

# Celebration of diversity in library services

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The Cultural Diversity Services Team of the State Library of South Australia has achieved a great deal in reflecting and responding to the needs of its customers since its establishment in 1993.

The key role of the team is to:

- ensure that access and equity are built into the library's corporate planning, policy development, service design, service delivery and review processes;
- actively contribute towards developing collections and services that reflect and respond to Australia's cultural diversity;
- develop and incorporate suitable facilities in all sections of the library to promote accessing of its services and programs by people with disabilities;
- develop and deliver appropriate cultural awareness training programs for library staff;
- establish links with relevant community groups, agencies, organisations and individuals; and
- establish consultative mechanisms and reference groups within and outside the library.

Key achievements over the last five years have included:

- the establishment of the English Language Learning and Improvement Service (ELLIS), an independent learning centre which attracts more than sixty customers regularly. The customers are either recent migrants or tourists who wish to improve their vocabulary, pronunciation, functional or business English. The service is complemented by two weekly conversational classes run by volunteers. ELLIS is also assisted in its operation by a team of about ten volunteers who are rostered on a rotation basis. The service is also seen by the TAFE Institutes and private English colleges as a valuable support for their courses.
- the publication of *Ants to Elephants*, an anthology of multicultural folktales gathered from the ethnic

communities of South Australia. The library has a collection of seventy-five stories from more than thirty languages. These stories are now preserved in the Oral History section of the library. This project was undertaken by the team in 1993 with the idea of bringing community elders into the library and also creating a cultural link. Twenty-two stories from the collection were chosen for the publication of a story book which is being distributed throughout Australia. Illustrations for the book were drawn by school children after these stories were told to them by a professional story teller. During the 'Come Out Youth Art Festival' of 1995, on-going story telling sessions were held at the library, in the spirit of celebrating the cultural diversity of contemporary Australian society.

The team has held four conferences during the last five years as joint projects with other organisations namely: *Images on a broken glass*, a multicultural writers conference with a writers association; *Library services for a multicultural society* with the South Australian Working Group on Multicultural Library Services; *Cultural diversity and marketing of services* with the Multicultural Communities Council of South Australia; and *Technology disability and libraries* with Disability Information and Research Centre, South Australia. In 1998 the team manager Mallika Prasad-Chowta has been the convenor for a major project of the Multicultural Education Co-ordinating Committee which is a Ministerial Advisory Committee to the Minister for Education Children's Services and Training, South Australia. The project, *Countering racism through cultural understanding*, involves thirty-four schools and more than 4000 students. Through these joint activities the team has developed close liaison with various organisations, and has also been able to project its role widely in government and non-government sectors.

The team conducted a major survey of library customers in 1994 to assess their needs and cultural profile.

One of the strong recommendations of this survey was to hold multicultural events and exhibitions in the library on an on-going basis. Since then the library has held Indian, Polish, and Latin American literary evenings which have been proven to be very popular. Currently the team, in co-operation with the communications unit of the library and the Federation of Spanish Speaking Communities Council of South Australia is holding a three month long exhibition titled *Expressions of Latin America*. Weekly story telling and weaving demonstrations for South Australian school children are also being held in conjunction with the exhibition.

The Cultural Diversity Services team of the State Library of South Australia has been innovative and proactive in reflecting, promoting and preserving the multicultural heritage of South Australia.

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