

the last word

Marilyn Hawthorn is the Assistant Director, Northern Territory Library (NTL), providers of library services in partnership with local government across the Northern Territory. These services include supporting public libraries and knowledge centres in very remote indigenous communities facing significant challenges, including a lack of basic community service infrastructure, low levels of literacy and periodic isolation when transport routes are out of action. NTL is currently implementing the Northern Territory segment of the Federal Government's Closing the Gap: National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Public Internet Access (RIPIA) program. Marilyn reports on progress and how the NT ALIA network has helped raise the profile of this important program.

As an institutional member of ALIA, NTL is always a keen supporter of the Association's network in the Territory and the annual Top End Symposium. Last year's Symposium gave our staff a great opportunity to tell the RIPIA story to our network colleagues, and as expected, the symposium was a great forum for exposure of the project, with keen interest shown in both the program and strategies for its progress. As a result of that presentation, NT ALIA State Manager Jayshree Mamtora recently also reported on the RIPIA story to IFLA's Regional Standing Committee on Asia and Oceania and to LIANZA members in Auckland.

RIPIA is a joint Northern Territory and Federal Government-funded four year program, born out of the 2008 Regional Telecommunications Independent Review and subsequent Glasson Report. A key initiative from the review is a refocused Indigenous Communications Program to improve basic telecommunication services, basic public internet access and training to remote Indigenous communities.

NTL was asked in late 2009 by the NT Government to implement the RIPIA program. At that time NTL was focused on a Libraries & Knowledge Centres' program that at that time supported 22 remote libraries. Accepting responsibility to implement the RIPIA program was a great challenge for our library staff to take on in addition to regular programs. Of the 40 sites across the NT selected by the Federal Government for RIPIA, only 18 were in sites where NTL already had contacts or gave support to an existing remote library.

RIPIA has two components, installing hardware, software and internet access, giving appropriate training, and then maintaining equipment, access and training. Strategies to implement RIPIA have included working to engage local stakeholders and community members, leveraging existing NTL programs and using both experienced NTL staff, and contracting other people with good networks and knowledge as necessary. Initial site-scoping visits revealed many had no working public internet access, no usable building or room, or no organisation to care for new resources.

We found many stakeholders and useful helper contacts onsite and discovered that planning with community personnel before arriving onsite is essential.

The NTL team has taken advantage of a range of existing programs or opportunities to assist progressing RIPIA, including *Broad Band for Seniors*, the satellite subsidy scheme, the re-use of old NT Government computers and partnering with the *One Laptop per Child* organisation. Solutions for internet supply have also required compliance with NT intervention laws on internet filtering.

Implementing this program has had the added benefit of upskilling within the team and our colleagues. The RIPIA team, along with others in NTL, are now using new technologies and web tools such as the Webex Conferencing software for mentoring and meetings and our team members have honed their skills in lateral thinking, teamwork, goodwill and commitment.

RIPIA has given NTL opportunities to explore new ways of working with various technologies, for better outcomes. New connections with other useful organisations have been made, and existing NTL programs have been enhanced by the RIPIA program.

We have found working with other organisations and individuals in remote communities is critical to achieving any success.

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