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If some stranger came up to you on the street and asked *do we really need librarians* what would your answer be?

You are probably of the view that no one is likely to approach you with this question, so it doesn't rate wasting your time over. However, having been approached by a newspaper pollman while walking down an Adelaide street the other day and asked for my view of the appropriateness of the slogan 'Going all the way' for the SA Liberal Party, I think life is full of unexpected questions.

The lobbying efforts of the ALIA national office have been magnificent in the past few years in positioning libraries on the Federal agenda. ALIA has capitalised on every opportunity to respond to Government inquiries and is achieving a credible and respected position within the circles that matter.

It's time for all members to build on that momentum by stressing the value of our profession and highlighting the integral and intellectual contribution we make to what is becoming, in broad terms, the information industry. In preparing for a paper at this month's *Synergy in Sydney* conference, I came across an article by keynote speaker James Matarazzo, which reported that when USA corporate librarians were asked to identify the library services that added most value to their companies, nearly two thirds of respondents did not have an answer!

Closer to home, we have the instance of a major bank being taken over by an insurance conglomerate and being told to shut down its library because *the insurance industry doesn't need a library and neither does the banking industry*.

Or if you prefer, take the case of the local government councillor who was reported in the suburban paper as saying that the library could wait since there were footpaths that deserved higher priority.

Finally, an influential economic 'think tank' commentator and former Treasury official who says that it is high time libraries quit draining the public purse and became self-funding. The easy option would be to blame the organisations concerned for their short-sightedness in this scenario and if you are someone who wants to shoot the messenger, then it is a good option. I prefer to heed the messenger and get to the real problem — which is a lack of understanding of the value of librarians and the usefulness of libraries. And this is our biggest problem because, although I doubt you will find anyone who disputes the *goodness* of libraries, it is a major task to convince these same people of the *usefulness* of libraries.

Decades ago, there was a popular sci-fi novel called *The disappearance* by Philip Wylie which was written from the premise of all the men disappearing from the women and vice versa and then giving us a picture of how the two sexes managed without each other — the outcome was not what you'd expect! I would like us to borrow a page from Wylie and ask ourselves what would happen if all the librarians disappeared. Instead of a quiz night, get your Branch to hold a 'life without librarians' night and amaze yourself with how many examples of the way life would change.

Then, after this bit of fun, it's time to get serious and start demonstrating near and far the usefulness and importance of our profession.

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We are in the throes of an information revolution that needs our professional input perhaps more than we've ever been needed before. Information technology is making all sorts of delivery networks possible and internet, EdNA, CIN, for example, need us to ensure that the focus remains on the information and not the technology that drives it.

We live in a society that has more legislation on its books than ever before and corporate requirements that make compliance a key responsibility, not simply a pastime. How does that previously-mentioned insurance conglomerate afford not to have a librarian?

Information literacy — the ability to frame questions, find information and subsequently use it — will be the key success factor for our young people. Take away the teacher librarian and you take away a foundation stone of future opportunity.

Librarians save money, librarians put more information in the hands of many, librarians facilitate new ideas, librarians are professional information managers, librarians are essential to the information equation — a library is not a *library* without a librarian! Industries across the board are needing a greater range of knowledge and skills to compete and librarians hold a pivot position to that competitive success. We must seize the opportunities before us and demonstrate, with our actions, the value of our library profession.

At our July General Council meeting the Council adopted a new vision statement which I hope all members will embrace: *ALIA excellence in library and information leadership*. It conveys the key positive stance we need to be taking for our profession and highlights that we don't settle for second-best! ■