

A new age for libraries on the move

Odelle Davidson

There has been a rapid increase in the number of residents in the newest northern suburbs of Wanneroo, WA, who have begun to enjoy the benefits of a convenient, modern library and information service since the City of Wanneroo introduced its innovative new mobile library in March this year.

Mobile libraries in Australia traditionally have provided a basic delivery service restricted by size, limited stock resources, in-transit time, number of stops and the inability to link into power and communications.

Rapid population growth produces demand for services, often well before the construction of a static library is feasible. Previously such growth in fringe metropolitan suburbs was not able to be adequately met by traditional mobile library services. Wanneroo approached this challenge by combining a static and mobile library into a semi-static facility, providing sophisticated services, extended opening hours and the flexibility to move locations.

The brief for the new library design called for all the features of a static public library including on-line and public access computers, CD-ROM, telephone, fax, security, photocopiers, air-conditioning, disabled access, a wide range of stock, discreet children's section and staff amenities. The library was to be sufficiently mobile to enable several relocations weekly but without the short life-span and the mechanical failures of a vehicle.

The internal environment was required to create an atmosphere of light and space. Staff conditions should not be claustrophobic due to the long days worked. Most important, the on-going services expenditure must be cost effective.

Nerida Clifford, city librarian said the immediate success of the library exceeded expectations. In the first twelve weeks, new members, loans and reservations surpassed the total for the previous financial year.

The success is primarily attributed to intensive planning by a project team. The Libraries, Engineering, and Building Departments, along with the Computer Services and Graphics Sections combined forces to create the library.

Service enhancement

The new mobile library is open five and a

half days a week, longer than existing static libraries in the area. Stock on shelves has doubled, on-line access and the public enquiry terminal have trebled reservations, storytelling sessions take place in the children's section without interference to other users and telephone renewals and reservations operate as in static libraries. Children are avid users of the CD-ROM, not often available in the homes of the newer low income suburbs.

The Council criteria, to not only deliver a higher level of service rapidly into the new suburbs but also enhance communication with ratepayers, has been achieved. The library is small enough to ensure an informal relationship between client and staff, yet sufficiently large to provide timely on-shelf and on-line provision of Council information.

The mobile library service has been developed as a staging mechanism of strategic planning. The long-term service area of a static library is identified and a suitable mobile library site established within the service area. Once the static library is constructed the mobile library relocates to another embryonic service area. This cycle is now operational, with the next proposed site at Neerabup currently being developed for service commencement in 1997.

The process of identifying strategic locations presented the opportunity for a co-operative venture with Westrail. Currabine is currently the last railway station on the north metropolitan line. Many residents of the more remote new suburbs travel south to use this station. With Westrail's co-operation this 'Park 'n Ride' station is now a 'Park, Ride 'n Read' facility.

The library has approximately three times the lifespan of previous vehicles. However, probably one of the most important features to any Council is the efficient use of plant equipment. The prime mover shifts the library only four times a week and is therefore free to service other Council functions during the majority of its service time.

The immediate success of the service has stimulated interest from other West Australian high-growth authorities facing similar service provision challenges.

Originally, it was anticipated this would be the last Wanneroo mobile library, however this successful new format may extend its future further into the next thirty years of Wanneroo's development. ■



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• **21-23/1/1997 Information On-line & On Disc conference.** ALIA information science section. Sydney Convention & Exhibition Centre, Darling Harbour. Contact: Wael Foda, ACMS, ph (02) 332 4622, fax (02) 332 4066.

• **29-31/1/97 History Institute** Vic Summer School of Historical Research. Visit eight archival repositories in Melbourne, guided by archivists and historians. Cost: \$250 (all three days), \$100 (selected days). Details: History Institute, 254 Faraday Street, Carlton 3052. Ph/fax (03) 9344 6209.

• **13-16/3/97 The 1997 Somerset celebration of literature.** This nationally recognised festival, which features children's authors, will be held for the fourth year at Somerset College, Mugeeraba. Confirmed authors to date include Colleen McCullough. Contact: Graeme Gardiner at Somerset College, Somerset Drive, Mugeeraba 4213.

• **23/8-7/9/97 IFLA Study Tour.** Draft Itinerary available from ALIA National Office, PO Box E441, Kingston 2604, ph (06) 285 1877, fax (06) 282 2249, e-mail enquiry@alia.org.au.

• **11-12/9/97 12th National Cataloguing conference in Canberra** New opportunities for cataloguers. Paper sessions and workshops. Contact: Prue Deacon, ph (06) 2897062,

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