

LIBRARIES/BUILDING/COMMUNITIES

THE VITAL CONTRIBUTION OF VICTORIA'S PUBLIC LIBRARIES – A RESEARCH REPORT
FOR THE LIBRARY BOARD OF VICTORIA AND THE VICTORIAN PUBLIC LIBRARY NETWORK

Connecting with the Community **Part B: Disadvantaged young people**

This report is one of five sections of the full **Connecting with the Community** report. The full report is available from the State Library of Victoria website: www.slv.vic.gov.au



Library Board
of Victoria



The original *Libraries Building Communities* reports were published in 2005. The reports presented the findings of the first comprehensive Australian study of the value public libraries add to their communities. The study was designed to provide information that would assist in the planning of public library services and in advocacy efforts on behalf of public libraries. It included all 44 public library services in Victoria and drew on the views of nearly 10,000 Victorians. There are four reports with an *Executive Summary*:

- Report One: *Setting the Scene* covers the concept of community building, the Victorian Government's policy agenda, the Victorian public library network, project methodology and relevant research.
- Report Two: *Logging the Benefits* outlines community views on the role and benefits of public libraries.
- Report Three: *Bridging the Gaps* provides socio-demographic profiles of library users and non-users and strategies of bridging the perceived gaps in public library service delivery.
- Report Four: *Showcasing the Best* gives over thirty examples of innovation and excellence in Victorian public libraries.

In 2006, the research continued with the *Libraries Building Communities* Library User Census and Survey Project and publication of a further two reports from this research:

- Report One: *Statewide Analysis and Comparisons*
- Report Two: *Library Services Data and Reports*

In 2007, further qualitative research was undertaken with five groups identified in the 2005 reports as 'hard to reach' for public libraries: indigenous Australians; disadvantaged young people; Horn of Africa communities; low income families; and, vulnerable learners. The outcomes of this research and ideas for engaging these groups are contained in the *Connecting with the Community* report.

In 2007, a second volume of case studies of some of the many innovative and excellent programs offered by Victorian public libraries that strengthen their communities was compiled. These are published in *Libraries Building Communities* Report Four: *Showcasing the Best, Volume 2*.

All publicly available reports related to the *Libraries Building Communities* project are available via the State Library of Victoria website: www.slv.vic.gov.au

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Introduction

The concern is that, among the 40% not using [public] libraries, there are people who are hard to reach but who would benefit enormously from what the library has to offer ... data indicates that about 13% of Victorians fall into this category.

STATE LIBRARY OF VICTORIA 2005B, P. 6

Libraries Building Communities (LBC) is a Statewide Public Library Development Project of the Library Board of Victoria undertaken through the State Library of Victoria and the Victorian public library network. Its aim is to convey to decision makers, and others, the breadth, depth and potential impact of the modern public library on the whole community.

LBC research shows that about 60% of Victorians use public library services. Of the remainder, a significant proportion give 'lifestyle' reasons for not using the library. A smaller proportion, representing about 13% of Victorians, have potentially much to gain from using library services but face considerable barriers in accessing and using these services. This group includes both people from marginalised social groups whose access to information and technology is severely limited, and people who face special difficulties in using the library (e.g. those who are housebound).

To provide a clearer picture of these 'hard-to-reach' groups, the Connecting with the Community research project has collected qualitative information about their characteristics and barriers to participation. The project report also suggests practical strategies and recommendations for meeting the specific needs of these groups.

Through discussion with the LBC Workgroup, comprising representatives of the State Library of Victoria and Victoria's public library services, the Connecting with the Community project chose to research five target groups within the population:

- Indigenous Australians
- Disadvantaged young people
- Horn of Africa communities
- Low-income families
- Vulnerable learners

The research does not suggest that all members of these population groups face barriers in accessing and using public library services. Some people within these groups are regular and passionate library users. Nor does the research suggest that these groups fully account for the 13% of Victorians who may be marginalised in their

access to information. Other groups might have been chosen.

