Graduated Success: Monash Health Library's Cadetship Program

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Monash Health Library service is actively supporting the development of new health librarians through a Cadetship position open to new or soon-to-be graduate librarians. In this workplace training program, new librarians benefit from a supportive environment that is designed to bridge the gap between education and practice, while managers and the hosting library enjoy the dynamism of fresh perspectives and skills. On a library sector level, the role promotes pathways into health and special libraries and sustainable development of the health library workforce.

Through five questions this article shares the experience of the people who have lived the program. It includes words from three librarians who have undertaken the training:

- Nga Man Wong, current Library Systems Manager at Eastern Health Library
- Saara Kahkonen, current Clinical Librarian at the Northern Territory Department of Health Library
- Eunice Ang, current Library Cadet at Monash Health.

Their words highlight the myriad benefits that workplace-based training brings to individuals, library teams and industry. It is an inspirational story for other libraries who may consider offering workplace training programs.

The five questions were put to Nga Man, Saara and Eunice. Their answers follow.

Would you recommend a temporary cadetship placement to other library graduates?

- **Eunice:** Absolutely! The 1-year contract is short but the experience you get, especially being a new graduate, is invaluable. Use the time limit as a form of motivation to push yourself and try to gain as much skills and experience as you can. Even if you have prior experience working in other libraries, a cadetship in a health library will still add to your existing skills and experience. I did my work placement at Monash Health before joining as a library cadet. The cadetship is like an extended work placement and the best part is that it is paid. Instead of being just a visitor, you'll get to be truly part of the team and contribute to library goals. On top of that, you'll make personal and

professional connections in the industry. The cadetship at Monash Health has been good to me and I have gotten a lot out of it. Health librarianship is also a specialized and niche field, so this is one of those rare opportunities to get experience in the industry.

- **Saara:** Short answer: yes. Ultimately it offers new graduates a much-needed foot in the door. Graduate positions have the benefit of acknowledging recent academic qualifications within an environment for building professional experience. I recommend the Cadetship to new graduates who are particularly interested in health, special, or research libraries. I also advise the candidate to be flexible and proactive in the tasks that they complete as there are both Librarian and Library Technician tasks involved, and at times it is hard to find your feet in that ambiguous space between the two. Professional development opportunities are enthusiastically encouraged; however, it is important to be your own advocate as well as it is a fixed term position and you will have to move on in a year. This graduate position is set up in a way that can be moulded to suit your interests – an adaptability which is another huge benefit of the initiative.
- **Nga Man:** I enthusiastically recommend library graduates who are keen on working in special libraries to start with a temporary cadetship placement. The high-quality training offered by the program helped me appreciate the full picture of the special library industry, and especially the work of hospital libraries. The cadetship provided me opportunities to learn from and collaborate with library specialists in the team and beyond. Furthermore, taking initiatives and having hands-on experience from project to project allowed me to build knowledge and discover areas of expertise. This program serves not only as a solid foundation for new graduates' career path development, but also allows new librarians to discover their areas of interest and expertise they might want to develop.

Did the cadetship change or impact on your career plans?

- **Eunice:** I always knew that I wanted to do something that was focused on research support services. Because of that, I was interested initially in the tertiary education sector. However, the cadetship has changed my mind, and I can see myself in hospital libraries in the long-term. The opportunity to be involved in the industry was the deciding factor – you never know until you try it! I have been impressed by the focus on expert searching and the collaborative approach to research support in the health care sector.
- **Saara:** Definitely. I may not have worked in health libraries without the Cadetship experience. My first love is public libraries and I had anticipated

remaining in that sector, however, I was keen to learn about other types of libraries and special libraries interested me. But translating interest into experience can be difficult, particularly when thinking about special libraries where there tend to be fewer openings. I am still learning about health care and supporting health professionals, though it is undeniable that the experience opened doors for me in research support, training, advanced searching, special collections, and marketing which now benefit me in my new position. Indeed, the biggest impact it had on my career was that it enabled me to secure a higher level librarian role (in a Health Library) in a much quicker timeframe than I had dared hope for. I now plan to stay in the Health Library sector for years to come.

- **Nga Man:** My experience as a Library Cadet changed my career plans. I was always interested in working in special libraries, but I only had slight experience of specials from working in a law library overseas and expected to complete the internship at the Australian Parliamentary Library secured at the end of my Masters degree. I had been expecting to go down the path of law librarianship. But then the Cadetship provided me with insight into how hospital libraries work and medical librarian career paths. It allowed me to combine librarianship with my previous career in nursing, which was another huge bonus. The impact on my career path has been beyond my expectations, and it linked me to my next career opportunity. My supervisors were very encouraging and showed great support for my career development.

What were the biggest benefits for you in undertaking the Cadetship?

