

Meeting the information needs of a culturally diverse community

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Marrickville, located in Sydney's inner west, is widely known for its cultural diversity. The area has had a long tradition of migration which reflects the immigration patterns of Australia. Each suc-

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George Zantis (Right) speaking to locals as part of a recent council community relations program initiative at Marrickville Metro Shopping Centre

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In recognition of its diverse community, Marrickville Council's library service was the first public library in New South Wales to have an ethnic services librarian, largely due to the efforts of George Zantis. Having experienced community outreach programs in London in the late seventies, George was frustrated that Marrickville's predominantly multicultural community was essentially unaware of library services. George convinced the then head librarian, Frances Charteris, to allow him to take the library's Bookmobile and strategically park it in the middle of various shopping centres on a regular basis. From this small but dedicated

leaders in the field of Best Practice service provision for those of non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB).

In 1991 the Census indicated that over 41 per cent of Marrickville's population were born in non-English speaking countries and significantly that 55.5 per cent of residents (aged over 5 years) spoke a language other than English at home. Current library statistics show that 54 per cent of Marrickville library's users are from NESB and that on average 55 per cent of all loans (branches excluded) are in languages other than English. Currently Marrickville holds just under 47 000 items in languages other than English. Marrickville library's main NESB collection areas include materials in Arabic, Vietnamese, Chinese, Portuguese and Greek — the Greek language is the library's area of specialisation with over 20 000 items in its collection. The Vietnamese collection has also grown and contains approximately 7 000 items (25 per cent of

all adult loans at Marrickville library are Vietnamese). Other smaller collections include Tagalog, French, German, Spanish and Italian languages.

Informational and recreational materials such as books, periodicals, newspapers, videos, talking books, and music on cassette are available for loan. A Greek book list is also produced, published and circulated every month to all NSW libraries. The library's on-line public access catalogues are in both Greek and English and will shortly be available in Vietnamese with plans also being made for Arabic. 'Local ethnic affairs policy statement' materials are also provided as are learning English materials. Library orientations are also provided for each of the main language groups.

Full- and part-time bi-lingual staff are available to assist users, particularly for the study assistance program, and also to provide the library with purchasing and cataloguing expertise. Over 250 community language items are lent on request to other libraries throughout NSW each month.

The library's ethnic services librarian has, in collaboration with other staff, developed and maintained relationships with the many and various community groups in the Marrickville local government area. This has been particularly successful with NESB seniors, through the provision of regular focus groups (morning teas) and 'product' launches.

Through the use of an interpreter (either a staff member or community worker) the library has been able to provide these groups with information and importantly obtain useful feedback that can be used for service design and delivery. As a result of all his hard work and dedication George Zantis, Marrickville's ethnic services librarian, was presented with a Premier's Award for services to the community and the people of NSW in March of this year.

The future still looks bright for multicultural services at Marrickville despite rising costs and the inherent difficulties confronted when dealing with diverse groups. ■