



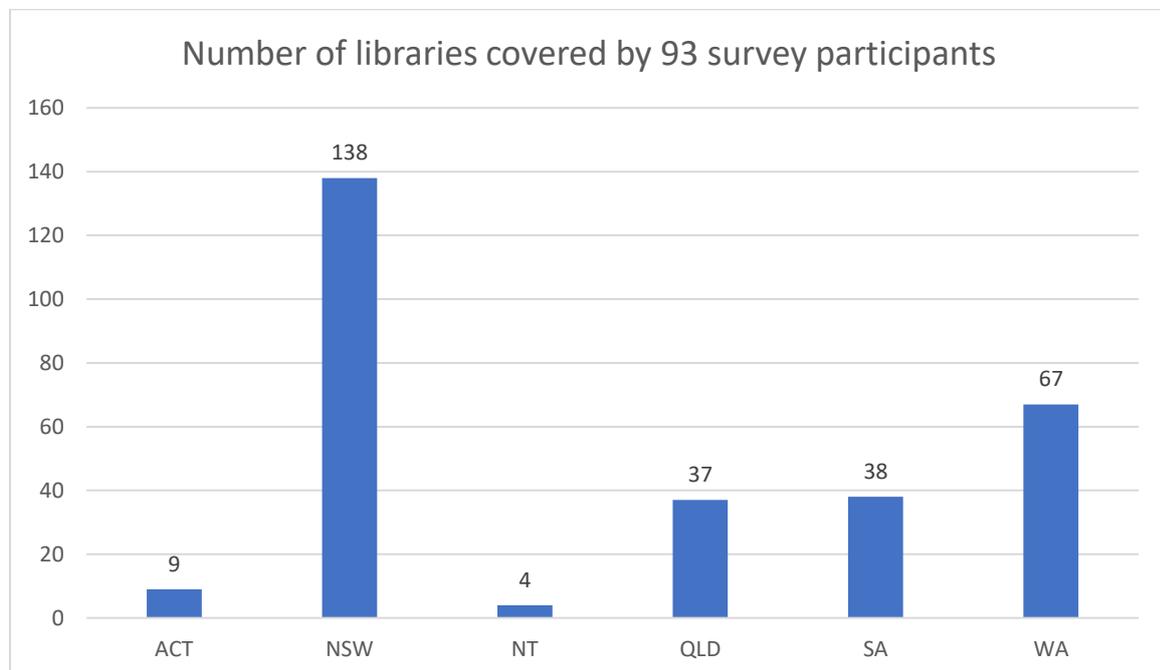
## ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance Public Library Survey

### Background

Between 18 May and 10 July 2020, ALIA ran a survey through Survey Monkey, asking public libraries how they had responded to the COVID-19 lockdown during the month of April, specifically relating to new memberships, loans of print and digital items, delivery or collection services, and virtual storytimes.

We received 93 responses on behalf of 293 central and branch libraries in four states and two territories. There were no responses for Tasmania and Victoria.

The results provide a snapshot of how library staff adapted their services to changing circumstances.



## Key findings

The survey portrayed an industry which has experienced a high level of disruption and the need for a complete revision of its operating model, but whose workers have risen to the challenge, continuing to serve their existing users, while attracting new ones. Individual members of staff have been personally impacted by reduced hours of work, and, in the case of some casual workers, the loss of employment.

- People continued to join libraries after the closure of buildings. Libraries made this possible by activating online memberships. 88% of respondents signed up between one and 600-plus new members during April 2020.
- 16% of respondents said their library or library service had had to stand down staff during April. The 15 respondents reported 106 people affected, almost all of whom were casual employees.
- Very few libraries reported an increase in physical loans during April 2020, compared with the previous year, and the vast majority saw loans decrease – 69% of libraries and library services by between 76% and 100%. At the same time, in most cases digital loans increased year-on-year, with 26% seeing digital loans more than double.
- Libraries and library services increased their outreach while buildings were closed, with 21% offering click and collect or kerbside pick-up; 18% continuing their existing home library service and 12% expanding it to more users; 16% offering home delivery and 8% finding other ways to put print books in the hands of readers. Only six (6%) did not provide at least one outreach service.
- Libraries were creative and thoughtful about how they provided materials to their users during lockdown. There were activity and craft packs, mystery boxes of books, book giveaways. Recognising that people use printers in libraries, some offered 'print and collect'.
- Events moved online, including virtual storytimes. 70% of respondents had livestreamed or recorded and posted virtual storytimes to YouTube or Facebook. As a rough average, there were 350 views per storytime, but this varied from a few people for a livestreamed event, through to several thousand views of recorded sessions.
- The many comments we received in an open question at the end of the survey gave an idea of the level of change experienced in libraries. The responses have been collated under six headings:

