

## **Bringing Leadership in Libraries to Life**

As society grapples with unprecedented change, the library and information sector have a vital role informing, guiding and supporting people as they seek answers.

The future of libraries is dependent on our willingness to adapt and embrace opportunities to improve what we do.

The sector recognise the value of technology and have demonstrated a willingness to adopt new systems and processes to improve the flow of information. It is time we invested the same energy and thought into the development of our people.

While it has never been easier to access information, the role of libraries in the vanguard of information services has become even more important.

As Jon Bing the Norwegian legal academic succinctly put it back in 2009:

*'To ask why we need libraries at all, when there is so much information available elsewhere, is about as sensible as asking if roadmaps are necessary now that there are so very many roads.'*

Our role particularly in public libraries is less about the curation of content and more about ensuring that we help people find the information and knowledge they need.

To stretch Jon Bing's metaphor we are no longer in the business of storing and preserving roadmaps, we are all about making sure that as many people as possible are able to easily access the map they need.

The technology we deploy in our libraries only goes part of the way towards meeting the needs of our customers. Early literacy, encouraging lifelong learning and building stronger more resilient communities are now core business for public libraries.

The library and information sector have to think more deeply on how we invest in and develop our people. Our people have to be more innovative, adaptable and capable of dealing with failure.

Library services (particularly Public libraries) are in the midst of significant generational change. We have succession planning issues - a significant cohort of staff are on the cusp of retirement and at the same time community expectations of libraries are shifting.

We also operating in a female-dominated workforce with many part-time staff – this has made it challenging to find enough professionals willing to take on leadership roles.

The succession issues have been recognised at a state-wide level. The State Library Victoria and Public Libraries Victoria Network have invested in leadership programs to help address this, but little has been done at an organisational level.

Incidentally this paper is not a camouflaged treatise on how to manage ageing segments of the workforce out of library land, but rather how we achieve a balanced approach to cultural change and give people the tools they need to step up and embrace the opportunities.

Casey Cardinia Libraries have been operating public libraries in Melbourne's South East since 1996. We serve a diverse and growing community of more than 400,000 people.

Our libraries are located at Cranbourne, Doveton, Emerald, Endeavour Hills, Hampton Park, Narre Warren and Pakenham. The Cardinia Mobile Library provides a weekly service to Beaconsfield, Bunyip, Cockatoo, Garfield, Gembrook, Koo Wee Rup, Lang Lang, Maryknoll, Nar Nar Goon, Tynong and Upper Beaconsfield.

More than a quarter of residents were born in non-English speaking countries. Key languages other than English include Sinhalese, Persian/Dari, Arabic, Spanish, Hindi and Mandarin. More than 4,500 Afghan-born people live in Casey; this is nearly half of all Afghan-born people in Victoria. We have a significant rural population who have quite different service expectations to people living in brand new suburbs.

Forecasts estimate that the population of City of Casey and Cardinia Shire council will exceed 650,000 people within twenty years. Significant trends include internal-migration, arrival of new migrant groups, more young families and an ageing population with increased life expectancy.

We have 117,000 members and receive just over 2 million visits per annum. (approximately 900,000 physical visits and 1.1 million virtual visits).

It is anticipated that membership and visits will continue to grow, while lending of physical items will continue to gently decline as new ways of delivering information evolve.

We have approximately 150 staff, many of whom have been with CCL since inception. 84% of our employees are female and the majority are employed on a part – time basis. Staff turnover is low at less than 1% and the workforce is ageing.

Our financial position is increasingly complex. We have a turnover of approximately \$11 million per annum.

Just over 70% of our revenue is spent on staffing, just under 13% of revenue is invested on the Collection and the balance goes towards ICT, Furniture and Equipment, Program Delivery and Marketing.

Based on state-wide benchmarking we are the second lowest funded library service in Victoria on a per capita basis (2016 -17 PLVN Annual Statistical Survey).

The introduction of rate-capping (which limits local government contributions) and repetitive efficiency drives by State Government suggests there is very little prospect of increased funding. All the while our resident population is growing at 4.5% per annum.

In 2017, changes to CCL's leadership team, a cash-constrained operating environment, rapidly changing community needs and the imminent opening of a new flagship branch at Bunjil Place created a need for new ways of working.

CCL had operated for many years on a hub and spoke model of management that relied on strong personalities used to a command and control culture.

