

# Drawing **inspiration** from **SLQ's Indigenous Library Services**



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... gives a voice to the new generation of library and information professionals. If you have any suggestions or topics for this column, please contact the column co-ordinators, Kate Davis, <kdavis@gmail.com>, or Naomi Doessel, <nomesd@yahoo.com.au>.

As an Indigenous Australian, it's very rewarding for me to be able to integrate my work, my study, and my Aboriginality. Recently, I've had various opportunities to do this, including a ten-day fieldwork placement with the State Library of Queensland's (SLQ's) Indigenous Library Services (ILS) section. The placement was part of the QUT's Master of Information Management program which I've now completed.

Although I'd had more than four years' exposure to the LIS sector via my position within QUT Library, this professional placement provided me with a glimpse of a library environment vastly different to that of an academic library.

One of the more visibly obvious aspects of SLQ's ILS is *kuril dhagun*, the Library's own Indigenous Knowledge Centre. Within *kuril dhagun* is a 'knowledge zone', which includes: an exhibition space; a touch screen 'intranet' system providing access to Indigenous stories and resources; a reference desk; a community meeting space; and a lounge area.

The new SLQ building (which opened in late 2006) was also designed in support of *kuril dhagun's* community engagement activities, with a talking circle and fire-pit located outside, sheltered by a wooden wall-panelling carved with Aboriginal art. It's the venue for popular community barbecues and for regular 'nights by the fire' with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists. Everyone is welcome at *kuril dhagun*, and a visit there is highly recommended!

As part of my placement, I assisted with the installation of exhibitions and preparation of school holiday programs, participated in team meetings, and observed discussions with external collaborators on outreach initiatives and oral histories projects, and had lengthy discussions with *kuril dhagun's* manager, Nadine McDonald-Dowd. I listened and watched keenly, engaged with the space's resources, and I learned a lot.

The SLQ has established fifteen Indigenous Knowledge Centres (IKCs) in regional and remote areas to provide library services and to partner with communities in engaging with libraries and fostering community learning. Testimony to the team's commitment was the Taking IT On project, which saw more than 840 Indigenous adults in 23 remote communities receive basic IT and technical support training.<sup>1</sup> As a result, some of these communities are now enthusiastically documenting their own digital stories.

During my placement, I also gained a better understanding of the leadership role the SLQ's ILS team plays in working with public libraries to support and strengthen their engagement with Indigenous communities. Significantly, I also gained

valuable insight into the 'traditional' library work of the Indigenous Resource Officers, such as Tania Schaefer, in the SLQ's Heritage Collections section.

Tania has extensive experience with Aboriginal resources (such as the Tindale collection and the online Paul Mackett Australian Aboriginal Genealogy Resources collection), while her colleague Elizabeth Fa'Aoso specialises in Torres Strait Islander resources (such as the Margaret Lawrie collection). Both are invaluable contacts for the many Indigenous Queenslanders who request their assistance with family history research each week.

Tania and Elizabeth implement the Protocols for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Collections,<sup>2</sup> which the SLQ developed in recognition of the cultural and intellectual ownership of Indigenous people, and to demonstrate its commitment to appropriate cultural management of these collections.

Working with Tania on the SLQ's 'micrographics' desk was frightening, enlightening and inspiring — in that order. I always knew that family history research was 'a popular sport' but my understanding was taken to a new level. My appreciation for the meaning of a 'busy desk' also evolved rapidly during my first two-hour shift with Tania. By the end of my second shift, I was expertly loading microform machines and researching passenger ship arrivals from 1870!

The ten days passed far too quickly and I still savour the lessons I learned and the inspiration I felt during my professional placement — the SLQ's leadership and innovation in the provision of Indigenous library services is obvious. It has given me valuable insight into the intersection between 'traditional' library work and the more contemporary initiatives that can expand and redefine the concept of a 'library'.

Back at QUT Library, I have taken on a strategic role in co-ordinating a library-wide approach to the provision of services to our Indigenous clients. Here I will have the opportunity to integrate some of my learning from my fieldwork placement.

My work and my fieldwork placement have been at the intersection of my Aboriginal heritage and my chosen career pathway. I look forward to contributing to the LIS profession and sharing ideas about what a committed and proactive library can do to foster the inclusion and participation of Indigenous communities in library services. This is a dialogue that all new graduates — and all experienced LIS professionals — can participate in and engage with.

## References

1. State Library of Queensland. *Indigenous Library Services. Service brochure*. Brisbane: Queensland Government, 2007.
2. State Library of Queensland. *Protocols for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Collections*. Brisbane: Queensland Government, 2007.

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