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Available at: <http://www.soros.org/openaccess/read.shtml> [Retrieved 22 January 2007].

Interview with LILAC 2015 bursary winners

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Information literacy (IL) is a key issue in many professional fields, but it can be challenging for public libraries, schools and the NHS to cover conference delegate and travel costs. In recognition of this, LILAC offers bursaries each year for three outstanding information professionals representing these diverse sectors, enabling them to attend the full conference. As a current student of Library and Information Management at Manchester Metropolitan University, and working in a Research Services support role at Manchester University Library, IL is, for me, always filtered through the lens of the academic library. I was therefore interested to find out about the importance of IL in other sectors as well as the developments and challenges they face.

The appeal of LILAC 2015 for this year's bursary winners lay in its solid mix of theoretical and practical elements. Kim Davis, librarian at Fort Pitt Grammar School, Kent, said: "I wanted to know more about the theory of IL, as well as seeing what other institutions have done." Sarah Gardner, Outreach Librarian/Library and Knowledge Skills Trainer for Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, agreed: "The theory-type sessions, for example on differentiation, as well as practical sessions, such as the flipped classroom, were major draws." The opportunity to connect with like-minded professionals was also important, especially for Anne Archer, Library and Information Officer at Newcastle Public Libraries, who has been interested in IL since her undergraduate days, but has not yet had the chance to undertake any specific training.

Neither Anne, Sarah nor Kim expected to win a place at the conference: "It was such a wonderful surprise to get the bursary as work wouldn't have been able to send me... for three days," Anne explained, describing herself as ecstatic. Kim celebrated with an impromptu dance round her desk, earning a few confused looks from sixth-form students. Sarah said: "It was an honour to be attending such a prestigious event as a bursary winner. It made me want to wring every drop out of the experience." The winners are keenly aware of the importance of IL in their everyday work. Kim and Anne have both worked to develop their roles in supporting students as they prepare for the rigours of university: Kim said: "I show students where to discover resources and encourage them to look deeper into their assignments." A visit to Newcastle University Library revealed to Anne the IL skills gap amongst undergraduates: "I realised that public libraries were uniquely placed to help plug this gap."



Lucinda with her award. Copyright WPCThunderbird, shared via [Creative Commons](#).

Anne's proactive response was to design, promote and deliver a successful library skills programme for sixth-form students which runs to this day. IL is woven into all aspects of Sarah's work at her NHS trust: "I perform literature searches for clinicians and offer database search skills training, as well as teaching the theory of critical appraisal for application to randomised controlled trials and systematic reviews." The winners perceive substantial challenges to IL across their various sectors. "Although public libraries contribute towards IL in terms of the lifelong learning, it remains a hidden concept," Anne believes. "It needs to be brought to the forefront and discussed at both a local and national level in a more strategic and joined up way." Both Sarah and Kim cite budgetary and time constraints as major obstacles to effective IL teaching. Kim identified increasing pressures, meaning teachers are sometimes unwilling to allow time for students to research, preferring to give them the information already deemed useful. "School libraries are being squeezed and teachers have often not heard of IL and need persuading of its relevance." Sarah notes that it is extremely difficult for frontline NHS staff to be released from clinical areas in order to attend training, with many forced to pursue research interests in their own time. "This means accessing the library and our courses during staffed hours can be problematic."



Newcastle University, the conference venue.
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All three bursary winners were able to identify clear learning points throughout the conference which will influence their future approaches to IL. The conference's keynote speakers in particular left a lasting impression (more details can be found here: <http://www.lilacconference.com/WP/keynotes>). Sarah found that Ray Land made his subject matter accessible, entertaining and thought-provoking: "He put me in the right frame of mind to embrace and engage with the 'troublesome knowledge' I was acquiring at a rate of knots throughout the conference." Land's and Barbara Fister's talks caused Anne to reflect that traditional attempts to teach IL may be doing a disservice to the concept: "Troublesome knowledge can be a good thing. If we simplify IL we may be discouraging students from engaging with difficult concepts." Kim found the TUC's Julia Jones' keynote inspiring. "I can now see the wider context of IL; how these skills should be developing through school and then extending right out into the real world, influencing decisions that affect individuals and households."



Delegates at Newcastle Civic Centre for the conference dinner.
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The attendees found individual sessions throughout the conference thought-provoking. Anne and Kim enjoyed Sarah Pavey's session on independent learning and visual literacy. "It was so practical, unique and engaging that it is definitely something that I will be taking away and putting into practice," said Anne. Kim welcomed the session's game-playing format as an enjoyable and intellectually stimulating break in the middle of a busy conference day: "I took away the idea that the use of visuals and games can switch on a part of the brain required for IL. I plan to incorporate this idea into future work with students." Sarah left the conference with a list of new ideas to explore: "I learnt strategies for differentiating one-shot teaching; how to make short animated videos; uses for a welcome toolkit; new ways to engage with users; ideas for getting course participants to create content for future course participants; interesting things to do with interactive polls, and some uses for Vine and Instagram in a library setting."

Natasha Skeen's session on *'Working with schools: The Hive as the public face of HE*, Lily Todorinova's session on *Wikipedia as a vehicle for IL* and the Teachmeet were also praised highly. Sarah describes the latter as "a whirlwind of innovative ideas in a fun format," and Anne, who delivered a Teachmeet talk, found that it was "a real learning curve which I thoroughly enjoyed, even if my voice was ready to give out by round four." The winners were pleased to discover much cross-disciplinary overlap. Kim said: "It was surprising how many of the papers from university libraries were relevant to schools," while Sarah gained a sense that "when it comes to experiences in delivering IL training, there is much more that unites librarians in different sectors than divides them." Sarah, Anne and Kim were unanimous in their overall impressions of LILAC 2015. "It was absolutely amazing," said Kim. "I've never spoken to so many new people at a professional event before. I'm already considering coming to LILAC 2016." Although Sarah initially felt a little peculiar as one of only two NHS librarians amid several hundred academic librarians, she appreciated the welcome she received from other delegates: "I found the conference to be so friendly and inclusive that I soon felt right at home. Without a doubt the best conference I have ever been to." Anne felt a real buzz and conversation between delegates at every point in the day: "Everyone seemed to be really energised and engaged which was really exciting to see."



Delegates networking at the Great North Museum.

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What advice would this year's winners give to information workers in non-academic sectors considering applying for bursaries for LILAC 2016? "Go for it," says Sarah; "You can't put a price on a funded opportunity to step sideways out of everyday work and spend three days absorbing new concepts and swapping ideas with enthusiastic, knowledgeable people from all over the world." Anne urges public library workers to consider their important role in the teaching of IL: "Public libraries are very under-represented, but what you have to offer is so important, and you will not only be learning from FE and HE delegates – they will also be learning from you. LILAC and the IL community need you." Consider what you can bring to and gain from the conference, suggests Kim: "If you want to know more about IL and can identify where you could use this sort of experience in your organisation then just apply. Everyone I've met has been friendly and welcoming and every element of attending this conference was a learning experience for me."