

COMMUNITY BUILDING AT FAIRFIELD CITY LIBRARY SERVICE



Public libraries have always had a community building approach – our very insistence on equity of access to information is one of the foundations of a healthy community. Over recent years we've ventured into more specific areas of community building – assistance for migrants to learn English, help for people who want to learn to use computers or get a job, support for students with homework centres and online tutoring, and many others.

The important thing is to know what a particular community needs and to respond appropriately. Public libraries rarely have funding in place before they launch into new ventures; they usually take the Nike approach – Just Do It! Some examples of these kinds of programs are the *Finding MY Place*, *Achievers Day*, and *Communities on*

the Move programs run by Fairfield City Library Service.

Finding MY Place originated in Belmont City Library, WA and was the brainchild of staff member Natasha Griggs. This program has been so successful it has spread throughout Western Australia and into Victoria, South Australia, and NSW. Staff from Fairfield City Library were inspired to start a *Finding MY Place* program after hearing Natasha speak at the *12 to 24s @ Your Public Library in Australia and New Zealand* conference in June 2010.

Finding MY Place is a way for libraries to work with at-risk young people in their communities. The library works with a school to identify the students – those who are truanting and at risk of dropping out of school – and then crafts a program of motivational speakers

and trainers. Fairfield's speakers include ex-drug addict and ex-prisoner Tony Hoang, featured on the SBS series *Once Upon a Time in Cabramatta*, as well as those who teach healthy relationships, martial arts, fitness, and basics such as resume writing and interview techniques. The students come to the library once a week during school time and participate in the program which also includes food, in our case, pizza, since we are talking about hungry teens! Since our first pilot program in late 2010, we have worked with four local high schools and approximately 12 teens from each school. We pre-test and post-test the students to see how their attitude to school and their future plans changes over the course of the program. The change in some students has been amazing. We were particularly delighted when graduates Peta Hide and Ashleigh Maddison (see photo top left), from the previous program came to speak to the new group and tell them that it had made a positive change in their lives.

Through the program we have also developed some great partnerships with local agencies who work with at-risk youth. These partnerships have provided the funding for the food and, even more importantly, most of the contacts for the speakers and trainers. Almost all these people donate their time to the program or are able to do it as part of their normal job. One of our partners, Youth Connections (MTC Work Solutions), is also able to do follow up with the students at school once the program has finished.

Another program which aims to inspire young people is *Achievers' Day*. Local Studies Librarian, Marilyn Gallo wanted a way to build relationships with local schools and also collect and archive the schools' histories. The schools identify past students who have achieved in various fields – sports, business, law, politics, etc – as well as past teachers and others who can provide oral history interviews about the school's history and growth. Material such as photographs and school yearbooks are collected and digitised by the library with copies going to the school as well as into our Local Studies collection. The project is celebrated with an *Achievers' Day* event. The school puts on a display in the library and up to 100 year 9 and 10 students come to hear the past students talk about the role the school played in their life and career journeys and, of course, to eat pizza.



Communities on the Move is a program aimed at collecting the social and settlement history of a particular ethnic group. Run similarly to *Achievers' Day*, key community members are identified and interviewed for the oral history collection. Photographs, documents, and other memorabilia are collected and digitised to go into the Local Studies collection with copies provided to the community group. The finale of this program is a celebration of that specific community group – dancing, music, guest speakers from the community, and, of course, food traditional to that culture.

Do programs like these build community? In the *Finding MY Place* program we are obviously working with very small numbers of students compared to our overall population. However, the ongoing costs to the community of these young people dropping out of school early are potentially enormous – with minimal job opportunities they may end up dependant on social services long term. Worst case scenario is criminal activity and, ultimately, the justice system. *Achievers' Day* targets a different group of young people, but also aims to inspire them to achieve to their potential. *Communities on the Move* allows one community group to showcase their history and culture to the rest of the community, thereby promoting understanding and fulfilling Council's motto *Celebrating Diversity*.

So, what's the benefit to the library service of building community apart from purely altruistic outcomes? Community building also builds for our future – partnerships, collections, good will, great publicity, and, ultimately, library users.

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REVITALISING A DECLINING SERVICE

The library service at Gumeracha library was in slow decline, but remained important to the Gumeracha community. So with a miniscule budget of \$30 400, and a lot of creativity, the Gumeracha Civic Centre Revitalisation began.

The aims were to:

- create a 'shared space' for Gumeracha Library and the Torrens Valley Community Centre (TVCC),
- revitalise a library service,
- provide the Community Centre with main street frontage and increased space, and
- maximise usage of Council facilities by the community.

Community Centre. The library is now accessible for six days, up from three, and the centre has achieved stronger partnerships with community volunteers. The Community Centre has increased space – and all of these outcomes were achieved with no additional operating costs.

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All outcomes were achieved with no additional operating costs

Over the course of the revitalisation, the library and foyer were redecorated, with refit of the current service desk and work area. Community and Council information display areas were improved, and the foyer refurbished to include moveable magazine and newspaper stands. Two discrete areas were created: a 'café' area with tables and chairs, and a reading area with easy access to the current coffee machine. Finally, changes were made in service delivery model, increasing the use of volunteers during 'unstaffed' periods.

The revitalised Gumeracha Civic Centre launched on 10 November 2013, with the new shared space model increasing access to library resources and facilities while providing street front access to the

