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## The Wide World of Support Staff

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# Introduction

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My favorite session at the annual Support Staff Division (SSD) conference is “A Day in the Life of a Library Assistant.” Making a connection with peers from other libraries that experience the same joys and struggles as I do is one reason. Another is that over the years it has made me aware of the variety of tasks that support staff performs.

Whatever the appellation used—tech, technical assistant, technician, paraprofessional, clerk, library assistant, or library aide—these days support staff may be called on to do more and more tasks, and even to perform at a higher level than in the past. Part of this trend may be dictated by reduced budgets or by geographical constraints; whatever the reason, I have seen support staff over and over rise to the expectations they are faced with.

This is nothing new though, as the movement for recognition and empowerment of library support staff has been around in various forms for decades. More recently, The Library Support Staff Interest Round Table (LSSIRT) of the ALA was instituted in 1992, and here in Oregon in 1998, it became an official OLA Division with voting rights on the OLA board. In 2005 The ALA Council established the Policy on Inclusion and Mutual Respect referring to library support staff/paraprofessionals, officially recognizing the value of support staff and encouraging them to actively participate in the association. We now have the ALA-APA Library Support Staff Certification (LSSC) program with required competency sets to provide paraprofessionals with the chance to attend a specific educational program tailored to their own position in the library world, and earn certification that demonstrates not just their competency and knowledge but their commitment to their chosen profession.

For me, working as a library paraprofessional is my profession. Having already earned a professional degree and worked in education, I have no interest in earning another degree. Being a library worker in a support role does not indicate lack of skill or ambition—I am consistently amazed at the talent I see represented among support staff, both my coworkers and the many I have met throughout the state in 17 years as a member of OLA. The support staff I know who are enrolled in or planning to enroll in the LSSC program will not supplant librarians; they will instead bring depth and advanced skills to their roles which can only enrich the libraries in which they work.

The best library I can imagine is one that treasures all its employees, regardless of the level at which they work; that empowers all the staff, librarian and support roles alike, to use all of themselves to best serve the public. Read on to see support staff at work doing amazing things and telling amazing stories.

—Margaret Harmon-Myers  
Adult Services  
Eugene Public Library

OLAQ

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# Library Support Staff Today and How it Has Changed

by **Suzanne L. Sager**  
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What is the role of Library Support Staff today and how has it changed over the years?

According to the American Library Association (ALA.org, “Library Support Staff Resource Center”) website, Library support staff, or library paraprofessionals, are involved in all library operations at all levels. They may manage libraries or they may contribute very specialized expertise in some specific field. They may engage in routing activities or supervise and direct other staff. Generalizations about them are difficult to make, and to find an all-encompassing job description, nearly impossible. The range and complexity of their duties varies with each position, the size and type of the library in which they work and each library’s specific needs, goals, or mission.

One important difference in the past is that people working as librarians were expected to have a Master of Library Science degree (MLS), but that has not always been true, nor is it true now. There are people without an MLS degree working in library management just as there are people who have an MLS degree working in support staff positions. I received a Master of Library and Information Science from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana in 2005, but have continued working as a Library Technician 3. I know several other people who also have a library degree, but work as library support staff. Unless you are willing and able to relocate, there are not very many opportunities for librarian positions. Some librarian positions also pay less than what some library support staff earn. It also seems that librarian positions have become more specialized over time.

Library support staff positions have also changed over time and are more challenging than they used to be. I started working in the Portland State University Library on August 5, 1986 in a position that would now be considered a Library Technician 1. The majority of my time was spent adding holdings information to shelf list cards and filing them in the card catalog. The following year, I was promoted to a Library Technician 2 position and was trained to catalog books that had Library of Congress records. Two years later, I was again promoted to a Library Technician 3 position and trained to catalog books with participant level records. For several years, everything I cataloged was revised by a Cataloging Librarian. Eventually it was decided that work of Library Technician 3 no longer needed to be revised. Library Technician 3 employees are now expected to catalog using any available records and can create original records when necessary.



In the 28 years I have worked in the Portland State University Library, we have gone from using a card catalog to using an online catalog. We started with Sirsi, then moved to Innovative Interfaces and recently moved to Ex Libris. We haven't had a card catalog for a very long time nor have we had Library Technician 1 employees since the level of work they performed is no longer being done. The area I work in has also changed our name from Technical Services to Resource Services. In 2013, we moved from the Smith Memorial Student Union into the library. During the move, I came across an old organizational chart showing a total of 32 people. This included 22 support staff and 10 librarians. We currently have 13 people, of which seven are library support staff and six are librarians.


