

Health Library Staff Member Spotlight

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When did you first start working in a health library?

My experience with health libraries was a (very) short stint at the Townsville Health Library back in 2008. When I moved back to Darwin in 2009 I won a job with the NT Health Libraries and I've been here ever since!

How/Why did you join health librarianship?

This happened more out of necessity than design. My husband at the time was in the military and when he got posted to Townsville I was scrambling to find a library job. I approached the library at James Cook University and landed both a job with them and with their affiliate library at the Townsville Hospital. The experience I got there helped me secure a job with the NT Health Libraries when I moved back to the NT.

What was your previous employment background, prior to health libraries?

Before health libraries I spent several years in public libraries, academic libraries (including special collections), a school library and spent a year or two at the NT Police, Fire & Emergency Services College library. I've pretty much worked in libraries since I left high school, in a range of volunteer, casual and library assistant roles before I finished my librarianship. My mum's a librarian so I had built in connections in the NT and an innate love of libraries and their role in the community.

How do you describe your current position?

I'm currently acting as the Systems & Resources Coordinator, a role that manages the Resource Management Unit and leads a small (but brilliant) team of librarians and library technicians. My team manages all the print and electronic resources for NT Health Libraries, which consists of five physical locations across the territory. We also manage library systems such as the LMS and digital repository. My other hat is as team leader for the library Marketing Team, which is a heap of fun and very rewarding. We started this team a couple of years ago, with the aim of being more strategic and consistent with our marketing and communications, increasing the profile of the library within the organisation, and improving engagement with our clients.

What do you find most interesting about your current position?

The projects! NT Health Libraries has a few projects on the go at the moment and my team have a hand in many of them. Most exciting is the upgrade of our existing institutional digital repository to DSpace-CRIS 7, to be known as NT Health Research Online. NTRO will bring together all the research output of NT Health and really build

our profile as a research organisation, while also boosting the profile of individual researchers.

What has been your biggest professional challenge?

One of the most challenging, but ultimately rewarding things to come out of my position with the NT Health Libraries has been two secondments to other areas of the organisation. The first was a move to the Learning & Development Team where I was part of a project to update the organisation's learning management system, and the second was to the People, Safety & Analytics team, where I worked with staff from across the organisation to develop a framework and guideline around COVID-19 training. This was in the midst of the pandemic and ultimately led to a consistent approach to COVID-19 training across all NT hospitals, primary health care clinics, quarantine facilities and corporate divisions. The challenging aspect of these secondments was that for both of them I was essentially 'thrown in the deep end', with very little notice, working in a space very different to libraries and applying my librarianship skills in very different ways. But in the end these secondments allowed me to grow and I brought a huge range of new skills, knowledge and experience back to the library at the end of it.

What do you consider the main issues affecting health librarianship today?

Where do I start? Increasingly tight budgets, paired with poor exchange rates, up against the rising costs of print and electronic resources? Or the issue of making ourselves seen and valued amidst all the information and competing voices out there? Or the fact that many decision-makers still see us as 'the lovely librarian ladies' instead of information professionals with high levels of expertise and experience? Take your pick.

What advice would you give to a new member of a health library or a new graduate information professional?

Diversify! Learn new skills, follow your curiosity, and don't get stuck on just the one path or 'type' of librarianship. Many of the opportunities that I've been presented with have come my way because I had the right skills for the job. Everything from project management to web design, basic SQL (programming language) to engaging with stakeholders, developing communication strategies to implementing test strategies for IT project deployment. And many things in between.

What would you do if you weren't a health librarian?

100% would be an author. My first novel was shortlisted in The Banjo Prize 2023, which is a competition for unpublished manuscripts run by HarperCollins Publishers Australia. I didn't win, but I'm still chatting to them behind the scenes and I have everything crossed that my books will be library bookshelves one day soon!

What is your favourite non-work activity?

If I'm not writing, then I'm out in the bush or at the beach with my kids and partner. We're so lucky to have the spectacular, unspoilt landscapes of the NT on our doorstep.

Anything else you would like to share about yourself?

people can find out more about my authorial alter-ego at www.amharamckey.com or on Instagram @amhara_mckey_writer

