

## **Services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in New South Wales Public Libraries Survey results**

In mid 2003 informal discussions between the State Library and the Local Government and Shires Associations emphasised the need for a better understanding of public library services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their use and non-use of public libraries.

While a certain amount of information was available there was insufficient for informed decision making as the annual statistical return collected by the State Library does not specifically ask for data relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This made it difficult to adequately describe what research needed to be undertaken to support and promote the development and provision of services and programs.

Following discussions with the Public Library Network Research Committee it was decided to initially survey the New South Wales public library network to gather information about services, staff and collections provided for this target group. The Committee agreed that this was the first step in developing a proposal for in-depth research into the use and non-use of public libraries by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

### **Background**

In June 2004 surveys were e-mailed to each public library service in New South Wales to find information about the services, staff and collections provided for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The annual statistical data collected by the State Library Public Library Services division does not cover this area in detail, so very little information on the extent of these services was available. Anecdotally it was believed that several New South Wales public libraries were providing services targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within their communities. The survey was to establish the nature and extent of public library services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in New South Wales.

The survey was to find out:

- the extent of current collections and services targeting indigenous communities
- which public libraries employ Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff, and in what positions these staff are employed.

### **Survey results**

#### **Question1: Staff**

Fourteen New South Wales public libraries have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as staff. The sixteen positions include library officer, library assistant, administration assistant - Aboriginal designated, acting library manager, mobile library driver/operator, cataloguer, and aboriginal researcher.

One library commented they would be advertising for an Indigenous Circulation and Support trainee officer who will be expected to undertake the library technician's course.

#### **Comment**

The total number of staff in New South Wales public libraries is 2,315.98<sup>1</sup>. The 16 positions held by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people are equivalent to 0.69% of library staff.

From the 2001 Census New South Wales has a population of 6,371,745 including 119,865 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people who comprise 1.88% of the population. For the library community to match this percentage there would need to be 44 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people employed in public libraries.

#### **Question 2: Services, programs or events**

35 out of 98 library services provide targeted library services/special events/programs to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in their communities.

The targeted programs include:

- monthly storytime with Aboriginal pre-schools
- local Aboriginal classes visiting a library on a regular basis
- NAIDOC Week displays and events, exhibitions
- Reconciliation Week displays and events
- talks with Aboriginal elders regarding local Indigenous history
- an Aboriginal elder presenting story times
- fortnightly visits by Mobile library to schools with a high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- library participation in community festivals recognising the original inhabitants of an area
- Aboriginal material selection days
- annual displays of Sorry art
- visiting authors and story tellers
- cultural awareness programs
- creation of family history database including photographs
- recording relevant events regionally
- creating Aboriginal web site
- providing a venue for meetings for Indigenous groups
- a permanent exhibition at a heritage centre
- collecting resources for local studies
- workshops in Tracing your Aboriginal Family History and producing fact sheets.

Other libraries indicated that they planned to develop programs in the second half of 2004

#### **Question 3: Collections targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people**

Fifteen libraries have designated collections targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the primary users of the collection. These collections include The

---

<sup>1</sup> *Public Library Statistics 2002/03*, Sydney, State Library of New South Wales, 2004, p74

Koori Mail, picture books, posters, non-fiction, artefacts on display, basic literacy material, Aboriginal studies material, an Indigenous archive and separate reference collection.

The collections range from modest in size (30 items) to larger (about 300 titles to 743 titles), or may be located at a specific branch of a library service. Resources are frequently marked with flags. 69 libraries did not have designated collections targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

### **Comment**

Some libraries do not appear to differentiate between their collections *for* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their collections *about* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Some libraries replied that they had material within their general collections. This is likely to be true for most public libraries.

### **Question 4: Collections about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people**

Fifty eight out of ninety eight libraries have a designated collection of library resources *about* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Three libraries did not reply to this question. Some of this material seemed to be the same as the items in the collections targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Some libraries have a centralised collection, others at all branches, and for some it is a single branch collection.

### **Question 5: Designated Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Services Community Liaison Officer or similar position**

There are thirty three designated Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Services Community Liaison Officers across the state.

These job titles range from Indigenous Liaison Officer, Community Development Officer – Projects; Aboriginal Community Development Officer; Indigenous Community Development Worker to Aboriginal Community Development Officer.

There are other designated Aboriginal positions within some councils. Six councils share the one position of Aboriginal Heritage Manager, three share an Aboriginal Heritage Sites Manager and five share an Aboriginal Community Development Worker.

The survey results indicate that the provision of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is fragmented and varies considerably across the state.

### **Comment**

This question was asked to find out what local specialist support may be available to library staff when they are developing service, collections and programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

### **Question 6: Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Services consultative committees**

28 councils have an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Services consultative committee.