These groups were selected on the basis that they represented populations who were thought to significantly underuse available library services. The more that public libraries know about the nature of these groups – their information needs, the factors that influence their access of information, the examples of library programs implemented in Victoria, Australia and overseas – the greater the opportunity for existing library services to be enhanced to better meet the needs of all members of the community. It is hoped that in time the proportion of Victorians who have much to gain from using library services but face barriers in accessing and using these services might no longer be 13%, but 10% or 5%, or even lower.

Research methods

I&J Management Services has worked with the State Library of Victoria and the Victorian public library network on several aspects of the Libraries Building Communities project. In 2007, it was engaged to undertake the Connecting with the Community research project.

Selection of target groups

In planning the research, the LBC Workgroup discussed potential criteria for selection of the hard-to-reach target groups that would be the focus of the project. Five broad criteria were thought to balance the arguments for and against targeting different population groups:

- **Universality** – The population target group and the findings related to that target group are relevant to the majority of Victorian public libraries.
 - **Real benefits** – The target group is likely to be interested in and benefit from access to public library services.
 - **Policy connectedness** – The target group corresponds with groups identified as socially excluded and identified as target groups in Commonwealth, state and local government policy statements.
 - **Research efficiency** – The target group is not the subject of similar research already being done in the public library system, thereby avoiding duplication of effort.
 - **Coverage** – The target group should represent a significant proportion of the 13% of Victorians in the hard-to-reach group.
- Applying these criteria and taking in to account the knowledge, experience and input of the LBC Workgroup, it was agreed that the research would focus on the following hard-to-reach target groups:
- **Indigenous Australians** – Previous LBC research and library data indicates that Indigenous Australians are generally not frequent users of library services. However, the information, literacy, educational and computer services available through public libraries are of benefit to Indigenous Australians of all age groups, including people living in rural and urban communities. Libraries could also play a role in developing and maintaining Indigenous language and cultural records.
 - **Disadvantaged young people** – This target group includes teenagers and young people who have left school early, those who are homeless or at risk of being made homeless, those in families where parents are unemployed, and young people facing other forms of social and/or economic disadvantage.
 - **Horn of Africa communities** – Humanitarian and refugee migration programs have seen a significant influx in Victoria over recent years of migrants from Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Djibouti. Aside from being a target group of interest in their own right, it was thought the issues related to library access and use by this group might be shared by other and future emerging migrant communities.
 - **Low-income families with dependent children** – A range of research reports, such as *Dropping off the Edge* (Vinson 2007), has identified families with children living in economically disadvantaged areas as facing difficulties in accessing community services that could assist their economic, educational, health

and social wellbeing. This target group includes sole parents and other families dependent on Centrelink benefits.

- **Vulnerable learners** – The skills needed in the twenty-first century workplace differ from those possessed by many older workers, long-term unemployed and people with low-level skills making the transition back to employment and learning. For many men aged over 45, women without an employment history, and people with disabilities, accessing further education and acquiring information and computer skills is critical to their capacity to participate in the workforce.

Other groups that were considered by the LBC Workgroup for attention in this research included some from broad population groups such as seniors, people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, people living in rural communities, the unemployed and people with disabilities, as well as some from more specific population groups such as homeless people, housebound people, itinerant travellers and people in detention. It was thought that subject to the findings from the five selected target groups, future research might be undertaken with these or other relevant population groups.

It was also understood that both the five target groups and those groups not included in the Connecting with the Community research project are not mutually exclusive, and that there is overlap between groups (e.g. disadvantaged young people and low-income families; vulnerable learners and the unemployed). This makes it possible to develop some understanding about library use and needs among groups not targeted by this research.

Research activities

The Connecting with the Community research project comprised three stages. The first was the process outlined above, in which the LBC Workgroup selected five groups who might benefit from greater access to and use of public library services. In addition to the selection of

these target groups, the LBC Workgroup also decided on five locations in Victoria to concentrate the field-based research activities. These were chosen as areas where it was known that library users and non-users from the respective target groups lived and might be engaged to participate in the research. The following five locations covered metropolitan, urban fringe and regional areas:

- Indigenous Australians – Shepparton.
- Disadvantaged young people – northern suburbs of Melbourne (e.g. Reservoir, Darebin).
- Horn of Africa communities – western suburbs of Melbourne (e.g. Footscray, St Albans).
- Low-income families – Hastings.
- Vulnerable learners – northern suburbs of Geelong (e.g. Corio, Norlane).

