

LIBRARIES/BUILDING/COMMUNITIES

THE VITAL CONTRIBUTION OF VICTORIA'S PUBLIC LIBRARIES – A RESEARCH REPORT
FOR THE LIBRARY BOARD OF VICTORIA AND THE VICTORIAN PUBLIC LIBRARY NETWORK

Connecting with the Community



Library Board
of Victoria



The original *Libraries Building Communities* reports were published in 2005. The reports presented the findings of the first comprehensive Australian study of the value public libraries add to their communities. The study was designed to provide information that would assist in the planning of public library services and in advocacy efforts on behalf of public libraries. It included all 44 public library services in Victoria and drew on the views of nearly 10,000 Victorians. There are four reports with an *Executive Summary*:

- Report One: *Setting the Scene* covers the concept of community building, the Victorian Government's policy agenda, the Victorian public library network, project methodology and relevant research.
- Report Two: *Logging the Benefits* outlines community views on the role and benefits of public libraries.
- Report Three: *Bridging the Gaps* provides socio-demographic profiles of library users and non-users and strategies of bridging the perceived gaps in public library service delivery.
- Report Four: *Showcasing the Best* gives over thirty examples of innovation and excellence in Victorian public libraries.

In 2006, the research continued with the *Libraries Building Communities* Library User Census and Survey Project and publication of a further two reports from this research:

- Report One: *Statewide Analysis and Comparisons*
- Report Two: *Library Services Data and Reports*

In 2007, further qualitative research was undertaken with five groups identified in the 2005 reports as 'hard to reach' for public libraries: indigenous Australians; disadvantaged young people; Horn of Africa communities; low income families; and, vulnerable learners. The outcomes of this research and ideas for engaging these groups are contained in the *Connecting with the Community* report.

In 2007, a second volume of case studies of some of the many innovative and excellent programs offered by Victorian public libraries that strengthen their communities was compiled. These are published in *Libraries Building Communities* Report Four: *Showcasing the Best, Volume 2*.

All publicly available reports related to the *Libraries Building Communities* project are available via the State Library of Victoria website: www.slv.vic.gov.au

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Introduction

The concern is that, among the 40% not using [public] libraries, there are people who are hard to reach but who would benefit enormously from what the library has to offer ... data indicates that about 13% of Victorians fall into this category.

STATE LIBRARY OF VICTORIA 2005B, P. 6

Libraries Building Communities (LBC) is a Statewide Public Library Development Project of the Library Board of Victoria undertaken through the State Library of Victoria and the Victorian public library network. Its aim is to convey to decision makers, and others, the breadth, depth and potential impact of the modern public library on the whole community.

LBC research shows that about 60% of Victorians use public library services. Of the remainder, a significant proportion give 'lifestyle' reasons for not using the library. A smaller proportion, representing about 13% of Victorians, have potentially much to gain from using library services but face considerable barriers in accessing and using these services. This group includes both people from marginalised social groups whose access to information and technology is severely limited, and people who face special difficulties in using the library (e.g. those who are housebound).

To provide a clearer picture of these 'hard-to-reach' groups, the Connecting with the Community research project has collected qualitative information about their characteristics and barriers to participation. The project report also suggests practical strategies and recommendations for meeting the specific needs of these groups.

Through discussion with the LBC Workgroup, comprising representatives of the State Library of Victoria and Victoria's public library services, the Connecting with the Community project chose to research five target groups within the population:

- Indigenous Australians
- Disadvantaged young people
- Horn of Africa communities
- Low-income families
- Vulnerable learners

The research does not suggest that all members of these population groups face barriers in accessing and using public library services. Some people within these groups are regular and passionate library users. Nor does the research suggest that these groups fully account for the 13% of Victorians who may be marginalised in their

access to information. Other groups might have been chosen.

These groups were selected on the basis that they represented populations who were thought to significantly underuse available library services. The more that public libraries know about the nature of these groups – their information needs, the factors that influence their access of information, the examples of library programs implemented in Victoria, Australia and overseas – the greater the opportunity for existing library services to be enhanced to better meet the needs of all members of the community. It is hoped that in time the proportion of Victorians who have much to gain from using library services but face barriers in accessing and using these services might no longer be 13%, but 10% or 5%, or even lower.

Research methods

I&J Management Services has worked with the State Library of Victoria and the Victorian public library network on several aspects of the Libraries Building Communities project. In 2007, it was engaged to undertake the Connecting with the Community research project.

Selection of target groups

In planning the research, the LBC Workgroup discussed potential criteria for selection of the hard-to-reach target groups that would be the focus of the project. Five broad criteria were thought to balance the arguments for and against targeting different population groups:

- **Universality** – The population target group and the findings related to that target group are relevant to the majority of Victorian public libraries.
 - **Real benefits** – The target group is likely to be interested in and benefit from access to public library services.
 - **Policy connectedness** – The target group corresponds with groups identified as socially excluded and identified as target groups in Commonwealth, state and local government policy statements.
 - **Research efficiency** – The target group is not the subject of similar research already being done in the public library system, thereby avoiding duplication of effort.
 - **Coverage** – The target group should represent a significant proportion of the 13% of Victorians in the hard-to-reach group.
- Applying these criteria and taking in to account the knowledge, experience and input of the LBC Workgroup, it was agreed that the research would focus on the following hard-to-reach target groups:
- **Indigenous Australians** – Previous LBC research and library data indicates that Indigenous Australians are generally not frequent users of library services. However, the information, literacy, educational and computer services available through public libraries are of benefit to Indigenous Australians of all age groups, including people living in rural and urban communities. Libraries could also play a role in developing and maintaining Indigenous language and cultural records.
 - **Disadvantaged young people** – This target group includes teenagers and young people who have left school early, those who are homeless or at risk of being made homeless, those in families where parents are unemployed, and young people facing other forms of social and/or economic disadvantage.
 - **Horn of Africa communities** – Humanitarian and refugee migration programs have seen a significant influx in Victoria over recent years of migrants from Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Djibouti. Aside from being a target group of interest in their own right, it was thought the issues related to library access and use by this group might be shared by other and future emerging migrant communities.
 - **Low-income families with dependent children** – A range of research reports, such as *Dropping off the Edge* (Vinson 2007), has identified families with children living in economically disadvantaged areas as facing difficulties in accessing community services that could assist their economic, educational, health

and social wellbeing. This target group includes sole parents and other families dependent on Centrelink benefits.

- **Vulnerable learners** – The skills needed in the twenty-first century workplace differ from those possessed by many older workers, long-term unemployed and people with low-level skills making the transition back to employment and learning. For many men aged over 45, women without an employment history, and people with disabilities, accessing further education and acquiring information and computer skills is critical to their capacity to participate in the workforce.

Other groups that were considered by the LBC Workgroup for attention in this research included some from broad population groups such as seniors, people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, people living in rural communities, the unemployed and people with disabilities, as well as some from more specific population groups such as homeless people, housebound people, itinerant travellers and people in detention. It was thought that subject to the findings from the five selected target groups, future research might be undertaken with these or other relevant population groups.

It was also understood that both the five target groups and those groups not included in the Connecting with the Community research project are not mutually exclusive, and that there is overlap between groups (e.g. disadvantaged young people and low-income families; vulnerable learners and the unemployed). This makes it possible to develop some understanding about library use and needs among groups not targeted by this research.

Research activities

The Connecting with the Community research project comprised three stages. The first was the process outlined above, in which the LBC Workgroup selected five groups who might benefit from greater access to and use of public library services. In addition to the selection of

these target groups, the LBC Workgroup also decided on five locations in Victoria to concentrate the field-based research activities. These were chosen as areas where it was known that library users and non-users from the respective target groups lived and might be engaged to participate in the research. The following five locations covered metropolitan, urban fringe and regional areas:

- Indigenous Australians – Shepparton.
- Disadvantaged young people – northern suburbs of Melbourne (e.g. Reservoir, Darebin).
- Horn of Africa communities – western suburbs of Melbourne (e.g. Footscray, St Albans).
- Low-income families – Hastings.
- Vulnerable learners – northern suburbs of Geelong (e.g. Corio, Norlane).

The second stage of the research involved collection of information about the factors that influence the library use of people from each target group. In effect, the research was conducted as five parallel mini-research projects, each having three distinct components.

1. Literature review – This involved a short, focused review of Australian and international literature to identify relevant research into the library use of these target groups, as well as examples of practical strategies implemented by libraries to encourage greater access to and use of library services by the target groups.

2. Interviews with community stakeholders – For each target group, this involved telephone or face-to-face interviews with a small number of stakeholders from agencies engaged in providing community support to the target group. Across the five areas these stakeholders included local government officers, youth workers, social workers, community leaders, community workers from migrant resource centres, representatives from community educational providers, staff at neighbourhood houses and community centres, and personnel from the Department of Human Services' Neighbourhood Renewal projects in relevant locations (e.g. Hastings, Corio).

3. Focus group discussions with targeted groups –

Two to four focus groups were held with each selected target group to explore perceptions of, attitudes to and use of public libraries. Participants were recruited to the groups through networks of the community stakeholders (e.g. playgroups, youth groups, ethnic community associations). Participants included some people from the target groups who used public library services and some who did not (including some who were unaware of available library services). The number of participants in each group ranged from four to twenty, with in most cases eight to twelve people involved and a total of around thirty people from each target group. Focus group participants received refreshments and were reimbursed for their contribution.

The second stage of the research also involved three focus group discussions with interested staff from Victoria's public libraries. About fifty staff members took part in three separate focus groups, each in a different location and each concentrating on one or two of the selected target population groups. The aim of these focus groups was to canvass issues related to the use of libraries by the target groups, and also to identify the innovative strategies currently being adopted by Victorian public libraries to attract and engage these target groups. The three focus groups were:

- Indigenous Australians and Horn of Africa communities – East Melbourne Library.
- Disadvantaged young people and low-income families – Dandenong Library.
- Vulnerable learners – Broadmeadows Library.

The final stage of the Connecting with the Community research project was the writing of this report. The report has been structured to document the findings of the overall project and highlight the findings related to individual target groups. The introductory section of the report contains the research objectives, information on research methods, presentation of a set of Principles of User Engagement and a summary of the overall findings.

The body of the report is presented in five parts, each dedicated to one of the selected target groups. These self-contained research reports have:

- 1 A description of the selected target group.
- 2 A description of the group's primary library and information needs.
- 3 Ideas and lessons for engaging the target group from libraries in Victoria, Australia and overseas, based on the literature review, the staff focus groups and information provided by the LBC Workgroup.
- 4 Discussion of factors that can inhibit access to and use of library services by the target group.
- 5 Discussion of actions that Victorian public libraries might take to increase productive library use among the target group and build connections with the community.
- 6 References and further reading relevant to the research.

Information about strategies to engage other population groups could, if desired, also be presented as self-contained reports in this format, reflecting as these do the Principles of User Engagement described in the next section of this report.

Additional information about the individual research approaches adopted with each target group is contained in the report on each group.

Principles of user engagement

In undertaking the Libraries Building Communities Connecting with the Community research project, a number of common principles emerged that could underlie the effective engagement of hard-to-reach library users.

These principles apply to the engagement of all library users, including the general population and, within this, the selected target groups. They describe a desired outcome, not the method or process by which the outcome can be achieved (e.g. increasing engagement

Principle	
Awareness	Ensure all targeted user groups are aware of available library services.
Engagement	Create places and spaces that are accessible, inviting, engaging and comfortable for each targeted user group.
Collections, programs and services	Provide collections, programs and services that meet the library and information needs of each targeted user group.
Policies and procedures	Implement policies and procedures that maximise access to library services and allow all library users to have an enjoyable library experience.
Customer service	Ensure library staff have the motivation, capacity and resources to engage and support library users.

through provision of opportunities for users to contribute to library planning, activities and programs), as this may vary from library to library, or between user groups. The principles are provided for guidance, and are not intended as a complete recipe for widespread and effective community engagement with public libraries.

The application of these principles to each of the research target groups is discussed in the individual research reports. The principles are broadly used as the basis for discussing the library and information needs of the target groups, the factors that inhibit or constrain their use of library services, and the strategies libraries might adopt to increase community engagement.

Summary

The Libraries Building Communities initiative aims to convey to decision makers, and others, the breadth, depth and potential impact on the whole community of the modern public library. Libraries are immensely important to their communities – culturally, economically and socially:

Libraries collect and disseminate information; they provide comfortable and convenient places for people to read and learn; their physical spaces form meeting places for community groups; being free and open for all they help to create a fairer society ... [Public libraries are] highly valued by the communities they serve, and are uniquely placed to draw a diverse range of people and groups together (State Library of Victoria 2005a, p. 5).

The Connecting with the Community project has undertaken research to enable library managers and staff to better understand some marginalised and disadvantaged population groups that tend not to be library users. It is estimated that about 13% of Victorians have potentially much to gain from using libraries but face barriers in accessing and using these services. People in this group could benefit from the educational, recreational and social information resources and programs provided by Victoria's public libraries, but are unaware of or disengaged from library services. These are people from marginalised social groups whose access to information and technology is severely limited, and people who face special difficulties in using the library. These are people that libraries find hard to reach through their normal communication and networking activities.

This research is focused on collection of information that will provide a clearer picture of these hard-to-reach groups – their characteristics and barriers to participation. The report aims to suggest practical strategies and recommendations for meeting the specific needs of these groups. It also aims to enable Victoria’s public library network to enhance the capacity and connectedness of Victorian communities.

Taking into account issues of relevance, benefits, policy connectedness, coverage and research efficiency, the LBC Workgroup selected five population groups to be the target of this research:

- Indigenous Australians
- Disadvantaged young people
- Horn of Africa communities
- Low-income families
- Vulnerable learners

These groups were selected on the basis that they represented populations who were thought to significantly underuse available library services. The more that public libraries know about the nature of these groups – their information needs, the factors that influence their access of information, the examples of library programs implemented in Victoria, Australia and overseas – the greater the opportunity for existing library services to be enhanced to better meet the needs of all members of the community.

The research does not suggest that all members of these population groups face barriers in accessing and using public library services. Nor does the research suggest that these groups fully cover the 13% of Victorians who may be marginalised in their access to information. Other groups might have been chosen. The research does not provide a cure-all to the challenges faced by these groups in accessing library services, nor a complete outreach strategy for every library. The research does not anticipate that every library will implement all of the programs and initiatives referenced in this report. Like any public institution, libraries cannot be all things to all people. The research emphasises the need to distinguish the important community role of library staff from that

of a welfare or social worker. It highlights the importance of libraries working closely with community health centres, child and migrant welfare agencies and other organisations that are able to complement the work of libraries by providing this type of support.

However, it is intended that the information contained in each of the individual sections of this report will be considered by library services as they assess the profile, characteristics and service needs of their local community. It is hoped that the challenges faced by these groups are better understood, and that methods of connecting with communities can be enhanced.

- Indigenous Australians are often unaware of what libraries have to offer, and feel uncomfortable in an unfamiliar environment. But if their library were a meeting place, a centre for bringing together information about Indigenous language and culture, then young and old they would come, they would share and they would learn.
- Disadvantaged young people want access to information, access to technology, and they want it now. There is information they need for educational and employment purposes; there is information they need to access community services. Libraries could be the place they come to for that information, if libraries had spaces and environments that were inviting, comfortable and entertaining.
- Horn of Africa communities in Victoria have been displaced, and are seeking connections: connections with one another; connections with their homeland, culture and traditions; and connections with their new home. They need to know what libraries have to offer. They need to develop English language and literacy skills. They need access to computers and information technology skills. They need access to information on jobs and community services. Libraries can work with these communities and their community leaders to fulfil these needs.
- Low-income families could benefit from many existing library services if they knew what was available: storytime for children, free access to the Internet, free access to books and magazines, support for skills development, and information on community

and employment services. These families need to be encouraged to come to and experience a modern public library. They need to feel welcomed and comfortable and able to take a little time out to read and take advantage of their library.

- Vulnerable learners are on the fringe of the workforce. They need access to information on education and employment opportunities. They need to develop information, literacy and information technology skills that are becoming essential in the workplace. They need to be encouraged to be lifelong learners. Many have not been in a public library for years, and once they find out about the resources, services and programs that libraries have to offer they can start to integrate their library into their learning plans.

The Connecting with the Community research aims to be a source of information and ideas that assist libraries to improve the quality and reach of service provision to give those who stand to benefit most the chance to access and use their local library. It is intended that this information promote discussion and community engagement.

It is hoped that in time the proportion of Victorians who have much to gain from using library services but face barriers in accessing and using these services might no longer be 13%, but 10% or 5% or even lower.

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State Library of Victoria 2005a, *Libraries Building Communities: Executive Summary*, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

State Library of Victoria 2005b, *Libraries Building Communities Report Three: Bridging the Gaps*, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

Vinson, T 2007, *Dropping off the Edge: The Distribution of Disadvantage in Australia*, Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia, Melbourne.

Part A: Indigenous Australians

Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders need to be involved in the decision-making processes, at all levels, to achieve informed and appropriate directions and agendas across the library and information sector.

NSLA 2006, P. 2

A1 Indigenous Australians

Background

The Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) 2006 Census indicates that there were 30,141 Indigenous people living in Victoria, representing 0.6% of the population. This compares with a count of 25,059 Indigenous people in the 2001 Census. The Indigenous population in Victoria is smaller than that in other parts of Australia with 455,018 Indigenous people counted Australia-wide in 2006 (2.3% of the population), up from 410,003 in 2001 (ABS 2008).¹ Profile data from the 2001 Census details the characteristics of Victoria's Indigenous population:

- Victoria's Indigenous population has a considerably younger age structure than the non-Indigenous population, with 57% under the age of 25 years, compared with 34% of the total Victorian population.
- Over half (52%) of Victoria's Indigenous people live outside the Melbourne metropolitan area. This compares with 28% of the non-Indigenous population, and strongly reflects Indigenous people's connection with traditional lands.
- The Goulburn Statistical Division, with 11% of Victoria's Indigenous population, has the largest number of Indigenous residents outside Melbourne, with 59% of these people living within the City of Greater Shepparton. The Mallee Statistical Division has 8% of Victoria's Indigenous population, with 51% of these people living in Mildura Rural City.
- Forty-eight per cent of Victoria's Indigenous population is in the Statistical Division of Melbourne; 13% of these reside within Northern Middle Melbourne, a further 11% in Western Melbourne and another 9% in South Eastern Outer Melbourne.

¹ Census data is generally regarded as underestimating the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (www.aihw.gov.au/indigenous/statistics.cfm) notes the uncertainties regarding Indigenous population estimates in the Census. They observe that between the 1996 and 2001 Censuses, estimates of the Indigenous population increased by 19% and that a change of this magnitude can only be partially explained in terms of natural increases determined by births, deaths and migration levels. They conclude that much of the additional change 'appears to be the result of increasing numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people identifying as Indigenous on census forms' (AIHW 2006). It is likely that this effect also influenced the 'increase' in Indigenous population counts from 2001 to 2006.

The *Victorian Indigenous Homelessness Study*, published by the Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria (Berry et al. 2001), reports that the Aboriginal community of Victoria is not a homogenous group connected to one area or having exactly the same needs and cultural practices. There are about 2,500 to 3,000 families belonging to some 35 major Indigenous clans. Although all Indigenous groups share particular issues and problems, an underlying historical diversity of cultures, languages and traditional practices explains the complex make-up of the Indigenous community in Victoria.

Disadvantage for Indigenous Australians

In the presentation notes to her paper *Indigenous Knowledge Centre Developments and the Indigenous Library Services Strategy*, Sandi Taylor, from the State Library of Queensland, describes the level of disadvantage in Aboriginal communities:

Indigenous Australians continue to have the lowest socio-economic profile of all Australians, the worst health of any group in Australia and significantly lower levels of participation and attainment in formal education. Babies of Indigenous mothers are twice as likely to die at birth or during the early post-natal phase than babies born to other Australian mothers (Taylor 2005, p. 1).

Taylor emphasises that when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, it is important to recognise the level of disadvantage and the policies that have created this situation.

In her response to the 1995 National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families, Lowitja O'Donoghue connected practices of the past, which saw Aboriginal children taken away from their families and communities, to current levels of disadvantage:

The effects of [practices such as these] have resulted in intergenerational trauma for indigenous Australians, as well as disadvantage, lack of access and equity and lack of social justice (SA Link-Up Program n.d.).

The *Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework* quotes data showing that Indigenous people die on average 20 years younger than other Victorian citizens, and experience a greater concentration of hardship and trauma over the course of their lives (Aboriginal Affairs Victoria 2006). Writing about the Aboriginal community in Shepparton, Neville Atkinson (2006) notes:

- Five years into the twenty-first century, the Aboriginal community in Shepparton experiences unemployment estimated to be as high as 77%, versus 6% for the local mainstream community.
- School retention rates for young Indigenous people are as low as 26%, while for the remainder of the Goulburn Valley community it is more than 70%.
- Aboriginal share of the documented wealth of the community is less than two-tenths of 1% of the total, even though the community makes up about 10% of the community population.

In another article in *The Age*, Paul Briggs provides special insight into the issues facing Aboriginal people in Victoria. He notes that the idea that Australia's 'genuine' Indigenous people can only be found in remote northern and north-western Australia is part of a national tendency that consistently undermines the identity of almost 200,000 Aboriginal people (half of the nation's documented total Aboriginal population) who live in south-eastern Australia:

... south-eastern Australia's Aborigines have no opportunity to take identity for granted, and no opportunity to celebrate their culture in the environment of diversity and multiculturalism that the nation purportedly values (Briggs 2006, p. 1).

Further, Briggs notes:

... a penetrating sadness in the consequence that indigenous people in communities such as Victoria are constantly portrayed as groups that have not made a contribution to the economic and social fabric of the wider community ...

If indigenous people in south-eastern Australia are to join the mainstream as equals in our national society, then we need to be allowed to reclaim and share our identity and culture. That requires an acceptance that identity is not prescribed by geography and cannot be imposed on people by commercial forces or cultural dominance (Briggs 2006, p. 2).

The *Victorian Indigenous Homelessness Study* outlines some of the cultural values important to Indigenous Australians (Berry et al. 2001). Issues of family are fundamental to understanding Indigenous needs and cultural practices, and the family is a broader concept than for most other groups. Family obligations are also very important, as a study participant said:

It's about a 'sense of belonging' and being part of a community – when I go home to my community or when I go to my father's country, I know I'm going home (Berry et al. 2001, p. 4).

