

1993—International Year for the World's Indigenous Peoples

inCite will focus on Australian libraries' relations with their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander users

The IYWIP (surely an unfortunate acronym) was launched by the UN General Assembly on Human Rights Day, 10 December 1992, 'to focus the attention of the international community on one of the planet's most neglected and vulnerable groups of people'.

The Australian Government has strongly supported the initiative, affecting all Commonwealth portfolios. The national objectives are:

- to enhance relations between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and

the broader community;

- to increase the knowledge and understanding in the domestic and international community about the World's Indigenous Peoples, in particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders;
- to identify activities through policy and program development to improve the socio-cultural position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders;
- to maximise the involvement of non-government organisations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and commu-

nity-based individuals in the achievement of the national objectives.

inCite has asked a number of Australian librarians to describe the services they offer to Aboriginal communities and individuals, and has been delighted by their enthusiastic response. A lot is happening out there that is very little known, and this is an opportunity to increase our understanding and appreciation of this worthwhile endeavour. The first two contributions follow. *Are you involved too?* If so, please contact the Editor. ■

Library services to the Aboriginal communities

Lorraine Vass tells us what is happening in the Northern Territory

Towards the end of 1989, within three weeks of taking up my appointment with the Northern Territory Library Service (NTLS), I found myself at Yirrkala on the very beautiful Gove Peninsula in East Arnhemland. Having located the Yirrkala Community Education Centre I was welcomed by Manduwuy Yunupingu, who was Principal at the time, with the rather quizzical greeting, 'You must be the library lady'.

The Territory's indigenous people are everywhere: in town living communally in reserves or camps or perhaps over the road from your house, out bush on communities or outstations and often a combination of some or all, according to season, family or ceremonial demands. Through school, university, work, politics, church, sport, shopping or the complex lineages of local families, there is constant interaction between Aborigines and non-Aborigines.

Library service to Aborigines is interwoven into every sector of library development in the Northern Territory, particularly education and public libraries, but also some special libraries (see *Visions from the Frontier* elsewhere in this issue).

From its inception, the NTLS has had a high level of commitment to library service to Aboriginal people both directly, in the case of remote school and community libraries, and indirectly through the municipal libraries.

The first Aboriginal community library to be established was at Barunga in 1982. Considerable progress has been made since, but we have to balance resources to maintain the relevance of existing libraries against the ever-increasing number

of communities that want to develop a library service open to all. The remote community libraries are integral to the Territory's public library network. They are part-time and often joint-use with the school library. Their limited stock is rolled over regularly through a centrally administered exchange program. Where possible, they are staffed from the indigenous community. Not a lot of borrowing goes on. Usage tends to be of a browsing nature and centred on the library. Print and visual material about Aboriginal people, their stories and regional themes are particularly popular. So, too, is video viewing.

In the urban centres, developing a library service that targets Aboriginal people is the responsibility of the municipal library. An extensive survey in 1991 provided the basis for its planning:

- increasing Aboriginal staff numbers;
- enhancing the promotion of library services amongst Aborigines;
- improving collections of resource material of interest to Aboriginal people; and
- heightening staff awareness of Aboriginal culture and cross-cultural skills.

In Alice Springs and Katherine targeted service is more focused on specific groups. Alice Springs Public Library has cultivated close ties with the staff and students of Yipirinya Primary School and Yirra College. It also maintains intermittent dialogue with Tangentyere Council, the umbrella organisation for the numerous town camp cooperatives, regarding library service to town camp residents.

Katherine Community Library, on the campus of the NT Open College, provides for a strong Aboriginal student clientele, as



Aboriginal trainees enter holdings data onto LINNET, Darwin Public Library and Information Service

well as a group of Aboriginal people with disabilities. The Library also offers resources and an information service to support the Katherine Regional Aboriginal Language Centre, Aboriginal health workers and teachers in remote communities.

The NT Government's recent initiative to establish an Office of Aboriginal Development is one that we aim to capitalise on. We have a program up and running across the Territory. The new forum, and the focus provided by the International Year for the World's Indigenous People, will help us explore a range of options for enhancing library service to the 25% of our Territory's population who are indigenous Territorians. ■