

Unaccompanied minors in an academic library

There is little debate on the 'unaccompanied minors' issue among librarians in a university setting. Many have had concerns about noise from unsupervised children disturbing other customers, but no one can say they have been called on as unwilling baby sitters. Some have been glad to take on the role when a cute cuddly baby is offered. A search of publicly available university policies shows this matter is usually dealt with at university level, requiring adequate supervision and protection of the child. There is one instance of a specific library policy, although overall the matter is not handled consistently throughout the sector. There have been few instances of youngsters walking in off the street, perhaps because many university libraries are buried in central areas of large campuses. The growing incidence of city-based campuses may change this trend, and lead us to think about this matter in our space design and service provision.

University-high school agreements encourage minors

It is interesting that through the various university library agreements with high schools we are in fact encouraging unsupervised minors into our facilities in the interests of long-term marketing of the university and library services. These agreements, if well implemented and managed, can lead to greater use of the collection by young high school students, introducing them to university life, lowering apprehension and creating a positive feeling towards the institution. There has been little research done as to whether they actually achieve these goals, yet all librarians I spoke to in a small informal survey agreed they are a positive step and that there is a case to support their continuation.

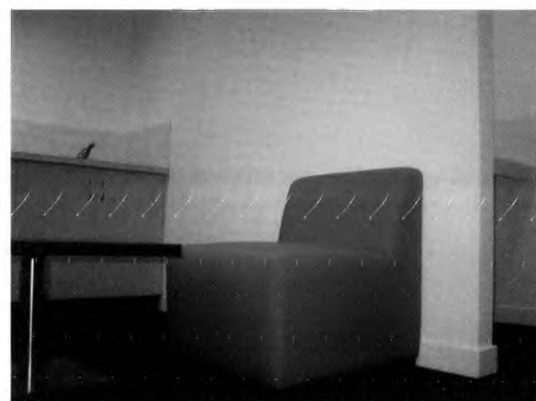
Thinking about space design and service provision

Recently, when designing a new academic library for Edith Cowan University (ECU) in Perth, Western Australia, facilities to assist student parents of young children were discussed at length. The options discussed ranged from offering a high level of service (involving crèche-style facilities similar to those offered at local community centres) to no special facilities at all. The realistic solution is a parenting room where fathers and mothers can change their babies and feed them in private if needed. A crèche facility was impractical due to operating costs, low demand and public liability insurance issues.

The parenting room in the new ECU Library at Joondalup is on the ground floor adjacent to the coffee shop and is well advertised with signage (inset). The room is about 3 x 4m with a change table, comfortable seating for feeding, nappy disposal and a sink for washing and bathing. It should be well known to parents of young children and may help to reduce the noise in the quiet study areas and make library usage more accessible and comfortable for young parents. The facility opened in December 2006, after students had left for summer break. So it is too early to comment on usage as students recommenced late in February.

Overall, the room reflects a desire by academic libraries to remain customer focussed and move with the times. In Australia there is a growing mature-age market for universities and these types of facilities and services will grow in prevalence. Who knows, we may even see the provision of crèche facilities in libraries in our lifetime, as universities seek to meet the ever-growing expectations and changing demographics of students.

Jeff Murray
CAUL Executive



CAUL Achievement Award

At its November meeting, the CAUL Executive considered and approved the nomination of Jocelyn Priddey, Senior Manager, Information Resources at the University of Queensland, for the CAUL Achievement Award for 2006. Nominations were also received from Griffith University and the University of Western Australia.

The committee applauded the work undertaken by Jocelyn on behalf of the wider membership over a long period of time, most particularly in support of the CEIRC program. As is customary, Jocelyn will attend the first meeting of CAUL in 2007, to receive her \$5000 cash prize, and to speak about her work.