

Leftovers and scraps

Library and information resources and access in Australia's immigration detention centres

Dr Alan Bundy, past president, Australian Library and Information Association

In 2001 a small group of library professionals, led by Alan Bundy began a review of library and information services available to immigrants being held in detention centres around Australia. Following is an abridged copy of the report of the review. The full-text is available from <http://alia.org.au/advocacy/>.

ALIA's first object is: 'To promote the free flow of information and ideas in the interest of all Australians and a thriving culture, economy and democracy.'

That object is not narrowly restricted to those who are legally Australian citizens. It encompasses the promotion of responses to the library and information needs of all in Australia, permanently or temporarily, and regardless of their status. This includes, for example, library and information services to prisoners, tourists, and people on working and temporary protection visas.

The Association considered that those detained in Australia's immigration centres are disadvantaged in their access to library and information resources and services compared with the general community. ALIA had anecdotal information to support this view, and in 2001 it decided to seek permission to formally review provision in the centres.

In late 2001 the Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs facilitated an approach by ALIA to Australasian Correctional Management Pty Ltd (ACM), the service provider for immigration detention centres in Australia. The approach to ACM resulted in visits to the centres in Sydney (Villawood), Melbourne (Maribyrnong), Perth (WA), Woomera (SA), Port Hedland (WA) and Curtin (Derby WA). These visits occurred from mid-2002, and were undertaken by volunteer senior librarians in association with local public librarians. Except for the visits to the WA centres, the visits were led by a member of the ALIA Board of Directors.

Appreciation for their considerable time involved in organising and making the visits, and reporting on them, is extended to Larry Amey, Anne Hall, Denise Barber, Stefan Jordanoff, Alan Bundy (visit leader), Patti Manolis, Kevin Dudeney (visit leader), Moyra McAllister (visit leader), Tina Dunemann, Grant Stone (visit leader), Susan Feeney, Pam Whiteford-Hey.

The review, for logistical and cost reasons, was limited to the centres on the Australian mainland. However the provision of library and information resources in the centres in Christmas Island, Cocos Islands, Manus (PNG) and

Nauru is of equal concern, and is addressed in the recommendations.

Key findings

- there is no greater sense of humanity than to reach out to disadvantaged people and show care for their condition. The provision of relevant library and information resources and access for detainees is a tangible, useful, and appreciated measure of that care.
- refugee claimants detained in centres should have access to library and information resources for educational, informational and recreational purposes as consistent as possible with those resources available through public libraries to refugee claimants on temporary protection visas.
- all refugee claimants in mainland and offshore centres should be afforded an opportunity to educate, inform and recreate themselves through access to library and information resources appropriate to their need and language.
- there is a special responsibility to provide for children for as long as it continues to be the policy to permit their detention in the centres.

In the above context, the Association's review of the library and information resources provision in the centres leads to the following conclusions.

- The centre service provider appears to have no contractual obligation or corporate policy for the provision of library and information resources and access in the centres.
 - it has no knowledge of library operations and issues, and appears to have not sought professional advice.
 - current provision is consequently ad hoc, variable, inefficient, and provides poor outcomes for detainees.
- The centre service provider appears to have no corporate policy for the provision of information technology, other than to deny access to the internet.
- Little funding has been provided to acquire, organise and house library and information resources.
- Collections mainly derive from

donations. They largely consist of inappropriate, irrelevant and out-of-date items in poor condition. These collections, to use the words of an education officer in one centre '...devalue the detainees, who are getting leftovers and scraps.'

- Collections are, in the main, poorly organised, poorly housed and not easy to access.
- Provision of legal and health information resources is minimal.
- Video resources are more extensive but not refreshed adequately.
- Although in general about fifty per cent of detainees have some English language proficiency, the greatest single need of detainees is their own bilingual dictionary and access to ESL material.
- In providing access to centre library and information resources, bureaucratic conventions about the lending, return and 'loss' of library materials need to be reconsidered.
- There is potential for local public libraries and state public library agencies to partner the centres more proactively and effectively. The primary educational and library and information services responsibility is that of the service provider as a for-profit organisation. However the linguistically and culturally diverse and changing populations of the centres require flexible and cost-effective responses about which public libraries and their central agencies are well placed to advise and assist.

