

Children and libraries: a winning combination

ON SATURDAY 13 June the City of Gosnells, WA, hosted a conference for children's Librarians in Local Government and Teacher-Librarians.



Organiser Suzanne Bennett, Children's Librarian

Over 80 delegates attended, Public Librarians and half Teacher-Librarians or teachers working in school libraries (particularly primary schools).

The Mayor of Gosnells, opened the proceedings and Mandy Cheetham, Branch Librarian Karrinyup, gave the

first paper, on the history and growth of library services to children.

Other speakers took the viewpoint of the Ministry, of the teacher-librarian on the public librarian, and there was a demonstration of Reader's Theatre; a highly visual and entertaining segment.

At present, there is only one children's librarian employed in regional and country libraries in WA, one in the metro area of 59 libraries, run by 23 local authorities, only ten have created children's specialist positions.

Three children's librarians spoke about problems of lack of time to devote to the position, and the need for qualified and capable librarians in the field of library services to young people.

Neil Grieve, Curtin University, gave a stimulating and controversial talk on future directions in education for children's librarians, suggesting that limited positions in the workplace may mean that courses for children's librarians will be abandoned. Marie Wilson, Edith Cowan University, felt that the challenge for library educators

was to maximise learning opportunities for students with few resources available in a depressed economic environment. Networking, shared expertise and alternatives in course design were some suggestions for overcoming obstacles in the educative process of teacher-librarians.

At the end of the day the conference was challenged to answer the question 'Where do we go from here?' Some points raised were:

- A Children's Librarian is a PR person for Council and the Library;
- the children's librarian job description needs realistic reappraisal;
- effective communication is required between school and public librarians;
- standards are needed for children's and teacher-librarian appointments;
- ALIA should do more to promote the cause of children's librarians;
- City of Gosnells was challenged to initiate strategic plans for school and public libraries;
- opening hours of public libraries should include weekend afternoons. ■

SearchMAGIC on the CFA's Bulletin Board

Leigh Baker (WICEN), Coralie Jenkin (CFA) and Norma Tovey (Triad) collaborate in describing an important new networking application

THE COUNTRY FIRE Authority (CFA) is responsible for fire prevention and suppression in the state of Victoria outside the Melbourne metropolitan area. The CFA has 834 permanent staff and more than 80,000 volunteer firefighters located in 21 regions throughout the state. The CFA library, a small research library with about 4,000 volumes, 140 journal subscriptions and an average of 35 users each day, has collection strengths in bush fires and fire fighting.

The library is available to all members of the CFA, as well as members of the public, students, fire protection engineers, conservationists, etc. Located in Melbourne, the library is isolated from many potential users some of whom live up to 600 kilometres away. The only services provided to regional members are a monthly library bulletin and response to requests. The librarian was conscious of the need to extend services throughout the state and so put forward the idea of providing the SearchMAGIC on-line public access catalogue on a bulletin board, not knowing that it had never been done

before (anywhere in the world) with SearchMAGIC.

The first step was to obtain Triad's agreement that use of the single user version of SearchMAGIC on a bulletin board would not contravene the purchasing agreement. Then hardware was purchased, the bulletin board installed, the menu commands translated into English (from American), and SearchMAGIC was loaded. This stage saw much help from David Tilson and Leigh Baker of the Wireless Institute Civil Emergency Network (WICEN), and Peter Anderson of CIRCIT. The bulletin board may eventually be useful for other library purposes, such as international databases, publicity bulletins, a full text retrieval database for fire fighting articles, etc., as well as for uses by other sections of the CFA.

SearchMAGIC contains the library catalogue (books and journal index) in one database. Users with a computer and modem can use SearchMAGIC as though they were in the library, then leave a message (which will be printed immediately) for the librarian, requesting

materials.

It may be helpful to note that in SearchMAGIC menu screens and prompt lines have replaced the INMAGIC command interface. In SearchMAGIC, which can be used with any databases created with INMAGIC, users 'pop up' a list of all available search words or terms, select those they are interested in and paste them into a search prompt with the minimum of key strokes. One further key is used to display or print the list of items found.

SearchMAGIC is independent of the full INMAGIC software and costs less. Being 'search only', there are no risks of data corruption. It is ideal for installation on networks or to allow users at scattered locations access to information, using their own computers. From remote locations a PC, modem and communication software can be used to connect to a bulletin board system installed on a host computer running SearchMAGIC. The Emergency Services installation is a good example of this means of providing database services to a wider group of clients. ■