



Australian
Library and
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Association

MEDIA RELEASE

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Practical support through libraries the goal for new national disaster recovery program

As calls for coordinated support increase in the wake of the devastating bushfires, the national body representing Australia's library community has taken action to create a dedicated Disaster Recovery Support role, aimed at supporting not only bushfire victims in Victoria but also Queensland's flood affected communities and victims of disaster nationally into the future.

A new paid position has been established with the aim of providing practical, coordinated support. The position will be coordinated by the Australian Library and Information Association and has the backing of representatives of the library community and the book trade.

"Libraries are very much at the heart of their communities, and library staff are generous people, but we are also practical," Executive Director of the Australian Library and Information Association, Sue Hutley, said.

"Disaster support is as much about timing and usefulness as it is about need. We want to make sure that donations and support from our industry are coordinated and distributed at the right time, in the right place, to be useful. This is vital not only for the recipients of that support but also for those who so much want to help, but aren't quite sure how to do that effectively," she said.

The decision to create a national coordination position is the result of a meeting convened by the Australian Library and Information Association and included representatives from public libraries in the Victorian bushfire region, public and school libraries and associations, local government, the State Library of Victoria and booksellers.

"We knew there was a great commitment to help amongst members of our industry but we also realised that central coordination for not just this event but also other disaster recovery efforts would add enormous value to that commitment," Ms Hutley said.

The move has been welcomed by industry representatives. All organisations connected to Australia's libraries will be called upon to support and contribute towards the Disaster Recovery Project Manager position, which will be coordinated nationally by the Australian Library and Information Association. There will also be a concerted effort to build on the experience and knowledge gained from disaster recovery efforts past and present, to provide a resource for the whole profession and the nation.

Ms Jane Grace, currently Outreach Manager for Yarra Plenty Library Service, is acting in the position and has already begun to work with the bushfire families and wider communities to ensure appropriate support is provided. Ms Grace is also working with Queensland colleagues to provide support to flood affected areas.

"People are often well-meaning, but getting the needs and requirements right for the people on the ground is our aim," Ms Grace said.



“The Victorian libraries really are providing an amazing service in these difficult times and making a difference in people’s lives,” she said.

“At this point, our focus is on finding out what people need and when the best time to deliver that is. It’s a long term project and we will share what we learn with other organisations to develop a model for disaster recovery through the national learning and literacy network that includes all levels of government, school, state and public libraries.

“What we do know is that at the moment the communities affected by the fires are very much focused coming to grips with their loss and the absolute basics – accommodation and food. Some schools are reopening so that children can return to their friends and start to deal with the loss of their friends and the physical change in their environments.

“We will now work with those communities to find out what comes next. It’s about restoring some sense of normality in the community. That may come from organising storytelling or a way of enabling families to receive books to replace their home collections – when they have somewhere to keep them.”

A call for applicants for the ongoing position of ALIA Disaster Recovery Project Manager will be announced shortly. More information on the position will be available on the ALIA website at <http://www.alia.org.au/employment> .

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The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) is the professional association for the Australian library and information services sector. It seeks to empower the profession in the development, promotion and delivery of quality library and information services to the nation, through leadership, advocacy and mutual support. ALIA represents the interest of 6,000 members, the profession and Australia's 12 million library users.