Another difference between library support staff and librarians is that librarians are expected, and in some cases required to be involved in professional development. What exactly is professional development? It can include being involved in local, national and international professional committees. It can also include publishing, presenting at or attending professional conferences, or participating in leadership institutes. I believe it is equally important for library support staff to be involved in professional development and there are unlimited opportunities to do this. One place to start is to join a professional organization. I personally would recommend joining the Oregon Library Association (OLA) and its Support Staff Division (OLASSD). If you aren't currently a member, you can go to <http://www.olaweb.org/join-now> to join. Membership is based on income which makes it affordable for library support staff. There is also a special rate of just \$20 for students, unemployed and retired librarians. Joining the Support Staff Division won't cost anything additional. As an OLA member, you will enjoy lower rates to attend the annual conference (the next one is being held at the Eugene Hilton on April 15–17, 2015). It is also a great way to network with other librarians and library support staff. OLASSD has three types of scholarships available to help pay for conference attendance, support staff training, or first time membership into OLA/SSD.

The American Library Association (ALA) also offers reduced membership fees for library support staff. ALA recently changed how they charge for their conference bundled registration and offer a much lower rate for library support staff. The Library Support Staff Interests Round Table (LSSIRT) is only an additional \$10 to join. Other library organizations include the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL Oregon) and the Pacific Northwest Library Association (PNLA).

It is very easy to volunteer to be on a committee in any one of these organizations. If you are interested in volunteering with OLA, you can get more information at <http://www.olaweb.org/seeking-volunteers>. It is sometimes possible to attend committee meetings virtually making it easier than ever to be involved. I have personally been involved in OLA and OLASSD for over 15 years. I am currently serving as the ALA Representative for OLA. If you want to become more involved in your own community, you should consider volunteering for your local library board or friends group. I work in an academic library so I really enjoy being able to be involved in my public library by serving on its board.

Whatever you decide to do, you should be prepared to use your own resources (whether that is time or money) to be involved in professional development. The benefits you receive will far outweigh what you put into it. I have worked with some amazing people, visited some awesome libraries and have learned about different areas of the library. Most importantly, we as library support staff can and do make a difference in the library profession.



In the 28 years that I have worked in the library, the one thing that has remained a constant for me is that I love what I do. The work I do is both challenging and interesting. I also enjoy having all the opportunities to be involved in OLA and would personally invite you to explore ways in which you too can become involved. We as support staff need to be represented within the library community. Feel free to email me if you have any questions or would like more information. 

### **References**

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# We Are Rich in One Another:

## The OLA Support Staff Division's First Twenty Years

by **Susan R. Gilmont**

*Assistant to the Librarian,  
OSU Guin Library,  
Hatfield Marine Science Center*

The story of the Oregon Library Association's Support Staff Division (OLASSD) begins with an individual and an idea. In 1990, after over 15 years of working in libraries, Donetta Sheffold attended a library support staff conference in New Jersey. She came back to Oregon burning to share the experience.

Younger readers may not understand how isolated support staff members were in those days. The Internet had yet to explode into our lives. No massive open online courses (MOOCs), no webinars, no web, no e-zines, no e-mail, no texting, no social media. You could work for years without meeting workers from other libraries. I did. Educational opportunities and means of communication were limited. Attending that conference had been illuminating and inspiring. Now, Donetta wanted to break the isolation and share with others the experience of connecting with peers. The Support Staff Division of today is the product of that inspiration and the efforts of many people.

This article is not a full history<sup>1</sup>. Instead, it gives highlights of the group's efforts on behalf of support staff in its first twenty years. The list is not comprehensive. I have left out a lot, including organizational mechanics. As you read the timeline, some broad themes will emerge. The Oregon Library Association's support for this group has been unfailing, as has SSD's advocacy for its members. I hope readers will share my pride in this valiant little band's many accomplishments, and perhaps some of you may even be moved to participate in the organization. The next chapter belongs to you.