## **Comment**

This question was asked to find out how many libraries had access to local consultative committees.

## **Question 7: Further comments including planned services**

52 libraries had no plans for specific services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Two libraries noted that this area was not applicable to their plans. Three libraries had no comment. Forty one libraries did have plans and these included:

- examining the possibility of an Aboriginal trainee
- plan to further expand collection resources
- consideration of adopting the 1995 library and archives protocols
- including Indigenous people in consultation for marketing plan
- negotiating to appoint an Aboriginal trainee library assistant
- NAIDOC Week displays and events
- Work with representatives of community and looking for new ways to engage
- Aboriginal story telling, planning to use Aboriginal flag stickers to distinguish material
- currently researching what services and resources other libraries are providing with a view to implementing some targeted programs in the second half of this year
- The Library and the Indigenous Knowledge Centre have contact with each other re. Aboriginal family and local history and through occasional guest appearances at storytime. We are a small town ... in future there will be opportunities to expand Aboriginal services through the library.

## **Conclusion**

The responses from the ninety eight library services (100% response rate) have provided an overview of the current situation in New South Wales. The survey results show that the provision of public library services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is fragmented and varies considerably across the state.

As expected the survey results support the need for further research into the use and non-use of public library services by A&TSI people and will help shape the brief for the research. Overall the results of the survey provide information for future research, cooperative activities and funding bids.

Ellen Forsyth

**Information Services Consultant, Public Library Services**

2 May 2005

## **Survey results – detailed comments from the Surveys**

### **1 Do you have any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people as library staff member(s)?**

#### **If yes what is/are their designated position(s)?**

Comments provided were

- Library officer - full time
- library assistant
- Acquisitions Officer, Library Assistant
- Casual Library Assistant - who also indexes local newspaper
- Administration Assistant - Aboriginal designated
- Acting Library Manager
- have been involved with indigenous employment schemes but not permanent staff have eventuated
- will be advertising for Indigenous Circulation and Support trainee officer - will be expected to undertake the technicians course
- Mobile Library driver/operator
- Cataloguer
- have supported [name of council] CDEP program
- library assistant
- library assistant
- library assistant, library assistant circulation and end processing
- Aboriginal Researcher, and 1 library assistant
- Library assistant
- part-time library assistant

### **2. Do you (in the library) provide targeted library services/special events/programs to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in your community?**

#### **If yes please describe including frequency (e.g. monthly)**

Comments provided were

- monthly storytime with Aboriginal pre-school
- local Aboriginal classes visit library on regular basis
- NAIDOC Week displays and events
- NAIDOC Week - included storytelling and introduction to language
- NAIDOC Week displays
- NAIDOC Week events twice a year
- feature an Aboriginal story teller about 3 times a year
- one branch organises NAIDOC Week events as well a regular preschool story time
- NAIDOC Week
- Australian Museum exhibition
- Aboriginal organised community visits - 3 monthly

- Reconciliation and NAIDOC Weeks with displays and programs for children and young adults
- One off events
- Assists with Council's promotion of NAIDOC Week
- children's activities during NAIDOC Week
- hold a talk with Aboriginal elders regarding local indigenous history – annual
- NAIDOC and Reconciliation Week displays, plus elder doing story times
- various special event for example family history workshops
- cultural awareness programs
- creation of family history database including over 8 000 local photographs
- recording relevant events regionally in print and photo, creating Aboriginal web site
- venue for meetings for Indigenous groups
- fortnightly visits by Mobile to schools with high proportion Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- Library participates in [name of Festival] - an annual event sponsored by Council recognising the original inhabitants of the [name of Council] area
- NAIDOC Week
- work with [name of Council] Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation in community work
- storytime sessions
- Aboriginal material selection day (twice yearly)
- annual display of Sorry art
- visiting authors/story tellers (ad hoc)
- NAIDOC Week display
- Monthly storytime with Aboriginal pre-school
- various special event for example family history workshops, cultural awareness programs
- creation of family history database including over 8 000 local photographs
- recording relevant events regionally in print and photo
- creating Aboriginal web site, venue for meetings for Indigenous groups
- permanent exhibition at Heritage Centre, visitor centre shop
- collect resources for local studies
- ran workshop in Tracing your Aboriginal Family History
- NAIDOC Week with storytimes
- NAIDOC Week - join with local Aboriginal groups for their celebrations
- library tours for Aboriginal children
- occasional special events,
- story times by Elder; Young - 3 times a year, Harden - 4 times a year
- regular visits from [name of] preschool
- children's holiday activities
- Aboriginal story tellers
- As part of Information and Cultural Services our events staff organised [name of festival] a one off event (depending on future funding) in 2004 specifically Indigenous people by commissioning artworks and dreamtime stories
- The [name of] Festival (yearly) this year had a category for Indigenous youth, celebrate NAIDOC and Reconciliation Weeks

