

# inCite 5

Newsletter of the Australian Library & Information Association

## Library aid in our region Australia helps the National Library of Vietnam

*inCite 19* last November looked at the problems of 'Libraries in distress', and particularly at the aid that Australia was giving to the National Library of Cambodia. The article concluded with the promise to look at this issue again. We are now pleased to publish these accounts of Australian efforts in support of the National Library of Vietnam (NLV) in Hanoi.

Dr Helen Jarvis lectures at the University of NSW and directs BISA (Bibliographic Information on Southeast Asia). She writes:

It seemed straightforward enough, although somewhat challenging — select appropriate hardware and software for automation of the Vietnamese National Bibliography; find the best supplier in Bangkok; pick it up and take into Vietnam; install the system and teach a team from NLV how to use the equipment and do MARC cataloguing.

Five days after leaving Sydney I was on the plane to Hanoi with 300 kg of computer equipment as excess baggage. The heaviest item (over 60 kg) was the Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS), custom made in Bangkok, with four car batteries installed for backup power, an essential item for Hanoi's erratic and wildly fluctuating power supply.

No porters were to be found in Hanoi, so Mr Duc, the Director, and I joined the driver and other NLV staff in lugging the crates and boxes and bunches of welcoming flowers to the NLV's landrover. Straight off to the library, where we unloaded it all into a newly prepared computer room — spruced up and

painted and an airconditioner installed in the wall, and some fantastic electric wiring bringing the 240V circuit from the main section of the library (Hanoi has both 110V and 240V circuits so you have to be on the ball each time you plug in some equipment).



Kieu Van Hot of the National Library of Vietnam with Jan Fullerton, Director of General Collections and Services, NLA

Two days later we stood beside the functioning equipment toasting our success with a bottle of champagne I had managed to slip into the baggage! And 2 months after that we said our goodbyes at a farewell breakfast with Ian Lincoln, the Australian Ambassador and officials from the Ministry of Culture. I was presented with the first diskettes of machine-readable Vietnamese National Bibliography (VNB) data to add to the Vietnamese Union Catalogue (VUC) database. Five years later the data is still coming — admittedly in fits and starts — and we are still editing and processing it in Australia for loading into ABN — also in fits and starts.

It has been a wonderful project to be involved with. My only regret is that our

beloved friend Phan Quang Loc is not still with us, but he did live to see the rewarding first stage.

*Elizabeth Watt* of the National Library of Australia (NLA) fills in some details:

Over the past 9 years Australia has given major assistance to the NLV, through the NLA, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) Cultural Relations Program, and BISA.

The main objective of the assistance has been to bring some computing power into the NLV, particularly for cataloguing and producing the VNB. The automation of these basic library processes has enabled the NLV to play its part in the international exchanges of cataloguing data and in the VUC project, recording the holdings of Vietnamese books and other library materials in major libraries

in Australia, United States, France and Vietnam.

Australia has so far provided two Olivetti microcomputers and peripherals, two printers, two UPS units, a dehumidifier, and consumables such as paper, diskettes and printer ribbons.

Also, through its Regional Cooperation Program, the National Library of Australia has given the NLV Australian books to the value of \$500-\$1000 each year for the past 11 years. Regular exchanges of official publications with the NLV have been maintained for over 30 years. Interlibrary loan forms and vouchers have also been provided, which enable the NLV to obtain photocopies from Australian libraries free of charge.

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may be one of the means 'to instil an understanding (as distinct from a mere awareness) of the concept of professional competence'. Advocacy in the sense that I am defining is part of that professional competence, I would support this notion of mentoring because it is a practice that all of us, consciously or otherwise, follow. How often do we call a colleague for advice or to discuss a common issue? How often do we call on those we know to have had the prior experience in a particular area we seek and may be able to help provide a solution to a problem? How often do we call on those whose opinion we respect, those who we see as either our professional superiors or those who are our peers? These actions, or rather the answers, are all part of an unofficial mentoring process.

Newer members of the profession do not have this network of experienced colleagues whom they can approach. It is vital for their professional development that these networks are developed. It is also vital for our professional standing that these newer colleagues develop quickly the expertise to articulate their professional concerns.

