How to get a volunteering position in a Library
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"Experience without theory is blind, but theory without experience is mere intellectual play"

> Immanuel Kant
An introduction to volunteering in a Library

According to Volunteering Australia, over 6.1 million Australians, or 36% of the Australian population undertakes some sort of volunteering, equating to approximately 713 million hours each year. An amazing statistic given the population of Australia. Volunteering in a library provides both you and the Library with enormous value and benefit!

As an individual, volunteering provides you with an opportunity to develop new skills, acquire exciting new knowledge as well as provides you with a great pathway to possible employment. Being a volunteer, also allows you to give back to the local community. As a library, volunteers provide countless opportunities to further develop and enhance the services provided, often allowing libraries to extend their range of in-house services.

This guide has been written with the aim to assist you with understanding the role of volunteers within libraries, the process of finding a volunteering position and to enable you to achieve exceptional outcomes for your future career. Fantastic careers don’t happen by accident – they are planned, they are prepared, and they are delivered!
"Knowledge without understanding and experience is like a flower without colour and fragrance."

> Tasneem Hameed
Volunteering as part of your study

Part of studying with Library Training Services Australia (LTSA) involves working at, or volunteering at a library. This is an extremely valuable part of your studies.

The reason for this is, that exceptional learning experiences and work readiness involves more than learning out of a textbook. So much knowledge and wisdom is achieved from immersive learning experiences in a practical Library context.
"The only real security that a man can have in this world is a reserve of knowledge, experience and ability”

> Henry Ford
What is Work Integrated Learning?

Finding work experience through volunteering or employment during your studies is the ultimate accessory to delivering exceptional education and career outcomes. Technically, this is known as Work Integrated Learning (WIL) and it involves integrating the theory and knowledge you learn at LTSA in context in a practical library workspace.

Work Integrated Learning provides a number of very valuable benefits to you:

- It allows you to put theory into practice
- It transforms knowledge and information into understanding
- It enables you to become ‘work ready’ – enabling you to gain on-the-job skills and experience
- It enables you to try the career, before you ‘buy’
- It enables you to establish valuable networking opportunities
- It provides you with mentorship, supervision and support
- It enables you to meet people with similar interests
- It establishes a work history
- It helps you find out what you don’t want to do
- It enables you to find out how the ‘system’ and library environment works
- It develops a range of important skills sought by future employers
- It eases the transition from study to work.

Previous industry experience is one of the most highly sought after qualities for those entering the workforce. This experience will provide you with confidence, valuable experience and understanding – linking and integrating all the information and knowledge you learn in your studies!
“Knowledge comes with learning, skill comes with experience”

> Vishaak
Volunteers are seriously valuable to society!

Whilst the thought of volunteering may feel like a daunting experience, it is important to note that volunteers are extremely valuable members of our society, and do some amazing work.

Volunteering helps organisations, such as libraries, with the following:

- Alleviating worker shortages, particularly in times of limited budgets
- The provision of work-ready graduates
- Decreased recruiting costs
- Creation of dynamic work environments
- Contribution to industry
- Access to new ideas that promote creativity and encourage innovation
- Staff development through engagement with students
- Opportunities to provide feedback that shapes the next generation of library workers.

Thus, don’t underestimate the value and impact of your service!
“Skill is the unified force of experience, intellect and passion in their operation”

> John Ruskin
Finding a volunteering position

Firstly, it is useful to identify a target of potential libraries in your area that you can contact (there are over 5000 libraries in Australia!). These can include:

- Local council libraries
- School libraries (both public and private, primary or secondary schools)
- University, College or TAFE libraries
- State libraries
- Private libraries (e.g. charity, legal, health etc.)
- Mobile libraries
- Any other libraries that may be in your area.

Some larger libraries (such as State Libraries) often have volunteering opportunities, information and sometimes formal intakes up on their website, so it is often a good idea to check their websites first. It is important to note that for the experience to be truly valuable, that you will need to volunteer for a minimum of eight hours per week. This can be done in one chunk, or you can separate it out to a few hours on different days – whatever works for you.
“Prepare yourself in every way you can by increasing your knowledge and adding to your experience, so that you can make the most of opportunity when it occurs”

> Mario Andretti
Setting yourself up for success

As with any job, when approaching an organisation to offer your services as a volunteer (in what sometimes can be a competitive environment), there are ways you can ensure you are giving yourself the best chance of success possible.

