



## the front line

That irascible Anglo-Canadian millionaire, political 'king maker' and British wartime cabinet minister Lord Beaverbrook also had some claim to notoriety as an owner of newspapers. Unlike, we are assured, his latterday counterparts, he did not hesitate to provide guidance to his editors. Part of that guidance was an injunction to publish good news because it sold newspapers. In August 1939 his 'Daily Express' trumpeted 'No war this year, or next'. On 1 September 1939 Germany invaded Poland. World War II had begun.

Some will cavil, but I am on firmer soil in conveying the following good news about the public library system in Australia. There are more public libraries, with more resources, serving more Australians, than ever before.

- Fact 1:** There are now 469 public lending library services. In 1980 there were 404. Increase 16.08%
- Fact 2:** There are now 1288 static service points. In 1980 there were 1148. Increase 12.2%
- Fact 3:** The total bookstock is 24,793,116. In 1980 it was 20,161,614. Increase 22.97%
- Fact 4:** Total loans in 1986 were 97,793,116. In 1980 there were 92,972,000. Increase 5.18%
- Fact 5:** Other resources include audiodiscs/tapes 1,267,225 videotapes 27,266 periodical titles 42,086

At least 95% of Australians probably now

have access to a public lending library but an average of 40.69%, or a mean of 47.5%, choose to do so. That, as Peter Dawe noted recently in this column, is a challenge facing public libraries. It is a challenge well met by those many libraries reporting memberships between 45% and 80%. But what of the others, those reporting 20% or 30%? Are the reasons lack of resources, lack of staff, lack of hours, lack of service points, lack of marketing skills or lack of proactive professional dynamic? We all have our thoughts and theories, but regrettably there has been no research to determine why service A achieves 60% membership and service B achieves 30%, despite demographic and geographic similarities.

We all, too, regardless of the type of library and information service in which we work, should be concerned about the welfare of Australia's public library network. It is the showwindow of our profession; it is how that person in the street judges us; it underlies our claim on the national information policy agenda. The potential — a cost-effective infrastructure for national information — is manifestly there. Australia Post aside, there is no co-operating public service agency that is as widely distributed, accessible and used as is the public library network in this country. But the potential is even greater. For example, only 37 (7.24%) of services provide Sunday afternoon opening. Is this responding to the constraints on the modern family and workforce? Only 16 (3.41%) use Australian and overseas online databases, and only 39 (8.35%) designate a Reference/Information Librarian from a total of 1553 librarians employed. Is this responding to the information society? Only 27.5% of services have non-English resources, and even less (1.7%) employ a Multicultural/Ethnic Librarian. Is this responding to the reality of our society? Only

78 (16.63%) employ a Children's Librarian. Is this building on the hard work of many teacher librarians in a response to the future of our society? The answer is clearly no in all cases. To attempt to change that situation we need to identify our support base and to do something tangible with it.

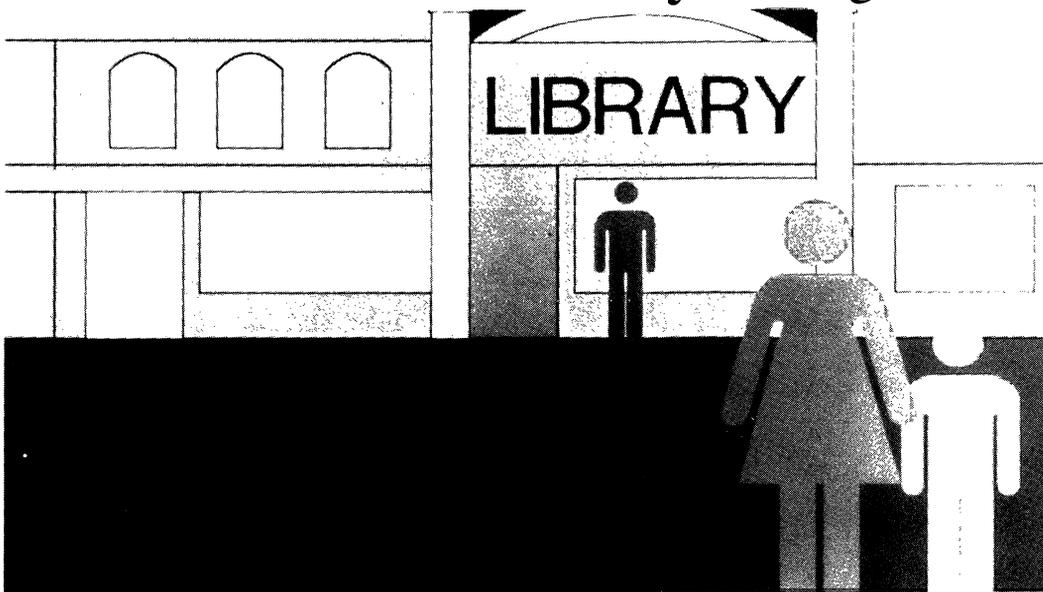
Let's focus on that 40.6% average, 47.5% mean, membership figure. Yes, it should, it could, be higher. But even at 40.6% it means that libraries are the most heavily used service provided by state and local governments where an option to not use the service exists. And even at 40.6% there are 6.5 million Australians — 6.5 millions Friends of the Library — who recognise the value of libraries. There are also many, on both sides of the political spectrum, who support libraries. Libraries that manifest the desire on one side of that spectrum for equity, education and sharing of community resources, and on the other side the desire for freedom of choice, individual advancement and cost-effective use of public funds.