But how do we encourage these novice members of the profession — librarians and library technicians — to become advocates for their chosen profession and not just advocates for the day-to-day job

for which they are employed? How do we persuade them of this difference? How do we encourage them to take up professional issues and voice their opinions?

*Our responsibilities as members of our profession, are not just to our users, but also to the profession itself.*

We need to encourage our new professionals to look more widely, beyond the walls of their institutions. To take part in the programs of the Section or Special Interest Group which defines their current employment or interest and also to look beyond these confines to the Association and profession as a whole. We need to provide encouragement and opportunities for them to consider themselves as part of that vanguard which, like the South Australian members of ALIA, is willing to stand up and express the 'professional solidarity' for which Australian librarians have become noted.

I do not believe however, that this

professional advocacy is a skill that can be learnt as part of diploma, undergraduate or graduate programs. Professional advocacy I would propose, is a skill learnt 'on the job', a skill which is learnt alongside the more experienced colleague.

This responsibility then rests with the many ALIA members who have this experience. It is our obligation to ourselves.

Consequently, our responsibilities as members of our profession, are not just to our clients, our users, but also to the profession itself. A responsibility which includes the education of the new professional in skills such as lobbying and advocacy.

I suggest we have a duty to develop their skills (and also our own) in becoming the 'public' librarian or library technician. It has been stated that 'society judges a profession by the behaviour of its members' (Finks, Lee W: *Librarianship needs a new code of professional ethics. American libraries*, January 1991, 84-92). If this is the case, then it is indeed the responsibility of us all to ensure these advocacy skills are fostered and matured.

This is indeed a very 'public' face that I am proposing for ALIA members. A public face which has brought some success here in South Australia and which has increased the respect with which we as responsible professionals are viewed by our community. □

#### *Library aid... continued from 1...*

There is an impressive list of training and study visits:

1984-85: the Deputy National Librarian, Mr Loc was in Australia for a 6 month BISA course in automated cataloguing and application of computers in libraries followed by a 6 month work attachment at the NLA. (Sadly, Mr Loc died in 1986).

1985: the Director of the NLV, Mr Duc, made a 2-week study visit to Australia, visiting major libraries in Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne.

1986: a 2-month training course in automated cataloguing was given in Hanoi by Dr Helen Jarvis, Director of BISA, for about 12 librarians from the NLV and other Vietnamese libraries.

1986: the Deputy National Librarian of the NLV, Mrs Cuc, was funded to attend the CONSAL VII (Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians) meeting in Manila.

1987: Dr Helen Jarvis made a 4-week follow-up training and assessment visit to Hanoi, and also supervised the installation of further equipment.

1987: Mrs Dan, the newly-appointed officer in charge of the NLV automation project, received 7 months training and work experience in Australia at BISA and the National Library of Australia.

1988: the Director of NLV, Mr Duc, attended the IFLA/LAA Conference,

Sydney, and Conference of Directors of National Libraries, Canberra.

1989: The NLV received consumables, a new UPS unit to replace one that had failed, and a dehumidifier.

1990: the librarian-in-charge of the automation, Mr Kieu Van Hot, spent 6 months in Australia combining a short BISA course with a longer period of work experience in the NLA.

1990: the Deputy National Librarian of NLV, Mrs Cuc, was funded to attend CONSAL VIII in Jakarta.

1991: Peter Haddad, Chief Cataloguing Librarian at the NLA, will go to the NLV for 4 weeks to conduct a workshop on cataloguing, retrospective conversion of catalogue records and resource sharing. He will also assess the project and make recommendations on its future direction.

#### **Has the assistance worked?**

Overall this project so far has been very successful, thanks to many factors:

- the combination of carefully chosen equipment and very specifically targeted training;
- the high calibre of the key staff of NLV;
- the good understanding between the two national libraries, built up over many years;
- the continued commitment and support of DFAT both in Canberra and Hanoi, which has enabled the project to

maintain its impetus and develop further;

- the special skills and commitment of Dr Helen Jarvis and National Library staff involved in coordinating the program and providing supervision of the trainees;
- automation which has enabled NLV to participate as an equal partner in the International Vietnamese Union Catalogue Project. VUC now contains over 6000 records, the majority of which have been contributed by the NLV;
- the attendance at international conferences has enabled NLV staff to gain regular exposure to recent developments in librarianship.

*Helen Jarvis and Elizabeth Watt* □

