

Libraries and literacy

'When literacy is part of your mission, it is woven into everything you do.'

This comment from an American public library manager, Sandy Neerman introduces the American Library Association's key action plan, *21st Century Literacy*, published in the December 1998 issue of *American Libraries*, which is devoted to the contribution American libraries can make to alleviating adult illiteracy.

About ninety-million adults in the United States cannot read well enough to earn a living wage. This is twenty per cent of the population. Interestingly Australian figures show almost the same proportion of adults and children who, for many reasons — interrupted education, social dislocation, undiagnosed or untreated learning difficulties, migration from non-English speaking countries — have problems with reading.

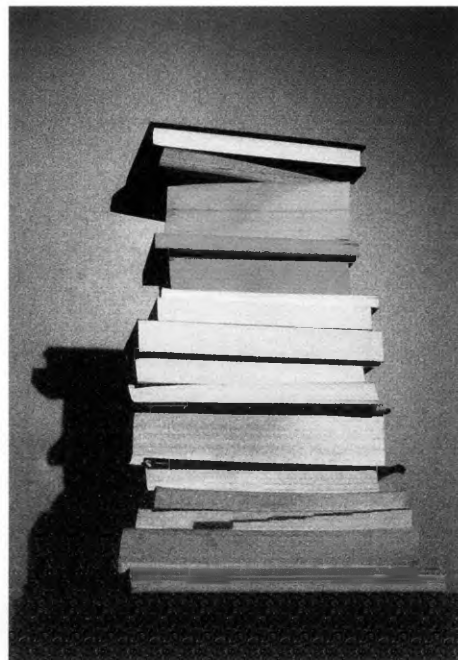
It is in our interest as librarians to involve ourselves in literacy programs

— in community and family literacy programs and in information literacy programs.

As the ALA plan says: good libraries help create a literate public. A literate public demands good libraries.

Libraries must lead by fostering literacy in all its forms, identifying and partnering with literacy providers and learners, and participating in community coalitions of families, teachers, employers and other groups. Libraries should make sure that all users receive orientation to the library.

A number of articles in this issue of *inCite* deal with different responses libraries in Australia are making to build the levels of literacy in our community. One state library used a partnership with a publisher to develop library programs. Another held a seminar to bring



government, teachers and librarians together to discuss issues of service, resources and funding opportunities. An ALIA award winner gives detailed advice on library programs to encourage family literacy and regular use of libraries by children and young adults. We would appreciate articles and letters from other librarians sharing their experiences in this important endeavour. ■



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