

Sharing the joys of literacy

How important are libraries in literacy development?

The connection between the two is not always understood. Literacy providers have sometimes seen themselves as professionals who operate only within institutes of education whereas librarians may have seen their role as providing or guarding books for the use of the converted rather than encouraging new readers.

Literacy needs to work in the context of people's lives in the community and libraries can contribute greatly as access and support points in the learning process.

For over one hundred years in Australia compulsory schooling has



Margaret Whitlam, Chair of the National Consultative Council for International Literacy Year .

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Australian Libraries Summit revisited

Following the Australian Libraries Summit in October 1988, it was generally agreed that there should in due course be a formal review of progress on the implementation of Summit recommendations. The Steering Committee as its last act suggested that the ALIA Conference in Perth in September-October 1990 would provide the appropriate opportunity, but by mid-1989 action on implementing the Summit agenda was so encouraging that the Australian Council of Library and Information Services (ACLIS) suggested that this review process should take place much earlier. At their suggestion, and after consulting other major libraries and peak organisations to whom future action on Summit resolutions had been assigned, I decided to convene what is now colloquially referred to as 'The Australian Libraries Summit Revisited' meeting in late 1989. This proved impossible, because the



airlines dispute not only made it impossible for the National Library to arrange the proposed meeting but also heavily disrupted the business schedules of the other professional bodies. The meeting was finally held in Canberra on 2 April 1990, with the task of reviewing progress on the implementation of Summit

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Participants in the recent Summit Revisited meeting.

resolutions and alternative or further action which might be required on some of them.

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provided an organised opportunity for children to learn to read and write. However, until recently, society has not known that about 15 per cent of the adult population has not gained adequate literacy skills during those childhood years.

The reasons are many and varied and include poverty, illness, isolation, sight and hearing problems, emotional disturbance and non-attendance at school. Opportunities need to be provided for those people to learn basic literacy skills as adults.

Of the estimated one million Australian adults who are functionally illiterate, only about 28 000 are currently enrolled in literacy programs. A number of adult literacy programs already operate out of libraries, providing a real connection between books and learning for the most educationally disadvantaged in our community.

However, we need more. Through the International Literacy Year (ILY) program in Australia the whole community — industry, community agencies, educational bodies — is being encouraged to take literacy development as its responsibility and put literacy permanently on the public agenda.

Australia's ILY program has concentrated on funding strategic national projects which can provide further development in the four priority areas: adult literacy, child and community literacy, international activities and public awareness. For example, major funding has been provided for the development of competence ratings scales for adult literacy, and for the development, by two State Governments, of a framework for literacy strategies for pre-schoolers through to adults.

Through two Small Grants Programs a number of libraries have received funding. Students within the Carringush Regional Library's adult literacy program will write and produce

a quality publication dealing with the central theme of International Literacy Year: their perceptions and their hopes. The Queensland State Library will conduct a Literacy Services in Libraries Seminar which will focus on the way librarians can, and have, contributed to existing literacy services and resources and the use that tutors and students have made of the library.

The Western Suburbs Regional Group of Libraries in Perth has organised a competition to produce a reader friendly brochure which will promote the library as a resource for people with literacy difficulties. The Rockhampton Library will compile and distribute a 'literacy bag' to stimulate greater public awareness of the importance of literacy and the role of the public library in literacy.

From the ILY international budget funds were provided to part-sponsor the World Conference on Education for All held in Thailand in March. As part of an Australian delegation I attended this conference in my role as Chairman of the National Consultative Council for ILY.

The Conference adopted the World Declaration on Education for All and a parallel Framework of Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs.

The Declaration identifies the 'essential learning tools' and 'basic learning content' required to ensure the development of individuals while recognising the scope of basic learning needs and how they should be met. The Framework emphasises the role that non-government agencies should be given in the planning and implementing of basic education programs.

Learning is a life long process. I know the richness books and writing can bring to our lives and I hope that many more people, as a result of ILY, will be enabled to share such joys.

Margaret Whitlam

Flood fund established

At the Queensland Branch Council Meeting on 3 May it was resolved to establish a fund to assist in re-establishment of libraries in flood-affected areas. In western Queensland libraries were badly affected. In Charleville only one of the libraries escaped — the library at the High School. The Public Library, and the libraries at the Primary School, the Pre-School, the School of Distance Education, and the Catholic School were completely wiped out. This means that not only books, but catalogs, furniture, shelving, display materials have gone. The primary school library at Alpha met the same end.

The Shire Clerk described to me the events as they affected the Public Library: 'The water came through the town at 41 km an hour. It burst through the glass doors of the library, taking them off completely, and whirled round inside. All that is left is about 100 books which were on a high shelf attached to the wall.'

With so much to replace, it is reasonable to expect that libraries will come fairly low on the list when the available funds are allocated. This is a worthy cause, and an opportunity to demonstrate that the profession is capable of putting its hand in its own pocket as well as putting its hand out!

Send donations to ALIA Queensland Branch Flood Fund, PO Box 318, Ferny Hills, Qld 4055. We are attempting to obtain tax-deductibility for this fund but at this stage there appear to be some difficulties. Branch Council is arranging a social function to launch the fund in the near future.

Jenny Cram

Convener

Queensland Branch Flood Fund

Enhanced by which bank?

Use of Compact Disc Read Only Memory (CD-ROM) databases in the Social Sciences and Humanities Library, University of NSW will shortly be enhanced by two new sets of computer equipment and compact disc drives. The cost of the equipment is being met by a \$10 000 donation from the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, UNSW branch. Manager, Ron White, presented the University Librarian, Dr Christine Henderson, with a large facsimile

cheque for that amount on 26 April.

CD-ROMs are physically identical to the CD used for music except that they store data — up to 250 000 pages of printed text — instead of music. Each Special Library has a CD-ROM service that provides fast, accurate and user-friendly access to information sources, enabling undergraduates to become familiar with modern information retrieval systems and searching techniques. Postgraduates and academ-

ics can use CD-ROM databases as a complement to online searching of remote databases.

Databases currently held by the Social Sciences and Humanities Library include Business Periodicals Index, ERIC (access to the world's literature in education and related disciplines), Humanities Index, MLA International