

YOU'VE GOTTA LAUGH



We've all had them. Those memorable questions that become our favourite stories to share with colleagues. The team at Public Libraries Australia are running a survey to collect the funniest things library staff have been asked by their patrons. It will run until the end of the year, so if you haven't shared yours already, please do. To inspire you, here are just a few of the answers received so far.

Corinne Hughes from Richmond-Upper Clarence Regional Library's Kyogle Branch had to keep her best professional face on when a gentleman with a very heavy accent asked her to 'Please tell me where the nearest 'pawno' shop is?' She says, 'in my most unshaken, quiet, professional library speak I say, 'I'm sorry, Kyogle doesn't have a porno shop'. The client then replied, 'I've just been to the shop across the street (pointing to the Anglicare op shop) and they don't have what I want. I like collecting old things and other people's junk.' I did my best helpful librarian smile, said sorry, hoped the client didn't think I was an idiot or mocking his accent, and gave him directions to the other op shops in town.'

As Julie Mitchell of Albany Public Library knows, many public library patrons clearly believe the staff are omniscient. She responded to the survey with this gem: 'A fire engine had just raced past the library when a patron asked me if I thought that they were attending a house fire, as he had grilled some lamb chops and couldn't remember if he turned the stove off. I rang the fire brigade, who informed me that they were attending a bushfire at another location. I then organised a taxi for the person, so he could go home and check his stove.'

In Alice Springs, Georgina Davison at the Alice Springs Public Library reports that she was once asked to show a

patron how to open a can of Spam. She complied, secure in the knowledge that she was teaching him a skill he would probably use over and over again.

Sometimes, the obvious just escapes people. Sarah, from Caroline Springs Library has been asked, quite seriously, 'do you have a book?' The question was followed by a long pause, so Sarah confidently answered, 'yes'.

But we are brilliant at unpacking the real request from the white noise around it when we have to be. As Michaela Owen from Yass had to do with this one: 'Do you have the Black and White book?' Her reply: 'Do you mean *50 Shades of Grey*?' They did. Or the request received by the City of Bunbury's Kellie Pain for 'those new-fangled LSDs'. 'As DVDs had just arrived in our library,' says Kellie, 'I did a very quick rethink of the wording of the question and with a very straight face showed the older gentleman the DVD collection.'

From pictures of whales (for a tattoo) to 'how to give birth in the ocean with dolphins' (yes, there is an article out there) and fixing dropped stitches in a child's knitting, the unexpected is part of public library everyday life. Extra kudos, though, goes to the team at Bentley Library for keeping their cool with this one: 'I scanned this upside down!! How do I print it so it's the right way up?' Instructions on how to turn the printed page up the other way did the trick. Clearly, they saved any eye-rolling for later in the privacy of the staff room.

Send your funniest request from a library patron in to Public Libraries Australia via the survey website at bit.ly/1ATavFy. The survey will remain open for the rest of 2015.