Book review: Enabling end- users: Information skills training

Ann Poyner. Oxford: Chandos Publishing, 2005. 147pp. ISBN: 1-84334-108-5

The professional background of the author indicates her breadth of experience in the area of information skills training and that she will, therefore, have much useful knowledge to share. She has contributed much to the development of information skills training, especially in an outreach setting within the NHS. Though relevant to health care library services, the author does not specify her audience as such but refers to librarians and information professionals generally who are involved in end-user education.

The chapters of the book follow a natural progression, giving a brief overview of each topic, from assessing the quality of the user experience in the library and how this can be improved, through surveying and involving users to best assess their needs, the role of librarian trainers and how they communicate, search processes and techniques, preparation of training materials, one-to-one and group training delivery techniques, electronic resources, including useful information about the Internet to pass on to users and a few information gateway and resource web addresses (though maintaining the currency of references to electronic resources is naturally difficult in print format, eg. NHS access to Zetoc will cease in July 2006). The author also includes an example each of an information audit and a training needs assessment questionnaire, as appendices.

The stated aim of the book, to assist busy information professionals with the planning and delivery of information skills training through personal tuition, rather than via e-learning packages or distance learning programmes, is delivered in the content. The clear layout of the chapters, including a list of contents at the beginning of each and the ample use of headings and bullet points, enables the audience to read the book as a whole or find and dip into the relevant section. The book is a practical guide containing many useful ideas and can be referred back to when focussing on a different aspect. The book may also prove a tool for re-assessing training delivery and trying out different ideas, time and resources permitting.

The author does not include references to other published printed material on the subject, which may have been useful for those setting up new services in this area, and would also be helpful if wanting to study a topic in more detail.

Working in this area we found the book a valuable overview, and we are now adapting relevant ideas to assist with developing a training programme for our own service users. Useful tips we obtained from the book were the STAC (searching strategy framework), the need to prepare instruction material carefully and to get a colleague to test it, to focus exercises on topics of interest to the individual in one-to-one training and to evaluate training sessions personally, in addition to the end-user doing so. The book reflects how library services are evolving, especially within the NHS, and how we wish to train users to become independent information seekers and users of the rapidly increasing variety of electronic resources available, while still developing our own role as information specialists. We certainly recommend colleagues to read it.

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