

Title

Supporting prison libraries: the 2015 ALIA Minimum Standard Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners

Abstract

In 2015, there were more than 36,000 adult inmates in corrective services custody in Australia, with national imprisonment rates reaching a ten-year high (ABS, 2015). Prison libraries play a pivotal role in serving the educational, recreational and other information needs of those inmates. Access to quality information can assist inmates to understand their legal rights and obligations and to prepare themselves to reintegrate into the community. In 2015 the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) established a working group to review and update the *Minimum Standard Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners*, first published in 1990. This paper describes the activities of the Working Group and the challenges they faced. It examines how Corrective Services New South Wales has responded to the publication of the Guidelines. Other activities relating to prison libraries that are underway or proposed are discussed and opportunities for further research are suggested.

Introduction

In 2015 an Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) Prison Libraries Working Group was formed to revise and update the *Minimum Standard Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners*. The Guidelines were published in 1990 and have remained unchanged since then. The group were dispersed across the country and had differing perspectives and experiences. They faced a number of challenges regarding organisation, technology and decision making. Despite the challenges, the revised Guidelines were written and published in December 2015. This paper explores the processes the working group employed to engage with each other, and the challenges they faced in achieving their goal. The membership of the group and the methods employed to facilitate engagement and efficient operation will be described.

The context of prison libraries

There are currently 102 residential correctional facilities in Australia. This includes adult prisons, juvenile detention centres, and remand and reintegration centres.

Each correctional facility is required to include a library (Australian Correctional Administrators, 2012). The ALIA *Minimum Standard Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners* (2015a) set minimum standards for library provision to the residents of these 102 facilities.

Australia's seventeen immigration detention centres are additional to the 102 facilities that house inmates and other detainees. Very little is known about the library services provided in immigration detention centres or the needs of their users.

The Australian Human Rights Commission (2013) stipulates that "Each detainee should have access to a library containing books, newspapers, dictionaries and up-to-date-legal reference materials, and DVDs/videos in languages that correspond with the major national groups in the facility's population." Regrettably, the authors of this paper have no knowledge of the reality of library service provision in Australian immigration detention centres. As a result, an informed discussion of library services to people detained in these centres, although an important issue, is not possible here. While the Guidelines encompass Australian immigration detention centres, they are not designed to cover the specific needs of asylum seekers.

Prison populations

As at 30 June 2015, there were 36,134 adults in Australian correctional facilities. This amounts to an imprisonment rate of 196 per 100,000 adults, a 6 percent increase from the same date in 2014 (ABS, 2015). There are approximately 951 juveniles in custody each day in Australian juvenile justice facilities (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2015). These facilities operate outside the justice systems of some states and territories, belonging instead to health or welfare departments. In other states and territories, they sit within the justice departmental portfolios. As with the case of Australian immigration detention centres, the authors of this paper have no knowledge of the existence or quality of library services provided to these young people. However, the coverage of the revised ALIA Guidelines specifically includes these libraries.

The literacy, numeracy and general educational levels of Australian inmates are lower than for the general population. Thirty-two percent of adults entering Australian prisons had completed only year 9 studies or below, or had no schooling. Only 16 percent of Australian inmates had completed year 12 studies (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2015, p. 21). The Victorian Ombudsman (2014) identified that in Victorian prisons in 2013, 59.5 percent of inmates had literacy levels that required intensive support. At a national level, the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (Dawe, 2007) identified that 62 percent of Australian inmates had literacy levels that are classified as less than functional.

The history of prison libraries

All inmates need to have access to recreational and information resources via their libraries (Australian Correctional Administrators, 2012 p. 17 & 28). ALIA endorses this view. Community members have access to public library networks that provide access to knowledge, information and works of imagination to support their needs for education, personal development, creativity and an understanding of the world around them. Members of incarcerated communities generally rely on their prison library to fulfil these needs.

The provision of library services to inmates has a long history. Coyle (1987) identifies the earliest mention of books being brought into prisons as occurring in the seventeenth century. Carroll (2013) provides us with a history of libraries in Australian prisons, with a specific focus on the library at Port Arthur. Carroll and Coyle agree that books were first introduced into prisons by the clergy as a means of reforming prisoners through religious training. More recently, libraries in prisons have moved away from their religious focus to more closely resemble public libraries.