### Beginnings

- Dr. Melvin R. George, Director of the Oregon State University Libraries, offers a scholarship for a staff member to attend the annual conference of the New Jersey Association of Library Assistants. (1990)
- Donetta Sheffold attends the New Jersey meeting. She is inspired to do something in Oregon. (Summer, 1990)
- Donetta and Deb Cook, then a library technician at Southern Oregon State College, co-host a roundtable discussion at the OLA conference in Ashland to learn if there might be interest in starting a support staff group in this state. Interest is high. (April, 1991)
- Letters are sent to attendees and a ballot on whether to form a group is distributed, along with options for naming the group. The group is approved. (1991)
- Petitions supporting the formation of a Library Support Staff Roundtable (LSSRT) within OLA are distributed among OLA members. The OLA Executive Board unanimously approves the new roundtable. (1991)
- The Library Support Staff Roundtable becomes an official part of OLA. OLA provides some seed money to help the fledgling group get off the ground. (January, 1992)
- LSSRT holds its first official meeting at the 3rd OLA/WLA Joint Conference. Fifty-two people attend. Donetta Sheffold and Judith (Jey) Wann from the Oregon State Library are elected chair and vice-chair. (April, 1992)





- Vision and goals statements are drafted and routed to members for discussion. (1992)
- Sheffold and Wann travel across Oregon meeting members in person and learning about their concerns. (1992–1993)
- LSSRT sponsors its first sessions at OLA. (1993)
- A membership directory is produced and distributed to members. (1994)
- The LSSRT chair and some members attend the OLA Continuing Education Summit and speak about support staff education needs. (1994)
- Planning begins for LSSRT’s own conference. From the beginning, it has been clear that many support staff are unable to attend OLA, having to “mind the store” while librarians attend the conference. An alternative to OLA for support staff is needed. (1994)
- Donetta Sheffold attends the New Jersey conference again and solicits advice for the Oregon group. (1994)
- To the best of our knowledge, Donetta Sheffold is the first Oregon library support staff member to serve as an officer in OLA when she is elected Secretary of the Oregon Library Association.
- The first LSSRT conference, “Gateways ‘95” is held at the Wilsonville Holiday Inn. It is a resounding success, with 298 attendees. (July, 1995)

### **Consolidation**

- Soaring to Excellence broadcasts are sponsored around the state. (1995–1999)
- Increased sensitivity about language referring to library employees leads to removal of the term “non-librarian” in LSSRT’s charter. It is replaced by “library support staff.” (1996)
- A networking directory is distributed to members. (1996)
- The first support staff-themed issue of the *OLA Quarterly*, “Special Focus—Library Support Staff” (v.3, no.1, Spring 1997) is published. LSSRT members and supporters edit and write articles for the issue. (1997)
- LSSRT develops scholarships to enable members to attend library conferences. (1997)



“I do want to say that it was the friendships, laughter and wonderful conversations with a group of extremely dedicated women who brought about the strong bond we all had in this cause.”

—Donetta Sheffold, Oregon State Library

- The second edition of the networking directory is distributed to members. (1997)
- LSSRT establishes the “Donetta Sheffold Scholarship” is established to expand continuing education opportunities for members. (1998)
- LSSRT moves from Roundtable to Division status and the OLA Support Staff Division ([http://www.olaweb.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=313](http://www.olaweb.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=313)) is born. We now have a seat—and a vote—on the OLA Executive Board. (1998)
- The committee structure has freed the Executive Board to look at broader issues. Policies are developed for grants and scholarships, decision-making by e-mail, guidelines for archiving SSD materials, expenses for site refreshments, expenses for continuing education sessions and speaker honorariums. A new logo is developed. (1999)
- A new electronic discussion list for members is launched. (2000)
- SSD begins to sponsor book mending workshops around the state. (2000)
- A long and beneficial relationship with Kris Kern and Carolee Harrison of Portland State University begins; they give many book mending workshops around Oregon. (2001)
- When the OLA Treasurer position becomes vacant, OLA Chair Janet Webster appoints Suzanne Sager of Portland State University to the position for the 2001/2002 year. Sager is re-elected for 2003/2005 and later becomes the first support staff member to be OLA’s representative to the American Library Association. (2001)
- SSD petitions the OLA Executive Board, asking that “inclusive language” (i.e., “library staff” instead of “librarians”) be used when referring to all who work in libraries. The OLA Executive Board approves. (2002)
- *OLA Quarterly* v.9 no.2, Summer 2003 (“Diversity Matters”) features an article by Maresa Kirk and Jey Wann, “With All Due Respect,” which urges respectful treatment of all library employees. (2003)
- A logo contest produces a member-created logo for SSD. (2003)
- SSD supplies eight \$50 scholarships for workshops on library security and sponsors training on Front Page software in Eastern Oregon. (2004)
- The Winter 2005 (v.11 no.4) issue of the *OLA Quarterly*, “A Day in the Life,” features contributions by and about support staff. (2005)
- SSD contributes \$250 to support the Summer Literacy Conference. (2006)