Material wealth is shared, as in many families, but within much more extended family networks. In addition, comfort using outdoor space may conflict with the rules and regulations of the mainstream community. For example, different Indigenous groups may make choices about indoors or outdoors cooking and sleeping according to a cultural norm, and not necessarily due to a lack of shelter.

A2 Library and information needs

A review of literature on library services and discussions with community members through the Connecting with the Community research project have identified the main library and information needs of Indigenous Australians. For anyone who is new to the field, or who has never had an opportunity to think about the issues in relation to the information and library needs of Indigenous people, a good place to start is the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Protocols for Libraries, Archives and Information Services* (ATSILIRN 2005) (see section A3). These issues are placed in a broader policy context in the *Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework* (Aboriginal Affairs Victoria 2006), which identifies a number of strategic areas for action.

Library and information needs: Indigenous Australians

Access to information, resources and services to improve literacy and numeracy.

Access to information, resources and services that support Year 12 completion, educational attainment and development of pathways to employment.

Capacity to capture, maintain and access information about Indigenous people's language and cultural heritage.

Engagement in provision of library and information services to Indigenous people.

Access to information to improve literacy and numeracy

Literacy is a central issue for Indigenous communities, as overall levels of literacy among the Indigenous population remain well below those of other Australians. Lack of fundamental English literacy skills has profound effects on further educational participation and achievement. Although literacy levels are higher in urban areas, they still lag behind levels for non-Indigenous students.

Literacy is a fundamental principle of library service. In August 2004, the Northern Territory Minister for Local Government, Mr John Ah Kit, declared to Parliament:

One of the aims of libraries is to preserve our Indigenous culture and encourage community development ... Libraries and knowledge centres will offer programs to increase literacy awareness (Ah Kit 2004).

Indigenous Australians need a focal point for access to literacy support, as well as information, learning and recreational reading. This includes reading support for young children as they learn to read, as well as literacy programs for older Indigenous Australians:

'Aboriginal people with limited literacy who use our Library are predominantly looking for imagery that reflects their world in books and videos' (Senior 2006, p. 4).

Access to information to support educational attainment and employment pathways

Indigenous Australians' workforce participation, employment rates, levels of educational attainment and Year 12 completion are also well below those of other Australians. This is in part linked to low literacy levels, as well as limited access to education and employment. However, there is also a need for Indigenous Australians to be able to access information about educational and employment opportunities and pathways, and to develop job readiness and information technology skills.

Public libraries are a common community information access point that can support the provision of these services to Indigenous Australians.

Capacity to capture and pass on language and cultural heritage

Indigenous culture places great store in the tradition and passing on of Indigenous language and heritage:

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia are diverse in their cultures, histories and languages, and so their information requirements are equally diverse. Australia has over 200 distinct Aboriginal groups, plus the peoples of the Torres Strait; of these groups there are approximately 100 languages still spoken (ATSILIRN 2008).

Aboriginal people feel very strongly about language; the historical degradation of all Aboriginal languages is well documented and ongoing. So much has been taken from Aboriginal people since invasion that, like the land, language had become a precious and binding force which equates with identity (ICVET 2008).

The limited number of publications of Indigenous languages material is noted in the literature; there is enormous potential for capturing the songs, dance, art and stories of Aboriginal communities.

In her paper presented to librarians, historians and archivists at the Deadly Directions conference in August 2005, Jackie Huggins talks about why information or 'memory' services are important to the Aboriginal community. Two points are of particular importance:

Organisations like yours can surely assist to make sure that information is preserved for future generations and scholars who wish to pursue their interests in this field. Record keeping organization[s] can make such a huge difference in the lives of so many.

Genealogy is becoming increasingly important for all Indigenous peoples because of native title claims and the need to find out about family, home and country (Huggins 2005).

Therefore, one of the most culturally valuable services that public libraries can provide for Indigenous Australians and the broader community is to be a centre for capturing, maintaining and accessing information about Indigenous people's language and heritage. In doing this, emphasis would need to be placed on Aboriginal ownership, management and control of this material, and ensuring respect for Aboriginal languages and culture.

Engagement in service provision

If Indigenous Australians are to be encouraged to use library services, they need to feel welcome and engaged. Consultation with Indigenous people found that they felt more comfortable in libraries if there were people there that they were familiar with and felt comfortable to approach. They also said that they needed to feel that the library had something to offer them that is both interesting and valuable in terms of information and resources, as well as being culturally relevant. That is, they wanted to be involved, and be seen to be involved, in the development and provision of library services to Indigenous people.

A3 Ideas and lessons

Victorian public libraries and their counterparts interstate have implemented a range of programs to support the library and information needs of Indigenous Australians, as overseas libraries have done to support the library needs of their indigenous communities.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocols for libraries, Australia

The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Protocols for Libraries, Archives and Information Services* was first published by the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) in 1995. The protocols address issues and concerns related to Indigenous materials held in libraries, archives and other information services, as well as those related to the provision of services for Indigenous people. The protocols serve as a guide to assist libraries when handling Indigenous materials and interacting with Indigenous peoples.

The protocols were reviewed in 2004 to establish the extent of their use, how useful they are and barriers to use. This led to their revision with improvements in content and supporting information and presentation. The revised protocols are available from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library and Information Resource Network (ATSILIRN 2005) and provide extensive information and suggestions for those working in the library, archives and information areas. The key points from the protocols are summarised below.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocols for libraries	
Content and perspective	<p>Accept the crucial need to consult in an appropriate and ongoing manner with relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the development and management of their collections.</p> <p>Make a serious effort to balance collections by acquiring material by, as well as that about, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.</p> <p>Support the growth in publishing of material by Indigenous peoples by sponsoring publications, promoting writing groups or offering to house records.</p> <p>Collect material about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from the local area.</p> <p>Facilitate the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community keeping places in which documentation of importance to a community, or copies of the documentation, can be kept in appropriate environmental conditions and under appropriate control.</p>
Intellectual property	<p>Recognise the primary rights of the owners of a culture ... 'it must be the indigenous people with authority in the particular group who own the information who advise on research and curatorial practices' (Langton quoted in ATSILIRN 2005, p. 4).</p>
Accessibility and use	<p>Endeavour to make Aboriginal people feel comfortable in libraries. This includes having approachable staff members, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander faces among the staff, an easy atmosphere and pleasant surroundings.</p> <p>Extend beyond the walls of the organisation. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can be employed as liaison officers. This will serve to promote libraries and encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to use the facilities as a meeting place and resource.</p>
Description and classification of materials	<p>Move away from the use of outdated, inaccurate or value-laden terms to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in indexing terminology, subject headings and classification systems.</p>
Secret or sacred materials	<p>Show sensitivity to both published and archival materials that contain secret or sacred information and which should not be made generally available.</p>
Offensive material	<p>Recognise that collections may contain materials that are offensive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Accept responsibility to preserve and make accessible the documentary record but also respond appropriately to the existence of offensive materials.</p>
Governance and management	<p>Ensure the involvement and participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in governance, management and operation of materials with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.</p>
Staffing	<p>Take affirmative action to recruit and promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This responsibility will require employers, educational institutions and professional bodies to be proactive in developing employment and promotional pathways.</p>
Education and training for professional practice	<p>Ensure staff are appropriately prepared to deal with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander materials, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.</p>
Awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and issues	<p>Pursue the national aim of contributing to greater understanding between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous peoples.</p>
Copying and repatriation of records	<p>Respond sympathetically and cooperatively to requests for copies of records of specific relevance to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community for its use and retention.</p>

National Policy Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library Services and Collections, Australasia

The *National Policy Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library Services and Collections* (NSLA 2007) is designed to guide progressive action across national, state and territory library institutions in their plans and approaches to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander library services and collections. Not surprisingly, the framework covers many of the issues described in the protocols. A number of additional points are raised, including:

- the need to recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practices are dynamic and always evolving;
- the importance of strategies to promote the preservation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and to ensure they are supported by and reflected in collections;
- the importance of professional development for library staff, including training in pre-service professional programs; cultural training programs in professional preparation; and ongoing professional development of staff via internal activities and/or professional conferences, forums, publications, and the dissemination of innovative practices.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library and Information Resource Network, Australia

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library and Information Resource Network (ATSILIRN 2008) was established to meet the need for a support and information network for Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders working in libraries and for those people servicing the information needs of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders. The ATSILIRN website (home.vicnet.net.au/~atsilirn) provides access to the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Protocols for Libraries, Archives and Information Services* and information about conferences and links to related material about Indigenous people and information services.

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) is a Commonwealth statutory authority within the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, which provides information and research about the cultures and lifestyles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Through this, AIATSIS aims to raise awareness among all Australians, and people of other nations, of the richness and diversity of Australian Indigenous cultures and histories. AIATSIS has a digitisation program which delivers electronic information resources and services to clients via the AIATSIS website (www.aiatsis.gov.au) and the Mura catalogue. The site currently includes Online Exhibitions featuring items such as selected messages from the Sorry Books, community newsletters, and selections from the rare book collection.

Libraries and Knowledge Centres, Northern Territory Library

The Northern Territory Library is the equivalent of a State Library, and among other things has responsibility for 22 remote libraries, predominantly located in Indigenous communities. Some are located in council premises; others are joint-use libraries located in high schools where they serve both the school and the community.

In response to requests from Indigenous communities for help in preserving and providing appropriate access to their cultural heritage, the Northern Territory Library implemented a new Libraries and Knowledge Centres program for these remote libraries in 2004. The model integrates traditional library concepts with Indigenous knowledge concepts, and builds on the services already provided through the community libraries.

As well as providing core library services such as English literacy and information literacy programs, the centres provide training and support for community members engaged in acquiring and preserving local knowledge. The centres also offer recreational activities to all groups within the community. A key component of the program is the Our Story database, which enables

communities to access and store digitised material related to their cultural heritage. The Ara Irititja software was selected after several products were evaluated. The database stores and displays any digital media so that photographs, sound recordings, videos and other resources can all be viewed through the one interface. The database allows for sensitivities such as removing the pictures of people who have died.

Many community library officers have taken on the role of database facilitators, identifying and gathering local content, training community members to use the database and facilitating the ongoing development of the content by working with community members to provide additional information and stories. An evaluation of the Libraries and Knowledge Centres model reported its potential to be a key infrastructure for building capacity in Indigenous communities (see www.ntl.nt.gov.au/about_us/knowledgecentres).

In 2007, the Northern Territory Library received the prestigious annual Gates Foundation Access to Learning Award. The US\$1 million award recognised the library's work in providing free computer and Internet access and training to Indigenous communities as well as its unique Our Story database. The award funds will be used to increase training opportunities for Northern Territory community library officers and library users, and expand the Libraries and Knowledge Centres programs in other communities.

Indigenous Knowledge Centres: the Queensland experience

The major priority of the State Library of Queensland's Indigenous Library Services Strategy (June 2002) has been the establishment of Indigenous Knowledge Centres in remote communities where there are no library services. The centres offer free community-wide access to the resources of a traditional library, supplemented with materials to support the oral and visual traditions of Indigenous peoples. As Sandi Taylor noted in her presentation to the 2004 Australian Library Industry Association conference, the centres are 'special

places to look after the songs, language, stories and traditions of their [the Aboriginal] culture' and also are 'a means to reach out to the wider global community' (Taylor 2004, p. 1).

The process of establishing the centres has involved challenging traditional library models and developing and exploring the potential for libraries to meet the knowledge needs of Indigenous peoples. Important characteristics of the model include:

- flexibility, shaped by the way a particular community articulates its knowledge needs;
- a two-way learning process between the State Library and Indigenous communities throughout Queensland;
- community capacity building as a pivotal component, beginning with community engagement.

The principles for social engagement and some of the successes of the centres are described in Taylor's paper, including the case of one centre offering training to the community in using the public computer to access Internet banking, rather than time-consuming and costly travel to the bank.

Koori Library Pathways Project, Shepparton, Victoria

A collaborative project between the Koori Resource and Information Centre and Goulburn Valley Regional Library Corporation is working to:

- ensure delivery of accessible and responsive library and information services to the local Indigenous community;
- preserve and safeguard local Aboriginal culture, knowledge and history;
- encourage greater understanding of Aboriginal people in the broader community through sharing of this information.

Cross-cultural awareness training programs are being run to heighten awareness among library staff of Indigenous issues, and to better equip staff to guide and refer the

public to relevant Indigenous resources and information. The early activities have included archiving weekends to sort through the centre's resources (providing an important stepping stone for the centre in recording its history), a review of Shepparton Library's Aboriginal materials, development of collection protocols, and creation of the Koori Library Pathways Project webpage (www.koorilibrary.8ways.net).

For more information, see *Libraries Building Communities Report 4: Showcasing the Best: Volume 2*.

Akaltye Antheme Collection, Alice Springs Public Library, Northern Territory

The Akaltye Antheme (Giving Knowledge) Collection at the Alice Springs Public Library attempts to provide to the Indigenous population resources that are relevant to their interests and English language literacy levels. Launched in 2002, the collection includes materials, published or unpublished, in a variety of formats, by, about, or for the Aboriginal peoples of Central Australia.

The Alice Springs Public Library has an Indigenous Services Officer position fully funded by the Alice Springs Town Council; this has had a major impact on the development of the collection.

The goals of the project have been to:

- present Indigenous knowledge with value and respect;
- provide an environment that supports family and group access to library services, such as email, CDs, web browsing and related skills transfer;
- provide information exchange between remote communities and across states and territories;
- provide access and sharing of information between people working out in the bush, often in isolation;
- place an expectation on people and organisations producing reports in Central Australia to produce them in a manner accessible to the people they are about, and for;

- provide access to the wider community of visitors and urban residents to real information produced by and for Aboriginal people.

Indigenous communities were approached to make available to the library locally produced resources, including books, magazines, videos and software. An agreement was reached by which the library can hold and manage the presentation of this material in a responsible and ethical manner. The criteria for accumulation of resources were that the process:

- involve consent, support and ownership by the Aboriginal agencies contributing to it;
- promote to the non-Indigenous audience positive information produced by and for Aboriginal people that negates the image of hopelessness often perceived by visitors to Alice Springs;
- include graphic information produced for readers with low English literacy, such as some Indigenous patrons and some tourists and migrants;
- promote access to computer technology and related skills transfer for family groups;
- promote communication across different agencies that work on remote communities.

To ensure that the Akaltye Antheme Collection is appropriate to the needs of the Indigenous community, it is housed on display shelves in rough Dewey order, with all book covers facing the public. This reflects the preference of Indigenous library patrons for images. A coloured spot system has been used for subjects such as landcare and health; this is intended to assist Indigenous people become familiar with the library system. Many items have been laminated and re-bound to withstand rough handling – to encourage heavy and repeated use by patrons who have little familiarity with the care of books.

Library services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in New South Wales, State Library of New South Wales

In 2004, the State Library of New South Wales conducted a survey of public libraries to document the collections and services that were available to Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders. This was seen as the first step in developing a proposal for in-depth research into the use and non-use of public libraries by Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders. The survey aimed to determine the extent of current collections and services targeting Indigenous communities, and which public libraries employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and in what positions. To highlight the results, a seminar was held in May 2005 with the papers and survey findings published in August 2006 (State Library of NSW 2006).

Of 98 library services, 35 targeted library services, special events or programs to Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders in their communities. These included:

- monthly storytime with Aboriginal preschools;
- local Aboriginal classes visiting a library on a regular basis;
- NAIDOC Week displays, events and exhibitions;
- Reconciliation Week displays and events;
- talks with Aboriginal elders regarding local Indigenous history and elders presenting storytime;
- cultural awareness programs;
- creation of family history database (including photographs) and workshops and fact sheets on *Tracing Your Aboriginal Family History*;
- library participation in community festivals recognising the original inhabitants of an area;
- Aboriginal material selection days;
- permanent exhibitions at heritage centres;
- visiting authors and storytellers;

- recording relevant regional events;
- providing a venue for meetings for Indigenous groups.

Fifteen libraries had designated collections targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander users. Many libraries had collections about Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders but did not differentiate between their collections being for or about these groups.

Aboriginal Material Selection Day, Marrickville Council Library Services, New South Wales

In March 2004, Marrickville Council Library Services held an Aboriginal selection day where members of the local Aboriginal community were invited to select some material for the library collection. Two areas were targeted: material suitable for Aboriginal studies for high school and other students (as well as interested community members), and quality picture books for the junior collection. The community selected five suppliers, who provided material, information and book lists. A second purpose of the day was to strengthen the bonds between the library and the local Aboriginal community with a view to increasing Aboriginal membership and involvement in the library's activities.

Indigenous Marketing Plan, Great Lakes Library Service, New South Wales

Great Lakes Library Service has strengthened relationships with the local Indigenous community around Forster through Indigenous art. A local Indigenous art group redesigned the library's logo and, with funding from the Regional Arts Board, installed three major contemporary Indigenous artworks in the library and a mosaic on the front of the library (see www.greatlakes.nsw.gov.au/Library/downloads.htm).

Welcoming Places: Ideas for Public Library Services for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, State Library of Queensland

Welcoming Places tells the inspiring story of how public libraries in Cairns, Cooloola, Paroo, Thuringowa and Townsville participated in a project with the State Library of Queensland's Indigenous Services Team to improve services to their local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (State Library of Queensland n.d.). The Listen here! project provided a part-time Indigenous project officer for six months and funding for programs. Some libraries also received a grant for collection development. Each library was asked to trial the following strategies: using an Indigenous reference group for guidance and support; organising public programs; creating an Indigenous presence in library spaces; and seeking advice to improve collections. The many different approaches and programs included art workshops during NAIDOC Week, storytelling for children, the launch of an Indigenous children's collection, an oral recollections project, scrapbooking workshops with elders, and a project to create a dictionary of local Aboriginal languages. The Listen here! project led to increased library usage and membership by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

A4 Accessing and using library services

The Connecting with the Community research project conducted focus groups with Indigenous Australians and community organisations with an interest in supporting their access to public library services. These identified a number of significant factors that influence the library use of Indigenous Australians. These are summarised and discussed below, often using the words of the Indigenous participants in the research focus groups.

The findings can, however, be summarised as two core and interrelated themes: a low level of awareness of the services offered by public libraries and a low level of use of public libraries, both personal and by peers.

Factors influencing library use: Indigenous Australians	
Awareness	Low levels of awareness of the services offered by public libraries.
Engagement	No compelling reason for using library services. Use of alternative library services.
Library programs and collections	Limited collections and programs for and about Indigenous Australians.
Policies and procedures	Perceived discomfort in library environment.
Customer service	Limited numbers of or no Indigenous library staff.

Low level of awareness of library services

Public libraries appear to have low 'brand awareness' among Indigenous Australians. There is a significant lack of awareness about what services public libraries have to offer and, like some other library non-user groups, Indigenous Australians who are not library users tend to have old-fashioned and stereotypical views of libraries and librarians:

When I walk into a library I expect to see what I used to see. Just aisles with books everywhere, and an old lady sitting at the reception desk, a grumpy old one.

The lack of awareness is compounded by there being insufficient library users in Indigenous communities with recent and relevant library experience to raise awareness or correct misunderstandings. Where there is some knowledge of the general role of libraries, any educationally related service provision or support is seen as the province of school or TAFE libraries.

No compelling reason for using library services

The lack of awareness and experience of libraries contributes to some Indigenous Australians having no compelling reason for using library services. When asked whether they have used their local public library, for some the question is puzzling and the answer is simply 'No':

I haven't had no reason to.

Not everyone can read.

When I went to school, sometimes they would take us down there and they got us all like a little card, and I have still got it now, like still got it, but never used it.

Libraries are places with books, and if you cannot read, why go to a library? From this perspective the logic is clear. If you want to access education, go to a school. If you want information about jobs, go to Centrelink. If you want to access a computer, ask a friend. Even where Indigenous Australians indicate that they have a need for access to literacy support services, education and employment support, and community information, there is no understanding that the library might be one place to go.

Use of alternative library services

Indigenous Australians in education, at either school or in vocational training, tend to use the libraries associated with their education provider as the sole source of educational resources. There is a natural connection between provider and service. When studying at TAFE, go to the TAFE library:

It's big and has lots of books.

In these cases, the educational library can become the de facto public library, as Indigenous library users tend to be communal users. That is, one person borrows and others use, and when that communal use is complete the book is returned. In addition:

If a brother gets a book from the TAFE library then it must be OK, so that is where I will go.

Limited collections and programs for and about Indigenous Australians

Indigenous Australians perceive that libraries have limited information, collections and programs for and about themselves, their history and their culture:

I reckon a lot of the libraries don't have Aboriginal stuff ... not enough information on Indigenous culture.

In some cases the perceptions are based on fact. Indigenous people have tried to use a library to find information about their ancestors, relations and connections, but have been unable to find any relevant resources, either because the library does not have access to them or they do not exist. Either way, there is no return visit.

In other cases, a library may have an Indigenous collection, but it may not be widely known among the local community. This is where 'ownership' of

the collection and having a role in its formation and maintenance is important. Indigenous people want to be in charge of how their culture is represented in the library. They have a history of ‘having things done to them’, rather than ‘being treated with respect’ and ‘being allowed to reclaim and share their culture’.

Another factor in this situation is for the library to distinguish between the characteristics of its Indigenous collections. That is, are they information, resources and services tailored and targeted for use by Indigenous people, or are they information, resources and services about Indigenous people? The latter might be of wider interest to all library users. The literature on Indigenous collections suggests that too often this distinction is not well made in libraries.

Overall, the belief is that it is ‘very rare to find Aboriginal stuff in libraries’.

Perceived discomfort in library environment

Library policies and practices can make libraries an uncomfortable place for some people and communities. Indigenous people can be quite wary of institutional situations:

When I got my learners I didn't want to buy the book and I didn't know anyone that had a book so I went down and borrowed it, and then I forgot that I had it, and I lost it, and then about four years later I found it but I was too shame to walk it in there and give it back so I just put it in the slot and walked off. Ha!

I wouldn't take my kids to the library 'cause they would just run amok mate.

Indigenous people also report more strongly than other library users concern about the negative feelings that arise when an overdue borrowed item is highlighted through a letter demanding the return of the item. This very often dissuades them from borrowing again.

Whether the reasons are rational or founded in fact, this perceived discomfort is a barrier to library use. Potential feelings of shame, uncertainty, shyness, being scared to ask questions and being seen as ignorant – these are all reasons not to attend a library. As a result, even people who have a need for particular information or resources may be reluctant to seek it out; they go without, and are deprived of an educational, employment-related or recreational opportunity.

Limited numbers of or no Indigenous library staff

Perhaps more than most, Indigenous people feel more comfortable dealing with someone they know or know of, and the same is true in libraries:

I go to ... I didn't feel like I wanted to deal with the others. I go straight and ask for what I want. So I need fella I'm comfortable with.

