

Library services to Aboriginal communities in Queensland

Annette Pike and Colin Sheehan describe an exciting program from the State Library

Queensland has thirty-four Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) communities, all with populations below 10 000. Two of these communities are in Central and South-East Queensland; the rest are distributed from Townsville up to the far Northern Torres Strait Islands. The government's reform agenda has encouraged more self-management and most of these communities are now responsible for the provision of their own local community services.

Two of the State Library of Queensland's five Divisions, Public Libraries and Information Services, have developed a multi-dimensional approach towards the provision of library services to the ATSI communities of Queensland. The Public Libraries Division administers the Country Lending Service (CLS) scheme under the direction of the Library Board of Queensland. The CLS was established in 1974 to assist local authorities with populations under 10 000 to provide a library service. The ATSI communities are of course eligible to join this CLS scheme, through which they are entitled to:

- bookstock at the rate of at least one volume per capita;
- regular stock exchanges;
- information and requests for special materials;
- a catalogue of the 600 000 books in the Public Libraries Division;
- posters, games and music cassettes;
- regular visits by experienced librarians;

- training courses;
- a 50% subsidy on furniture and equipment.

Current ATSI library services

Communities operating library services under this scheme include Mornington Island, Yarrabah and Kowanyama. Kowanyama is the latest community to join the CLS scheme and may well become a blueprint for future public library service developments to ATSI communities.

Kowanyama is an independent Aboriginal community with a population a little under a thousand, located 45 km from the coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria on the Mitchell River delta area. The abundant wildlife of the Mitchell delta is valued as a traditional hunting resource by the community. Public facilities include a police station, post office, hospital, bank and a community education training centre with modern air-conditioned facilities, audiovisual equipment and discussion rooms. The library was established in this training centre. Future plans include cultural museum facilities.

Consultation with training centre representatives helped select an initial 500 titles for the library from the CLS bookstock. Staff from the Public Libraries Division set up the new library facility in mid-1990 and conducted a two-day on-site workshop for community members. Workshop topics included archival collections, experiences in other Aboriginal Community Libraries, ATSI Collection Resources, library

organisation, CLS procedures and public library services in isolated areas. The library is now run by a member of the Kowanyama community with the same assistance, training and back up services as is provided to CLS librarians throughout the state.

A new development has been ATSI Cross-Cultural Awareness training sessions in the regular program of CLS workshops and training packages for public library staff in Queensland. These sessions include guest speakers of an ATSI background.

The John Oxley Library, in the Information Services Division, has several indexing projects aimed at improving access to the information on ATSI people in the Library's collections. These projects include name and subject indexing of early Queensland newspapers, manuscript collections and photograph collections. Six Aboriginal people were very successfully employed among the indexers, finding it an especially rewarding task when they located information about their own families. These projects continue to expand, with additional newspapers and genealogies. The Library Board now plans to invite specific communities to participate in a pilot program to access the databases through a local area network, as a preliminary to making the data more widely available.

(Annette Pike is the Senior Consultant, Local Government Services, in the Public Libraries Division, and Colin Sheehan is the Manager of the John Oxley Library Information Services Division, of the State Library of Queensland.)

Electronic Document Delivery Survey

On behalf of the Working Group on Library Systems Interconnection, UNILINC Limited has developed a Questionnaire as part of a survey of Electronic Document Delivery systems—document here referring to any electronic format—text, video, audio etc., either individually or in combination.

We would like to hear from any library or information service currently involved, or actively planning to be involved, in electronic document delivery, and which is interested in completing the Questionnaire.

Please contact: Linda Rouse, Special Projects Manager: phone: 02 212 4444, fax: 02 212 6495 or electronic mail (AARNet): linda@unilinc.edu.au. All responses by end of March 1993, please.



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