

National conference scholarships

Last year, the Reference and Information Services Section (RAISS) ran two scholarships to the *Fantastic futures: virtual and in the flesh* conference. A requirement of the scholarships was that they provide reports at an evening meeting of the section, however, as both winners are from country areas it was decided that written reports for inCite would be more appropriate.

Rethinking reference services

Sandra Rothwell, Dixon Library, University of New England

Being unable to attend the *Fantastic futures* conference under my own recognisance, and my institution also being unable to fund my attendance, I was delighted when RAISS (NSW) gave its members the opportunity to receive financial assistance to attend what looked to be, and in fact turned out to be, a 'fantastic' conference.

I work in a rural university library and distance quite often dictates the amount of contact we have with others working in the area of information provision. As a recipient of the conference scholarship I was able to make contact with people from all over Australia who are working in our profession and find out how they are coming to terms with the Internet and all it is capable of doing. I believe all information professionals are rethinking the manner in which they provide reference services and what they can do to make sense of the vast array of electronic material available through world wide web and the Internet.

The conference allowed me to hear speakers from around the world share their experiences and to liaise with information professionals from all spheres of library work. Librarians and information workers are very approachable people, it is in their nature. I went to the conference not knowing a soul, but came away with a wealth of contacts and, as invariably happens in the library world, meeting people who knew someone that I currently work with or have worked with.

I thoroughly enjoyed the National RAISS conference and would like to thank RAISS (NSW) for granting me one of its scholarships and I would also like to thank Dixon Library, at the University of New England, for providing me with additional monetary support. I feel that conferences such as this one provide an excellent opportunity for professional development and would encourage all ALIA members to apply for any scholarships which might be offered in the future. ■

Realistic to futuristic

Carol Jackson, Charles Sturt University

The recent RAISS conference attracted delegates from all around Australia to Adelaide. With full-capacity audience, the conference program was a collation of well-planned topics. Virginia Walsh spoke of her work with ALIA, mentioning an important aspect of the librarianship profession — that all librarians should be lobbyists for the profession. This ideal is one that would raise the image and profile of our professional standing in our community as well as complementing the profession as a whole.

Keynote speakers kept all participants enthralled. Presentations included overhead transparencies, electronic wizardry and at one session, there was a virtual reality display in the form of an aerobics demonstration.

Topics addressed ventured from realistic to futuristic domains in relation to the delivery of information. For those of us who work in the information industry, the electronic delivery of information is steadily progressing and increasing. How we approach and view this phenomenon is captured by the descriptive word 'change'. And change is what the RAISS conference highlighted. Technological change that embraces the historical, scientific, functional and statistical concepts associated with libraries. Trends in storage, transmission and processing of information highlighted the speed in which the rate of change has occurred with emphasis on keeping these developments in context.

Do we adjust to this change or do we ignore it? Do we flow with current trends in information technology, telecommunications, broadcasting, publishing as well as the other 'high-tech' areas that we work with on a day-to-day basis? Key areas to ponder on are what will happen if libraries choose to remain static or unprogressive in today's society? In comparison, are libraries undertaking steps to ensure they stay abreast of modern information retrieval/delivery methods? Whether you are an academic environment, a community service, a special library facility or a school area, the need of access to information is changing the way we produce that access.

One must consider what do libraries exist for and what will libraries turn in to? Will we be creating or even owning our own information networks? Will we be packaging information? Will we go beyond the limitations we set for ourselves? These are just some of the questions raised to encourage thoughts of the future of our industry that were presented as challenges from the guest speakers. We as librarians make the difference (as the connector between the library users and information retrieval/delivery methods). Technology and methodology factors today still align with the trio of information=knowledge=wisdom. Indeed, that is what our profession is focussed on — access to and delivery of information regardless of format, timing, presentation, retrieval and location.

From a professional viewpoint, the conference was added value. It encouraged social interaction with other colleagues (meeting known acquaintances as well as making new ones) and enabled the threshold of participation to become a reality — in that one could make assessments and judgements about the quality of the information at each session. Sharing the experience has strengthened my knowledge of the library and information profession and has made me aware of the large network that we have in Australia.

My warmest thanks to RAISS (NSW) for the opportunity to venture to the National Conference this year and to my work environment for the time release to attend this wonderful gathering. ■