

My Work as Library Volunteer

Jeanette Warne

Volunteer, Kenmore Christian College, Brisbane

Until my 'retirement' in January 1992 I was a Registered Nursing Sister providing care for residents in an Aged Persons Home. The then Principal of Kenmore Christian College, Rodney Tippett, heard that I was retiring and approached me asking if I would be prepared to provide oversight of the college library in a voluntary capacity. In the past, it had been maintained part-time by a student supervised by a faculty member. This was proving to be an inadequate arrangement.

I replied that as a nurse I knew *nothing* about libraries. I could hardly find my way around the local public library. Mr Tippett explained that while the College had no funds available to pay me a salary, they were prepared to underwrite the cost of training me as a library technician at an Institute of TAFE.

Suddenly I was confronted with a mid-life career change - and I decided to take the plunge! For the next three and a half years I attended TAFE part-time and quickly put into practice my learning as I also maintained the KCC library part-time.

Advantages of the Situation

- **New Skills**

I went from being a (fast) two finger typist to a touch typist (even if a very slow, not so accurate one). I learnt that Pettee is a cataloguing system and not being small minded. I now have an Associate Diploma in Applied Science, Library Technician.

- **Flexible Working Hours**

I can choose work hours which suit me and fit into my family and social life.

- **Social Contacts**

My social contacts broadened immediately through TAFE and KCC contacts. I also found that there is a strong network amongst theological library staff in Brisbane. This has now broadened further through contacts made at the recent ANZTLA Conference.

- **Purpose in Life**

My whole perspective of opportunity for Christian service has been enlarged.

- **Freedom to Say NO!**

Because I am not being paid, I am not afraid of losing my job if I decline to do something with which I do not feel comfortable.

Disadvantages of the Situation

- **No Pay**

I must stress that although my time is given voluntarily, there was a reciprocation by KCC as they paid all my TAFE costs, including the provision of expensive text books. The College has

also been generous in other areas. For example, it was very pleased to pay all my costs for the ANZTLA Conference.

• **Work Hours**

At one stage circumstances caused my hours to become full-time. I have since been able to reduce them, and with odd exceptions, keeping to these reduced hours. However, because work hours are flexible, there can be a tendency to see things that need doing so you keep going and complete them.

As you can see, the advantages of being a volunteer far outweigh the disadvantages. I am pleased that I am able to make a contribution in this way.

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Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength

They will soar on wings like eagles;

they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Isaiah 40:31

Louise Talbot

Volunteer, St Francis' College, Brisbane

Without this knowledge I would not be able to speak here today. I have been a volunteer for about 20 years. I have volunteered at play group, the kindergarten, pre-school, primary school (reading groups, science, cooking and craft groups), tuck shop, junior football club, high school and in the parish.

My children have now grown up: my daughter Tracy is 20 and studying for the Bachelor of Human Services at Queensland University of Technology and my son Daniel is 19 and studying for the Bachelor of Business at Australian Catholic Unity.

I think my volunteering went with being a mother, and wanting to help with everything my children were interested in and deciding to stay home to raise my family, but also deciding it didn't mean staying in the home.

I am now a volunteer in the library at St. Francis College. My husband Gavin is training at the college to be a priest, so when the librarian Sue Lockeridge mentioned on orientation day 18 months ago that they needed someone to volunteer to type the catalogue cards into the computer, I thought "I can do that; that doesn't sound too difficult." Was I wrong! It wasn't just copy typing, it was really using the computer and the old brain, but with Sue's patience and help I managed to surprise myself and the family and I love it!

But why did I volunteer this time? We decided not to live at college. Gavin had done some of his studies part-time, so he knew everyone, but I didn't. I felt I needed to be part of the college community, I needed to have a sense of belonging so working in the college library has given me this.

As I said before I have volunteered in many situations, and I thought volunteering in the library was going to be easy. It wasn't, but it was most challenging! Volunteers fill a void in the community. There are not enough paid positions but the work still has to be done and without volunteers some places would not be able to function.

Pluses for being a volunteer are: you can usually decide when you want to work; you can fit it in around the family. If you don't like the work or the people you can move on and do something different. You meet interesting people and form lasting friendships. It keeps you informed with the world today and modern technology, e.g. the computer. It also helps build self esteem to know you can do a particular job. The only negative aspect I have found is that sometimes you feel used, for example, some people would say "She's a good worker. She'll do it!", so they leave you with everything to do. But you get over that attitude because that can happen whether you're paid or not.

I try to work on the principle of this little saying,

"You can give without loving, but you can't love without giving"

meaning: you can volunteer because you think it's the right thing to do, but if your heart's not in it you'll hate it. But if you volunteer because you really want to and you're a caring person you'll love it.

Louise Talbot

Volunteer, St Francis' College library, Brisbane.

Getting the work done with volunteers

Edythe Feazel

Why use volunteers?

Christian education and volunteers are traditionally paired. We remember that Harvard, Yale and most other colonial colleges were privately founded and supported with the goal of training pastors and furthering the kingdom of God. These schools were voluntarily financed and guided. Great libraries such as the Boston Athenaeum and the Library Company of Philadelphia were also begun and staffed with volunteer labour. The tradition of volunteer excellence, initiative, and vision is well established.

Many libraries of the 90s have mature collections which require labour-intensive maintenance. They are coping with demand for expensive access tools on CDROM, and are struggling with escalation in serials prices which erode materials budgets. Most libraries have backlogs of special collections which are inaccessible to patrons. At the same time, administrations are reducing staff size, eliminating departments, barely maintaining levels of service, or worse yet, reducing them. As librarians scramble with their backs against the Red Sea to continue to provide the best possible service with limited resources, one solution may be to initiate a volunteer program.