- Susan Mincks, a retiring SSD member, donates money to fund scholarships to help support staff attend the SSD conference. (2006)

### **Hard Times**

- SSD lobbies OLA to hold down dues increases for lower-paid library staff. (2007)
- Vice-Chair Michael Baird resigns in April. Since he was also head of the Conference Committee, the resignation causes a crisis. Chair Suzanne Sager takes over as head of the Conference Committee and Executive Committee members pitch in with Conference Committee members to help create another successful conference. (2007)
- To our great pride, past SSD Chair Jan Griffin is awarded the OLA Distinguished Service Award. We believe this is the first time support staff received this award. (2008)
- SSD continues to express concern to OLA about the costs of membership. Following a raise in OLA dues, the SSD Executive Committee votes to waive the \$5 fee for membership in SSD. The fee remains waived to this day. (2008)

“I remember the first LSSRT Conference. We weren’t really sure how many people to expect, and we ended up with (so many) attendees! We knew we were on the right track by providing library support staff with opportunities to learn and network.”


—Ellen Mueller, Multnomah County Library

“SSD was an opportunity that went way beyond my expectations. There were so many wonderful people who willingly shared their knowledge and expertise. I learned so much from them and the organization mostly how valuable support staff are to the library world. Working with the SSD family provided me with tools to improve my skills and value my job.”

—Cathy Zraggen, Deschutes Public Library

- Three library workers get to talk about their work life in the inaugural installment of the popular “A Day in the Life of a Library Assistant” session at the SSD annual conference. (2008). This annual feature gives many support staff the opportunity to tell their stories.
- Our awareness of issues facing people with disabilities is raised when SSD invites a deaf library employee to present at our annual conference. SSD helps fund a team of interpreters, supported by an Executive Committee member who has American Sign Language skills. Although the presenter had worked in libraries for many years, this was the first library conference she had ever been able to attend. (2009)
- SSD gets a Facebook page, has a new webmaster, and support-abil-i-ty (<http://www.ola-ssd.blogspot.com/>), the SSD blog, is born. (2009)



- The new national Library Support Staff Certification Program creates a buzz. An anonymous SSD member donates money to fund five \$200 scholarships to help support staff participate in the program. (2009)
- SSD has its first video-meeting. (2010)
- As part of our statewide outreach, SSD members participated in the fall meeting of the Eastern Oregon Library Association. SSD contributions included a talk on the history of SSD, a talk about support staff certification, and a book-mending workshop. (2010)
- To build a closer relationship with the Washington Association of Library Employees (WALE), the WALE Chair attends SSD's conference and the SSD chair and the chair of the Continuing Education Committee attend the WALE conference. (2010)
- With all our steps forward, the economic downturn causes a step back. Portland State University (PSU) Library decides that participation in OLA is not a necessary part of support staff members' jobs, and will therefore no longer allow release time for staffers to attend SSD meetings. PSU's heretofore extremely valuable participation in SSD plummets. The SSD chair calls OLA's attention to the problem in a Board meeting, in her annual report and at the OLA retreat. (2010)
- SSD gets a laptop and begins using Skype at meetings. (2011)
- The organization reaches a long-held goal of geographic diversity, adding board members from southern and eastern Oregon. (2011)
- Susan Bacina, the SSD chair, works with other OLA members to examine barriers to participation in library organizations. Bacina notes that OLA is moving towards online meetings, which will make it easier for some people to participate, but that "attitudinal barriers will be harder to break down, especially in the current economic times." (2011)
- SSD collaborates with the State Library on an ALA scholarship for certification training, offering and granting a matching funds scholarship amount. (2011) 

"I can't imagine what my library life would have been like without SSD."  
—Jay Wenn, Oregon State Library

<sup>1</sup>For a good early history of the Support Staff Division, see Sheffold, Donetta. "LSSRT—Wind on the Buffalo Grass?" (*OLA Quarterly* 3(1):11,18). <http://commons.pacificu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1677&context=olaq>



# Working With, Not For:

## Confronting the Us vs Them mindset between Information Services and Access Services in a Major Urban Library System

by **Angela Weyrens**  
*Access Services Administrator,  
Central Library,  
Multnomah County Library*



There is a well-known awkward weight, hardly ever mentioned aloud, that library staff hold close to their chests as they walk the narrow bridge over the imagined gulf that separates the Information and Access staff. The words stamped on the weight are “Who does the REALLY IMPORTANT work around here anyway?” This weight is a distraction that keeps us from filling in that gap and creating more stable ground on which we might keep our organizations relevant. It’s time to start talking about it, so that we can demystify and dismantle it, and maybe even toss it off the bridge.