- have provided Aboriginal Storytelling sessions during NAIDOC Week, arranged Aboriginal Cultural Displays and produced fact sheets
- Since 2001 10 councils across [area] joined together to celebrate the annual [name of festival]. This year arranged the [name of festival] Launch, storytelling with music and dance performances and NAIDOC exhibition,

**3. Does your Library have a designated collection of resources *targeting* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?**

Comments provided were

- Koori Newspaper
- picture books, posters, non-fiction, artefacts on display
- Aboriginal studies material
- Indigenous archive
- basic literacy material
- Yes
- 30 items
- within existing collections
- [name of branch library] has collection
- resources marked with flag
- resources marked with flag
- through collection
- 743 items at Central library
- ~300 titles including some journals
- some items in general collection
- separate Reference collection at Headquarters in the Moree library. Integrated lending collection across region which includes video
- part of general collection
- not designated
- designated by flag - consultation suggested to integrate in collection rather than have as a separate collection
- items labelled by flag
- Waterloo has a collection includes Koori Mail, picture books and junior fiction by Aboriginal authors
- currently building this collection of books for all ages plus cds and vibe magazine
- actively collecting material - especially for children - mostly story and picture books. Distributed through out the library service but indicated with spine labels. Only about 50 titles so far
- included in general collection

**4. Does your Library have a designated collection of library resources *about* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?**

Comments provided were

- as part of general collection
- information on land rights
- Aboriginal studies material

- each branch has a collection of material
- general lending and reference
- Aboriginal studies collection – 225 items at [central library] in existing collections
- resources marked with flag
- through collection
- 743 items
- ~250 titles at [central library]
- \$5 000 from ATSSIS to develop collection
- ~300 titles
- items interfiled in main collection but marked with flag
- some items in general collection
- yes - as part of non fiction
- separate Reference collection at Headquarters in the [name of] library. Integrated lending collection across region which includes video
- part of general collection
- not a separate collection but have books about the topic integrated into general collection
- yes - one branch
- designated by flag - some sensitive material is kept in stack
- items labelled by flag
- library maintains in print an original publication about local Aboriginal heritage called "Hands across time : a guide to North Sydney's Aboriginal Culture and History" In addition the library has completely reviewed its collection using the Black Books Bibliography and continues to collect extensively
- provide an extensive collection for children, young adults and adults relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Seek to provide an in depth collection relating to the original inhabitants of the area - kept in local studies, reference and lending"
- Koori" collection - about 600 items - community consultation on selection
- monographs of relevance but not designated
- library materials with spine labels
- in general collection
- yes- particularly anything about local peoples
- non-fiction, history, local history
- included in general collection
- yes - branches

**5. Does your Council have a designated Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Services Community Liaison Officer or similar position?**

**If yes what is the position title?**

The comments provided were

- Indigenous Liaison Officer
- currently position vacant
- 6 month contract

- Community Development Officer - Projects
- Aboriginal Community Development Officer
- Aboriginal Community Development Officer
- Indigenous Community Development Worker
- Aboriginal Community Development Worker
- Aboriginal Liaison Officer, and other Aboriginal designated positions within Council
- Aboriginal Community Development Officer, Aboriginal case workers
- Aboriginal Community Officer
- Aboriginal Liaison Officer
- ATSI Community Access Worker
- Ethnic Community Development Officer
- Community Development Officer - Access and Equity
- Aboriginal Liaison Officer
- Aboriginal Community Worker
- Aboriginal Heritage Manager - shared position between six northern councils
- Aboriginal Projects Officer
- Aboriginal Heritage Officer, Aboriginal Project Officer
- Community Worker, Youth Services
- Resource Coordinator, Guraki Committee
- Aboriginal Community Development Worker
- Aboriginal Liaison Officer
- Community Development Officer - Aboriginal Service
- [name of council] - Aboriginal Community Development Officer; [name of council] - Aboriginal Liaison Officer; [name of council] - Aboriginal Community Project Officer; [name of council] - Aboriginal Support Worker
- Planned
- Aboriginal Liaison Officer
- Aboriginal Community Development Officer
- Aboriginal Heritage Sites Manager (shared with 3 other councils), Aboriginal Community Development Worker (shared with 5 other councils)
- Aboriginal Development Officer
- Yes
- Multicultural Community Worker
- a not yet implemented recommendation of Council's Cultural Plan
- Aboriginal Heritage Officer - employed by 4 councils
- Aboriginal Liaison Officer
- Leisure and Cultural Development Coordinator

**6 Does your Council have an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Services consultative committee?**

The comments provided were

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Committee
- yes - meetings quarterly 12 community reps and 2 councillors

