

# Love Libraries Competition: Top Ten New Librarians 2007

## ENTRY FORM

**Name:** Helen Dahlke

**Age:** 24

**Length of service (three years maximum):** 1 year

**Library service:** West Berkshire

- **Why have you chosen to make a career in public libraries?**

I've always enjoyed using public libraries and believe that they are an important way for people to have access to information and reading. Without public libraries I would not have achieved many things in my life; they gave me information beyond what I knew from everyday experience and made me determined to have a successful career from a young age.

The difference that I can make to somebody's life by answering an enquiry may seem small to some but when you think of how many enquiries public library staff answer daily that difference is significant. Working in public libraries enables me to make a difference and use my skills to help people. I can be creative, I can use my IT skills, I can use my love of reading, and every enquiry is a new opportunity and a new challenge.

I am committed to a career in public libraries. I have started the Chartership process run by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP). I regularly attend meetings of my local CILIP branch group, as well as visits to other libraries. I also contribute by writing up my findings for my local CILIP Career Development Group and have written an article based on my MA Librarianship dissertation for Public Library Journal. My dissertation explored the concept of advocacy from a public library service point of view and I feel strongly that we need to use advocacy and marketing to raise the profile of public library services. Entering the *Love Libraries* campaign is one of the ways I can help do this.

- **What is it about library work that you enjoy?**

Meeting different people everyday and being able to help them do whatever it is they want, better. I love the challenge of answering enquiries and the satisfaction when someone has got what they want. There's always something new and different to work on and explore, I am constantly learning new things. I enjoy working with book groups and people who find reading amazing, as well as developing promotions to encourage more people to read. I also enjoy working with public library staff because they are committed and enthusiastic. To put it simply, working in public libraries is fun!

- **Why do you think libraries are important?**

People should be able to explore reading without the constraints of having to pay for it. Libraries are important not only because they are free and so save people money but also because making

reading free allows people to make freer reading choices. You can pick up anything and not worry about wasting your money if you don't like it. Libraries encourage people to explore reading and provide opportunities to share their enjoyment of it through book groups. Reading is one of the most important skills you can have - and enjoying reading can take you places you've never been and help you understand where you are now.

I believe everyone has a right to information, and that public libraries play a vital role in enabling people to find it and access it. Libraries have an important community role as people trust them and feel they are important part of community life.

- **What has been your biggest achievement in the role?**

My biggest achievement so far has been the role I have taken in working with our stock unit and new library management system.

West Berkshire is part of the South East Library Management System (SELMS) consortium and we have purchased a new library management system with them. The new Spydus system from Civica has been live since June. The members of the SELMS consortium are the first in the UK to use this system, previously it has only been used in Singapore and Australia. I am a member of the West Berkshire Libraries Spydus User Group, which meets to discuss the best ways of using the new system and to feedback any comments from our users – whether members of the public or staff. Working with this company is groundbreaking and it's an exciting time to be working for West Berkshire.

Working in the Stock Management Unit has allowed me to see the overall process of stock procurement, from selection to arrival in the libraries. This has given us a clearer view of the acquisitions process and channels of communication between the librarians and the Stock Management Unit staff. I have helped to streamline the process of purchasing books which has minimised the delay between ordering and stock being available for loan. This has been especially important for users' requests. We are the second authority to go live with Spydus but the first to be using the Acquisitions module. The deeper understanding of the how the stock procurement process works has been vital in developing the best ways of using the new system to its full advantage.

With our previous library system the Reader Development team were working closely with our adult fiction and reference supplier to test Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) method of ordering. This has proved very important to the development of the EDI functionality of the new system, meaning that we are already close to using EDI in our ordering, making the stock procurement process even faster.

- **How have you helped to improve your service?**

Our library management system has changed and I have spent time getting to know it and understand how it works. I have helped disseminate information about the easiest ways to use it, am heavily involved in the functionality testing and working with other members of staff to see how we can improve the service by working in new ways with the new system. I have worked with our website and our new online public access catalogue (Opac) to ensure they are informative and easy to use.

We can accept new technology and use it to our advantage. Pre-loaded MP3 players ('Playaways') will be introduced in December in response to people who wanted something smaller than CDs and I am now looking into rentable downloads and how they can be implemented. I feel it's a very exciting

time to be working in public libraries; new technologies are providing new ways of working and as long as we use these for what we want them to do, rather than for the sake of it, we can only benefit.

At the moment we manage our book group sets using a spreadsheet maintained by library staff, which takes up a lot of staff time. Book groups have also commented that they want more control over deciding which sets to have when and want to be able to reserve the sets themselves. Working with the trainers for Spydus and our own library systems staff I have developed a way of putting the books on the system that will allow our book groups to reserve the sets directly, freeing up library staff and maximising the use of the book sets. This new way of managing the sets is in the process of being implemented and once complete we can look at more ways of engaging with book groups directly.

The World Fiction collection of books in other languages has increased issues since I have been responsible for it. We have increased the number of books we rent from our supplier and the service is appreciated by our users, many of whom donate their own books as well. I am in the process of sourcing suppliers for more Polish fiction and non-fiction to respond to the requests and needs of our users.

I have created 'friendly' URLs for key sections of the library pages on the council website. This has been very useful for promotional literature and for giving concise answers to enquiries. Informal feedback from users has been that they find remembering the 'friendly' URL easier than using a series of links from the homepage.

- **Why do you deserve to be recognised as a Top Ten New Librarian?** (250 words max)

Libraries are brilliant - but I know they can be better. I am ambitious for myself and for the public library service as a whole. Public libraries and their staff have so much to offer and we all need to work together to make sure their potential is fully realised. I am committed to working in public libraries and am working hard on my professional development as well as the development of the service. The opportunities being a Top Ten New Librarian will give me will help me to continue in my career and help me work to improve public library services.

I want people to share my passion for public libraries and will always promote them in whatever situation I find myself in. Public libraries are in a prime position to help with some of the biggest challenges facing our society today and we need to make sure we are the first service people think of when they want a community resource or information or reading or all three! I am aware that libraries aren't always reaching the people that need our services most and I think this can be changed. We can raise the profile of libraries and encourage more people to use the public library service but we need to start now and be prepared to make what changes are necessary. Initiatives like the *Love Libraries* campaign are helping to do this and I want to be a part of it.