### 1. Transitioning to digital delivery of services

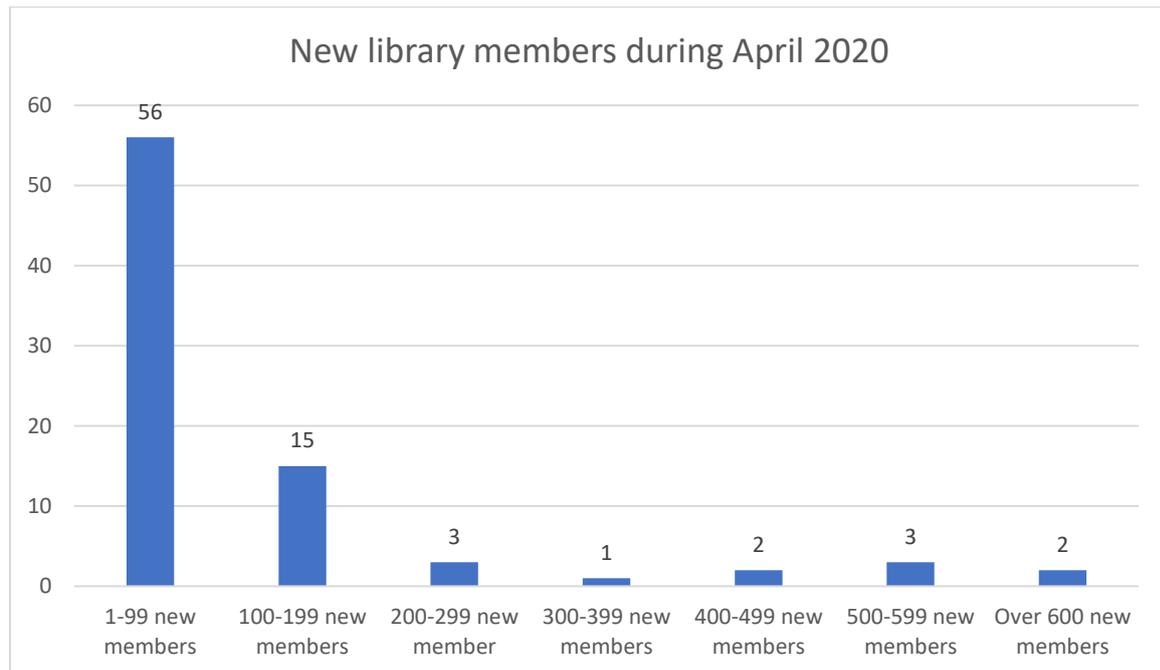
- Increased investment in ebooks and eResources
- Appreciation for the ALIA book industry agreement which enabled virtual storytimes
- Moving events and community learning programs online
- Creation of video content and use of local studies materials
- Zoom and social media to promote connection and engagement

- Staff innovation, creativity and digital dexterity
2. Delivery of physical items
    - Click and collect and other variations as described above
    - Books, craft and activity packs
    - Importance for housebound and other home library service users
  3. Library user response
    - How much libraries were missed
    - Appreciation for new services
    - Positive impact on Council reputation
  4. Library staff working from home and behind the scenes
    - Time involved in developing and delivering new services
    - Opportunity for professional development and training
    - Stocktakes, refurbishment, collection management tasks, which there would not otherwise have been time for
  5. Memberships
    - New member numbers down, but reaching new users through digital services
  6. Looking ahead
    - Concern about reopening restrictions and how these will be perceived by library users
    - Libraries collecting information about the community experience of COVID-19 for researchers

## In detail

### Online membership

10 libraries and library services did not sign up new members during the month (presumably because they did not offer online memberships) and one did not respond to the question. The others had new members join, ranging from a handful in small country libraries, through to several hundred in larger regional and metro libraries. In total, 82 libraries and library services signed up 9,239 new members.