- **Eunice:** The flexibility offered by the cadetship at Monash Health allowed me to build on my existing skills (e.g. customer service, training, marketing) in my work while also developing new skills in tasks and projects that interests me (e.g. collection access and discovery, advanced searching, research support). The cadetship also gave me insight into health and special libraries and the issues and challenges faced by these libraries. I have also appreciated being able to work in a collaborative environment with an incredibly supportive team. In a short span of time, I have built lasting connections with colleagues, which has perhaps been the biggest reward. Working in a small library team means I have the opportunity to work on a little bit of everything, which is something that I recently realized I have really enjoyed! I especially loved learning how to build advanced literature searches in health science databases and I won't be able to go back to basic searches again.

- **Saara:** The biggest benefit for me in undertaking the Cadetship was gaining marketable and varied professional experience beyond the library customer service desk. Beyond securing a salaried position, my other biggest criteria

coming out of my degree was to be able to perform duties away from the information/reference desk – as I had a few years' experience of that already from public libraries. The graduate position enabled me to build skills and experiences in a huge variety of areas and it was flexible enough to accommodate my own personal interest areas. The Library Director listened to my creative ideas and motivated me to implement them in the Health Library context. The position does as it should by providing a space where the new graduate can build a relevant, varied, marketable and expert set of skills, knowledge and experiences which act as a springboard for bigger and more experienced positions. On an interpersonal level, another major benefit was being surrounded by innovative and forward-thinking library leaders who instilled in me a real sense of the importance of professional development and sector involvement for continued library (and librarian) excellence. The strong connections I made with professional peers while at Monash Health have been a real asset since I moved to a physically remote team which can make networking with other Health Libraries difficult.

- **Nga Man:** The biggest benefits came from collaboration, professional development and career opportunity. In terms of collaboration, the Cadetship provided me with the opportunity to join an inter library committee for our library management system. I learned from and collaborated with experienced medical librarians and information specialists across Victoria. It provided a sense of involvement and belonging. In terms of professional development, attending conferences and webinars made me reflect on the importance of technical skillsets for the library industry. It motivated me to build my technical skills, such as coding and systems management, and those skills have become very useful in my day-to-day work. In terms of career opportunities, the Cadetship has set me up with a broad view of the library sector and technical skills grown from innovative projects. Through these experiences the Cadetship has provided a solid foundation for my future career development.

What keywords best describe benefits of the program?



Do you have any other comments about the program?

- **Eunice:** The cadetship has created a safe space for learning and trying new things and I am very thankful for the opportunity to grow personally and professionally. The program is a success thanks to the library team's enthusiasm and willingness to share ideas, knowledge and experience. It is good to come in with an open mind and a good attitude. Being proactive and asking a lot of questions goes a long way. If you are a new librarian, be sure to observe and shadow your colleagues to gain as much experience as you can.

- **Saara:** The traineeship bridges the gap that I and a lot of my peers felt upon graduating. Given the choice between a new graduate librarian and a librarian with several years of experience, employers often chose the qualified and experienced candidate. I also found that where an employer was willing to take on a new graduate with little library experience, I was still overlooked in favour of candidates who had made a career change and thus had existing professional skills from their past jobs. As the old adage says, how can we gain experience if we aren't given the opportunity to build it? The Cadetship solves this problem and as such I can't recommend it enough to employers in the library sector. The employer benefits from the initiative as well, as the library team gains a qualified and enthusiastic team member who is looking to put what they've learnt into practice. I will be forever grateful for this valuable initiative and the opportunity it gave me to grow!

- **Nga Man:** I am very thankful for the Cadetship opportunity, which allowed me to begin my library career. I am particularly appreciative for the team's support. Without the supportive team environment, my experience would have differed and my achievements would have been impacted. The success of my Cadetship depended on my own attributes and willingness to learn, but this is not enough when it stands alone. The provider also has to be driven to make the experience vibrant and to demonstrate great leadership and listening skills. I felt valued and listened to throughout my experience of the program.

Key Takeaways

For learners:

- Have an open mind and be curious, it will let in new and worthwhile ideas.
- Question everything, even yourself. It is not about being right, but about understanding.
- Be engaged in professional development and own your career. Be your own advocate.

- IT knowledge and systems skills are essential for every single library role from graduates to managers. Systems skills need to be seen as part of the standard library toolbox.
- Embrace challenges and be prepared to venture from your comfort zone. Raise your hand for projects that will expand your skill set.

For managers:

- Listen. If you are not listening, then you are not learning. The best ideas can come from the most junior member of staff as easily as from the most senior.
- Trust. Just because someone is new to the sector, it does not mean that you need to micro-manage them. You are leading the person, not their tasks.
- Support, guide and teach. There are considerable rewards in developing the next generation.

The experiences described above indicate that the success of workplace training depends as much on the incumbents as the supervisors. From the trainee's perspective, coming in with an open mind and a willingness to learn positively impacted the experience. Similarly, managers should be flexible in the leadership approach and be prepared to listen to the new librarians to help them explore their ambitions and gain skills that fit their interests.

This program has positively highlighted the rewarding work undertaken by librarians in health care environments. It celebrates a rich career pathway to current and graduating students of librarianship. In addition, there are benefits for the team and established librarians who also experience the program. We hope that the perspectives shared here encourages new relationships between health libraries and librarianship students.

In the words of Benjamin Franklin:

Tell me and I forget
Teach me and I remember
Involve me and I learn