

MyWeek

Jane Milne

Team Leader Sighthill and Ratho Libraries, Edinburgh

Monday: (Late shift) We are working on a full-scale refurbishment project, which has ambitious timescales, so I catch up with my line manager, Evelyn, and the site manager to check if all is well. It is. I check the final paint colours including a fantastic silver colour which our painter spent hours trying to source. After this I've got a bit of light relief in the form of Chatterbooks, then I help out with our Duke of Edinburgh Group.

Tuesday: Today I get to be a mum to my 8 month-old as I work flexible hours. You'll mostly find me cleaning up and singing *The Wheels on the Bus*.

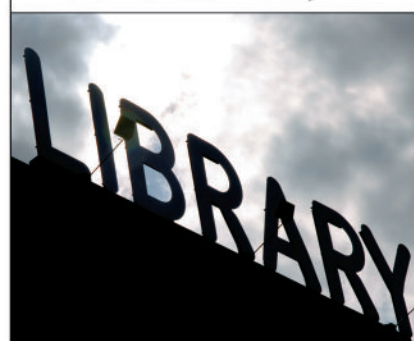
Wednesday: (Late shift) Ratho Library today, after a quick trip to Radio Scotland for a live interview about winning the Libraries Change Lives Award. Evening shifts are a key time to engage with children and young people. Our Duke of Edinburgh Group is writing to famous people for quotes to include in a book which they want to publish and, I admit it, I abused my position in order to write a letter to Russell Crowe! The team and I also identify funding for a girls' group to run alongside the boys' football literacy project.

Thursday: I'm with Library Assistants at a local record shop today to buy CDs, DVDs and graphic novels, selected by our teenagers. Back at Sighthill, I catch up on how our video diary project and girls' health group are running and then attend a local youth issues group.

Friday: I'm spending the day interviewing candidates for a Library Assistant position. I keep updated with phone calls about arrangements for a visit from our MP.

Weekend: I meet first thing with our local police officer for an update on everything happening in the area and then research new furniture and fittings for the library. I get a chance to catch-up on emails and organise my time for the coming week.

GazettePeople



The People page looks at the working lives of our members and suppliers. To feature on the page you are welcome to submit an article of 700 words explaining what your job is, what it entails, what its highs and lows are, the opportunities it presents and any other interesting information. Please include a good quality picture. Send to Debby Raven, Editor, Library + Information Gazette: debbyraven@btconnect.com

If you would like to feature in our My week column drop Debby an email and she will be in touch.

Picture by: Jody Kingzett

Libraries must preach to the unconverted if they want to remain the public's information provider.

Hear the word

PAUL MILLER IS paid to think a lot and what he thinks is that the library systems being built rarely meet the real needs of their users. Fortunately he is also paid to talk, so he can do something about it.

'My job is to engage the broadest set of potential stakeholders in a conversation. We need, collectively, to think about what a 21st-century library service should look like; every preconceived notion is up for grabs,' he says.

He has always been interested in work involving the use of 'multiple, disparate sources of data' and standardisation. Last September he left the public sector for LMS supplier Talis, and the industry's most intriguingly named post.

Talis is highly visible at the moment because of its support for Library 2.0, the concept from the US which, very generally, means crossing boundaries between different systems and library authorities, using common building blocks.

It also stands for the opening up of resource discovery and against all those systems that mitigate against this, such as the Opac. 'Opacs are an evolution of the card index system, designed for cataloguers, not for public use. The Opac does not sit very well with today's users of online services,' says Paul, who wrote a Talis 'white paper' on Library 2.0 earlier this year.

It is his job to challenge 'all those processes placed between the user and the information they want'. He gives a simple example. 'I can't use my local library because it's shut when I'm not at work. How many people live and work in the same library authority? Local libraries generally aren't open when people are at home.'

Paul came to the information sector via early work on Geographical Information Systems (GIS). A degree in archaeology was followed by a PhD looking at using GIS to combine archaeological data in order to build a city model that could be used to predict the survival or otherwise of archaeology – in areas where new development was proposed, for example. He was also involved in some of the early exploration of metadata formats such as Dublin Core.

Work at the University Computing Service in Newcastle supporting GIS was followed by a stint at the Arts & Humanities Data Service. Then came Ukoln, as its first Interoperability Focus, and a post hosted by Jisc on behalf of the MLA, the British Library, the NHS, the e-Science Core Programme and others, as Director of the Common Information Environment (CIE). Developing standards encouraging interoperability across sectors (before the existence of the MLA) was therefore an early interest.

Paul was attracted to the Talis job partly out of frustration: 'Often with



PeopleProfile

Paul Miller

Technology Evangelist, Talis

large public sector organisations things move quite slowly. Talis talked about vision. Lots of the stuff we were trying to do at CIE would probably be done faster at Talis – and with the chance of ending up with something sustainable. There was also the usual problem of relying on bits of short-term funding.' As a result, he understands fully that lack of resources is one of the problems with getting everybody involved in his big conversation. But there is also cynicism about Library 2.0, both from other vendors and from public librarians.

'Some say it's simply what libraries do already. I wish that were true,' says Paul. 'Some authorities are seizing opportunities but the bulk probably aren't. There are so many pressures to simply meet existing targets, juggling priorities and scarce resources. However, I believe we can show how value can be increased quite easily. But we won't get there with libraries staying in silos, and vendors competing over core services. Ultimately, aren't we all trying to offer a better service to the user?'

Other critics say Talis's espousal of Library 2.0 is just a fancy way of promoting its services, such as Talis Source, an aggregated national union catalogue, Talis Platform, an open

platform to which libraries may contribute their catalogue data, and the Directory, which aims to offer an easy way to query different library catalogues.

One of his main aims is to ensure that libraries recognise the potential of new ways of working. It's not even important any more for users to think of 'the library', but to access individual services as they need them: 'The sector has tended to see the online as merely an extension of the offline; they offer up the library website and expect users to choose to flock to it. We really need to grapple with a less glamorous or visible, but far more valuable, reality of integrating library services with any number of other applications or contexts. We need to be pushing individual services out to where the users are.'

'There is still the belief that the public will recognise a library's right to exist. But the public can go elsewhere for information.'

'We have an opportunity to place the library – and librarians – at the heart of information-seeking behaviour, by adapting and meeting the needs of users rather than attempting to mould them to our current generation of services.'

'Believing that we can continue as we are might be the biggest threat to libraries.'

■ Paul Miller is speaking at the Sconul (Society of College, National & University Librarians) Conference and AGM, 21-23 June, Newcastle.

“ We have an opportunity to place the library – and librarians – at the heart of information-seeking behaviour, by adapting and meeting the needs of users rather than attempting to mould them to our current services. ”