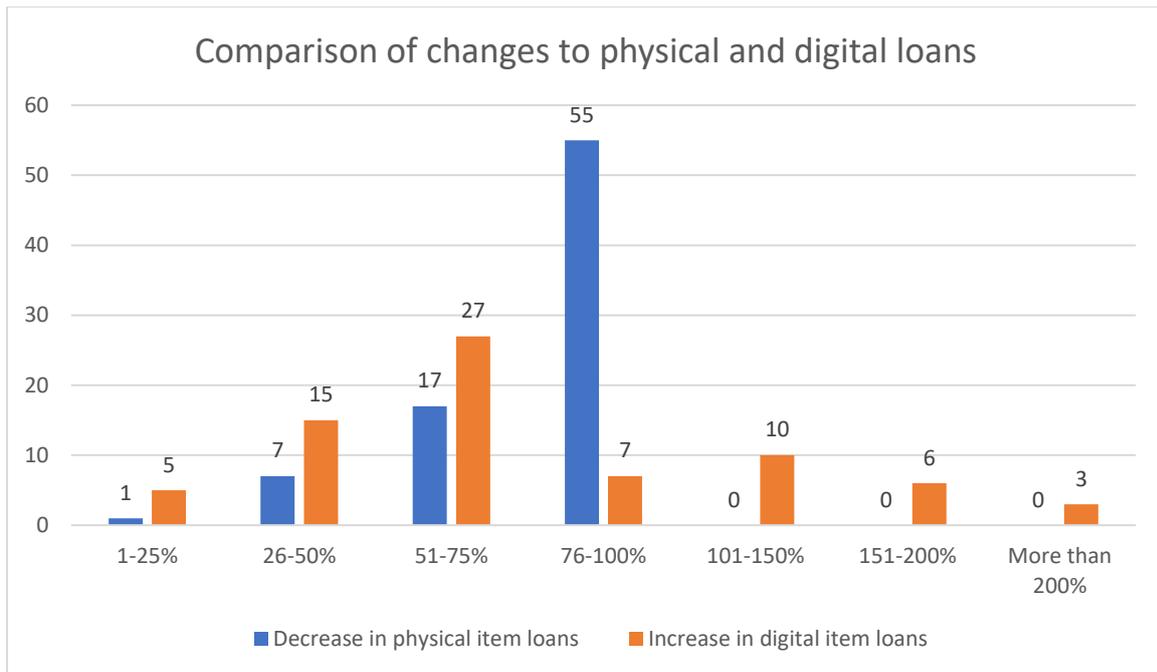
### Employment of library staff

78 respondents (84%) said no employees were stood down during April, but a number wrote of reduced hours for staff. The other 15 libraries and library services (16%) lost 106 staff – mainly casual employees.

### Loans

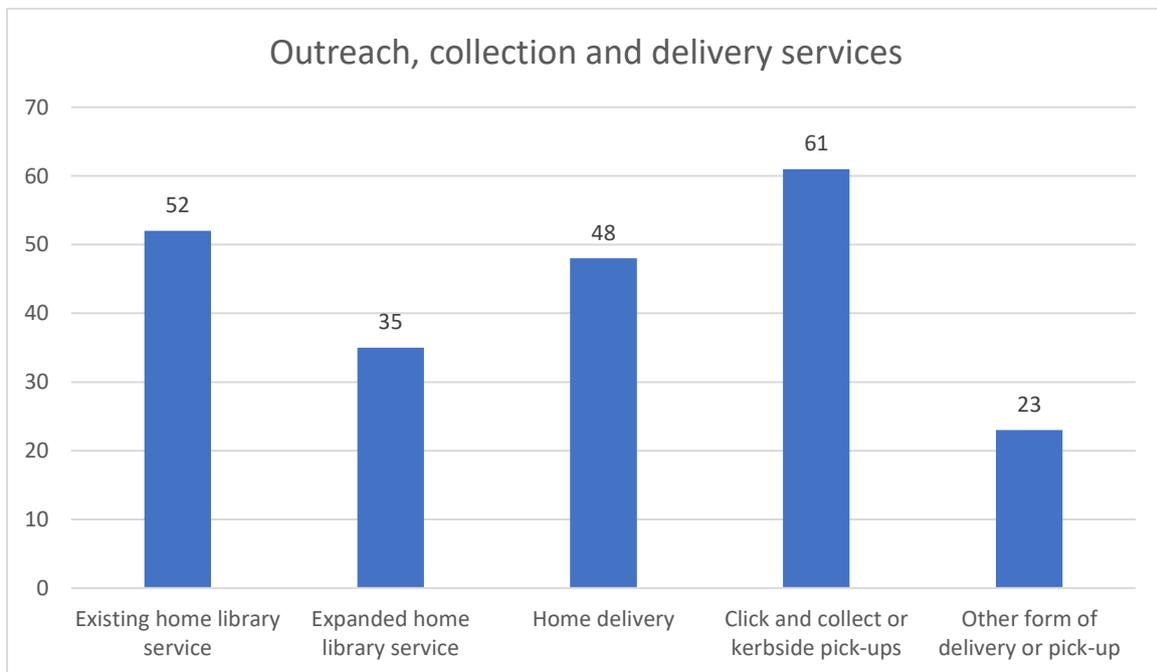
Five respondents reported an increase in loans of physical items during April; eight did not report their figures. The 80 libraries and library services reporting a decrease in loans of physical items were mainly in the top quartile, with 55 (69%) stating a drop of between 76% and 100%.

By contrast, most libraries reported an increase in digital loans, with the increase for 19 libraries and library services (26%) exceeding 100%. 20 did not report their figures for digital loans.



