adventure of a lifetime!

Although I was about to be thrown completely out of my comfort zone, all I could see were the amazing career possibilities and networking opportunities this new challenge could bring.

The organising committee allocated daily shifts in various areas of the conference, such as visitor information desk, registration information desk, translation headsets centre, living signs and the interpreter booth.

Some of my most memorable shifts include the US Caucus, where I met some amazing American delegates who have convinced me that the upcoming American Library Association Annual Conference with 20,000 delegates would be worth my while. I found myself helping out in the interpreters' booth, listening to presentations being interpreted simultaneously in six languages, and leading a tour to the United Nations Library in Geneva. The highlight of the tour for me was undeniably the UN Library, which



encompasses an impressive collection of resources. It is, first and foremost, highly valued by its organisation.

Out of 530 applications, 295 volunteers were part of IFLA Lyon, comprising of one Australian (moi), three Africans, one French resident of Denmark, one Swede, two Germans, two Italians, one Belgian and one Luxembourger. Our registration, accommodation, food and travel expenses while in Lyon were covered by IFLA.

We became known as 'the smurfs' (due to our beautiful blue volunteer vests) and we worked solidly on creating a seamless conference experience for over 3,500 delegates from 120 countries. Having a behind-the-scenes experience, and seeing firsthand the amount of work involved in putting together a conference of this calibre is beyond what I could have ever imagined.

I also made the most of the times I was not allocated a shift. I attended a session on management of library associations and heard about the great work that ALIA is doing on the future of the profession and how this relates to the IFLA trend report. I also attended the General Assembly, where all the associations from around the world have their say about IFLA's constitution and strategic direction.

As an Australian, I had a great sense of pride to be at an international conference where Australia was so well represented (we had about 66 Australian delegates in attendance). I travelled halfway across the world to make international connections, but I discovered that my Australian and New Zealand connections also grew more than I would have expected.

I also took the opportunity to experience the non-library aspects of Lyon. The Lyon sights, food and lifestyle certainly played a considerable part in making the 80th IFLA World Library and Information Congress a magical learning experience.

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