

TasTAFE BUILDS LIFELONG LEARNERS



PETRINA OSBORNE looks at how TasTAFE libraries help set students up with the skills to achieve their own lifelong learning goals.

TasTAFE is Tasmania's largest vocational education and training provider and the role of TasTAFE's seven libraries is to assist students to gain a qualification and employment, and to provide lifelong learning opportunities. TasTAFE aims to reduce learning barriers, provide practical support, improve self-confidence and encourage students never to stop learning. To achieve this, our libraries have trialled and introduced a variety of initiatives.

Virtual reality, coding, robotics and 3D printing in DigiLabs

Virtual reality, robots and 3D printing devices are beyond the reach of students to purchase. TasTAFE DigiLabs (makerspaces) provides equal access for students to these new technologies. They offer supported, fun and collaborative learning opportunities. Group activities give students opportunities to step outside their comfort zone and develop leadership and communication skills.

Encourage Creativity

Students juggle competing family, work, social and study commitments. We encourage them to practice reading and writing and express their creativity by developing competitions that offer attractive prizes. Successful campaigns include a short story competition and reading and book review challenges. We minimise rules because they add barriers to participation.

Digital literacy classes

Library and Migrant Resource Centre staff work together to provide digital literacy classes for adult migrants.

Classes make learning fun, improve digital literacy and build self-confidence and life skills. Topics have included keyboard and mouse skills; Gmail; Google searching; YouTube; searching real estate websites for rental properties; online security; using Google maps to plan trips; iPads; Wi-Fi; apps; cloud storage; and using Word.

Overdue fines


Feedback we received suggested that many students avoided the library because they couldn't afford fines. So, we removed overdue fines to provide an equitable service to all of our students. After these fines were removed usage statistics improved and the number of unresolved loans decreased.

Rewards

We replaced overdue fines with incentives to read. Students respond positively to simple loyalty programs that provide a reward they actually want. Each loan now results in a stamp on a loyalty card. This encourages students to read and gain exposure to new topics and world views. TasTAFE libraries don't have self-issue kiosks, so each stamp on a loyalty card is a positive encounter with staff that allows us to build rapport and provide encouragement to our users.

Personalised support

Many students with looming deadlines ask for one-on-one help to learn basic computing skills. Library staff teach skills such as locating files; formatting Word documents; attaching files to emails; printing documents; and backing-up files. Students regularly ask library staff to proof read assignments and resumes. If there isn't time to make an appointment with Student Support staff, library staff help as they can. The provision of just-in-time digital skills training and ad-hoc assistance builds a student's sense of trust in TasTAFE's support network.

The diverse needs of our student cohort drives us to pilot and adopt programs that have practical outcomes, but it is just as important to create a welcoming space where students feel emotionally supported. When we get the balance right, students are encouraged to become lifelong learners and excel in their chosen field. 

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