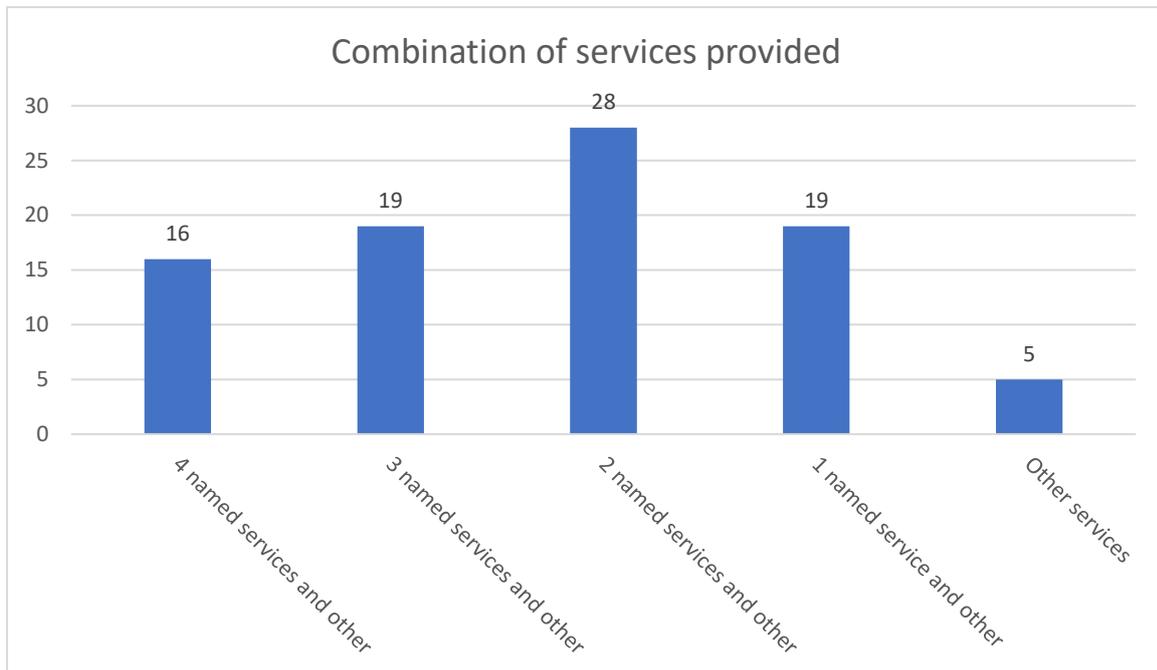
### Putting books in the hands of readers

Most libraries adapted their outreach services to accommodate the needs of their communities during COVID-19. 52 libraries and library services (18%) continued their existing home library service; 35 (12%) expanded the service to more users; 48 (16%) provided home delivery and 61 (21%) offered click and collect or kerbside pick-up. 23 (8%) offered other ways to access print books.



Most libraries and library services used a combination of methods: 16 (18%) offered all the services detailed above and 'other'; 19 (22%) offered three of the services and 'other'; 28 (32%) offered two of the services and 'other'; 19 (22%) offered one of the services and 'other'

and five (6%) provided 'other' services. Only six respondents did not provide additional services.



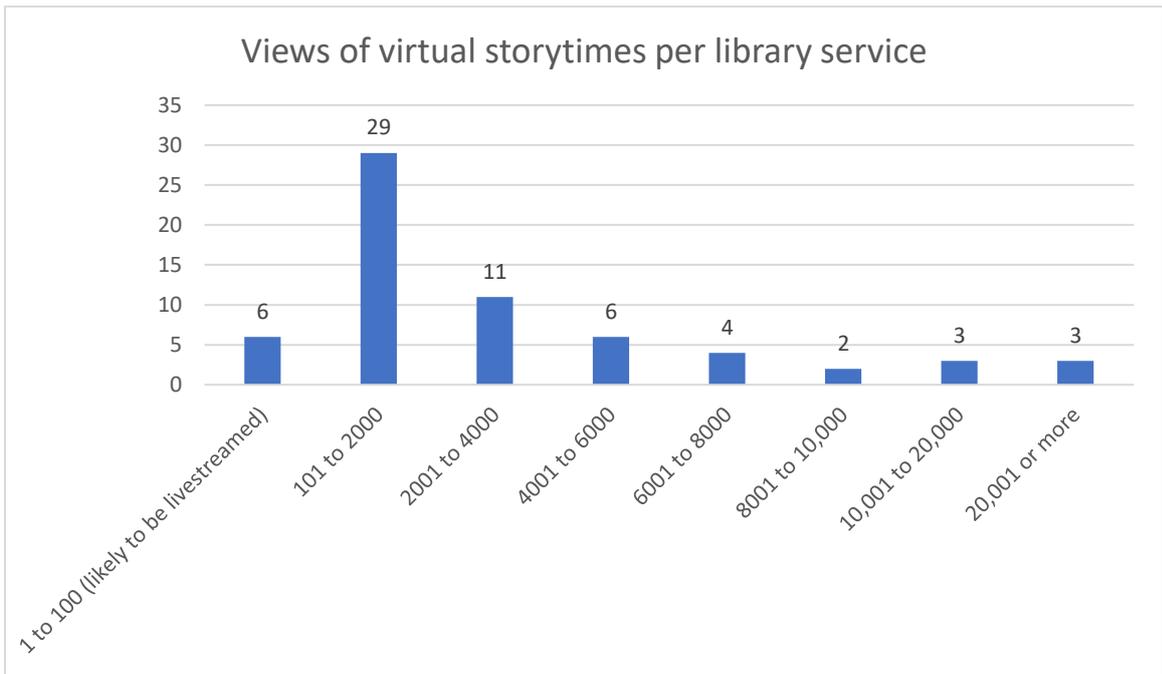
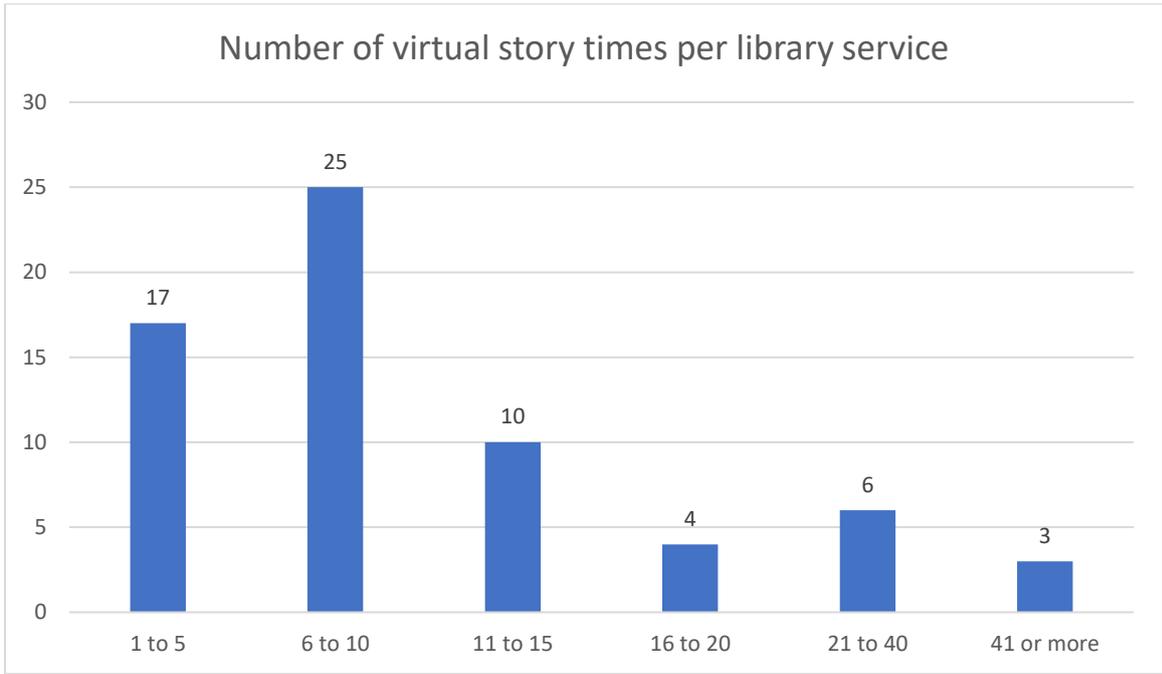
Other forms of delivery or pick-up included:

