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Children, Early Reading and a Literate Australia

The Role of Australian Public Libraries

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Research

Research into early brain development shows that a child's ability to learn and to develop pre-literacy skills is greater if they are read to from birth.

Half a child's brain growth occurs between birth and age four

The best way to help a child's listening and speaking skills is to begin reading books with them when they are infants - babies as young as six weeks old enjoy being read to and looking at pictures.

By age two or three, children begin to develop an awareness of printed letters and words. Toddlers and preschoolers are especially ready to learn from adults reading to and with them.

The most powerful predictor of future reading success among preschoolers is awareness of the speech sounds that correspond to letters.



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The Role of Public Libraries

Helping a child become literate can no longer be thought of as the exclusive responsibility of schools

Literacy acquisition is a process that begins from birth and requires input from families, caregivers, and teachers with the growing, independent and professional support of the **public library network**

Materials to encourage the emergence of literacy skills can and are found in all public libraries e.g. free services such as access to reading materials and computers, and a vast array of other children's programming including children's 'story-time' sessions

Public libraries can and do encourage the development of emergent literacy skills in children through shared book reading, exposing children to various forms of print, playing language games and singing songs



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Why is this role important?

- There is nearly a 90% probability that a child will remain a poor reader at the end of year 4 if the child is a poor reader at the end of the year 1
- For 60%, reading is not an easily acquired skill
- 90% - 95% of the poor readers can reach average reading skills with early intervention
- If intervention comes at 9 years – 75% still have difficulty



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What have public libraries been doing?



Public libraries have been working at the coalface of childhood literacy in one form or another since their inception

Public libraries throughout Australia deliver professionally designed and developed programs, activities, services and collections that promote and develop children's literacy

Importantly these activities also support and provide education for parents on developing their child's literacy i.e. by providing them with the tools to build their child's literacy and love of reading



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Success Factors

Public libraries are inclusive (more so than many other agencies) and open to all target groups, for example children, parents and caregivers; those from our CALD communities, people with disabilities, students, young adults, seniors etc

Public libraries are viewed (and this is supported by countless surveys) as being safe, non-threatening spaces where all are welcome no matter your age, your opinions, your beliefs, your lifestyle, your address, your country of birth or your political preferences

Access - public library services are everywhere. There are still more public libraries in Australia than there are McDonalds plus many mobile libraries servicing our more remote communities. Public libraries are well placed and within relatively easy reach of most Australians



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Accessible Services





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How have we achieved so much to date with so little?

By believing strongly in what we do and that childhood literacy is one of the most important and fundamental roles of the public library

By 'begging, stealing or borrowing' ideas and resources to help us achieve our goals

By lobbying our funders for better and meaningful recognition; and better resourcing

By networking with each other locally, on a state/territory level and nationally via our associations, conferences, the Internet (blog, Wiki, email etc)

By continuing to innovate and develop ideas on a 'shoestring'



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What do we need to succeed in the future?

We need to work together and take an holistic approach to public library service delivery especially as it applies to children's literacy to deliver more consistent and equitable services, programs and resources to our immediate communities, across our states and territories and nationally

We need to work closely with all three levels of government to achieve a common platform for public libraries to provide consistent and equitable services, including children's literacy programs across Australia



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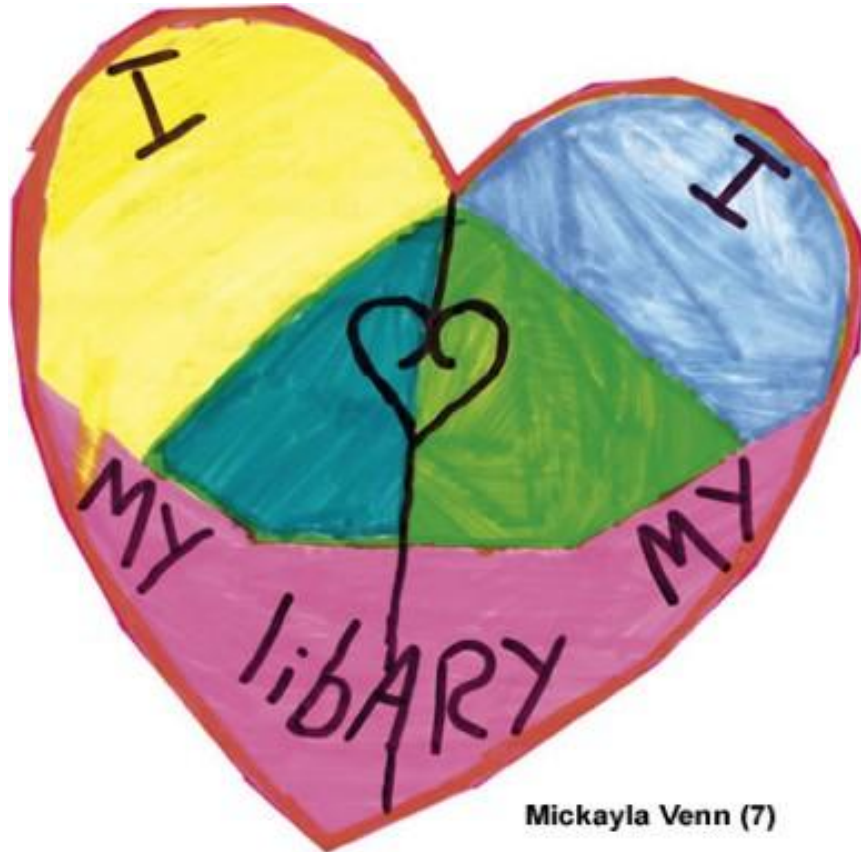
What do we need to succeed in the future?

We can achieve success by:

- Developing a public library delivery model that acts locally and thinks nationally
 - Library standards e.g. levels of service; connectivity; staffing etc
1. Developing a nationally focussed and equitable Funding Formula
 2. Achieving higher levels of government recognition and support of our important community role, especially as it applies to children's literacy and community literacy generally



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Mickayla Venn (7)

