



WALT Conference Grant Recipient

Sharyn English Winning Essay 2011

I found making a choice between the keynote speakers at the ALIA 2011 National Library & Information Technicians Conference extremely difficult indeed. I hope to have the opportunity to hear each and every one, however when I came to the point of naming just one, as the subject of this essay, the deciding factor was the title of our conference **Back to Basics** - this was what convinced me to choose Sarah Garnett the Founder of The Benjamin Andrew Footpath Library. It of course goes without saying that this is an inspiring and heart-warming story which I remember seeing on the ABC network and immediately admired her the minute I heard it. Truly how much more **back to basics** is this wonderful act of kindness that has now become such a valuable gift to this community of people. We are all no doubt aware how the illiterate person can be substantially disadvantaged and have all read and I am sure acknowledged the truth and importance of the principles in the ALIA Statement on libraries and literacies and now we see this fabulous example of the "real work in action". Knowing is merely the first step - the **doing** is the most important step and this is the real lifelong learning for us all. The work of Sarah Garnett founding the unique Benjamin Andrew Footpath Library is truly providing a powerful model of "promoting social inclusion for all people". (Alexandria Proclamation, 2005)

In my former nursing career I have spent time working with people who suffer from mental illness and disadvantaged youth. It is another of my goals to contribute in some way to helping those who may have some anxiety in certain social or unfamiliar environments, to feel at ease in requesting assistance, to gain access to materials and information they require. Whether it be, striving for a reconnection or a step to help them find a new path in life, researching a medical problem, or purely recreational purposes.

I introduced my children to the library from infants and as a family we have enjoyed and benefited from the many services provided by the public library system. These experiences have contributed to our lives and I wish to hear more about how Sarah was able to bring this unique library experience to the forgotten in our community.

This aligns perfectly with another two of the statements from the policies of ALIA:

Libraries must actively commit time and resources to coordinating literacy activities at all levels and to promote literacy among all members of their community, users and **non-users** alike.

Libraries are part of the solution to many community problems. Libraries help children and adults become literate, productive citizens and help people of all ages lead more satisfying lives.



The establishment of the Benjamin Andrew Footpath Library not only brings reconnection and hope to the people it ministers to, it also serves to remind us all of the quote from Margaret Mead that states

“never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world indeed it is the only thing that ever has”

Sarah's work is a wonderful illustration that encompasses one of the most meaningful aspects of library and information services. I am very pleased that she will be one of the keynote speakers and I look forward with great interest and enthusiasm to hearing Sarah Garnett speak at the upcoming ALIA 2011 National Library & Information Technicians Conference.