

VOLUNTEERS

The Toy Library Officer describes her volunteers as a wonderful resource without whom they would be lost and this description could equally apply to every other volunteer at Fremantle City Library. Most are retired people wanting to give back to their community and many of them do volunteer work in other sectors of the community as well as the time they give to the library. Their satisfaction from contributing to their community is high, and the assistance they give is not easily measured because of the improvement in service that results from their efforts.

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Volunteering at Royal Talbot

Royal Talbot Rehabilitation Centre is the rehabilitation campus of Austin Health in Victoria. We care for patients in the areas of stroke, head injury, spinal cord injury, amputation, and orthopaedics, and are most fortunate in having around 50 volunteers who support our patients in many ways. They cheerfully provide services to the Patient Library, the Royal Bazaar and Bookshop, Leisure Services, Art Therapy, Animal Therapy, Horticultural therapy, Woodworking, Patient Transport, and our extensive gardens. All our volunteers bring a special touch to these programs, helping to restore confidence in patients and creating a supportive and social atmosphere and a stepping stone to a positive future.

Royal Talbot is very fortunate, and most unusual, in having a patient library in addition to the Health Sciences Library. *Reflections* Patient Library has been operating since 1993, starting with 200 books and now offering over 4 000 items, including fiction and non-fiction books, talking books, DVDs, and CDs. It is available to patients, families, and staff, and also includes a Patient Education collection. The library could not operate without our wonderful volunteers, who issue loans, catalogue the books and audiovisual items, and provide a friendly ear to patients and family members who simply wish to chat. As many of our patients are long-term, families are often here for hours at a time, for weeks or even months, and our volunteers sometimes forge special relationships with patients and frequent visitors. One of our very clever volunteers has recently converted the card catalogue to an online resource so we can now offer both manual and computer access. Library usage increased by 51% from 2007 to 2008, which is a pleasing testament to the loyalty, reliability, and friendliness of the volunteers.

Currently we have 13 volunteers staffing the library for some hours of each weekday, and one evening. They are of varying ages and backgrounds, and some have been contributing their time for over 30 years. Some have been patients themselves at Royal Talbot and have been anxious to give something back, some have heard of the centre through family and friends, and others have responded to advertisements in the local paper.

In December each year we host a Volunteers' Thank You lunch and give each person a small gift of appreciation. In National Volunteer Week this year, we are providing an afternoon tea and we know that the volunteers will enjoy getting together and meeting those who are new, or who help out on other days and in other areas. It is a small way of acknowledging our appreciation of all the services they provide so willingly.

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Friends as volunteers

Friends of the Library, Launceston, has offered volunteer support for Launceston Library since 1992. The members of Friends, in partnership with the library, have developed a program of strategic activities and projects that helps the library extend its programs and achieve its goals. Friends contribute their differing knowledge, skills, and interests to enrich the library's resources, raise its profile in the community, and link its services to its users, especially those with special needs.

The Friends group has been a key player in the library's heritage publications program which has produced a number of valuable resources, including *On the Tide: stories of the Tamar* and *The journals of Charlotte Cleveland*.



Preparing for the fair

The Friends also work behind the scenes as part of the library's volunteer program in projects such as improving access to the library's heritage collections, organising ephemera collections, and attending events to promote the Launceston Library. Monthly Coffee Mornings with guest speakers help bring people to the library.

One major project has been the Launceston Family Album, carried out with the help of a grant from the Tasmanian Community Fun, and involving detailed genealogical research. <http://www.launcestonfamilyalbum.org.au/>

In partnership with a local Lions Club the Friends hold an annual book sale of donated items. The sales have generated over \$70,000 in extra funding for the Launceston Library.

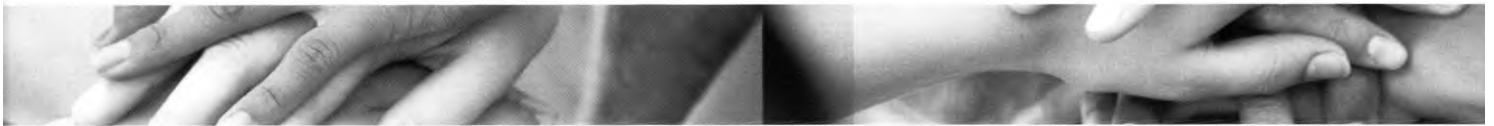
In 2008 the Friends supported the Launceston Library in its winning of FOLA's inaugural Peter McInnes Award for innovation and excellence in services to children and young people.

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Volunteering at the State Library of Victoria

Volunteers have supported the work of the State Library for over 35 years – in special collection areas behind the scenes, in front-of-house activities such as tours of facilities and exhibitions, and in assisting the State Library of Victoria Foundation with fundraising projects.

