

LETTERS

Public libraries and information services

Dear Editor,

John Levett [*InCite* 10 July], one of our best stirrers over the past two decades, in commenting on Alan Bundy's and my comments on information service in public libraries [*InCite* 3 April and 8 May], rightly points out the variability of the degree to which many public libraries are coping with basic information enquiries. This is often because of inadequate resources — both in trained staff and in reference sources.

I did not deny, in my reply to Alan Bundy's sweeping statements, that the service needs a great deal of improvement. What I was trying to stress is that colleagues could assist the public library to be an adequate 'first point of access for information for the general public and for the public's access to the national system of library and information services'. (Summit resolution.)

Constructive help is wanted. How many librarians contacted their local public librarians during the recent 'Public library funding campaign' in New South Wales initiated by the local government and shires associations and outlined in Faye Lawrence's summary [*InCite* 19 June]? This awareness campaign was aimed at State funding (15 per cent from State, 85 per cent from local government).

Now to John's reference questions. There would be no problem answering them in most Sydney public libraries, but some would have to be taken as queries and checked further than is possible on busy, and often inadequately staffed, enquiry desks.

The adequacy of the answers is John's point. There have been, thankfully, considerable improvements in many public libraries' reference services since John did his survey, over which there was much consternation.

Sutherland statistics will illustrate the volume of enquiries that public libraries are trying to cope with. The reference service recorded 73 335 in 1988 — 40 294 at the Central Library. Many hundreds were not recorded, as queues, especially at weekends, mean the staff

on reference and reader advisory duties are often too busy to record accurately.

There have been improvements in public library information services in New South Wales through the initiatives of the State Library — use of Ilanet, online access to the catalogue by the end of this year, etc. The excellent support given by the Public Libraries Department in training sessions, workshops and meetings has helped to raise the standard of reference staffing.

The reference staff in some public libraries in Sydney could certainly perform more efficiently for those who do not have access to other library services if the hordes of TAFE, University, and other students could be encouraged to satisfy their needs at their own institutions' libraries.

There are other reasons for the variability of information service other than inadequate staffing and excessive student use in some local government areas. The salaries are poor and need urgent attention.

The pay for performance system currently being adopted by some councils will help to some extent to retain trained staff. Many services have not utilised available technology to improve information services to the public and their councils.

All who are concerned about the future of public libraries, not only their information services, should get behind the current campaigns — IFTN and the ACLIS lobbying program — as well as talking to their local MPs and anyone else who may influence funding of local government libraries.

D. Oliver

Director, Library & Community Services, Sutherland Shire Council

Library levity

Dear Editor,

For some years I have been assiduously collecting Australian and overseas library cartoons with a view to, one day, making them available in a published volume to bring some lightness, levity and even a touch of lewdness to our workaday concerns.

Thanks in part to contributions from colleagues, the collection is now large enough to be published. However, are there any other cartoon collectors out there in library land? Show me yours and I'll ... Telephone (08) 354 6260; facsimile (08) 354 6699; or write to me at SACAE Library, Holbrooks Road, Underdale, SA 5032.

Alan Bundy

From 14 ...

NSW Video purchasing Co-op.

Grant funds provided. The average cost of each title was \$62.

This year, members will select video titles from two lists of preselected titles, one provided by the State Film Centre of Victoria and the other by the State Library of South Australia. If the Co-operative's submission for Special Grant funds is successful again this year, these funds will be used to purchase additional titles selected by the Co-operative's committee members.

Selection guidelines were also discussed. It was agreed that only titles priced at more than \$100 before discount would be considered for purchase, and that the minimum discount would be 40 per cent. There would be a continuing preference for Australian-produced material. Captioned videos and children's titles would be considered on merit. It was generally agreed that children's titles had been particularly popular. Members wanted more information to be provided on the labels of some videos. The committee will emphasise this to producers.

Despite such irritations, the scheme has enabled public libraries to acquire videos normally too expensive for them. Their collections are more balanced and users can view quality educational material when they wish to do so.

Bill Stinson

ALIA Audiovisual Services
Sub-committee

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