The second stage of the research involved collection of information about the factors that influence the library use of people from each target group. In effect, the research was conducted as five parallel mini-research projects, each having three distinct components.

1. Literature review – This involved a short, focused review of Australian and international literature to identify relevant research into the library use of these target groups, as well as examples of practical strategies implemented by libraries to encourage greater access to and use of library services by the target groups.

2. Interviews with community stakeholders – For each target group, this involved telephone or face-to-face interviews with a small number of stakeholders from agencies engaged in providing community support to the target group. Across the five areas these stakeholders included local government officers, youth workers, social workers, community leaders, community workers from migrant resource centres, representatives from community educational providers, staff at neighbourhood houses and community centres, and personnel from the Department of Human Services' Neighbourhood Renewal projects in relevant locations (e.g. Hastings, Corio).

3. Focus group discussions with targeted groups –

Two to four focus groups were held with each selected target group to explore perceptions of, attitudes to and use of public libraries. Participants were recruited to the groups through networks of the community stakeholders (e.g. playgroups, youth groups, ethnic community associations). Participants included some people from the target groups who used public library services and some who did not (including some who were unaware of available library services). The number of participants in each group ranged from four to twenty, with in most cases eight to twelve people involved and a total of around thirty people from each target group. Focus group participants received refreshments and were reimbursed for their contribution.

The second stage of the research also involved three focus group discussions with interested staff from Victoria's public libraries. About fifty staff members took part in three separate focus groups, each in a different location and each concentrating on one or two of the selected target population groups. The aim of these focus groups was to canvass issues related to the use of libraries by the target groups, and also to identify the innovative strategies currently being adopted by Victorian public libraries to attract and engage these target groups. The three focus groups were:

- Indigenous Australians and Horn of Africa communities – East Melbourne Library.
- Disadvantaged young people and low-income families – Dandenong Library.
- Vulnerable learners – Broadmeadows Library.

The final stage of the Connecting with the Community research project was the writing of this report. The report has been structured to document the findings of the overall project and highlight the findings related to individual target groups. The introductory section of the report contains the research objectives, information on research methods, presentation of a set of Principles of User Engagement and a summary of the overall findings.

The body of the report is presented in five parts, each dedicated to one of the selected target groups. These self-contained research reports have:

- 1 A description of the selected target group.
- 2 A description of the group's primary library and information needs.
- 3 Ideas and lessons for engaging the target group from libraries in Victoria, Australia and overseas, based on the literature review, the staff focus groups and information provided by the LBC Workgroup.
- 4 Discussion of factors that can inhibit access to and use of library services by the target group.
- 5 Discussion of actions that Victorian public libraries might take to increase productive library use among the target group and build connections with the community.
- 6 References and further reading relevant to the research.

Information about strategies to engage other population groups could, if desired, also be presented as self-contained reports in this format, reflecting as these do the Principles of User Engagement described in the next section of this report.

Additional information about the individual research approaches adopted with each target group is contained in the report on each group.

Principles of user engagement

In undertaking the Libraries Building Communities Connecting with the Community research project, a number of common principles emerged that could underlie the effective engagement of hard-to-reach library users.

These principles apply to the engagement of all library users, including the general population and, within this, the selected target groups. They describe a desired outcome, not the method or process by which the outcome can be achieved (e.g. increasing engagement

Principle	
Awareness	Ensure all targeted user groups are aware of available library services.
Engagement	Create places and spaces that are accessible, inviting, engaging and comfortable for each targeted user group.
Collections, programs and services	Provide collections, programs and services that meet the library and information needs of each targeted user group.
Policies and procedures	Implement policies and procedures that maximise access to library services and allow all library users to have an enjoyable library experience.
Customer service	Ensure library staff have the motivation, capacity and resources to engage and support library users.

through provision of opportunities for users to contribute to library planning, activities and programs), as this may vary from library to library, or between user groups. The principles are provided for guidance, and are not intended as a complete recipe for widespread and effective community engagement with public libraries.