- yes - Aboriginal consultative committee comprises Councillors, Land Council Councillors, Aboriginal Organisation representatives, Aboriginal community worker, State and Federal members of parliament
- Dubbo Aboriginal Working Part - council are members
- Manly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee
- yes - Guraki Committee
- [name of council] only Aboriginal Liaison Committee
- yes Aboriginal Liaison Committee at [name of council] comprises Mayor, 2 councillors and 2 local Aboriginal people
- Reconciliation Committee
- working towards this

**7. Do you have any further comments? e.g. planned services for this community.**

Comments provided were

- Library runs programs to educate the community and be inclusive. Part of Heritage Week included Aboriginal storytelling. NAIDOC Week - displays and activities
- Examining Aboriginal trainee placement
- interest in any wider programs
- social plan 2005-2010 consultative process have been established to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to provide input into the social plan. Meeting 20 June 2004
- plan to further expand resources. [name of council] has MOU with local land councils
- ongoing commitment to service Aboriginal community
- cooperative grant application
- Will consider adoption of the 1995 protocols later this year. Including Indigenous people in consultation for marketing plan
- Social planning process includes Indigenous focus groups as compulsory contribution to Council's Social Plan
- negotiating to appoint and Aboriginal trainee library assistant
- Currently consulting with indigenous groups and developing an Indigenous marketing plan. Expected outcomes are : indigenous collection, activities, Indigenous art work being hung in the library, possible genealogy service. Discussing with Council possible Indigenous employee
- Working with community services department to provide library programs for marginalised children - many of whom are Aboriginal
- NAIDOC Week
- Council hopes to establish an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services consultative committee by mid August
- 6 activities across NAIDOC Week
- vehicle about to be upgraded
- Social plan - more detail on form
- Condobolin TAFE and CDEP have planned services for Aboriginal people in [name of town]. [name of council] Library supports these planned services

with out of normal opening hours, internet use and help with researching library resources

- local action group – [name of council] Residents for Reconciliation
- Work with representatives of community and looking for new ways to engage
- have applied for cooperative grant
- plans to improve relationship with Aboriginal groups, LIAC pamphlet to Aboriginal Centres, review of library resources
- Aboriginal Social Plan
- Aboriginal story telling, planning to use Aboriginal flag stickers to distinguish material
- Reconciliation Group meets - membership is expanding. Social plan being developed. Informal liaisons between Council staff and
- currently researching what services and resources other libraries are providing to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee and will discuss these finding with the [name of] Committee with a view to implementing some targeted programs in the second half of this year
- Because of the nature of our communities this will continue to be an increasingly important part of our work as funds allow
- hope to build on work of library assistant
- a community panel of 1,500 community members is currently being developed by Council. This is to be representative of the LGA's demographics
- have included Aboriginal groups in the planning of the library, some plans for new library
- original inhabitants acknowledged at the commencement of all Council functions and events
- have made attempts with a hostel in the past - would like to address this again
- are in transition
- Council through Reconciliation Committee have had a few ceremonies and erected a mural
- have participated in local events in the Koori community - for example the [name of] community festival and ATSIC visit. Both of these library conducted a display - intend to continue to be involved in these and similar events
- [name of] Council hosts each year the [name of ] Festival which originated from the [name of council] Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consultative committee.
- through local studies have been proactive in documenting the Aboriginal history of the [name of council] area
- Have a great number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in area and the need for library services and programs, particularly for children and youth is great. Had employed and Aboriginal trainee and kept on permanently and found the delivery of services and programs was easier - but employee has left. Are desperate to renew services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people but lack the ideas, funding and contacts to do this. Keen.
- currently extending library. Aim to provide for whole community including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- continue involvement in NAIDOC Week and [name of] Festival. Consultation with Aboriginal community as part of revision of social plan

- Services and activities provided in conjunction with Council's Cultural Officer and Advisory Committee for example Harmony Day, Aboriginal dancer training and NAIDOC Week
- Council has helped establish the [name of] Local Indigenous Knowledge Centre by helping them to get grants for staffing and providing office space and resources in the Economic Development and Community Services building. It is staff part time by local Aboriginal people. They work in the fields of developing knowledge of Aboriginal culture, languages, Aboriginal sites and family history. The Library and [name of] have contact with each other re. Aboriginal family and local history and through occasional guest appearances at storytime. The Library and [name of] keep the networking between us current, but time/cost constraints for both groups are currently strained to the max. We are a small town and many barriers that previously existed between the Aboriginal people and others have been broken down. I think it is fair to say that there is a willingness that in future there will be opportunities to expand Aboriginal services through the library.

### **Bibliography**

State Library of New South Wales, , *Public Library Statistics 2002/03*, compiled by John Blenkinsop and Sue Parkinson; Sydney, State Library of New South Wales, 2004,