

## Library users are the best advocates

Recent economic hardship has seen local and national governments around the world target libraries as a cost cutting measure. It may be tempting in these straitened times to spend time lobbying government for more money, or to cut back opening hours or services in the hope of demonstrating a more concrete return on investment. Rather than attempting to please or convince government, however, we are better served by focusing on another group: library users.

In Wallasey, England, hundreds of protestors marched on a town council to protest the closure of local libraries. In Los Angeles citizens marched to save the Los Angeles Public Library, and in Philadelphia people protested in the freezing cold and were ultimately successful in saving their libraries. At the New Mexico State University, researchers spoke out recently against cuts to library subscriptions, "the lifeblood of the university".

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Here in Australia, historians and archivists managed to rally the public to significant protest, thus preventing the closure of some parts of the National Archives, despite their highly specialised nature.

To have users who will advocate for libraries, we need to offer something to users that they value enough to speak out in support. This may be access to the internet, a wonderful readers' advisory service, or a quiet place to read. Ensuring

the value of library services to users may mean accepting that services and spaces look very different than they have in the past: we are living in a changed information environment, and the onus is on libraries to ensure that we stay relevant and useful. If libraries manage to provide what users want, however, we will never lack for advocates: not only will users advocate for us, but they will spur the general public to do so as well.

In reality, libraries and librarians are an interest group, one of hundreds of interest groups, like farmers, gun owners, public servants, animal lovers, doctors ... The strength of an interest group lies not in the justice and truth of its cause (though that may be a factor) but in having friends—people who appreciate what we do and are prepared to speak in our defence.

One is always reminded of Mandy Rice-Davies, who was told that Lord Astor, at the trial of Dr Stephen Ward, had denied any involvement with her: "Well, he would, wouldn't he?" It is one of the classic lines in politics. People will view what we say about libraries with scepticism. But they will listen to people who value what we do.

The corollary is: if we can't persuade our users to support us and speak up for us, we will never persuade anyone. And why should we expect to?

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## PD for advocacy

**Advocacy** (n): *the act of pleading for, supporting, or recommending*

Library and information managers are advocating every day – recommending books, journals, and websites, enthusiastically explaining their suite of services, promoting the activities of their organisation, and delivering campaigns on behalf of community and government. Some are responsible, in a more formal way, for advocating on behalf of their own organisation or department to those responsible for allocating funding. All library professionals should be advocating their own profession to the wider community.



### The ALIA PD team can help

We regularly include a range of courses in our line-up designed to support you as you gain confidence and better understand the most effective ways to advocate for your organisation or cause. Recent examples of our courses are: *Making Your Case Successfully* and *Evidence-based Library and Information Practice*, *Promote Client Access to Literature*, and our innovative *Public Speaking with Confidence* teleconferences.

Coming up with a killer fact to support your case is one of the most effective ways to advocate for your cause. Having accurate financial statistics that support your activities is imperative when speaking 'accountant'. ALIA teamed up with TAFE NSW Sydney to offer *Manage a Budget* this month, an online, at-your-own-pace course designed to help you become a top-notch number cruncher. And there are a range of quick, easy, and cheap online mini courses always on offer through WebJunction such as *Delivering the Message* and *Competitive Factors in Strategic Marketing*. Marketing is, after all, just another variant of advocacy.

ALIA Training aims to offer you opportunities to learn and develop knowledge and skills in areas that are relevant to you. So it's important that you also advocate for your own

professional development needs and wants: tell us what you are interested in. Here are some new topics we've been thinking about for next year: EndNote training, teaching information literacy, Web 2.0, researcher support, and research practice.

What do you think? Send your PD wish-list to [pd@alia.org.au](mailto:pd@alia.org.au).

Speaking of advocating for yourself, by gaining ALIA's Certified Practitioner status you are able to advocate your skills and ongoing professional commitment to your employer, potential employers, and colleagues. Gaining this recognition is really very simple to achieve. Keep a record of your professional development activities throughout the year (reading, conferences, courses, employer provided training, and so on) in an e-portfolio, online with ALIA's My PD, your employer's professional development record, or through old-fashioned paper records in a folder. Ensure you meet the 30 point minimum each year, satisfy an audit should you be selected, and the post-nominal (CP) is yours. For more details: <http://www.alia.org.au/education/pd/>

### Congratulations PD Competition Winners

Renee Holman – PiCS *Leading Library Teams* in Melbourne  
Jennifer Burgess – PiCS *Introduction to Library Metrics* in Adelaide

We look forward to reading about your experience in an upcoming issue of *inCite*.

**Want to win a free registration at a range of PD courses offered by ALIA's training partners throughout the year?**  
Visit <http://www.alia.org.au/education/pd/pd.services/competitions.html>

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