

Power our Territory!

1st ALIA Top End Symposium, 12–13 September 2003, Palmerston, Northern Territory

More than fifty participants attended the first ALIA Top End symposium, *Power our Territory: information literacy initiatives for development of the Northern Territory* which was held at the Palmerston Campus of the Charles Darwin University in the Northern Territory. The symposium took place over two days, on a Friday afternoon and a Saturday morning, thus ensuring maximum attendance as some participants were only able to come on a weekday whilst others were only able to attend at the weekend. The symposium also coincided with

a Public Libraries Northern Territory (PLNT) group meeting scheduled for 16–17 September. So for the first time library and information workers from throughout the Territory — Darwin, Palmerston, Alice Springs, Batchelor, Katherine and Jabiru — came together to learn about current activities, develop new ideas and explore future options with colleagues in the area of information literacy and lifelong learning.

The symposium aimed to:

- further develop an understanding of information literacy and the critical

role it plays in the development of the Northern Territory; and

- enhance the capacity of library and information workers in the Northern Territory to design, implement and evaluate appropriate information literacy programs for their communities.

The four-person committee (Jayshree Mamtora, Linda Winzar, Sarah White, and Ruth Quinn) worked assiduously over a six-month-period to bring together a wide-ranging program of papers from all types of libraries: public, academic and special. Prue Mercer, convenor of the ALIA Information Literacy Forum and manager of information services at the State Library of Victoria, delivered a thought-provoking keynote address setting the scene and laying out the issues facing us.

The symposium also afforded the opportunity to address library issues relating to indigenous peoples who make up approximately thirty per cent of the Northern Territory population. Several speakers noted the need to focus on the users, and their specific and very different needs. For some, simply getting people into the library was a huge step forward while, at the other end of the scale, the emphasis was on developing the information literacy skills of students. Understanding the various communities and their environment is critical. Speakers made a significant call for those in the profession within the Territory to collaborate and to share the challenge of developing appropriate information literacy programs.

The symposium reiterated that library and information workers have a role to play, to lead the way and help communities cope with a mass of information. And those working in the same sector should consider getting together and looking at opportunities for collaboration.

The symposium was a great success for all concerned and there are calls for ALIA Top End to host similar symposia on an annual basis.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our sponsors for their generous support: EBSCO, Bolinda Publishing, Corporate Express, Charles Darwin University and Peter Walton & Associates.

Jayshree Mamtora, organising committee, first ALIA Top End Symposium

Celebrating success...

While we are focused on the Top End, here are some of the group's other successes for the year...

Graduate mentoring: an opportunity for new graduates

One of the highlights this year has been the development of the program, 'Graduate mentoring: an opportunity for new graduates'. Under the guidance of Ann Ritchie and Stelios Podias, a mentoring training group was formed in 2002. In 2003, the program was offered to ALIA members who have undertaken library studies and who have reached the 'new' or 'soon-to-be-graduate' stage at both technician and librarian level. The program provides an incentive for graduates to join ALIA or renew their membership as they now have a forum to come together to discuss ideas and issues which affect their future. Meetings and CPD activities have covered a wide range of topics and themes including how to develop a curriculum vitae, tips for obtaining the right job, re-entering the library workforce, establishing and maintaining a professional profile, and making your professional association work for you. Because the focus of each meeting is geared to the specific needs of the mentorees, sessions have been well-attended and participation enthusiastic. The group's facilitators have used their expertise and experience to provide an interesting and relevant program backed up by strong professional support. Planning is well under way to ensure the continuation and success of the mentoring program into 2004.

The great debate: are libraries cultural institutions?

As reported in the July edition of *inCite* (p9) 'The great debate: are libraries cultural institutions?' was jointly hosted by ALIA Top End and the Northern Territory Library and Information Service during Library and information Week. The most significant achievement of this event was the bringing together of the entire Top End library community: government, the public and private sector and from the general public — people who use libraries, people who would like to avail themselves of the services and those who have stayed away with the advent of the new technology feeling libraries are no longer for them. As one eighty-year-old gentleman who attended said, 'It's good to know that libraries to-day are not just about computers. They still care about us, the readers!'

The debate was opened by the NT Minister for Libraries, the Honourable John Ah Kit, who shared with a packed audience his journey towards self-empowerment via knowledge and information gained as an indigenous child growing up in the local camp. Later he began to use libraries to complete his education and begin his entry into politics.

The two debating teams comprised an eclectic mix of Territory personalities and a lively, passionate and humorous exchange ensued. Paradoxically, the negative team seemed to champion the cause of libraries more strongly than the affirmative so that in the end the argument that libraries are cultural institutions most definitely prevailed.