VALA2022 Bring IT On!

Teresa Köhne, Sunshine Coast Libraries

I was thrilled when I was given the opportunity to attend VALA2022 as the Diversity Scholarship recipient sponsored by SAGE Publishing. Travelling to Melbourne in the depths of winter to attend the conference onsite, along with the locals returning from their long weekend in the sunshine state, was well worth it.

The atmosphere was somewhat electric with attendees soaking up the face-to-face contact and recharging with in-person connections. It was clear that people are very keen to move on from the COVID dominated world and focus on the good that the GLAM sector is valued for.

I recently heard Ian Hill talk about the GLAM sector as part of the 'quality of life sector' (along with parks and recreation) in recognition of our potential impact on the community throughout their life. While we are not essential for survival, when we are meeting our goals, we add quality to life and strengthen our community as a result. The presentations and conversations at VALA2022 demonstrate that goals across the sector are consistently focussed on improving quality of life for our communities.

Here are some of the fantastic reminders and think-points (aka dot points) I have kept from some of the sessions that resonated with me.

Keynote 1: Intelligent Optimism, by Dr Shasta Henry and Mr Will Tait (Future Crunch)
- Adaptability is intrinsic
- Beginners have lots of ideas, experts have few
- We want disruptive thinkers, those that challenge respectfully – that's how to prompt significant improvements

Keynote 3: Pandemic privacy: preserving and protecting our digital rights when we're all trapped on the internet, by Ms Alison Macrina (Director, Library Freedom Project)
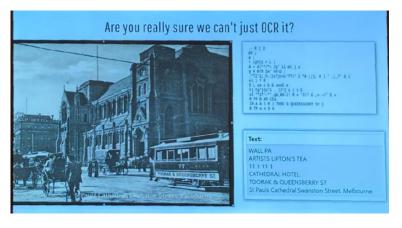- Privacy is an equity issue
- Privacy has a direct impact on struggles for social justice
- Social issues all relate to privacy and technology (and libraries are in a unique position to help!)

Keynote 4: Data, decisions and dynamics: What libraries need to know to realise the promise and avoid the pitfalls of AI, by Ms Kathy Reid (PhD Candidate, Australian National University)
- The future is already here – it's just not evenly distributed – or inclusive – or fair
- AI assumptions and preconceptions cause damage across cultures and underrepresented areas of the community
- Data is a representation of a real-world phenomenon and the labels we stick on data create our futures, especially the missing ones

Concurrent 14: AI, Accessibility and Digital Collections: Examining the practical application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to enhance the accessibility of the digital collections of the State Library of Victoria, by Mr Justin Kelly (Senior Data Engineer, State Library of Victoria)
- If an image is online, does that mean it's accessible?
- Image vs OCR vs AI text extraction

Concurrent 20: Learning together: four principles for digital literacy learning in libraries, by Mx Teishan Ahearne (eLearning and New Technology Facilitator, Moreland City Libraries)

- Digital literacy is essential, but whose agenda is being served in training programs?
- Four principles – build safety (together), be experimental/experiential, be learner centred and be non-prescriptive

Concurrent 26: Creativity and cross-institutional collaboration, by Kat Cain (Deakin University Library), Karen Miller (Curtin University Library), Kristy Newton (University of Wollongong Library)

- Creativity is an innate human ability
- The core to success in collaboration is building a relationship with genuine connectivity
- Be curious and cultivate generative conflict (not destructive conflict)

Keynote 5: The need for a digital clean-up day, by Mr Gerry McGovern (Author and speaker)

Gerry McGovern shared with us the unimaginable volume of raw resource extraction performed to produce digital goods, 90% of which ends up as waste. Gerry also called for respect for data, starting with an understanding of the impact of data creation, transmission and storage – in photos, webpages, documents, emails both personal and professional. We need to manage the culture of collecting and storing everything (not items that are records or have heritage value, but 'junk'). The creation and storage of data has significant impact on resources and power usage for data centres – the 'cloud' is physical!

He rightly stated that most consumers are disconnected from physicality of digital world – they are not aware that it is destroying our physical world.

- Don't tell Alexa to turn off the light; turn it off yourself
- Don't drive an electric car; walk
- Challenge yourself, family, friends, colleagues, customers to join the global digital cleanup day on 18 March 2023 https://www.digitalcleanupday.org/

Keynote 6: Me te toroa i te tau ana i te au: riding the currents in uncertain times, by Ms Kim Tairi (University Librarian, Auckland University of Technology)

To round out three very inspiring and thought-provoking days, Kim very beautifully highlighted the need for empathy and social connection, and the importance of acknowledging and sometimes expressing vulnerability. She reminded us that social connection is a fundamental human need and shared her challenge to create your unique self-care manifesto.