

Challenging illiteracy



The Australian Readers Challenge (ARC) is a practical way to help all Australians experience the joys of reading and the incalculable, lifelong benefits that follow.

Recent research has shown that in some remote indigenous communities illiteracy rates are as high as 93 per cent. Research consistently links low literacy with poor health, social and economic outcomes. Our partners at the Fred Hollows Foundation (FHF) have been working with indigenous communities for many years, seeking to build broad and sustainable health strategies. Their approach is consultative, working closely with the communities they serve. The Foundation has begun to address literacy through their 'Literacy for Life' initiative.

ARC seeks to raise funds to support the literacy work of FHF. At the same time ARC hopes to promote a love of books and reading among the broader Australian community.

How ARC works

ARC is a simple, practical and fun project that encourages participation from readers of all ages.

Readers pay \$5 to register and are then challenged to read ten books, at least seven of which must come from the specially prepared ARC booklists. There are booklists for everyone from pre-schoolers (with read-aloud titles) to

adults. There is also an indigenous authored list.

Readers who successfully complete the Challenge receive a certificate signed by swimmer Ian Thorpe. Ian Thorpe's Fountain for Youth Trust is a partner of ARC.

Interested readers can register through the ARC website, participating bookshops and registered schools. Libraries are welcome to register to receive ARC posters.

History

ARC developed from the enormously successful Riverbend Readers Challenge (RRC), run for the last two years by Riverbend Books, a Queensland independent bookshop.

In 2004, its first year, RRC was taken up by 112 schools and readers of all ages. Funds were raised to purchase \$50 000 worth of books for the FHF (with much appreciated help from the Australian Booksellers Association and the publisher Allen & Unwin). Over 38 000 books were read by young Australians during the first RRC.

In 2005 RRC continued to grow. School registrations increased by 49 per cent, with schools participating in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia. General public registrations rose by 90 per cent. Many parents, teachers and older teenagers participated through the new 'adult' booklist.

Teachers, librarians and parents have provided tremendous support to the Challenge, appreciative of the opportunity for them, their students and their children to contribute to the lives of indigenous Australians in a direct way. We also received many reports of students, often reluctant readers, taking on the Challenge with gusto. Readers visited the Challenge website in droves, submitting reviews of the books they read.

Towards ARC

Building on the success of RRC, the Australian Readers Challenge will be launched nationally in March 2006 with the full support of the Australian book industry and seeking to involve many more Australians in the effort to address the crisis in indigenous literacy.

What can you do?

Start at the ARC website, <http://www.readerschallenge.com.au>. From 1 September the site will accept registrations from individuals, schools, book clubs and libraries. Registered schools and libraries will receive an ARC pack with full-colour posters and ARC stickers (to identify booklist titles) in early February 2006.

We encourage readers of all ages to take up the Challenge and help make a positive and practical contribution to literacy in Australia.

Nick Hughes, Riverbend Books, Bulimba Qld

New grads and old hands

On Monday 25 July the ALIA New Graduates Group and the revitalised NSW ALIA group jointly hosted a very successful networking event. The flood of RSVPs required a late switch of venue to the State Library! Jacqueline Smith (Macarthur Clinical Library), Sue Walden (Legal Information Access Centre (LIAC), State Library of NSW) and NSW state librarian and ALIA vice-president Dagmar Schmidmaier AM spoke on 'Marketing your library; marketing yourself'.

Jacqueline's career includes a stint at Bankstown Public Library under the leadership of that legendary librarian, Cec Churm. Her top tips were: 'TLC' = think like the customer; ensure scalability and viability – think of symbiotic relationships and the maxim of under-promising and over-delivering; and remember the five Ps of social marketing: price, product, promotion, place and people. She urged us to market all aspects

of the librarian's role — from storyteller to technologist.

Sue described the evolution of the LIAC service and its promotional strategies. Her marketing mantras include: communicate strategically; be client focussed; facilitate special events through providing scalable advice and support and always involve stakeholders. The 'Crime at your library' e-program, for example, was made relevant and credible to its secondary school market through thoughtful listening and building on client feedback.

Dagmar briefly explained ALIA's leadership role and the marketing support it offered to individuals and libraries. Her advice was to be proactive, positive, and master the art of the one-minute presentation. Being provocative also has its place: if libraries are so fan-

tastic, she challenged the group, why do we all use and love Google?

Alex Byrne, UTS university librarian and incoming IFLA president, will offer ideas and challenges for both new grads and old hands at the next ALIA NSW event on 12 October.

Anne Doherty and Maggie McElhill



l-r: Sue Walden, Dagmar Schmidmaier AM and Maggie McElhill at the recent ALIA New Graduates Group and ALIA NSW joint event held at the State Library of NSW