

Australian Library and Information Association

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The Little Book of Public Libraries is for people who love libraries and want to share their passion with others.

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If you are already a library champion, this book will give you key messages that you can pass on to friends and colleagues. If not, we hope it will open your eyes to the valuable contribution libraries make to families. communities, society, and the economy as a whole.



There are over **1500** public libraries across Australia and **8200** library staff, who provide expert guidance.



Almost ten million people or nearly 50% of the population are library members and many more of us use them as study spaces, for online research, and just to browse the collections of books, CDs, DVDs, and magazines, giving a total of 111 million annual visits.

Australians borrow more than 183 *million* items a year and make nearly 10 *million* enquiries. There are **8500** PCs in our libraries, **7000** with internet access.

All this costs Australians **1757** million—less than **10c** a day each.

Source: The Australian Public Libraries Statistical Report 2006-2007 (State Library of Queensland, January 2009) WIIIIII

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Litorrames are changing

If you haven't visited a public library for a few years, go and take a look. The library of today is probably not the place you remember.



A new approach

These days, library staff not only have the kind of knowledge and information skills you'd expect, but also an approach to customer service that has a lot in common with a modern retail outlet. The chance of hearing a librarian say "shhh" is pretty remote.

All libraries have their own calendar of activities. from pre-schooler story-time through to internet-user classes. You may still lose yourself in shelf upon shelf of books, but you can also find displays of the latest bestsellers that wouldn't look out of place in your local bookshop.

Computers are the biggest visible sign of change. Virtually every library in Australia now offers internet access, opening new doors for library users. Young and old are turning out in force and finding that there's much more to discover.



Libraries come in lots of shapes and sizes, from prestigious landmark sites through to the outback letterbox library. Some have been squeezed into buildings that weren't designed to take them, but the quality of customer service and the enthusiasm of the staff isn't dependent on the physical size of the library.





Public libraries are the new village green.

- They are public spaces, where everyone is welcome and can participate.
- You can use them in different ways—to borrow books, CDs, DVDs, magazines, search the internet, use their extensive e-resources, find out information, take part in events.

- There is expert help on hand if you need it.
- The services are free.



Public libraries strengthen family relationships.

- Public libraries provide people with a refuge from the stress and expense of modern living.
- They are places where parents, grandparents, carers, young people and children can share the excitement of discovery, whether it's through books, the internet or activities.

 Public libraries provide a free family outing with something for everyone.

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Public libraries improve quality of life.

 Libraries are safe places, where everyone is welcome and receives equal respect.



You can read for pleasure, study, look for jobs, learn a new skill, share your skills, and, if you can't travel to the library under your own steam, it comes to you through mobile libraries, the home library service and the internet.

Public libraries build safer, stronger, sustainable communities.

- Libraries bring everyone together, welcoming new arrivals and celebrating our Indigenous heritage.
- They provide free access to information and ideas and are an important foundation of democracy.

Planners and developers recognise this unifying role and many have put a public library at the centre of new buildings and regeneration projects.

Public libraries make citizens healthier.

Reading is known to contribute to our personal well-being and all public libraries have information and advice about wider health concerns, including obesity, cancer, mental health issues, the effects of smoking and the importance of maintaining an active mind as well as an active body.

 We believe public libraries can play an even greater role in the health of the community in future.





Public libraries are safe, welcoming places, where children and young people are respected and treated as individuals. Their library card gives them access to books, CDs, DVDs, information, and the internet, but with these rights come responsibilities. Libraries offer children an early taste of what it's like to be a good citizen.





There are items to borrow and fun things to do, including pre-schooler storytime, school holiday activities, and summer reading programs. The importance of early literacy and the role of libraries in supporting parents and their babies cannot be over-estimated.



Libraries add an extra dimension to literacy and learning throughout childhood and teenage years, reaching reluctant learners as well as star pupils and giving them a better start in life.



For young adults, libraries support both academic and vocational training, helping to create opportunities for young people and enabling them to achieve economic independence.

and learning

Public libraries support formal and informal learning and literacy development for people of all ages. They are "street corner universities" where everyone can learn about the subject of their choice, in their own time, at their own pace.



Libraries work closely with local schools and colleges and support them through lending, out-ofhours reading activities, and homework help. They provide free internet access for research and staff can show students how to navigate the web to find the most useful resources.

All public libraries target people who lack basic skills. They provide books, support material, and many have expert guidance or offer a venue for adults who need help with reading. They have a valuable role in assisting non-English speaking members of the community to develop English language skills.

Increasingly, libraries are refocusing on the joy of reading for all ages, with fun programs, workshops, visiting authors, writers-in-residence, seminars and competitions.

Monto Antonion and the economy

Public libraries help create a vibrant, productive local economy. They assist people to improve their life chances and businesses to become more competitive.

Developing skills

Improving adult literacy and language ability, teaching people to use computers, providing access to knowledge and information: these are ways in which public libraries help people develop the skills companies need.

Finding jobs

When you are unemployed, sitting at home can be soul-destroying. Instead, job-seekers use the public library to scan the positions vacant pages in local and national newspapers and to search the internet for opportunities advertised online.

Promoting innovation

Companies, especially those developing new technologies, need reliable market information, but it can be prohibitively expensive for some smaller businesses. Public libraries subscribe on their behalf to all kinds of statistical information, news and business intelligence, and online directories.



Expanding the digital economy

Libraries are already an essential portal for e-government services. The digital divide—the gap between people who are confident IT users and those without digital literacy skills and access to computers and the internet at homeis lessening now that there is universal access to the internet in public libraries.



Contributing to prosperity

Libraries contribute directly to the local economy through spending on building works and purchases, and the tax paid by employees. Another way of measuring their economic contribution is to assess how much it would cost to buy the services public libraries offer elsewhere, if indeed they were available from another provider.

There is no definitive formula, but research carried out around the world has consistently shown that for every dollar spent on public libraries, a significantly greater sum is returned to the economy. In New South Wales, a recent study has found the economic benefit to be four times the investment.



There is much more we could say, there are many more examples we could give, but the purpose of this book is to be a quick and easy pocket reference. Here are other places you can go to find more information.

Australian Library and Information Association www.alia.org.au

National and State Libraries Australasia www.nsla.org.au

Friends of Libraries Australia www.fola.org.au

Public Libraries Australia www.pla.org.au

For a list of state and territory library associations: www.alia.org.au/publiclibraries



And there is of course...



The Little Book of Public Libraries is for people who love libraries and want to share their passion with others. The Little Book of Public Libraries is based on a publication produced in the UK by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. We would like to thank MLA for granting us permission to use its original concept.

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