At my own public library in the heart of downtown Portland, Oregon, the edges of the gulf lie between the Information Services (IS) staff (professional librarians and library assistants) and the Access Services (AS) staff (pages and clerks).

People talk about the “luxuries” of working in the central branch of a large, urban library system, and indeed there are some—many staff, many materials, lots of space. But there are also challenges. The sheer number of people and large scale of everything means a hierarchical or striated structure is necessary just to get through the day, let alone provide the framework to make strategic decisions, implement innovations or take risks. This makes cross-departmental collaboration something you have to actively pursue and makes information sharing an every-day-no-exceptions necessity.

Of course, structures are only as good as the cultures that utilize them. Inside of this one, with all its rules and necessary pecking order and chains of command, the natural division of work duties, job classification, and salary range can divide library staff by creating myopic cells for highly specialized work instead of providing a general area of focus that keep us from being overwhelmed. People who have worked here for 30 years or more (and there are more than a few) remember when pages were given permission to answer only one question posed



by the public: “Where’s the bathroom?” and librarians were surrounded by the sudden silencing of all conversation when they dared to travel into the basement stacks. No wonder the pages were indignant and the librarians dismissive. Unfortunately, memories like these about our traditional roles are still deeply ingrained in library culture.

I’m currently the Access Services Administrator in my building, with two major departments in my area of responsibility. I have 17 years of library experience working as-and-with hundreds of pages, clerks, shelvers and volunteers. But I have no MLS and limited reference work experience compared to my professionally educated Administrator peers. Admittedly, I have a better close up view of the support staff side of the equation and can bring plenty of my own baggage to this examination of the tension that exists.

When I started in public libraries as a paraprofessional, I was provided with the following guidance: “Don’t ask the librarians questions. They don’t know the particulars of your job, which is to put materials on the shelf and stay out of their way. Let them handle the patrons. If you need help, don’t ask them. Ask one of us.” This was not said with any animosity toward the Information staff. It was just the Way It Was. It was easier to stay isolated, on separate planets with different orbits around the sun, than to figure out how to pool our resources and work together. Being new and eager to fit into the well-established, much-romanticized-by-me library culture, I took the guidance to heart. This system of deliberate separation created a reality in my mind where the “real library work” was kept, ostensibly aloft, certainly secret, in the realm of capital “R” reference, and those of us who performed the “not as important and rightfully hidden” labor of handling patron accounts and keeping the collection in order were literally and figuratively housed in the basement.

Of course patron service and user experience suffered for our lack of integration. Hand offs were clumsy if they happened at all, patrons’ service expectations went unmet due to the public not knowing or caring who the “real” librarians were (it was hard to figure out how to say to the public “I’m really not supposed to talk to you”), and half the public services staff never really knew what the other half was doing. Work was duplicated, done incompletely, incorrectly, or not at all. We had no service agreements or way to know what we (as staff) or patrons could expect from other departments. In the broadest terms, within our dysfunctional understanding of daily operations, AS staff only knew that patrons’ reference inquiries were mysterious, untouchable, and answered out of earshot; IS staff knew that items got checked out, fines were collected, and materials got moved around without their having to get involved. We were all part of the same system, but you wouldn’t have guessed it.

While that was almost 15 years ago, and we’ve made such great strides away from that reality, we still struggle with the divide. At our best: we feel and act like a great team of people seamlessly and passionately exercising our dedication to public service, and patrons can tell. At our worst, we feel and act righteously indignant in our separated silos, not communicating or extending each other the most basic courtesy, and the patrons can tell.

One of my clerks recently spoke up during a meeting about the work we currently do to support the IS staff. She said “We’d love to work more collaboratively with the IS staff. We just want to feel like we’re working with them, not for them.” This so succinctly and accurately encapsulated the myriad ways I’d felt about our work environment in the past. The question remains: How do we work more collaboratively across classification lines and instill a broad sense of importance for all library staff contributions when, for decades, the culture and politics of the work place dictated that the staff took on roles that felt like those



of nobility and servants? Especially when there are many of us still around who weathered the weirdness and still struggle with the old mindsets? We have done quite a bit of really good work around this since the turn of the last century, but it's taken time and deliberate planning to figure out our best route. Here are some of our successes.

