

State Records (NSW)

– Indigenous cadetship project



Christine Yeats, manager, Public Access, State Records (NSW)

The State Records Authority of NSW has considerable holdings of records relating to Aboriginal people, particularly from the former Aborigi-

nes Welfare Board and its predecessors. State Records decided to participate in the ALIA/ASA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy for the Library, Information and Archives Sector because it wanted to make the records, and information about them, more accessible to the Indigenous community. While access to this material is only granted on a case by case basis, these records form one of the most important resources for Aboriginal researchers.

State Records' aim in recruiting Kirsten Thorpe was to build her skills, knowledge and understanding of archives and the holdings of State Records. In addition Kirsten was able to help us to identify appropriate and culturally sensitive strategies for informing our Aboriginal clients about the resources available and encourage them to use the records. Kirsten has worked in the Public Access area since her appointment and has already participated in regional workshops

and provided introductory talks to groups of Aboriginal researchers wishing to access the States' archives. As part of her practicum Kirsten also developed a series of introductory leaflets on key records.

Now that Kirsten has completed her Graduate Diploma of Science (Archives and Records) she has moved to the position of Archivist — Aboriginal Liaison. She will be the first point of contact for Aboriginal people interested in either visiting our Search Rooms or wanting to find out more about what State Records holds. We anticipate that over the next few years she will gain experience in all aspects of the work of State Records.

Finally, State Records would like to express its appreciation to ALIA and the Australian Society of Archivists for the opportunity of participating in this initiative, particularly as we understand that we are the first government archives to have done so. ■

Combining work and study

I started a cadetship on 10 February 1997. This Cadetship was offered through the ALIA/ASA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy for the Library, Information and Archives Sector, in conjunction with Batchelor College, now Batchelor Institute Indigenous Tertiary Education. I combined study and work for two years — not an easy task, but thankfully I persisted and in October 1999, I graduated with a Diploma in Library and Information studies.

At the onset of the cadetship, Batchelor Institute offered a guarantee of employment upon my graduation. True to their word, I am now employed on a three-year contract AO3 Library Technician position, to be re-negotiated at the end of this time. I would prefer the security of a permanent position, and of course I have set goals and career aspirations.

At present my main aim is to improve my position at work, which means further study. My application for enrolment in the Bachelor of Library and Information Management at the Northern Territory University, has been accepted and I have enrolled in semester one this year.

I will always be appreciative for the opportunity and experience in doing the cadetship. It is a pity that the cadetship has been offered as a one-off venture through Batchelor Institute Library. An independent Aboriginal organisation is the ideal place for a library cadetship to be an ongoing strategy. I found the only negative aspect of the cadetship was the low salary.

Fay Corbett, library technician, Batchelor Institute Indigenous Tertiary Education

Helping to break down the barriers...

Kirsten Thorpe, Archivist — Aboriginal liaison, State Records New South Wales

I have been employed under the ALIA/ASA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy for the Library, Information and Archives Sector at State Records New South Wales as a cadet archivist since March 1999. While working full-time at State Records I undertook studies in the Post-Graduate Diploma Science (Archives and Records) course at Edith Cowan University as a full-time student. The course was by correspondence through the external studies division in Perth, Western Australia.

While working at State Records I have been situated in Public Access, which involved answering reference enquires relating to New South Wales State archives. My main focus has been on assisting Indigenous people in their research and explaining the procedures to access records. The majority of Indigenous people visiting State Records access the records of the *Aborigines Welfare Board, 1883–1969*. I have also been involved in talks and tours with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups that have visited the archives for family history or research purposes.

I was mainly interested in pursuing a career in archives as I believe strongly in the preservation of our cultural heritage

and believe that more Indigenous people should be accessing archives throughout Australia. In the long term I hope to assist communities in establishing keeping places, obtaining copies of records and collecting resources for use in their local areas. I believe that guides to records in archives should be created in a culturally appropriate manner and promoted widely throughout communities to break down the barriers that have long existed between Indigenous people and information services.



Kirsten Thorpe

Although I found the experience of managing full-time work and study very challenging, it did bring with it a number of benefits. While I was being introduced to archives and working at State Records I was able to relate my practical experience with issues and concepts that I had been learning about in the course. As well as this I could discuss the course with staff, who as professional Archivists could understand the material that I had been reading about. ■