

REGIONAL AND RURAL LIBRARIES

We found that once the initial contact had been made, the participants were much more confident about approaching the library for support associated with a wide range of topics, and were keen to promote library services to colleagues. The study is nearing conclusion and we look forward to analysing the data collected.

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Developing staff in the regions

The David Mann Library is a one of four regional campus libraries of La Trobe University, Melbourne. Situated in Wodonga, Victoria, it provides library services to the staff and students of La Trobe University, Wodonga Institute of TAFE, and research staff of the Murray Darling Freshwater Research Centre.

One of the challenges of a regional library service is attracting and developing suitably skilled staff. It can be difficult to recruit staff when many of the available positions are only part-time, opportunities for advancement are limited, and accessing regular professional development requires a considerable amount of planning and costs associated with travel and accommodation.

Despite the challenges, it is imperative that staff skills are developed for the benefit of the clients served and for the professional satisfaction of the individual staff member. At the David Mann Library, this occurs by taking advantage of the networks to which we belong.

Being part of a network of La Trobe University libraries provides access to support for external programs, such as national

conferences and CAVAl training, which we may not afford as a stand alone library. It also provides access to a sharing of collegiate expertise across the campuses. Recent advances in technology have made this sharing of knowledge even easier as rural staff can now attend seminars via video conferencing or view them at a later date on DVD. Cross-campus activities can also take the form of informal mentoring, participation on working groups, or providing the opportunity for regional staff to participate and lead major cross-campus projects. La Trobe University Library also hosts an annual Learning & Research Services Conference each year, which brings all information services staff together to meet, learn, and discuss issues related to the profession.

Professional networks, such as ALIA, CAVAl, and VATL, are also important to a regional library such as ours. They provide ready access to professional literature, updates on issues relevant to the profession, a place to seek advice, and a vehicle for connecting to other libraries in the region.

One of the advantages of working in an educational library is the richness of the surrounding learning environment. As this is a joint use library, staff can access the professional development activities offered by both institutions but also may attend public and internal lectures, seminars, and presentations. There is also the intellectual stimulus of being surrounded by others interested in ideas and learning who challenge the library staff each day to expand our knowledge base or to find solutions to problems in different ways.

Library staff also learn from each other. Because of the difficulty in travelling to access professional development, the library has developed a series of in-staff training activities each year. The members of our Staff Development Committee create a list of areas that the staff would either like to know, or would benefit from knowing, and a staff member develops and presents this training. This can range from instructions on how to use equipment



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in the library to understanding more about e-books to skills in time management.

In the past four years, the library has also run a program called the Self Directed Professional Activity (SDPA). Once a semester each staff member spends one afternoon working on an activity of their choice to advance their knowledge, skills, and/or work performance. Activities undertaken in the past have included professional visits to other libraries, writing project briefs, developing a catalogue of publicity shots, and learning how to use new software.

Keeping staff engaged and engaging is important for all libraries and achievable even at smaller and more remote sites. Regional libraries just need to be a little more creative and take advantage of the networks to which they already belong.

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eRecords at the State Library of NSW



Thanks to the eRecords project at the State Library of New South Wales (SLNSW), public libraries and their users in rural and remote NSW will increasingly have the same access to the library's collections, via its online catalogue, as residents of Sydney who are able to visit the Macquarie Street buildings.

The eRecords project is unlocking the contents of the State Library's unrivalled cultural and historical collections with project funding of \$10m over three years from the NSW Government. Although SLNSW has been using electronic catalogues since the 1980s, one million collection items remain accessible only through hand-written or typescript cards – necessitating a visit to Sydney or telephone or email contact through a staff member.

By September 2009, a total of 218 473 eRecords had been created for collection items, such as:

- the Dixon Library sheet maps which document the exploration and charting of Australia and the Pacific
- pictures and photographs in the heritage pictorial collections
- over 20 000 Australian literature titles, from popular 'penny dreadfuls' to rare first edition literary classics, including *We're all Australians now: a letter to the troops at the Dardanelles* by A.B. Paterson.
- The MacPherson Drama collection: 4000 20th century plays, including rare and quirky female-only productions, and classics that became major motion pictures, for example *Rebecca: A play in three acts* – the film adaptation scored Alfred Hitchcock his first Academy Award for Best Picture.
- The Robbins Stage Magic Collection
- The Nelson M. Richardson collection: a unique collection of bibles and medieval manuscripts including the Library's oldest manuscript, *The book of Isaiah*.

You can keep up to date with the progress of this major retrospective conversion project via the SLNSW website at <http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/about/projects/erecords/index.html> and the project blog at <http://blog.sl.nsw.gov.au/erecords/>

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