

## Multicultural Library Services: An international snapshot

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions Satellite Conference *Innovative Multicultural Library Services for All* was held at the Centurion Lake Hotel, Pretoria, South Africa 15–17 August 2007.

The conference was the first in which IFLA's Section on Library Services to Multicultural Populations partnered with IFLA's Reading Section and the Libraries for Children and Young Adults Section. It attracted delegates who were librarians, archivists, museum workers, educators, researchers, authors, publishers, booksellers and government officials. We could almost have made an alphabet picture book out of all the nations represented.

I was privileged to attend the conference to give a paper 'Libraries for Life: Creating Library Services for Diverse Communities'. Keynote speeches were given by Dr Lorlene Roy, President of the American Library Association, Patricia Aldana, President of International Board on Books for Young People and Professor Katherine Parry, City University of New York.

Dr Roy spoke about the ways that indigenous people have adapted to new technologies and processes while retaining their cultural identity. She discussed Cajete's indigenous circle of life — being, asking, seeking, making, having, sharing and



IFLA conference venue

celebrating and how library services could be developed to reflect native American life views.

Patricia Aldana spoke about the need to ensure that children see themselves reflected in the books they read. It is as important for children to find themselves in literature as it is for them to find new worlds and explore new ideas.

Professor Parry discussed the power and politics of language and its impact in Africa. She demonstrated a model of multiple literacies which showed multiple ways of using written language rather than multiple formats. This model shows three levels of literacy — mother tongue, *lingua franca* and English language.

Kirsten Leth Nielsen, Chair of the IFLA Section on Library Services to Multicultural Populations, presented the IFLA Multicultural Library Manifesto. This defines cultural diversity and states the broad principles and mission of multicultural library services. It also considers how these issues impact on management and operation, core actions, staffing, funding, legislation and networks as well as discussing the implementation of the Manifesto.

Some personal highlights of the conference were:

Yuriko Watanabe, Library of Tokyo Gakugei University, who spoke about providing library services to displaced people in Burmese refugee camps. Volunteer librarians from Japan build and stock basic libraries in the refugee camps and then train local refugee people to run them. One of the children who uses the library, ten-year-old Posacle, wrote:

*I love the library  
It is better than any other place in the world  
When I feel very sad  
I go to the library and then I always feel fine  
...  
What I have found in the books  
Makes my life shine  
Everyday  
Like gold.*

Dr Anna Gustafsson Chen, from the Internationella Biblioteket, Sweden, demonstrated a multilingual catalogue which allows searching in Russian, Persian, Arabic and Chinese scripts. It is possible for staff to do the search in Swedish and then



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*IFLA delegates*

change the screen to Chinese or vice versa, so even if the librarian and customer have a different language they can do the search together. The website is <<http://www.internationalbiblioteket.se>>.

Another feature of this catalogue is that it highlights a randomised range of books in the appropriate language, so each time a customer goes to the page he will find a different selection of titles to browse.

Ingrid Bon, from Biblioservice Gerderland, Arnhem, The Netherlands, talked about the Boekenpret (Fun with Books) service. This national program to increase reading for pleasure and improve literacy levels is a cooperative venture between libraries, maternal health, schools and preschools. The program includes training for workers, home visits and coffee times at the library. There is also a 'Stay a night over bear' — the bear is borrowed by families and must be read to before it will 'sleep'.

Lone Hedelund, from Gellerup Bibliotek, Denmark, spoke about their community-based library service which incorporates health, employment and social services. Programs include storytelling for women who share stories from their own backgrounds, volunteers who read aloud in the library, volunteer homework help tutors and a job corner. The job corner has one library worker and one health worker.

Stine Fugl, of Noerrebro Library, Copenhagen, Denmark discussed a program to visit families with new babies and give a gift of a book. Over the following four years the library service visits another three times, bringing a gift book and talking with the families about the importance of reading, talking and playing with the children. Stine visits with a bag full of puppets to interact with the children and their families as often the families do not speak much Danish. Another interesting idea from this library service is the career library. You can 'borrow' a person with a particular job or qualification and talk to them about their work and experience.

I visited Wespark Community Library, which is a joint use school and community library giving students and local residents access to resources, computers and the internet. The community is extremely multicultural and has a population of 22,000, most of whom have limited or no income. The library runs school

holiday programs, preschool visits and outreach visits to the local hospital, as well as literacy classes and IT classes for adults. The librarians are employed by the municipality but are seen as staff of the school. They also have a users committee which is a group of volunteers who work in the library and who are extremely good cooks if the food they supplied for our visit was any indication. Recently, the library has received sponsorship from a business which pays for the school fees and uniforms for five students as well as sponsoring the library's computers.

Delegates were treated to a reception with representatives of the City of Tshwane, also with fabulous food, and the beautiful singing of students from the Tshwane University of Technology. The hospitality and generosity of our hosts was truly inspiring.

This conference was a fantastic way of meeting librarians and others from related disciplines and hearing about the issues we all face from a different context. The next IFLA conference will be in Quebec, Canada and of course, in 2010 it will be in Brisbane, so start planning now to attend. Most of the papers presented at this year's conference are available at <<http://www.lib.tut.ac.za/ifla>>.

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