

Front Line



Di Booker
SA Branch
President

The Front Line columns this year have provided those of us fortunate enough to fall into the category of contributors (Presidents — National or State etc — or just by virtue of being on John's list!) with a forum for more philosophical discussions than perhaps have appeared here in the past. I take this opportunity to raise a few questions, not always to offer answers but perhaps provide an opportunity for discussion, and may be some disagreement.

I also take this opportunity to continue the discussion raised by both John Levett (Front Line, *inCite 1*, 1991) and Craig Grimison (Front Line, *inCite 3*, 1991)

concerning the responsibilities we have as members of our profession.

As the most user-friendly of all information providers, librarians will again be in the vanguard as society struggles to fulfil the empowerment imperative. (John N Berry III, *Library Journal*, 1 February 1991, p6)

South Australian librarians have certainly shown that they will be in the vanguard, the forefront, of struggles to maintain their library and information services. Basic services which provide the avenue for empowerment of the South Australian community.

Much has been, and no doubt will be, written about the South Australian campaign. A campaign which continues, less noisily than in December 1990 and January 1991, but nonetheless the South Australian members of ALIA, ACLIS and CLASA continue to show the community at large that they are willing, and able, to stand up and fight, and continue to fight, for principles they believe are important.

As the incoming president of the South Australian Branch, I was thrust into this campaign; to be quickly 'blooded' in my term of office, as some State Library staff later commented; to become quickly familiar with the tasks of writing letters to the press, responding to questions from the media, taking part in radio talk-back debates and briefing politicians. In addition, quickly learning to practice

diplomacy in dealing with those with opposing viewpoints and patience for the right moment to ask that tricky question. The other key players in this campaign were also being faced with similar tasks.

A student working with me during this period commented that he had not realised that 'all this was part of being a librarian'.

How then does one learn these skills and even more basically, learn to recognise the need for them?

How does one learn the art of being an advocate for one's profession?

How does one learn the art of being an advocate for one's profession? Not just an advocate in an institutional sense of promoting the service we offer but rather an advocate for a broad professional viewpoint.

In other words, how do we empower the junior members of our profession to also be able, and to want, to take their part in these debates.

John Levett has suggested (Front Line, *inCite 4*, 1991) that a mentoring process

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may be one of the means 'to instil an understanding (as distinct from a mere awareness) of the concept of professional competence'. Advocacy in the sense that I am defining is part of that professional competence, I would support this notion of mentoring because it is a practice that all of us, consciously or otherwise, follow. How often do we call a colleague for advice or to discuss a common issue? How often do we call on those we know to have had the prior experience in a particular area we seek and may be able to help provide a solution to a problem? How often do we call on those whose opinion we respect, those who we see as either our professional superiors or those who are our peers? These actions, or rather the answers, are all part of an unofficial mentoring process.

Newer members of the profession do not have this network of experienced colleagues whom they can approach. It is vital for their professional development that these networks are developed. It is also vital for our professional standing that these newer colleagues develop quickly the expertise to articulate their professional concerns.

But how do we encourage these novice members of the profession — librarians and library technicians — to become advocates for their chosen profession and not just advocates for the day-to-day job

for which they are employed? How do we persuade them of this difference? How do we encourage them to take up professional issues and voice their opinions?

Our responsibilities as members of our profession, are not just to our users, but also to the profession itself.

We need to encourage our new professionals to look more widely, beyond the walls of their institutions. To take part in the programs of the Section or Special Interest Group which defines their current employment or interest and also to look beyond these confines to the Association and profession as a whole. We need to provide encouragement and opportunities for them to consider themselves as part of that vanguard which, like the South Australian members of ALIA, is willing to stand up and express the 'professional solidarity' for which Australian librarians have become noted.

I do not believe however, that this

professional advocacy is a skill that can be learnt as part of diploma, undergraduate or graduate programs. Professional advocacy I would propose, is a skill learnt 'on the job', a skill which is learnt alongside the more experienced colleague.

This responsibility then rests with the many ALIA members who have this experience. It is our obligation to ourselves.

Consequently, our responsibilities as members of our profession, are not just to our clients, our users, but also to the profession itself. A responsibility which includes the education of the new professional in skills such as lobbying and advocacy.

I suggest we have a duty to develop their skills (and also our own) in becoming the 'public' librarian or library technician. It has been stated that 'society judges a profession by the behaviour of its members' (Finks, Lee W: *Librarianship needs a new code of professional ethics. American libraries*, January 1991, 84-92). If this is the case, then it is indeed the responsibility of us all to ensure these advocacy skills are fostered and matured.

This is indeed a very 'public' face that I am proposing for ALIA members. A public face which has brought some success here in South Australia and which has increased the respect with which we as responsible professionals are viewed by our community. □

Library aid... continued from 1...

There is an impressive list of training and study visits:

1984-85: the Deputy National Librarian, Mr Loc was in Australia for a 6 month BISA course in automated cataloguing and application of computers in libraries followed by a 6 month work attachment at the NLA. (Sadly, Mr Loc died in 1986).

1985: the Director of the NLV, Mr Duc, made a 2-week study visit to Australia, visiting major libraries in Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne.

1986: a 2-month training course in automated cataloguing was given in Hanoi by Dr Helen Jarvis, Director of BISA, for about 12 librarians from the NLV and other Vietnamese libraries.

1986: the Deputy National Librarian of the NLV, Mrs Cuc, was funded to attend the CONSAL VII (Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians) meeting in Manila.

1987: Dr Helen Jarvis made a 4-week follow-up training and assessment visit to Hanoi, and also supervised the installation of further equipment.

1987: Mrs Dan, the newly-appointed officer in charge of the NLV automation project, received 7 months training and work experience in Australia at BISA and the National Library of Australia.

1988: the Director of NLV, Mr Duc, attended the IFLA/LAA Conference,

Sydney, and Conference of Directors of National Libraries, Canberra.

1989: The NLV received consumables, a new UPS unit to replace one that had failed, and a dehumidifier.

1990: the librarian-in-charge of the automation, Mr Kieu Van Hot, spent 6 months in Australia combining a short BISA course with a longer period of work experience in the NLA.

1990: the Deputy National Librarian of NLV, Mrs Cuc, was funded to attend CONSAL VIII in Jakarta.

1991: Peter Haddad, Chief Cataloguing Librarian at the NLA, will go to the NLV for 4 weeks to conduct a workshop on cataloguing, retrospective conversion of catalogue records and resource sharing. He will also assess the project and make recommendations on its future direction.

Has the assistance worked?

Overall this project so far has been very successful, thanks to many factors:

- the combination of carefully chosen equipment and very specifically targeted training;
- the high calibre of the key staff of NLV;
- the good understanding between the two national libraries, built up over many years;
- the continued commitment and support of DFAT both in Canberra and Hanoi, which has enabled the project to

maintain its impetus and develop further;

- the special skills and commitment of Dr Helen Jarvis and National Library staff involved in coordinating the program and providing supervision of the trainees;
- automation which has enabled NLV to participate as an equal partner in the International Vietnamese Union Catalogue Project. VUC now contains over 6000 records, the majority of which have been contributed by the NLV;
- the attendance at international conferences has enabled NLV staff to gain regular exposure to recent developments in librarianship.

Helen Jarvis and Elizabeth Watt □

