

It is unfortunately not unusual to find a child left unaccompanied in the library, and sadly the child can be quite young. Parents and care-givers seem unaware of the dangers and possible risk in this action and often leave children unattended for long periods of time. Staff are placed in uncomfortable position of having to either look after children or approach adults about supervision of their child and receiving negative (often aggressive) responses.

To develop support for staff, we initially contacted the department responsible for children's services in the Northern Territory (NT). The Department of Family and Children's Services were very happy to provide assistance and to read through draft documents written by library staff. We felt it was important to get the wording correct and to be in accord with state legislation. The FACS staff were surprised and shocked that parents and caregivers were leaving their young children alone in public buildings like the library. They acknowledged the stress this action places on staff.

After initial consultation with staff at FACS and discussions with public libraries in the Territory, it was decided to create a generic protocol that could be customised by each library. This allows libraries to accommodate unique elements of their area (vital, given how remote some libraries are), their different customer bases and the limited external services available to assist with any problems.

In the next column are the objectives of and definitions used in the NT protocol. Specific procedures and contact details for various agencies such as FACS and police centres were also developed. Libraries outside the Northern Territory should note that child protection legislation is a state responsibility, and varies in each state. This material is provided only as an example for libraries and librarians dealing with similar problems.

Another part of the process for addressing concerns is correspondence to parents of unaccompanied children alerting them to the situation and providing alternative care information.

The procedure and protocol is primarily a guide for staff to follow. It helps to give peace of mind by outlining their level of responsibility and rights. It has also become a useful tool for management when dealing with the parents of an unaccompanied child, especially in situations where conflict has arisen.

Sarah White Manager Library Service City of Palmerston

OBJECTIVE

To ensure that library staff manage situations related to unattended children.

OUTCOME

To ensure that children are not left unsupervised in the Public Libraries and/or that children not collected from the library at closing time, are placed in protective care.

DEFINITIONS

- Child/children: person(s) under the age of 13 years.
- Unattended: having no responsible person to tend to the needs of the child or ensure their safety.
- Supervision: having the responsibility to watch over children and know the child's whereabouts at all times.

TARGET AUDIENCE

- NT Public Library Staff

PRINCIPLES

- Children's safety and well-being is paramount.
- The responsibility for the safety and behaviour of children rests with parents or caregivers.
- Unsupervised children can be at risk in any public place, including public libraries.
- Public libraries have a role in educating the general public about the risks associated with unattended children in any public.
- Library staff cannot take responsibility for the supervision of unattended children.
- When concerns arise regarding unattended children, NT Public Library staff will follow a protocol.

CIT signs reciprocal library agreement with DET

On Monday, 15 January 2007, Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) and the Department of Education and Training (DET) signed a memorandum of understanding, which enables staff from both institutions to access the other's library collections. The landmark agreement provides access to increased resources for both government-school and CIT teachers within the ACT, supporting all ACT teachers in their goal to improve learning outcomes for students.

Dr Colin Adrian, (CEO of CIT, left in picture) said at the signing that 'the agreement provided DET staff with an amazing array of specialist resources to support teaching and learning in vocation and technical education programs.'

Dr Adrian also said that 'in collaboration

with Principals, individual schools and the VET in Schools and Careers area of DET, CIT will further explore initiatives to encourage VET in schools.'

Trish Wilks, Director of Curriculum, Assessment and Professional Learning (signing on behalf of Dr Michele Bruniges, CEO of DET) said that the agreement was 'an excellent example of the advantages of education partnerships. Teachers of both institutions will enjoy the benefits of being able to access both collections free of charge.'

The DET Library is both the Departmental library and the teaching resources centre for schools in the ACT. There are currently in excess of 22000 items in the collection available for loan. The CIT Library & Learning Centre collection holds in excess of

65 000 hard copy titles and 300 electronic databases and journals.

For further information about the reciprocal agreement, contact Lynn Fletcher, Institute Librarian (CIT) on 62073378 or lynn.fletcher@cit.act.edu.au; or Julie Goodall, Head Librarian DET, on 62058215 or julie.goodall@act.gov.au.

