

Information behaviour in everyday contexts -

Dr Karen Fisher

Community Information Strategies Australia Inc. (CISA), ventured north from its Adelaide home to hold its 5th annual Connecting Up Conference (CU08) in Brisbane on 19 - 20 May 2008. Connecting Up brings together people from the community, non-government and government sectors to explore and share knowledge and experience of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) and learn how they can benefit the not-for-profit sector.

One of a number of overseas presenters at the conference was Dr Karen Fisher, Associate Professor and Chair of the Master of Library and Information Science Program at The Information School, University of Washington, Seattle USA. Karen's research interests focus on information behavior, specifically the social and cognitive aspects of how individuals need, seek, manage, give and use information in different contexts. Karen focuses primarily on how information behavior occurs in everyday contexts. This led her to conduct her PhD research in podiatry clinics in Canada, her country of origin, a study that resulted in the identification of the concept of Information Grounds. This is defined as 'an environment temporarily created when people come together for a singular purpose but from whose behavior emerges a social atmosphere that fosters the spontaneous and serendipitous sharing of information'. Karen's subsequent research has included work with other varied other settings—from public libraries to cafes and shopping malls—and groups including homeless people, immigrants, farm-workers, teenagers, stay-at-home mothers, and internet users.

As well as attending and presenting at CU08, Karen presented a session for librarians at the State Library of Queensland.

Of particular interest to librarians is Karen's 2005 monograph *How libraries and librarians help: A guide to identifying user-centered outcomes*, written with Joan Durrance and Marian Bouch Hinton. This book provides a toolkit outlining the practice of measuring outcomes that can enable librarians to illustrate the benefits that their library service provides to the community and users. An online version of the toolkit is available at Karen's website, ibec.ischool.washington.edu.

Working with colleague Mike Crandall, Karen has begun a national study of the social, economic, personal, and professional value of free access to computers at public libraries. This project is supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

More information:

ibec.ischool.washington.edu

www.connectingup.org

www.cisa.asn.au

Fisher, K. E. & Durrance, J. C. (2005). *How libraries and librarians help: A guide to identifying user-centered outcomes*. American Library Association. Chicago, IL. ISBN: 0838908926

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