

Love Libraries Competition: Top Ten New Librarians 2007

ENTRY FORM

Name: Jennifer Foster

Age: 25

Length of service (three years maximum): 1.5 years

Library service: Trafford

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

When I started working in libraries I think I was the most surprised out of everyone I knew. My friends had figured it out years ago; there were certainly enough clues. Entire holidays spent with my nose in a book, the massive book collection, the cataloguing of that collection using my parents first Amstrad. You'd have thought I would have figured it out earlier and not bothered with art school and the hospitality training that distracted me until I arrived at the inevitable conclusion myself.

The turning point came when I realised that I wanted to work with people in a way which would actually make a difference to their lives. For this reason I knew that, despite the problems in the profession at the time, working in public libraries would be something that I would really love. Public libraries are about books, people and information and it is the last two that I have really grabbed my passion. Don't get me wrong, I love books; I spent more than my fair share of time in libraries as a child. But it is the satisfaction of meeting the information needs of users, however complex or routine, which really makes me feel like I have made a difference. Now that I've found what I was always meant to do, I can't imagine doing anything else.

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

The range of work is enormous and I think it is this that is most enjoyable. On any given day I might talk with the lady from the local animal shelter, deal with a problem with the LMS server, signpost someone to the voluntary council, discuss cultural provision within the authority or edit a leaflet collection in a library. I love the variety this brings to my work and the fact that however mundane something seems to be I know that it fits into a picture that is much bigger than the individual task. I am pleased that by starting my career in Trafford I have entered a stimulating and innovative atmosphere where not only does the end product have tangible results but where I will be challenged and questioned all the way to arriving at that result. I think that this is vital to making the most of the resources available while providing the best possible service.

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

Libraries hold a unique position in England. Although they are managed and operated locally, beholden to individual authorities, they are part of a national institution that has historically held a position of trust and value within society. What makes libraries even more special is that they maintain these traditional assets while at the same time taking on new ideas, adapting them to their

own use and developing services in order to stay relevant to their users needs. Libraries may not always be recognisable as the institutions they were 100 years ago but continue to be places of enormous value to the community. Every member of a community can get something positive from a library, we just need to make people realise what we can offer.

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

I came into the post of E-Services Assistant Librarian when it had been vacant for several months. When I started it was an essentially reactive post and straight out of library school I had few expectations and was prepared to buckle down to admin. However, prompted by new challenges within the service and by my own incapability to sit around waiting to be told what to do, I was encouraged to recreate the position as a much more proactive one. I got involved in partnerships across the authority, took on new responsibilities and developed ideas using a mixture of traditional and innovative solutions. My role is now one of the most diverse in the service with the result that the work I do cuts across many different strategies and policies. I feel that by changing the post in this way I will not only have improved information provision within the service but also left a legacy to be built on by future holders of the post.

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

In the last year I have raised the profile of community information across my library service so that libraries are more actively taking ownership of their provision. Although I have taken on other projects, it is this and the work connected with that has made the biggest difference to front line services and to our partnerships with other bodies.

I have, along with the ICT department, worked towards a sustainable replacement to take the authority's community information provision into the future while improving the diversity and usability of the current solution. Thus we have an interim solution that has more relevance to the people who need it and an easier task ahead of us when the new solution goes live.

While doing this I have had to ensure that more traditional resources are not neglected, it is important to me that anyone can find the information they need, whether it be a pamphlet for the local yoga class, or the email address of their councillor. So while I am developing the use of blogging and social software as communication tools I am also writing information leaflets and ensuring libraries have a presence in council produced literature. As my work has progressed I have found that one of my hardest jobs is to convince the more conservative that new technologies have a place in our services while reminding the innovators that traditional information provision still holds enormous value for users. People seem to find it difficult to believe that I can be a champion for both.

Part of my work has seen me building partnerships from both within and outside the local authority, thus reducing duplication of resources. My membership of the Cultural Partnership has raised the profile of libraries and our role in information with a number of different agencies and organisations. I believe that because of this people who might never have previously entered a library are finding out about the services we provide.

I have become especially involved in the provision of information for older people and I work with partners such as the Trafford's Older People's Service, the Primary Care Trust and local voluntary groups to ensure that this particular group gets the best possible service. As part of this collaboration we have consulted with users in order to ensure that we provide information in a suitable format that is relevant to the diverse needs of this group.

- **Why do you deserve to be recognised as a Top Ten New Librarian?**

I am committed to seeing change happen in public libraries and feel that as a new librarian with enthusiasm and commitment, I can really play a part in this change.

The last year has been a constant learning curve during which time I have taken in traditional services, innovative technology, standards, national projects and corporate policies. Yet I've realised that this learning has to be ongoing because as a service we need to be taking on new ideas and technologies and combining them with the existing skills we already have. My aim for the future is to develop my knowledge and pass my enthusiasm for new ideas and technologies onto others in order that people have the confidence to step beyond what they are familiar with and push themselves to take on new ideas.

Libraries need to continue to change and I want to be involved in that by encouraging others to take on new tasks and concepts rather than holding on to the past. We need to learn from each other, from our users and from the more commercial world, in order to provide the best possible services to everyone who needs it. Equally importantly, we need to push the library offer to those who are not aware of our services. In this way libraries will continue to be places of value and relevance, both as a physical building in communities and as a virtual presence online.