In their guidelines, ALIA identifies that Australian prison libraries have a number of functions. ALIA sees the role of the prison library as supporting education, recreation, and welfare programs. They should also supply inmates, especially those who have pending legal matters, with legal resources including electronic legal materials (Australian Library and Information Association, 2015a).

Existing guidelines

Two Australian documents existed at the time the project began that served as a guide to the provision of library services to inmates. Firstly, the Australian Correctional Administrators (ACA), a national group responsible for establishing operational guidelines for all Australian adult prisons have produced *Standard Guidelines for Corrections in Australia* (2012). This document mentions prison libraries twice. Firstly:

Remand prisoners and all inmates who have legal matters pending, whether they are on remand or sentenced to a term of imprisonment, should: ... (ii) have access to legal library resources, including where practicable supervised access to electronic media for the purpose of viewing electronic legal documentation (p.17).

and secondly:

Prisoners should have access to a library, adequately stocked with both recreational and information resources, which is operated according to standard library practice. Prisoners should be encouraged to make full use of the library (p.28).

These statements are a recognition of the importance of library services in supporting the legal, informational and recreational needs of inmates. Effective prison libraries can also support the work inmates do towards rehabilitation, reskilling and reintegration into society. However, these brief declarations lack the detail

required to establish how prison libraries should operate and what services and collections they should provide.

The second document was the ALIA *Minimum Standard Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners* published in 1990. These guidelines provided more information about the provision of library services to Australian inmates. They are aspirational rather than a reflection of the current reality of prison library service provision and there is no requirement or compulsion for Australian prisons to meet these standards.

International guidelines also exist that provide information about the management of prison libraries in other countries. The American Library Association (ALA) published their *Library standards for adult correctional institutions* in 1992, and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) published their *Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners* in 1995 (Lehmann & Locke).

In recognition of the importance of prison libraries and acknowledgement that the 1990 ALIA Guidelines were declining in relevance to prisons over time, ALIA made the decision to review and update the document.

The Prison Libraries Working Group

In their April 2015 *InCite* magazine, ALIA advertised for members interested in forming a Prison Libraries Working Group. The goal of the group was to undertake a

total review of the 1990 *Minimum Standard Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners* and drafting an edition based on 2015 industry practices and standards.

The Working Group formed in May 2015 and consisted of three ALIA staff members and eight self-nominated ALIA members. A PhD research student chaired the Working Group. The members included a public librarian from Western Australia with an interest in providing a library service to the local prison, three librarians who had worked at the Alexander Maconochie Centre in the Australian Capital Territory and a university librarian who had volunteered in a prison library. The Group also included the Manager of Library Services, Corrections New South Wales and the librarian of the Casuarina Prison in Western Australia. Two members left due to work commitments and two more joined the group during the period of engagement - a law librarian with expertise in the legal information needs of prisoners and a university academic researching cognitive, interpersonal, sociocultural, and behavioural aspects of human interactions with libraries. The group met eleven times over a six-month period. Each meeting operated as a teleconference, facilitated by the Chair of the Group and established by ALIA staff. ALIA staff were responsible for producing agendas for and minutes of each meeting, in consultation with the Working Group Chair.

The Group had to decide early in the process how to engage with each other efficiently and effectively to produce the Guidelines within the given deadline. The Group was dispersed across Australia and its various time zones. Some members were attending the meetings from their homes, others from their workplaces. Some Group members were working in IT environments with restrictions on social media

and could not access collaborative, online authoring tools. Members working in prisons had additional barriers to accessing the internet at work. The Group therefore decided to take a 'low tech' approach to collaboration. The Chair retained the master copy of the draft Guidelines being produced by the Group. The chapters under review at any particular time were distributed by email.

Once the structure of the Guidelines had been confirmed, Group members were each allocated chapters of the 1990 Guidelines to review and rewrite. Assignments were determined by the particular expertise and knowledge of Group members. This enabled the Group to better maintain a version control practice that mitigated the risk of confusion over successive updates.

One chapter was reviewed at each meeting. The member responsible for that chapter was asked to produce a draft document and send it to the other members by email for consideration prior to the meeting. At the meeting, the author of the chapter discussed their work and other members provided input and suggestions for refinements. Feedback on the chapter was incorporated and an updated version of the chapter was emailed back to all other members for review.

This process was orderly and efficient and enabled the new Guidelines to take shape steadily.

