

LEADING A GREENER LIBRARY

With the current focus on climate change and the impact we are having on the environment, many people are wondering how we can make a real difference. Libraries are positive, proactive and full of amazing community focused people, so it's natural that they are perfectly placed to lead the way in finding practical solutions to sustainability challenges, and to provide leadership towards a greener future.

There seem to be three basic areas in which we could be working to make a change. Firstly, we need to take personal responsibility for the impact of what we do within our own libraries. Secondly, we need to ensure that we support the organisations or institutions within which our libraries operate and enable them to achieve their sustainability objectives. Finally, we must take the lead and provide information and education to our communities to empower them to engage confidently in working towards a better future.

As library workers, we must embrace the challenge both personally and as a group, and this sometimes requires basic changes in the culture of our workplaces. Let's take a very simple, everyday example. Many of us use reusable cups for our morning café coffee, as a matter of course, but how do we take this a step further and ensure that our catered library functions also avoid disposable crockery and cutlery, bottled water and over packaged foods. Having attended several conferences seminars recently there certainly has been a lot of very heartening progress in this direction, but there is still much room for improvement. It is clear that much more thought and planning is required when organising an event, which gives greater emphasis to the logistics of responsible catering.

Whether it's catering, plastic packaging on the serials you receive, or pamphlet boxes being thrown into landfill, or even a larger project like installing blinds on windows, or replacing inefficient lighting, why not take the lead and suggest an agenda item for the next library staff meeting, addressing some aspect of library activity or operation which could be made more environmentally responsible? Once a discussion is started and the inevitable hurdles overcome,

even small changes can lead to reductions in waste, environmental footprint and in many cases, financial savings. Changes made at this level can also provide the perfect groundwork for developing programs for our communities.

Since our libraries sit within larger organisations, whether they are local or state government, educational institutions or other private or public organisations, we also have a responsibility to support them and enable them to achieve their sustainability objectives. There are a number of ways that a library can take leadership in this area, for example, providing research support to those formulating the sustainability policies, developing and providing outreach programs for other staff, facilitating meetings and information sessions with industry experts, sourcing current information.

Thirdly, libraries are trusted to provide current and accurate information, their staff are knowledgeable and well respected in their communities. Many have been developing responses to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and working on programs to embed the various SDG into their outreach and education programs. For example, public libraries already have programs which include guest speakers and information sessions on aspects of sustainable living, such as organic gardening, recycling, cooking without waste, repair and recycling cafés. Many also have recycling stations for batteries, ewaste, book swaps, just to name a few.

The possibilities for programs within your library, your community and the organisation within which your library sits, are endless and much can be achieved, often without needing a huge amount of money or resources. We just need library people with a passion and a vision for change to step up to the challenge. ✨

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