NEW ZEALAND
public libraries

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Public libraries are places where the feet can rest and the mind can soar

Penny Carnaby, National Librarian, New Zealand

On a recent private visit to Cape Town I was fortunate to spend a day with Johan Swiegelaar (Director: Library and Archive Services) and Ninnie Steyn (Manager of Library and Information Services), discussing the similarities and differences of providing public library services in our very different countries. The scale is different yet many issues are familiar; and the biggest issue of all is keeping up with change. So what are the main trends for public libraries in New Zealand?

Unlike Western Cape, public libraries in New Zealand receive no direct assistance from national government. (As our total population is only four million, we have no provincial political level.) There are 74 city and district councils, all but one running an independent public library service, as this is considered a purely local government function. Funding is purely from local government, plus what we can raise ourselves. Every library is required by its council to raise a small percentage of its annual operating cost (mine is 10%) from external sources. Library managers have to be inventive! This is usually done through a mixture of small user charges and other sources, for example, sponsorships, donations, sales of cancelled books or souvenirs, or contracting to provide other services such as selling bus timetables.

Because of this independence, public libraries have to struggle to coordinate themselves. While I can see it sometimes brings frustrations, I would be happy to have the level of cooperation and assistance you do between provincial and local government to provide libraries. However, our National Library has lately provided seed funding, administration and technical assistance on a number of leading edge projects.

Public Libraries of New Zealand Strategic Framework

The National Library of New Zealand, the Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA), and Local Government New Zealand Association have jointly produced a readable and practical blueprint for future development of public libraries for the next ten years, showcasing the best projects in the country. It is intended to be used by library managers for their own planning, and also to explain to funders and government officials where we aim to take our libraries and why. Well worth dipping into for ideas at *www.natlib.govt.nz/en/about/Public_Libraries_Strategic_Framework.html*

Matapihi

This is a joint project between a number of large libraries, museums and other cultural institutions to make heritage materials available online with a single search. Try it out at *www.matapihi.org.nz*

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Any questions

This is a real time online bilingual reference service aimed at school children from ten upwards, provided by the National Library's School Library Service, the Ministry of Education, and eight large public libraries. It has been so popular that it was almost overwhelmed. Other public libraries will be asked to assist. *www.anyquestions.co.nz*

Epic

Only rich libraries can afford international database licences, right? Wrong! Over 200 of New Zealand's libraries from public, academic and business sectors, plus the Ministry of Education, jointly negotiated a deal for 14 Gale and Ebsco databases which are now available throughout the country, including in every school. The key for every public library to have it, was in the funding formula chosen by the consortium, based on population and likely use, so even small libraries could afford to join, and their small contributions all helped to make the total viable. Achieving national licensing across all library sectors is a world first. However, getting the funding and the deal was only the first step. We now need to focus on adequate training for all library staff to use the databases effectively, and adequate promotion of the databases to the public. This is being coordinated by LIANZA to try to bring all public libraries on a level to provide a consistent standard of information capability to the public. Not easy when the largest local authority has the resources of 380 000 people and the smallest has less than 3500.

We do have national standards against which to measure our public library services at *www.lianza.org.nz/publications* (Go to Online Resources and type in Standards). They are written by a LIANZA committee and are not binding on local authorities, although some have formally adopted them, and most of the others are aware of the measurements. It is very useful for a library manager to be able to quote the standards in support of a request, and to be able to back that up with national statistics (collected by LIANZA) showing how other libraries measure up. As the editor of the latest edition, I can vouch for the professionalism which has gone into ensuring that the standards are achievable but meet public needs. Most

measures are expressed in per capita terms so small libraries can meet them as well as large ones.

National promotion of public libraries is mainly coordinated by Metronet, the 19 city libraries, some of whom have professional marketing staff. Metronet has run two small television campaigns. (We had to save up for two years each time to do this, but are still learning what works best!)

Lobbying to get libraries a major role in the government's Digital Strategy has helped to focus government attention on the value of public libraries to support dissemination of e-government information, and to train the public to move into the digital age. We hope funding will shortly follow…The New Zealand Digital Strategy revolves around three categories (invented by librarians): connectivity (the equipment and bandwidth), content (both existing information, and creation of new information, particularly New Zealand heritage and science), and capacity (training). We are bidding for funds from the Digital Strategy to create a People's Network similar to the British model so every public library will provide a free Internet centre and training in use of a range of software, including how to create online content. Some of the larger libraries have already gone beyond this with learning centres with free access to Internet and office software, and professional staff to

provide individual and group assistance. In the meantime, every public library provides some form of public Internet access but most charge for it.

Another major trend in New Zealand is improving multicultural service as New Zealand becomes more diverse. I am sure we could learn a lot from South Africa about providing a library service for multiple cultures and languages. One of the rapidly growing populations in New Zealand now is of course South African.

So, although the kiwi is a flightless bird, the minds of Kiwi librarians are soaring.

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