The application of these principles to each of the research target groups is discussed in the individual research reports. The principles are broadly used as the basis for discussing the library and information needs of the target groups, the factors that inhibit or constrain their use of library services, and the strategies libraries might adopt to increase community engagement.

Summary

The Libraries Building Communities initiative aims to convey to decision makers, and others, the breadth, depth and potential impact on the whole community of the modern public library. Libraries are immensely important to their communities – culturally, economically and socially:

Libraries collect and disseminate information; they provide comfortable and convenient places for people to read and learn; their physical spaces form meeting places for community groups; being free and open for all they help to create a fairer society ... [Public libraries are] highly valued by the communities they serve, and are uniquely placed to draw a diverse range of people and groups together (State Library of Victoria 2005a, p. 5).

The Connecting with the Community project has undertaken research to enable library managers and staff to better understand some marginalised and disadvantaged population groups that tend not to be library users. It is estimated that about 13% of Victorians have potentially much to gain from using libraries but face barriers in accessing and using these services. People in this group could benefit from the educational, recreational and social information resources and programs provided by Victoria's public libraries, but are unaware of or disengaged from library services. These are people from marginalised social groups whose access to information and technology is severely limited, and people who face special difficulties in using the library. These are people that libraries find hard to reach through their normal communication and networking activities.

This research is focused on collection of information that will provide a clearer picture of these hard-to-reach groups – their characteristics and barriers to participation. The report aims to suggest practical strategies and recommendations for meeting the specific needs of these groups. It also aims to enable Victoria's public library network to enhance the capacity and connectedness of Victorian communities.

Taking into account issues of relevance, benefits, policy connectedness, coverage and research efficiency, the LBC Workgroup selected five population groups to be the target of this research:

- Indigenous Australians
- Disadvantaged young people
- Horn of Africa communities
- Low-income families
- Vulnerable learners

These groups were selected on the basis that they represented populations who were thought to significantly underuse available library services. The more that public libraries know about the nature of these groups – their information needs, the factors that influence their access of information, the examples of library programs implemented in Victoria, Australia and overseas – the greater the opportunity for existing library services to be enhanced to better meet the needs of all members of the community.

The research does not suggest that all members of these population groups face barriers in accessing and using public library services. Nor does the research suggest that these groups fully cover the 13% of Victorians who may be marginalised in their access to information. Other groups might have been chosen. The research does not provide a cure-all to the challenges faced by these groups in accessing library services, nor a complete outreach strategy for every library. The research does not anticipate that every library will implement all of the programs and initiatives referenced in this report. Like any public institution, libraries cannot be all things to all people. The research emphasises the need to distinguish the important community role of library staff from that

of a welfare or social worker. It highlights the importance of libraries working closely with community health centres, child and migrant welfare agencies and other organisations that are able to complement the work of libraries by providing this type of support.

However, it is intended that the information contained in each of the individual sections of this report will be considered by library services as they assess the profile, characteristics and service needs of their local community. It is hoped that the challenges faced by these groups are better understood, and that methods of connecting with communities can be enhanced.

- Indigenous Australians are often unaware of what libraries have to offer, and feel uncomfortable in an unfamiliar environment. But if their library were a meeting place, a centre for bringing together information about Indigenous language and culture, then young and old they would come, they would share and they would learn.
- Disadvantaged young people want access to information, access to technology, and they want it now. There is information they need for educational and employment purposes; there is information they need to access community services. Libraries could be the place they come to for that information, if libraries had spaces and environments that were inviting, comfortable and entertaining.
- Horn of Africa communities in Victoria have been displaced, and are seeking connections: connections with one another; connections with their homeland, culture and traditions; and connections with their new home. They need to know what libraries have to offer. They need to develop English language and literacy skills. They need access to computers and information technology skills. They need access to information on jobs and community services. Libraries can work with these communities and their community leaders to fulfil these needs.
- Low-income families could benefit from many existing library services if they knew what was available: storytime for children, free access to the Internet, free access to books and magazines, support for skills development, and information on community

and employment services. These families need to be encouraged to come to and experience a modern public library. They need to feel welcomed and comfortable and able to take a little time out to read and take advantage of their library.