People working for CCL understood change was occurring but felt disempowered.

Our 2016 staff survey indicated that we needed to bring the organisation into line with contemporary leadership practices and empower staff to take more control of decision making.

The leadership team recognised that CCL was on the cusp of significant change and there was a strong will to engage everyone in a fresh set of directions.

We recognised that our biggest single cost centre was staffing, but we needed to flip the thinking and change from a cost driven management approach to one centred on investment and development of our people.

In November 2016, the whole organisation was invited to participate in an all staff planning day facilitated by Mel Neil a Mind Fitness Coach who had considerable experience working with organisations seeking growth.

It was the first time in 20 years that all our staff had the opportunity to come together. There was a lot of energy in the room as the team developed a new vision for CCL:

*'Inspiring spaces where everyone is free to discover possibilities.'*

As importantly we agreed on a set of values and guiding behaviours:

Teamwork - We excel when we all contribute. We are loyal and dedicated to each other. We always do our fair share.

Love of Learning - We love new things. We believe there is an opportunity to learn anywhere and everywhere.

Fairness - We treat all people fairly. We do not let our personal feelings bias our decisions about others. We give everyone a chance.

Creativity - Thinking new ways to do things is crucial to our success. We are never content doing things the conventional way if we believe a better way is available.

Social Intelligence - We are aware of the motives and feelings of other people. We know what to do to fit into different situations and we know what to do to put others at ease.

Humour - We like to laugh, bringing smiles to other people. We try to see the light side of all situations.

The CCL 2017 – 21 Library Plan acknowledged the thinking of the team at the time:

*'We understand the need for innovation. Our appetite for risk is increasing. There is a willingness to have a go, make mistakes and learn from them. If we celebrate our strengths, empower our people to have a go and share success, we will be a great public library.'*

One all-staff planning day does not a new organisation make, but it was a very positive step in the right direction. People knew that they had been heard and realised that together we had drawn a line in the sand.

While there was need to bring some changes very quickly, the leadership team at CCL recognised that staff need to be engaged and supported in the journey from good to great.

We had great people doing good work. Our community needed us to lift our game and perform at a consistently high level across multiple locations.

Equipped with the knowledge that the majority of our staff were motivated and capable, we needed to consider how we get the best value from our people.

We wanted staff to embrace cognitive non-routine work practices that supported more meaningful engagement with customers and delivered greater value to the community.

This meant a change in management style towards a strength-based approach that encouraged people to do work that energised them.

We want our people to be the best they can be. We want to build a high performing workforce where people are celebrated for realising their strengths.

CCL recognised the need for a sustained focus on equipping our people with the skills and capabilities they need to meet the aspirations and future requirements of CCL.

CCL asked Mel Neil to help design a leadership program that would achieve maximum impact for minimum expenditure. There was a need to reach the entire organisation and ensure the change was lasting. We wanted to inspire our people to participate through an entirely voluntary process.

Mel helped us develop an innovative delivery model that engaged CCL graduates from the Aurora Program and the Shared Leadership Program as facilitators.

Together we created the CCL Living Leadership Program - a personal development program that combines contemporary leadership theory and practical personal health and well-being strategies.

Every member of staff was offered the opportunity to participate. We wanted great outcomes for our people and the organisation irrespective of whether they were working full time or part time.

By linking personal development with CCL's needs, we made a clear statement about our desire to positively support our staff through the organisational change process.

The CCL Living Leadership Program was designed to encourage career progression, develop leadership potential at all levels of the business, and start individuals on a path to development, and investment in self.

CCL's Living Leadership Program offered a compelling proposition for staff:

- Embark on a journey of development and discovery

- Learn how to set personal and professional goals that allow them to have both success and wellbeing
- Develop a personal toolkit for mental toughness and health, happiness and success and a higher sense of meaning and purpose
- Realise their strengths and learn how they can bring their strengths into everything they do in all areas of their life; and
- Contribute to a healthy, happy and dynamic team.

CCL's Living Leadership Program facilitators undertook bespoke train the trainer sessions with Mel Neil that equipped them to run training programs for participants. We also leveraged the '[Mind Insurance Happiness Lab](#)' an online portal designed to support personal development and well-being.

CCL's Living Leadership Program encouraged participants to be Mindful, recognise their own values and link them back to CCL's, set personal and professional goals, realise and celebrate their strengths. The content has been delivered in part from a digital platform, and also through a series of group workshops. The delivery method in itself challenged participants to embrace a new way of thinking and working.