'Cause people that can't read or write or shy might be more likely to go to a person they knew and ask questions than a total stranger.

You can't ask questions of people at the desk.

Shyness would come into it too. Just asking for information, or having someone to access, who you feel comfortable with would probably make a difference. Maybe another Koori person.

The combination of a lack of awareness of libraries, limited use and recommendation by other Indigenous people, and discomfort in the library setting all add up to barriers to access and use of public libraries. This might be offset though if there were an Indigenous face in the library.

A5 Connecting with the community

A range of potential responses from Victorian public libraries to the findings of the Connecting with the Community research project with regard to Indigenous Australians is presented below.

Opportunities for libraries to reach out to communities: Indigenous Australians	
Awareness	Promote access to library services to and through Indigenous communities.
Engagement	Position the library as a meeting place for Indigenous Australians and a place of Indigenous culture. Engage communities through Indigenous elders and children.
Library programs and collections	Develop library collections and deliver library programs for, about and through Indigenous Australians.
Customer service	Employ Indigenous library staff. Provide cross-cultural awareness training programs for library staff.

The main way to get more Indigenous Australians to use public library services is to get more Indigenous Australians to use public library services. This may seem an absurd or cyclical argument, but in a community where connectedness is important and there is acceptance and comfort in referred familiarity and shared experience, if sufficient Indigenous people were regular library users then others would follow.

Promote access to library services to and through Indigenous communities

Public libraries can best promote the information, resources and services they provide to Indigenous people by working through the Indigenous people in those communities who are library users. Those who use

library services are an effective and trusted source of information for non-users, especially, but not necessarily, if they are persons with some standing in the local Indigenous community. Indigenous library users could be encouraged to 'bring a friend', host a tour of the library or take information about library services back to their community. They could be supported in these endeavours with targeted information and resource material specific to Indigenous library users, and images and faces that reflect Indigenous culture and use of the library.

Position the library as a meeting place and a place of Indigenous culture

In geographic locations where there is a significant Indigenous history and population, libraries could reach out to these communities by positioning themselves as a place that brings together key elements of Indigenous culture. More than just being a centre for local Indigenous historical, language and cultural collections, the library could, in the absence of other facilities, be a meeting place. That is, a place where the Indigenous community feels welcome, feels at home, and has a reason for being:

If you feel there's a part of the culture is in there you are more inclined to walk through the door.

I reckon, like, if Rumba [Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative] rang you up and said we are going to have the meeting at the library, I'd go.

I think it is a fantastic idea to have a Koori part of the library.

If other people were there, then I would go.

The initial reason for meeting might not be library-related: the library might be used as a community facility for social gatherings, mothers' groups and more. But it might be, through an Indigenous book club, storytime with an Indigenous flavour, events where elders tell their stories to Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and activities designed to build and maintain the Indigenous collection.

Whatever the initial reason may be, once Indigenous people become familiar with and comfortable in attending the library and view it as a place with relevance and meaning, they are more likely to use the services available.

Engage communities through elders and children

Indigenous people identified two key groups that could be used to attract them to a public library: children and elders.

If libraries were seen as providing books, services and places that were attractive and beneficial to Indigenous children, their enthusiasm and their parents' interest in supporting the children's literacy, education and own cultural awareness would be enough to bring people in. Some library users noted that their children's encouragement to 'go to the library' had been a factor in their use of children's and other library services. Children could be familiarised with the library through school tours or special activities, such as storytime, book collections and holiday programs. Comfortable reading and learning spaces for Indigenous mothers with young and school-age children and literacy support for these children could be implemented.

The role of elders in influencing community attitudes and behaviours is also significant. Library activities featuring Indigenous elders telling stories, hosting storytime, talking about their personal experience, and talking about their people's culture would both give them further opportunity to bind their community and open Indigenous culture up to the non-Indigenous library users.

Develop collections and deliver programs for, about and by Indigenous Australians

Libraries could increase access and use by Indigenous Australians by working with local communities to develop, maintain and present collections and programs for and about Indigenous people. When asked what would make them interested to actually go into a library the answers were straightforward:

More Koori books.

Yeah. 'Cause you are more inclined to know people who are in the books. As well as a place where you go and access that information which you don't have in your homes.

If they had Aboriginal stuff in there people would go in, it's as simple as that.

Libraries should regularly stocktake their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collection, promote it to the community and share it with other library services. They should also engage local Indigenous people in the 'ownership' and maintenance of these collections as a community resource:

We can't have gubbas [white people] working in there looking after our culture. You have got to have an Aboriginal there.

Employ Indigenous Australians as library staff

Employment of Indigenous library staff is influenced by the staffing and resource levels, and access to suitably qualified Indigenous personnel. However, where it is possible to have Indigenous people on staff, the presence of a Koori face in the library would make other Indigenous people more comfortable and more likely to come to the library and ask any questions they might have.

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Further reading

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Part B: Disadvantaged young people

Get to know young people on their own territory before inviting them to the library. This might mean spending time doing things which are completely unrelated to reading ...

THE READING AGENCY 2008

B1 Disadvantaged young people

Background

Many young people use and are familiar with public libraries. Many parents bring young children to storytime at their library, and many children participate in school holiday programs involving books, storytelling, reading and other creative activities. School-age children attend homework clubs, and students of all levels – primary, secondary and tertiary – use their local libraries for research and to access the Internet.

However, this pattern of use is not universal, and there are some families with children who have little or no recent experience of public libraries. Library usage figures also show a decline in library membership and active use of libraries by older teenagers and young people after their secondary education.

The focus of this aspect of the Connecting with the Community research project has been on young people aged 15 to 24 years who are socioeconomically disadvantaged – including those who are living in poverty or on very low incomes. There are no exact figures on how many young Victorians fall into this category but data from the Brotherhood of St Laurence (Boese & Scutella 2006) and Mission Australia (2004) suggest that it is in the order of 6–16% of the population of young people in this age group. This corresponds to between 40,000 and 100,000 young people, or from about 1–2% of the total Victorian population. The lower figure is considered very conservative and indicates the number of young people living in ‘entrenched poverty’.

It is estimated that half of these disadvantaged young people live at home and about 60% are male (Mission Australia 2003). They often live in families where the head of the family is unemployed, is a sole parent, or, if a parent is employed, they are part of the ‘working poor’.

Some groups within the community are overrepresented in the population of disadvantaged young people. Indigenous young people are much more concentrated in the lower end of the income distribution; this reflects the large proportion of the Indigenous population not in employment. Young refugees, asylum seekers,

newly arrived migrants and youth from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are also more likely to experience poverty than other young people. Between 1996 and 2001, young people aged between 16 and 24 years formed almost one-third of the total intake under Australia's humanitarian migration program, compared with 14% of the Australian population aged between 15 and 24 years. About one-third of these young people settled in Victoria (Ransley & Drummond, cited in Boese & Scutella 2006).

Many disadvantaged young people live in neighbourhoods that face heavy pressures of poverty, unemployment, family stress and racism (Vinson 2007). In these areas, there are often limited educational opportunities, limited access to government and community services, and few public resources such as parks and recreational and cultural facilities.

The implications of disadvantage for young people

Low socioeconomic status impacts negatively on wellbeing, and particularly affects literacy and numeracy. Young people with literacy and numeracy problems have severely limited opportunities and are more likely not to complete secondary school or move into further education. They are also more likely to face periods of unemployment later in life and experience long-term economic disadvantage (Boese & Scutella 2006).

Writing on this issue, Horin (2007) notes that Australia has a 'long tail of underperforming students' and that:

... for all our illusions about being egalitarian, family background plays a bigger role in determining school success here than in many places. Our school system, how it is funded and organised, is less effective than many in compensating for social disadvantage.

The achievement gap between average students and those from a low socioeconomic background is bigger than in many comparable countries. Horin quotes from Vinson's study (2007) to highlight the central role of

limited education in the web of problems that lock people into poverty. From leaving school early, threads run to limited computer use, poor work skills and low income, as well as high imprisonment and high unemployment rates. Lower rates of computer ownership and Internet access in low socioeconomic households suggest that computer access for young people in these households is lower than for other young people (Muir et al., cited in Boese & Scutella 2006).

As noted in the Mission Australia report (2004), children and young people living in poverty are more likely to experience adult poverty, with a huge cost to them and to society generally. The impacts of poverty result in higher expenditure on health, social welfare, education and the criminal justice system, as well as lost opportunity to the economy as young people do not meet their full potential.

Findings from the three last National Health Surveys (1989–90, 1995 and 2001) suggest that socioeconomically disadvantaged groups experience more ill health, and are more likely to engage in behaviours risky to their health (e.g. smoking) (ABS 2008). They are also less likely to have access to the medical care they require.

Accessing affordable and secure accommodation is a major issue for young people in low-paid work, insecure employment and for those who receive government benefits. Homelessness may be the only option when housing is unaffordable. Mission Australia (2004) notes that young people aged 12 to 24 years made up an estimated 36% of all homeless people in Australia on Census night in 2001. Young people aged 15 to 19 years are also the largest client group in the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, followed by those aged 20 to 24 years. Unsatisfactory housing can contribute to poor health, family violence and poor educational outcomes.

Many socioeconomically disadvantaged young people are socially excluded: they experience social isolation and lack the opportunity to participate in their community. Recreational activities and access to social and cultural resources are vital for personal

fulfillment and physical and emotional development, and can offer alternatives to antisocial behaviour. Access to these resources is influenced by location, gender, socioeconomic status and ethnicity.

Without the social connections established through school or work, young people are increasingly left to their own devices and often have dwindling material and non-material resources. The potential net effect is a sense of being disenfranchised by the community (Mission Australia 2003).

The stresses associated with disadvantage can contribute to young people having disrupted and unstable family lives. Conflicts can lead to young people disconnecting from their family. Without a stable home environment, there may be problems staying on at school, and the data shows that the employment options for young people who do not complete their secondary education are severely curtailed.

B2 Library and information needs

Public library services have a critical role in developing opportunities and resources for young people that are educative, social, participative, and empowering (Morrison & Roach, cited in Vincent 2000).

A comprehensive review of literature on library services and discussions with community members through the Connecting with the Community research project have identified the main library and information needs of disadvantaged young people. In some cases, these needs are shared by all young people, regardless of their relative level of advantage or disadvantage. However, in general the compounding effect of socioeconomic disadvantage strengthens the importance of disadvantaged young people having access to the following library and information services.

Library and information needs: Disadvantaged young people

Equal access to computers, the Internet, books and information resources.

Information skills and IT skills essential to education and employment.

Access to information on health, housing and other issues relevant to young people.

Library services in their space.

Support and encouragement in accessing library services.

Equal access to computers and information resources

There is concern in Victoria, echoing the concern documented in the United Kingdom (Vincent 2000), that children from wealthier homes use libraries and borrow library books more frequently than children from low-income families. Children and young people living in poverty are seen as an underserved library patron group due to a variety of factors. For example, their parents may not understand or appreciate the value and importance of independent reading for their children and may not be aware of the wide range of services and materials available at the public library. In poorer families, parents or guardians may not be able to afford books, resources or computers needed to support young people with their study. Libraries offer an important complement or alternative to school-based learning environments, especially for young people at risk of disengaging from school.

Libraries can also offer otherwise disadvantaged young people equal opportunities to access information and cultural/recreational products (such as Internet games and music).

It is also important that public libraries provide access to computers and the Internet because, as noted in section B1 of this report, disadvantaged young people are less likely to have this available at home. Libraries can help

to provide more equitable access to computers and the Internet. For young people who cannot otherwise access computers – at home, school, a relative or friend’s home, a neighbourhood house or Internet café – public libraries can provide an access point of ‘last resort’. Access to information technology is also growing in importance as it starts to be seen by government and other service providers as a way of offering solutions to exclusion problems (e.g. through community support websites, alerts and advice sent by mobile phone) (Social Exclusion Unit 2005).

Information and information technology skills

In the United Kingdom, the Department for Education and Skills has labelled competency in information technology the third basic skill (in addition to literacy and numeracy). Libraries have a specific role in supporting the development of young people’s reading skills and can encourage and nurture young people’s literacy and information skills. These skills are crucial for giving young people access to further educational opportunities, work, the political debate, socialising and technological development. As a neutral community resource, libraries have the potential to offer young people informal learning opportunities where formal education and/or home learning support are not effective.

Access to information for young people

Public libraries can play a key role in providing accessible information on subjects such as health, housing, drugs, sex education and sexuality. The level of information provision currently available for teenagers in these areas is often poor.

Given the relatively high levels of unemployment among young people, public libraries also have a role providing information on welfare benefits and training opportunities. Unemployed teenagers taking advantage of training opportunities are also likely to rely on the public library as an informal means of studying.

Library services in their space

Access to public libraries can be an issue for some young people, particularly in areas where there is little or no

public transport, and they have no alternative means of getting to or from libraries. This particularly affects young people in rural and outer suburban areas.

However, in addition to being physically accessible, young people also want to be in places and spaces that they find welcoming, undemanding, stimulating, socially engaging and matching their expectations for immediate and unrestricted access to information and resources. Young people like to be able to make a space their own domain.

Support and encouragement

There is a tendency in some research and literature to equate being socially disadvantaged with being dysfunctional and having behavioural problems. This is not true for the majority of young disadvantaged people. Most do not provide specific challenges for library services beyond their need for more intense support and encouragement. However, in some instances particular behavioural problems can require attention. Library services at West Torrens in South Australia and Sighthill in Edinburgh both provide examples of positive approaches to tackling these issues (see section B3).

Being actively involved in library services, or any coordinated community activity or facility, can give disadvantaged young people a sense of belonging, dignity and self-worth – feelings they may not experience in other areas of their life.

B3 Ideas and lessons

Victorian public libraries and their counterparts interstate and overseas have implemented a range of programs to support the library and information needs of young people:

- study groups and yourtutor database services to help with homework (e.g. Whitehorse Manningham Regional Library Corporation);
- young adult collections;
- Youth Week activities and other creative entertainment and recreational activities (e.g. bands, art classes);
- Xbox games;

- Virtual Library where young people can access a site through their library card to chat and ask questions about libraries;
- access to Internet, MySpace, chat sites and blogs;
- programs for students undertaking the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (e.g. Stonnington Library and Information Service);
- involving young people in focus groups to discuss ways in which libraries can better meet their needs (e.g. Yarra Plenty Regional Library Service, Darebin Libraries);
- volunteering opportunities (e.g. Auslan storytime at Frankston Library Service).

These types of activities apply to all young people, including those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged.

Other examples of programs and initiatives specifically targeting disadvantaged youth, and which have been adopted elsewhere in Australia and overseas, are provided here, with additional references in section B6.

Their Reading Futures, United Kingdom

Their Reading Futures is a program for libraries in the United Kingdom, to help them deliver the best possible reader development services for young people. The program's website (www.theirreadingfutures.org.uk) provides a range of learning packages and resources for library staff and includes information on many issues, including involving young people in shaping libraries, and the contribution of libraries to young people's health, safety and wellbeing.

The site includes a section on involving hard-to-reach young people, which provides twenty 'top tips' for engaging hard-to-reach young people in libraries (The Reading Agency 2008).

- 1 Work in partnership with workers who are experienced in working with hard-to-reach young people. They are also likely to have contact with the kind of young people you want to involve.

- 2 Spend time building up relationships with young people. It may take time for them to trust you.
- 3 Get to know young people on their own territory before inviting them to the library. This might mean spending time doing things which are completely unrelated to reading, such as playing pool or going climbing.
- 4 Spend at least twice as much time listening to young people as talking.
- 5 Don't try to be cool! Be yourself. Young people respond well to people who are genuine and caring, regardless of their age or 'street cred'.
- 6 Persevere. Hard-to-reach young people are used to being let down by adults and may try to test you. Keep going back for more and you will earn their trust and respect.
- 7 Don't try to impose your own values on hard-to-reach young people. 'Bad' language is part of their culture and through questioning it you will instantly lose their interest. If you feel responsible for them when in public situations, such as the library, politely point out that their language could be offending other people.
- 8 Smile! A friendly smile goes a long way to breaking down barriers.
- 9 Keep rules to a minimum. If you need to set ground rules for behaviour, involve young people in formulating their own group code of conduct.
- 10 Be positive. Offer praise for every achievement, however small it seems.
- 11 Consider how you position yourself in relation to young people. Avoid standing over them or positioning yourself behind desks or at the front of classrooms. Join young people on their level by sitting on the floor or arranging chairs in a circle. This helps young people to relax and dispels any school associations.
- 12 Bear in mind that the world of books and libraries is likely to be very alien to hard-to-reach young people. Don't expect them to have read anything at all. Never try to get to know them by asking them about their reading habits.

- 13 Don't assume that young people are able to read and write. A large number of hard-to-reach young people struggle with literacy. Never rely on young people to read things out, take notes or understand written instructions.
- 14 Don't make judgements or assumptions about young people. They are all individuals and their interests and experiences are endlessly surprising.
- 15 Ask young people for their views about libraries and demonstrate that you will take them seriously. Hard-to-reach young people love to feel listened to and valued.
- 16 Get to know young people's interests and gradually introduce books which they will personally relate to. This shows that you have listened and that you care.
- 17 Ask young people what activities they would like to do and see if they can help you put on those activities in the library.
- 18 Use incentives such as refreshments and vouchers.
- 19 To share reading materials, start with magazines. Look at quizzes, facts and horoscopes – these will open up discussions.
- 20 Many hard-to-reach young people will have previous defaults on library materials. A clean slate approach will take away a huge barrier.

Sighthill Library Youth Work, Edinburgh City Libraries and Information Service, Scotland

This project has successfully removed barriers that were contributing to the social exclusion of young people in Sighthill, and has given them the opportunity to access services that have helped them to develop reading, literacy, learning and life skills (Milne 2006).

Sighthill Library is a small community library that serves one of the more deprived communities in Edinburgh, where 18% of those available to work are unemployed and one-quarter of households are classed as being below the low-income threshold. The work of the library is extremely community centred and library staff regularly work with key partners in community education, youth work and community safety.

For several years, the library service had suffered from an increasing amount of antisocial behaviour involving young people – a problem that impacted on the effective operation of the library as well as affecting the local community in general. It was recognised that simply excluding young people from the library was having no impact on their unacceptable behaviour, and was only moving the problem outside the library and encouraging a culture of confrontation between local young people and library staff and users.

The Library Officer Team devised a strategy to enable library staff to address the antisocial behaviour in the community in a more positive way. This involved working closely with key partners to deliver a program of imaginative activities and events for young people. This has included:

- A youth video project – Staff work with 16- to 18-year-olds to make videos about local life. This trains them in professional skills, such as creative writing and filming, before they go to college, and it does wonders for their confidence.
- The Reading the Game activity – Participants who play football as Sighthill United against other youth and local teams also take part in football-related reading and literacy projects.
- Setting up a number of clubs and groups – These encourage young people to use the library in a positive way; they include a fortnightly Gamers Workshop, where library staff show young people how to design computer games and improve their gaming skills.
- Youth Boox – This harnesses young people's own tastes by allowing them to choose CDs and books for the library within a set budget.

By opening up new opportunities and reducing antisocial behaviour in the area by up to 60%, the library's work has had a dramatic impact on the lives of the young people and the community.

Breaking barriers: libraries and socially excluded communities, Canada

In this paper, Annette DeFaveri (2005) examines what stops socially excluded people in Canada from using

the public library and she examines approaches for overcoming these barriers. DeFaveri notes that low-income young adults frequently associate the library with their school experience, which may have been hostile and isolating. They feel that, like their schools, the library is an authoritarian institution, which imposes its values and behavioural norms on them. The challenge for the libraries is to show young adults that the library is an inclusive and respectful organisation that strives to represent and include all community members. DeFaveri notes some possible approaches to achieving this inclusion:

- Host youth events and ceremonies in the library. For example, invite young adults to hold their graduation ceremony at the library or host an evening of readings by young people.

Once the young adults felt comfortable in the library, once they believed that they were part of the community entitled to use the library, the library could offer access to its collections, programs, and services (DeFaveri 2005, p. 3).

- Put more emphasis on welcoming new users.

New patrons can be welcomed graciously as the jewel in the service model crown. Librarians could register people in person, take the opportunity to talk about the patron's reasons for coming in to the library, to ask if other family members need cards, and give a tour of the branch resources (DeFaveri 2005, p. 2).

DeFaveri believes this investment of time would help personalise the library and make it relevant to new patrons.

- Host public information programs on social issues. DeFaveri notes that hosting programs offsite and establishing book clubs that initially meet offsite, perhaps in local neighbourhood centres familiar to people who live in poverty, is a starting point to get these families interested in public library services.

She suggests that at first the librarian or volunteer coordinator might read short selections to the group aloud and lead a discussion of them, then work towards having the group members read the selections aloud. Eventually the group might feel comfortable enough to meet at the library.

DeFaveri argues that encouraging community inclusiveness should be promoted to staff as an added skill rather than an added duty. To accomplish this, she notes that staff needs to understand the advantages of bringing new users to the library and how this is a reflection of the library's core mission and values and not an extracurricular activity.

finding MY place!, Ruth Faulkner Public Library, Western Australia

finding MY place! aims to retain students in education by showing them how exciting learning can be. The program is a partnership between the Ruth Faulkner Public Library in the City of Belmont and the Department of Education and Training; it assists at-risk students aged 15 to 19 years to remain in a learning environment. finding MY place! uses the public library as an alternative 'no stress' learning environment as the setting for a series of 10 library-based workshops. The workshops are designed to motivate and engage students in activities that highlight their natural abilities. Students get a chance to explore careers in art, music, sports, fitness, make-up, and apprenticeships and traineeships in many occupations. In motivational workshops, students learn of the consequences of alcohol and drug abuse, the importance of health and wellbeing, and why it is better not to be on the 'bad' side of the law.

Since its beginnings at the Ruth Faulkner Public Library this initiative has been taken up by many public libraries across Australia, including several in Victoria (e.g. Darebin Libraries (see below), Yarra Plenty Regional Library).

For more information see: www.vetinfonet.det.wa.edu.au/vet/find-my-plac.aspx

finding MY place!, Darebin Libraries, Victoria

In 2007, Darebin Libraries and Reservoir District Secondary College trialled the finding MY place! program to provide better career guidance and employment preparation for local disadvantaged youth. Based on an initiative developed by the West Australian Department of Education and Training and the City of Belmont Library Services (see above), ten workshops were run for a group of year 10 students during school hours at the local library. Workshops were run by a variety of presenters on topics including: goal setting, self-esteem, interview skills, further education, creative skills, health and personal presentation. The workshops were designed to enable students to experience an alternative learning environment, and encourage them to remain in learning and to motivate them, foster self-esteem and prepare them for life beyond the classroom and entry into the workforce. As a central and widely known community service accessible to young people, the public library is able to complement existing education, training and career development opportunities.

