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ALIA President

In this, my last Front Line as President of ALIA, I would like to take the opportunity to reflect over the past year.

It has not been an easy year, indeed it seemed that problems came thick and fast—but so did the achievements which addressed those problems. While we can feel satisfied and celebrate those achievements, it is important to realise that the Association has the potential to achieve so much more.

What is needed, however, is an entirely new paradigm. The Association still has a managerial orientation, and because of this orientation, there has been a roller coaster ride of innovation and retreat which allows only small, incremental changes around the edges of the current system. Reforms which have been offered in recent years, regardless of potential, and even proven worth, have too often floundered as just another managerial option.

In common with many organisations, within the Association there has been a belief that leadership is a necessary ingredient of corporate success, and where leadership failed, scapegoats were found.

What is required is systems thinking and the empowerment of each and every member to participate meaningfully in the creation and maintenance of an effective organisation. The focus must be on both the process and the task.

Members of the Association must participate both from the position of being accepting of others and taking responsibility for the larger whole.

...we live in a culture of brokenness and fragmentation. Images of individualism and autonomy are far more compel-

ling to us than visions of unity and the fabric of relatedness seems dangerously threadbare and frayed... We have all but lost the vision of...our oneness, our unity, our interdependence upon one another.

It is not leadership from any one person that is required to revitalise the Association, but rather an aspect of leadership that each of us has the capacity to summon from within when we are vitally concerned about issues or when executing our responsibilities. Leadership thus becomes a rather fluid concept focusing on those behaviours which propel the work of the group forward.

Unlike the American Library Association, ALIA presidents do not start the year by overtly setting their theme. Naturally, one tries to achieve the things one highlighted in one's statement of professional concerns when one nominates, but the theme may not be explicit.

I believe that the theme of my year has been Representation. Underlying that is a commitment to add value to every encounter with others, and to empowerment of all.

Adding value may be no more than actively acknowledging another as a person. A cheery smile and positive word to service personnel, or people you pass in the street, a friend, a relative, a colleague, a subordinate, even someone whom the world counts as a success and therefore whom we may (erroneously) believe needs no encouragement.

To be empowered is to be able to take care of oneself and to have influence on others. Paternalistic attitudes and behaviour are very disempowering to those who are the focus and recipients of that paternalism.

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This is one reason I have very much focused on the individual, the individual member of the Association, the individual user of libraries, the individual living in the 'developing' countries where we have tried to assist in addressing library needs.

The other reason is that as long as the Association's effectiveness remains an optional matter to be based on the wisdom and leadership of the President, or of the General Council, and not based on a continuous change process built into the whole Association, reform initiatives will be short lived and only partially effective.

Of course, one never achieves as much as one hopes. Sometimes we may even fail. How we try is as important as the outcome in ensuring the psychic health of the Association, its members and those with which it comes into contact.

I would not be a Librarian if I could not find words penned by someone else which express far better than I can, the core of the matter.

I would like to say to the men and women of the generations which will come after us, You will look back at us with astonishment. You will wonder at the passionate struggles that accomplished so little; at the truths we grasped at but never could quite get our fingers round; but what you will never know is how it was thinking of you and for you that we struggled as we did—that it was in the thought of your larger realisation and fuller life that we found consolation for the futilities of our own. [Olive Schreiner 1855-1926, South African feminist and author] ■