



## Knowledge Centres / Cate Richmond, NT Library

In 2004, the Northern Territory (NT) Library implemented a new Libraries and Knowledge Centres program for libraries in remote communities. The program was developed in response to requests from indigenous communities who wanted assistance to preserve their cultural heritage and provide appropriate access to it.

I'll begin with an overview of the NT Library and the Libraries and Knowledge Centres program and talk about the 'Our Stories' component of the program, which is a key component of the program. I'll also talk about the evaluation of the program which Martin Nakata and a team of academics undertook for us and share some stories about how some of the content from those local databases is being used in communities.

I've chosen *Engaging with the Community* as the title for this presentation because just a few months ago, the Libraries and Knowledge Centres program won the inaugural *Chief Minister's Award for Excellence in Public Sector Management* in the category of *Engagement with the Community* and we were also highly commended in the category of *Indigenous Community Development*. What was really nice about the timing of that award was the opportunity to celebrate that success with both our own staff but with also the Community Library Officers who were in Darwin for their annual training forum. We couldn't have won those awards without the ongoing commitment of those Community Library Officers who work very hard in their remote communities to provide library services.

As a quick overview, the NT Library is the equivalent of a State Library. It is administered by the NT Department of Local Government Housing and Sport. NT Library is responsible for a centralised model for all public libraries across the territory and one of our roles is to facilitate annual operational funding from the NT Government to local councils for the provision of library services. We provide advice and support and training to the six municipal and twenty-two community government jurisdictions where there is a library service. Community libraries are predominantly located in indigenous communities, mainly across the top end with a couple in the centre. There are twenty-two remote libraries and they come in all shapes and sizes. Some are located in council premises like the one at Milingimbi. Others are joint use libraries located in high schools where they serve both the school and the community.

The libraries contain a wide range of resources including books, magazines, videos and DVDs. All have at least one computer available for public access and most have Internet access. Through the Internet community members have access to the combined online catalogue of NT libraries and to a wide range of online resources including for example the *Health and Wellness Resource Centre* and ebooks such as *Tumble Books*. NT Libraries recently introduced the *Your Tutor Service*. It is a free Internet service that provides students or adults who are learning or studying with one to one real time tutoring in English, maths, science and research based subjects. Students aged 9 to adult can talk to a live tutor online every Monday to Friday 3-8pm NT time.

Each community library is staffed by one or more Community Library Officers and is usually open between 10 – 30 hours per week. The Community Library Officers or CLOs are employed by local councils to operate the library and provide that library service to their community. With ongoing support from NT Library they provide a regular and sustainable service. They are usually local and long term members of their communities and have demonstrated a real commitment to the communities that they provide library services to.

Jacqueline and Selina describe some of the things that they do at Milingimbi Library. They run story telling sessions with crèche children. They have Internet access for information. People come in to check and send email and use Internet banking and its usually the women who use Internet banking they notice. They lend books and DVDs, videos and children's CDs. We now have the Our Story database in that library and as soon as that was set up people started coming in to look at what the database had to offer. Jacqueline and Selina have commented that that is one of their main jobs now because it involves adding information to local resources and making sure that images that are viewed by the community are restricted if appropriate, for example, if a person passes away.

For NT Children's Week they have an art competition and a sausage sizzle for the whole school. The best art on the theme of '*what makes me happy*' was awarded a prize and the art was displayed in the library.

A small team of staff provide ongoing training and support and that involves onsite visits to all the communities and regular contact by telephone and email - often a weekly basis. We have one staff member based in Alice Springs and the rest of us are based in Darwin but clock up a lot of miles.

The Libraries and Knowledge Centre Program – what we found was many indigenous communities are exploring ways to preserve their cultural heritage and provide appropriate access to it. There is a focus on repatriation of local material and the preservation of old photos, tapes and video recordings and documents. There is recognition that these items need to be preserved in a digital format. In communities where digitisation is well advanced there is further recognition of the need to structure and organise that digital material so that it is easily retrieved and accessed. There is high demand for access to local material. And for personal copies of family photos and recordings of songs and stories.

In June 2004, NT Libraries implemented a new Libraries and Knowledge Centre model. The model is built on the services that NT Libraries already provides through the community libraries. It is presented as a series of building blocks comprised of traditional library concepts plus indigenous knowledge concepts. The model outlines the essential components and who is responsible for providing each of these. The components include the library system, community knowledge and knowledge database, staff, and a place for the community to service. The strength of the model lies in the fact that it builds on that existing infrastructure in the community library and that it is sustainable through the ongoing funding and support that NT Libraries provides.