Youth Strategy, West Torrens Library Service, South Australia

When the new Hilton Library in Adelaide was opened in 2004, young people, including many who were newly arrived in Australia as refugees, were quick to adopt it as their space. However, as library staff note, this was accompanied by a number of behavioural issues that had to be addressed:

Behaviour included rowdy, sometimes threatening actions towards staff and other customers, fights, obscene language, damage, furniture throwing etc. Police visits were becoming commonplace along with a growing file of complaints from other customers (Cathcart n.d., p. 2).

To tackle these issues, library staff and partners developed a package of strategies, including:

- A Code of Conduct – This sets out some basic rules of behaviour. To ensure their credibility, the rules were developed in collaboration with the youth themselves.

These have been produced in a simple and pictorial format.

- Partnerships to assist the library to develop strategies to deal with behavioural problems and develop the skills for managing these:
 - The Multicultural Resource Centre located an African youth worker who was in the library for a few nights each week. His brief was to facilitate mutual understanding between young people and library staff and explain the Code of Conduct. He also worked with the young people on developing and performing a concert; this provided an opportunity for him, and library staff, to work closely with the young people and foster the beginnings of a relationship. The youth worker was able to correct some very basic misunderstandings that had been caused by miscommunication.
 - South Australia Police Cadets have run weekly youth games nights at the library, which provide an enjoyable activity for young people while reinforcing the Code of Conduct.
 - Through a partnership with two local schools, the library ran a finding MY place! program providing weekly sessions on life skills. The sessions varied from basic cooking and nutrition to where to buy secondhand clothes for job interviews and where to get advice on drugs issues.
- Development of a youth area and facilities – The library purchased some more Xboxes and added a sound post to enable listening to music and a games PC. Additional collections were established to cater for youth interests, including CDs, DVDs, graphic novels and magazines, as well as the traditional youth fiction collection.
- Homework help sessions – Two sessions are run each week, one specialist session for newly arrived students (in partnership with the Australian Refugee Association) and another session for all comers.

Since adopting this approach, complaints from library patrons decreased, there is greater acceptance and understanding between young people and other library users, and staff have a more confident and comfortable relationship with young people.

verbYL, Livingstone Libraries and Arts Services, Queensland

Livingstone Shire Council on the central Queensland coast operates full service and small community branches, with a special emphasis on young people. verbYL is a youth lounge provided by the youth and library services of Livingstone Shire Council for all youth between the ages of 13 and 25. verbYL (www.verbyl.com.au/hp-what.html) was first conceived of by the council's library and community development departments after consultation with the youth of the area about the lack of services and activities for young people. What they wanted most was a place of their own where they could meet, relax and enjoy themselves in a safe, secure environment where everyone was welcome.

Together the youth council and shire council developed verbYL, which is staffed by both youth workers and library staff and provides many combined services – including information referral, counselling, study help, tax help and general fun. Within the space at Yeppoon are Internet-capable computers for chat, gaming or study; a Nintendo Wii, PlayStation, Xbox, Xbox 360 and handheld Nintendo DS; and board games for loan within the space. DVDs, books, console games, graphic novels, CDs and magazines are available to use, both within verbYL and for borrowing. verbYL holds regular games and events for young people. Membership is free for all young people between the ages of 13 and 25.

One library coordinator's blog, Real Public Librarian (2006), includes many posts on the issues of attracting young people to libraries and looks at the challenges and opportunities of offering a totally inclusive youth library. A 2006 post notes that when librarians talk about inclusive library services:

In many cases attention is focused on the resources needed in existing and new libraries to attract youth – funky furniture, some electronic resources, the Internet, maybe some music listening posts. These are thought to be some of the necessary ingredients for a successful 'hang out' space within the library (Real Public Librarian 2006).

For libraries that are serious about engaging with young people, including those that may bring some behavioural problems with them, and noting that librarians are not social workers, the blogger argues:

... you need the serious help and commitment of human service professionals working with you. In fact it takes the efforts of the whole community to help these youth, and there are incredible opportunities for librarians to make a significant contribution ...

... the ideal is to maintain a critical proportion of 'mainstream' kids to 'at risk' kids who are using the space ... So you need to be fighting on two fronts – tempering the behaviour of the 'at risk' youth, while at the same time fostering understanding, tolerance and resilience by the broader youth community and encouraging them to keep coming. You may have to face the harsh reality that some mainstream kids will not feel sufficiently safe or resilient enough to want to use the space under any circumstances (Real Public Librarian 2006).

Tupu Youth Library, Manukau Libraries, New Zealand

Tupu Youth Library in Clover Park, a growth suburb on the outskirts of Auckland, opened its doors on 14 August 2001. It was New Zealand's first, and remains its only, public library dedicated to young people aged 5 to 19 years old.

The need for a library in Clover Park had been identified by the local council in 1996. At that time, the neighbourhood was characterised by its ethnic diversity (approximately 53% of the population were Pacific Islanders and 25% Maori); its youth (43% of the population were aged under 20 years); low education levels (48% had no formal qualifications); high unemployment and very low incomes (38% received unemployment benefits) (Dorner 2003). It was an area of extreme disadvantage.

The idea behind the Tupu Youth Library was to help break the poverty cycle by supporting learning among young people. For this reason, it was intended to have a strong information technology focus and an emphasis on resources for youth (Dorner 2003). It needed to provide space for study and learning, as well as a place for young people to ‘hang out’; it also needed to be located in a place where residents of all ages felt comfortable gathering. A site in a local park was chosen for its proximity to schools, homes and other recreational facilities that were already well-used by the community, such as basketball courts and a children’s playground.

In 1996, and again in 2000, the council undertook an extensive program of consultation with the local community to gain a full understanding of the needs to be addressed by the new facility (Dorner 2003). Hundreds of interviews, focus groups and meetings with community groups took place. Those consulted included local residents, both library users and non-users; school principals; church groups and not-for-profit groups providing support services to the unemployed; as well as school students at all levels. A local gang, on whose ‘turf’ the library was to be built, was also consulted, resulting in a decision by the council to build a new basketball court adjacent to the new library to replace the court that would be removed when the library was built.

Many features of the Tupu Youth Library reflect the wishes of the community to provide music listening posts; a homework study centre; an information technology centre with access to the Internet and a wide range of software, online and print non-fiction collections to support the curriculum; large paperback youth fiction collections; and Maori and Pacific Island collections maintained by people in the local community. Many programs are run for young people, including literacy programs and homework help clubs supported by qualified teachers supplied by the Ministry for Education.

Most importantly, in response to advice from the community, Tupu Youth Library both looks and feels Polynesian. It is a long narrow building with floor-to-ceiling windows throughout to reflect a *fale*, a Samoan

house. The internal walls and carpet feature a bright floral design. The tops of the service desks incorporate a *tapa* (bark) cloth decorated with traditional Samoan motifs. Pacific Island and Maori artworks are dotted throughout the library. Most staff members are Polynesian. The library even has a Polynesian name: *tupu* means ‘new growth’ in many Polynesian languages. Tupu allows Polynesian people, especially youth, to feel welcome.

In 2003, Tupu Youth Library won New Zealand’s 3M Innovation in Libraries ‘Supreme Award’ and was also showcased at the 69th World Library and Information Congress in Berlin.

B4 Accessing and using library services

The Connecting with the Community research conducted focus groups with young people from disadvantaged areas and community organisations with an interest in supporting their access to public library services. These identified a number of significant factors that influence the use of libraries by disadvantaged young people. These are summarised below.

Factors influencing library use: Disadvantaged young people	
Engagement	Perceptions of libraries as old, quiet and bookish places of learning. Do not feel physically or emotionally comfortable in libraries. Authority figures promote library use.
Collections, programs and services	Limited interest in services provided by libraries.

Perceptions of libraries

Young people generally see libraries as big, old, clean buildings that are quiet places of learning attended and staffed by bookish, ‘nerdy’ and often older people. These perceptions are, of course, coloured by their individual experience, but across a range of young people from

disadvantaged areas interviewed during this research these perceived attributes of libraries were the most widely shared.

These perceptions of libraries were not always expressed negatively, with young people also saying that libraries seemed to be relaxing, calm and peaceful places for learning, researching and listening. Libraries were seen to be most relevant to people wanting to learn, school kids and ‘nerds’, or older adults and senior citizens. This, for some young people, adds up to ‘boring’ and not a place where they want to be.

Comfort levels

To some, a place with the attributes described above might have enormous appeal. However, to many young people, and in particular those with limited interest in learning, this sort of library is not a place in which they feel physically or emotionally comfortable, and is not a place they would choose to be in their spare time.

While finding it hard to explain what they meant by not being comfortable, young people did make the following comments:

It smells funny; too geeky; it doesn't feel right; I don't want to be seen at the library; there are people watching; I got told off; you've got to walk past the front desk; couldn't we just sit on the floor.

The factors that contribute to these feelings of discomfort among some young people are related to building structures and design, furnishings and décor (‘If I read at home I don’t sit on the kitchen chair’); expectations about noise levels and behaviour; and lack of immediacy in accessing computers and resources (‘I can’t just jump on a computer’).

At the same time, for some disadvantaged young people the fact that libraries are open, warm and safe makes them an inviting place to be. This is a level of security that they may not find in other places.

Authority figures promote library use

Parents and teachers are generally the people most likely to encourage a young person’s access to and use of library services. Their motivation for promoting library use is primarily educational, perceiving benefits in developing good reading habits, enhancing information skills and supporting leisure interests.

Young people’s attitudes and behaviours are increasingly being shaped by peer behaviour and ‘group think’. Advice from persons in positions of authority is not always an encouragement to engage, and in some cases is a clear disincentive to use libraries. For disadvantaged young people, where relationships with parents and teachers may be even less supportive, or in conflict, the influence of peers may be even greater.

This, of course, creates challenges for library staff when young people are at the library because staff are also clearly in positions of authority, power and knowledge in the library environment.

Limited interest in library services

Young people participating in this research indicated a moderate level of awareness of the sorts of services offered by most modern libraries. Young people generally knew that they could go to their library to access computers and Internet free of charge, read magazines, get books, borrow DVDs and CDs, use photocopiers and printers, study and participate in library programs. These young people commonly had a family member or friend who was a library user, although interestingly these persons tended to be female – mum, a sister or grandmother. This knowledge of library services was not equally shared, but the feedback suggests that, unlike many other hard-to-reach groups for whom lack of awareness of what services libraries provide is a critical issue, this is not a factor that limits engagement of disadvantaged young people with public libraries.

The more significant finding is that many young people have limited interest in what libraries have to offer them. Their primary information and resource needs revolve around technology: the main reason they might

use a library would be to access computers to gain information, access support and government services, or assist with study if they are still in the education system. Accessing DVDs, CDs and magazines is of some interest as these also engage young people through visual and spatial attributes. Although the 2006 Libraries Building Communities survey of Victorian public library users found that more than 90% of adult users access books when they come to the library, books and other information resources tend to hold little appeal for young people once they are out of school and a formalised learning situation (State Library of Victoria 2006). In fact, almost all young people who had not been to a library for some time said their last library use had been for study purposes. Access to books is almost never the main reason a young person would want to go to a library.

The next issue is that depending on the level of disadvantage experienced by a young person, if there are other places where a young person feels more comfortable accessing technology to get the information they want (e.g. a friend's or relative's place, a neighbourhood house, an Internet café), then public libraries are seen as being of limited value.

B5 Connecting with the community

A range of potential responses from Victorian public libraries to the findings of the Connecting with the Community research project with regard to disadvantaged young people is presented below.

However, these need to be prefaced by acknowledging one interpretation and response to the findings of this research that is in essence also true of all population subgroups who individually have diverse information and resource needs. That is, some disadvantaged young people tend to have limited interest in libraries as they currently exist, especially if they are no longer at school and do not have specific learning objectives. These young people do not see libraries as a comfortable place, and, with access to technology their main reason for using a library, if alternatives exist they are more likely to go elsewhere. For some young people libraries are a place they choose not to be:

When library staff already feel stretched in trying to serve people who do use the library, it's easy to understand why some might feel that hard-to-reach young people are one group whose needs might be better served elsewhere (The Reading Agency 2008).

Opportunities for libraries to reach out to communities: Disadvantaged young people	
Engagement	Take libraries to the young people.
Library programs and collections	Leverage interest in computers to extend use of library services. Provide entertainment for young people.
Policies and procedures	Make libraries more comfortable for young people. Expand access to library resources and services.

Take libraries to young people

Young people generally know what libraries have to offer. They know where their libraries are. Yet they do not come in significant numbers. If libraries want to reach out to disadvantaged young people, they may need to consider possible outreach services, access to 'virtual' library services or in some cases ways of offering transport to the library. We need to 'reach young people where they are – not where we want' (Vincent 2000, p. 158).

Public libraries can make stronger links with schools and other education providers as a way of reaching disadvantaged young people. In addition, links can be made with other community organisations (e.g. social workers and youth workers, council officers, youth clubs and programs, Centrelink) that already interact with disadvantaged young people to try to reach those who are already distanced from education and employment.

Leverage interest in computers

If access to computers and technology are seen by young people as the main service libraries have to offer, these should be positioned as the 'hook' for attracting

young people to libraries. Libraries have information and resources that young people, and especially disadvantaged young people, need. Any engagement strategy should have technology as a central component.

Libraries could also ensure that they are able to quickly assist disadvantaged young people with accessing information that might be of particular relevance (e.g. information about housing services, job search websites).

Magazines are also a library resource of special interest to young people, although the types of magazines vary across gender and age group – comics for younger teenage boys, *Dolly* magazines for younger girls, car and sport magazines for older male teenagers, fashion and entertainment for older females.

Provide entertainment for young people

Libraries are not entertainment venues. But to attract young people, and thereby give them access to information and resources that are useful and valuable to them, it may be necessary to introduce some entertainment value to the library experience. Some Victorian libraries have already done this, with the introduction of Xboxes, creative activities and bands. This does not have to extend to providing music, a disco or band every Friday night, but activities and facilities that involve music, movies and food (e.g. a café or sausage sizzle) might get young people to come to the library. A key feature of these activities is that they also contain a social component, which is very important to young people, especially those who are often disengaged from other activities.

Make the library a more 'comfortable' place for young people

One way to give young people a feeling that they belong in the library is to give them some ownership of the library, and in particular the library space they occupy. As was found in West Torrens in response to an initially combative relationship between young people and the library, opening up the conversation as to how the library can be used and giving young people some input into these decisions can promote engagement.

Factors that might be considered are:

- codes of conduct, outlining acceptable behaviours for young people, relationships with other library patrons, and responses from library staff;
- access to youth spaces;
- a 'look and feel' that is comfortable, less conservative, interesting and able to be changed from time to time (e.g. zones, themed spaces);
- furniture that young people can 'kick back and relax in' (e.g. beanbags, rugs and comfortable chairs);
- not 'cleaning up' the young people's space each night.

Taking into account the impact of peer behaviour on young people it was also notable, in a 'catch 22' sort of way, that one of the things young people saw that would attract them to use libraries was seeing more young people at libraries.

Expand access to library resources and services

Young people made a number of suggestions that would make them more likely to access and use libraries. These cover a range of different policy and program areas, and may not be able to be implemented when balanced against other library objectives and patronage:

- expand opening hours;
- extend borrowing time beyond two to three weeks;
- have more copies of each resource and more computers ('So we don't have to wait');
- have more staff at the desk ('So we don't have to stand around for 15 minutes for one book');
- lower or abolish fines;
- offer incentives for frequent use (e.g. of the Internet);
- allow food and drink in the library.

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Further reading

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Part C: Horn of Africa communities

Not everyone comes from countries where there are institutions like public libraries. There's a huge amount of awareness-raising to be done ...

CARPENTER 2004, P. 28

C1 Horn of Africa communities

Background

In recent decades, the Horn of Africa has been a region continuously in crisis.² Political instability is standard, and the region is regularly stricken by natural catastrophes, such as droughts and floods, that hit rural areas particularly hard. It is estimated that between 1982 and 1992 some two million people died in the Horn of Africa due to a combination of war and famine (Prendergast, cited in *New Internationalist* 1992).

African settlement in Australia started in about 1984, with a 'wave' of settlement since 1999 primarily through humanitarian and refugee migration programs. By 2007, there were more than 20,000 African settlers in Victoria. Approximately 50% are from the Sudan, 22% from Ethiopia, 19% from Somalia and 9% from Eritrea (ABS 2008).³ Most, but not all, are refugees and asylum seekers.

Typical of many other new and emerging migrant groups in Victoria, people from the Horn of Africa represent a highly urbanised community. The greatest numbers currently live in public housing in the municipalities of Greater Dandenong, Moonee Valley, Maribyrnong and Brimbank. However, it is expected that over time this very high concentration of the Horn of Africa population within particular urban areas may diminish.

A large proportion of this population is under 20 years of age; there is also a significant proportion of single mothers with large families:

2 For the purpose of this report, Horn of Africa countries include Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Djibouti. These countries have strong cultural and geographical links.

3 Information on the demographic characteristics of the Horn of Africa population in Victoria is available through a series of Community Profiles prepared by the Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs (2001), based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics' 2001 Population Census. More up-to-date information is available from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship Settlement Database and profiles developed by migrant resource centres.

Australia has never had a stream of refugees quite like this one. In 2004–05, 56% of the African refugee intake was under 20. Violetta Walsh, director of Newcastle’s migrant resource centre, estimates that sole supporting mothers with large families (up to nine children) account for half the African community in that town (Bagnall 2006, p. 3).

There are many languages spoken in the Horn of Africa communities but the most common are Arabic (including Lebanese),⁴ Amharic, Tigrinian, Somali Dinka and Eritrean. Many people are multilingual; the Sudanese, for example, often use Arabic as a second language. Some of these languages, such as Somali, have an oral rather than a written tradition.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics’ Census captures information on religious affiliation, and at the 2001 Census the most common religious affiliation reported by the Somali- and Eritrean-born population in Victoria was Islam. The Ethiopian-born population reported affiliation with a broader range of religions but the commonest response was Islam (about 40%). Three-quarters of the Sudanese-born reported an affiliation with Christian religions.

This report outlines the findings of the Connecting with the Community research project with respect to Horn of Africa communities.

The needs of refugees and asylum seekers

A number of research papers and presentations by representatives of the African community highlight the situation of refugees and asylum seekers in Australia (Taylor 2004) (see also section C6). These show that:

- Many have come to Australia via refugee camps and have experienced physical and mental trauma.

- Although refugees with permanent protection visas have access to a range of government services available to other permanent residents, those on temporary protection visas are not eligible for many government settlement and other support systems and do not have family reunion rights. For example, asylum seekers on bridging visas have access to fewer benefits, are not eligible for Centrelink payments, and are only eligible for Medicare if they have been given permission to work.
- The substantive issues facing these communities include employment, education, health, problem gambling and domestic violence. Some newly arrived African people do not read or write their own language due to the difficult circumstances from which they have come. Lack of language skills, training and previous work experience has contributed to the high unemployment rate.
- African–Australian youth often find themselves ‘caught between two cultures’. An important issue for the community is providing opportunities for young people to develop their confidence, independence, leadership skills and pride in their African and Australian identity.

While refugees face some similar issues to other new migrants settling in Australia, refugees generally also have distinctive issues which are not always taken into account when regional settlement is proposed. These may include the lasting impacts of pre-migration trauma and torture, of long periods in refugee camps, with disrupted education and employment and lack of health care, and the anxiety of having family still living in situations of high danger (Taylor & Stanovic 2005, pp. 5–6).

⁴ Many countries in the Horn of Africa have historical, political and trade links with Arabia and the Middle East.

The majority of refugees arriving in Australia are poor in terms of income and assets. They face many of the same day to day issues as other people living in poverty, but with an underlay of their pre-migration experiences and overlay of additional expenses and of policies which exclude a subset of them from income support and employment assistance (Taylor 2004, p. 6).

Without English proficiency, refugees are readily excluded from many aspects of life, including employment, education, access to services and social interaction (Taylor 2004, p. 13).

'We are looking at pockets of a lost generation. We have 18- and 19-year-olds being put into Year 10 with an educational base of maybe two years ...' (quoted in Bagnall 2006, p. 4).

These papers also identify the types of issues that make the settlement process difficult for refugees and asylum seekers from the Horn of Africa. These include:

- adjustment issues regarding education and law and order;
- poor access to essential local services and community structures, from sporting clubs to child care centres;
- lack of cultural appropriateness in the content and delivery of health education and services;
- restricted access to education and relatively high school drop-out rates;
- time taken to assess and recognise overseas qualifications;
- lack of knowledge in the broader Australian community about Africa and African–Australians.

Refugees need accessible and affordable English tuition and interpreting and translation services to enable employment, education, use of services and social contact (Taylor 2004, p. 17).

Education is often seen by refugees as the key to their future settlement and to their or their children's inclusion in the host society. Refugee parents often lack knowledge of the educational system, and young people face pressure to leave school to contribute financially to family and relatives overseas (Taylor 2004, p. 14).

These papers also identify factors that will promote settlement of refugees. Those that are most relevant to public library services are:

- providing a welcoming host community that is informed, has the capacity to build ties with newcomers, and is an effective way of dealing with discrimination if it arises;
- ensuring access to English tuition classes available to those with and without work and offering social contact;
- providing opportunities to refugees and asylum seekers to participate in their communities, especially through sharing of their culture and crafts.

As Nela Milic, a member of the United Kingdom's Refugees in the Arts Initiative and a refugee, notes of libraries:

I know that you are not language schools, but you are the treasurers of language and that treasure needs to be shared with us (Milic 2004, p. 19).

C2 Library and information needs

A comprehensive review of the literature on library services and discussions with community members through the Connecting with the Community research project have identified the main library and information needs of Horn of Africa communities. These are summarised below, and in many ways are also applicable to other emerging communities.

Library and information needs: Horn of Africa communities

Accurate, up-to-date and sufficient information about government and community services.

Information skills and IT skills essential to work and school.

Access to computers and the Internet.

Connections to the broader community.

