

Your voice

Narrow-minded attitudes

There I was thinking our profession had got over such narrow-minded attitudes as that displayed in the letter 'Xboxes in libraries' (*inCite*, April 2006). Yes Mr Williams, we do have Xboxes in our library, which serves one of the most multicultural communities in South Australia. This includes many new young arrivals with some fundamental language and literacy problems to whom reading and books mean not a lot.

Far from being 'foolish and ultimately self-defeating', we have found that our Xboxes have helped us forge a link with these, and other youth, to help make the library a place they feel comfortable visiting because there is something for them, something they can understand, use and enjoy. Ultimately this has paid off, as we can build on that link through introducing programs such as Homework Help, where we work with these young people on using the broader library resources and services. My staff report that as the relationship has developed, these youngsters feel able to ask for help with things such as putting together a CV and yes, even asking about a good book.

Another interesting spin-off is that we find other family members wandering in because their children have gone home and told them all about having fun at the library. These people are curious because this is a long way from their childhood memories of a library and often, they also want somewhere to relax and get away from a busy life. This must be one of the core functions of a modern public library, to provide a safe, free and comfortable environment and as people come to enjoy that, they soon discover our resources and so the cycle continues.

Far from 'undo[ing] all the good work', let's get away from the 50s attitude and get on with making our public libraries a place for all community members to live, learn and enjoy, and I certainly have no compunction in using a bit of 'commercial culture' to do just that.

Shane Cathcart, Hilton SA

A tale of three cities

In the June 2006 issue of *inCite* Bathurst City Library's John Cumberford ('Library v Learning Centre') responded to an earlier article 'Lithgow, first learning city in NSW'. As the manager of Central West Libraries centred on Orange, the third of the three regional cities

that are strung out along the highway between the Blue Mountains in the east and Dubbo to the west, I feel a strong need to contribute to this discussion.

While there are many similarities between these three cities, there is enough divergence to ensure that each library service responds differently to meet the needs of their community.

The Lithgow Library Learning Centre (its official name) is to be congratulated on the way in which they have championed their Council's decision to become a learning city, an innovative move designed to reinvigorate a struggling community and equip people with the skills needed to survive and thrive in the 21st century. This action has firmly positioned the Library as a key contributor to community life and attracted much needed funding for the construction of the new Library building which incorporates the Technology Centre.

In Orange, as we have just completed extensive consultations as part of the development of our Marketing Plan, I feel confident in talking about what our community wants. Our clients have indicated that they value the library as a centre for research and life-long learning, for social connections and yes, for recreational reading. Overwhelmingly they added the words 'value added' to describe how they would like the reading experience to be improved. Building on the work that is happening in Australia and overseas we will use the professional skills and expertise of our staff, coupled with their unbounded enthusiasm, to meet client expectations. At the same time we will continue to develop our strengths in other areas and provide a guarantee that their library won't be 'dumbed down'.

Bathurst is known for its educational facilities so perhaps the citizens seek information differently. Only they would know.

Jan Richards, Manager, Central West Libraries, Orange NSW

In response to John Cumberford's article (*inCite*, June 2006) regarding the Lithgow Library Learning Centre, the reader needs to know that the Centre meets the needs of the Lithgow community. Community consultation took place over a number of years. Three major areas of need were identified within the Lithgow community: the need for an improved library facility, a

technology centre and a learning community. Council saw a golden opportunity to respond to these three needs by consolidating the library, the technology centre and the learning shop in to one multipurpose facility in the central business district.

The centre promotes reading, literacy and lifelong learning in a safe, comfortable setting. On a particular day the activity includes: resource loans; reference queries satisfied to a technical/professional level; internet use in the Tech Centre (62 per cent male on any day!); computer classes for seniors; Homework Centre with a qualified tutor; Storytime and craft activities; reading for leisure in the courtyard; Youth Council, Garden Club, Department of Health meetings; 20 Koreans learning English; video-conferencing with the Department of Industrial Relations, jobseekers and those in casual work; school students researching a local history project; family historians tracing ancestors; and groups of people socialising together in different areas of the library.

The Lithgow Library Learning Centre is providing the service the customers need for both information and recreational purposes. The number of people coming through the door in the new location has increased by 300 per cent. It is proving to be a delightful, friendly, well-used community space that the whole community enjoys.

Penny Hall, Community manager, Lithgow City Council

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 6335, Kingston 2604. Please include your name and postal address with your letter or e-mail.

Letters will be accepted for publication until the 18th of the month.



► My final issue for the evening was to encourage senior members of the profession to support the New Generation Group. They need our support to network and make connections but we also need to encourage them in learning and excellence. We need our new professionals to undertake further study, in particular formal study for higher degrees. We know that our environment will continue to change and we also know that the workplace is chang-

ing rapidly. We need professionals who will review the existing body of knowledge that supports the educational curriculum for professional programs so that it can be reshaped and developed to meet the needs of the evolving workplace. ALIA, together with the Aurora Foundation, is continuing to promote and encourage the development of leaders for the profession and I encourage you to support these initiatives. ■

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