

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A ...

STUDENTS NEED SCHOOL LIBRARIES CAMPAIGN

By Madison Dearnaley

BIOGRAPHY



MADISON DEARNALEY

Madison Dearnaley splits her time between two schools, where she works as a teacher librarian and a library aide, respectively. After completing a Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood)/Bachelor of Human Services, Madison decided her future lay in the world of libraries and went on to complete a Master of Information Studies (Librarianship). Madison is part of the *Students Need School Libraries* campaign leadership team and is the website coordinator for the campaign. Madison is also a professional reader and blogs about all things school libraries and young adult (YA) and children's literature at <https://madisonlibrary.wordpress.com/>

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ABSTRACT

The roles of school library staff are often misunderstood by students, parents and others outside the library sector. The *Students Need School Libraries* campaign set out to ask school library staff what they do in a typical day or the favourite things they enjoy about their role. *The Day in the Life of a ...* blog series aimed to share the wonderful diversity and range of strengths and skills school library staff have and the tasks they do each day to serve their students and communities.

INTRODUCTION

The roles of school library staff are often cloaked in mystery and misunderstood by many people outside the school library sphere. Furthermore, our roles are often stereotyped or negatively portrayed in media, films or even books. And while a cardigan might be a very practical layer and a bun a nice, tidy hairdo, we must acknowledge that negative or limited understandings about school library staff are probably contributing factors to the declining numbers in our profession.

Recently, as I was working at my desk, a student asked me, "So, what do you librarians do all day when there aren't any students in the library?" My first response was to wonder when exactly that 'time without students' was meant to occur. In normal, non-COVID times, apart from 15 minutes when all students are in home groups, our library is a bustling, happening place from open to close (and even then, some of the junior classes like to squeeze into that 15-minute time slot!). My second response was to rattle off a list of some things my role included: updating a spreadsheet of current digital textbook licences, planning a dystopian games activity for my book club, helping to process loans and returns of a borrowing class, unjamming the automatic stapler the student in question had just jammed. And all that in just the last half hour!

SO, WHAT EXACTLY DO LIBRARY STAFF DO ALL DAY?

You and I may know the answer to that question so well it is exhausting just to think of it, but parents, school administrators, even students themselves might be unsure about what library staff spend their time doing. Invisibility of school library outcomes leads to invisibility of our roles, which leads to invisibility of the need for qualified library staff and school libraries for all students (Hay & Todd, 2010; Hughes, 2014).

It is also important and interesting to share this information between school libraries and library teams, to reflect on our own practice, to borrow great ideas and be proud of what the school library collective regularly achieves in their communities and beyond. As we collaborate and share our work, we shine a light into the darkness of that invisibility and create our own version of visible learning.

As the website coordinator of the *Students Need School Libraries* (SNSL) campaign, I took the opportunity to cast a wide net on my student's question and share the answers with the campaign community and beyond. We asked anyone involved in a school library, including but not limited to library aides, teacher librarians, library volunteers, heads of library, librarians, library technicians, library suppliers, publisher outreach teams, and author and illustrator visitors, to share a typical day in their role. The results were wonderfully varied and exciting. Please enjoy this selection.

A TEACHER LIBRARIAN

"[I do] Everything. As the sole teacher librarian at our school with only one to two days a week of support ... everything. Cataloguing and processing books, working out reading levels for literacy class books, shelving, working with classes, teaching research skills, running book club, advising the English faculty (I teach English, but they respect my librarian knowledge and ask my opinion), displays, taking students on reading-related excursions, arranging the occasional author visit, Book Week activities, Premier's Reading Challenge, YABBA voting, tech stuff ... and more."

A LIBRARY TECHNICIAN

"My name is Lily Smith and I am a library technician at Pacific Lutheran College. I have been working in the library field for the last 11 years, and I really love my job."

"As a library technician, my tasks deal with the technician side of the library system, such as cataloguing, maintaining library records and the

library system, but of course, when you work at the school library, your job is more than just being a library technician. We are also the ambassadors that promote 'love to read' to our patrons. We encourage the students to love reading by celebrating books through special events, such as Book Week, National Simultaneous Storytime, and book celebrations.

"I love to see when the children's faces light up when they come to school dressed up as their favourite book characters. I think those moments help to cement the love of reading for our students."





A LIBRARY ASSISTANT

"My name is Peta Griffin and I am the library assistant at Pacific Lutheran College on the Sunshine Coast. I have been at Pacific Lutheran College since 2007 and thoroughly enjoy my role here. As well as doing my regular jobs of book issuing, repairs, processing, circulation, and so on, I have loads of fun with the students during our activities for special events such as our yearly Year 2 party, Book Week and National Simultaneous Storytime."

"Dressing up is a huge part of the fun, and Lily Smith, who is our library technician, and I make sure we dress up as much as we can. We make a lot of our own costumes and have an absolute ball. The kids love seeing all the funny costumes we wear and they dress up as well. It's a great way to interact with the students and to be more involved with them."



A LIBRARY AIDE

"It's always busy and always different. I love that moment when a student comes back in asking for a personal book recommendation because they loved the last one I suggested, or when a student has a bit of an 'aha' moment when they are learning how to use a new system or can login to browse resources on the library catalogue."

