

# The Age Information Centre: A community resource

**T**WELVE MONTHS AGO 'The Age Information Centre' opened its telephone service working from a room above *The Age*, Collins Street office, Melbourne. At that time there were four people on staff, all who had been employed especially to establish the Centre – a manager and her assistant, a systems librarian and a community liaison officer.

In December 1980 the Centre opened as a shop-front in Melbourne's City Square. Two inquiry officers and a part-time indexer joined the original team and the Centre now acts as an outlet for *Age* privilege offers, education resource kits, reprints and photographs from *The Age*, in addition to providing a telephone and face-to-face information service.

The Centre provides current information in the areas of leisure, recreation, education, the arts, community groups and services. During winter it is open from 9-5.30 Monday to Friday although the hours are extended during the more active summer months.

Queries now average about 600 to 700 a week and a record is kept of every query specifying a category and the source used to provide the answer. This information is used in day-to-day planning but will also be important when the service is computerised.

The retrieval system at present is completely manual with an alphabetical, key word card system. During the past 12 months the original system has been heavily adapted to cope with the pattern of day-to-day queries that has emerged. As one might expect many of the queries are related to material that has at one time been published in *The Age* newspaper – a restaurant reviewed three months ago, a gallery specialising in Eastern ceramics discussed in *Melbourne Living*, or a bush-walking group mentioned in *Weekender*.

## Research Service

The Centre staff will research information if it is not immediately available. Personal contact has been made with all of Melbourne's municipal recreation officers, community education and arts officers and tourist centres in addition to government departments and community groups.

If an enquirer is looking for a computer course near Chelsea, a BMX track on the Peninsula or an arts festival in Footscray it is normally a simple matter to obtain the information if the Centre does not already have it on file.

Some enquirers do expect the Centre staff to have instant recall of every article published in *The Age* – occasionally since the first edition in 1854. The date of a particular article can be searched through *The Age* editorial library but this can take some time.

If the enquirer wants the information immediately they are encouraged to undertake such research themselves at the State Library or their local public library. Most enquirers are quite happy to do this and to have been made aware that such facilities are available to them. It is the Centre's experience that many people are unaware of the wide range of resources existing in their community – hence the demand for the service that 'The Age Information Centre' provides.



The retrieval system is manual with an alphabetical, key-word card system. Plans to computerise the service are presently being studied.

## Books of The Age

Now that the Centre's telephone and personal information service is operating successfully the plans are to use the information existing in the Centre to cater for the special needs of different community groups. An example of this development is *Books of The Age* a monthly index to books reviewed or mentioned in *The Age*.

The need for such an index was made apparent by the number of bookshops that telephoned the Information Centre seeking details in order to locate a book for a customer whose only advice was that 'it was

on dolphins and it was reviewed in *The Age*!

*Books of The Age* provides details of title, author, publisher, price and date of *Age* review. While it is not possible at this stage to provide additional details many libraries are also finding it a useful service and have placed a subscription (\$25 a year) with 'The Age Information Centre'.

*Incite* readers visiting Melbourne are most welcome to visit the Centre and see it in operation. For more information call in at the City Square or telephone (03) 63 7621.

Pamela McLure  
The Age Information Centre

## Who would like to visit Paris in springtime?

**T**HE INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS on the Universal Availability of Publications (UAP) will be held in Paris from 3 to 7 May 1982.

The objective of UAP is the widest possible availability of published material (that is, recorded knowledge issued for public use) to intending users, wherever and whenever they need it, as an essential element in economic, social, educational, and personal development.

The UAP program aims to improve availability at all levels, from the local to the international, and at all stages from the publication of new material to the retention of last copies, both by positive action and by the removal of barriers. UAP aims at ensuring that existing improved access to information on documents is matched by improved access to the documents themselves.

This Congress is being organised jointly by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) and the International Federation of Library

Associations and Institutions (IFLA).

Problems identified as constraints to the availability of publications will be discussed during the Congress and effective solutions will be sought. The Congress will therefore be of interest to librarians, information specialists, archivists, booksellers, publishers and other professionals involved in the production, distribution and organisation of information in printed or other form, as well as to all categories of users of information.

Attendance at the Congress will be by invitation. Participants invited to the Congress will attend in a personal capacity and not as representatives of any member state, organisation or institution. However, certain international, governmental and non-governmental organisations will be invited to send representatives as observers to the Congress. If anyone would like to attend or would like more information please contact Susan Acutt, Executive Director, LAA, 473 Elizabeth St, Surry Hills 2010, by 30 October 1981.