- Activity packs for children
- Mystery packs of books
- Contactless collection of printing
- Craft bags for holiday programs
- Delivery by another team in council
- Point and collect
- Parcel post
- Call and collect
- Book exchanges
- Donations of books
- Little street libraries

### **Virtual storytimes**

28 library services (30%) did not create virtual storytimes, either to livestream or as recordings, but others took advantage of the opportunity to extend their services to families with small children during the lockdown.

In total, 65 library services created 858 virtual storytimes. 64 reported their viewing figures, which totalled 299,522. These were said to be understated in some cases because viewing figures were readily available from YouTube but not from Facebook. This gave a rough average of 350 views per storytime.



## Open comments

At the end of the survey, we asked people to tell us how else their library had responded to COVID-19.

### Transitioning to digital delivery of services

- We have really appreciated the leadership and support provided by ALIA, APLA and our State Library during the COVID-19 pandemic. This support has enabled our libraries to rapidly move some service provision into an online environment whilst still supporting the most vulnerable groups with physical items. Within our local government authority, libraries have proven themselves to be leaders.
- We conducted three streamed storytime sessions to Council's eight childcare centres in April. We also recorded storytime sessions that were not uploaded until May. Local history sessions have taken place virtually and we have converted history photos into virtual jigsaw puzzles. Virtual book club sessions also took place.
- Library staff fielded a high number of technical enquiries for assistance with e-resource login, app, resource use. Library staff developed online tutorials and help sheets and launched them online. We purchased additional e-resources to increase online options for customers - comics and film streaming services. The online joining process was simplified and the new process will benefit our online customers. An online digital author event was organised in April. This was our first online presenter event. We had 31 attendees, although physical numbers of people viewing were likely greater as we had multiple people eg couples and families who used same login details.
- Our staff rose to the challenge of staying connected with our community behind closed doors and with limited entry. As well as ensuring the development and maintenance of the physical collection, we have transitioned our face to face programs online where possible - so as well as weekly virtual story sessions we are offering Little Bang Discovery Club Online, Microsoft Office Bootcamp Online Learning, Facebook Tuesday Challenge, Essential Chess Strategies for Kids Online in partnership with Chess School SA, and ESL classes conducted via videoconferencing. Our website Stay Connected page has many referring sites and opportunities for people to engage at home. In SA, public libraries are part of the wonderful One Card Network so our community has access to a wealth of consortium online resources, alongside our locally purchase ones such as Kanopy and Story Box Library.
- We presented workshops via Youtube. Code Club and Robot Club continued online. Library staff assisted the art gallery to film an existing exhibition, for launching and viewing online. Library staff are using video and drones to film a 'plein air' art workshop from a remote location. Art Gallery school holiday workshops and Youth Centre school holiday and Youth Week programs have also been offered online with assistance from the library staff.
- We commenced regular sessions via a closed Facebook group to maintain the Language Café program which was very much appreciated by our multicultural

