

Samoaan library, Australian librarian: connecting people and libraries through international volunteering.

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-problems- lack of money, slow internet, books very dated and haphazard collections because you are relying on donations, digital divide, lack of Samoan language materials, low pay for librarians,

Volunteering as a librarian overseas is a fantastic way to connect with people of a different culture and assist the growth of library services in developing countries. I am currently volunteering in Samoa as an Australian Youth Ambassador for Development (AYAD) and participating in a Pacific Law Library Twinning Program, where an Australian law library is 'twinned' with a Pacific Law Library to provide legal texts and librarian assistance and training to a Pacific library. The AYAD program and the twinning program both work to connect cultures and bridge cultural divides.

Libraries in Samoa are very different to Australian and New Zealand libraries. One public library serves the entire population. Most libraries still rely on a card catalogue system. Library services lack trained staff, funding, access to current texts, computers and internet access. Collections are often haphazard and dated as they are made up of donated items. There is no national library and a lack of Samoan language materials. While Australian and New Zealand libraries forge ahead, connecting people through innovative projects and Web 2.0 devices, the public library in Samoa still has no computers for public use. The digital divide abounds.

My experience as an AYAD in Samoa has allowed me to share my skills with my colleagues, exposed me to a new culture and new friendships, and given me a new perspective on the importance of good libraries and information services. With the Library Association of Samoa, I have worked to raise the profile of Samoan libraries through events such as Library Week. Yet there remains a great deal to be improved. The continuous improvement of library services in Samoa is important for education, literacy, providing access to information, breaching the digital divide, preserving Samoan culture, and promoting Samoan culture through literature. Improving internet services within libraries and providing internet training will help Samoans connect with each other and preserve the Samoan culture and language in a new way.

I hope this paper raises the awareness of the need for better library services in Samoa and across the Pacific. As Samoa and New Zealand have strong connections and a large population of Samoans living in New Zealand, the opportunities for connecting people through library services are boundless. Samoan Language Week at the Waitakere libraries is an excellent example of this. I encourage conference participants to explore their options for volunteering in developing countries and for setting up twinning programs between their libraries and libraries in developing countries. In this way we can connect people, libraries, and cultures.