- Vulnerable learners are on the fringe of the workforce. They need access to information on education and employment opportunities. They need to develop information, literacy and information technology skills that are becoming essential in the workplace. They need to be encouraged to be lifelong learners. Many have not been in a public library for years, and once they find out about the resources, services and programs that libraries have to offer they can start to integrate their library into their learning plans.

The Connecting with the Community research aims to be a source of information and ideas that assist libraries to improve the quality and reach of service provision to give those who stand to benefit most the chance to access and use their local library. It is intended that this information promote discussion and community engagement.

It is hoped that in time the proportion of Victorians who have much to gain from using library services but face barriers in accessing and using these services might no longer be 13%, but 10% or 5% or even lower.

References

State Library of Victoria 2005a, *Libraries Building Communities: Executive Summary*, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

State Library of Victoria 2005b, *Libraries Building Communities Report Three: Bridging the Gaps*, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

Vinson, T 2007, *Dropping off the Edge: The Distribution of Disadvantage in Australia*, Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia, Melbourne.

Part B: Disadvantaged young people

Get to know young people on their own territory before inviting them to the library. This might mean spending time doing things which are completely unrelated to reading ...

THE READING AGENCY 2008

B1 Disadvantaged young people

Background

Many young people use and are familiar with public libraries. Many parents bring young children to storytime at their library, and many children participate in school holiday programs involving books, storytelling, reading and other creative activities. School-age children attend homework clubs, and students of all levels – primary, secondary and tertiary – use their local libraries for research and to access the Internet.

However, this pattern of use is not universal, and there are some families with children who have little or no recent experience of public libraries. Library usage figures also show a decline in library membership and active use of libraries by older teenagers and young people after their secondary education.

The focus of this aspect of the Connecting with the Community research project has been on young people aged 15 to 24 years who are socioeconomically disadvantaged – including those who are living in poverty or on very low incomes. There are no exact figures on how many young Victorians fall into this category but data from the Brotherhood of St Laurence (Boese & Scutella 2006) and Mission Australia (2004) suggest that it is in the order of 6–16% of the population of young people in this age group. This corresponds to between 40,000 and 100,000 young people, or from about 1–2% of the total Victorian population. The lower figure is considered very conservative and indicates the number of young people living in ‘entrenched poverty’.

It is estimated that half of these disadvantaged young people live at home and about 60% are male (Mission Australia 2003). They often live in families where the head of the family is unemployed, is a sole parent, or, if a parent is employed, they are part of the ‘working poor’.

Some groups within the community are overrepresented in the population of disadvantaged young people. Indigenous young people are much more concentrated in the lower end of the income distribution; this reflects the large proportion of the Indigenous population not in employment. Young refugees, asylum seekers,

newly arrived migrants and youth from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are also more likely to experience poverty than other young people. Between 1996 and 2001, young people aged between 16 and 24 years formed almost one-third of the total intake under Australia's humanitarian migration program, compared with 14% of the Australian population aged between 15 and 24 years. About one-third of these young people settled in Victoria (Ransley & Drummond, cited in Boese & Scutella 2006).

Many disadvantaged young people live in neighbourhoods that face heavy pressures of poverty, unemployment, family stress and racism (Vinson 2007). In these areas, there are often limited educational opportunities, limited access to government and community services, and few public resources such as parks and recreational and cultural facilities.

The implications of disadvantage for young people

Low socioeconomic status impacts negatively on wellbeing, and particularly affects literacy and numeracy. Young people with literacy and numeracy problems have severely limited opportunities and are more likely not to complete secondary school or move into further education. They are also more likely to face periods of unemployment later in life and experience long-term economic disadvantage (Boese & Scutella 2006).