community. Our innovative staff made the decision to swap to a virtual author event, instead of hosting the annual Gala Dinner for our city-wide book club. Little Bang Discovery Club, an interactive science program for children aged 4-8 moved online for the very first time and we had 80 participants.

- We provided Zoom meetings for our regular Movie Group. These people were contacted via their emails. We provided phone reference enquiries. We provided Conversation English via video chat and phone. We created displays that could be seen from the street. We created a virtual Easter Egg Hunt on Facebook. We conducted 'care calls' to community members who were isolated and alone.
- We posted six Rhymetime videos, viewed a total of 4,467 times, in addition to virtual storytimes. We were able to nominate the library to provide limited computer access to vulnerable people in the community as part of a wider community services plan. This was considered essential, and so our library was able to be 'open' in a very limited way and have staff back at the library to coordinate the home delivery service much earlier than other public libraries.
- We provided online Get Skilled and Get Creative videos, which were viewed 5,278 times. Our customers have been overwhelmingly supportive, and we have learned that we can provide a lot more, to a larger mass by embracing the digital world.
- We set up a Digital Helpline to help people access our online resources, and join the library, as well as assist with common digital tech issues.
- We developed Your library @ home - a curation of information for customers on our website.
- We introduced Beamafilm to our customers and significantly increased our ebook and eaudio content on BorrowBox.
- We used it as an opportunity to reach out to existing and potential patrons via social media and to increase our social media presence. Rather than offering virtual storytimes (which many, many other libraries were already doing), instead we filmed and posted our librarians doing book reviews of items that were available through our eResources. The response to this was hugely popular, with three posts generating 950 views.
- We worked on getting eResource platforms for all four of our libraries up and running.
- We posted four 'Live from the Archive' sessions to Facebook with 7,828 views.
- We hosted a book club on the library's Facebook page.
- We created online content linking to the excellent work of others (virtual rhymetimes, storytimes, crafts); and we created local history puzzles.
- Online experiences have been very well received especially those involving existing local storytellers.

- We provided a school holiday program via Facebook and our afterschool clubs. We introduced a weekly 'Ask a Librarian' session via Facebook.
- To promote reading and local organisations/businesses we have come up with an innovative storytime that is on the Council Facebook page. Different people from different careers introduce themselves and read a story that pertains to their place of work.
- It has been a credit to our members how well they adapted to using eResources. We tried to engage with the community as much as we could to support those in need. Utilising Zoom has been very valuable

### **Delivery of physical items**

- Given that we were closed to the public for the whole of April, the loans were significant. We did more than 500 individual deliveries.
- We put together Family Activity packs using low cost craft and free picture books.
- We increased our housebound delivery service to those self-isolating or in the high risk category.
- Continuing our home library service was really important for our clients and having the compliance team on board mitigated risk and gave them meaningful work to do. It was a great team effort. Introducing Click and Collect in April was very valued by the community and we were very happy to offer this service during the closure period.
- We delivered craft kits for ages 2-4, 5-7, 8-12, and adults.
- During the school holidays we offered themed take home packs ranging from coding to unicorns via our online booking and collection system.
- When we stopped click and collect services and home delivery it was hard not being able to support patrons with accessing books.
- The decision was made to have zero physical contact with the community during closure period. Now (May) we are doing click and collect, 45-min browsing sessions, access to computers, WiFi, printers, copiers and materials.
- Our customers have told us that the libraries played a crucial role in supporting their health and well-being during the challenging circumstances we've found ourselves under the cloud of COVID-19. Whilst they missed engaging with us and our facilities in the manners in which they'd been accustomed, they were grateful for the services we were able to provide – Click and Collect to provide safe access to our library items, phone based customer service available across weekdays and weekends, a Library to You delivery service to reach customers who couldn't or wouldn't travel, and a wealth of online programming that kept our community connected.

- Our community has really appreciated the delivery service – we have received some very positive feedback. Our Council felt it was important to offer our community the service especially to elderly members. We have taken precautions when delivery items and to quarantine and sanitise our returned items.
- We had lots of calls from customers looking for books early on. Then the information became confusing as it changed so often. When we finally were able to do click and collect again, we didn't have the same response as before.
- We were very fortunate to have the local Aboriginal Corporation for Health as our partners. They have done all our home deliveries and collections. They have gone above and beyond.
- We have organised activity packs for children 4-7 years, 8-12 years, 13+, these have been distributed with housebound book bags and can also be collected from the library.

