

A little recognition goes a long way

Organisational restructures helped the staff at two libraries discover the value of their work and industry experience

At a recent CREATE Australia library workshop, Merrilee Pigram, ACT Library and Information Services, and Erica Nagle, Mackay City Council Library Services, described how their organisations used the library industry training package to support major organisational change.

For both speakers, the process of restructuring unveiled many staff training and skill development issues and highlighted the need for flexible, learner-driven training and assessment.

'Following our 1998-99 restructure all positions in the service were spilled,' says Merrilee Pigram, manager of program services at the ACT Library Service. 'We updated our selection documentation, putting new emphasis on skills, training and qualifications. Of the 122 staff, 73 customer service officer positions were identified as requiring specific training.'

According to Merrilee, the flexibility of the library industry training package was a major plus, especially given the need to deliver training to staff

with different skill needs. Even more important was the capacity to use the package for the recognition of prior learning (RPL).

'Staff felt empowered when they received formal recognition for their existing work skills,' says Merrilee. 'RPL also helped us to identify training needs and information gaps so we could target training to each individual's needs.'

Erica Nagle, manager of library services at Mackay City Council, agrees. 'When we started implementing the training, staff were nervous about recognising their existing work experience and knowledge — now they are experts in gathering evidence for RPL,' she says.

And, says Erica, perceptions about education, training and professional development have changed dramatically. At first, staff expected training to be teacher-led and classroom-based but, following information-sharing sessions organised by the library, they saw the benefits of self-paced training and assessment.

Erica sees improved staff morale as a major outcome of the package. That, in turn, will encourage a culture of life-long learning. She is confident that the library's experience will transfer to the rest of the Council.

The ACT Library and Information Service is similarly committed to becoming a learning organisation, providing ongoing structured training in the workplace. 'The first group of Certificate II graduates has completed training and assessment and we are about to begin the program with the next fifteen trainees,' Merrilee says.

'Our aim is to make the package the cornerstone for training for non-professional staff in the organisation. With eight sites open to the public seven days a week, it is essential to have a highly-trained and multi-skilled workforce.'

Proceedings from the national workshop on implementing the library industry training package are available from CREATE Australia (phone 02 8399 2655 or create@createaust.com.au). ■

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