General recommendations

1. The Commonwealth Government specify a contractual requirement for the service provider to provide, and provide access to, library and information resources similar to those available to the general community.
2. The centre service provider develop a corporate policy and funding approach to the provision of library and information resources and information technology.
3. The centre service provider invest in a professional librarian to initiate, negotiate and co-ordinate a national systemic approach to library and

information technology provision.

4. The centre service provider and centres seek advice from state public library agencies on the most cost-effective way of purchasing resources, and refreshing video collections.
5. The Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs initiate discussions with the National Library of Australia, in possible association with the Council of Australian State Libraries, to review library and information resource provision and access in any continuing or new IRPCs located in other countries in the region.
6. All detainees be offered their own bilingual dictionary on entering a centre.

Library operational recommendations

ALIA recommends that the centre service provider:

Provide:

- a staff member at each centre with a good educational background as the library and information technology co-ordinator;
- an acquisitions budget;
- a core collection of legal and health materials, with the collection of legal

materials based on that of the Legal Information Access Centres located in many NSW public libraries;

- a core reference collection including recent encyclopedias, atlases, dictionaries (English and bilingual);
- material in areas such as science, law, geography and social science to support private study;
- material to teach 'survival skills' for example, popular magazines;
- art, craft and hobby books;
- large print books;
- picture based books for adults in simple language;
- good children's picture books and early childhood fiction;
- appropriate fiction;
- controlled internet access;
- material to support the curriculum, such as multiple copies or class sets of ESL material and tapes, dictionaries and readers;
- a dedicated library room and quiet reading area at each centre to encourage study; and
- exclude acceptance of donated materials except where they are up-to-date, in good condition, language appropriate and meet the collection development policy of the centre concerned.

ALIA encourages


the state public library agency to:

- make LOTE and ESL materials available in a manner that is flexible and accommodates the needs of detainees;
- facilitate the refreshment of centre video collections;
- advise centre staff on cost-effective purchase of resources, especially LOTE, ESL and large print;
- in association with the local public libraries, annually review and report to the service provider and centre management on the library and information resources provision in the centres; and
- the State Library of WA's public library division include in its review the new Christmas Island Centre, and the small Cocos (Keeling) Island Centre.

ALIA encourages

the local public library/ies to:

- provide regular visits by a librarian to advise centre staff and provide professional supports;
- establish flexible loan periods.
- devise ways to be responsive to the changing needs and composition of detainees; and
- support the Centre as part of the library's housebound service. ■




New Informit Database

SNIPER

Searchable Networked Intellectual Property Electronic Resource (SNIPER) is a new bibliographic database that is commercially available only on Informit Search.

SNIPER, produced by IP Australia, provides information relating to IP Australia's core business areas including copyright, patents, trade marks and designs.

SNIPER is updated monthly. It is included in the Business Australia Online compilation and the Informit Online Bibliographic Suite.

**RMIT Publishing**

contact RMIT Publishing
phone: 03 9925 8100
email: info@informit.com.au
www.informit.com.au

<http://amol.org.au>

a selection of resources available online:



Working with collections

Find professional networks, conservation and collection management tools, funding bodies, an online digitisation course, case studies, a reference section and more.



Touring exhibitions database

Find exhibitions for your venue, or promote your exhibition for hire. Link to support organisations and other resources.



National guide to collecting institutions

Promote your collections, exhibitions and events to tourists, researchers, schools and the general public.



National Exhibition Venues

Promote your exhibition venue to tour managers. Find venues for your travelling exhibition.



open museum journal

OMJ Volume 6: *New Museum Developments and the Culture Wars* explores the politics of representation in cultural institutions.



Australian Museums & Galleries OnLine is an initiative of the Cultural Ministers Council, a collaborative project of federal, state and territory governments and the cultural sector.

Images: Miner's compass © Newcastle Regional Museum. Paget's Electric Pictures touring car © Queensland Performing Arts Museum