Firstly, ensure that you have your Curriculum Vitae (CV) or Resume up-to-date. Make sure that it is clear and logical. Whilst you may not have any library experience, it is important to identify any skills, knowledge or experience that you have, that may be transferable or relevant in a library context. Thus, you should consider if you have any of the following skills from previous work environments, and ensure they are communicated and clearly visible in your CV:

- Administration and clerical skills, such as answering phones, sorting mail, filing and maintaining records and/or archiving, word processing, photocopying, updating or entering information/data, and mailing out material
- Use of IT equipment, such as computers, audiovisual (AV) equipment, photocopiers, scanners, tablets, smart phones etc.
- Customer service skills (both internal customer service – that is, customer service directed internally to colleagues; and external customer service – that is, customer service directed at clients, customers or the general public)
- Dealing with disruptive or difficult clients, customers or patrons
- Scheduling, supervising or training of workers or volunteers, such as in the use of IT equipment
- Any management or leadership experience
- Bookkeeping or accounting skills and experience
- Organisation and prioritisation skills
- Any community work and contact, e.g. coaching a sporting team, helping at the tuckshop or uniform shop etc.
- Social media skills or marketing skills
- Retail and/or merchandising experience
- Occupational health and safety skills or knowledge, including First Aid skills
- Any other skills, qualifications or information that may be relevant or transferable
And don’t forget

It is also crucial to ensure you communicate the following:

- **Your passions!** Make sure you let people know the things that you are passionate about, and why you are drawn to working in libraries. Is it a love of books? A desire to help people? A love for the library environment? A desire to empower others with access to information and knowledge? Whatever your driving force is, it is so important to identify this, and communicate it.

- Identify the fact that you are commencing Library Studies at a Certificate II, Certificate III, Certificate IV or Diploma level.

- Identify clearly the opportunity you are looking for. Ensure you communicate that you are looking for a volunteering opportunity that will enable you to:
  - Provide support services and provide value to a library and the community
  - Engage in an environment where you can implement your theoretical knowledge to gain greater understanding and experience
  - Have access to a workplace supervisor that can sign off on your assessments, and provide mentorship if possible
  - Work, as a minimum, 8 hours per week (not necessarily in one hit).

- **Identify when you would be available to volunteer** – what days and times you can do

- **Identify any other volunteering or community work** you have completed.

Remember when you are selling yourself, or when you are selling anything in life, make sure you identify “what is in it for them”. This isn’t just about finding an opportunity for you, it is also about delivering value and real, tangible outcomes for them too. It needs to be a win-win situation!
“What one has not experienced, one will never understand in print”

> Isadora Duncan
When approaching a library, try to first find out who the main contact is that you need to speak to. Is it the HR Manager? Is it the head Librarian? Is it the Branch Manager or is it the Supervisor on duty? Check online if they have an information about volunteering and available positions. Some libraries will have applications forms that need to be filled in.

Also, do your research on the library. What do they do? Do they specialise in anything? What services do they provide and what community or customer base do they serve?

It is also important to try to provide a personal touch. Instead of simply sending out your CV or information to the decision maker, see if you can go to the Library and hand it to the most senior person in charge at the time of your visit, or if you can, the person who is the decision maker. Give them the opportunity to meet with you, and get to know you by having a brief conversation with them, and handing your CV and associated material in person.

This is far more valuable than simply sending it to them in the post. Make sure you look the part, and smile! First impressions always count.

Finally, don’t forget to follow up with a phone call or email a few days’ later. Remind them of your application, and re-send it through by email if necessary. Keep in touch with them, and if any opportunities are not immediately available, ask to be notified if an opportunity comes up.
If you need help along the way, please make sure you contact us here at LTSA – we are here to help and try to facilitate the best outcomes for you possible!

Also, put the word out! Use your networks to see if anyone can facilitate any warm introductions to anyone in the industry. It is a small world, so make sure you maximise your chances by putting the word out there.

“Prepare yourself in every way you can by increasing your knowledge and adding to your experience, so that you can make the most of opportunity when it occurs.”

> Mario Andretti

And be positive. We won’t always succeed first time around, but never, ever give up! Keep trying until you find the right opportunity. It will come… but it does require work, tenacity, and always, passion!

For further information, support or assistance, please feel free to call us on 1300 17 15 60 or contact us at info@ltsa.edu.au