### **Library user response**

- Activating our Takeaway Library service with a 'Click and Collect' system (the week after libraries were closed) was a very successful initiative at both branches. Our community has been very appreciative of the effort we have made to build resilience through provision of our library service and interacting with a 'person' during the shutdown period was often the highlight of their week.
- We had comments from clients: 'I didn't realise how much I used the library until I couldn't' and constant queries about when First 5 Forever would start again.
- Community support has been wonderful, with patrons very grateful for all the services we are able to provide.
- The responses from our community members has been very positive. The ability to get their reading 'fix' while unable to do much else was greatly appreciated, while staff enjoyed the increased one-to-one interaction that was the click and collect service. Customers relied on the staff readers advisory skills and often commented that staff picked better books than they would themselves.
- Customers have loved the take-away service, with lots of positive comments.
- Members were very happy when we reopened on 19 May - even though services were limited to borrowing and returning of items.
- It was a great opportunity to promote all aspects of online library services. The libraries' value has been identified through customer response and feedback during the physical closure.
- From the amount of feedback we have received directly from our customers, it is clear to us that libraries continued to play an important role in the lives of a large part

of our community, and we couldn't be happier to be there for them when they needed us most.

- The virtual story time and book pick up service have been very well received in our community.
- Having our mobile library on the road delivering books gave us visibility, great feedback and the staff loved it.
- We received a lot of feedback from patrons so grateful that we were offering a click and collect service.
- The city received a large number of positive responses and feedback to the interim services that libraries offered.
- We felt passionate about reassuring our community that there was life during the Phase 1 closures. We felt that we had a big footprint for a tiny library and wallowed a bit in the thanks and gifts of chocolates and biscuits and letters from people. We hope that other libraries will be encouraged to do more should we have to revert to Phase 1 again: leading not retreating.

#### **Library staff working from home and behind-the-scenes**

- Library staff working behind the scenes have shown how flexible and adaptable they can be by being so creative and innovative with alternate online programs and workshops. Staff have been very focused to also complete major tasks like a complete stocktake over eight libraries. Great leadership shown by ALIA in producing toolkits and checklists for COVID19.
- All staff were directed to work from home (from 30 March to 17 May).
- It has been an opportunity to clean, reorganise and added shelving to library.
- Library staff were seconded to other Council departments for 2-3 days per week for the first two weeks of May.
- Taking over all the many activities our 49 volunteers do has assisted us in keeping casuals employed - they are such a vital part of our service and we value their commitment and training, so we didn't want to lose them.
- It has been really quiet working without customers. Staff have at times felt isolated. However, it has been a great time to catch up on tasks and PD that was not possible during opening times of the library.
- It has given library staff a chance to deliver pre-recorded and live streaming of programs that they would never have had the time to do. It has been great for the team to think of ways to change our service and programs to provide a connection to our community. A lot of creativity appeared, which is fantastic.

- It has remained busy, just in a different way, and all staff have continued to work.
- It was incredibly difficult to explain to decision makers that despite being closed, library staff still had much work of value that could continue. It appears despite years of providing information about what we are doing, and why, they only value us issuing and returning books.
- It's been a fairly stressful time - three of our staff were redeployed for a few weeks - all are back for re-opening. We are very grateful for shared documents through ALIA and the library community.
- Libraries adapted quickly to the closure and reopening. Some staff were redeployed into other tasks including the establishment of the COVID-19 helpline.
- It has been an amazing journey for staff, as they discovered confidence and abilities, they did not realise they had. They have always been committed to our community - and this provided amazing challenges that they cheerfully and determinedly faced and overcame. It has increased an already positive connection with the community, increased our profile within Council and highlighted the agility and flexibility of our staff, whether answering Council phones, going online, cleaning, managing quarantine requirements, just being there for our community, helpful and positive.
- It has been a positive experience in some ways, giving staff time to think outside the box, take on projects they don't often have time to, exploring new ways of service delivery and working together as a team to continue making a difference to customers during uncertain and challenging times. The feedback has been wonderful.
- It has been a roller coaster ride but one that I'm very proud to say the staff have coped with at every stage. All new and bewildering, never done anything like it and the way they all got together and resolved every issue is awesome.
- A unique library experience for all staff that required quick innovative thinking on a daily basis and teamwork.
- During our eightweek closure, staff have undertaken a weeding program across most branches; increased our online resources; reviewed layouts to enhance customer experience and access to collections. The service has adapted to the changing Covid-19 environment, responding with virtual programming, tech support for online eResources, offering online registrations and provided contactless home delivery service. Staff have completed online training to increase skills in Readers Advisory and knowledge of database subscriptions. We have completed a minor library management system upgrade.
- It saved having to shutdown to complete a renovation project and the stock take is now completed.
- Our casuals, although they are still employed, have no longer been receiving shifts.