The six modules of the CCL Living Leadership Program take participants on a reflective journey through wellbeing, understanding their values, techniques for positive goal setting, identifying and using strengths in themselves and others. There is application for learnings at work, and more broadly in life.

For many of the participants, employed at all levels of the business, this is the first time they have been 'invested in' as leaders.

We touched base participants throughout the program to ensure that they felt connected with the program and were realising the benefits. The facilitators also met regularly to review the effectiveness of delivery. A formal survey will be conducted when all participants have completed the last module.

Participant: "[my favourite task was] to see and understand my motivators - I was surprised at the answers but happy and agreed with them

One of the greatest challenges emerging so far has been the large uptake rate – rostering more than 60 people for regular workshops has been difficult. We consider this to be a great problem.

Participant comment on one-on-one session with a strengths expert: "[I found the discussion] hard – out of my comfort zone"

Participant comment on goal setting: "I really enjoyed setting goals in a work/professional manner and a personal manner and breaking them down

so that I could see a progression of steps, not just a big broad goal. Useful to think in smaller steps rather than just shoot for the stars”

Participant comment on values assessment: “It’s interesting to see what we have in common and [common] value attributes that librarians have. Good to use for future hiring as to what we value as a corporation as a whole”

It is anticipated that future cohorts will not be as large, and this will enable us to schedule the workshops more regularly and easily, creating natural momentum for the program.

The initial cohort of emerging leaders have particularly embraced the strengths-based learning and have applied this within their teams at an individual branch level. The concept that people are more successful when playing to their strengths, rather than focusing on weaknesses, has resonated universally for this group.

The first round of CCL’s Living Leadership Program concluded in May 2018. 62 of the 63 original participants are likely to graduate in June and work has commenced on a second year of program design and delivery that will give the first-year participants further opportunities for growth.

CCL will also offer an opportunity for those who did not participate in the first year of the program to enrol for a refined version in 2018. We expect that between 20 - 30 more staff will take the plunge and embark on their own journey of personal growth and development.

CCL sees the potential for the Living Leadership Program delivery model to be shared across the sector with organisations seeking sustainable change.

There was also recognition that while the focus in an immediate sense on CCL, there is a sense that this journey is an investment in the industry more broadly. We are making a clear statement that investment in leadership development should not be limited to full time employees.

The facilitators have also shown considerable development through this experience. Most of the group had never delivered training before and have had to learn the content of each module throughout the journey. Not an easy task, but every facilitator demonstrated their leadership qualities and grew in confidence through this process.

CCL has employed a number of strategies to help decentralise management and democratise the organisation.

Irrespective of whether or not team members participate in the Living Leadership Program we have clearly articulated the values and guiding behaviours that we expect all staff to support.

Staff are being given a greater voice in how services are delivered and the visitor experience has been prioritised in planning improvements to our branches.

People are being held to account for their performance and there is greater transparency in our recruitment and development practices. We have actively encouraged internal applicants to apply for opportunities and at the same time brought in talent from other library services and indeed other sectors!

Considerable thought has been invested in how we empower our branch managers and specialists to make more decisions and engage their teams in strategy and planning.

Our 2017 Organisational Health Survey showed that we have made considerable progress in a year of significant change.

Our staff feel good about themselves and their colleagues. Job satisfaction remains high and people can see that the organisation has a clear plan and future direction.

We are continuing to evolve our performance appraisal process to move from a formal annual season of ordeal to one that is less formal, more ad hoc and strengths based.

We have had some staff leave, but we have also seen a number of people step up, embrace the values and guiding behaviours and change the way that they work.

We successfully opened the beautiful new library at Bunjil Place in late October 2017 and over the first 6 months of operation, visitation has doubled. Our performance as a library network has improved on nearly every metric. While it is early days, there is a growing sense of optimism about the direction we are heading.

We will continue to measure the growth and development of our organisation through the annual Organisational Health Survey, but we will also monitor health and well being through the Happiness Lab and less formal channels including conversations with staff.

Several members of the original facilitators team have now moved on to take up leadership positions elsewhere in the sector. This provides an opportunity for a select group of participants to move into the facilitator space. This is exactly the continuum the CCL hoped to create. An evolution of leaders and confident leadership at all levels, and a team working to their strengths.



## References

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