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Soloing with Friends

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Soloing with Friends



**Jeannie Ferriss, Library Director
Whitehall Community Library**

I have worked in many different types of libraries over the past years: academic, public, school; doing many different types of services: children's, young adult, reference, information literacy, government documents, etc. This variety has enabled me to develop some wonderful friends across the library world and experience some unique partnerships in services.

Currently, I am on my way to teach information literacy in a small country school which houses grades K-8th. When the students graduate they come seven miles east to attend high school in the town where I am the public library director. They will suddenly be in a system where the other students have had access to a full-time school librarian and literacy instruction beginning in kindergarten. As you can imagine there was a large gap in the literacy skills of the transferring students. Through the willingness of one teacher and the resources of our library, this gap no longer exists. This is just one small example of how librarians may work together to use their different skills and talents to create unique services to a variety of patrons.

There are many opportunities for academic librarians to reach outside their bubble and experience different cooperative settings. Christian libraries may partner with state universities to host grant speakers, create summer reading programs to service areas close to their campuses which other programs cannot cover due to distance, host Bible studies for churches who many not have space or the personnel to open up during the day, reach out to school librarians to host concurrent students who are taking both high school and college level freshman classes for credit, or any other space sharing ideas one can conceive.

Public Library Directors in Montana are required to take 60 hours of training and be certified every four years. This training is open to anyone who would be interested in learning more about public relations, staff management, technology, administration, developing library board members, and more. When I tell other librarians about this, the normal response is "Where do I sign up?" Sharing training opportunities is one of the greatest advantages of having relationships outside the academic world. Did I mention the training is free?

Crossing disciplines and creating cooperative relationships with other librarians has many advantages, especially for solo librarians in small academic settings. It creates fellowship with others who are often struggling with the same situations in many

circumstances but live right next door. What library isn't facing budget concerns, insufficient staffing, technology updates, and time constraints? Working with librarians in other disciplines gives an entirely new perspective on public relations, enabling students to interact with different age groups (my students loved working with preschoolers during summer story times) or getting to know the elderly as they assist in teaching computer classes.

Creating partnerships with other types of librarians may also give you a fresh perspective on your own talents and abilities in different forms. When working with a state university several years ago I rediscovered my love of grant writing. Since then I have changed job positions and grant writing is a major source to fund unique programs and technology at my new job.

There are things to consider when creating new relationships outside of one standard field. When working with the schools on information literacy, I am very aware of the need for constant communication with the teachers who provide student assignments. As a public librarian, I plan and execute programs by doing the instruction myself or inviting others to share their expertise. When sharing with those who educate K-12 students, I acquainted myself with the school guidelines and standards their librarians follow.

As a solo librarian in a Christian college setting I was made aware that many academic librarians tie their programs and research to the publishing world. It is always appropriate to consider which members may need to publish their work as part of their academic job description. Publication may work differently in the public world. It is often the number of patrons in attendance which decides whether a program continues or not, getting the word out is more important in guaranteeing "a successful" program for a county or city library.

Libraries are the information source for multiple types of patrons and librarians may only gain in knowledge and experience when opening up to those in other areas of library service. I have found it to be educational, exciting, enriching, and I have a great group of new friends to show for it. Challenge yourself to explore new experience with others today, then enjoy the benefits of a different point of view. †

Are you a solo librarian? Have you come across a plan that works for you? Do you have thoughts or ideas that might assist other librarians? Please consider sharing your ideas with others in ACL by submitting to this column. Contact Associate Editor, Jeannie Ferriss (jfluvbks@gmail.com) if interested.

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