

# Librarian with a mission

Heather Fisher, ALIA study grant award winner

My day began like any other — but a letter lying in the bottom of the courier box changed that, for the letter contained the unbelievable news that I had been successful in my application for an ALIA study grant!

I am a children's and young adult librarian, and like many other librarians I have witnessed a long round of restructuring, demands for increased productivity, downsizing, upgrading, economising, assessment and review of work performance, job redesign, collaborative decision making, team building, quality management, best practice, enterprise bargaining, remuneration packages and all the other exhausting, debilitating and demoralising movements in our workplaces. There are many who are struggling with falling time allocation for planning and preparing children's programs and certainly many who are struggling to make an impact with decreasing budgetary allowances.

In many libraries the position of children's librarian has been allowed to lapse implying that the service is either an optional extra which can be dispensed with when times are tough, or that because everyone has been a child at some time and many of the staff have

children then *ipso facto* everyone can be a little bit of a children's librarian.

I feel that there is really only one way to turn the tide. The children's service, with its special focus on encouraging children to enjoy reading and helping them to find information relevant to their needs, has to find ways of being a vibrant, positive force within the library with a minimum of staff input and cost.

It became my mission to find ideas for projects, activities and events for all age groups varying from the quite small (one-person story times, puppet shows, finger painting activities for pre-schoolers) to the quite large (creative writing for teenagers, cartooning workshops, puppet making activities) and ranging in scale from the single session, to a limited series, to a regular weekly event. My personal questioning and reading and PUBYAC searches led me to believe that there were ideas that were possible — stimulating ideas which would be fairly simple to implement and not very costly — but details were scanty and the places that had tried them were in the United States and Canada. I believed that I could assemble a manual with all kinds of ideas which were tailor made for those handling the children's service and that

these suggestions would be spiritual medicine for flagging staff bodies. The activities and events would be aimed at the busy staff member who did not feel that they had any special talents in music, art or craft but who wished to offer lively, interesting literature based programs in their service to young clients.

After seeing an advertisement for the study grants in *inCite*, I felt that I would like to undertake a project addressing the issue of the availability of a practical manual on behalf of all staff in libraries who handle children's services. For my submission I chose about twelve of the hundreds of relevant sites in the United States and Canada and in the months ahead I will be contacting these places again and reassessing their value. There will be no real attachment to any library of institution or library but rather I hope to spend a little time in children's sections of many libraries detailing their proactive outreach efforts. The areas I wish to follow are children's programs (story times, holiday programs, summer reading programs, kid's clubs), teenage initiatives (teen times, teen newsletters or other publications, teen holiday programs) and successful family literacy programs. I plan to visit the United States and Canada in their summer 1997, as that is when the library activities seem to be at their most intense, and it makes sense to try to see these events operating to gauge their true effectiveness and the true input costs in time and money.

My submission was supported most warmly by references from my library services manager, Ross Barrett and the children's consultant at the State Library of New South Wales, Sue Parkinson. They have always listened and encouraged me and indulged my enthusiasms and part of the success of the programs conducted at Gosford City Library has been due to their commitment to the integrity of the children's service in our network.

The ALIA Study Grant provides \$5000 to undertake this project and it is hoped that the benefits will go effectively beyond my personal satisfaction to be a practical offering towards an active library service to the children and the young adults of our communities. ■

## Stop press

### New editor for AARL

Eric Wainwright, AARL editorial board

I am pleased to announce the appointment of Dr Peter Clayton of the University of Canberra, Faculty of Communication, as the new editor of Australian Academic and Research Libraries, as from 10 March 1997 until 31 December 2000. Peter, who has been associate editor of AARL since 1990, will be responsible for issues from volume 28, number 2, June 1997.

In making the announcement, I would like to pay tribute to the very considerable work of Peter Biskup, the retiring editor. Peter has edited AARL since 1990, and has contin-

ued to build the journal on the foundations laid by the previous editors, Deitrich Borchardt (1969–1984) and John Horacek (1985–1989). Peter has made a significant contribution as editor, ensuring a continuing supply of good copy, a sound editorial touch and a healthy membership base. AARL is one of the very few Australian journals in librarianship indexed overseas, and recognised as a peer-reviewed quality resource. ALIA, and the University, College and Research Libraries Section in particular, have much to thank Peter for. On behalf of the editorial board, I wish Peter well in his retirement. ■