Information on government and community services

The primary information need of Horn of Africa communities is access to accurate, up-to-date and sufficient information about government and community services. This is essential to assist community members to access the housing, employment, education, welfare and social services they require. A significant challenge for migrants in new and unfamiliar surroundings is not knowing what services and support are available:

People need to know what they can get and how to get it. They need support on housing information, they need support on employment information. So there's a whole range of information needs which libraries in particular are in a good position to provide (Bell 2004, p. 21).

As a central community information hub, public libraries provide a single point of reference for migrants to access this important information. Libraries may also provide this information on services, but this is secondary to their being an efficient access point. A report from the United Kingdom emphasises that the best way for libraries to

meet these information needs is by helping refugees to make links to community workers and other agencies, rather than trying to provide primary information themselves (Thebridge & Nankivell 2004).

For those Horn of Africa migrants with low English language skills, government and community service information needs to be available in relevant community languages, such as Arabic or Lebanese.

During community consultations, specific mention was made of the value of practical information related to accessing public transport, traffic rules, how to get a licence, courts, marriage celebrants, and other everyday activities.

Information and information technology skills

Many Horn of Africa migrants have limited education and little or no information or information technology skills, skills which are becoming increasingly important in the workplace and in education, in accessing community services, and in communication, especially for young people.

Through programs targeted at skill development and by providing an environment where migrants can test and enhance these skills, public libraries can support migrants to develop information technology skills and the confidence to access information and use computers.

Access to computers

Libraries can help Horn of Africa migrants to bridge the digital divide. Access to computers and the Internet can help refugees to keep in touch with people at home, develop skills that are essential at work and school, and meet their information needs.

Connections to the broader community

Refugees and asylum seekers, and the Horn of Africa community in particular, seek understanding and acceptance in their new communities. They wish to understand the way in which the community where they now live operates, and at the same time would like

to share information about their cultural background. Though strictly speaking this may not be seen as meeting an information need, it is part of the wider role of public libraries in building social capital by fostering connections between new population groups and the broader community.

Crawley (2004) argues that libraries can play an important role in creating greater awareness in the broader community about refugees and asylum seekers. This information can be disseminated through sources that people come into contact with every day. She describes how libraries can provide:

... spaces for public debate and discussion – ways of really bringing out the asylum and refugee issue in a safe space that allows people to discuss these issues in a way that engages with what their concerns are and provides them with the kind of information that they think they need (Crawley 2004, p. 13).

C3 Ideas and lessons

Victorian public libraries and their counterparts interstate and overseas have implemented a range of programs to support the library and information needs of Horn of Africa communities, refugees and asylum seekers. Some examples are provided here, with additional reports in 'Further reading' in section C6.

Building Bridges: Making Connections, Nottingham City Libraries and Information Services, United Kingdom

The Building Bridges: Making Connections project in Nottingham in 2004 to 2006 aimed to reach out to refugees and asylum seekers through libraries. With the support of a grant received from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, the project sought to break down barriers, to improve access to services, and to respond to the developing needs of local asylum seekers and refugees (Zvonic, Parish & Bangar 2007).

The project had the following key features:

- It was supported by a Steering Committee and Partners Group. The members were drawn from a range of organisations, agencies and council departments, including representatives from refugee action and community groups. Partners contributed a wealth of experience in this area of work and their skills have proved invaluable in achieving objectives. Both the Partners Group and the Steering Committee were important in providing a framework for libraries to be part of the multi-agency support network in Nottingham.
- Libraries took opportunities to promote library services and participate in events organised by community agencies where local services available to refugee communities were presented. The library service held a promotional stall at each event and displayed relevant book, audio and visual stock. Where large numbers of children were expected, they also provided a storytelling corner.
- In three information technology taster sessions, adult refugees and asylum seekers had the opportunity to acquire skills in information technology, mainly access to the Internet and email. To overcome barriers to participation, organisers provided child care, interpreters and learning guidance to suit people's individual needs (e.g. participants could acquire basic skills such as how to open an email account in just one session).
- People whose personal and psychological difficulties meant that they were unable to take part in group sessions were given induction in the use of Internet facilities at libraries and setting up email addresses. One woman from Eritrea benefited greatly from learning how to use email as her only personal support came from a friend back home. She said: 'It is great that I can now communicate with my friend without paying for huge phone bills.'
- The project set up weekly conversation sessions. Improvement of English language knowledge is an essential skill that improves prospects for finding work, building social relations and achieving greater independence. One of the appeals of the conversation

sessions is that the atmosphere is informal and relaxed and learners feel supported and stimulated in the learning process. Each week a session is based around a different topic, thus broadening the range of vocabulary and comprehension. Sessions aim to encourage cultural exchange of information about traditions, attitudes and values, as well as give an insight and better understanding into British culture and the refugees' new social environment. The sessions also provide communication practice around practical skills such as renting a property and looking for work.

- The project encouraged the development of reading skills through provision of English graded readers. Many learners do not feel confident about themselves as readers, and reading a book in a new language seems unachievable. Introducing them to graded readers at a suitable level builds their confidence and interest in reading for pleasure, as well as developing language skills.
- Libraries were promoted to primary school children as a safe and welcoming environment which facilitates learning and enjoyment. Children learned to search for materials that interested them through a Dewey Bingo game. This was particularly useful in familiarising children with the library catalogue and locating books on the shelves. Some teachers pointed out that it was a pleasant experience for the children to feel welcomed and valued at a public venue by getting the attention from the staff and enjoying a relaxed atmosphere, complete with snacks.
- The project increased the provision of relevant stock in libraries. In response to the finding that some asylum seekers have little awareness of British road rules and regulation, the libraries purchased the *Highway Code* from a small independent publisher in the six main languages spoken by asylum seeker and refugee communities. The library also purchased and promoted pregnancy and childbirth videos in foreign languages. In expanding its collection, the library liaised with knowledgeable members of the community to identify appropriate material, and had a flexible approach to funding and sourcing acquisitions.

- Through training that provided information on particular needs and circumstances of asylum seekers and refugees, staff were made more aware of these issues and gained confidence in working with them.
- Identifying a point of contact in the library that staff can approach for any information and advice regarding service provision to asylum seekers and refugees has been a key element in ensuring an efficient and fair service.

Welcome To Your Library, London Libraries Development Agency, United Kingdom

The Welcome To Your Library initiative was coordinated through the London Libraries Development Agency across five London borough public library services, and funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation (Carpenter 2004). The aim was to identify and overcome some of the barriers that asylum seekers and refugees face in using public library services. The Welcome To Your Library website provides comprehensive information about the initiative and inspiration for libraries everywhere (www.welcometoyourlibrary.org.uk).

Three key priorities in England's national public library strategy *Framework for the Future* (DCMS 2003) provided a context for the Welcome To Your Library work:

- promotion of reading and informal learning;
- access to digital skills and services including e-government;
- measures to tackle social exclusion, build community identity and develop citizenship.

Some highlights from this initiative include:

- collecting baseline information to understand as fully as possible who was in their neighbourhood, where they were and what these potential users wanted;
- finding out about barriers and needs;
- raising the profile of services on offer, with emphasis on sensitivity to language and a personal approach to reaching people and getting and building people's trust over time;

- developing stock and other resources with input from refugees and asylum seekers to ensure relevance, and also encouraging production of new material in appropriate languages;
- storytelling events and workshops as an opportunity to explore identity in a safe and neutral environment.

You need to be sensitive about how you're going to elicit people's views and reach people effectively ... you don't just barge in and do it to your own timetable ... Not everybody comes from countries where there are institutions like public libraries. There's a huge amount of awareness-raising to be done ... Facilitating contact between communities could really start to create a set of relationships between the library service and people from different ethnic origins and open doors to much, much more comprehensive involvement in the development of services (Carpenter 2004, p. 28).

The key lessons offered by the projects are:

- Work in context, not in an isolated world of libraries or museums or archives (or even all three) and place what you are doing in the context of overall government programs and objectives.
- Get active involvement of the users that you want to reach, in both planning and delivery.
- Identify human and financial resources that will enable you to mainstream the work, build capacity and create sustainability.

Making it Work, Archives, Libraries and Museums London, United Kingdom

In a paper for Archives, Libraries and Museums London, Michael Bell (2004) outlines a number of key success factors for libraries working with refugees and asylum seekers, based on project experience from across the United Kingdom. The findings are being drawn together into a good practice toolkit called *Making it Work*.

In summary, these key factors are:

- Making plans – identifying needs and clarifying goals:
 - establish links with refugee community organisations and other service providers;
 - involve potential service users in identifying needs;
 - be clear about what you can and cannot do.
- Making it public and making it easy – promoting services and ensuring access:
 - early and appropriate promotional material;
 - exploit links and networks;
 - make your services easier to access;
 - make your service part of a more holistic approach.
- Making friends – achieving results through partnerships:
 - engage with appropriate networks and partners.
- Making it better – learning from experiences.
- Making it last – creating sustainable services.

We see a number of projects where refugees and refugee community organisations have felt disengaged because they've been promised the earth and received very little. If the projects that had been set up were much clearer about the limits to their remit, there would probably have been a lot more satisfaction, and probably a lot more celebration of the success of those projects (Bell 2004, p. 22).

Bell (2004) emphasises that libraries as information providers are very important in helping refugees address their lack of understanding of how the system works. Libraries contribute to community participation and cohesion and help both host communities and refugee and asylum seeker communities better understand each other.

Refugee Resources and Collection Service, Merton Libraries, United Kingdom

Merton Libraries' pioneering Refugee Resources and Collection Service seeks to help asylum seekers and refugees become self-sufficient and make a new life (The Library Association 2001). The project was developed when Asylum Welcome, a Wimbledon-based drop-in centre for refugees, contacted Merton's library service for help. Library staff started visiting the centre, found out what languages the refugees spoke and came back with whatever books they could find. They now regularly visit the drop-in centre where they issue books and other materials in a range of ethnic languages. Groups are walked to the nearest library to see how easy it is to gain access to a wealth of information, and the library service has organised arts and cultural events focusing on the lives of refugees.

The Refugee Resources and Collection Service initiative received a Libraries Change Lives award from the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in 2001.

Working with young refugees, London Borough of Brent Libraries, United Kingdom

The Harlesden Library in the London Borough of Brent has a project aimed at raising the profile of reading and literacy skills among young refugees and asylum seekers and countering stereotypes of refugees through arts and drama (WTYL 2007). This project is an initiative with the Brent Youth Partnership, Brent Refugee Forum and a local school, Alperton, and was funded through the Community Chest. The library engaged a tutor to work with 28 young people in the library over 20 weeks, with two sessions per week, covering English for speakers of other languages, drama, reading and writing. At the end of the sessions, the young people wrote articles about their views of war, their fears and aspirations. The work culminated in a showcase of arts, drama, writings and dance. The project staff emphasise the importance of making connections and building trust between the library service and the other partners, particularly refugee community organisations. This was

an essential first step before commencing and funding this work. Time, persistence and patience were all seen as essential.

For more information see: www.welcometoyourlibrary.org.uk/editorial.asp?page_id=52

Turning Corners, Leeds Library and Information Service, United Kingdom

Turning Corners, a cycling project run by the Leeds Library and Information Service in association with the Leeds City Council Road Safety Unit, has sought to engage young refugees and improve their literacy skills through something they enjoy doing – cycling (WTYL 2007). The main components of the 2005 program were:

- Practical sessions, including bicycle repair and maintenance – The content was interesting, creative and fun-based, and met learning objectives such as developing participants' literacy skills, extending vocabulary and encouraging verbal expression. The sessions also covered all the relevant themes and topics appropriate to cycling.
- Cycle training – This incorporated health and safety issues, bike checks and playground riding skills assessment. 'On road' training included hazard awareness, road positioning, and left and right turns to and from minor and major junctions.
- Library-based sessions – These covered joining the library and how to use the library and its facilities.

The outcomes of the project for participants include: increased self-esteem and confidence; increase in participants' use of spoken English; promotion of health, fitness and exercise; passing of the cycling proficiency and road safety test; and participants joining the library and becoming aware of the services offered, including jobs and skills support.

For more information see: www.welcometoyourlibrary.org.uk/editorial.asp?page_id=43

Camden Libraries Refugee Work Experience project, Camden Libraries, United Kingdom

The Camden Libraries Refugee Work Experience project began in June 2004 (WYTL 2007). It provides structured work placements for refugees and asylum seekers with information technology skills and entry level 2 English. Each work placement lasts for 12 weeks for 15 hours a week and includes payment for lunch and travel expenses. Experience includes training in library management systems, routine library duties and familiarisation with the United Kingdom's working culture. Placements have access to the library learning centre support for information technology and English language courses that help with drawing up a curriculum vitae, job seeker skills and interviewing technique. Some participants have used their new skills to tell the Local History and Archives Library the story of their immigration. Many have talked to primary school children about their experiences, helping to break down the barriers between cultures.

As the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals – which gave the project a Libraries Change Lives award in 2007 – notes:

The scheme has been successful in building self esteem, contact with the wider community, and developing an understanding of workplace rules and regulations, enabling refugees to access basic skills including developing CVs and attending computer sessions in library learning centres. The programme also provides a daily routine to follow whilst balancing home and work life (CILIP 2007),

For more information see: www.welcometoyourlibrary.org.uk/editorial.asp?page_id=53

Embracing diversity and empowering citizens, Aarhus Public Libraries, Denmark

Aarhus Public Libraries in western Denmark has a reputation for being a world leader in the provision of services to immigrant and refugee communities, receiving in 2004 a Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Access to Learning Award for this work. Nearly 12% of the Aarhus population consists of immigrants or refugees; this figure rises to 43% and 27% respectively in the areas served by the library's Gellerup and Hasle branches, which cater for many Middle Eastern and African nationalities, including Somalis, Congans, Lebanese and Kurds, Iraqi, Iranian, Afghan and Turkish people. Jack Jackson's *Aarhus Public Libraries: Embracing Diversity, Empowering Citizens in Denmark* (2005) provides a comprehensive report on the services offered and the underpinning principles and philosophy.

Key services supporting immigrants and refugees with the information they need to participate in community life include:

- The People's Information office (folkeinformation), in Gellerup library, is a municipal service staffed by seven bicultural 'new Danes' – including a Somali, a Congan, a Lebanese and a Kurd – who help immigrants and refugees who speak little or no Danish communicate with authorities, employers and others.
- The Job Corner, in a cosy nook in Gellerup library, is equipped with computers, printers and notice boards to display employment advertisements printed daily from the Danish Internet job portal. In addition to the dedicated workstations, the library offers counselling services on preparing a résumé and job application as well as introductory courses in how to use the databases of the public employment service and others.
- The Health Centre is located in the meeting room attached to the Gellerup library and consists of three units: health care specialists, dental therapists and midwives. The centre holds an open house most afternoons, where individuals and groups can drop by without an appointment to ask questions or air concerns. Courses are scheduled for parents, groups and individuals on topics such as contraception, heart

disease, high blood pressure, childhood illnesses and good nutrition.

- The IT Competence Boost is an ongoing program at the Gellerup and Hasle libraries primarily intended for immigrant and refugee women to teach them basic information technology skills. Skilled volunteer guides from the immigrants' own neighbourhoods take these sessions, which are occasionally accompanied by samples of folklore, music, dance and food from the participants' native countries.
- The FINFO service, an online service for immigrants and refugees (www.finfo.dk) gives access to valuable information about the Danish state and society (e.g. asylum, residence, work, education, politics, culture) in 13 languages, including Somali, Arabic, English, Urdu and Persian. Links are also provided to news, music, literature and other useful information websites from the countries of origin of many immigrants and refugees in Denmark. This service is provided cooperatively by 70 municipalities and the state library.

The American Place, Hartford Public Library, Connecticut, United States of America

The American Place is a free library service for immigrants and refugees (Hartford Public Library 2008). Its main goal is to help people adjust to life in America while preserving elements of their native culture. The programs are free and include practical advice for living in the United States, classes for learning English, information on becoming a citizen, and instruction on how to use the library to find information on jobs, health, housing, education and other topics of interest. The American Place is a recipient of the National Award for Library Service.

Citizenship and immigration services, Queens Library, New York, United States of America

The Queens Library in New York offers a range of citizenship and new immigrant services (Byrne 2006). These include:

- a list of agencies in the area offering citizenship preparation classes and immigration services for free or for low or sliding-scale fees;
- coping skills and cultural programs, which include presentations on topics essential to new immigrants' 'acculturation' to American culture, as well as citizenship and job training information, advice on helping children learn, and information on available social services;
- a directory of Immigrant Serving Agencies in over 50 languages, which contains information on agencies offering low-cost or free social services to immigrants;
- a Learn English program provided through six adult learning centres;
- Mail-a-Book for new immigrants in which selected books can be mailed to a new immigrants' home with return by mail using postage-paid labels supplied by the library. The aim is to introduce new immigrants to the library's collections.

Collections and engagement, Maribyrnong Library Service, Victoria

Maribyrnong, in the inner western suburbs of Melbourne, has the second most ethnically diverse population in Victoria, with 40% of residents born outside Australia. This includes a significant proportion of refugees and asylum seekers from the Horn of Africa. The Maribyrnong Library Service conducts events and programs (e.g. a women's sewing group) to celebrate the area's cultural and linguistic diversity and create greater awareness of the rich array of people living in the community. These are described in the *Libraries Building Communities Showcasing the Best* reports, volumes 1 and 2 (State Library of Victoria 2005, 2008).

In 2005, the Maribyrnong Library Service undertook extensive consultation with African community leaders and Horn of Africa groups to support its development of an African languages collection. Issues covered include types of languages spoken, types of material required, subject interests, availability of resources, and computer training needs. The African Languages Collection was launched in August 2005.

As part of its Celebrating Diversity program in 2005, the library ran an African True Stories session. Three African migrants told their stories, from the time they left their

homeland to the present day, highlighting their struggle, tenacity and achievement. The session was followed by an Ethiopian coffee ceremony.

Language programs, Brimbank Library and Information Service, Victoria

Brimbank Library and Information Service and Victoria University are starting to run English classes at the library for Horn of Africa communities. Groups are brought in to the library and someone who speaks their language walks them through the library, explaining the services available. If they can see something familiar (e.g. a CD of music from their country of origin or a picture book in their language) this can help to develop their language skills.

Cultural diversity training, Western English Language School, Victoria

The Western English Language School is a multicampus Victorian government school that provides high-quality programs in English as a second language for primary and secondary school-age students throughout the western suburbs of Melbourne. The school also runs professional development courses for teachers, multicultural education aides and other professionals working with migrants for whom English is a second language.

The school has run courses for library staff from Brimbank Library and Information Service on differences in communities and cultures, exploring some of the social niceties that are often taken for granted. The course fosters greater understanding among library staff of different communities and how to work with particular groups. Some municipal councils have been doing this type of work for several years and have a good understanding of the issues involved.

Melbourne City Library has brought people in from local colleges to talk with library staff about what language and support services they can provide.

CALD Senior Surfers on the Internet, State Library of Victoria/Department of Planning and Community Development, Victoria

The CALD Senior Surfers project, a joint initiative between the State Library of Victoria and the Office of Senior Victorians, was developed to provide an opportunity for Victorian seniors from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds to learn about the Internet. The project, in 2005–06, set out to gauge the level of interest in the Internet by CALD seniors, trial various approaches to training delivery, and take learning from the project to inform the design of future projects.

The most tangible asset of the project has been an *Introduction to the Internet* handout being tested and produced in 13 languages. The handout is part of a package or delivery model containing session plans, translated instructional materials, suggestions for multilingual online content, advice on interpreter usage and cultural sensitivity, and technical information on browser set-up.

Multicultural Bridge, State Library of Queensland, Queensland

Multicultural Bridge (www.slq.qld.gov.au/info/lang) is part of an ongoing strategy from the State Library of Queensland that provides information in 19 languages about the library's collections, services and activities including the Languages Other Than English collection of approximately 113,000 books in over 60 languages. The website can be used to discover how to find books, music, videos, maps, pictures and family history information. It also provides information about public library services in Queensland and has links to a range of websites in languages other than English.

C4 Accessing and using library services

Discussion with members of Victoria's Horn of Africa communities, community organisations and public library staff with an interest in supporting their access to public library services identified a number of significant factors that influence how Horn of Africa communities use their local libraries. These are summarised below.

Factors influencing library use: Horn of Africa communities	
Awareness	Generally low level of awareness of services offered by public libraries. Lack of familiarity with libraries as a concept.
Engagement	Willingness to participate in library activities (presenting opportunities for promoting wider community engagement).
Collections, programs and services	Limited collections in community languages. Low-level literacy and computer skills.
Policies and procedures	Difficulties in taking up library membership. Lack of awareness of library rules.
Customer service	Sensitivity of library staff to user's comfort levels.

It should be noted, however, that the factors that influence, either positively or negatively, use of public library services by different groups in the community can vary considerably. Issues related to accessing public libraries and the quality and presentation of library facilities were identified through the Connecting with the Community research as significant for some groups, yet were not seen as constraints on library use by Horn of Africa communities.

It should also be noted that the factors that influence library use vary *within* communities. That is, the issues of most relevance to older male Africans were not the same

as those raised by African teenagers (e.g. access to resources in community languages versus a preference for resources in English).

The following summation from discussion with library staff captures some of the challenges libraries face in achieving widespread engagement of African communities:

Ninety-five per cent of Africans don't come to the library – they're scared, shy and don't know how to find a book or use a computer. Language is an issue. They find it hard to communicate with librarians. They need to have a reason to go to a library – some don't have those goals. Some people want to learn more and read more books – but they are not in their language. Even DVDs are in English, not Arabic or Dinka.

Awareness of library services

Although there are clear patterns of frequent and intensive use of public libraries by some members of the African community, it would be more accurate to say that there is generally a low level of awareness of the role of libraries and the services they offer.

Some members of the Horn of Africa communities are very willing to engage with their public libraries, and are regular users of library services (e.g. it is estimated that 35% of users at Maribyrnong Library Service are of African origin – men, mums, teenage children). These are people who have become aware of what services are available and which are most relevant to them. For older and working-age Africans, this can include access to the Internet, access to information on government services, and access to newspapers and essential community information. For younger school-age Africans, some of whom are daily library users, this includes research and reference material (that they do not have access to at home and is not available at school), and access to the Internet for communication and entertainment purposes.

However, this level of awareness is not widespread. Some members of African communities, often but not

exclusively women, are less familiar with the concept of a free public library and have little or no experience of libraries. They do not know what is and is not available in a library; they may have poor English language skills; they may feel uncomfortable asking questions about how to find resources; and they may be unfamiliar with a friendly service culture. This can be very stressful and make it difficult for them to feel comfortable in a library. Other community members simply have no knowledge of library services.

