

1992 Nancy Booker Lecture/Vonnie Young Award

Susan Pescud reports a bleak present but a brighter future for Children's Librarians

The Nancy Booker Lecture, hosted last year by the NSW CYSS and Public Libraries Sections, was given by Julie Barkman, Senior Librarian, Children's and Young Adult Services at Sutherland Shire Library and Information Service. Her subject, *Recruitment and Retention of specialist Children's and Young Adult Librarians in NSW public libraries*, is also the topic of her thesis for an MLib at the University of NSW.

Julie's overview of the state of Children's Librarianship in NSW was based on a postal survey of all 89 public library systems. Her survey covered January 1988 to December 1990, when there was a very high turnover of Children's Librarians, most pronounced in Sydney where 70% of all Children's Librarians left their positions. She also interviewed 10 current and 10 former Children's Librarians from Sydney public libraries, to try to explain the high turnover. Some problems are:

Poor remuneration

Poor pay contributes to the decision of experienced Children's Librarians to leave their field in search of greater rewards. It also makes Children's Librarianship a less

attractive option for new graduates who may find better salaries outside the public library system or simply outside their field.

Low status

Poor pay is linked to another issue—the low status of the position. The Children's Librarian's position in public libraries is often not given the same status as other specialist librarians.

Management were generally supportive, but sometimes the Children's Librarian was not recognised as a senior member of staff. Also there was a lack of recognition by other staff members, who considered the 'cutting and pasting' tasks of the Children's Librarian to be of little professional value.

Burn out

It is ironic that the variety, challenge, and public contact that attract people to Children's Librarianship may also be the cause of their leaving.

Lack of time and staffing, particularly in small libraries, may result in high levels of stress that cause some librarians to leave their position. Workload and responsibilities including taking classes and story-times; management duties; collection

development; reading professional literature and children's literature and attending workshops and seminars. All this required work far beyond the normal 35 hour week, and worse where support staff is non-existent or consists only of the most inexperienced member of staff.

This is a bleak picture, but Julie believes that possible solutions include:

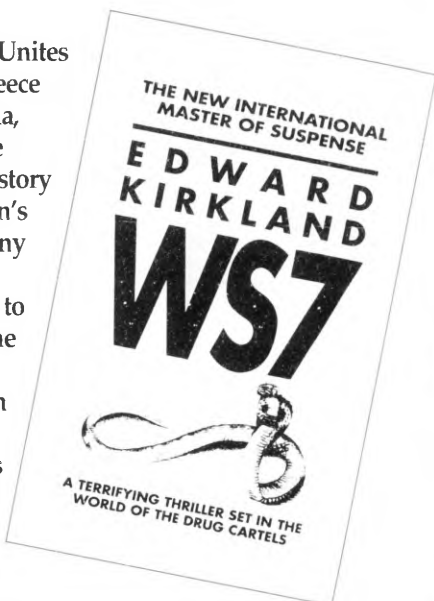
- improved opportunities for training for Children's Librarians in tertiary institutions;
- improvement in status with higher remuneration, inclusion as part of the management team and the employment of support staff.

Children's Librarians can help to improve their status by setting and meeting objectives; by using statistics and performance measures to support their positions; and by involvement in professional organisations.

Julie's research highlights the commitment and love of their work that is evident in many Children's Librarians. If only the problems can be resolved, there must surely be a brighter future for Children's Librarianship in NSW. ■

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