Each member could engage with the process regardless of their location, circumstances and operating environments. The key factors in this success were the levels of organisation and goodwill of the Working Group, the consistency and predictability of the process and the administrative support provided by ALIA staff.

Library collections

When developing the Guidelines, the Working Group drew on the *Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners* (3rd ed.), published by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). The IFLA Guidelines were based on the assumption of a humane and enlightened practice of criminal justice and incarceration in accordance with the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and focused on education, rehabilitation, and constructive use of time (Lehmann & Locke, 2005). Although the IFLA Guidelines were published 10 years before the Working Group convened, they are still remarkably relevant today, and provided the committee with a model of Guidelines that can remain relevant over time.

There are prison libraries in every State and Territory, and they serve diverse populations. They are managed by prison library staff of differing skill levels, including library professionals and inmates who work without any professional supervision or input. The Guidelines therefore needed to be practical, aspirational and able to be applied to a range of library services.

The working group had to address competing requirements when writing the collection development standards. They needed to incorporate sufficient detail to usefully assist prison library staff, including employees and inmates without library qualifications. At the same time, they needed to be general enough to apply to various collections supporting different demographic compositions of prison populations in different legal jurisdictions.

The Working Group determined that there is little existing literature on collection development and resource selection for prison libraries. Therefore, the Group decided to compile a list of subject areas that prison libraries should ideally contain. As the Group included three members who had worked within prison libraries, their expertise in this area was valuable. The list soon became long and it was apparent that an exhaustive list was unachievable, cumbersome and would not remain current over the lifetime of the document. The list that was published in the revised Guidelines consists of broad classes of recommended materials. For example: “non-fiction including a broad range of topics such as self-help, life skills, personal relationships, parenting, business skills, indigenous topics, history, biography, autobiography, art, music, film, hobbies, car maintenance, sport, car racing, photography and health and well-being” (ALIA 2015a p. 13).

Inmates’ legal information needs were also addressed. Remand prisoners and sentenced prisoners with pending criminal trials and appeals need access to criminal law resources. Inmates may also have family and civil law problems. Additionally, inmates are subject to administrative orders and as such, administrative law is an important subject area for prison libraries.

Prison libraries face several challenges with regards legal materials. They are generally expensive and must be current ie reflecting the legislation in force at moment. The sheer bulk of primary and secondary legal material required to understand legal rights and obligations has vastly increased in modern times (Heydon, 2012). New editions of criminal law books ideally need to be purchased

every year or two. The cost of maintaining a comprehensive legal collection is therefore significant.

Legal publications are moving increasingly to online delivery. Online legislation is now authorised in the Commonwealth jurisdiction (Legislation Act 2003 s 15Y) and many States and Territories, and it is no longer routinely produced in hard copy. The major caselaw annotators which are used to find legal precedents are only available online. Yet in many jurisdictions, inmates do not have any access to the Internet. The security and order of prisons is a primary driver of prison management. Internet access poses complex challenges to that security. Even access to caselaw can pose security challenges when inmates access details of the proceedings of fellow inmates.

The Working Group recognised that meeting the legal information needs of inmate populations is an area where prison librarians need specialist knowledge and supporting materials. As with general materials, the working group was unable to identify any existing, comprehensive, authoritative lists of legal information resources suitable for prison libraries. The Group ultimately decided that a detailed list of legal information resources for each jurisdiction was beyond the scope of the Guidelines. Instead, the Guidelines encourage collaboration with other libraries with legal collections and the use of other partial lists that may be available.

An opportunity exists to develop and maintain resources that provide recommendations for fiction and nonfiction titles for prison librarians, and in particular

current, authoritative legal primary and secondary materials for prison library collections.

Approval and publication of the Guidelines

The Working Group finalised the draft Guidelines in late November 2015. The Guidelines contain chapters on the existence and Purpose of Prison Libraries, management, financial resources, human resources, physical facilities, library collection, prisoner services, digital services and performance assessment as well as a facility assets data sheet. The guidelines were submitted them to the ALIA Board who accepted them at their December meeting and published them to the ALIA website at <https://www.alia.org.au/about-alia/policies-and-guidelines/alia-policies/prison-guidelines>. The publication of the Guidelines was announced in the newsletter, *ALIA Weekly* (ALIA, 2015b).

