

Libraries hold more than stories

ALIA President, **LYNDALL LEY**, reflects on some of the services that libraries offer their communities that showcase the wide range of benefits libraries create.

Hello again everyone.

Libraries are now, more than ever, more than books. We read amazing stories every day of the 'things' that you can access or borrow at your local library; from musical instruments to laptops, tools to toys, ebooks and articles to the perennial paper favourites, libraries offer something for everyone. There's even the incredible [Human Library™](#) – a worldwide movement for social change designed to build a framework for positive conversations that can challenge stereotypes and prejudices. The Human Library™ is a place where real people are on 'loan' to 'readers', and as they say themselves – 'a place where difficult questions are expected, appreciated and answered'. I suspect everyone who works a reference desk will say that all libraries are places where that mantra applies.

But perhaps, even more than being about 'things', libraries today and of the future are about their spaces and their services for their communities. Not only are they safe and inclusive spaces for all, but they mean different things to different people through the innovative use of physical space and the provision of a wide range of services. They are private spaces and playgroups, theatres and lecture spaces,

makerspaces and science labs, Wi-Fi and streaming services, studios and study desks, galleries and creative display areas, places for recreational and social groups to meet and interact and students to learn and study. The library is a destination for fun as well as learning.

I recently visited [Tampines Regional Library](#) in Singapore, a remarkable public library spread over five floors at the heart and hub of its community and which offers such amenities as digital makerspaces, exhibition galleries, and even a culinary studio where cooking lessons are offered. Some of these activities are provided in partnership with local organisations.

The library was recently one of the five finalists in the Public Library of the Year award of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. The prize was [ultimately awarded to School 7](#) in Den Helder, Netherlands, a library where not only can you borrow an ever-increasing range of 'things', but where you can get married in the theatre or celebrate your birthday in the café – truly a library space where everyone is welcome and everything is possible.

Today's libraries are marked by their ability to understand what their communities need and to ensure spaces and services – both traditional and innovative – deliver exciting and important outcomes, whether they be school, special, university, public, or any other sort of library. They are deeply entwined with the communities they serve and are always changing and growing, looking for ways to be ever more innovative and essential. Libraries serve up both the expected and at times, the unexpected. Libraries today are bucking tradition, offering just what their community needs and values. 🌟

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