- At the grass roots, since reopening, branch staff are dealing with the impact of managing the number of people in the building at any one time and continuous cleaning of equipment as well as ensuring the general running of a library. Those who are working from home, many for the first time, are adapting in their own way, though missing the physical social interactions that are such a part of the library world.
- We have been very busy with home deliveries to all seniors, click and collect at door, stocktake and refurbishment of children's area.
- Our experience was that work wise we were flat out for the majority of the time. There was a great deal of time spent cleaning items and then quarantining them for three days. Because we left our chute open we had to empty it many times each day. We were lucky to swap books and other resources with another library and had our own internal courier system happening. We also swapped hundreds of large print books for our readers of westerns and romance. There was also time to do some weeding of the collection.
- With the testing times came opportunity. Our staff were creative, inspiring and dedicated to the customers in our service. I also think it showed how important libraries are to communities.
- The staff adapted very well to their new work environment and stepping out of their usual roles. Staff became drivers, delivery people, call centre staff and warehouse staff taking items off the shelves for Click and Collect and the Home Delivery Service. Storytime, Baby Rhyme Time and adult programs shifted online so staff became performers and proficient at creating online videos. The time was also used for professional development and training.
- The creation of virtual storytime sessions provided an opportunity for staff to learn new skills.
- We got it done, we're still getting it done. We're inventing stuff as we go along, working on the weekends to get procedures written and issues ironed out, and looking at every issue as a way to maybe still deliver a service in the safest way we can. We increased our housebound member service from 18 people to 83 in the space of two weeks. Staff have taken on new roles. And it has been deeply appreciated.
- We did lay off casuals and staff went to only their core hours. Click and Collect very much took pressure off justifying staff staying at work.
- Staff have used the lockdown period to change the library layout and to conduct and record online author interviews.
- It has been extremely quiet without customers. However, all those jobs that staff never had time for have been completed. Professional development courses both paid and free have been undertaken by staff which has been great.

- All staff have handled the closure of the libraries differently – some have taken this on board as a positive experience and something that will end eventually and others have found the changes a little difficult to handle.
- On the upside we have completed online courses, cleaned out years of accumulated stuff from our storerooms and nearly finished weeding the collection.
- We took the opportunity of the library being closed to the public to do many projects: stocktake, reclassifying and re-labelling junior fiction books to easy reading sets, re-labelling talking books with fiction genres, getting the library web site updated and listing items for attention on the web site, working on the manual for our new library management system and other circulation desk and library procedures. We have made session plans for Toddler Time, Brain training, Junior Brain Games, Brain Training for the nursing homes six weeks ahead.
- Collection maintenance has been the biggest winner during the library's closure and we are looking forward to re-opening the doors with updated, refreshed and organized collections.
- Staff were required to take leave, working half their standard hours.
- We have been busier than ever reinventing ourselves and trying to find new ways to inform, entertain, and engage with our community. We have learned many skills that we will take with us. We are now looking at what we can keep, let go or grow. Libraries and their staff are so resourceful and resilient.

### **Memberships**

- Interestingly, our April memberships were really low - but for May so far we have 35 so well up from April and only partway through the month (our marketing was better towards the end of April so perhaps this is why).
- While we would generally join 200 to 300 people in a month, 115 people joined as emembers to access e resources. We can't accurately measure eResource take-up over this period but from the number of phone enquiries we fielded, and the unusually high number of on-line memberships, we intuit that it was significantly higher than usual.

### **Looking ahead**

- We are constantly fielding phone calls and people in the street asking when the library will re-open. One of the main services missing in the community is internet and public computer access. On the plus side, the numbers of children and parents accessing on-line resources has greatly increased.
- By the time libraries re-opened on 16 May, the public was phoning, emailing, messaging, and generally accosting our library staff wherever they may be (virtually and physically). It was so good to know we were missed. I think the really tough work

begins from now though. The shutdown was just a pre-cursor to the really intense times ahead.

- We suspect that some patrons will not be happy with the very limited services safety and health concerns will limit us to providing, after waiting so long for us to reopen.
- Our library created a web page to harvest local stories on the impact of Covid-19 for the Local Studies collection. This will be promoted through schools and local community groups as the city starts to re-open and people have time to reflect.
- We are hoping that residents will send digital documents, pictures, videos etc from their time during the Covid-19 lockdown so we can archive them for future generations to look back on.
- Our sector (public libraries) struggled to co-ordinate which I believe resulted in closure earlier than necessary - going forward it would be worth investigating working with our relevant state Local Government Associations to prepare plans for them to act in a decision making/ advise provision capacity.
- Since re-opening our patronage is severely limited because of distancing requirements. Our space is small so we can only have 8 patrons in at any time. Our library was previously used by almost all of our school aged children for up to 13 hours a week. Some of them come in when we open and stay for the full day particularly on Saturdays. It was common to have 30 or more children in the library at once as it is the only safe drug and alcohol-free place in the community and many children come for respite and sanctuary.
- We have been distributing Panorama Project booklets, which participants can fill with their Covid-19 shut down experiences using whatever medium they wish. Booklets are returned to the library and sent to Arts North West. They go on tour to the libraries and art galleries of the north west region, and are then returned to the participants to keep as a permanent record of the time. I am filling out one of these books for the library as a record of what we have done during this time.

17 July 2020