

## ALIA's year of advocacy. 2010 is ALIA's year of advocacy

### ALIA's advocacy activities

ALIA's National Office has led the drive to raise the profile of libraries on the federal agenda, especially in the areas of education, social inclusion, disability, broadband, and communication. We have made submissions to government inquiries and, as a result, we have had the opportunity to put our case for libraries – public, school, academic, and special – and the role of information professionals, to senior government figures.

Over the past 12 months, under the presidencies of Jan Richards and Graham Black, we have been running our Every Member An Advocate campaign. This campaign has not only drawn attention to the importance of advocacy by all our members on behalf of the profession; it has also involved the development of tangible assets, with a new guide to advocacy and lobbying, evidence, statistics, and case studies available to download from the website (<http://www.alia.org.au/advocacy>).

Sector research and submissions prepared by the ALIA team can also be found on our website and provide useful information which can be adapted by members to make the case for their library and information service.

During the federal election, we produced a campaign kit, which included questions for the political parties and template letters to MPs and opposition candidates.

By the end of the year, there will have been 18 Every Member An Advocate workshops, free to ALIA members, held all around the country, and advocacy will have been a theme at other events, including the ALIA Access 2010 conference in Brisbane in September and the IFLA world conference in Gothenburg in August.

### The need for advocacy

During 2010, the funding situation in many public libraries has been a growing cause for concern. State government contributions to public library services have dwindled over the years, from what was in some places a 50:50 split with local government, down to a funding level of 20 per cent or less of the annual operating costs of the library service.

School libraries have enjoyed a period of investment in new and refurbished buildings, but there are not enough qualified teacher-librarians to run them. University and TAFE libraries have seen the requirement for, and cost of, e-resources rising steadily, without the increase in budget needed to pay for them.

With the impact of the global financial crisis (GFC) on businesses and the corresponding restraint in government offices, special libraries are under pressure to prove their value. Reference and research skills are less highly prized by the Google generation, despite the fact that, outside the library and information profession, few people go past the first page of search engine results.

### Securing our future

Australia may have escaped the worst of the GFC, but we only have to look at the situation overseas, especially in America and the UK, to see the need for advocacy to create a strong platform with government. Funding for individual libraries is in a parlous state and the profession is under attack, with politicians seriously considering the possibility of libraries being run by volunteers.

In some parts of Australia, library and information qualifications are not being given the respect they deserve and it is essential that we put energy into making the case for employing people with the appropriate skills.

### Every Member An Advocate

While the ALIA board has taken the decision to invest in lobbying and advocacy through the national office in 2010,

it is important for all ALIA members to advocate for their profession. Advocacy takes many forms. It ranges from simply being good at your job through to communicating the value of the service you provide.

Find out more about how you can participate in the Every Member An Advocate campaign on our website <http://www.alia.org.au/advocacy> and if you would like to talk about lobbying and advocacy, email ([advocacy@alia.org.au](mailto:advocacy@alia.org.au)) or call the ALIA member advocacy helpline – 0404 456749.

### Every Member an Advocate workshops

During 2010, ALIA will have run 18 Every Member An Advocate workshops in nine locations – Adelaide, Brisbane, Cairns, Canberra, Darwin, Hobart, Melbourne, Perth, and Sydney.

The three-hour workshops have been free for members (\$50 for non-members) and we have had excellent feedback about the format and content.

Some comments about what people liked best:

“The discussion with other librarians and sharing of ideas and real-life examples”

“The explanation of the difference between advocacy and lobbying and also the practical elements of getting key messages down”

“The balance between working together as one large group and in smaller groups”

“Networking, bouncing ideas, trying to problem-solve”

“The simplicity of the workshop”

“Practical tips and ways to improve advocacy and lobbying in organisations”

“Learning about the best tactics”

“The opportunity to discuss other people's situations”

Each workshop has attracted a dozen or more participants, and in Perth next month (November) we have laid on an extra session, as the two original events were booked out months ahead. We estimate that, by the end of the year, more than 250 ALIA members will have experienced an Every Member An Advocate workshop.

The venues have been organised by ALIA's Local Liaison Officers and we have been grateful to the state, university, public, and law libraries that have provided us at no charge with the facilities to hold these events.

Sue McKerracher, who runs the workshops, has discovered some wonderful advocacy success stories as she has travelled around the country meeting ALIA members. She says, “At the start of the workshop most people are modest about their advocacy skills, but during the group working session, it's clear that most are advocating for their library and the profession on a daily basis. It's particularly impressive when you think that many ALIA members, especially those working in special libraries, lobby and advocate on their own, without the support of colleagues.”

Sue has gathered great examples and ideas along the way, including:

- The university librarian who saw an important figure at a distance during the opening of an exhibition. She pursued her quarry out of the gallery to a nearby pub and managed to strike up a conversation at the bar. A glass or two later, he agreed to make a presentation to her students.
- The law librarian who saved her firm from a potentially costly and damaging action by providing a junior partner with the correct information before they gave erroneous advice to a client. The senior partners were reminded about the value of their library and the quality of the information given.
- The prison librarian who proved that libraries can save

## – and what a year it has been

lives. She found a book in his native language for a Russian offender who said he would remain on hunger strike until he had something to read.

- The health librarian who calculated the time saved by his team carrying out research for medical professionals and estimated that it was the equivalent of a full-time nursing position.
- The public librarian whose maintenance budget had been slashed, who turned it into a 'killer fact' – "the council spends less on maintaining our library than you would spend on fixing things in your own home."
- Several school librarians, who said that the library was one of the key factors used by prospective parents to judge the quality of the school.

She comments, "The most rewarding thing about the workshops is hearing from ALIA members that they can take the ideas we've talked about during the session and apply them in their workplaces. People also say they will share what they've learned with their colleagues, so ALIA's advocacy message will have reached many members and library and information professionals as a result of the Association's investment in this free PD."

There are still five workshops, in Sydney in October, and Perth in November. Check the ALIA professional development calendar for dates, venues and registration details <http://www.alia.org.au/education/pd/pd.services/training.calendar.html>.

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## How did you use our federal election campaign kit?

We have had a very good response to the ALIA federal election campaign kit available from when the election was called.

The kit included key messages, contact details for the major parties, the top 10 lobbying priorities for ALIA members, links to other resources, and two template letters to MPs and opposition candidates: <http://www.alia.org.au/election2010/>.

We asked the ALIA Public Libraries Advisory Committee members how they had used the kit. Jan Richards, in Orange, told us, "I forwarded the link to ABC radio, who were doing a series of interviews with local candidates and had asked listeners to send in questions. I felt that there was a good selection of questions in the ALIA document and I know that the ABC incorporated some of them into their discussion."

George Cowcher, from the State Library of Western Australia, said, "I didn't use the templates myself – even though I think they are very good – but did read with interest the responses from the parties. I think the top ten priorities are interesting and well worth keeping in mind. I think the work that ALIA did was great and can have ongoing benefit if people choose to use it, for example for state elections." As a case in point, Margaret Allen, State Librarian of WA and Vice-President of ALIA, used the priorities as part of her presentation at an event in September, going on to focus specifically on digitisation and the National Year of Reading.

ALIA Executive Director Sue Hutley explained, "It was incredibly useful to have the three main parties respond to the series of questions we posed. We will now be able to quote their responses back to them about the role of libraries, digitisation, the National Broadband Network, and other major initiatives."

We would love to hear more stories from members. Contact us through [advocacy@alia.org.au](mailto:advocacy@alia.org.au).

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