

Bringing Users and “Stuff” Together

Margaret Law &

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From the beginning of libraries, our purpose has been to unite library users with the “stuff” they need to go about their business. Over time, this stuff has evolved from manuscripts, through books and magazines, to include realia, toys, virtual resources and data. Our users continue to change and evolve as well, from walk-in clients, through telephone contacts, to now include users we may never see or be able to identify.

The methods we use to make connections between libraries and users have also changed over time, from the traditional book selection and acquisition processes, through the acquisition of electronic resources, to our current concern with access rather than ownership. Our services and techniques continue to expand to meet our users’ changing needs.

What has not changed during this time, however, is the need for a wide variety of people with different skills and attributes to connect users with the resources they are looking for. Regardless of the type of library, material or user, that connection is made through the efforts of people. As we work to make libraries more accessible and users more self-sufficient, it is easy to lose sight of the contribution that trained and


committed staff make to meet the goals of every library and information centre.

The staff who are involved in this process are both paid and unpaid, and include volunteers, library technicians, librarians, other professionals such as IT and accounting personnel, and various support staff. It is only by working together that we can provide library and information services as effectively as possible to the huge variety of users across the country.

This issue of *Feliciter* brings together some current thinking on the state of library staffing issues in Canada. It is a time of change in libraries, as we face the disappearance of traditional roles, the emergence of new roles, and the impact of demography. In addition, we find ourselves serving a more diverse group of users with higher expectations. Will we rise to meet the challenges ahead? Yes we will, because we have the people with the skills and commitment to do just that.

Roles in the information community are continuing to evolve. What used to be clearly library job titles may now be termed information analyst, information architect, resource centre manager, and a variety of others. It’s too soon to

say what impact this is having on staff issues, but it is clear that employment in this community will continue to change.

At her first professional job interview, Margaret Law was asked the question, “If you had a little extra money to spend, would you spend it on the collection or on the staff?” At the time, Margaret says, “I thought it was a simple question to answer, because libraries still largely represented collections. Now I would give the other answer – the staff. I have come to understand that a collection, whether virtual or concrete, is not a library without staff to connect it to the people who want to use it.” 

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