

Aboriginal focus

Glenys McIver describes work of the AIATSIS Library

The Library of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) is central to the Institute's purpose and functions: the promotion of all aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies. The Library's collections encompass printed materials, manuscripts, sound archive tapes, photographs, films and videos. They are a resource for research by academics, authors, film makers, and the general public, including as a specific target group the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people visit the Institute, often in group visits arranged jointly with the Institute's Community Access Program. Library staff also travel with staff from the Community Access Program to explain and promote the services directly to communities. For example, staff have recently visited Alice Springs and Lake Tyers.

The Library receives a growing number of written and telephone enquiries from those who cannot visit the Institute, generally supplying the information as a printout from its database. The Library provides bibliographies on particular subjects, names, languages or areas, derived from the various sections of its online catalogue. This catalogue, although not yet available as an OPAC,

allows free-text retrieval from any area of the entry, including the very detailed analytical entries with extensive annotations, prepared by Library staff.

The AIATSIS Library is open 5 days a week and there are no restrictions on who may use it. Most of the material from the printed collections is available on inter-library loan, with certain exceptions, such as rare items, but no material is lent to individuals. The Library has self-service photocopying facilities, and can do a limited amount of photocopying for remote users.

Like other Australians, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are keenly interested in researching their family histories. This has a special importance for indigenous people, as in many cases family links were severed by past policies and practices of government, particularly the removal of children to 'orphanages' or white foster-homes. There is a comprehensive catalogue of the Library's collection and visitors can consult the files of the Aboriginal Biographical Index. This Index is at present available only in-house, but Institute staff carry out searches for those unable to visit Canberra. The Index contains well over twenty thousand index entries for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander names, derived chiefly from books, journals, newsletters, and pictorial materials held in the Institute's



Lorna Raymond of AIATSIS working on the Aboriginal Biographical Index. Photo: Alana Harris, AIATSIS

collections. There are plans to extend this indexing to other media as staff resources permit.

The Library also holds many specialised tools useful to those researching their family histories. Many of these tools supplement the Library's own resources by directing users to other repositories and the Library maintains close relations with Aboriginal organisations working in the field of family reunion, such as *Link-up*, so that it can make referrals. Confidentiality is a prime concern in dealing with such requests for assistance.

Individuals and groups visiting the Library often identify material that may be of interest to other community members. Copies of such material, whether print, manuscript photographic, or audio, can be made for placing in community centres or keeping places. The Library administers a scheme known as the Return of Materials to Aboriginal Communities (ROMTAC) to assist with the costs of making this material available, up to a specified annual maximum. Naturally, this copying is subject both to the usual rules of copyright and there may also be further restrictions where secret or sacred information is concerned.

In this International Year for the World's Indigenous People the Library is undergoing a review and evaluation. These will assist it in building on its current range of services and activities to best meet the needs of client groups, in particular the needs of its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander constituencies. The comprehensive research collection, expert staff, and the excellent links with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities which have been built up, combine to provide a sound basis for further growth.

Brisbane City Library

Margaret Smith reports on the progress of the review

As reported in *inCite* 1992, the Brisbane City Council has conducted a review of its library services. The review team comprised USE Consultants, Brian Haratis, Denise Friend in conjunction with Phyllis Papps and Margaret Smith. The brief included a major review of the library service and the preparation of a strategy plan to assist with the future planning and development of the library service.

A Steering Committee of Aldermen, specialists and senior Council Officers was established to guide the project, which was undertaken in nine concurrent stages during July-November 1992. These stages were:

- a user survey of 6,000 clients using 32 branches;
- a phone survey of 1,000 Brisbane residents;

- consultations with key organisations, individuals, Aldermen and senior Council Officers;
- public meetings;
- submissions from the public and staff;
- staff workshops and meetings;
- a staff survey in written form;
- a major evaluation of the library service using established criteria;
- a demographic analysis of the Brisbane population with characteristics, profiles, projections and trends.

The information produced was collated and analysed. Detailed progressive reports were submitted to the Steering Committee.

The review is finished, and the report *Options for the Future: Future Development of the Brisbane City Library Service*, with five working papers, is now with Brisbane City Council. ■