### **It starts at the top.**

Our Library Director Vailey Oehlke recently said in an all manager meeting, related to an IS initiative we're implementing to help shape and direct the work of IS staff for the future, that "There's no work (at the library) that's more or less important. And I include my own job in that. We all have a role in the success of this organization." She went on to say that just because we are focusing on the role of IS and what that work will look like as we carve out our new relevancy, doesn't mean that materials don't have to be moved around every day. It is incredibly important that your organization's leadership embraces the idea that all library work is equally important, and that it is unacceptable to reinforce the idea that certain work has higher value for the organization and that it resides with one classification or another. This helps break down the Us vs. Them structure and provides an alternative where it is about being one team, all working toward the same goals.

### **But at the very least, do what you can to put your own house in order.**

Let us say your organization is not quite ready to embrace this philosophy yet. You can still influence the culture of your own, smaller work group. One of the things my departments have focused on for the last many years is to deal with our own internal issues before tackling anything outside the sphere of our influence. Process inefficiencies, personality conflicts, unnecessary competition, performance issues, unclear expectations—anything that would keep us from being viewed as anything other than role models—these things needed to be addressed before we could worry about anything else, including how we built and maintained our relationships with other work groups.

### **Model the behavior you expect from others.**

A physical manifestation of this shift in culture currently includes a project an IS colleague and I are working on called "MOLE (More Opportunities for Leadership Experiment)." Our lead workers were finding their mixed class meetings challenging, and it occurred to us that, with few exceptions, we weren't doing in our meetings what we had asked them to do. The idea is that if leadership (administrators like myself, supervisors, and lead workers) from IS and AS carve out the time to be present at a small percentage of the daily huddles, operational and planning meetings for each other, we will be more informed, we will have a chance to build better relationships, offer insight and ideas, and we will know when things will impact the work of the departments we're responsible for. Like diplomatic attachés—very exciting!

Leading by example is a great way to make something new less scary, and to communicate that we're all doing it together. If others see that it is not painful and nothing bad happens, the hope is it will make it easier for them to take their own leaps and suggest interdepartmental projects or discussions, build relationships, or even just know what's happening around them. At the very least, this cross-pollination should help deconstruct various rumor mills and assumptions that crop up from time to time.



**Make it okay to talk about the tension, because it affects people and their work.**

Talking about the differences between IS and AS work can feel like opening a can of worms. It's uncomfortable. But it's real. Just putting the divide on the table can be a relief. Even if you're not in a position of formal leadership, there is always a way to talk about issues that creates opportunity instead of closing doors. It helps if this is done in a structured way at first, through focused conversations with a facilitator, or in small groups where mis-steps can be worked through on a small scale. As many life-changing support groups would say, we first have to admit we have a problem.

**Implement "service agreements" between departments or work groups.**

Discussing with mixed groups of staff how they want to conduct their day to day business and what behaviors they expect to see out of their colleagues can have a big impact. Getting things written down in the form of a service agreement can help guide groups through sticky situations. For instance, just writing down what a successful inperson patron referral looks like can make a huge difference in how many staff make those referrals in the future, and there's documentation to look back to when things go awry. Spelling out the common goals (e.g. "Our goal is excellent and seamless patron service at that patron's point of need,") can help act as a filter through which all behavior expectations can be run to see if they make sense and are doable.

**Create collaborative opportunities in decision making.**

Asking small groups of interdepartmental staff to work on discrete problems within parameters agreed upon at the leadership level can be so beneficial on many levels. It creates buy in for multiple work groups, includes staff who are actually doing the work and experiencing the pain points, and helps contribute to a culture of transparency. Over the last few years we have successfully revamped the supply ordering process, reorganized almost half our overcrowded reading room collections and changed patron traffic patterns, and examined all our materials handling processes from check in to check out to eliminate "extra touches"—all by utilizing staff guided groups from mixed classifications. These projects were successful in part because every work group contributed to the problem solving and implementation.

**Take the high road.**


Everyone can relate to feeling that their buttons are being pushed, due to the ignorance of others, being subjected to cultural norms that feel wrong, or in the worst cases, by deliberate antagonizing during conflict. Friction points along the IS/AS divide are well known and earnestly experienced. The longer people work in libraries, the more baggage they may have around it. I certainly struggle with it. I have made goals around taking the high road when a class-based conflict arises. This is not as easy as it sounds. It takes self-awareness and some strategizing around what coping skills would best be suited for the particular situation. Removing myself from the conversation, practicing responses to trigger issues, and communicating directly about how I feel helps. (Taking the high road is not to be confused with tolerating unprofessional workplace behavior.)





