Tech for tots

Squealing and laughter are not the normal sounds coming from a technology user education session held at a public library, but these were some of the sounds generated from participants attending the 'Technology for Toddlers' sessions at Logan City Council Libraries during February.

Hands on computer and technology workshops were held for parents and carers and their children aged 2 to 5 years. Library staff demonstrated and led participants in using a range of free online resources available to help develop literacy and computer skills in young children.

The sessions aimed to provide participants with opportunities to gain new knowledge and understanding of the ways technology can help their children learn.

Session content focused on creating confidence in using the computer and resources both for adults and toddlers as well as promoting library resources, e-books, and educational online resources. The first part of the sessions involved building confidence in using the computer. A range of word, alphabet, literacy, mathematics skills, and other resources focused on concepts suitable for toddlers. E-books, online resources such as 'Bookflix' and 'Tumblebook', and book and character related websites were also examined with participants.

What always amazes me and the parents/adults attending these sessions is the ability young children have to quickly acquire new skills using technology, and the attraction of technology to hold the attention of a very young child much longer than ever thought possible.

Madeline, just one of the two-year-olds who attended these sessions, had never used a mouse or computer before, but by the end of the session she was able to use the mouse to navigate and select, create an online drawing, use an e-book, and find and type the letters of her name on the keyboard. After the session Madeline's grandparents booked time on the library internet computers for the following week so they could continue exploring resources using the computer with her.

It is always good to see the difference between the start of the sessions where toddlers are just pretending to use the computer and other resources and 'bashing' the keyboard to the end of the sessions where they are actually using keys and the mouse in a successful way.

The sessions are not just about educating the young children how to use the computers and learning software, but they are about educating the parents and carers attending. Parents and carers are the first and most influential educators of children, and these sessions are about putting quality free technology resources available for the very young into the hands of these educators. Many adults are happy to explore technology resources with young children at home or at the library, but there are many who need help to know where to start and what is available. Children don't just learn by using a computer or watching television but through the active interaction and guidance they receive when using these resources with a parent or carer. There is a broad range of excellent online resources available for toddlers and it is all free if you know where to look.

Apart from being very enjoyable sessions for both the participants and facilitator, the sessions always encourage parents and carers to think about the different ways of using computers with toddlers, not only as a learning tool but also as a tool that toddlers can use for communicating and creating.

Jennifer Hall
Young Peoples Librarian
Logan City Council Libraries
jenniferhall@logan.qld.gov.au

Curtin University archival studies at New Norcia

Each year, a group of students studying archives concepts and practice within the Department of Information Studies at Curtin University of Technology travel to the monastery town of New Norcia, the only monastic town in Australia (**http://www.newnorcia.wa.edu.au/**) to work on processing the unique historical records housed there. New Norcia was founded in 1846 by Spanish Benedictine monks and has been an Aboriginal mission, an artistic and cultural centre, and a home to schools.

For over ten years our recently retired colleague Dr Margaret Pember took a group of students to New Norcia because, in her words, "The students receive a marvellous history lesson. They process records ... from the personal records of individual members of the Benedictine Community ... to New Norcia schools records, to records of farm activities and the Abbey Press". The University acknowledged Margaret's long standing commitment by presenting her with a Curtin 2008 Teaching Award - Citation for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning: For enhancement of student learning in archives education through workplace integrated learning opportunities with special reference to the Benedictine Community of New Norcia program.

This archives experience has continued under the supervision of Pauline Joseph and the New Norcia Archivist Peter Hocking (who is an academic colleague of the Department). During the week-long field trip, the students stay in the Monastery Guesthouse and enjoy menus that follow Benedictine rules. However the main purpose of the field trip is to put the theory into practice. Students are allocated small collections of archival records and process these collections according to international best practice archival principles. Until the records are processed, they cannot be made available for study and research.

The Monastery at New Norcia has another link to the profession in Western Australia through the annual New Norcia Library Lecture. The lecture has been held in spring each year since the mid-1990s and features a leading national or international guest addressing an issue of current interest. The lecture day also includes the opportunity to take advantage of the wonderful hospitality provided the Monastery community. The New Norcia Lecture is actively supported by the Curtin Department of Information Studies and has become an increasingly popular event for the library profession in Western Australia, with recent lectures sold out well in advance.

Assoc Prof Kerry Smith
and academic colleagues
Dept Information Studies
Curtin University of Technology
K.Smith@curtin.edu.au