Writing on this issue, Horin (2007) notes that Australia has a 'long tail of underperforming students' and that:

... for all our illusions about being egalitarian, family background plays a bigger role in determining school success here than in many places. Our school system, how it is funded and organised, is less effective than many in compensating for social disadvantage.

The achievement gap between average students and those from a low socioeconomic background is bigger than in many comparable countries. Horin quotes from Vinson's study (2007) to highlight the central role of

limited education in the web of problems that lock people into poverty. From leaving school early, threads run to limited computer use, poor work skills and low income, as well as high imprisonment and high unemployment rates. Lower rates of computer ownership and Internet access in low socioeconomic households suggest that computer access for young people in these households is lower than for other young people (Muir et al., cited in Boese & Scutella 2006).

As noted in the Mission Australia report (2004), children and young people living in poverty are more likely to experience adult poverty, with a huge cost to them and to society generally. The impacts of poverty result in higher expenditure on health, social welfare, education and the criminal justice system, as well as lost opportunity to the economy as young people do not meet their full potential.

Findings from the three last National Health Surveys (1989–90, 1995 and 2001) suggest that socioeconomically disadvantaged groups experience more ill health, and are more likely to engage in behaviours risky to their health (e.g. smoking) (ABS 2008). They are also less likely to have access to the medical care they require.

Accessing affordable and secure accommodation is a major issue for young people in low-paid work, insecure employment and for those who receive government benefits. Homelessness may be the only option when housing is unaffordable. Mission Australia (2004) notes that young people aged 12 to 24 years made up an estimated 36% of all homeless people in Australia on Census night in 2001. Young people aged 15 to 19 years are also the largest client group in the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, followed by those aged 20 to 24 years. Unsatisfactory housing can contribute to poor health, family violence and poor educational outcomes.

Many socioeconomically disadvantaged young people are socially excluded: they experience social isolation and lack the opportunity to participate in their community. Recreational activities and access to social and cultural resources are vital for personal

fulfillment and physical and emotional development, and can offer alternatives to antisocial behaviour. Access to these resources is influenced by location, gender, socioeconomic status and ethnicity.

Without the social connections established through school or work, young people are increasingly left to their own devices and often have dwindling material and non-material resources. The potential net effect is a sense of being disenfranchised by the community (Mission Australia 2003).

The stresses associated with disadvantage can contribute to young people having disrupted and unstable family lives. Conflicts can lead to young people disconnecting from their family. Without a stable home environment, there may be problems staying on at school, and the data shows that the employment options for young people who do not complete their secondary education are severely curtailed.

B2 Library and information needs

Public library services have a critical role in developing opportunities and resources for young people that are educative, social, participative, and empowering (Morrison & Roach, cited in Vincent 2000).

A comprehensive review of literature on library services and discussions with community members through the Connecting with the Community research project have identified the main library and information needs of disadvantaged young people. In some cases, these needs are shared by all young people, regardless of their relative level of advantage or disadvantage. However, in general the compounding effect of socioeconomic disadvantage strengthens the importance of disadvantaged young people having access to the following library and information services.

Library and information needs: Disadvantaged young people

Equal access to computers, the Internet, books and information resources.

Information skills and IT skills essential to education and employment.

Access to information on health, housing and other issues relevant to young people.

Library services in their space.

Support and encouragement in accessing library services.

Equal access to computers and information resources

There is concern in Victoria, echoing the concern documented in the United Kingdom (Vincent 2000), that children from wealthier homes use libraries and borrow library books more frequently than children from low-income families. Children and young people living in poverty are seen as an underserved library patron group due to a variety of factors. For example, their parents may not understand or appreciate the value and importance of independent reading for their children and may not be aware of the wide range of services and materials available at the public library. In poorer families, parents or guardians may not be able to afford books, resources or computers needed to support young people with their study. Libraries offer an important complement or alternative to school-based learning environments, especially for young people at risk of disengaging from school.

Libraries can also offer otherwise disadvantaged young people equal opportunities to access information and cultural/recreational products (such as Internet games and music).