We have also done other, larger scale things that have improved our environment. We implemented a major customer service initiative in 2009 called *Think Yes!* that not only asked all library staff to focus on improving welcoming interactions with patrons and colleagues, but also created some practical guidelines for how we engage with others (empowering any library staff to talk about general options with patrons, creating concrete behavior expectations around being a team player). Our hiring practices have shifted to include an interpersonal skills focus—so important to relationship building and collaboration.

Public library work has changed so much in the past 20 years. Stable funding is no longer assumed. The pressure is always on to do more with less. The pervasiveness of the Internet and Google have changed the way patrons think of and use us. The work of IS has moved from that of gatekeeping experts to that of trusted guides and facilitators. The work of AS has become more inclusive of many direct customer interactions. Both work groups have moved to more lateral positions on the patron usage map. All of these things and more have helped us become more cooperative, more collaborative, more collegial, and even just more aware of each other.

Working better together in these ways will ensure that the only people we feel like we are working for are our patrons. 



# Community Relations Profile:

## “Team CR” Tina Davis and Liz Goodrich

by **Nate Pedersen**  
Community Librarian,  
Deschutes Public Library



and

**Liisa Sjoblom**  
Community Librarian,  
Deschutes Public Library



*Liz Goodrich and Tina Walker having fun at Halloween.*

The Deschutes Public Library (DPL) likes to have fun, and two staff members in the DPL’s Community Relations department take the charge at leading the fun. Liz Goodrich and Tina Walker Davis create and manage adult programs at the six branches of Deschutes Public Library. They also maintain and update the library’s social media outlets.

“We create cultural programs for grown-ups,” lead programs coordinator Liz Goodrich said. “We create opportunities for lifelong learning and community engagement. We hope to bring a sense of fun to it, and we like to mix things up for the staff too!”

It is the sense of fun that defines their working relationship, as well as their community relations efforts. Goodrich and Davis regularly finish each other’s sentences and laugh at each other’s jokes. Interviewing them is like hanging out with your sister and her best friend.

“Liz and I have a great time working together,” said Davis. “We do get up to shenanigans. We laugh and we bounce things off each other. It is this energy that helps us to brainstorm ideas together and find some jewels for programs.”

The Community Relations department is comprised of graphic designer Ann Hettinger, grant writer Suzy Olsen, and the two program coordinators—Goodrich and Davis. Led by manager Chantal Strobel, the team organizes 130 adult programs per year, raises money for, and executes, the largest community read program in Oregon “A Novel Idea ... Read Together” (6,500 participants annu-

### Links to web and social media sites:

Deschutes Public Library  
<http://www.deschuteslibrary.org>

Facebook  
<https://www.facebook.com/deschuteslibrary>

Pinterest  
<http://www.pinterest.com/deschutespublic>

YouTube  
<https://www.youtube.com/user/deschuteslibrary>

Twitter  
<https://twitter.com/deschuteslib>



ally), produces all of DPL's marketing and collateral materials, and oversees the social media. The average adult program attendance for 2013/2014 was 33 people per program.

"Liz and Tina are both highly successful at having a strong pulse on what is happening in pop culture and staying up with current affairs at a local and national level," Community Relations Manager Chantal Strobel said. "They have a knack of tying it all together for compelling monthly programs and very successful social media interactions. It is wonderful to have their intelligence, humor and wit draw in new audiences who have never before connected with the library. These two women know how to make connections happen!"

The Community Relations department creates monthly themes, "Know Wilderness," for example, or "Know WWI," or "Know Beer," or "Know Post-Apocalypse." The monthly themes are an effective way to keep programs organized and promote diversity and discussions in every program.

"The monthly theme allows us to stay organized, to be open to what others in the community are doing, and to look for opportunities to form partnerships that might bring in new people," said Goodrich. "It also helps to be aware of what's happening topically—things like the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act, for example, which is guiding our monthly theme in September. The programs we organize bring in people from many different experiences and expand what people think of when they think of the library."

Goodrich and Davis brought non-traditional library backgrounds to their roles at DPL. Goodrich had worked as a teacher, in a museum, and in a hospice before an "awesome stroke of luck" brought her into her community relations position. Davis previously owned an independent bookstore in Bend and spent several years as a freelance marketer. Davis' experience, working both in marketing and in community building through literature, was a natural fit for her community relations role with the library.

