



the front line

Living together . . . but not enough to read

We will soon be welcoming to our country, delegates to the IFLA/LAA Conference. What has been the welcome of Australian libraries and librarians to those — from all quarters of the world — who choose to make Australia their permanent home?

The Australian Bicentennial and IFLA/LAA Conference theme is 'Living Together', a theme of real relevance to our 'global village', and multicultural Australia in 1988. Multicultural Australia? It is estimated that 17 percent of persons aged 15 or over in Australia spoke a language other than English as their first language. Australia has been developing as a multicultural society since 1788, a process which has greatly accelerated over the last four decades. How have Australian libraries responded to that acceleration?

Library services to cultural minorities has been largely a post 1970 phenomenon, well reviewed in Anne Holmes' 1984 Brisbane Conference paper 'Multicultural library services in Australia: state of the art'. This paper suggests that Australian libraries stand well in their developing sensitivity and attempted responses to multicultural needs, not just in buying books in other languages, but in providing materials and services. As confirmation, I quote the April 1988 newsletter of the Dandenong Valley Regional Library (DVRL) in Victoria which notes that it provides 'books, magazines and newspapers in 16 different languages as well as being a distributor of community information pamphlets from a range of federal, state and local government agencies'. The DVRL figure compares well with the national average of 7.32 languages for those 27.5 percent of Australian library services reporting non English language resources.

Early developments in multicultural library services in Australia include the first national conference on multiculturalism and libraries, 1980; the LAA's 1984 'Statement on Libraries and Multiculturalism'; and the 1982 'Standards for Multicultural Public Library Service'

published by the Library Council of Victoria as almost one of the first actions by Warren Horton as State Librarian of Victoria. As Warren wrote in its introduction 'These are thought to be the first detailed standards for public library service in a multicultural context to be published anywhere . . . it is to be hoped that their usefulness will extend to other Australian states, as well as finding applications in other countries'.

More recently we have seen concerted, and as yet unsuccessful, initiatives to persuade the Federal Government that the Australian national public library network should receive national funds for services and resources to help persons who are in Australia because of national immigration policy — not state, not local government, but national policy.

The fact that 70 percent of Australian public library services lack a significant investment in non English resources suggests that libraries need to continue examining their own priorities. However national funding is urgently needed, and is the only solution, as reinforced by a recently published study on the reading needs of six migrant communities in Melbourne which concludes 'where the library is not meeting the needs of its users, this is primarily due to lack of resources'. *Not enough to read: the report of a survey of the reading interest of six migrant communities in Melbourne* by Jennifer Ashby and Derek Whitehead is available from Anne Holmes, Hawthorn City Library, 584 Glenferrie Road, Hawthorn, Vic 3122 for just \$7.50. Buy it and reflect on how the message it contains can be directed to an obdurate Federal Government bureaucracy.

For as Senator Margaret Reynolds said at the LAA 1984 Brisbane Conference 'any sound immigration policy must be backed by appropriately supportive education policies . . . libraries are crucially important in terms of community education. You provide a highly respected source of information and resources . . . already many public libraries throughout Australia have indicated their commitment to multiculturalism through a variety of innovative programs which have demonstrated the richness and diversity of local culture'.

The Australian Advisory Council on Languages and Multicultural Education (AACLEME) has similarly highlighted libraries in its recent eight-page submission to the National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia.

Libraries represent an under-utilised but potentially enormous resource for encouraging language learning, for facilitating and imparting language learning, and also for maintaining and extending proficiency gained in a second language. In addition libraries can contribute to diversifying and improving language pedagogy — [and] provide important information services to the language disabled as well as multilingual information services.

The case is formidable, yet of nearly \$29 million to be provided in 1988/89 by the Australian Government under the National Language Policy not one dollar is allocated to libraries, which remain the major unfunded area with a request of only \$1 million.

However that \$1 million would significantly improve multicultural public library resources in Australia, but it is still denied; the struggle continues and it will succeed. As Warren Horton, the Director General of the National Library of Australia said in a speech on 29 June 1982 . . . 'Governments still react to things which are attractive in terms of votes, but not to big commitments in terms of money . . . I am a great believer in plans. If government is to be influenced, I believe that you have to influence them with considered planning. Surely this concept, the basis of the first Australian Libraries Summit in October 1988, must be the continuing basis for the campaign for multicultural funding for public libraries.

The challenge for the LAA and ACLIS is to now persevere with a claim which is unassailable in terms of logic, evidence of need, political attractiveness, community support and relevance to Australia in 1988.

'Living together . . . but not enough to read' is an Australian issue; it is also an international issue for which all libraries, everywhere, must continue to debate, counsel and work together through IFLA as 1990, The Year of the Reader, approaches.

'Living together' will be the theme of 'Front-line' in the next two issues of *InCite*. In the first, Dr Hans Peter Geh, President of IFLA has kindly accepted an invitation to be the first overseas librarian to address the Australian library community through *InCite*. In the second, Averill Edwards, the LAA's Vice President/President elect 1989, will focus on how we can develop the contribution LAA makes to our region in the South Pacific.

Alan Bundy
LAA President

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