

# the last word

## FRIENDS STEP IN AFTER THE FLOODS

The January 2011 Queensland floods brought with them widespread physical, social and economic damage across the state. While it has not been the only environmental disaster to occur in Queensland, it was shocking in its reach, causing devastation and hardship to thousands of people and businesses. BoysTown, the charity for which Amanda Gardner works, is one of those businesses and they lost their entire library.

BoysTown was established in 1961 by the De La Salle Brothers as a boys residential school in Queensland. What began as a facility for young 'wayward boys' has grown to be one of the largest not-for-profit organisations which specifically seeks to address the needs of young people in Australia. Services include training, education and employment programs, advocacy and research, emergency accommodation support, Parentline and parenting programs. Kids Helpline, a national 24/7 telephone and online counselling advice and support service is just one important program provided by BoysTown.

While government funding provides significant support, BoysTown is principally funded through its own endeavours by donor campaigns, corporate giving and BoysTown lotteries. The lotteries are a core fundraising activity for the organisation and are integral to its financial viability.

We were fortunate that both the lotteries and Kids Helpline were only minimally affected by the flood damage. It meant that, after the floods, these activities could more easily resume and BoysTown could look to the future.

The damage to the offices in Milton, however, was extensive and included the corporate library. Along with the entire ground floor, my small, one person library, was completely wiped out.

The library collection was a varied one, containing over 3000 items focussing on a range of subject areas in the social services. Every item in the library was lost and in the clean-up no items were recovered.

Having taken over the position of one person librarian four weeks previously, disaster preparedness was not on my radar. I was still trying to remember people's names, let alone promote a disaster management strategy.

So, here was I, new to the organisation, without a library, faced with the loss of the entire collection, no possibility of recovering resources, little knowledge of the corporate culture and wondering if I still had a job. I needn't have been concerned. While the mud

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was still being swept out of the building I was assured my job was secure and the library would be rebuilt.

This space is too short to go into the process of rebuilding a library after a disaster and all the lessons learnt from that process. I would like to give an example, however, of the benefits of ALIA membership when such a disaster occurs.

The first task after the floods was to complete a library valuation. Unfortunately, it was not possible to use a standard formula for valuing collections and I was required to price match each title as best as I could.

This process was very complex and became especially complicated by my inexperience with the collection, catalogue software, dirty data from the old catalogue and

the eclectic nature of the collection itself.

To make a long story short, in one post-disaster ALIA meeting, a very simple

piece of advice was offered: determine what assistance was needed and ask for help with a specific task.

So, when I asked, Global Books in Print, a Victorian based organisation, provided a free price-matching service. They were able to match about half of the collection in the space of a few days.

It was my colleagues in the ALIA SIG, Queensland OPALs (QOPALs), who helped with the remainder of the price matching.

QOPALs provide a network between ALIA members in Queensland who are the sole librarians in their work units. The network is a forum for support and knowledge creation, sharing and information dissemination.

My colleagues in QOPALs lost no time in offering help and as a result pricing, publisher and supplier data on approximately 1500 titles were matched and entered into a spreadsheet and sent back to me within three weeks.

The price matching was a messy and time consuming job and from a simple piece of advice gleaned at an ALIA meeting my QOPAL colleagues provided relevant and valuable assistance when it was needed.

I have learnt many lessons over the last few months, one of those being the real value of belonging to a professional association such as ALIA. ALIA provided the networking which enabled me to draw on the generous support my fellow librarians in a time of crisis. Ten months on, I was pleased to be able to host a QOPALs meeting in my new library which, I have to say, is a great place to be.



Flood damage



Images courtesy of  
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Starting over

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