

Your voice

Dear Editor

I have just received my order of the *Little book of public libraries* – what a disappointment. The front cover does not excite, nor does it compel me to open the book. I have beside me the UK publication that it was based on which is inviting and bold and a real page turner. Why did you decide to use a beige torn page as the front cover of a book that is promoting how libraries have changed? This reinforces many people's views that libraries are full of dusty old books. I thought libraries were changing.

Karen Conway
Manager Library Services
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Dear Karen

Many thanks for your feedback about the *Little book of public libraries*; it's always good to know what the library community thinks and what works in different communities.

The *Little book* was deliberately styled to be modest on the outside with the many layers of texture inviting you to pick it up and explore the vibrant inner. It has now been widely circulated and we have received a very positive response, both from participants at the Summit and our public library colleagues. ALIA Executive Director Sue Hutley and I took copies to the Senate Standing Committee on the National Broadband Network and the Senators were very focussed on the *Little book* and asked a number of questions based on the copy, unrelated to Broadband – which is what the *Little book* is about, getting people thinking and talking.

I know that you'll find many ways of using it in the NT and I look forward to hearing of your successes. If you haven't already checked them out there are some suggestions on the ALIA web site of ways to maximise its use (<http://www.alia.org.au/publiclibraries/How.to.use.html>)

Jan Richards
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Note to Members

We welcome letters on any issue of relevance to the library and information sector. It is important to note that the opinions expressed in Letters to the Editor are those of the authors and not necessarily the official policy of the Australian Library and Information Association.

Deadline for letters is available on the website and they should be no longer than 250 words. Please include your name and postal address as anonymous correspondence will not be reproduced.

ALIA Public Libraries Summit – rising to the challenge

ALIA welcomed some 50 politicians and public officials, their advisers, and senior figures from the library world, to the first ALIA Public Libraries Summit, Thursday 16 July at the National Library of Australia in Canberra.

The event brought together all three levels of government – local, state and territory, and federal – at a time when public libraries in Australia and around the world are experiencing unprecedented levels of demand. It provided a much needed opportunity to debate the future of public libraries in the 21st century.

In her opening address, Senator Ursula Stephens, Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion, spoke of public libraries as “hubs of community life”, neutral spaces for learning, internet access, and e-learning. She said, “They will remain a vital part of the future ... a neutral third place, with the capacity to connect people with the outside world.”

She confirmed, “ALIA has a huge role in all of this”, describing the existing Library Lovers Day and National Simultaneous Storytime, as clever initiatives, and the Summer Reading Club as “a valuable way of drawing in young people.”

ALIA Executive Director Sue Hutley said, “It was clear from the debate during the day, and from the feedback from attendees immediately after the event, that what is needed is a lead body, providing public libraries with a united voice to government. ALIA was recognised as being uniquely placed to be able to deliver this, supported by, and in collaboration with, the state public libraries associations and Friends of Libraries Australia.”

Delegates effectively gave ALIA a mandate to develop a vision, strategy, and national framework for public libraries. Work has already begun planning this initiative, with the vision and strategy heavily influenced by the submissions posted in advance of the Summit, and the course of the discussion at the event.

The development of a national framework coincides with the launch of the ALIA-driven development of new National Standards for Public Libraries to give direction to the provision of public library services.

ALIA President Jan Richards concluded, “ALIA has been issued with a serious challenge and we intend to step up to the mark. We will be working with partners over the next few months to develop a national framework for public libraries as the basis of a plan with which we can go to Federal Government requesting its support.”

Sue McKerracher
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Helping people rebuild with books

Although the impact of the Victorian bushfires has lost some of its immediacy for people outside the area, for the survivors living in caravans and makeshift structures beside the blackened ruins of their homes, it remains all too real.

Against this heart-rending backdrop, ALIA's acting Disaster Recovery Project Manager Jane Grace and her team at Yarra Plenty Regional Library (YPRL) have been working hard since Black Saturday, providing support to libraries and families caught up in the bushfires.

Three school libraries were destroyed in the fires around Nillumbik. The public libraries were untouched, and these, together with the YPRL mobile library, have proved invaluable as community centres still standing among so much destruction.

Offers of help have flooded in, from as far afield as the US, and Jane's role has been to coordinate these, working directly with families, and through public libraries and the Mitchell, Whittlesea, Nillumbik, and Murrindindi Recovery Centres.

In addition, the ALIA/YPRL team has worked with local schools, and established partnerships with the Australian Booksellers Association (ABA), the Australian Publishers Association (APA), the State Library of Victoria, School Library Association of Victoria, Friends of Libraries Australia, and Public Libraries Victoria Network.

The next stage is a campaign entitled Rebuilding with Books, which will see brand new books being delivered to families who lost everything in the inferno. There will be a fundraising effort through booksellers, coordinated by the ABA, in September, and for libraries there will be a week of activity from 24 to 31 October. More information coming soon on the website at <http://www.alia.org.au/disasterrecovery/>.

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