A key component of the program is the *Our Story* database, which enables communities through their local library to access, store and make accessible digitised material related to their cultural heritage. NT Library evaluated several products before selecting the *Ara Irititja* software that was developed specifically for Pitjantjatjara communities in central Australia. The database has a simple user friendly interface and a proven record of successful implementation and use by indigenous people. An important feature of the database is the ability to restrict access to individual items to cater to cultural sensitivities. Parts of the database can be customised to reflect local names and language.

The database stores and displays any digital media so that photos, sound recordings, videos etc can all be viewed through the one interface. It was designed as a stand alone database and is not an Internet enabled product, obviously for good reasons in remote communities where connectivity and reliability are not always guaranteed. Storage capacity and response time are therefore are not dependent on Internet access. Additional storage capacity is provided through portable external hard drives.

NT Library has negotiated a territory wide licence for *Ara Irititja*, which allows it to be installed in all Northern Territory public libraries at no cost to local communities. Ongoing licence fees are met by NT Library. *Ara Irititja* was re-branded for NT Libraries as *Our Story*. In all cases the community owns the content in the database and the data is stored according to rules set by community leaders. NT Library technical support and library management expertise ensure that content in the database is appropriately structured and stored and is appropriately archived according to local requirements as well as made accessible to the community.

In summary, Library and Knowledge Centres provide access to knowledge and information through core library services including English literacy and information literacy programs. They enable the acquisition and preservation of local knowledge and provide training and support to community members engaged in acquiring and preserving knowledge. They also provide access to recreational activities to all groups within the community. When Vicky (Nakata) highlighted some of the issues that came out of the digitisation workshop, it was quite interesting. We are in a different position to a lot of other institutions who have a lot of indigenous content in their collections but don't necessarily have the links back to the community. The content in each of the local database has come out of the community. It is very much a community database that is managed by them. The intellectual property and copyright issues come into play when people from outside the community want access to those resources.

Our Story has now been installed in 10 communities: Wadeye, Peppimenarti, Milingimbi, Angurugu, Umbakumba, Barunga, Ti Tree, Ltyentye Apurte, Pirlangimpi and Milikapati. Planning has also commenced at Ramingining. Many of the local databases contain a significant amount of material – the Wadeye database for example has more than 20,000 items including photos from every clan group. Elders and community members continue to provide content to enrich items in the database by adding local stories and information. Material identified as public is accessible to the entire community through a computer located in the Wadeye library. Backup processes are in place to ensure data is not lost due to hardware or power failure and that was actually quite an issue at Wadeye where this material had been digitised - some of it quite a long time ago. It was sitting on one computer in the museum and of course when the last cyclone scare came through there was a lot of concern about what would happen if that computer happened to be destroyed. We're pleased to say that we have been able to help them with that particular issue.

A read only copy of the database is available at the school in Wadeye as well.

The flexibility of the program means that library services don't always have to be delivered within a designated library space. Programs may better meet community needs if they are delivered somewhere else, for example, at a childcare centre or women's centre or art centre. Portable computer equipment enables database access wherever people need it - under a shady tree or a bush trek. All of this can be achieved without compromising the key components of the model.

The key focus for libraries is on literacy. Access to information and preservation of culture. Literacy programs and the promotion of reading can occur anywhere anytime. The LKC model has the potential to facilitate the joining up of other government and non-government services.

Training in all aspects of managing the LKC enables the community members to develop or increase their skills. Ongoing IT support and training ensure that local services are relevant and sustainable. With the introduction of *Our Story*, many Community Library Officers have taken on the additional role of database facilitators; identifying and gathering local content, training community members to use the database and facilitating the ongoing development of the content by working with community members to provide additional information and stories.

The program has been very successful and in all cases the number of visitors to remote libraries has increased significantly. Its appeal is that it contains local material, both historical and contemporary, cultural and personal.

