

ABC OPENING UP REGIONAL LIBRARIES

For the past twelve months, a new kind of digital creative has been lurking in the aisles of their local regional library. They're ABC Open producers, and if you haven't met one yet, there's a strong chance that if you're a regional librarian, you'll be hearing from one soon.

ABC Open is a new initiative to bring digital media skills to regional communities and help those communities share their stories through the national broadcaster. By the end of this year, 45 highly skilled multimedia producers will be working across regional Australia to provide face-to-face and online skills training and support in digital storytelling, social media and more.

Our focus is on storytelling, and on sharing community knowledge and ideas through digital media. Our producers run workshops and offer online support to contributors. They work wherever there's room for people to come together and learn, so it's no surprise that they're increasingly popping up in libraries.

Libraries and the ABC have a lot in common. We're both highly trusted institutions, with rich traditions of sharing information and ideas and being accessible and relevant to our communities. As new technology has emerged, we've both been challenged to innovate and reinvent ourselves, so that we continue to occupy a central place in our communities.

For the ABC, this means embracing the 'active' audience - those people who are no longer satisfied by just consuming media, but who want to be part of creating the stories and media experiences that they want to see and hear. Web 2.0 has given them the tools, but not necessarily the skills or the context to get started.

Since the ABC Open website launched in September 2010, we've published around 5,000 contributions, including videos, blogs, and images, and shown a range of those contributions across other ABC websites and platforms, including News 24 which now hosts a regular ABC Open slot. Local stories produced by community members now feature on ABC Local websites, and across other ABC platforms, like the Environment, Arts and Science sites. Local history and characters, regional arts, the changing nature of regional communities, local knowledge and tips and tricks for making stories are all part of the mix.

One of our earliest projects, *Now and Then*, encouraged the use of personal and public archives to tell a story of how times and places have changed. Contributors held a photo in the exact location where it was photographed, opening a window on past events and people. In many cases, historical societies and council libraries provided the historical images which were then used by camera clubs, schools and other contributors. It was a great cross-generational project which received more than 1,000 images and created a rich collection of stories.

In our first year, we've seen many regional libraries recognise the value of working together. In Bendigo, ABC Open producer Jane Curtis has been collaborating with librarians to run workshops, set up a stall to answer questions about digital media and the internet, and

establish an account for the library on the photo sharing site, Flickr. She cross-posts on the library's Facebook to drive further engagement from Open workshop participants. ABC Open and the Bendigo Library recently collaborated on an exhibition, hosted at the library, of locally created photographic portraits, made at an ABC Open workshop. Jane and the librarians curated the exhibition, conducted school tours and developed study guides and highlighted the library's collection of photographic books to encourage further engagement. One of the visitors to the library, John Baensch from Heathcote, came to see a portrait of his mother, Daisy. "I'd never been to the library, but what an eye opener, I'll tell you what," he said.

ABC Open producers have found that they can draw not only traditional but non-traditional library users into their workshops, which are promoted on ABC Local Radio, online and through flyers and posters around town. Producers work closely with many community organisations, linking those groups more closely with their local libraries through workshops and events.

And as the Illawarra's ABC Open producer recently told the RISG conference in Sydney, there are many opportunities to collaborate. "Regional communities love the

local library, and they love local ABC", he later blogged. "Imagine the power of the two."

Cath Dwyer

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This summer, ABC Open will be running Digital Summer Schools around the country. If you'd like to book a workshop, or a series of workshops, for your library, visit abc.net.au/open, click on the Regions Tab at the top of the page to find your local ABC Open producer.