

So you want to offer indigenous library services...

Cool In Lib Project, Cooloola Shire Library Service

In 2000, Cooloola Shire Library Service received a \$30 000 Innovations Grant from the State Library Board of Queensland to run our Cool In Lib (Cooloola's Indigenous Library) Project. This was to be a year-long project to establish and improve library services to the indigenous community. Two indigenous employees would be trained in and oversee the establishment of historical, literary, cultural and information resources and services. The employees would undertake research, collection development and events co-ordination in conjunction with the Cool In Lib committee and library staff.

The project had five main objectives:

- Develop library services and collections that will respond to the needs of the indigenous community.
- Research, implement and document new strategies for marketing library services to the indigenous community.
- Develop community partnerships between Cooloola Shire Library Service, community agencies and the indigenous community.
- Increase knowledge and awareness of indigenous issues in the general community with the aim of assisting the reconciliation process.
- Provide 'train the trainer'-type education in cultural, historical, preservation and technology skills so that the indigenous employees can offer training to the community.

Cool In Lib activities

A wide range of specific activities was trialled as part of the project to see what worked (in terms of encouraging our local indigenous community to use the library service).

Establishment of an Indigenous Library Advisory Committee

The Cool In Lib Project had a management committee for the project before we obtained funding. This committee played an integral part in deciding what sort of activities we wanted to carry out. It was essential that the local indigenous community felt some ownership of the project and was kept informed. Membership of the committee consisted of library staff (including indigenous staff), local elders, traditional owners, representatives from the schools' ASPAA groups, aboriginal teacher's aides, youth representatives, representatives from local indigenous organisations, indigenous staff from regional offices of various govern-

ment departments and a couple of non-indigenous residents with a lot of experience working with indigenous communities (one had worked on an aboriginal settlement and the other had a background in indigenous heritage matters in the State government). We are extremely grateful to the elders who were very generous with their time and support.

The management committee met about once a month. The committee's support, advice and ideas were extremely important to the project. Committee members were able to network with the murri informal grapevine and let others know of forthcoming events.

Our Cool In Lib Project management committee will be continuing as an Indigenous Library Advisory Committee. Meetings will be held every three months. The committee will help library staff decide what sort of indigenous events we hope to run in the year and will make suggestions for purchases for the collection.

Employing indigenous staff

Employing indigenous staff is by far the single best thing to do if you want the indigenous community to feel at ease in the library. Before our Cool In Lib project started we did already employ one indigenous staff member (casual/part time) on our circulation desk. With the innovations grant funding we were able to employ a second indigenous staff member and have each of them working for ten hours a week on Cool In Lib initiatives. Incidentally this was nowhere near long enough!

Library staff attended a training session given by one of our indigenous staff. This training covered issues such as shyness and feeling uncomfortable in an institutional environment together with some of the very sad history of race relations.

It was difficult to keep accurate figures to prove that more indigenous people were coming into the library. It certainly seemed to be the case just from casual observation. Our Cool In Lib staff estimate that about 150 new indigenous members were signed on as library members during the year. Some of our new indigenous library members assisted staff by bringing in relevant magazine and newsletter articles on local indigenous community members and issues.

Offering assistance with indigenous family history queries

Most queries received by our indigenous staff related to family history research. Our

part-time indigenous staff received training in family history research from the library's local history officer and from John Oxley Library staff. The main resources used were Births Deaths and Marriages on microfiche and the Tindale information from State Library of Queensland website. The extensive family connections of our two indigenous workers also proved to be very useful.

The majority of enquiries were from young people trying to trace their indigenous background. These queries had to be treated with a great deal of sensitivity. In some cases those enquiring had only recently found out that they had indigenous ancestors and it took a fair bit of courage to come to the library and start their search for a part of the family that had in some cases been kept 'secret'. Our staff did refer people to John Oxley Library and to Community and Personal Histories staff, however lack of transport and/or lack of money meant that most people could not get to Brisbane. Also, most people making inquiries wanted to make the local connection first.

