

ALIA Excellence Award – Natasha Griggs

For excellence in her role behind the
Finding MY Place career guidance program for at-risk students

Natasha Griggs is the winner of the 2005 ALIA Excellence Award. The award recognises excellence in any area, field or aspect of practice in the library and information services sector.

Natasha has been working in public libraries for eighteen years in Western Australia and Victoria. In her current role as youth services librarian for the City of Belmont, her expertise in children's services has made her one of the leaders in the provision of youth services in public libraries in Western Australia. Natasha's expertise can be most-readily recognised in her recent work in the inception and implementation of the *Finding MY Place* program.

In May 2003, a partnership between the Western Australian Department of Education and Training and the Ruth Faulkner Public Library in the City of Belmont was established, based on a mutual commitment to assist disadvantaged young people considered at risk of disengaging from the education system prematurely. This partnership was the starting point for developing a unique program for some of the most highly disadvantaged young people within the City of Belmont's limits. With many of these students feeling alienated within the school environs, it was vital for them to realise that non-mainstream students also have a 'place' within the education system. A program was devised, aptly named *Finding MY Place*, as an intervention strategy to assist students with different needs from those of mainstream students.

Finding MY Place is a series of ten library-based workshops designed to motivate students. Workshop presenters are carefully selected to ensure that their stories provide food for thought amongst the students and engage students in activities that highlight their natural abilities. Self-esteem, confidence building, problem-

solving techniques, behavioural problems and setting achievable personal goals are dealt with in the workshops.

Natasha is easily identifiable as the driving force behind the *Finding MY Place* program's design and administration. Natasha developed the entire program, assisted with getting funding and liaised with Belmont City College's Year Ten co-ordinator on school and education-related issues. She was able to engage high-profile presenters for little or no cost, developed an excellent rapport with the young people involved who hold her in the highest regard, and helped to establish an environment of trust and respect in which young students felt safe to be themselves, relax and participate in activities at their own pace.

Following a very successful pilot program, the Department of Education and Training recognised the program's merit and asked that Natasha and the City of Belmont act as facilitators and mentors to enable other local government authorities to extend the same service to disadvantaged and at-risk students across the state. Natasha was able to liaise with the Department of Education and Training, on behalf of public libraries, to secure funding of \$140 000 to be distributed to local authority and regional libraries in Western Australia for this purpose.

A grant package was prepared by Natasha and sent to all local government authorities in Western Australia. To ensure that all interested parties were well informed, presentations were given at metropolitan public libraries, youth services and country librarian meetings — to make certain that all were aware of the aims of the program and how easily it could be implemented in most library and school communities. The successful



Natasha Griggs receiving her award from the West Australian Minister for Education and Training, the Hon. Ljiljanna Ravlich MLC

applicants were required to attend a compulsory workshop, conducted by Natasha, to ensure the program's aims and objectives were met and to establish a working partnership.

Natasha was available at all times through the grant application process, becoming a mentor to 24 West Australian public libraries which successfully applied for funding in 2005 to run the *Finding MY Place* program in their local government authority.

The first two instalments of the program in the City of Belmont have been extremely well received by the local high school, participants, school psychologists and the community. All participants of the first program have stayed in school, found work or are pursuing further training. Funding has also allowed two *Finding MY Place* participants to be employed in library traineeships. Discussions are currently underway to determine if the program can be included in the school curriculum as an elective at the Belmont City College.

Due to the program's innovative content, Natasha was invited to speak at the Metropolitan Public Libraries Association of NSW 2004 conference. Natasha has also been in consultation with the State Library of Victoria, which is considering introducing the program into public libraries in Victoria.

The positive outcomes of the program are a direct result of Natasha's efforts and energy in its design and implementation. Natasha is a highly-motivated person, with exceptional negotiation and communication skills. Her demonstrated compassion and commitment to young participants are commendable, and her work in this outstanding project and its promotion of libraries as places for lifelong learning make her a worthy recipient of the ALIA Excellence Award. ■



Kingfisher Library

Manufactured in Australia For 40 Years

THE BEST THEN THE BEST NOW

Phone: (03) 9280 6363 Fax: (03) 9280 6313 Email: sales@greerind.com.au