Co-ordinating and exposing that large national support base to parochial controllers of the public purse will not be easy. One idea being examined by your Executive is a national/state petition, to involve every public library in Australia (the media response to the largest petition ever presented in Federal Parliament would be the tangible spin-off). Another is the 'model libraries' concept of Past President Ian McCallum, which is developing into a 'Library Highways' program to show decision-makers what we are about and how we already provide a cost-effective, albeit fragile, national information network.

The amount required to substantially upgrade the public library network across Australia would be but a drop in the Federal budget — the cost of one Hornet fighter aircraft — but the times are not with us.

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justify holiday programs and should always have statistics, anecdotal instances and evaluation of children's responses at hand to use as ammunition. Often the whole library has to work around children's programs so it is important that they run as smoothly as possible.

Julie Hannigan, Children's Librarian at Randwick Municipal Library then spoke to the meeting about 'How to Program'.

Julie has devised a series of forms for holiday programming designed to help get the routine things out of the way. The first form is a long-term planner for an entire year, listing holiday dates, Book Week and Children's Week (incorporating the Koala Awards). The second form is a planner for each individual activity, on which the day and date, the program/activity/display proposed, the objectives, resources needed (including staff and materials), bookings needed, cost, publicity required, and evaluation of these steps and the response to the activity are listed.

Carole Miesel from Fairfield Library spoke about the success her library has had using professional performers for holiday programs. Carole believes professionals should be used in areas where librarians aren't experts. Fairfield Library believes in having a children's outreach program. Such programs stimulate children's imaginative processes, support the arts in Australia and give children the opportunity to appreciate the cultural arts.

Linda Briggs, from the Children's Libraries Film Circuit, spoke about using films in holiday programs. Films can sometimes be a good lead into programs, or can tie-in at the end of a program, finishing the session off on a quiet note and reinforcing the activity. Films can be a program in themselves. When planning a film program, it is important to think ahead and book films early.

The last session of the evening was an extremely helpful exchange of ideas (successes and failures) by everyone present. The evening was a pleasant one and just as importantly, a helpful one with people going away with fresh ideas and hopefully, renewed enthusiasm.

Julie Taylor

**Children's Librarians and Schoolies**  
Don't forget to send in details of events planned for Children's Book Week for In-Cite's special issue. Photos of last year's activities will be appreciated too!

## NEW ENGLAND REGIONAL GROUP

### Exchanges: the trials and tribulations

On 1 April the New England Regional Group held its first meeting for the year. The meeting was addressed by Ms Sheila Walters on the topic of 'exchanges'. Sheila is Health Sciences Librarian at the Arizona State University and has just completed an exchange with Armidale CAE.

Sheila spoke about many of the problems associated with organising her exchange (and indeed all exchanges), such things as organising visas, travel arrangements, accommodation, and so on. Sheila is due to return to the United States in June and her first commitment when she returns (in fact the day after) is to present a poster session on exchanges to the American Library Association Conference in San Francisco.

### Library services to the disabled

On 19 May the Group held its second function for the year. Guest speaker was Val Moon, Community Services Librarian with the State Library of NSW.

Val delivered a lively presentation, covering such topics as the role of the Community Services Librarian, the standard of services in the USA and Canada for the visually and hearing impaired (in 1986 Val was awarded a Churchill Scholarship which took her to the USA and Canada to study library services to the disabled), the role of public libraries in the provision of services to the disabled and community attitudes to the disabled.

Craig Grimison  
President

## INFORMATION SCIENCE SECTION

Proceedings of Online '87 are now available for sale from the LAA. The papers provide a comprehensive overview of the state-of-the-art of online information retrieval and have applications for a variety of library and information agency settings. Don't miss the opportunity to purchase your copy at the special price of \$25 plus \$3 postage (LAA members) and \$40 plus \$3 postage (non-members).

## UCLS SA GROUP

On 11 May, the Section was represented at the National Information Policy Seminar held at CSIRO, Woodville. Colin Taylor, of the SA Institute of Technology Library, among others, addressed the group.

On 14 May, UCLS joined with the SA Branch in an evening meeting on the proposed increase in ILL charges. Speakers were Euan Miller, Julie Hooke, Josie Powditch, Noel Stockdale, and Eric Wainwright.

On 27 May, Jane Price of the University of British Columbia, spoke to a combined Medicals/UCLS meeting of approximately 30 people. Afterwards, a smaller group enjoyed dinner with Jane at the Jasmin Restaurant.

## SA BRANCH

Following recent local council elections in South Australia, the SA Branch has written to all councillors congratulating them and drawing attention to the important role of library and information services in local government.

Councillors will also soon be invited to a seminar to be held as a joint venture between the LAA and the Public Libraries Branch to explain the important role of libraries, their special services and the need for continued support at the local level.

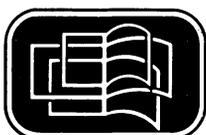
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The particular need now is to demonstrate to local decision-makers that their library does not stand alone, that it is an integral part of the 'national library' and that if it is not supported properly it either fails or becomes parasitic. What is to be made of the fact that in 1986 public libraries borrowed on interlibrary loan 192,566 items but lent only 148,520? Or of the fact that in 1986 one public library system in its attempt to meet user needs borrowed 9,078 items, but lent only 10? We've taken a long time to awaken to the challenge.

Alan Bundy  
Vice-President

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