A HEAD OF LIBRARY SERVICES

Sarah Love, at Mandurah Catholic College in WA, spends a lot of her time teaching, both her own timetabled classes and classes where she teaches research and referencing skills. She also plans library activities, such as parent and child reading sessions or study skill sessions.

When she's not teaching, Sarah fulfils the many and varied admin tasks of her position, including liaising with staff in other learning areas about using library services such as LibGuides, databases, referencing and anti-plagiarism software, as well as attending meetings with other learning areas, leadership teams and middle leaders.



A TEACHER LIBRARIAN

"I support teachers and students with literacy education, I manage teacher resources, the purchasing and updating of books, both in print and on KOBO."

"I manage Chromebooks and iPads and I teach STEAM, a love of books and literacy, research skills and online cybersafety units."

AN AUTHOR

Susanne Gervay, award-winning author of the *I Am Jack* series, along with many other picture books and books for young adults, is a strong supporter of SNSL. When she is not working overseas, talking to kids about bullying or promoting the power of story, she gets to visit school libraries and share her passion for writing and reading with school students.

When asked what she loved best as an author visitor, Susanne said:

"The opportunity to relate to kids, reading and, of course, working with my favourite people, school librarians, who prepare the kids with research, story and more before my visit. THANK YOU, school librarians."



A HEAD OF LIBRARY

Jennifer Cain is the Head of Learning Commons at Mater Christi College, Victoria. She spends most of the time in her role building LibGuides and creating resources for student learning. She also teaches students research, thinking and communication skills. One of the best projects she has worked on was implementing a Knowledge Week to promote the library and improve student learning through fun and engaging events and activities. She described her job as rewarding, especially when collaborating and co-teaching with subject teachers with the goal of improving student learning.



A LIBRARY TECHNICIAN

Leanne, from Good Shepherd Lutheran College in Queensland, said:

"My job as a library technician in a P-12 college is very rewarding. Every day is different, as are all students and their needs. The main part of my job is to maintain the library collection and catalogue new resources, which I love to do.

"Sharing new material and matching students' needs and enjoying watching them get excited about new books is wonderful. Servicing the students with queries and resources is also a daily task and helping out at the front desk when it gets super busy.

"I also run a Year 1-2 book club, which is very entertaining as I get to know the different students and their interests. We read and discuss the books that I have chosen and also do some colouring in. Working with books is one of my passions but there is sooo much to read ..."



A LIBRARY TECHNICIAN

Jane Steinback, who runs the school library at Curtin Primary School in the ACT, said:

"I love finding just the right book to help a child be excited to read. I love getting the kids excited about the Chief Minister's Reading Challenge. It has become a real competition in our school as we take the top 3 or 4 readers with us to the awards. These are the students who read more than the 30 required; I have had students read more than 200 books. After the awards, we stop at Paperchain and each winner gets to choose a book to the value of \$30 to take home and keep."

Jane spends most of her time returning and borrowing and helping students find books, shelving and straightening the shelves and putting the books in the wrong place back where they belong. She also does the book processing, book repairs and finds resources for teachers, as well as coordinating book club.

A TEACHER LIBRARIAN

If Elizabeth Abbott, teacher librarian at Dubbo College, NSW, could share just one thing about her role with others it would be:

"How hectic it can be and that the library is a vibrant space (not the hushed hallowed spaces of yesteryear)."

The professional roles in school libraries are certainly diverse. Indeed, this personalisation of services to each particular school community should be promoted because it is one of the strengths of what we offer (Godfree & Neilson, 2018). The responses show across the board that there is never a dull moment in a school library, and consistent themes across all responses indicate a love of learning, a love of reading and books, a desire to ensure students have access to the resources they need, and an understanding that the library serves a purpose that is far wider than just a storage place for books (though that



too is really important). These are personal as much as professional characteristics and show just how important it is to have such a wide range of personalities, interests and strengths in a school library team, as well as the training, collaboration and continual upskilling to continue striving to better serve our students and communities.



Students Need School Libraries

The *Students Need School Libraries* campaign's goal is to share with parents, school leaders and members of the wider community the very great importance of school libraries.

Our mission is to ensure student access to high-quality school library services, with a vision to work towards every student having access to a dynamic, well-resourced school library run by qualified library staff.

You can read all the A Day in the Life of a ... responses on the *Students Need School Libraries* blog: <https://studentsneedschoollibraries.org.au/blog/>

We are still accepting submissions for the A Day in the Life of a ... posts, so if you would like to share your story, you can do so here: <https://studentsneedschoollibraries.org.au/blog/share-your-day-in-the-life-of-a/>

If you haven't already done so, we encourage you to view and share the films created to promote the importance of school libraries and school library staff. You can view all the films here: <https://studentsneedschoollibraries.org.au/films/>

We welcome you to join us in the campaign to spread the word about the importance of school libraries for all students. You can find more information on our website <https://studentsneedschoollibraries.org.au/>, follow us on social media, join our newsletter mailing list <https://studentsneedschoollibraries.org.au/subscribe/>, or contact us <https://studentsneedschoollibraries.org.au/contact-us/> to get involved.

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