In June 2005, NT Libraries commissioned an evaluation of the Libraries and Knowledge Centres model and the evaluation was undertaken by a group of academics headed by Martin Nakata. Other members were Vicky Nakata, Sonja Smallerken, Victor Hart, Jane Anderson, Jane Hunter and several NTL staff. The team visited 3 Libraries and Knowledge Centres, talked with community members, elected members of community government councils, council staff, community agencies and community members at each site. They also spoke with government and non-government agencies including those with policy responsibilities, and with a range of service providers. The findings of the evaluation were very positive with the evaluation team reporting that the LKC program could be a key infrastructure for building capacity in indigenous communities. And that it provided an innovative approach to engaging with community needs for knowledge and info. A brief quote from the report:

*“The LKC concept is a model for the delivery of relevant and sustainable information services in the NT has the potential to be a key infrastructure element for NT Government’s plan for building capacity in regions and better futures for all Territorians. The LKC concept could become a leading example for the way such services can be delivered to Indigenous Australians. We strongly recommend that future developments of LKCs be sustained within the NT Government’s plans for Joined Up services, administrative agreements and focused outcomes so that innovative services of this kind can be extended to all communities in the Territory.”*

The evaluation report contains a number of recommendations for further development of the program and NTL is now developing strategies to address 3 key areas: literacy - particularly early years literacy; intellectual property and copyright issues; and training of Community Library Officers. The report has already delivered many benefits to Northern Territory Libraries well beyond the agreed objectives. For example Martin has invited us to participate in further research around indigenous digital collections and we’re in the planning stages of other research programs with universities and national institutions around aspects of the program.

Word has spread about the program and its potential and I’d love to be able to stand here and say we have had fantastic success with influencing the NT Government but we’re actually going through a local government reform in the NT at the moment and until that process is put in place it will be a bit difficult to see how we are going to make that influence but we certainly hope that we will be in there helping to shape some of that. And thanks to Martin and the team for giving us the evidence with which to do that.

The evaluation report and our response to it are on our website. A brief mention of future plans for the program. Apart from those research projects, we hope to bring some of that local content from each community database up into a territory wide version of *Our Story* on Internet. That is where we will run into the issues that other institutions are facing about how we make that content available and make sure that we’ve got appropriate permissions and so on. That will require a lot of close work with each community to negotiate that step of the project. We are also participating in the trial of the next generation of software under a project driven by the Anindilyakwa Land Council on Groote Eylandt. *Memory Place* is being developed as an open source product so that different organisations can use the code and customise according to their own needs. A large group of people from government and non-government agencies and universities are meeting quite regularly in Darwin now to exchange ideas and information and to contribute to the ongoing development of *Memory Place*.

I’d like to finish with a couple of brief stories about how some of the content is being used. The LKC program extends the boundaries of what might be considered traditional library work and often requires broader skills. Here we have Cindy from Amadjara filming Hazel collecting bush food. As well as learning how to manage the content in the database, Cindy learned how to use a video camera and set out to record and document local practices which were then added to *Our Story*. In Milingimbi on the day this photo was taken, Oscar came into the library immediately following a family funeral to turn off photos of the deceased person. The database can actually allow for those sensitivities.

In Anuragu, Elizabeth Caldwell, who provides some support to the local library staff has noted that when people first encounter the database they use it quite passively – they sit and watch while it is explained and demonstrated. Following this they may view the entire photo collection at their own pace using the mouse to move to the beginning of the collection. Once people become familiar with *Our Story* and its content, their interaction involves much more targeted use. For example they may want images for a family function such as a birthday. The images may be printed and displayed as part of the birthday celebration.

One of the outcomes of the Wadeye database was community access to resources that were previously unavailable. Gemma pictured here found a photo of her family totem in the database. The family had never before had access to a digital image of their totem. The image was printed off and then screen printed on to t-shirts which were worn at a family funeral.

Bernice Cavanaugh is the community library officer at ?? near Alice Springs. When the library received a book written by Roy McFadyen, Bernice realised that the author may have known some of her family. Mr McFadyen lived and worked at Loves Creek Station near Alice Springs from 1937 to 1942. Bernice wrote to him to ask for more information and whether he had photos of her family. Mr McFadyen is now in his 80s and invited Bernice to come to Brisbane. Bernice and another young woman from the community travelled to Brisbane to record an oral history of Mr McFadyen's time in central Australia. We sent along a staff member to provide technical support and Mr McFadyen presented Bernice with a set of photos from his photographic collection and donated a second set to the library. This wonderful material would have been lost to the community but for Bernice taking the initiative to contact Mr McFadyen. We like to think that she had the confidence and support to do that through this program. She has gone on to seek out other information about her community as a result of that.