Arriving at the hotel on 16 February 2017, in the vibrant heart of Dublin, I received a warm welcome to the LAI A&SL Conference on “The Social Librarian: Connecting and Creating Communities.”

A poster session, coffee, a selection of very naughty but irresistible pastries (I lost count how many I consumed) and an uplifting opening keynote speech set the tone for the next two days. Dr Brenda O’Connell’s (University of Limerick) presentation on wellbeing at work provided a framework for all the talks that followed and highlighted how developing positive relationships with colleagues and library users can lead to success, innovation and a stronger and larger library community.
I think that my genes mean that I have a slightly negative view of the world. However, I discovered that my “glass half full” attitude is only part of the picture. I was hopefully not the only delegate who will be following Dr O’Connell’s steps to increase my levels of “happiness” at work. So I will strive to thank colleagues, to be kind, to exercise and I am also listing three things every day that I am grateful for. I put this latter tip into practice immediately at the conference and here are my highlights.

On the first day I enjoyed inspiring talks, a witty poem on a bibliometric drinking game, and connecting with fellow delegates over drinks and canapés. I don’t think I was the only one to well up upon hearing Anne’s Byrne’s tale, shared by Maeve Gebruers from the Irish Traditional Music Archive. By sharing Anne’s personal story effectively through their web site, social media and local news, the ITMA helped to develop and increase their profile and user base.

On day 2, I appreciated the opportunity to share ideas in the World Cafe; to hear the story of Ferguson and the real difference libraries can make when their “awesome” doors remain open to their community; and the food, an impressive and social lunch and the undeniable lure of more cinnamon swirls. Scott Bonner’s heartfelt and self-reflective talk about Ferguson’s Municipal Public Library and its response to a town in turmoil will remain with me and strongly emphasised that #librariesmatter.

As to my own tale, I was grateful to be able to go forth from the conference and share with my workplace the benefits of connecting with colleagues, sharing stories, creating podcasts, listening to chair preferences and actively reaching out to the world beyond our libraries. I am grateful to the organisers for a thoroughly professional and engaging event. My only thought for the future and possible “room for improvement” would be that, as a first timer and somewhat reserved delegate, I would be grateful for more focused networking or icebreaking sessions, similar to those used in the World Cafe and the interactive segment of Dr O’Connell’s talk, throughout the entire event.

I would conclude by thanking the A&SL members for the bursary and the opportunity to attend such a library affirming and enjoyable two days.

Lynne Gault, Open Access Team, Queen’s University Belfast.

About the sponsored attendee bursary:
The A&SL committee offered two bursaries to cover attendance at the 2017 Annual Conference.

One of these was a “First-Timer” bursary, awarded to someone who had not attended an A&SL Conference before. The bursary covered the cost of the conference delegate fee for the 16th and 17th February 2017. Travel costs up to a maximum of €100 were also included.

After the conference, the bursary winners provided conference reviews. The second report has been published on LibFocus.com.

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