

# ARL Group (WA) Leaders' Forum

Gaye Sweeney, convenor, Academic and Research Libraries (WA Group)

On Tuesday evening 26 July 2005, the Academic and Research Libraries Group held a Leaders' Forum at Edith Cowan University Library, Mt Lawley campus. Five speakers from Perth academic libraries and the State Library of WA had been invited to talk about their vision on future library trends, and how these trends may impact on service delivery. This was a very popular meeting, more than fifty people came along to hear our guest speakers: Margaret Allen, CEO and state librarian; Dan Archibald, Edith Cowan University; John Arfield, University of Western Australia; Imogen Garner, Curtin University of Technology; and Margaret Jones from Murdoch University. The evening provided a rare opportunity to hear from all these research and academic library leaders, followed by a panel discussion.

Margaret Allen spoke about public library services in Western Australia and the trend to select sites for and design public libraries as community hubs or multi-function service points for local councils. Clients are able to access the library collections, electronic resources and bill-paying services from their local library building. Public library services are being changed

by the demand for 24/7 access to information, accessibility of digitised unique materials, non-book format materials (texts on CD or MP3) and self-service circulation systems.

Libraries are a solution to the digital divide developing between information-rich city dwellers and the information-poor rural population scattered throughout this vast State. The development of public libraries will help create informed and empowered communities. These convenient and comfortable places of learning are relevant to the needs of all library patrons, from those interested in recreational reading and self education, through to students of higher education, and the answer to increasing demand for the provision of electronic resources in remote areas.

John Arfield's talk, entitled 'Re-placing the library', concentrated on the changing study habits of students in academic libraries. Where previous generations relied heavily on print resources that could only be found in the library, students of today belong to the Google generation, more likely to use an internet search engine to find information. This new generation of informed users expect service delivery at the point of need. John's presentation was illustrated throughout by some highly entertaining and pertinent slides, demonstrating that today's students rely on technology including mobile phones, smart cards, personal digital assistants, and other electronic 'stuff' to satisfy their educational needs. The library building is a comfortable environment to study and communicate with fellow students, but the print collections are no longer as relevant.

Dan Archibald touched a familiar chord for many in the audience when he spoke about his experience in academic libraries and the vast changes of the last two decades. Since the bygone days of card catalogues and librarians accessing dial-up databases to search for information on clients' behalf, enormous changes in technology have enabled far greater access to information, delivered electronically to the end user. From a traditional model of the library as a repository of information, the emphasis has switched to the library as repository of online learning. Students and academic staff (whether on campus or remote access) demand a wide range of electronic resources and printed material collections are smaller or non-existent.

Hazarding an educated guess at significant factors for the immediate future, Dan suggested continued advances in electronic resources and information technology, content and digital rights management, e-re-



l-r Gillian Westera, Lyn Leslie, Trevor Wallis, Lisa Billingham, Jenny Smith

positories and other systems. Video, DVD, video streaming, on-demand downloaded publications and RSS feeds could change service provision. Libraries must be aware of each new technological step, and keep involved to avoid irrelevance.

Imogen Garner structured her talk around the acronym for Click06, the ALIA conference (Perth, September 2006). CLICK stands for *Create, Lead, Innovate, Connect, Knowledge*. Libraries need to create a flexible, innovative workforce that sees potential everywhere (like SMS, PDAs, blogs) and is able to create new services. Leadership should be developed among library staff in general, not just in management roles. You don't need to be a manager or supervisor to influence and empower yourself and others. Innovation is not just a bright idea, but where ideas take us as part of a team. A team needs four characteristic types — clarifiers, idealists, developers and implementers — in order to make a difference. It's important to look at the spread of skills, develop skills in people, and work out how we can acquire relevant skills.

Margaret Jones was the final speaker. Her talk on the sustainable community focussed on making development choices that harmonise three Es: economy, ecology and equity. Libraries sustain communities by enabling communities of scholars, communities of learners, at the local and global scale. She spoke of her personal experience using a telecentre/public library service in the southwest of Western Australia. Her experience neatly dovetailed with Margaret Allen's talk about the trend towards making better use of public library facilities, transforming them into welcoming places where all members of the community enjoy a wide range of facilities relevant to information needs.

In summary, the Leader's Forum attracted a lot of interest. It was terrific to see all of Perth's university librarians and the state librarian together (a major coup) and to hear them speak of the future of library services. The Academic and Research Libraries Group committee was also pleased to welcome a number of library studies students to this event, as our future leaders will surely come from this next generation of library professionals. ■

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