

# EEL... ENERGISE, ENTHUSE, INSPIRE

EEL gives a voice to the new generation of library and information professionals. If you have any suggestions or topics for this column, please contact the column co-ordinator Lesa Maclean at [maclean.lesa@gmail.com](mailto:maclean.lesa@gmail.com)



## Experiencing the world as a librarian

Three years ago, Maria Morales read a quote by Ralph Waldo Emerson that said "Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail." Since then, this quote has inspired Maria to pursue her personal and professional objectives in life. Maria will share her challenges and achievements with you as a librarian developing her professional career overseas. She hopes it might be an inspiration for you to seek out opportunities overseas.

In order to become a library and information professional in Spain, students must write a research thesis at the end of their Master's degree. I believe this can be one of the most personally satisfying undertakings of a student's academic career as it enables library skills and knowledge to be put into practice, and provides an opportunity to explore library interests.

As most Spanish universities have mutual agreements with other countries, both European and non-European, students can do research abroad and start experiencing the world as

librarians. One of my first achievements was receiving a library exchange grant to the North Pole. I almost regretted my decision when I had to ski to the university at -10 degrees or when I faced the polar nights with nearly 20 hours a day of darkness. However, I cannot find enough words to describe how I grew personally and professionally.

My Master's thesis consisted of studying how international students used the Norwegian academic libraries. It was tremendously rewarding to know that, as a result of my findings, libraries could potentially improve their collections and services for future international students.

After that enriching experience, I realised that my career as a librarian could not end up in Spain. Library and information skills are transferable across geographic boundaries, so I was determined to develop my professional career overseas. After a couple of years working in Spain, I decided to leave everything behind and come to Australia. I knew it was not going to be easy achieving my goals, but I had to try.

The first thing that I did when I arrived in Australia was look for the professional association. The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) has been invaluable to me, because they have given me professional advice as well as networking and professional development opportunities. I was especially grateful that this association recognised my overseas qualifications.

Working as a librarian abroad can be a thrilling, wonderful, and eye-opening experience, but it can also be tough, especially when you have to start everything from scratch on your own and with language barriers. I must admit that getting a job in Australia was not an easy task. I sent hundreds of resumes and I had lots of interviews for over a year.

In order to keep myself inspired during this difficult time, I visited as many different types of libraries as I could to compare them with European libraries. I found that both Spanish and Australian libraries offer innovative services: for example "Late Night Library" at Surry Hills in Sydney or "Library by the Sea" a service offered in most Spanish municipal



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libraries. However, I found that the multicultural collections in Australian libraries are much more developed. Libraries in Scandinavia, on the other hand, have more technologically advanced services, with over fifteen years of radio-frequency identification (RFID) experience.

I also volunteered at the Jessie Street National Women's Library. It was my first introduction to Australian libraries and I loved it. Unfortunately, I had to leave that position because, finally, I got my first paid Australian library job at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS): INSEARCH – my current position. I am also working at Waverley Council Library. So things are looking good!

Choosing to live and work in Australia has been the best decision I have ever made and I highly recommend the experience because it has helped me become a better librarian and a better person. The benefits of working overseas include an exchange

of library knowledge and experiences, learning another language, and it also demonstrates to future employers the ability to be independent, adaptable, and willing to take on challenges.

Moving away is not about having fears, it's about how well you face your fears. I believe that everyone has the patience, the strength, and the passion to achieve their ambitions, their goals, and their dreams. All you need to do is try. So, what are you waiting for?

*Maria Morales holds a Bachelor and a Master's degree in Library and Information Science. She has four years' experience as an information professional in Spain and two years in Australia. Her next adventure will be participating in an international library volunteer program and on a library exchange later in life.*

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## Connecting Up

Connecting Up Inc. is a not-for-profit organisation that works to strengthen the not-for-profit and community sector around Australia. We provide a range of programs including resources, directories, events, and learning opportunities for not-for-profits and charities. Our aim is to help the sector to be more effective in the work that it does to help the Australian community.

One of our programs provides software discounts and donations to eligible not-for-profits, provided by companies that want to be involved in helping the community. This program has saved millions of dollars for the charity sector. In the past, public libraries have not been eligible to participate but, with some recent changes in eligibility rulings, they can now take part. As Connecting Up has worked closely with public libraries for many years, this is a welcome development.

The role of public libraries as a community place and information hub is well recognised. Access to computers and internet for library patrons is one of the great benefits that libraries provide to the community. Our program will help to offset some of the costs of setting up and maintaining public access computers and ensure that these facilities can continue to be available in public libraries around Australia.

Public libraries that would like to be involved can find out more at [www.connectingup.org/donortec](http://www.connectingup.org/donortec).





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