Community engagement

Members of Horn of Africa communities who are familiar with their library tend to be very engaged, and are not only keen to be involved in library activities but have suggestions for ways that library services can better meet their individual and their community's needs. This active participation is seen in areas where there is a history of settlement (e.g. Maribyrnong, Brimbank) and areas where communities are just starting to emerge (e.g. Wyndham). Library staff have noticed people from the African community introducing others to the library.

There is also an observable interest among some African parents in actively supporting the education of their children through participation in homework activities. This may also provide opportunities for wider engagement with the Horn of Africa community beyond those students and parents who are currently library users.

Library staff also suggested that there appears to be a drop-off in library engagement once young Africans leave school, particularly among girls aged 15 or 16 years or more. Young people who are no longer at school, undertaking further education or in employment are a group whose information needs can be met by public libraries. However, this is likely to be true of all young people, and not be an issue peculiar to young Africans.

It was also noted that the attitudes of other library patrons affect the way some migrant groups feel in their library. Although generally library patrons are welcoming of new users, lack of understanding of and

familiarity with different cultures, combined with a 'fear of the unknown', can mean that some patrons are less accepting than others. For example, some library patrons have expressed concern with groups of young Africans 'hanging out' together in the library. Again, this is an issue that is not unique to African communities and needs to be managed sensitively through normal library procedures and through library activities that provide opportunities for users to meet and develop greater awareness of each other's cultures.

Library programs and collections

The primary issue for Horn of Africa communities in using library services is the absence of resources in their community languages. A challenge facing many library services as they try to accommodate the information needs of the diverse ethnic populations in their community is to develop a sufficiently wide and deep collection to support refugee populations that can emerge within the space of five to ten years, and then potentially disperse throughout the wider community as new migrant groups arrive. Libraries could take advantage of the fact that the language needs of these different migrant groups can intersect over time. For example, library collections of resources in Lebanese that were developed some time ago and have now been disbanded could be usefully deployed to support groups within the Horn of Africa community. As noted in section C1, though there are Horn of Africa communities in several municipalities, there are relatively higher concentrations in Greater Dandenong, Moonee Valley, Brimbank and Maribyrnong.

Both library staff and African library users noted the difficulties posed by limited collections in community languages. Some libraries with a collection for children to learn to read find that this is heavily used by adults, as it is one of the few reading resources they can access.

Where available, bilingual material is thought to be the best – especially for children as parents want them to learn and speak English and at the same time know their own language and culture. Audio material is also popular,

especially as some languages have a primarily oral tradition.

When asked about the cost of developing language-specific collections, Africans who are current library users indicated that they would be prepared to bear some of the cost if they individually and as a community could access a more substantial and well-maintained collection.

The importance of having relevant collections is reinforced by the experience of some one-off library users from Horn of Africa communities. These users indicated that, having gone to a library to use books to fill their main information need and being unable to do so, have left and not returned since, despite knowing that there are other library services that might also be of value to them.

The quality of material is also an issue. It may be possible to import material but it may not be up to the standard of publishing expected in Australia. Users are less likely to see this as a concern.

Many Africans have limited English skills, and do not have much experience in reading and writing, even in their own spoken language. This constrains their access to information on government and community services, and their wider use of library services. Training and supportive resources (e.g. texts, grammar books) are all required. Short courses on computers are also seen as valuable for those Africans who do not have access to computers at home and need to develop these skills for work, education, communication or leisure activities.

Policies and procedures

The research identified two issues related to library policies and procedures. The first was that many Horn of Africa migrants do not have the motor or literacy skills to efficiently sign up for library membership. Some Victorian public library services have introduced simplified sign-up processes for migrants experiencing these difficulties.

The second issue was that, as with other hard-to-reach groups, the behaviour of some African community members does not conform with what is generally expected in libraries. Shouting in libraries, bringing food to the library (and having dinner around a library table), leaving young children at the library in the care of older siblings, and a more relaxed attitude to time and appointments all create challenges for libraries. Some libraries are addressing these issues by carefully re-examining their expected norms of behaviour – often in conjunction with library users – and then clearly communicating what is agreed as acceptable behaviour through appropriate signage within the library.

Customer service

Some African library users find it difficult to approach library staff for assistance. There is no indication that this is due to library staff not responding to inquiries or being unhelpful, more that there is unease, discomfort and sometimes feelings of ignorance and shame in asking for assistance and explanations (especially if this relates to library rules or fines). Some Africans consulted during the research said that this situation might be eased if the library employed staff of African origin. However, while this would almost certainly help, other persons consulted indicated that a more active orientation from both library users and library staff, and greater sensitivity to the potential discomfort of African library users, could achieve the same end.

C5 Connecting with the community

A range of potential responses from Victorian public libraries to the findings of the Connecting with the Community research project with regard to the Horn of Africa community is presented below.

Opportunities for libraries to reach out to communities: Horn of Africa communities	
Collaboration and partnerships	<p>Libraries work collaboratively on planning, promotion, collections development and staff training.</p> <p>Libraries establish partnerships with local community organisations and complementary service providers.</p>
Engagement and promotion	<p>Use existing African library users and community representatives to promote library services and support new library users.</p> <p>Use children's programs, other established library programs, council programs and community locations to promote library services.</p> <p>Support and collaboratively promote specialist collections and library centres.</p>
Collections, programs and services	<p>Collaborative development of and investment in library collections.</p> <p>Map existing collections in community languages.</p> <p>Support development of literacy and computer skills.</p>
Library facilities	<p>Provide computers with Arabic keyboards.</p>
Customer service	<p>Libraries employ library staff of African origin or who speak relevant community languages.</p> <p>Libraries provide professional development related to cultural awareness.</p>

Collaboration and partnerships

The experience of libraries in Victoria in providing services relevant to refugee communities is reinforced by research from the United Kingdom. The changing

nature and high regional turnover of the refugee and asylum seeker community provides particular challenges for library service providers. In response, Thebridge and Nankivell (2004) suggest that libraries work collaboratively to develop more effective and practical services and approaches to supporting refugees and asylum seekers. Joint library partnership projects could be aimed at:

- simplifying joining procedures to make them consistent across all library services;
- producing common 'joining packs' or similar promotional material;
- joint training across services (both information training for library users and cultural awareness training for library staff);
- developing and maintaining coordinated information and websites to support refugees, which could include information about accessing library services;
- establishing a joint team or individual to monitor and evaluate services to refugees across a network of libraries.

These suggestions could be considered by Victorian library services with Horn of Africa populations, and extended to collaborative collections development, acquisitions and supplier management, as some libraries have already done.

There is also likely to be value in library services developing strong relationships with relevant community organisations and service providers that represent and support Horn of Africa communities, as occurred at Maribyrnong Library Service. These organisations include Adult Multicultural Education Services, migrant resource centres, and local African community groups. Increased linkages with other council services and their multicultural officers could be effective. The purpose of these partnerships would be to promote wider use of library services to the community, and not to fulfil government's broader community development objectives. These partnerships could be used to inform library policy development, support promotions activities, and inform collections and acquisition approaches.

Community engagement and promotion

Some members of the Horn of Africa communities are regular and passionate library users, including both older and younger people, male and female. Through these people and representatives of local community groups there presents an opportunity for promoting the services provided by public libraries and engaging more Africans in libraries.

All library services already have general children's programs, and some teenage Africans regularly use public libraries for homework purposes. Existing programs might be targeted to particular migrant groups to encourage greater participation by parents and their friends in the African community to promote awareness of available library services and encourage greater use of library services. Promoting library activities to hard-to-reach groups through council services such as playgroups and maternal and child health centres is another way of generating a ripple effect to raise awareness about library services that are relevant to targeted community groups. So too being aware of formal and informal community meeting places (e.g. restaurants where African men congregate, women's walking groups) provides additional avenues for promotion of library services.

Cultural events in libraries are seen to be effective in building community engagement, especially for African women who have skills and interests in their arts and crafts but no avenue for getting together or sharing their skills. Library participation might increase if nominated libraries with specialisation in a particular collection (e.g. Somali resources) had statewide or regional responsibility for managing this collection, conducting relevant promotional activities and programs, and encouraging through neighbouring library services participation from Horn of Africa groups across municipalities.

In all promotional activities with Horn of Africa communities it should be noted, however, that as many people have low levels of English literacy and some languages have a mainly oral tradition (e.g. Somali has only had a written form since the 1970s), brochures and

pamphlets about library services may not be the most effective means of communication.

Library programs and collections

It is difficult for a single library service to justify significant investment in a collection to support a particular migrant community when it knows that in time this group will disperse and be replaced by other migrant communities. Greater levels of collaboration and joint planning on collections development would appear to be necessary. Involving local community representatives in collections development would also ensure that relevant resources are identified. For example, young African people involved in this research strongly indicated that they saw no value in having access to resources in their traditional language as their energies were focused on improving their English language skills.

At the same time, work could be done to map existing collections in relevant languages for Horn of Africa communities to make it easier for library users and library staff to know what is available, locally and in nearby libraries.

Analysis of Australian Bureau of Statistics' 2006 Census data would also assist library services to better understand the size and demographic profile of their migrant population.

The demand for access to literacy programs and training on use of computers is not limited to Horn of Africa communities. However, the demand for these services is strong in the African community and libraries may provide a forum for delivering or facilitating access to these services. Where English language skills are very low, interpreters may be required.

Library facilities

Some African library users see access to the Internet as a valuable service, others do not. For those older, mainly male, Africans with limited English-writing skills who want to communicate with family and friends overseas and access news in their country of origin, having access to an Arabic keyboard would make it easier to use the Internet.

Having spaces, furniture and tables available for group meetings and family gatherings might also encourage communal engagement with the library and use of library resources and facilities.

Customer service

Reducing any barriers between African library users and library staff could be assisted by employing people of African origin or people who speak relevant community languages in libraries or in the promotion of libraries to community groups. Scholarships for persons speaking community languages, subsidies to encourage staff to learn languages, or provision of common questions and answers in other languages for use by library staff (see City Library, a branch of Melbourne Library Service) might be considered.

Recognising that this may not be possible, professional development for existing library staff could focus on ensuring greater awareness of the potential cultural reluctance of African library users to ask for the assistance that they need to fulfil their information and service needs. The emphasis, as it is with all library users, would be on helping people to do things themselves. When dealing with African library users, language barriers, lack of familiarity with libraries and lack of confidence need to be understood.

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Further reading

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Part D: Low-income families

It is not easy being a parent. You may face many difficulties as you struggle to spend time with your child, and to spend time reading. But this is natural. Never give up, just take it one step at a time.

JAIPAUL 2003, P. 5

D1 Low-income families

Background

Poverty and financial hardship bar access to many social, educational, employment and recreational activities that are, for most people, part of everyday modern life. The focus of this aspect of the Connecting with the Community research project has been on low-income families with dependent children, and especially on understanding the impact on children of growing up in families who experience financial hardship.

There are different ways of defining and measuring financial hardship. However, families with an annual income that is less than 50% of the Australian population's median income are generally accepted as being in severe hardship (Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs 2004, p. 14).⁵ On this basis, data from the 2001 Australian Bureau of Statistics' Census shows that in Victoria approximately 68,000 families with dependent children were suffering severe hardship. This represented 9% of all families with dependent children (ABS 2008). Almost three-quarters of these families were sole parent families, most often a single mother with dependent children.

A study by the Smith Family and the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling looked at the issue of who is 'poor' in Australia (Harding & Szukalska 2000). According to the report, 22% of single parent families and an estimated 732,000 dependent children (15%) were living in poverty in Australia in 1999. The authors found that of every 100 poor Australians:

- 24 live in working-poor (wage and salary) families;
- 23 live in families with an unemployed head;
- 15 live in other families dependent on social security;
- 14 live in sole parent families;
- 9 live in self-employed families;
- 6 live in families headed by an aged person;

⁵ This has been described by the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs (2004) as the most cautious way of estimating poverty.

- 5 live in some other type of family;
- 4 live in families reliant on superannuation and investment income.

These findings underline the fact that having employment is not a guarantee of an adequate income. Another study commissioned by the Smith Family (Harding, Lloyd & Greenwell 2001), notes:

Having a job appeared less of a protection against poverty than in the past, with the risk of being in poverty, among all Australians aged 15 years and over and working part-time, rising from 10.7 per cent in 1990 to 11.7 per cent in 2000 ... For the vast majority of wage and salary earner families, having a full-time job was sufficient to ensure that the family was not in poverty (Harding, Lloyd & Greenwell 2001, p. 23).

The implications of disadvantage for low-income families

Inadequate family income, due to lack of education, regular employment and/or other factors, can influence families and children in many ways. The Life Chances Study (Taylor & Fraser 2002), a longitudinal study initiated by the Brotherhood of St Laurence, found:

- Parents on low-incomes were significantly more likely than other parents to have serious health problems. They were also significantly less likely to receive help in raising their children from their partner (many were sole parents) or from friends and relatives.
- Low-income parents found it difficult to pay for their children's school costs, clothes and shoes, and outings. Being unable to meet these costs limited the children's participation at school and in their social life with friends.
- Children's own accounts of their lives demonstrate the way that low family income can lead to their social exclusion, both at school and in the wider world. Children in low-income families often had much more limited contact with the world beyond school and family than children in more affluent families.

- Parents often have to make a trade-off between time spent with their children and time at work earning an income to improve the family's financial situation.

There is now an overwhelming body of evidence to show that the pathways children start on during their formative years can have a lifelong impact – their early experiences lay the foundations for what lies ahead. Homel et al. (2006) note that creating opportunities for positive development for children and their families, and promoting their full participation as citizens in society, can reduce the chances that they will subsequently become involved in crime and related problems:

... mobilising social resources to support children, families and their communities before problems emerge is more effective and cheaper than intervening when problems have become entrenched (Homel et al. 2006).

A major report from the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs (2004) on poverty and financial hardship pulls together evidence of the relationship between poor educational attainment and poverty. The report notes the impact on the life chances of children as well as the wider societal impact:

Education and training are critical pathways into employment and social participation and a means of escaping poverty. Education is also critical to creating economic growth, generating higher standards of living and creating the basis of a socially cohesive society (Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs 2004, p. 143).

The high risk of poverty for people who leave school early and/or who do not acquire further education is due to the restricted employment opportunities available to those without qualifications, and the greater risk of unemployment. As the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) noted in its submission to the committee, the last decade has seen the development of 'a labour market where secure full-time jobs are

increasingly being rationed to those with the highest skills – people with limited formal education and vocational training are disadvantaged’ (ACOSS 2004, p. 118).

Studies by the Business Council of Australia (BCA) also reveal the long-term impact of leaving school early (BCA 2004). The BCA found that seven years after leaving school, approximately 7% of those who completed Year 12 were unemployed. But for early school leavers, unemployment is a much more likely prospect. Of young people who left school in Year 9, seven years later 21% of young men and 59% of young women were unemployed. Although completing school provides some protection from poverty, those who obtain tertiary level qualifications are least likely to be unemployed and at a risk of poverty.

In its final report, the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs (2004) also found:

- The link between health and socioeconomic status has been clearly shown in studies both in Australia and overseas, with lower socioeconomic status generally being associated with poorer overall health. Socioeconomically disadvantaged people generally experience greater ill health than people from groups with a higher socioeconomic status. The mechanisms by which socioeconomic status influences health status are many and varied, although those most often postulated are diet, health behaviour, education, access to health services (both preventive and treatment), quality of housing and psychosocial factors. Poor health can in turn lead to a compounding of poverty, because illness reduces an individual’s capacity to successfully take up employment and training opportunities.
- Gambling, and especially problem gambling, is a significant problem for many people on low incomes, and a contributor to the incidence of poverty among this group.
- Children in poverty find their quality of life eroded. They often suffer from great material hardship and have meagre possessions, little clothing and few educational toys or books.

- Children in poverty often feel different from their peers. Isolation and exclusion reinforce poor social skills as there is no money for socialising activities, which other children take for granted.
- Poverty places great strains on family relationships, and children may be living in households suffering from dysfunctional relationships. Poverty also undermines parenting; studies have found that economic and social stress leads to parents being less nurturing and more rejecting of their children.

D2 Library and information needs

A comprehensive review of literature on library services and discussions with community members through the Connecting with the Community research project have identified the main library and information needs of low-income families. As with the research findings in all of these hard-to-reach population groups, these are general findings and do not necessarily apply to parents and children from all low-income families.

Library and information needs: Low-income families

Access to information, educational resources and entertainment that they cannot obtain through their own means:

- children’s books and reading programs;
 - homework and school study resources;
 - DVDs and CDs;
 - the Internet.
-

Information skills and IT skills essential to work and school.

A family-friendly environment to access library and information services:

- free time to find the books and resources they need;
 - empathy and understanding from library staff and other library users.
-

Access to information, educational resources and entertainment

In 2002, the Brotherhood of St Laurence (Taylor & Fraser 2002) found that children in low-income families:

- often lacked educational resources at home, and their parents were worried that they could not help with homework because of their own lack of education, literacy and/or English proficiency, and could not afford to employ tutors;
- did not have access to home computers, which has become a major educational issue.

The Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs (2004) notes that the impact of poverty on education starts early and is exhibited in many ways. For example, research indicates that poverty in early childhood can lead to impaired cognitive development. Behavioural difficulties, isolation and exclusion are more prevalent in children of preschool age from low-income families. The committee received evidence of many contributing factors, ranging from family conflict to financial stress; these impact directly and indirectly on children through their parents' experiences and behaviour. Young children from low-income families may not have equivalent access to educational toys or books. Parents may not read to their children because they do not have the time or the ability. As a result, children from low-income families are more likely to be unprepared for the important transition from home to school, and are therefore at risk of having a poor experience from their first encounter with school, which may continue to colour their experience of school for many years.

Achievement in literacy and numeracy is of crucial importance to a young person's educational outcome and consequently their chance of completing secondary school and gaining entry to university, TAFE or further education and training:

Making a successful transition from school to full-time employment, the type of occupation obtained, and earnings are positively related to literacy and numeracy. Conversely, persons with lower literacy and numeracy levels are more likely to be outside the labour force or unemployed, and to experience longer periods of unemployment (Rothman & McMillan 2003, p. 2).

Consequently, the library services that are of primary benefit to parents and children of all ages in low-income families are those reading and study resources essential to develop literacy skills and educational attainment. Children's books, storytime, reading and holiday programs are all valuable in encouraging parents to read to their children and developing children's interest in reading. Study facilities, educational resources and homework programs are valuable for older children, as at home they may not have a suitable place to study and limited access to educational resources.

The Internet is able to meet information, education and entertainment needs of low-income families. Taylor and Fraser's research for the Brotherhood of St Laurence (2002) highlighted the digital divide by showing that only 31% of low-income families have home Internet access, compared with 88% of medium-income families and 100% of high-income families.

Access to computers, the Internet and broadband through public libraries is a very important service for low-income families. In addition to educational information available on the Internet, information on employment, housing, government and community services is also of interest. Similarly, free or low-cost access to DVDs and CDs is a further means of giving low-income families access to family entertainment resources that they may not be able to afford.

Information and information technology skills

Because of this relatively limited access to computers and the Internet, parents and children from low-income families also need to develop information and information technology skills to efficiently access the Internet and find the information they need when given the opportunity.

A family-friendly environment

When people from low-income families come to use library services, they want to do so in a way that does not take too long (they may be doing other things while they are out), and does not disturb other library users. In particular, most parents with very young and school-age children are sensitive to the boisterous nature and noise levels of their children in an environment that they perceive as being generally quiet and restrained.

In order to quickly find the books and resources they need for their family, parents (and often single parents) would value ten or fifteen minutes free to concentrate on that task, unencumbered by supervisory responsibilities. This does not mean that parents are looking for child care at the library while they read the newspaper (although to some this would be an attractive proposition). It is a short period of time in a busy and constant day to access educational and entertainment resources that will benefit their children and themselves.

Related to this is a need for empathy and understanding from library staff and other library patrons. Families who are new or irregular library users need to be aware of the general expectations of library behaviour but, as long as this is maintained, should not be made to feel a focus of attention if children are acceptably loud or active.

D3 Ideas and lessons

Victorian public libraries and their counterparts interstate and overseas have implemented a range of programs to support the library and information needs of low-income families:

- storytime and children's reading and holiday programs (e.g. Communities for Children program at Frankston Library Service);
- Baby Book Bags for parents of very young children;
- mothers' groups have their monthly or a special get-together at the library.

These types of activities apply generally to all families, including those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged.

Other examples of programs and initiatives adopted elsewhere in Australia and overseas are provided here, with additional references in section D6.

Hume Global Learning Centre, Hume Global Learning Village Library Service, Victoria

The Hume City Council's Global Learning Centre was opened in 2004, and is home to the first ever public library in Broadmeadows, one of Melbourne's most disadvantaged areas. In a suburb with relatively low levels of family income, high unemployment, low levels of literacy and a highly diverse multicultural community, the Hume Global Learning Village is a partnership that links learning providers from across the municipality including five libraries and the mobile library, local schools, neighbourhood houses and learning centres, Kangan Batman TAFE, Victoria University and local businesses. The Global Learning Centre is an innovative facility that combines a major public library with a location for

informal and formal learning activities, state-of-the-art multimedia equipment, computer and Internet training programs, an e-Play and Internet Café, seminar and meeting rooms and an exhibition space. By providing library services in association with other community learning activities and resources in a facility located right in the middle of the city next to the station and shopping centre, the Library Service has become a hub for all library users – young and old.

For more information see: www.humelibraries.vic.gov.au.

Family Literacy Projects, Red Deer Public Library, Canada

The Family Literacy program at Red Deer Public Library (RDPL) in Alberta came into existence in late 1997. Staff members at RDPL recognised the crucial need to assist disadvantaged groups in the development and enhancement of their literacy skills and those of their children. Staff developed a needs assessment plan, hired a contractor to do a feasibility study and made recommendations for programs and services. Programs include:

- World of Words (WOW), which consists of stories, rhymes, crafts and other literacy activities for children in kindergarten, their parents or caregivers, and younger siblings.
- Reading Pals, where volunteers are paired one-on-one in a holiday program with students who need additional support in reading, writing and comprehension.
- Family Reading Fun, where library coordinators establish outreach reading and literacy relationships with agencies supporting low-income families.

For more information see: www.rdpl.org

Family Literacy Center, West Warwick Public Library, United States of America

The Family Literacy Program at West Warwick Public Library in Rhode Island is a free first-step literacy program to help learners gain confidence and strength in their abilities to read, write and speak English. The year-round program comprises two four-month sessions and an eight-week summer session. Classes meet twice a week. Adults work in small and large groups with teachers and tutors, learning basic English skills and writing stories about their life experiences. Children's activities, including crafts and storytimes, are chosen on similar themes. Families also develop basic computer literacy as they use literacy-based software and learn keyboard skills. Some students then prepare typed drafts of their writings for publication in a library booklet titled *Our Stories*. Learners are offered referral assistance in pursuing their economic or educational goals.

