

Needs analysis for special interest groups

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Determining needs for special interest groups in the Northern Territory is achieved through a planned approach of consultation and research.

Specific actions which have been undertaken to identify needs of special interest groups include the 1997 Customer Survey and a review of service delivery to remote areas. Combined with this is a close working relationship with the Department of Education to improve literacy levels throughout the Northern Territory.

The issue of geographical isolation means the task is not an easy one. Con-

sultation with clients across the Territory to develop and deliver services which are culturally appropriate and accessible is achieved through consultation with disability groups, ethnic groups and remote and Aboriginal communities. The provision of an accessible, relevant information service is a cornerstone for social and economic development whether it be in an urban or remote environment.

Information from the 1996 Census, as well as the 1997 Customer Survey, has given NT Library a broad view of the needs of special interest groups. Analysis of the survey results has prompted library to increase the range of languages other

than English (LOTE) products to ensure non-English speaking clients are able to access popular fiction, non-fiction and children's books. Determining the needs of special interest groups is assisted by public librarians providing feedback to the library on the levels of demand for particular items. From this, the library has increased its stock of both 'spoken word' titles which are available to all clients, and 'talking books' which are for the exclusive use of visually impaired people.

We have also established a LOTE working group comprised of one staff member from each of NT Library, Palmerston Library and Darwin Public Library and Information Service. This group communicates with the collection management group who meet when the Northern Territory Library Network Planning and Development Group conduct their quarterly meetings. In addition to this, advice and assistance is sought from the local interpreter service on subject matter and specific titles.

With Aboriginal people comprising more than twenty-eight per cent of the Northern Territory population, there is a key focus on consultation to identify their requirements. This is addressed through the client services program which has responsibility for delivery of library and information services to remote and Aboriginal communities. Consultation occurs with individuals, communities, Aboriginal organisations and Community Government Councils to identify needs. This is essential to enable the provision of a culturally appropriate library and information service.

Needs of individual communities are further identified through the Community Library Officers (CLO) Forum, held twice yearly in Darwin. The meetings provide an opportunity to satisfy identified training needs, plus the opportunity to network and exchange information.

The anticipated outcomes are:

- a support group for isolated CLO's;
- sharing of knowledge and expertise;
- innovation and exploration of new work practices is encouraged;
- the development of services and collections which meet the community's needs; and
- exploration of linkages between libraries, technology and the Council's Community Development Plan. ■

Computers choose books

When the postman delivers a braille or talking book to one of 7500 sight-impaired customers of a special library, the chances are that its title was selected by computer, and that the recipient will approve of the digital choice.

For the Braille and Talking Book Library's system has a unique Automated Profile Matching facility, developed by Sanderson Computers, which matches available stock with customers' preferred literature.

When sight-impaired people join the library, they are asked questions such as who are their preferred authors, what they have read in the past and what types of book they prefer — romance, mysteries, biographies, sport or whatever. They are also asked whether they object to sexual references or violence in their books. The system then builds a complete profile of their likes and dislikes.

'About eighty per cent of our members choose to order their books in this way, and we have a very high satisfaction rate,' says the library's manager, Rose Blustein. 'Some people want to choose their own books, so we send them a list, but most want their books sent out regularly.'

The library lends some 200 000 titles each year and its computer system chooses from among 35 000

audio titles and 25 000 braille books. Each member has a quota, beginning at three books but increasing as they use the library services regularly.

The Automated Profile Matching system is a specially developed module of Sanderson Computers' URiCA library management system. When the system selects a book, it prints a mailing label which library staff attach to the selection and mail it. About twenty-five of the library's thirty-six staff use the system.

URiCA gives the library a total information management solution. As well as handling bibliographic data, it acts as a collection management system and also manages records, acts as an image collection system and performs full-text management.

An upgraded version of the system will allow library members to order titles via the internet from a web site catalogue. Sanderson Computers' award-winning SPYDUS interface, which links between web browsers and URiCA, will underpin this facility.

URiCA's online public access catalogue allows people using the Braille and Talking Book Library's thirty-four centres around Victoria to access the library's complete bibliographic database. The new system runs on a Unix hardware platform and supports twenty-four concurrent users. ■