

# Towards greater synergies in a joint-use environment

Joint-use libraries have been increasingly developed to optimise library resources within a community. There is an understanding by the partners in them that shared facilities, resources, operating costs and staffing offer greater benefits to users than separate facilities.

Joint-use libraries require providers to create strong practical and philosophical partnerships to serve different client groups and achieve maximum synergies. There are many different types of joint-use libraries in Australia and overseas, each with unique characteristics. They range from small rural school/public libraries to university/TAFE/public libraries.

In Canberra, Erindale College and Lake Tuggeranong College partner with the ACT Public Library Service. They were among the first examples of urban joint-use libraries and are still among the largest such libraries in the world. The libraries provide a service for the broader public as well as their Year 11 and 12 college students.

All joint-use libraries require a formal agreement or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to establish the ongoing management of the library. This document needs to be re-negotiated periodically to ensure that it continues to meet the requirements of all parties and supports joint-use ideals. Joint-use libraries may have significant challenges to negotiate about budget allocation, facility and technology management, staffing structure and work practices. Successful MOUs address these fundamental issues and provide mechanisms for resolving ongoing management challenges.

The current MOUs for Erindale and Lake Tuggeranong were overdue for renegotiation and this was a catalyst to re-visit the way things are done and to take a visionary approach to the way things might be done in the future.

In anticipation of a new agreement, a one-day forum was held on 22 July 2004 for ACT Public Library and Information Service management, executive staff from Erindale and Lake Tuggeranong Colleges, public library staff, and the teacher-librarians from the colleges. Student representatives were also invited but were not able to miss the day's classes at their respective colleges.

This was a diverse group, with ambitious aims to consider the big picture issues for joint-use libraries and avoid being side-tracked by details of existing operational or joint relationship challenges during discussions. Associate Professor Patricia Milne of the University of Canberra acted as a superb facilitator in what was a very demanding role at times. She emphasised the fact that there is no single model for a joint-use library and encouraged each group to think about the context and needs of their own joint-use library for the next five years.

The principals began the day by communicating the vision for their colleges. The principal of Erindale College, Michael Bradley, referred to the importance of lifelong learning, the changing clientele of the College, possible International Baccalaureate courses, increased numbers of international students, the need to prepare students for a range of options, and the flow-on impact this has on the library service. David Edmunds, acting principal of Lake Tuggeranong College, emphasised the significant and unique learning advantages that students have as users of the integrated learning system offered by joint-use libraries. These include: access to a massive range of resources, increased access to expertise from the teacher-librarians as well as the public library staff, significant information literacy programs to support learning, and longer opening hours compared with stand-alone school libraries. David highlighted information technology issues and possible technical solutions. He outlined some of the dilemmas faced by educators as they seek to implement improved models of teaching because many students

need considerable motivation and support in order to become independent learners.

Dr Alan Bundy, university librarian, University of South Australia, and an internationally-renowned expert on joint-use libraries and school-public library partnerships, was guest speaker. He delivered a thought-provoking, stimulating, informative and inspiring address, concentrated on areas involving significant change, challenge and need, and set each of these in the context of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century which will see: information abundance; public libraries redefining their role; changes in schooling and to school libraries; public libraries and schools being partners in learning; joint-use libraries as the ultimate form of co-operation; and the Erindale and Lake Tuggeranong libraries facing the future with great potential opportunities.

Dr Bundy acted as a critical friend at workshop groups following his address, and posed hard questions about the issues that needed to be addressed. This was in the context that joint-use libraries have sometimes failed or become dysfunctional because of a failure to identify, and then address, operational concerns. Some of the 'hard questions':

*What was the rationale for establishing the libraries, and is everyone convinced that this rationale is still valid?*

*Are the parties truly committed to the concept, or effectively tied to making it work, for reasons of political or financial expediency?*

*Are all of the users happy with the libraries? How do you know that users are happy? Do the libraries deter community non-users?*

*The uniqueness of most joint-use libraries militates against the creation of general criteria for evaluating them, and meaningful summative comparison with other libraries. What summative/formative self and external evaluation of the libraries has occurred, and should be provided for in the new agreement?*

*To what extent is there optimal engagement in the libraries about their opportunities to foster information literate, lifelong learning communities?*

Many other issues were also considered in the workshop sessions, which explored the vision for the joint-use libraries for the next five years. They included marketing and promotion of joint-use services and facilities, design and layout of library space, communications between college and library staff, program and training partnerships. Participants were dynamic, responsive and co-operative even though difficult and challenging issues arose and were explored.

We are indebted to Dr Bundy for sharing his wide knowledge and experience of joint-use libraries. He perceived Erindale and Lake Tuggeranong as examples of successful joint-use libraries and emphasised that it is people who underpin that success. It is important that staff are well-integrated, and recognise the value of a joint-use partnership.

The groundwork for establishing the new MOUs began with informed dialogue. The next step was to complete these for both joint-use libraries. Participants in the forum recognised that both of the joint-use libraries have real problems to resolve in order to achieve improved synergies. However, they were unanimous that they wished them to continue, and to build on their considerable record of success in meeting school and community needs for quality library service.

**Catherine Marshall, acting manager, Tuggeranong Library and Janice Wilson, teacher-librarian, Lake Tuggeranong College**