Davis now leads the social media for DPL. The library has Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Pinterest, Instagram and YouTube accounts, each of which is aimed at a slightly different demographic. Librarians have opportunities to participate in Pinterest, Twitter, Tumblr, and coming soon, Instagram.

"We look at social media as an overall way to raise brand awareness—letting people know about their library—about the possibilities that can happen at the library," said Davis. "Pinterest is a wonderful space for different staff to take part in social media. Library staff is able to share their own voice and their expertise and interest areas with a broad audience."

Facebook, by contrast, is solely managed by the Community Relations department and they have experienced a 40 percent increase in Facebook interactions this past year. From the public's perspective, Davis and Strobel believe Facebook is the voice of the library as a whole. They account the success in Facebook to the fact that they are following important guidelines to keep that "voice" consistent and effective.

"We are raising awareness that the library is socially relevant and on top of things in pop culture and the news first," said Davis. "Then we slip in a blurb about our programs and services and people actually see it and become engaged."



In addition to reaching out to the community, Davis and Goodrich noted opportunities for the CR department to build community amongst the staff at DPL. A recent example was the creation of a “Happy” video by the CR team that featured staff from all six branches of the library system. And in celebration of Banned Books Week, the CR team filmed a video called “Caught,” which shows various staff members posing for mug shots with banned books.

“It’s an effective team-building exercise,” said Davis. “It’s an outlet for staff to express themselves in a different way and to see what their co-workers are doing.”

Guided by that sense of fun and creativity, “Team CR” expands awareness about DPL into the larger community of Deschutes County bringing both traditional and nontraditional users into the library. It is obvious they enjoy every minute of it. 🐾



*Community Relations team with author Sherman Alexie.*



# Teamwork: It Starts With Hello

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**by Jay Hadley**  
Library Supervisor,  
Gresham Library,  
Multnomah County Library



Hello. Good morning!  
Goodbye, see you later. Happy birthday!  
Please, and thank you.  
Congratulations. Job well done!

Words like these are amazingly positive when used regularly. They can also be amazingly alienating, if you don't say them. Teamwork on a library team is built upon the connections between the team members. These small words and phrases are what create those connections on a daily basis, and without the connections, the team will fall apart.

Showing courtesy and respect to your teammates begins with good morning, and is enhanced with goodbye, see you later. The commitment to pleasantly greet your teammates signifies that you are ready to work with them that day, and opens the door to more connection and conversation. Goodbye, see you later tells your teammates that you are leaving for now, but will renew your connection with them later.

Library support staff can model the kind of behavior they would like to see in others, by being the courteous, encouraging teammates that everyone enjoys having. If we wait for others to show us respect and courtesy, it is time wasted that could be used to connect, converse and work more productively together. Take the lead in brightening someone's day!

Teamwork is built around shared experiences and there can always be a reason for a little (or big) celebration. Birthdays are a reason to have a celebration. At my library we have a monthly potluck in honor of staff with birthdays that month. It may seem small but it is a great reason to stop for a moment, share joy and food and wish someone a happy day. Celebrating an accomplishment is another reason for cake! Perhaps you just completed a major shift of your collection. Perhaps you made it to Wednesday. Celebrate! Congratulate your co-workers when they do a great job or go the extra mile. Support staff can be the engineers of celebration events that build team unity. Appreciation and kindness toward our fellow staff members are the small, yet amazingly powerful gestures that keep us serving library patrons with a smile.

Material in this article was sourced from *Think Yes for Team Players*, Multnomah County Library's internal customer service class. 



# OLA Quarterly Publication Schedule 2014

The *OLA Quarterly (OLAQ)* is the official publication of the Oregon Library Association. The *OLAQ* is indexed by *Library Literature & Information Science* and *Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts*. To view PDFs of issues, visit the *OLAQ* Archive on the OLA website. Full text is also available through *HW Wilson's Library Literature and Information Science Full Text* and *EBSCO Publishing's Library, Information Science and Technology Abstracts (LISTA) with Full Text*.

Each issue is developed around a theme determined by the Communications Committee and Guest Editor(s). To suggest future topics for the *OLA Quarterly*, or to volunteer/nominate a Guest Editor, contact the *OLAQ* Coordinator.

Vol./No.	Theme	Deadline	Pub. Date	Guest Editor
Vol 20 • No. 4 Winter 2014	<i>Beyond Curation: Libraries as Creators</i>	December 15, 2014	January 30, 2015	Stewart Baker

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