For more information see: www.wvlibrary.org/MAIN/Literacy/mainliteracy.html

Adults with Special Needs: A Resource and Planning Guide for Wisconsin's Public Libraries, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, United States

Barbara Huntington and Coral Swanson (2000) are co-authors of *Adults with Special Needs*, a guide to good library practices for supporting different population groups, which was published by Wisconsin's Department of Public Instruction. Chapter 10 of the guide provides a range of practical examples, suggestions and checklists for libraries to use in supporting families living in poverty (including homeless people) and overcoming barriers to participation. Strategies address issues related to issues such as library cards, fines policies, literacy programs, staff training, marketing and more.

GETTING STARTED WITH LITTLE MONEY AND TIME: POVERTY

Here are some ideas for public libraries to use when designing services to address poverty issues.

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

Greet everyone who comes into the library with a smile.

Review library fine policy.

PLANNING AND COLLABORATION

If local food pantries or other agencies are having food, blanket, school supplies, toy, coat, or clothing drives, help publicise the activities at the library. Investigate ways the library could participate.

If there is a summer lunch program for children who live in poverty, investigate the possibility of having the library be one of the distribution sites. Perhaps the lunches can be distributed as part of a program such as a 'lunch-bunch' group.

Consider starting a deposit collection of disposable reading materials in local homeless or domestic abuse centers, free clinics, or WIC sites.

Investigate possible outreach activities in community centers in low-income neighborhoods.

Ask a local agency to co-host a computer or Internet training session for families that use English as their second language. The library can provide the training, and the other agency can provide a translator.

Contact the area food pantries and homeless shelters, and discuss with them local needs and statistics on use. Share this information with the staff and trustees. If a list of pantries and shelters exists, get copies and put them out at the library. Keep one at the reference desk.

ACCESSIBLE BUILDINGS AND SERVICES

Review the library's policy on the need to have an address and identification to get a card. Discuss options that could make it easier for people to get a card, yet allow the library to manage potential costs of non-returned items. This would benefit not only people who live in shelters or on the streets but area visitors as well.

Investigate pulling together the library's resources on resume writing and jobs in one place near the newspapers so that people using the classified ads are sure to see them. If a complete move is not possible, consider a display shelf that would change periodically and feature job-related materials.

Put a short list of common phrases in other languages, along with a pronunciation guide, at the service desk and encourage staff to use it.

MARKETING

Plan a display that celebrates an important cultural event for a local minority group.

Schedule a family program that focuses on a minority group dance, food, traditions, and so on. Or arrange for an introduction to the language of a minority group in the community, presented by someone from that culture.

Plan to celebrate National Food Day (www.worldfoodayusa.org) in October with a display that focuses on hunger statistics and the local need. If possible, become part of a local food drive effort that week. Sponsor a 'Trick or Treat for UNICEF' activity.

[Source: Huntington & Swanson 2000, p. 125]

In 2006, John Gehner, Coordinator of the Hunger, Homelessness and Poverty Task Force Social Responsibilities Round Table of the American Library Association, addressed the Wisconsin Library Association's Annual Conference and outlined strategies for including disadvantaged persons and families in provision of library services (Gehner 2006). Gehner outlined five actions for engaging low-income people in accessing and using library services:

- 1 Look beyond income level to understand deprivation.
- 2 Focus on the causes of social exclusion, not just symptoms.
- 3 Remove barriers that alienate socially excluded groups.
- 4 Get out of the library and get to know people.
- 5 Understand that charity is not dignity; dignity is inclusion.

Family Literacy Library Services Grants Program, New York State Library, United States of America

Since 1995–96, a grants program administered through the New York State Library has helped parents engage their children in reading. The New York State Library's Family Literacy (formerly Parent and Child) Library Services Grants fund provides a total of \$300,000 per annum to New York's more than 100 libraries (see www.nysl.nysed.gov/libdev/familylit/index.html). These programs aim to assist parents in becoming the first teachers and nurturers of their children and help children enter school ready to learn. Funds are available for parenting information and literacy services to teen and low-income parents, and library resources and programming to families who speak English as a second language. Community partnerships involve a variety of community groups, such as doctors and medical service providers, local school districts, child care providers, home schooling families, children's authors and illustrators.

In 2007–08 and 2008–09, ten grants totalling \$600,000 were awarded to fund the following initiatives in 14 counties (www.nysl.nysed.gov/libdev/familylit/index.html):

- Brooklyn Public Library will present a series of family literacy and learning workshops to help Spanish-speaking immigrant families and caregivers nurture their children's early learning.
- Buffalo and Erie County Public Library's Get Graphic project will engage youth from 14 to 18 years with their community. Teens and their parents, educators, librarians, radio and TV personalities, publishers, writers and illustrators will be involved in a series of programs that explore the appeal of graphic novels and their educational roles.
- The Town of Indian Lake Public Library, in partnership with the Indian Lake Central School and Hamilton County Public Health Nursing Service, will provide a free, community-based pre-kindergarten program involving family-centered activities, reading and interactive learning for four-year-old children and their caregivers.
- The Irondequoit Public Library will help parents and caregivers prepare their young children to enter school through workshops to teach parents and child care providers how to develop early literacy skills through everyday activities and play.
- The James Prendergast Library Association's Get Me Ready to Read project will teach parenting skills to prepare children to succeed when they enter kindergarten.
- Middle Country Public Library, in partnership with the Americans for Libraries Council, will work with four public libraries in New York State to help the libraries become part of the national network of Family Place Libraries – community hubs for early childhood information, parent education, early literacy, socialisation and family support.

- The New York Public Library's Let's Read to Our Children project will teach Hispanic parents and caregivers the importance of early literacy activities through 120 community-based reading programs in pediatric clinics, doctor's offices and hospitals.
- The Oneida Public Library will provide family literacy and parent education that is both library- and home-based to families who are economically disadvantaged and have low literacy skills.
- The Richmond Memorial Library will expand its programming and media campaign Read to Me ... Help Me GRO to educate the community about the importance of preschool literacy. The program involves offsite story hours, read-aloud training and distribution of parenting information to new parents who have low incomes.
- Stephentown Memorial Library will provide educational and cultural opportunities for families with preschool and elementary school-age children using its newly added space for class visits, preschool programs, parent workshops and literacy activities.

Smart Start Family Literacy Program, Hartford Public Library, United States of America

The goal of the Hartford Public Library's Smart Start family literacy program in Connecticut is to enable Hartford preschoolers to be ready to read when they enter kindergarten. The project provides parents and caregivers the information and assistance they need to create environments that support literacy skill acquisition. With Smart Start, the library discovered that families who live in poverty and who also experience multiple barriers to library use will not only engage in a sustained and intensive program to build early literacy, but become regular attendees at library events, like puppet shows, craft programs, and music and movement programs. Through the program, library staff studied early literacy skills, prepared tip sheets and other materials, pulled books, contacted families and put

together workshops, training and coaching/modelling sessions.

For more information see: ct.webjunction.org/do/DisplayContent;jsessionid=61320905BB6999419FC9A6CA4E814F36?id=15062

Family Learning and Public Libraries, National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, United Kingdom

The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education in the United Kingdom undertook research in 2000 into the role of libraries in supporting development of family literacy. The research report, *Family Learning and Public Libraries: A Scoping Study*, mapped the provision of family learning programs in public libraries (Spacey 2000). The research found that storytime and 'bookstart' type sessions that promoted parental engagement with children's learning were the most popular library service family learning activities:

- the Reading Rocket – a children's mobile reading service that visits disadvantaged areas;
- Baby Music/Music with Mummy;
- Book Quest – a scheme for older children to share books with parents at home;
- family learning projects with local prisons;
- family quizzes and games clubs;
- a reading program in partnership with the local football club;
- Wiggly Reader – baby and toddler rhyme times.

There were also common links to Family Learning Week and Adult Learners' Week. However, it was noted that these activities tended to focus on early years and children's learning and not also recognise the benefits to adults of regular reading and library use.

The research recommended changes to the way libraries market themselves to families, and develop and implement programs, as well as increased library partnerships with agencies associated with provision of family services. Suggested areas for future research included:

- development and examination of the suitability of family learning provision with specific learning outcomes for adults and support for progression;
- research measuring the impacts of family learning in public libraries;
- family learning awareness and guidelines for front line and professional staff in public libraries;
- examples of best practice in library services successfully engaging with the children's services agenda and the critical factors contributing to this success.

For more information see: www.niace.org.uk/Research/Family/FL-Pub-Libs-Report.pdf

Libraries for Learning Partnership, City of Salisbury Library and City of Playford Library, South Australia

In 2005, the City of Salisbury and City of Playford libraries in North Adelaide formed a three-year partnership across all levels of government, with non-government organisations, TAFE SA and the University of South Australia to promote libraries as centres of lifelong learning. The partnership promotes sustainable early childhood literacy and reading programs targeted at areas of socioeconomic disadvantage within the Salisbury–Playford region. This approach to developing a culture of reading and creating value to the communities of Salisbury and Playford replaced previous ad hoc approaches whereby resources and programs were uncoordinated and did not necessarily result in positive

and measurable outcomes. In 2007, programs supported through the partnership include:

- development of early childhood literacy through the LapSit project;
- Family Reading Centres which include early childhood literacy parent packs of resources for parents to borrow. This project has received the University of South Australia's 2007 Chancellor Award for Community Engagement;
- liaison with local secondary schools to establish links with teacher librarians;
- an online tutoring service for school students through the public library service;
- cooperative professional development, resource databases and promotion.

For more information see: www.library.unisa.edu.au/llp

Families for Literacy, California Library Literacy Service, United States of America

In 1988, the Families for Literacy program was added to the California Library Literacy Service to focus on breaking the intergenerational cycle of low literacy. To qualify, families must have at least one child under the age of five. Specifically, the program provides:

- Literacy services for the adult caregiver – The adult caregiver is tutored in reading aloud to their child and taught strategies for engaging their child in the book. Book kits are given to parents: initially the tutor and learner practise reading the book in the kit and then the kit is taken home for the learner to read to their child and keep for their home library.
- Parenting education – Workshops offer information to parents on a range of topics, including child safety, parenting, nutrition, the benefits of reading with

children, selecting books for children, how to read to children, how to encourage reading, writing and learning in the home.

- Parent and child time together – Monthly events are held for families, which involve a meal, story reading, educational activities, children’s book giveaways and information about the library.
- Orientation to the library and other community resources.
- Free book distribution made possible by local grants and donations; bookcases are given to the families to house their home library.

This is one example from the *Study Tour of the California Library Literacy Service and Early Learning Library Programs* report compiled by Anna Boland (2007), of the Hume Global Village Library Service, following her study tour to California in April 2007 (funded by the Barrett Reid Scholarship).

D4 Accessing and using library services

The Connecting with the Community research conducted focus groups with adults from low-income families living in relatively disadvantaged areas and community organisations with an interest in supporting their access to public library services. These identified a number of factors that influence the library use by low-income families. These are summarised below.

Factors influencing library use: Low-income families	
Awareness	Lack of awareness of library resources and services relevant to low-income families.
Engagement	Perceptions of libraries as quiet and not family-friendly or child-friendly places. Low-level literacy and information skills. Limited transport options to access public libraries.
Policies and procedures	The threat of library fines.
Customer service	Perceived adverse attitudes of library staff and other library users.

Lack of awareness

Although some people from low-income families who participated in the Connecting with the Community research were very familiar with available library services and were regular library users, there were also those who had no idea of the range of free resources, services and programs offered by public libraries for the community. In some cases, this lack of awareness was associated with participants having outdated ideas of what libraries are, not having been in a library since their school days. In other cases, the lack of awareness is generational,

where a parent who did not use a library as a child does not contemplate using the library as an adult, either for themselves or for their children. This lack of awareness persists in some families, even though people they mix with regularly (e.g. socially, at playgroups, at school) are regular library users.

When presented with information about the range of services available from public libraries (e.g. storytime for young children, homework and holiday programs, access to DVDs, free access to the Internet), many non-users indicated a keen interest in finding out more about their local library.

Perceptions of libraries as not family-friendly

Forty years ago libraries were cold, imposing, studious, hushed places. There were rows of shelves, tables and hard chairs, and an index card catalogue. Any noise was met with a stern glare from a grey-haired librarian and all other library users. At least, this is the way some members of the community remember libraries, and how some imagine they are today.

This vision may not be true today, and may never have been, but for someone who holds this view, the library is not a family-friendly or child-friendly place, and is not a place they are likely to visit. In some cases, the negative effect of these perceptions is compounded by the external look of the library (e.g. old, formal, imposing, not warm and friendly), opening hours that do not fit with a busy lifestyle (e.g. adults in the household working one or more jobs, weekend activities), and limited access for prams and strollers (i.e. both entering and moving around the library).

The view that libraries are not family-friendly should not be interpreted as meaning libraries are unsafe places, for the opposite view is strongly held. Libraries are seen as safe 'non-denominational' community spaces. People are at the library for 'good' educational and social reasons ('It's not cool for a hoon to be in a library'); libraries are always staffed by someone attentive and watching; and with an absence of cash and drugs, there is no incentive to steal.

Low-level literacy and information skills

Parents from low-income families often have low levels of literacy and/or proficiency in English. They may lack confidence in sharing books and reading with young children, as this carries the potential embarrassment of having their literacy levels exposed to older children or library staff. For some ethnic and refugee communities, there may not be a culture of sharing books with children, with storytelling happening orally more than in written form.

Limited transport options

The effectiveness of transport options to visit public libraries is influenced by many factors (e.g. location, proximity to public transport, proximity to community gathering places, parking). For some libraries, transport access is not a problem; for others it is. The compounding factors for low-income families are potentially limited access to personal transport (e.g. more likely to be single vehicle households, no care at home during the day) and the cost and complexity of public transport travel, especially if this involves bringing more than one child (perhaps using strollers) and negotiating several transport connections to reach the library. For some families, library outreach services might be preferred to battling public transport networks and timetables, especially in outer metropolitan and country areas where low-income families are more likely to live.

The threat of library fines

Even though some people participating in this research had limited knowledge of available library services, they all knew that fines were imposed for overdue library books. They did not know if the fines were large or small, just that there was a potential financial penalty associated with library use.

Perceived attitudes of library staff and other library users

A bad customer experience is often a disincentive to re-use a service. The same is true in libraries. For some people consulted during this research the reason why

they are not, or are irregular, library users is because of a past bad experience, occasionally related to a collections issue but more often to do with an unpleasant interaction with a library staff member. So just as a family-friendly physical library environment can influence library use, so can the personal characteristics of library staff.

For people from low-income families who may lack confidence and be unfamiliar with the library environment, the attitudes of library staff and other library users can influence whether and how they use their library. Especially where parents may also be bringing one or more possibly noisy and active young children into the library, there is concern that the family group will not be welcomed.

The experience of young families who are library users suggests that for the most part, library staff and other patrons are generally understanding. However, the perception of parents from low-income families who are not library users is that their family group will be made to feel unwelcome and uncomfortable.

D5 Connecting with the community

A range of potential responses from Victorian public libraries to the findings of the Connecting with the Community research project with regard to low-income families is presented below.

Opportunities for libraries to reach out to communities: Low-income families	
Awareness	Promote library services and facilities through organisations and community members that interact with low-income families.
Engagement	Create family-friendly library spaces.
Library programs and collections	Maintain relevant information and educational resources and programs. Support development of literacy and computer skills. Review policies for library fines.
Customer service	Provide a welcoming and supportive library environment to overcome potential unease and uncertainty.

Promote library services

Whether parents from low-income families are, or are not, familiar with or comfortable with libraries, they still want the best for their children. And libraries offer free access to resources and programs that have the potential to enhance their children's future educational, employment and social prospects and connections.

Some low-income families are not aware of the services provided by their local library, so there is a need to better promote library services to these groups. Even some regular users are not aware of the full range of library services available. Although broad-scale promotion of library services (e.g. through local independent newspapers, newsletters, council bulletins and rates notices) might raise general awareness, the feedback

from focus groups conducted through the Connecting with the Community research suggests that more direct approaches are likely to be more effective. This would involve working in partnership with and through government service providers (at local, state or national level) and community organisations that low-income families interact with by choice or requirement. These could include:

- maternal and child health centres (e.g. at immunisation clinics);
- kindergartens and schools (e.g. the school newsletter, school visits to the public library);
- neighbourhood houses;
- Centrelink and employment agencies;
- welfare agencies;
- council officers providing support to low-income families, single parents and young people;
- local community supermarkets.

A complementary channel of awareness raising is to use the experience of low-income families who are library users to inform their friends and peers about the services they use at the library. Personal reference through either formal (e.g. 'Bring a friend' program, open day) or informal means is likely to increase comfort levels and motivation to attend a library.

Bearing in mind the low literacy levels of some target groups, reliance on print-based communication may not be most effective.

Create family-friendly library spaces

Low-income families will find public libraries more attractive if they create and promote a more user-friendly look and feel ('We'd like to be seen as the community lounge room'). Interestingly, this was not a call for libraries to be designed around the needs of families, but for libraries to provide a range of spaces that meet the needs of all library users, of which families are one type, and for this open all-embracing approach to be explicit to

all library users. The feeling was that community libraries should ideally be able to simultaneously accommodate the differing needs of the community, providing places for all people to 'fit in'.

Suggestions for how libraries could be more family-friendly were based on zoning of library spaces, including provision of:

- spaces for young children (not a creche, but just as a doctor's surgery will often have a play space with toys for young children, libraries could have something similar to allow parents a small amount of time to do what they need at the library);
- a fun space for young teenagers that encourages them to read books and magazines;
- a coffee shop where parents could sit and chat;
- quiet spaces for library users who are working, studying or seeking tranquillity.

Maintain relevant library resources and programs

It is not expected that libraries are about to stop what they have been doing for years and cut back on or withdraw library resources and programs that are relevant to the educational and information needs of the community. However, it is worth restating that public libraries offer low-income families access to information, books, computers, educational resources and activity programs that they may not otherwise be able to afford. With constant budgetary pressure on public libraries and increasing demands to service all sectors of the community, the need to support literacy and reading skills from an early age and provide opportunities for children's educational development will not diminish.

Storytime, toy libraries, literacy and reading programs for all ages, free magazines, school holiday programs and homework clubs, free Internet access, computer training and targeted information for low-income families are all services of value to this population group. This group considers that the focus should be on providing free or low-cost information services, books and resources and not branching into broader entertainment activities.

Support development of literacy and information technology skills

Providing support for development of literacy and information technology skills for both adults and children is a valuable community service ('We learned to use the computer at the library and now we have it at home'). The benefits for recipients come through increased personal confidence, community engagement and employment prospects. Where possible, libraries should individually or in partnership seek to provide these programs for all in the community, but particularly for members of low-income families.

Review library fines

Despite the perception of some library users, library fines are not a major revenue-raising source for public libraries. Library fines are a legitimate means of securing an ongoing library collection and keeping resources cycling through the library user base. Library fines are also, however, a disincentive to reading and library use. This can be especially true for some low-income families for whom the prospect (even if not the reality) of having to pay a fine for an overdue or child-damaged book is reason enough not to borrow library books in the first place. Library services might consider reviewing their policies to ensure that, among other things, library fines do not actively stop people who could benefit most from accessing reading resources.

Provide a welcoming and supportive library environment

Library staff play a critical role in providing a welcoming and supportive library environment for all library users, and especially low-income families. The necessary skills and approach include:

- a friendly, but not smothering, welcome;
- understanding that new users may be unfamiliar with library services;
- encouraging new users with low levels of confidence to ask even the 'dumb' questions;
- quick answers to questions about information and resources;

- tolerance of children's behaviour in the library and firm, but not overbearing, application of behavioural standards;
- encouragement to come back to the library.

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Part E: Vulnerable learners

The approach should be inclusive. There is great diversity within the older adult population, and [library] programs and services should be planned with attention to all segments.

VAN FLEET N.D.

E1 Vulnerable learners

Background

Lifelong learning enables all members of society to be informed, entertained and engaged with their community. Lifelong learning is a key element in reducing disadvantage and strengthening individual and community wellbeing. In particular, the pace of workplace reform and the impact of technology have made it essential for the entire community to embrace a lifelong approach to learning.

The twenty-first century workforce requires skills and competencies that were unknown when many current workers first got a job. Over the past 30 years, there has been a dramatic shift away from manufacturing, process, agricultural and other labour-intensive occupations to more service-oriented and technology-based jobs. This has meant that many people with relatively low levels of literacy, low levels of written and verbal communication skills, and without computer skills are finding it increasingly difficult to retain a position in or re-enter the workforce. The ever-increasing demand for qualifications and work-ready skills also affects women returning to the workforce after raising children, and young adults who left school early and are now seeking educational qualifications.

This group of people may be termed 'vulnerable learners'. Vulnerable learners are not strictly defined by demographic, ethnic, socioeconomic, geographic or other characteristics. They are a group who may have lacked the opportunities to participate in learning, faced structural barriers to learning, not been motivated to learn or lacked experience in learning, yet for whom learning has become critical to their social and economic wellbeing.

The most identifiable group of vulnerable learners and the group on which much of the findings of this report are based are in the latter part of their working life, probably aged 45 to 65 years. They may be long-term or recently unemployed, or may be working in an industry undergoing structural change and labour force reduction. They are unlikely to have had any formal educational

experience since secondary school. They are likely to have low levels of literacy and numeracy, and may be from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background. They are unlikely to be regular computer users.

Through a combination of factors, people in this group find themselves at risk of being marginalised from the workforce, and excluded from all the advantages that workforce participation bestows.

The challenges for vulnerable learners

The focus for vulnerable learners is primarily on development of work-related skills, but also on learning for life. Many people are keen to learn new skills for work and recreation, and just need support from community groups, including libraries, to make this happen. For others, lifelong learning may not be a perspective that they understand or personally feel comfortable with.

Recent research conducted by Melbourne's Darebin City Council found that the more marginalised adults tended to view learning as a luxury, and something 'not for them' (Basset 2006). The links between class, status and education were very strong in the minds of these participants. They may have had low-level educational attainment as children or adolescents and self-selected out of opportunities and invitations to participate in formal learning, at least in part because of their view of learning. Some saw learning as unnecessary or not legitimate because of their age. And for some, memories of their time in the compulsory education system continue to impact on their motivation to learn (Basset 2006).