The volunteer guides were established 13 years ago to introduce new users and visitors to library services and facilities, and now



provide an important and welcoming introduction for visitors to the heritage reading rooms and our exhibitions. Many volunteers have been with us for more than five years, some for over 10 years, and one for more than 20 years. Most are retired, including ex-library staff who continue to give us the benefit of their knowledge of library collections.

Behind the scenes, the library currently has 70 volunteers, most in long-term organising and indexing projects. These long-term projects have always been at the core of volunteering at the library, but we are very conscious of the changing volunteering dynamic: young people, often students, are keen to volunteer – albeit for short periods of usually less than six months or just over summer breaks, or weekend or evening volunteering. Many are international students, most of whom are looking for meaningful experience in Australian cultural life. Many students are also looking for work experience related to their course of study.

It is a challenge for the library to find volunteer projects that we can get up and running with sufficient but minimal training and supervision, so that all parties are satisfied: the volunteer seeks a worthwhile task and a sense of achievement; the Library seeks a quick 'return on investment' from training; and the outcome must be valuable to library users.

In the last year, three short-term projects were carried out by volunteers, and provided feedback in managing short-term projects: The Young Readers Project, where three volunteers spent several days every few months packing and labelling books, DVDs, and library bags to be distributed to each two year old in Victoria, via local libraries and Maternal and Child Health Centres. A volunteer provided 50 hours of research assistance over three months for ergo, the information literacy website for secondary students and teachers developed by the library. And we also trialled the involvement of school-age children (12 to 16 year olds) in storytelling and craft activities for pre-school children in the library's Playpod.

We are in the process of writing a new strategic plan for volunteering at the library, which will specifically address issues of attracting young volunteers, and volunteers who want short-term projects, and which will reward them in meaningful ways.

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Chinese Friends of Hurstville City Library

In 2008, as part of a community consultation project, focus groups were conducted with some of Hurstville City Library's key stakeholders. The Chinese community, which comprises almost 14% of the city's population, were obviously a target group and their response was overwhelming. In a field where it is often difficult to recruit participants, the consultants were able to fill the room with just the inducement of a cup of tea (green, of course).

During the focus group discussion, some of the participants expressed an interest in coming to the library voluntarily to assist with basic tasks. The idea gained momentum and, with the assistance of staff from CASS (Chinese Australian Services Society) and the Multicultural Services Officer, the Chinese Friends of Hurstville City Library was launched in August 2008.

Membership currently stands at 29, all of whom have migrated to Australia. They come from many different Southeast Asian countries including China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore,

Malaysia, and Laos, and possess skills ranging from dentistry to newspaper editing.

The Chinese Friends focus primarily on assisting with practical support. Each week a core group of about a dozen people come to Hurstville Library to shelve and tidy. Some come several times a week. They take great pride in ensuring the Chinese language collection is presented at its best and enjoy the camaraderie with staff and other library users. They feel that the library is truly 'theirs', and this builds their sense of belonging and engagement in the community. The Chinese Friends' contribution to the library equals approximately 24 hours of staff time and is incalculable in terms of building social capital.

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Housebound volunteers at Parkes Shire Library

For the past 31 years volunteers have been providing a housebound library service for the community at Parkes NSW.

The service began in 1978 as a joint venture between Parkes Shire Library and the Community Information Centre, now the Parkes Neighbourhood Centre. Today there are approximately 50 people registered for this service, 16 volunteers, and one coordinator. Many volunteers have been part of this service since it began – one of the volunteers provided this service until she was 82 years old, and is currently now a client at 100 years old, having just graduated from books to books on CD.

Books are chosen by the volunteers and delivered to clients in their homes as well as to the three retirement villages in Parkes. Items borrowed per client number from one to 14 items each. So it is quite a challenge for the volunteers to choose appropriate items.

Many of the volunteers also stop to chat or have a cuppa with their clients, and this is seen as part of the service. Many friendships have been built up over the years and it is always sad to lose a housebound client.

The service is coordinated by a volunteer who has also been part of the service since the early 1980s. She had retired but was persuaded to come out of retirement to take over this important task.

For the past three years, a morning tea has been held at Parkes Library once a month for the housebound and the volunteers offer their time (and delicious cooking) to help with this event.

To show appreciation for the work they do, volunteers are given a small gift from the Neighbourhood Centre at the end of the year and staff from the library and the volunteers get together once a year for a luncheon which is paid for by Council.

Parkes Shire Library is very appreciative of the time and dedication these ladies have shown to this service. We all know how difficult it is sometimes to find a good book, but finding a good book for someone else to read is doubly difficult. So thanks ladies for a job well done. A great joint community venture.

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