



Occupational Health and Safety – City of Greater Dandenong Libraries

The City of Greater Dandenong is approximately 25 kilometres south east of Melbourne and has one of the most diverse populations in Australia with 51% of its 130,000 residents born overseas from 150 different birthplaces. The City is the manufacturing hub of Victoria with the rate of social disadvantage relatively high with household income levels below the metropolitan average and the unemployment rate at 9%.

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There are two well used and busy libraries in Dandenong and Springvale that have nearly 1 million visits per year. To meet community needs, the libraries have some of the longest opening hours in Australia, with both libraries open 72 hours per week. The buildings have limited space for their rate of usage and are both 35-40 years old.

For staff who work in this hectic environment over the breadth of hours, special attention is paid to training a workforce in safe work practices from manual handling to conflict resolution. Just as important are the systems, documentation, reporting and follow-up relating to any incidents as they occur.

A spate of injuries five years ago led to a concerted effort to reduce the risk to staff in injuring themselves. With the injuries mainly relating to manual handling, many changes were made to address manual handling issues in the library. Staff were trained in manual handling techniques and also briefed on the mechanics of the spine and the effects that poor lifting and manual handling techniques can have over time.

An ergonomist performed a risk assessment on all work areas in the library and further changes were made as a result.

- Many pieces of equipment were replaced, including trolleys and scanners. Dump bins were replaced with custom made motorised dump bins to eliminate bending and twisting.
- A task analysis was completed for all library tasks, and this is now used as a guide for training new staff and for staff returning from injury or illness.
- Compulsory time restrictions were placed on tasks that had a high rate of repetition and manual handling, including shelving, shelf reading, returns. This means that staff are required to work as a team to ensure that tasks are continuously rotated.
- The time restrictions and safe work practices have been consolidated by the Libraries' OH&S committee to form OH&S commandments which are posted in all staff areas in the Library. These commandments are now policy and compulsory for all staff to follow.

- Both libraries have had minor renovations to bring about further opportunities to improve work flows.

Training for staff to minimise work related injury continues with staff attending general health and wellness sessions and learning further stretching exercises, with the emphasis on building stronger core muscles to minimise risk of back injuries. All staff also complete recommended stretching exercises before each rostered shift.

Task analysis documentation is being updated and all staff will be attending refresher training in early 2009.

Greater Dandenong Libraries provide training and guidelines for library staff in resolving conflict which can occur in a busy community facility.

All staff received training in practical and in-depth conflict resolution. The training sessions place staff in real life scenarios, where they can practice various conflict resolution techniques in a supportive learning environment.

Staff also developed a code of practice in dealing with difficult situations that can involve anything from reported thefts to breaching computer use guidelines to lost children etc. A reporting procedure ensures that team leaders and supervisors are made aware of such incidents and any trends can be identified and dealt with promptly.

Both libraries are well used by the local young adults. Incidents are minimal, given the opening hours, but occasionally staff report ongoing issues with individuals. Libraries have now developed a partnership with Council's Youth Services team where individuals who display ongoing problem behaviours are counselled by professional youth intake workers. The library works with Youth Services, the parents and the individual to devise an Acceptable Behaviour Contract, so that the individual is clear on behavioural expectations and the consequences of non-compliance.

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Do you intend to change the world?

I am at the Library of St Gallen in Switzerland, flicking through their thousand year old medieval codices. The gold leaf shimmers on the page as I leaf idly through the Evangelium Longum. No one hovers over my shoulder or presses a pair of white gloves into my palm; I am free to delve into any of their 144 volumes, fingers still sticky from the jam biscuit I ate fifteen minutes ago. Suddenly, with a keystroke, I'm back at my desk, resisting the temptation to go make another cup of tea. Thanks to the internet, copyright-free ebooks, audio books, music and software all cost nothing to download, and they are becoming increasingly available to everyone, thanks to volunteers who scan, dictate, record and ultimately upload content that sits happily, and legally, in the public domain.

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