

Lives of libraries 'out bush'

Imagine living in a small, remote community without the retail, banking, education, health, economic, employment, and business opportunities or facilities enjoyed by mainstream Australia. There is no newsagent to buy your daily newspapers or your favourite magazine. Young people have no choice but to leave their community to attend boarding schools and hostels to further their education. While mobile phones are readily available, computers in the home are still rare but increasing with improvement in connectivity. Welcome to Cape York and the Torres Straits in far north Queensland where the State Library of Queensland has been partnering with Indigenous Shire Councils since 2002 to establish Indigenous Knowledge Centres (IKCs).

IKCs are owned, managed, and staffed by the Indigenous Shire Councils, with one council choosing to give up their chambers to accommodate their IKC due to limited infrastructure. State Library facilitates the initial fit out, collection of books, professional development of IKC staff, literacy, and other programs. Often the only public access to computers and internet, IKCs combine library services with a community space for learning, capacity building, and strengthening cultural identity.



Children's Picture Diaries at Hope Vale in Cape York; local elders and recognised artists volunteered their support.

Children's Picture Diaries is one of the programs that State Library has delivered through the IKCs, partnering with their primary school. Children work with Dr Barbara Piscitelli AM, an early childhood expert, developing self portraits – who we are; landscapes – where we live; and making prints – what we like to do. The program heightens awareness of both the significance and value of children's art and the importance of art making to children's development. Children have fun, learn art technique, solve problems, and critically reflect on their work. Received positively by teachers, *Children's Picture Diaries* has supported art

activities into after school activities at the IKCs. New works are added to the Children's Art Archive in State Library, donated by Dr Barbara Piscitelli and one of only two collections of children's art in major Australian cultural institutions. Children's work is used in exhibitions and a series of virtual books created for the State Library collection and for the communities.

Away with Words is a literacy through the arts program where State Library partners with Education Queensland and the IKC to engage children in writer and illustrator workshops to create both personal and community stories. Four of these community stories are being combined into a single booklet to share Torres Strait Islander cultures. The *away with words* booklet will incorporate narrative, comic strip, cultural legend, and procedural text with maps, cultural and site specific information, a talking book CD, and learning notes for distribution to school libraries in 2010. Children living across Australia will be able to share experiences of children in the Torres Straits, learning about culturally significant places and objects of interest; events and services that are special to Torres Strait Islander communities (goods arriving by barge); weather (seasonal changes and how that affects supply of goods); strong moral coda through legends; and the significance of food and celebrations in island culture. *Away with words* workshops have recently been held in South East Queensland and in Cape York, with more planned for the new year.

Culture love is a school holiday program that activates the IKC as a community hub with arts activities for children and young people and links to the professional development of Indigenous artists and arts workers. The success and sustainability of *culture love* is the ownership and enthusiasm of the IKC coordinators as local leaders with community knowledge, their ability to consult widely, identify culturally attuned activities, and enlist the support of community and volunteers. Local artists are partnered with visiting Indigenous arts workers providing employment, networks, skills exchange, and professional development to the local artists to run similar programs in the future. With high levels of volunteerism and attendance, *culture love* has instilled pride in community producing new songs, music clips, digital stories, murals, and banners showcased to community and at festivals.

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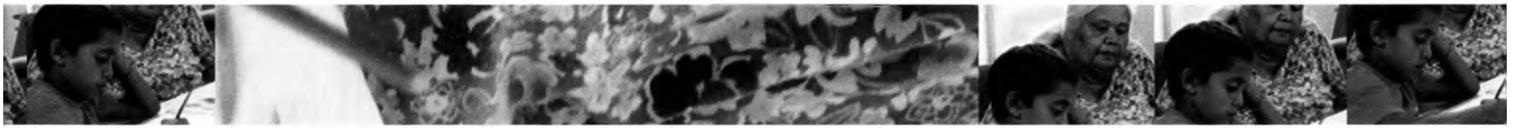
Giddy with relief: post-amalgamation in regional Queensland

In March 2008, Sarina Shire and Mirani Shire merged with Mackay City Council to form Mackay Regional Council. When we first heard about the forced amalgamations, a shiver ran down our spines – a reaction I suspect many people felt. However, I always thought that, of all the council departments, the library was probably in the best position to move forward in a positive manner toward these changes. Having been at Sarina Library for 30 years, I had met many of the staff in Mackay that we would be working with. My colleague and I attended the QPLA Conference in Ipswich in 2007 where I was able to discuss our concerns with one of the Mackay branch librarians and it was evident even then that if we had apprehensions to voice, we would be listened to.

The library amalgamation process was largely self-driven, and we had the added benefit of all stakeholders using the same library software, so we were not as adversely affected by issues facing other departments. Leading up to the amalgamation, meetings were held to ensure all parties felt they were contributing to the process. A mapping document was used to highlight differences in operational issues and discussions were held to merge all these issues into updated library procedures. These meetings were instrumental in how well our merge was undertaken. We could get to know each other and they helped establish rapport with all the staff involved.

In January 2008, Jan Kilbourne, Manager Community Development emailed us (in her words) a very preliminary Draft Transition Plan for the library service. We now had something tangible to follow and work towards while reassuring the public that indeed our smaller library branches would still be here post-amalgamation. This concern never occurred to me. Staffing, operational procedures, and computer issues reigned as much higher worries. Because of the meetings, we were well on our way to resolving these issues prior to March 2008.