There was a great deal of interest in the photocopies of Barambah and Cherbourg photos that we had obtained from John Oxley Library. Many members of the local indigenous community heard about these photos by word of mouth and came in to look for family members in the photos. Word of mouth certainly spreads far and wide – we even had a query from Victoria.

Establishing an indigenous collection and increasing the number of indigenous books in the general collection

When we started our Cool In Lib project we did not intend to establish a separate indigenous collection. Rather, we intended to add to the number of books dealing with indigenous issues or by indigenous authors in our general collection. Soon after our project started we received a number of donations (books and videos) from the indigenous community. We wanted these donations to be easily found so we decided to house them separately. Our indigenous collection consists of these local donations and of books dealing with aspects of the indigenous history of this area. It also houses the *Koori Mail* and various brochures and pamphlets. Of particular interest in the collection are photocopies of Cherbourg and Barambah photographs held by John Oxley Library and some early histories of Cherbourg. We also obtained copies of a number of university theses about the indigenous history of our area.

The collection is 'not for loan' and is located just outside our local history room. Comfortable seating is provided and we are in the process of arranging for a notice board that will be for indigenous community notices.

Indigenous artwork is also included in the collection. We were very fortunate to receive a beautiful framed picture depicting a Batchalla legend. This was presented to us by elder Aunty Olga Miller who also told the story of the legend.

The indigenous collection looks good, contains some interesting items (many donated) and will hopefully attract people's interest and they will look more closely at our other holdings. We are in the process of preparing bibliographies that will list other books of interest.

Holding specific functions/ exhibitions/events with an indigenous theme

We have held a number of functions with an indigenous focus. The major ones were for NAIDOC Week and the launch of an exhibition of indigenous poetry and art.

NAIDOC Week 2000 saw the launch of our Cool In Lib Project. We were fortunate to get Jackie Huggins up for the launch and Olga Miller, Batchalla elder, from Maryborough. The Mayor attended. Tanya Schafer the indigenous worker at John

Oxley Library also came. We had an exhibition of local indigenous photographs. We borrowed artefacts from the Queensland Museum and had them on display. The speeches were followed by a lunch for the indigenous community. This was extremely successful as we found it gave everyone a chance to mingle and meet. After lunch there was an informal session with Jackie Huggins. Coincidentally, in NAIDOC Week 2000, one of our indigenous employees, Nai Nai Bird, had the opening of an exhibition of her artwork at Cooloola Shire Public Gallery.

PoARTry in Motion

Jeanette Brown, a Cool In Lib employee, was keen to combine the talents of poets and artists and come up with an exhibition that allowed some interaction. With the encouragement of published indigenous poet, Cec Fisher, she started to collect published poems with an indigenous theme and to contact local unpublished poets. The final exhibition featured work by Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Cec Fisher, Maureen Watson, Judith Wright and also local poets including Olga Miller and Peter Jones. Jeanette actually was so inspired she started writing poems herself and they also were included in the exhibition. Photos of the poets and biographical details were included and local indigenous artwork was hung on the walls.

The exhibition was launched on

16 February by the Honourable Matt Foley. Matt read us poetry and generally added to the cultural ambience. Following the launch both Cec Fisher and Maureen Watson read their poetry and local poets also read their own work. The function was a great success — very enjoyable and well attended by our local community. A highlight of the day was the launch of a CD that some local musicians produced by putting to music the words of one of Jeanette Brown's poems.

The PoARTry in Motion exhibition has now been packaged up and we hope to offer it to other libraries who might like to encourage local indigenous poets from their own area to add their own work to the collection.

Holding children's activities and storytelling with an indigenous theme

Our January 2001 school holiday activities had an indigenous theme. Nai Nai built a goorie gonyah from tea tree bark and held children's activities featuring bark and rock painting. Jeanette held a session in which children painted didgeridoos made from cardboard cylinders. Parents and grandparents also attended.

Before conducting the sessions our indigenous staff spent time with our youth services librarian in order to plan the sessions and the publicity for them. ■

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