

CHILDREN'S LAUREATE CHAMPIONS LIBRARIES

Goldfields Library Corporation in Victoria teamed up with the Australian Children's Literature Alliance (ACLA) to champion the message 'reading changes lives' at the inaugural Woodend Children's Festival this year, and found themselves with a success on their hands.

Woodend is located at the base of Mt Macedon in central Victoria, and has a population of around 4,000. The first ever Woodend Children's Festival was a great success, attracting over 1,500 people. To bring Woodend Library to the festival, and connect with families about the importance of reading, Goldfields Library staff partnered with the Australian Children's Literature Alliance (www.childrenslaureate.org.au) to pilot a Share a Story reading corner.

ACLA champions the transformational power of reading in young lives through their Australian Children's Laureate program and awards the role of Laureate each year to an Australian author and/or illustrator of children's and/or youth literature making a significant contribution to the field. In 2014–2015, the Australian Children's Laureate is best selling author Jackie French.

Jackie, author of over 140 books, says there are a million ways to share a story.

'To read to a child on your lap; to have a child read to you while you cook dinner... to join a storytelling session at your library... Stories tell us who we are,' says Jackie.

'They teach us empathy so we understand who others are. They give us the power to imagine and create the future.'

The Laureate acts as an ambassador for Australian children's literature, inspiring young people to tell their own stories and be part of an active literary culture for enjoyment, wellbeing and success in life.

In January 2015, Jackie French will be launching her special Laureate project, the Share a Story calendar, which will promote different ways to share a story every month via the Australian Children's Laureate blog.

Building partnerships with libraries and schools is essential to the Laureate program.

At the Woodend Children's Festival, Goldfields Library staff acted as Laureate ambassadors, inviting families to share a story in our reading corner.

The reading corner was a simple set up, with a rug, comfortable cushions and a selection of books from the Goldfields Library collection featuring the works of current and previous Australian and international Children's Laureates, including Jackie French, Alison Lester, Boori Monty Pryor and Julia Donaldson.

ACLA lent us their beautifully designed Laureate banner, and we promoted library membership, programs and services. Library staff were amazed at how many people took the opportunity to take time out from the array of activities on offer at the festival to enjoy a bit of quiet time with a book. In fact, it seemed we were the 'chillout zone' for many tired parents, excited children and overawed toddlers! We were even asked, 'is this where we come to read a book?'

The Australian Children's Laureate team is keen to reach out to children and families to promote the transformational power of reading, particularly in regional and remote areas. Our experience partnering with them for the Woodend Children's Festival was highly rewarding. The joint promotion brought another level of engagement to our library display, cementing the role of libraries in promoting early literacy and fostering a love for books in children to the Laureate's bigger message, 'reading changes lives!'

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