

# THERE'S A LOT GOING ON IN LOGAN CITY

Logan City, in South East Queensland, is one of the most culturally diverse cities in Australia. Nine library branches serve the 215 cultures represented in the population. Some 26.1% of the residents were born overseas. The median age of the city's population is 33 years, and 31% of the population are under the age of 20.

This makes Logan a very young city, and that means programs and services for young people are vitally important. Among the innovative approaches and activities devised by the library staff are storytime programs designed to connect with special needs children and for children from varying cultural backgrounds, and improving digital literacy through creative activities using robotics and coding.

## MULTICULTURAL PARTNERSHIPS THROUGH STORIES AND PLAY

**S**pecial partnerships, programs and relationships have been developed within the community to complement children's programs at Logan City Council Libraries. Two examples are the partnerships with MultiLink and the Logan District Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation for Elders.

MultiLink Community Services Inc works with permanent migrants and their families ([www.multilink.org.au](http://www.multilink.org.au)). They run a free playgroup called the MultiLink Rainbow Playgroup, which meets biweekly, and partner with the libraries, bringing their participants to Story and Baby Time programs. Symbiotic benefits of the partnership include exposure to early literature and numeracy, songs and rhymes, fine and gross motor skills development, strengthening support networks for parents, English conversation practice, and development of social skills through play.

The Logan District Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation for Elders run the award winning Yarning with Our Mob Story Time program at Logan City Council Libraries, in conjunction with library staff ([bit.ly/1rKs8pX](http://bit.ly/1rKs8pX)). These monthly sessions celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and cater for the diverse needs of young people and families in the community.

Many volunteers also assist to deliver a diverse range of Logan City Council Libraries' programs, including Page Turners and Homework Help.

Page Turners is an after school reading and literacy program for school children. This program won a Logan City Council Customer Service Innovation Award in 2011. It is supported by elders from the African, Pacific Island and Indigenous communities. These elders regularly talk to the children and encourage them to develop good reading habits.

The Homework Help program is also supported by many volunteers. One such volunteer is a Farsi speaking, volunteer community member who provides invaluable assistance with students from a non-English speaking background.

These partnerships with community organisations and volunteers enrich, support and enhance the lives and customer experience of our patrons and their families, many of whom are from a multicultural background. Our services in turn complement the activities of many of our partners. It is a win-win situation.

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## MUTUAL ENGAGEMENT FORGES UNIQUE CAREER

**S**imon Ellaby's chance move into storytelling sessions for special education students opened up a whole world for them, and for himself.

Simon was working in a branch of Logan City Libraries, across the road from the local special school, when a casual enquiry from a teacher led him to volunteer for dedicated storytime sessions for special needs students in the mid 1990s. Helping to fill that urgent gap started him on a path he could never have imagined.

From fairly humble beginnings, these sessions quickly developed into a weekly highlight for both the students and Simon. The more stories Simon told and the more interactions he had, the more he realised breaking down the boundaries between the text and the performance was the best part for the students. Soon, the whole of each story was ad lib and wild. The numbers of students grew and grew, until Simon was regularly performing to 40 special needs students and their related teachers.

The two aspects of Simon's storytime sessions which most impressed the teachers were his powerful ability to engage the students with literacy through storytelling, and the opportunity afforded students to access library spaces in such a fun, and loud, and very public way. Naturally, they tried to lure Simon into becoming a special education teacher.

Asked about Simon's storytelling, Jennifer Hall, Young People's Librarian with Logan City Council Libraries, recalls how 'he brought creativity, drama, learning and fun to his special needs storytime sessions with wonderful retellings of *Elmer the Elephant*, the Being Unique storytime kit he created, his Jack in a Box song, his dramatic skills and kaftan, and his trumpet and theremin playing'.

Eventually Simon did leave the library to become a special education teacher. His final storytime drew quite the crowd, and he is not forgotten according to Jennifer. 'I still get enquiries from clients about Simon,' she says.

But Simon has not been lost to libraries. He remains passionate about the links between libraries, storytelling and literacy, and has independently developed a professional learning seminar, *A Book is Not a Story*, which he regularly presents to enthralled audiences of library staff, teacher librarians, teachers, and care providers in both Queensland and Tasmania. It's amazing sometimes what you can do with enthusiasm and some ad libbing.

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## FUN (WITH A SERVE OF DIGITAL LITERACY ON THE SIDE)

**Y**oung people's digital literacy programs have always been a core element of young people's services at Logan City Council Libraries. This year, computer coding for kids has been a focus with the libraries, using the CoderDojo program and LEGO® robotics.

These programs were developed to meet community needs that were identified through feedback from participants from past programs, consultation with young people and from recommendations arising from Logan City Council Libraries' *Under 18s Strategy and Action Plan 2012–2017*.

In 2014, Logan City Council Libraries began its own LEGO® robotics and coding for kids programs. The libraries purchased LEGO® EV3 and WeDo Robotics kits, considered a good investment with equipment lifespan expected to be seven to 10 years. Training for staff was conducted by Dr Damien Kee from Domabotics, who also presented LEGO® Robotic school holiday programs. Staff also attended these sessions, which provided ideas for group and equipment management for future robotic workshops.

EV3 and WeDo workshops have since been rolled out by library staff during Under 8s Week, school holidays, and Children's Book Week this year. One important finding from these sessions was the positive way participants have responded to the link between coding on a screen to the physical element of making and programming robots.

Logan City Council Libraries also commenced a series of sessions for children inspired by the CoderDojo program. These were held over eight Saturdays, facilitated by volunteers and library staff. Programs and resources we found most useful included *code.org – 1 Hour of Code*, *Khan Academy* and *Scratch*. Participants were also introduced to LEGO® Robotics and experimented with the 3D printer at the library.

In both programs, participants were introduced to problem solving and group work skills, simple block coding, robotics and maths concepts (measurement, degrees, rotations) and coding concepts (for example, loops and repeats).

Feedback from participants and parents/carers has been very positive for both programs. Sessions have been booked out, with long waiting lists – especially the WeDo workshops for younger children – and demand for robotic and coding workshops continues to grow.

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