

Why should libraries be in the literacy space?

In July at the State Library of New South Wales, National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA) held an event titled *Brave New Worlds – Libraries, Learning and Community Needs*.

Brave New Worlds aimed to provoke discussion about why libraries are and should be involved in the literacy and learning space.

Many libraries have a strong and visible presence in this space, but should we? Isn't literacy and learning the remit of our formal education system?

By focussing on how partnerships and initiatives like the National Year of Reading can raise the profile of libraries, and how programs like 26Ten in Tasmania and Better Beginnings in Western Australia can make a real difference to literacy levels and to people's lives, *Brave New Worlds* aimed to encourage libraries to reach out to their communities across all ages to support vital literacy development and encourage and support learning.

Adult literacy was raised as a major issue, with Australia still suffering from

staggering rates of poor literacy, and this provoked discussion around how libraries might reach those most in need of support.

The NSLA Literacy and Learning Group will consider the possibility of similar seminars being held across the

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country in the future. Broadening the audience beyond libraries provides opportunities for greater engagement with government at all levels and partnerships with other organisations in the community.

The NSLA Literacy and Learning Group is developing a Maturity Matrix

which will assist libraries to determine how they are placed as learning institutions, and will provide libraries with some aspirational goals. Once the testing is complete, the Matrix will be made available to all libraries, along with guidelines and a diagnostic tool

to help organisations work towards their goals. Further information can be found at www.nsla.org.au/projects/literacy-and-learning.

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a personal, community and work level. We are fortunate that we have a great community institution that can help us tackle the challenge of bringing all Australians to the level needed today.

Today's libraries are using their unique community position to work creatively in metropolitan, regional and remote areas to address literacy issues. Many libraries have already adopted innovative programs to address the needs of their unique and sometimes culturally diverse communities. But we who provide library services need to better understand how to use our skills and our status as trusted public institutions in literacy

and learning. Working together with other community groups and the education sector, we can build a more literate and more resilient Australia.

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