Case study on an application of the Guidelines

Corrective Services New South Wales (CSNSW) currently has over 11,000 individuals incarcerated in thirty-six correctional centres. CSNSW has a centrally managed library system for the public prisons, an arrangement which is unusual in Australia. Within each prison, there are between one and six separate libraries. These libraries are managed by the education staff and inmates performing most of the work within the library. Professional library staff at the Metropolitan Remand and Reception Centre (MRRC) Library provide a vital legal information service for all inmates around the state.

The conditions of the prison libraries in NSW vary widely, but generally, most are far below the ALIA minimum standards (2015a) and other international standards, for example the American Library Association's *Library standards for adult correctional institutions* (1992) and the IFLA *Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners* written by Lehmann & Locke (2005). The libraries range from spacious areas to cupboards, and in some cases, the library service consists of a book delivery trolley. Resources for CSNSW libraries are provided from a centralised budget, supplemented by a donations program coordinated by the staff at the Brush Farm Corrective Services Academy Library, under the direction of the Manager, Library Services.

The 2015 review of the ALIA *Minimum Standard Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners* provided an opportunity to examine the quality of CSNSW prison libraries and recommend improvements. Their publication coincided with the need to review the Correctional Centre Libraries section of the CSNSW Operations Procedures Manual (OPM). Aspects of the Guidelines were incorporated into the draft update of the Libraries section. These recommendations have subsequently been approved, and will form the basis of an information campaign about the prison libraries targeted at CSNSW staff.

In 2016, the OPM Libraries section will be used as an auditing tool to assess the quality of the libraries throughout the system. As libraries are redesigned or added to the system, the Guidelines will be used to inform library design. They will allow CSNSW to apply a standardised approach to service design, ensuring the adequacy

of libraries in both public and private correctional centres. Finally, the Guidelines will be a useful resource when developing or justifying library service budgets.

Future directions

Following the release of the updated *ALIA Minimum Standard Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners*, members of the Working Group have commenced the planning of several related activities.

At the time of writing, members of the working group were in the process of joining with other interested ALIA members to form an ALIA Prison Libraries Group. ALIA Groups are volunteer-run initiatives that connect library professionals who share a professional interest, a geographic area or an industry sector. The goal of the ALIA Prison Libraries Group will be to provide a platform for library and related professionals with interests in prison libraries to exchange information and ideas. Prison library staff often work in relative isolation from others within the profession as well as within a resource-constrained environment. In future, the group plans to become involved in supporting detention centre libraries and promoting the need for library services in juvenile justice facilities. In this way, the Group will lend ongoing support for the provision of quality library services to adults and juveniles housed in detention.

The Working Group also identified a need for additional practical guidance to supplement the Guidelines. When the ALIA Prison Libraries Group is formally established, it will consider the feasibility of developing and maintaining a more

detailed resource for prison library managers containing information such as links to useful online resources and research, sample documents and clauses to assist with library management and policy formation, and lists of recommended resources for prison library collections. Maintaining the currency of such a resource over time will be challenging, particularly as it will likely rely on volunteer labour.

The publication of the Guidelines may also trigger renewed interest in research on the extent to which existing services are meeting the minimum guidelines, and on the role of prison libraries and professional library staff play in modern prisons. Following the publication of the original ALIA Guidelines in 1990, The Australian Council of Libraries and Information Services (ACLIS) released a report on the state of prison libraries in Victoria (1991). Around this time, and following the release of the Kennedy report on prison reform (1988), the Queensland Corrective Services Commission commissioned Byrne to investigate the state of educational and training in correctional centres. Byrne identified poor and archaic prison libraries and lack of prisoner access to them as serious problems (1990). Since that time, there have been no notable, academic studies on the state of prison libraries in Australia.

Conclusion •

Prison libraries have the potential to play a vital role in the education, recreation, and rehabilitation of the thousands of people incarcerated in Australia each year. ALIA has taken a leading role in setting minimum standards for Australian prison libraries and providing prison library staff with guidance on library management. In doing so, they were successful in gathering a group of professionals with diverse experiences

and interests but who shared a common desire to see improvements in the quality of Australian prison libraries. The Guidelines they produced in 2015 provide practitioners with a tool for benchmarking their prison libraries and developing prison library spaces, services, collections and human resourcing. They provide librarians with the means to advocate on behalf of inmates for library services, and raise awareness of the role that prison libraries and librarians can play.

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