

Your voice

I feel moved to comment on the lack of support and direction from ALIA on library services to children and young people. This concern is prompted by the current debate on national literacy standards. The perception of literacy as a problem is not a new issue; it has waxed and waned over the past two decades with public discussion between experts about the best methods of dealing with the problem. There appears to be unanimous agreement regarding the significance of enriching language experiences in the first five years of life, on the later acquisition of literacy skills. Listening to stories, looking at picture books, singing nursery rhymes, playing baby games ... the list goes on. Which community agency provides access to this rich source of literature? Who is the link between this cornucopia and the young child? The public library and the children's librarian.

As a news vehicle which aims to present 'perspectives on issues relating to library and information science', *inCite* abounds with reports on information technology, reports on reports, strategic planning, industrial and management issues, professional education, awards and so the list goes on. Unfortunately, the list includes few references to children's and youth services. Glowing accounts of several fine new public library buildings reported in the September issue virtually ignored the existence of services to children and young people. In addition, no papers on any issue or topic pertaining to children's and youth services were listed on the program of the Public Libraries and Reference and Information Services Sections Conference. This is very disturbing as it may be symptomatic of the apparent lack of professional recognition and interest in the field.

The view from the 'coal face' is that librarians working in children's and youth services feel they lack professional recognition and support — not from public library users — but in many cases from their own managers. Could it be that these managers feel constrained by the apparent lack of commitment and support for this area of service by the professional association?

To meet the challenges of the coming millennium, there needs to be a strong statement of commitment and recognition from ALIA of the importance of children's and youth service librarians in the continuance of public library service. This should include support for the establishment of relevant undergraduate and post-graduate degree courses, continuing professional education and career path development. Those working in the field of children's

and youth services need to feel valued by their professional body.

Excellence in library and information services is ALIA's vision for the future. Children and young people are the future. The quality of the library service that they receive today may well determine the level of excellence of library and information services in the next century.

Mandy Cheetham, Greenwood

Your voice

Your letters on any issue of relevance to the library and information sector are welcomed.

All letters should be addressed to the *inCite* editor and may be e-mailed to incite@alia.org.au, or faxed to 02 6282 2249, or posted to: Your voice, ALIA, PO Box E441, Kingston ACT 2604. Please include your name and postal address with your letter or e-mail.



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