



SA PRISON LIBRARIES: A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

Historically, prison library services in South Australia have relied on donated books from well-meaning members of the public and other benefactors. As a result, most of them are largely full of unwanted, outdated and inappropriate resources. Twelve months ago, South Australia's Minister for Corrections, Tom Koutsantonis, highlighted the prison library collections as critical to supporting literacy and numeracy, and in enabling prisoners to access meaningful leisure activities. Project Officer Abigail Day describes the assessment project and a long overdue change for the better.

In July 2009 I was contracted by the Department for Correctional Services (DCS) to undertake an assessment of all eight prison libraries in South Australia. A questionnaire was devised to establish key information on resources, prisoner access, security issues and volunteers. The results of these were presented to the Executive Board, and from that I was re-engaged to carry out the development of all eight sites.

So, what does this involve? Three key issues for raising standards to emerge from the library assessment were the need to implement regular library opening times, creation of prison librarian roles and funding to buy new resources as well as a computer with library software to manage these resources.

While all sites need developing, three were deemed 'functioning' and have been used as the benchmark for improving standards.

The first four months have been spent focussing on three key areas for purchasing, these being resources, furniture and selecting a suitable software supplier. A budget for new resources was established using IFLA guidelines, and core collections for each library were then developed. Each collection incorporates a percentage of fiction, non-fiction, reference, indigenous and Languages Other than English (LOTE), literacy and numeracy, graphic novels and some magazine subscriptions, combining a standard collection with specific prisoner needs.

Each site was also assessed for shelving and furniture, with a strong focus on creating a comfortable area to help foster a passion for books and learning. Items such as front-on display shelving, book display easels, returns



trolleys and paperback spinners give each site a much more modern feel as well as making books more appealing for emerging and reluctant readers.

Softlink Australia have been engaged to supply both software and hardware that is tailored to our specific needs. DCS requires software to be uncomplicated and user-friendly as it will primarily be used by prisoner librarians and volunteers, but advanced enough to provide administrative access to activity reports and other management information. Softlink are providing us with a hybrid solution – ALICE software (non-internet based) installed on all prison library computers, and Liberty software (internet based) installed on a computer centrally to manage and collate data from prison sites.

Each library will function slightly differently, according to the needs of the prisoner and the institution. For example, high security prisoners housed at Adelaide Remand Centre and Yatala Labour Prison will have access to library services primarily through a volunteer-operated outreach service, run from a central library. Mainstream library at Adelaide Women's Prison will have regular opening times with rostered visits to increase access, while the Visits Centre in the Living Skills Unit has had a partition built by the women themselves to create a separate lockable space for the library.

Each of the three functioning prison libraries – Mobilong Prison, Cadell Training Centre and Port Lincoln Prison – will have their existing databases upgraded to the ALICE software.

As prisoners in the Pre-Release Centre primarily attend work and education outside of the prison, there is no intention to greatly develop their library; rather, the focus will be on introducing prisoners to their local public library services. Murray Bridge public library have been providing an outreach service to Mobilong prison successfully for a number of years now, with library staff regarding the prison as part of their community.



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The development of South Australia's prison libraries is long overdue and the overall objective must be to set up a library service that is as self-sustaining as possible. Key to its success is the employment and training of appropriate prisoner librarians, as well as an understanding by prison staff of the library role.

A functioning prison library is an important cog in the wheel toward rehabilitation and, for many, a prime opportunity to discover the wonders of learning and recreational reading. As many repeat offenders lack the cognitive thinking skills to identify with another point of view, a passion for reading can help develop these skills. As Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird* says, "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view – until you climb into his skin and walk around in it".

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ORIENTATION VIA A BLOG

Orientating a large group of students to the library is always a challenge. With 90+ new students and one hour allotted for the library orientation this year at Bond University, the team decided to centre library orientation activities for the new cohort of medicine students around the Library Matters blog, writes Wendy Abbott.

Our aim of making library orientation more self-directed and independent and focusing activities around the Health Sciences and Medicine (HSM) Library Matters blog to make it stick in the minds of students as a worthwhile resource to revisit in the future. Two pages were added to the blog, one titled Library Orientation and the other Quiz Yourself. From the Library Orientation page, students could access all the important information they need to know to be able to hit the ground running and make the most of the library from day one of their studies. Screen casts on searching Summon and self-service options such as renewing loans and placing hold requests on library items featured in the Orientation information.

Students then used the Quiz Yourself page, containing multiple-choice quizzes (created with Google Docs), to reinforce the information they had learned from the Library Orientation page. A DIY library tour was also created which students followed to find the most significant parts of the library. Students also had the option to use the chat link on the blog to seek assistance from the Liaison Librarian for Health Sciences and Medicine.

Students enjoyed the self-directed nature of the activities, and the Library Orientation page has been left on the blog for students to return to as needed. An added benefit appears to be the increased traffic on the blog since May this year, enhancing its effectiveness as a tool for communicating library news to students. Statistics from Google Blogger indicate a threefold increase in views of the HSM Library Matters blog – a great endorsement.

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