

## **ALIES Presentation – Jenni Burgess**

### **A Virtual Library in the S.A. Department for Families and Communities**

#### **Background**

The Department for Families and Communities, in South Australia, is a large state government department comprising areas such as ageing, public housing, homelessness, family and child welfare, child protection, disability, domiciliary care, youth justice and disaster recovery.

The Department employs over 6000 staff all over South Australia representing many different occupations from call centre operators to social workers and psychologists, from architects to policy makers, speech therapists, nurses and podiatrists.

#### **Why a Virtual Library?**

It would be impossible to have a physical library which met the needs of this diverse group of staff let alone the volunteers, foster parents, carers, non government organizations, and other groups who use the service.

However, there are two small physical collections one is part of the Disability SA Information Hub and serves the disability community, parents and carers of those with a disability, as well as staff, non government organisations and students in the disability field.

The central collection, covers all the other subject areas which the department encompasses and as well as staff, serves volunteers, prospective adoptive parents, foster carers, and NGOs.

The book and audio visual collections are small and contain mainly recent material although historical, departmental publications are always kept.

The distributed nature of the client groups means that most customers interact with the library service online, via email or telephone and may seldom, if ever, visit the physical library.

It makes sense to make as many resources as possible available online, so that staff in all parts of the state have equitable access to them.

#### **Access to the Virtual Library**

The Virtual Library is available to staff through the DFC Intranet and the DFC internet site. The two sites mirror each other as closely as possible so maintenance is easier and library staff do most of this themselves. The only differences are that the Library catalogue and the Blog are only available on the intranet.

The intranet site requires no login and is most used when people are at work within the department. There are two links from the Intranet's home page.

The internet site is available 24/7 from any PC with internet access. In this case, staff login with a generic username and password as we are not licensed to make our subscription products available to people outside the department.

The two sites are maintained because many users are unable to find time to use online resources when they are at work and prefer to do their research after hours. Google Analytics is used to watch the traffic to the internet site.

## Benefits

- Equitable access - all staff, wherever they are located, can access the resources at the same time. Access is also available after hours and away from the workplace.
- A wider range of resources can be provided as many of the databases and journals cover multiple subject areas.
- More cost effective use of the budget. We couldn't cover all the subject areas adequately with print resources for the same investment.
- Current awareness services are facilitated by technology such electronic tables of contents, auto alerts from databases, RSS feeds etc.
- Resources are always up to date e.g. journal articles, online reports, nursing and allied health textbooks

## Challenges

- Maintenance  
Ensuring that access remains stable, this is more of an issue with electronic journals, than databases.
- Funding  
There is never enough money to cover the vast array of online journals and databases needed to serve such a varied customer base. Tough decisions have to be made, statistics and feedback are vital.
- IT access  
Technologically challenged staff may feel intimidated. This is overcome by ensuring that the personal service is still available, it is not only about self help.  
Not all staff have access to the same IT facilities, some have low bandwidth speed making searching difficult.
- Training  
This is a constant demand which must be met to enable staff to make best use of the online resources provided. Some staff don't have the skills, some hope they will never have to acquire them and some can't wait to be shown how to use these online sources. We offer telephone support as well.  
We are currently investigating developing some online tutorials
- Promotion  
Constant promotion of the online resources available and how to use them. This is primarily through attendance at network or team meetings, articles in online newsletters, targeted emails, trials of new products, the library blog etc.
- Suppliers  
Some publishers are not prepared or organized to provide institutional access to their products, this seems particularly the case with some management resources e.g. McKinsey Quarterly, Safari Books, Books 24/7  
Some publishers restrict access to specified IP ranges, this has been a problem in the past in the state government where all departments use

floating iP addresses, this has largely been overcome with the use of referring URLs and jumpstarts.

#### **What does the future hold?**

- a federated search engine
- the library catalogue online
- webinars or interactive online tutorials in which staff
- separate areas of the internet site for parents, carers, NGOs etc

#### **What do library staff say?**

Library staff aim to provide the best and fastest customer service possible, they pride themselves on delivering excellent customer service. What we lack in physical facilities and surroundings we make up for in the standard of customer service offered.

#### **What do the customers say?**

Most staff find the Virtual Library very convenient but they know that they can still ask the staff to do literature searches or find information for them.

#### **Conclusion**

If the customer is always right, I'll give them the last word by playing the recently completed library video.

This is a rather amateurish effort but it was our first foray into video production. The real win for me was not in the quality of the video but in the fact that busy (and nervous) people were willing to travel to Adelaide to speak about what the library service does for them!