



Being a Librarian

by Jane Hardy, Assistant Director: Strategy & Advocacy, Australian Library and Information Association

“I’m of a fearsome mind to throw my arms around every living librarian who crosses my path, on behalf of the souls they never knew they saved.”

Barbara Kingsolver, American writer and activist

Being qualified

- completion of an ALIA recognised course and therefore eligible for associate membership of ALIA
- ALIA is the body which sets and maintains standards for entry into the library and information profession in Australia
 - » it plays a vital role in ensuring that education for the profession produces graduates
 - o who have the ability to provide excellent library and information services to benefit the nation and clients
 - o who can respond to and meet the everchanging information needs of a
- acquiring core knowledge and skills
 - » the distinctive area of knowledge and skills which is required for effective professional practice
 - o knowledge of the broad context of the information environment
 - o information seeking
 - o information infrastructure
 - o information organisation
 - o information access
 - o information services, sources and products
 - o information literacy education
 - o generation of knowledge
 - » generic skills
 - o effective communication skills
 - o professional ethical standards and social responsibility
 - o project management skills
 - o critical, reflective, and creative thinking
 - o problemsolving skills



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- o business acumen
- o ability to build partnerships and alliances
- o effective team relationship skills
- o self management skills
- o a commitment to lifelong learning
- o relevant information and communications technology skills
- o appropriate information literacy skills.

Librarians have:

- the core knowledge, skills and generic attributes to deliver the highest quality library and information services
- the skills to promote and defend the ethical values and importance of library and information services to the community
- an understanding and appreciation of the information and learning needs of clients of library and information services
- an understanding of the characteristics of the dynamic environment in which they and their clients operate
- an understanding of the sector and its importance to the nation so they can contribute to the ongoing development and improvement of the profession
- a commitment to the improvement of professional practice through a culture of research and evidencebased information practice
- commitment to lifelong learning and professional development undertaken in partnership with employers, educators and training providers.

Committed to core values

A thriving culture, economy, and democracy requires the free flow of information and ideas. Fundamental to that free flow of information and ideas are Australia's library and information services.

Library and information services professionals therefore commit themselves to the following core values of their profession:

- Promotion of the free flow of information and ideas through open access to recorded knowledge, information, and creative works.
- Connection of people to ideas.
- Commitment to literacy, information literacy and learning.
- Respect for the diversity and individuality of all people.
- Preservation of the human record.
- Excellence in professional service to our communities.
- Partnerships to advance these values.

Understanding, promoting and defending the importance of libraries

- access to information is the foundation of a democratic society



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- freedom can be protected in a democratic society only if its citizens have unrestricted access to information and ideas
- equity of access to information
- censorship and internet filtering – current challenges to unrestricted access of information
- libraries are so much part of the fabric of our communities that they can be overlooked. They are, however, a crucial part of a community’s social, cultural and economic capital. It is a major challenge to convey to decision makers, the breadth, depth and potential impact on the whole community of libraries. Few other services have the multiplicity of roles, or user range and diversity, or potential to influence so many lives.

Case studies

1. I have been meaning to write for some time to thank you for all your help and guidance you gave me, and the other computer illiterates, when we attended the internet classes you ran at [the] library. It was good to be able to learn in a group and benefit from others’ questions and experiences without feeling overawed by this technology that was new to us.”

2. “A man in his early sixties came into the library with an internet address in his hand. He had written it down from the TV. It was going to give him all the information he needed to attend a reunion of workers on the Snowy Mountain Hydro-electric Scheme. He has become a keen reader and a regular patron.”

3. “Not long after we introduced email to the library, an elderly gentleman asked if we could help him send an email to his daughter who was travelling. The man had no knowledge of computers and no typing skills. A friend of his told him that the library had email facilities and that he would be able to obtain help from the library staff. He had written down what he wanted to send so a staff member offered to type it for him. He kept coming back every day to see if he had any reply, sometimes twice a day. This went on for several weeks. He finally received a reply from his daughter. By that time too, he was confident enough to use the email facilities himself.”

Importance of information in development and innovation

ALIA advocates the development of an informed society that can partake and participate in skilled decisionmaking.

Accurate, relevant and timely information is the key ingredient to effective decisionmaking. Australia’s longterm economic development is dependent on its ability to use information to make decisions and harness innovation that enables growth, progress and productivity.

The library profession contributes to an informed society by acquiring, organising, archiving, retrieving, using, synthesising and



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Partnering with your community

- identifying and meeting needs of your clients
- relevant to all sectors whether public or special or university
- design and deliver customised information services and products
- identify and evaluate information services, sources and products to determine their relevance to the information needs of users

Awareness of the major issues in Australian libraries

The issues and challenges for libraries include:

- Need to improve literacy skills, including information and computer literacy, so that all Australians can participate in our democratic society and digital environment
 - » The Australian Bureau of Statistics report *Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey*, found that slightly less than half of the Australian population, approximately 7 million, failed to achieve the minimum required level or higher in prose and document literacy. [ABS 4228.0 *Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey*, Summary Results, Australia, 2006]
- Provision of national broadband access
- Implementation of a national digital preservation program
- Development of national online quality resources
- Improved recognition and support for the delivery of government services through public libraries
 - Need to review legislation and administrative arrangements supporting public libraries within states and territories
 - Funding for library buildings, resources/collections, services and staff
 - Need to review of copyright in the digital environment and the impact on library services
 - Planning for workforce and work skills in the library industry
 - Funding to maintain collections of national significance.

Commitment

- Are you committed to the ideals of your profession?
- What can you do about the issues that you care about?
- What are you doing?

If you are not advocating in some way, then support ALIA, your peak library association, so that it can advocate on your behalf.

Without your support, we will not be able to tell decisionmakers about how important libraries are.