At the same time, there are negative attitudes in the community towards older people participating in learning that provides what is seen by many as basic job-readiness skills. These attitudes can impact heavily on participants' self-confidence and self-actualisation, and reduce their confidence that they can learn, grow and contribute to society.

Yet it is also true to say that many people who find themselves in this group, and at risk of longer-term

marginalisation and disconnection from work-related aspects of society, are often currently connected into the community through their participation in cultural groups, clubs and friendship and family circles. These connections are valuable, but can be tested as personal circumstances change, an outcome to which many long-term unemployed persons can attest.

A submission to a United Kingdom Parliamentary Education and Skills Committee 2006–07 Inquiry into Skills stresses the importance of learning to vulnerable adults for their entire wellbeing:

The most vulnerable adults in society remain the least likely to take part in learning, despite the Government's Skills Strategy and having the most to gain by improving their skills ... Low participation in learning by vulnerable workless adults occurs in spite of their strong appetite for improved skills and employment. For vulnerable adults, skills are as relevant to secure housing, improved health and social inclusion as they are to sustainable employment (Education and Skills Select Committee 2007).

E2 Library and information needs

A comprehensive review of literature on library services and discussions with community members through the Connecting with the Community research project have identified the main library and information needs of vulnerable learners.

Library and information needs: Vulnerable learners

Literacy, information and IT skills essential to workforce participation.

Access to learning and information resources.

Information about educational and employment opportunities.

A supportive learning experience that encourages lifelong learning.

Literacy, information and information technology skills essential to workforce participation

Vulnerable learners may be at risk of becoming disengaged from the workforce due to their low levels of literacy, information and information technology skills. Possessing these skills does not mean they will retain their current employment, but it does increase their likelihood of remaining in the labour force should they become unemployed or be made redundant.

Other learners seek to develop skills to enable them to make a transition into employment or into more secure employment. Although libraries may not be the ultimate source of skills acquisition for vulnerable learners, they offer services that are valuable to people without a background in formal education or learning.

Vulnerable learners generally need to develop their literacy skills, particularly if they are from a CALD background and English is not their first language. More than any other skill-set, the capacity to read and write, and to be able to communicate effectively in written and oral form, is essential for job retention and job acquisition. Libraries are a central community training ground that offers access to materials and resources for development and practising of literacy skills.

Information and computer skills are also important for vulnerable learners, as most jobs now involve some form of access to computers or technology. Recent research conducted in the Australian vocational education and training sector has found that more than two-thirds of employers believe that all people in the workplace need good computer skills, regardless of whether those skills are used to a great or any extent in the workplace (Australian Flexible Learning Framework 2007). Libraries provide free access to computers, and potentially opportunities for basic training in computer skills that are valuable for vulnerable learners who might not have home computer or Internet access.

Access to learning and information resources

Learners, in most situations, need access to learning and information resources. These might include textbooks, other physical reference material, CDs and DVDs, and online information. Libraries have the capacity to provide vulnerable learners, who might be from lower socioeconomic groups, with low-cost access to learning resources they might not be able to easily obtain elsewhere.

Information about educational and employment opportunities

Vulnerable learners need access to relevant, often community-based, learning opportunities to enhance their literacy, information and computer skills. They may also need to access formal educational programs provided by public and private registered training organisations or educational institutions. Vulnerable learners are likely to be unfamiliar with these learning opportunities, what they involve and how to access them.

Vulnerable learners might also need to be able to access information on employment opportunities in their area. Again, they may have worked with one employer for many years or be looking to re-enter the workforce and will not be familiar with how to seek out employment information using modern channels (e.g. www.seek.com.au).

A supportive learning experience that encourages lifelong learning

While it is valuable for all people in a community to develop a love of learning and a healthy approach to lifelong learning, this is more difficult for those who do not have a history of learning. Vulnerable learners need to be supported in their endeavours by taking their first steps to re-engaging with learning, whether this be formal or informal, in a personally supportive environment.

E3 Ideas and lessons

Victorian public libraries and their counterparts interstate and overseas have implemented a range of programs to support the library and information needs of vulnerable learners:

- computer and Internet classes (general or targeted to particular community groups, e.g. Chinese computer classes, computer classes for women, introductory PC classes for over 50s);
- computer skills guides;
- study groups for adult learners;
- book clubs;
- resource centres for job seekers.

These types of activities have general application to other community groups, not just adult learners looking to re-engage with the workforce, but they are particularly important to this group. Other examples of library programs and initiatives adopted elsewhere in Australia and overseas are provided here, with additional references in section E6.

Literacy and Learning Assessment, City of Greater Dandenong Libraries, Victoria

The City of Greater Dandenong Libraries has a formalised relationship with Centrelink⁶ and the Adult Multicultural Education Services to conduct literacy assessments for Centrelink clients and support them in accessing language, literacy and computer skills and collections in languages other than English. This service is promoted through Centrelink, the Victorian Department of Human Services and local CALD community groups, and enables vulnerable learners to be introduced to libraries as a by-product of their assessment.

The libraries support access and equity for the pursuit of lifelong learning through the English Language and

Literacy Access program, a free community service provided by the City of Greater Dandenong. The program helps non-English- and English-speaking adults to learn English, improve their reading and writing, gain information about further study, and explore lifelong learning opportunities.

The libraries' website also has a direct link from the home page to a job opportunity page run by the council advertising vacancies in the City of Greater Dandenong. There are also links to information for users looking for a job, wanting to update their résumé, or needing hints on interviews and understanding the interview process through the libraries' Job and Course Link.

Wynlearn, Wyndham City Library Service, Victoria

Wynlearn is a website designed to increase awareness of and participation in lifelong learning opportunities among Wyndham residents. The Wyndham Community Learning Strategy 2005–2008 found that compared with the rest of Melbourne, Wyndham residents leave school earlier and have fewer tertiary qualifications. There are also low participation rates in adult and community education locally. Through a Libraries Building Communities' Demonstration Grant from the Library Board of Victoria, the Wyndham City Library Service established a dedicated online portal which brings together information about learning events and learning organisations in the local area.

Wynlearn (www.wynlearn.net.au) allows users to browse through categories of learning opportunities, providing details of each course as well as venue information. The site has innovative features such as allowing users to create learner profiles to notify them of new learning events in their areas of interest. Wynlearn enables users to:

- browse or search a calendar of learning opportunities within Wyndham. Searches can be narrowed by area of interest, favourite provider and/or time of day. Users can then register to book into a learning opportunity;

⁶ Centrelink is the Australian Government agency that offers a range of employment, welfare, social and support services and payment options to more than one-third of the Australian population.

- find details for local learning providers by clicking on a map of their local area;
- discuss learning opportunities within Wyndham with other users, and post their own topics in an online discussion forum;
- access articles and news feeds about adult and community education in Australia and links to other organisations.

Skills.net Roadshow, State Library of Victoria/ Department of Planning and Community Development, Victoria

The Skills.net Roadshow, funded by the Victorian Government and managed by the Vicnet division of the State Library of Victoria, delivers free introductory Internet training to those who do not possess the skills or normally would not have access to the Internet. Skills.net Roadshow trainers travel across Victoria delivering one or more of the introductory sessions, providing laptop computers or deliver the training at local training venues.

The sessions are targeted at Victorians who are Internet beginners. No minimum computer skills are required. The program also targets participants who fall into one or more of the following categories: people who are unemployed; people with a disability; people over 55 years of age; people from non-English-speaking backgrounds; recent migrants; Indigenous people; or people who did not gain Internet skills at school or work.

For more information see: www.roadshow.skills.net.au

Words in the Workplace, Manchester Library and Information Service, United Kingdom

The Learning Centre at Hammerstone Road Depot, Manchester, is a joint employer/trade union initiative designed to allow employees to attend basic skills classes in work time. The program has been running for about five years with classes delivered by adult education tutors. The Manchester Library and Information Service supports the work and promotes reading for pleasure through programs such as Quick Reads and Raw Passions. Rosemary Ryan, the Fiction

and Reader Development Co-ordinator for the Library and Information Service explains how learners developed their creative writing skills:

In January 2007, using the theme of 'Bringing Life to Words', as part of the RaW Cities Festival in Manchester and Salford, we commissioned Craig Bradley, poet and creative writing facilitator, to run four sessions designed to engage participants with words, reading and writing for pleasure. The sessions covered one topic each time: life stories, sports writing and poetry. The outcome was several pieces of writing by individuals, and a group poem. For the fourth session we had planned to do fiction, but instead we used it to prepare a live broadcast on BBC Radio Manchester, with Craig reading the group poem and one of the learners reading his story on air (Ryan 2007, p. 1).

Most of these men had never produced a piece of creative writing in their adult lives. However, by building up relationships over the sessions, using contemporary song lyrics as an example of poetry, and using extracts from biographies of people they knew, by the second session some were so enthusiastic they went home and wrote pieces, which they brought back the following week.

The sessions were a fantastic example of a successful partnership, working between the BBC, which supported the sessions with funding, and the Manchester City Council's Adult Education, Libraries and Operational Services departments.

Learning Center, Brooklyn Public Library, New York, United States of America

Learn to Read @ The Library is an innovative educational program at the Brooklyn Public Library for beginning adult readers and writers, offering resources and instruction through volunteer tutors and technology-assisted learning. The learning and employment services provided by the centre include:

- volunteer tutors help adults learn to read, write and use computer technology;

- a free education and job information service for job hunters, career changers, and students of all ages;
- free English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) services, materials, classes and conversation groups;
- Pre-General Equivalency Diploma services;
- Skills Training and Employment Project in which job seekers get access to career advisers, guidance, training and resources.

For more information see: www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org

The Adult Learner Program, Queens Library, United States of America

Queens Library in New York started its Adult Learner Program in 1977 to provide services, resources, and lifelong learning opportunities to the changing communities of the borough of Queens. The program has six adult learning centres which provide educational services to ESOL and literacy adult learners.

Literacy learners are speakers of English who need to develop their reading and writing skills to improve their employment and life opportunities. Literacy students learn to read in small groups led by staff or volunteer tutors. Students also study on their own under the supervision of staff or in student-led groups. Students work on the reading and writing skills needed for banking, shopping, filling out application forms, writing to their child's teacher and other daily tasks. Special events and field trips are organised by staff and tutors to give students the opportunity to work together on projects and activities of relevance to their needs.

Each adult learning centre is equipped with computers and educational software for language skills learning. Students may also participate in computer-based projects that allow them to become more familiar with the computer while learning English and practising their reading and writing. Each centre has a collection of books, and audio and video tapes available for students of all levels. Some centres also offer basic education classes for adults who aspire to develop their academic

skills to a Pre-General Equivalency Diploma level. These classes focus on the development of useful learning strategies to enable students to move from group tutoring to classroom learning, and to ready them to continue their education. The Adult Learner Program relies strongly on the input from its trained volunteer workforce.

For more information see: www.queenslibrary.org

Center for Adult Learning, Jacksonville Public Library, Florida, United States of America

Jacksonville Public Library's Center for Adult Learning receives funding from businesses, organisations and charitable foundations to help deliver a program aimed at improving the functional literacy of adult learner, that is, the ability to read and write at a level that makes it possible to function in today's world: write a cheque; follow a recipe; use a computer; read a newspaper; fill out a job application; find a number in a phone book; read warning labels on medication; or read a letter from your child's teacher. Volunteers serve as tutors, work in the office, and speak to community groups.

All participants undergo an assessment and together the student and tutor make an individual education plan. With help from instructors, audio and video tapes and personal computers, students receive instruction in four areas: reading; basic maths skills for everyday living; life skills and ESOL reading and conversational skills.

For more information see: jpl.coj.net/lib/adult_learning.html

The Vital Link, United Kingdom Public Libraries and the National Literacy Trust, United Kingdom

The Vital Link in the United Kingdom is run by the Reading Agency in partnership with the National Literacy Trust, the National Reading Campaign and public libraries. The program supports vulnerable learners and lifelong learning by aiming to enable adults with low literacy levels to benefit from a consistently high-quality reading service and realise the pleasure of reading as well as the personal benefits this can bring.

The program commenced in 2001 and has developed many learning resources, toolkits, guidance and case studies to support public libraries in the delivery of program activities. For example, the toolkit provides support on ‘reader development’, a proactive approach to promoting reading which focuses on the needs of the individual reader and offers support and choice. The Vital Link improvement framework provides advice for librarians and reading tutors on: where to start; setting up a reading group; running a session; linking to the adult literacy core curriculum; using information technology for reader development; special events and activities; and evaluating reader development work.

For more information see: www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitallink/about.html

E4 Accessing and using library services

The Connecting with the Community research conducted focus groups with vulnerable learners and community organisations with an interest in supporting their access to public library services. These identified a number of significant factors that influence the library use of vulnerable learners. These are summarised below.

Factors influencing library use: Vulnerable learners	
Awareness	Very low level of awareness of library services.
Engagement	Low levels of literacy and numeracy. Discomfort in coming to an unfamiliar centre for reading and learning.
Policies and procedures	Limited opening hours for working people.
Customer service	Library staff experienced or perceived as unapproachable and unhelpful.

Very low level of awareness of library services

Vulnerable learners are likely to have very little or no awareness of the reading, literacy, computer and adult learning services provided by or accessible through public libraries. They are a group that has been out of formal education for some time and may be less likely to do recreational reading. They may not have visited a library since their school days, and even then their low level of educational attainment suggests they may not have been passionate library users. They may be migrants or people from a non-English-speaking background with no home culture of library use. They may have family or friends who use library services but will know very little about this use and have little interest in libraries.

Vulnerable learners’ idea of library resources may not be much more than books, with little awareness of access to CDs, DVDs, magazines and newspapers. Their expectations of libraries are of ‘a quiet place’, and not a place where activities occur, nor a place where technology can be found. Vulnerable learners tend not to connect libraries and learning.

Low levels of literacy and numeracy

One of the defining characteristics of vulnerable learners is their low levels of literacy and numeracy. They are also likely to have limited computer skills, even though their children may be literate and competent computer users. The reasons for this functional illiteracy and potentially their low level of educational attainment as children or adolescents may vary (e.g. migration, family circumstances and employment priorities, learning difficulties, poverty), and is relevant in developing engagement strategies. However, the consequence is the same for all vulnerable learners: discomfort in an environment founded on literacy.

Discomfort in coming to an unfamiliar centre for reading and learning

With little or no recent experience of libraries, and with low literacy levels, vulnerable learners may feel uncomfortable in a library setting, and even threatened and intimidated. This is not about the safety of the library, which is universally seen as a safe place, but the risk of exposure of their low literacy levels, something they may have worked to cover up and cope with over many years.

The feedback from vulnerable learners consulted during the Connecting with the Community research highlighted some of the drivers and characteristics of this discomfort. One of these was the architectural design of libraries, with traditional older libraries and imposing and eye-catching modern libraries both creating a sense of being overwhelmed and unwelcome, especially to someone lacking confidence in crossing the threshold. Inside, the vibrant library design that is engaging and interesting for younger and active library users can be inhibiting to the reluctant library user. The wall of books to someone with low functional literacy is confronting and challenging.

Vulnerable learners are likely to be coming to a library because they have acknowledged a deficiency in their educational skill base, and potentially their social skills. Anything that draws attention to this deficit will make them uncomfortable. Anyone with clearly superior literacy, reading and information levels, such as a librarian, will increase this discomfort.

Limited opening hours for working people

As distinct from vulnerable learners who are unemployed, those who are working are likely to be working in occupations where they have little flexibility in working hours. They may also have family commitments that impose on their time. If libraries are not open at convenient times, or run programs when it is difficult for working adults to participate, this can be a reason not to attend a library, even if they could benefit from being there.

Library staff experienced or perceived as unapproachable and unhelpful

It was interesting to note that the research uncovered a number of vulnerable learners who were non-library users who talked about a past and unpleasant experience with a librarian as a reason for not going to a library. The incidents were often many years ago, and in retrospect probably inconsequential, but the perception of library staff as being 'unapproachable' and 'unhelpful' remains.

As vulnerable learners come to the idea of using a library despite a level of discomfort, and might avoid it if this decision could be rationalised, the potential for library staff to be unfriendly and unwelcoming is a factor in the learners' library use. This presents a challenge for all library staff, who need to be friendly, approachable and knowledgeable, but not so knowledgeable as to be seen as overbearing.

E5 Connecting with the community

A range of potential responses from Victorian public libraries to the findings of the Connecting with the Community research project with regard to vulnerable learners is presented below. However, the primary feedback from this research is that if adult learners were aware of what was available at their public library and made to feel comfortable in coming to the library they would be far more active and regular users of library services. That is, in the words of one library staff member:

The trick is to get them in the door. Once they're in, they'll come back.

Opportunities for libraries to reach out to communities: Vulnerable learners	
Awareness	Promote awareness of library services through community networks.
Engagement	Assist people to engage with the library through community-based participation in library activities.
Library programs and collections	Conduct or facilitate access to literacy and IT classes for adult learners. Encourage volunteer support for adult learners.
Policies and procedures	Examine options for increasing library opening hours and access points.
Customer service	Review staffing, task allocations and professional development to enable library staff to be more accessible to assist learners with inquiries.

Promote awareness of library services through community networks

Vulnerable learners need access to literacy, information and computer skills, and public libraries provide a community setting for accessing training opportunities or information about training. However, vulnerable learners are not aware of the role of libraries in supporting literacy and learning.

Libraries need to raise awareness of the services they provide to vulnerable learners. They cannot assume that adult learners who may be otherwise well networked in their community know what their library has to offer. The most effective channel for this communication would appear to be through established community networks and organisations that vulnerable learners are already involved with. For people from a CALD background this may be through local ethnic groups and ethnic media. The Australian Government's central employment agency, Centrelink, provides a pivotal point of access and information for the unemployed, as do local employment networks. Information could be disseminated through sporting clubs, schools, medical centres and other community facilities.

Given that vulnerable learners have relatively low levels of literacy, personal engagement is likely to be more effective than print-based communication. Radio and electronic media also avoid some of the literacy issues. Where printed information on library services is distributed, it should use visual images and basic language so that it is accessible by all.

Assist people to engage with the library through community-based participation in library activities

In addition to raising awareness through community networks, these networks might also be used to facilitate engagement of vulnerable learners with library services. The aim is to connect libraries to people by being in places that people go to, and being places where people feel comfortable.

Libraries could connect with community-based learning organisations and non-learning organisations to support targeting of vulnerable learners and delivery of adult training. This might include:

- CALD groups and peak bodies;
- multicultural resource centres and language centres;
- Centrelink;
- job network agencies;
- Adult Multicultural Education Services;
- community-based registered training organisations and TAFE colleges;
- University of the Third Age;
- church and religious groups;
- schools;
- local council community officers.

It is recommended that where possible, vulnerable learners be ‘introduced’ to their library as part of a group or with a familiar person. This will eliminate some of the discomfort in an individual and personalised ‘first’ experience at the library. Community groups could host a tour of the library, with library users from within the group talking about their experience of the library and how it assists them. This approach has the benefits of building links with key community groups and making vulnerable learners feel more comfortable in the library, and creating a support network for the vulnerable learner.

Libraries could run open days, or activities for children while adults get to stay and learn about their library. Libraries could also have regular induction days or introductory tours at appropriate times, targeted at people with little experience of libraries and low levels of literacy, information and computer skills, and highlighting these services to participants.

Conduct or facilitate access to literacy and information technology classes for adult learners

Most Victorian public libraries already offer some form of computer training or support, which is valuable to vulnerable learners. Literacy and reading support programs also exist, although these may not have a component targeted at adult learners. The City of Greater Dandenong’s English Language and Literacy Access program is an example of where this approach has been implemented.

However, libraries may not always be the point of delivery for literacy and computer classes for vulnerable learners. In this case, the library can be the window to the adult learning training opportunities that exist within the local community, as the Wynlearn portal has done in the City of Wyndham. The more comprehensive the resources available and the more visible the links to training and employment websites (e.g. www.seek.com.au, www.seeklearning.com.au), the more chance that vulnerable learners will feel supported in their training search and endeavours.

Encourage volunteer support for adult learners

The international experience in literacy and learning programs in libraries is that volunteers play a crucial role in providing the human resources to deliver and support these programs. Realistically, Victorian public libraries are not in a position to provide significant staffing support to literacy and learning programs, unless this occurs in conjunction with formal literacy and education providers.

Libraries should look to develop a volunteer base with the skills to work with adult learners in initial skill development areas, possibly as a precursor to more formal training. Libraries could also seek to re-engage participants in these programs on other volunteer

activities within the library, thereby expanding their exposure to the library, reading and information services that are useful to them. This might in some cases provide voluntary experience that would support vulnerable learners in establishing new career pathways.

Examine options for increasing library opening hours and access points

Libraries should not base opening hours or the location of access points on the interests of a single user group, or potential user group. However, if vulnerable learners are to be targeted it must be acknowledged that working adults with standard and inflexible working hours may have limited capacity to access library services other than in evenings or on weekends.

Libraries could also build partnerships with community service outlets that ‘decentralise’ access to library services (e.g. have access points in shopping centres, community centres and take an active interest in civic redevelopment).

Enable library staff to be more accessible to assist learners with inquiries

Enabling library staff to be more accessible to assist vulnerable learners is more than just a resourcing and scheduling issue. Library staff need the skills to present themselves as friendly and approachable. They need to be informed and helpful and able to build confidence in new adult library users. They need to patiently take time to provide the support needed and be able to step back when this is no longer required.

The professional development of library staff has been a key to literacy and learning programs in the United Kingdom and the United States of America, and is no less relevant in Australia. In particular, staff have the capacity to use reference inquiries as a way of engaging library users in accessing other information services.

E6 References and further reading

References

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Van Fleet, C n.d., *Public Libraries, Lifelong Learning, and Older Adults: Background and Recommendations*, paper presented to the Public Libraries and Community-Based Education: Making the Connection for Lifelong Learning conference. Retrieved 28 April 2008 from www.ed.gov/pubs/PLLIConf95/vanfleet.html

Further reading

The following reports and websites provide information on vulnerable learners and the role of libraries in assisting them to access relevant community information and resources:

Cartwright, P, Chapman, J, McGilp, E, Skilbeck, M, Toomey, R, de Souza, M & Gaff, J 2006, ‘Reaching the unreached learner: lifelong learning, adult and community education in Victoria, Australia’, in A. Oduaran & H. Bhola (eds) *Widening Access to Education as Social Justice: Essays in Honor of Michael Omolewa*, Springer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht, The Netherlands.

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