



GRAB A GRANT — AND GO!



Victorian librarian **GEMMA STEELE** successfully applied for a travel fund grant that she used to take herself to Adelaide, where she attended the ALIA National 2016 Conference and toured several libraries.

Back in October last year I was lucky enough to receive a grant from the Melbourne UNESCO City of Literature Travel Fund to help me to travel to Adelaide to visit some special libraries and attend the ALIA National 2016 Conference.

The Travel Fund provides grants of up to \$3,000 for people working in the literary sector – including writers,

editors, publishers and librarians – enabling them to enhance their work through travel. Attending the ALIA conference is one of the best ways to keep up to date with the latest on emerging and existing library trends, enabling me to improve our library operations and share this knowledge with my colleagues and other librarians in my network. ALIA conferences are also one of the best places to extend your network as they are attended by professionals from all sectors throughout Australia and the rest of the world, so I took advantage of this opportunity by making several new contacts.

Data was still a consistent theme at the conference, but it was interesting to see that the conversation seems to have now shifted towards data management, whereas at the VALA conference earlier this year, and through my professional reading, it seemed that until now the focus was very much on big data, linked data and analytics. Research data management is an area I would like to do some professional development in, as Museum Victoria is full of researchers, and I was happy to hear that there are a couple of free online resources available to help me get started: 23 (research data) Things from the Australian National Data Service (bit.ly/2cwP3UN) and the Research Data Management Guide on the University of Queensland Library's website (bit.ly/2cbQNDDE).

Another theme was improving training and increasing professional development opportunities for librarians, which was particularly evident in Belinda Weaver's



A packed audience in the main hall.



Adelaide City Library entrance



SLSA Story Wall Collage

presentation, 'Next Generation Librarian Training', in which she called on librarians to develop their skills in order for the profession to become 'bulletproof to survive'. She said, 'We have to be careful about losing the ground that we have ... [we have become] too invested and can't see outside ourselves.' Belinda also called out library and information studies courses, stating that most have no hands-on computational instruction in areas such as digital repositories or systems management, and she said that courses need to 'come down from the realm of the abstract and become concrete'.

Professional development was a theme that also ran through Friday's Special Libraries Summit*, along with advocacy, research and best practice, and building support within a broader network of special libraries with shared priorities. The summit saw participants from special libraries in government, health, law, research and other fields come together and discuss the issues affecting the sector, with the aim of developing the basis for a collaborative national action plan.

Following the session, which took the format of roundtable discussion with presentations from leaders in special libraries, a seven-point action plan was outlined with areas for specials to develop, such as demonstrating the value of special libraries and mapping the sector, greater collaboration within the sector, scoping collaborative projects and progressing the skills of special librarians in a meaningful way.

I also went to Adelaide with the intention of visiting other libraries. I will take any opportunity that I get to visit another library, which I do through both my work and the ALIA Vic Specials group, because it is easy to become insular and stagnant if you are a special librarian working in a small library. Visiting other libraries is a great opportunity to get out of your own space and see what others are doing.

Among the libraries I visited were the South Australian Museum Library and the Research Library of the Art Gallery of South Australia. There are relatively few museum and gallery libraries across Australia, so it was very helpful to visit similar library services and compare their service to our own as well as deepen my connection with the librarians there.

My trip to Adelaide was extremely valuable, and I would like to thank the Melbourne City of Literature Office for helping me to get there. 🌟

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* For more information on the proceedings and outcomes of the Special Libraries Summit, contact Sue McKerracher (Sue.McKerracher@alia.org.au).