

Visions from the Frontier

Colette McCool is gearing up for the RAISS Conference

On 7-9 July of this year, the Darwin library community will host the Reference and Information Services librarians Section (RAISS) Conference: *Infobridges—Linking Australia with Asia*.

We shall be telling you about the Territory library and information scene in forthcoming issues of *inCite* as a lead up to the conference, to give you some

1986, ASLA in 1980 and *Libraries in Isolation* (Alice Springs) in 1979. It is this difference that inspires interest in the Territory from colleagues interstate and challenges those who work here.

Library services in the Territory have to be different to meet the Territory's special needs. The Territory's population is small but it is very diverse. Less than 1% of Australia's population is spread across one sixth of our continent's land mass. Over a very short period, innovative services have been developed to overcome isolation and distance. Currently, the Northern Territory Library Service (NTLS) has embarked on a planning process to lead it into the next century.

There is a very rich mix of cultures, and of people who live in very different ways. The majority of Territorians live in urban, regional centres, while others live hundreds of kilometres from regional centres on remote cattle stations, in mining camps or lead quasi-nomadic lifestyles. Of a school student population of 37 000, one third are Aboriginal children living in tribal areas.

Library services in the Territory were established in more recent times than those of other states: the NTLS in the 1960's, the coordinated public/community library service was established only in 1982, and the University Library which had its genesis in the collection of Darwin Community College and Darwin Institute of Technology is now four years old. They have all grown rapidly.

Being a relatively young community has had its advantages. We are not constrained by tradition and can better respond to our user's needs. Sometimes we have drawn on the experience of others, at other times we have found a

unique solution to suit the environment and our users.

We have been assisted by the Northern Territory Government's commitment to a Territory-wide communication network. LINNET (Libraries in the Northern Territory Network) makes accessible to all communities the major collections of the Territory and provides a gateway to national and international databases.

The state/public library network

Imagine a State library coming up to its thirteenth birthday and a public library network where the oldest local government authority has yet to reach 40 and the creation of new authorities is almost a monthly occurrence. Youthfulness is only one characteristic of the Territory's public libraries. Responsiveness to the challenge of harnessing community creativity in the design of flexible models for the delivery of library services is another.

At present, the network comprises the State Reference Library and its highly regarded Northern Australia Collection, six well resourced municipal library services in the main centres of Darwin, Alice Springs, Katherine, Tennant Creek, Palmerston and Jabiru; two high school based joint-use public libraries in Nhulunbuy and Humpty Doo and 20-odd part time community libraries, the majority of which are operated by Aboriginal community government councils or incorporated associations. A postal library service caters for individuals or families living remote from community centres.

44% of Territorians over the age of 18 are registered public library users, the nation's second highest.

There is a heavy reliance on the centralised collection management, technology, stock rotation, training and consultancy services offered by the NTLS. As the network of public libraries grows, this leadership role will continue with emphasis being given to identifying and providing appropriate materials to support the differing literacy needs and aspirations of community groups across the Territory, extending information and document delivery technology, training local people to become catalysts for increasing information literacy skills in the communities



School's out at the Nightcliff Branch of Darwin Public Library and Information Service

background information on what we are doing and what we have achieved.

The Territory has a reputation for hosting successful conferences that were memorable and different—ALIA in

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► and finally, marketing the array of services available so all Territorians, enjoy similar, if not better, opportunities for accessing the information they need as other Australians.

Education

School libraries in the Territory refuse to be disadvantaged by isolation and distance and provide a quality service to both staff and students. Professional library advisory positions are there to assist the 170 government and non-government schools. All schools have a library, whether it is a few shelves of books in a bush school or a multimedia facility in a larger school.

School libraries play an integral part in the school curriculum and in many schools teachers and teacher-librarians work together to ensure students become information literate. The libraries are also technologically advanced, with widespread use of automation and increasing use of CD-ROM technology.

The LINNET network provides all secondary schools and colleges with a union catalogue, circulation control, interlibrary loans, electronic mail and access to the union catalogue of the Northern Territory State, public and

community libraries. National databases, such as ABN, SCIS and Presscom, are also available on-line, as is the Northern Territory Film Library booking facility. The majority of urban primary schools have libraries automated on stand-alone systems, as well as access to LINNET. And Apple Macintosh computers in most bush schools offer individual library catalogues using Hypercard.

Contrasting needs of urban and remote students are reflected in the provision of TAFE and Higher Education. TAFE programs are offered through the Northern Territory Open College, Centralian College, Batchelor College and the Northern Territory University (NTU), while Higher Education is offered by Batchelor and the university. There is a strong emphasis on Aboriginal education and studies. Many students also undertake distance education courses or study interstate. Library services reflect these diverse needs and have developed to meet them—even if books have to be delivered by the weekly plane!

Links with Asia

The Territory's proximity to Indonesia has led to many formal and informal

government and business links. Involvement of the library sector has been relatively recent but is developing rapidly. In 1991 the NTU signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with the Indonesian government universities in Kupang and Ambon. All three participating libraries have identified areas for targeted activity, ranging from staff exchange and development programs to the planning of new library buildings.

Last year NTU Library received a DEET grant which focused on developing resources in Southeast Asia and particularly Indonesia. As part of this program, the library has purchased a rare collection of over sixteen hundred titles, covering East Timor from 1734 to 1991. Most of the items are in Portuguese, collected over a period of 30 years by a member of the Portuguese Army who was stationed in East Timor. Purchase of this collection will greatly enhance the depth of resource material available in Australian on East Timor.

The DEET grant has also helped the library to develop the INTAN MAS database on northern Australia and eastern Indonesia. This now has more than 12 000 records and will be accessible via computer networks in 1993. ■

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Dear Miss Melvil,

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Yours,
Desperately Seeking Solution.

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