One big obstacle in most council departments was the merging of computer software. We were fortunate that all the parties involved were using the same LMS. The actual systems merge went relatively well despite some major hiccoughs, for example the duplication of ISBNs resulting in over 300 000 duplicate authority records. From a Systems and IT perspective the challenges of extending the network to the rural branches of Sarina and Mirani had a major impact on service delivery. Intermittent network drop-outs involving our LMS and hardware incompatibilities meant that customer service was compromised. A high level of patience was shown by all during exceedingly frustrating times. We were giddy with relief and large cheers were heard when these issues were finally resolved after a long and trying 18 months.



One of the first workshops Jan organised to help bond the new workforce together was, I fondly remember, 'Personality Training'. We learned that our personality traits weren't so dissimilar to those of the people we were going to work with or were, in fact, compatible so different points of view could be worked together to form constructive outcomes. Workshops on organisational values were held first with senior staff and second with all other library staff to discuss how the library service could achieve an appropriate workplace culture and environment.

The proposed structure of the council went through a couple of changes with Jan Kilbourne originally being appointed Manager of Libraries, which was to revert back six months later to Manager Community Development and Libraries. Mackay already had a library service running four branches and Mirani and Sarina slotted into the existing organisation with remarkable ease. All Mackay librarians were conscious of Mirani and Sarina staff's worries of being 'taken over'. There was significant resistance to change from us on some levels: reservation and overdue fees, due dates, and stock collections to name a few. However, staff worked extremely well and enthusiastically through the merge to create positives from negatives at their respective branches.

Even those of us who were most vocal in our opposition to amalgamation have admitted to being very surprised and pleased with the transition. Disgruntlement with overdue fees has disappeared because of the quicker turnover of stock. A big allocation of the budget was spent on refurbishing Mirani and Sarina libraries. Music CD and DVD collections have increased to the point where we are running out of room to shelve them. We are learning to part with cherished collections so the stacks look brighter and the stock fresher. A major plus for us is no longer having to wait two months for an InterLibrary loan because we now have six branches to call on to have requested items here within days.

Employee morale was always a major concern as was increased workload for Mackay staff in extending core programs to an additional two branches. We were fortunate in that there was no doubling of positions and that gave staff a sense of security that other council departments (and possibly other larger Queensland libraries) may not have had. Sarina and Mirani libraries still function as usual: we run our own branches, and it's just the reporting structure that has changed. I think we would all agree we are still working on some issues which have arisen from the amalgamation. The big change is that staff do not see these issues as amalgamation problems anymore. Rather, we see these projects and ideas as our collective way of improving internal communication, processes, and staff development. Mackay Regional Council Library Service is developing a strong, cohesive team that is working together to develop and implement exciting services for their communities.

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R&R research: librarians engage with rural & remote nurses

In 2009, library staff were invited to join a funded nursing research project – and we were delighted to accept! The study addresses identified inhibitors to the engagement of nurse clinicians with research, and is funded through a Queensland Health Nursing and Midwifery Research Grant. The librarians are particularly involved in the study's intervention component, to support nurses who work in two rural/remote locations in North Queensland.

The Townsville Health Library is located in The Townsville Hospital which is the major referral hospital for North Queensland. It is the only Queensland Health library in the Townsville Health Service District (THSD), which, after a recent expansion, has

10 remote hospital facilities. The rural health facilities visited for the project are respectively located 87km and 135km from Townsville by road. Historically, and despite the provision of state-wide online services, there is an identified service gap resulting from geographical isolation, a common experience for rural practitioners.

Nurses of all levels working throughout THSD are expected to embrace research and evidence-based practice, with some nurses required to undertake a small action-based research project annually. It was observed that nurses working in THSD's smaller, rural/remote facilities have found it extremely difficult to demonstrate their involvement. Many factors have limited nurses' access to the face-to-face support and educational opportunities. The study addresses several of these inhibiting factors, while building upon other factors known to be supportive of developing a nursing research culture.

The intervention phase of the study is a multi-faceted education program about evidence-based practice and research skills, tailored to the participants' pre-existing research knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The education is delivered in the participants' local facilities with the provision of continued support throughout the year. It is anticipated that this intervention will result in improved orientation toward research measures. Additionally, the nurses will demonstrate their improved research skills by producing high-quality research proposals of relevance to their local practice situations.

The principal investigator is Anne Gardner, Professor of Nursing in the Tropical Health Research Unit (a jointly funded position linked with James Cook University). The co-investigators are the nursing research manager (Dr Wendy Smyth), the director of nursing of a rural hospital (Ms Mary Vicary,) and the director of library services (Ms Bronia Renison). A clinical nurse (Ms Tina Cann) is appointed as a research assistant to the project. Another librarian (Ms Margaret Larcombe) also accompanies the researchers on site visits to the remote facilities to meet with the participants.

The librarians provide professional advice about information services and assistance with research topics and information technologies, and also deliver tailored information literacy training. Throughout the project the librarians have been present at follow-up contact sessions conducted by videoconference to answer questions and provide help in context. Individual queries from participants are handled by telephone and email.

Involvement with this project has resulted in the development of a close collegial relationship with nursing research staff. It has provided a much needed opportunity for library staff to engage and build relationships with health practitioners at the remote facilities, and to raise the library profile within the district.

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