

IT'S NOT FINE TO FINE



Eradicate library fines!

But now we come to the rallying call, what can you do about it? Here are four simple steps to get you started on the path to a fine-free library:

For many years the act of fining library patrons for overdue items has been challenged, and for good reason. Fining patrons for overdue items rallies against our core values as librarians – they create barriers to information and services. Fines don't discriminate, which means they affect both those that can afford to pay them but also those that cannot. Within library operating budgets they are also classed as a revenue stream, but for me there is something deeply problematic about having a budget line born out of fining our own patrons. Above all, this is a social justice issue. Fines unfairly discriminate against those of less economic means which runs contrary to the very essence of what libraries are trying to achieve – access to all.

I have come to see this topic gain more traction over the last couple of years. There are many stories of libraries across the globe removing library fines and questioning their fines and fees policies. Twitter conversations have sprung up calling on people to join the movement using hashtags such as #ItsNotFineToFine, #NoLibraryFines and #CritLib and websites have been created to support the cause such as (endlibraryfines.info). Already within Australia there are many States, Territories and library services that have abolished library fines and have made positive policy changes in regard to fines, with more services adopting this approach regularly. However, there are still some services and institutions that have not yet made the change.

At the ALIA New Librarians' Symposium 2019 (NLS9) I gave a talk that brought together examples, arguments and resources around why it's not fine to fine. I presented the case study of Casey Cardinia Library Service which built a business case showing they would actually save over five thousand dollars by implementing a no fines approach (due to the high administration costs of serving the fines) as well as aligning with the library service core values and strategic plan.

Become informed

Bringing people onside means being able to convey the message and understand the topic. You don't need to be an expert, but a little more knowledge goes a long way. Find out what stage your library has progressed in removing fines, and if there is already a move towards removing library fines, find out how you can help.

Build a business case

Once you have a support base, you will need to build a business case to present to library executives or to council.

Contact stakeholders

With many library services concerned that a no fines approach could leave a funding black hole, gaining support from council or other stakeholders would be extremely beneficial. Although, I think we should keep this debate within the industry, as a user centric campaign presents the risk of bad publicity towards libraries.

Advocate

If at first you don't succeed, continue to write to council or management and talk with colleagues.

In order to help in these steps, I created a website of resources, (itsnotfinetofine.com). Here you will find a template for both building a business case and writing to council. Use this as you need, and feel free to adapt, alter and customise. This article isn't an attempt to disparage library services that still operate fine based policies, but rather to add to the conversation and highlight the topic. In doing so we might be able to change the approach of those organisations that still fine patrons as part of their operational procedure. If not us, then who? 🌟

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#ItsNotFineToFine

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