

PUBLIC LIBRARY

MEDICINE HAT PUBLIC LIBRARY – Michelle Bien

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My typical workday at Medicine Hat Public Library

During a typical workday I will work in different areas:

- 1) Adult Services circulation desk
- 2) Reader's Advisory desk (called the Fiction Desk)
- 3) My workroom desk (called off-desk time)

The circulation desk is a high energy, fast paced job most of the time, dealing with a high volume of patrons.

The Fiction desk allows me to spend more time helping patrons to find their books, or new authors, etc.

My off-desk time is heavily involved with many aspects of youth in the library. This includes collection development of the young adult (YA) collection and programming for YA's. I also do collection development for Faith Fiction and Hi-Low collections. Five hours a week I wear my "Youth Outreach Coordinator" hat. I work with a teen advisory group at meetings and teen activity nights. This group is called Tic-Tac (Teens initiating change – Together and committed)

Why I chose to work in a public library?

I had previously worked at Medicine Hat Public Library as a circulation clerk, and I enjoyed it, but I wanted more challenges (and better pay!). So I decided to go back to school. When I graduated from SAIT, I was offered a job in the Technical Services Department here.

What do I think are the most important attributes or skills a library technician should have in order to be successful in a public library?

You must enjoy working with the people who use your library. Our job is to make their library experience a positive one, every time, if possible. Using your skills of conducting a reference interview to determine what your patron really wants, along with your personal knowledge of authors are extremely beneficial. Making use of tools you learned about like "Genreflecting" (adult and teens editions), or an online tool like Novel List make your job easier. You can even teach an interested patron on how to access these tools themselves, empowering them to have a better library experience.

What are my primary duties?

The Adult Services circulation desk is my primary duty. It must be staffed by two staff members from opening to closing. This duty is shared between all Adult Services staff members.

What are the most important soft and hard skills I used from my library technician education?

Originally working in Technical Services, my hard skills of typing, cataloging, computer use, and weeding were immediately applicable.

When I moved to the Adult Services circulation department I used important soft skills like conflict resolution, and people skills. Having the basic knowledge of science, literature and art that I learned at SAIT gave me self confidence doing reference interviews.

How have I seen opportunities for library technicians evolve?

I have seen library technicians ready, willing, and able to take on more challenging roles in the library. And when they are offered these roles, they do very well in them.

For example: I was offered the opportunity to maintain the young adult fiction collection, but all decisions were passed by my supervisor first. Soon she no longer required this, but she is always available if I have questions. My research and report writing skills helped me prepare a proposal to start a teen graphic novel collection. This was approved, and has proven to be very popular.

Then I applied for, and received, the position of Youth Outreach Coordinator. This has opened the opportunity to work with a teen advisory group for meetings and activities (which I love doing) and the teens enjoy as well.

Recently the Head of the Reference Department asked me if I would be willing to take on the YA non-fiction collection development (yes, yes, and yes!). So, I have seen my job evolve, and grow with me.

What are some fun tasks in my position?

I get to dress up in costumes like a medieval lady, a crusty pirate and Morticia Addams. I get to play monopoly, eat pizza, and watch movies while stuffing myself with hot, fresh popcorn. Every summer I set up murder scenes on the theatre stage and host teen murder mysteries (which are SO much fun).

What are some repetitive tasks in my position?

The checking in and out of books. During really busy times it seems like you just stand there and sign out/desensitize and sign in/re-sensitize library items.

Luckily, changes are coming after our library's circulation desk renovations are completed. My position will be more information/reference assistance with less circulation duty. This is another opportunity presented for me as a Library Tech to evolve.

What are some challenging tasks in my position?

I don't care for dealing with confrontational patrons, especially when I am working evenings or weekends when there is no supervisor. Occasionally, there are personality conflicts between teens during teen activity nights. There never seems to be enough time to do all of your tasks properly.

What are some special duties I perform periodically?

- Library tours to teens and adult groups
- Teach "Introduction to Computers" classes to adults
- Library conference presentations
- Writing an article for the AALT Journal (which I hope to do again)

How do I keep up with the changes in the profession?

- Attending library conferences such as AALT and ALC (and a great place for networking!)
- Reading library journals like the AALT Technician, VOYA, SLJ, and Library Journal
- Participating on listservs

Over the years, how have I seen the roles change for library technicians?

I feel that librarians, school principals, etc. have found the advantage of employing library technicians. We can work well with librarians, operate small libraries, supervise staff, and generally be an asset. I find that Medicine Hat Public Library treats library techs with respect and appreciates our abilities.

(For example – my supervisor is away this afternoon, and has offered me the use of her office and computer to complete these questions)