It is also important that public libraries provide access to computers and the Internet because, as noted in section B1 of this report, disadvantaged young people are less likely to have this available at home. Libraries can help

to provide more equitable access to computers and the Internet. For young people who cannot otherwise access computers – at home, school, a relative or friend’s home, a neighbourhood house or Internet café – public libraries can provide an access point of ‘last resort’. Access to information technology is also growing in importance as it starts to be seen by government and other service providers as a way of offering solutions to exclusion problems (e.g. through community support websites, alerts and advice sent by mobile phone) (Social Exclusion Unit 2005).

Information and information technology skills

In the United Kingdom, the Department for Education and Skills has labelled competency in information technology the third basic skill (in addition to literacy and numeracy). Libraries have a specific role in supporting the development of young people’s reading skills and can encourage and nurture young people’s literacy and information skills. These skills are crucial for giving young people access to further educational opportunities, work, the political debate, socialising and technological development. As a neutral community resource, libraries have the potential to offer young people informal learning opportunities where formal education and/or home learning support are not effective.

Access to information for young people

Public libraries can play a key role in providing accessible information on subjects such as health, housing, drugs, sex education and sexuality. The level of information provision currently available for teenagers in these areas is often poor.

Given the relatively high levels of unemployment among young people, public libraries also have a role providing information on welfare benefits and training opportunities. Unemployed teenagers taking advantage of training opportunities are also likely to rely on the public library as an informal means of studying.

Library services in their space

Access to public libraries can be an issue for some young people, particularly in areas where there is little or no

public transport, and they have no alternative means of getting to or from libraries. This particularly affects young people in rural and outer suburban areas.

However, in addition to being physically accessible, young people also want to be in places and spaces that they find welcoming, undemanding, stimulating, socially engaging and matching their expectations for immediate and unrestricted access to information and resources. Young people like to be able to make a space their own domain.

Support and encouragement

There is a tendency in some research and literature to equate being socially disadvantaged with being dysfunctional and having behavioural problems. This is not true for the majority of young disadvantaged people. Most do not provide specific challenges for library services beyond their need for more intense support and encouragement. However, in some instances particular behavioural problems can require attention. Library services at West Torrens in South Australia and Sighthill in Edinburgh both provide examples of positive approaches to tackling these issues (see section B3).

Being actively involved in library services, or any coordinated community activity or facility, can give disadvantaged young people a sense of belonging, dignity and self-worth – feelings they may not experience in other areas of their life.

B3 Ideas and lessons

Victorian public libraries and their counterparts interstate and overseas have implemented a range of programs to support the library and information needs of young people:

- study groups and yourtutor database services to help with homework (e.g. Whitehorse Manningham Regional Library Corporation);
- young adult collections;
- Youth Week activities and other creative entertainment and recreational activities (e.g. bands, art classes);
- Xbox games;

- Virtual Library where young people can access a site through their library card to chat and ask questions about libraries;
- access to Internet, MySpace, chat sites and blogs;
- programs for students undertaking the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (e.g. Stonnington Library and Information Service);
- involving young people in focus groups to discuss ways in which libraries can better meet their needs (e.g. Yarra Plenty Regional Library Service, Darebin Libraries);
- volunteering opportunities (e.g. Auslan storytime at Frankston Library Service).

These types of activities apply to all young people, including those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged.

Other examples of programs and initiatives specifically targeting disadvantaged youth, and which have been adopted elsewhere in Australia and overseas, are provided here, with additional references in section B6.

Their Reading Futures, United Kingdom

Their Reading Futures is a program for libraries in the United Kingdom, to help them deliver the best possible reader development services for young people. The program's website (www.theirreadingfutures.org.uk) provides a range of learning packages and resources for library staff and includes information on many issues, including involving young people in shaping libraries, and the contribution of libraries to young people's health, safety and wellbeing.

The site includes a section on involving hard-to-reach young people, which provides twenty 'top tips' for engaging hard-to-reach young people in libraries (The Reading Agency 2008).

- 1 Work in partnership with workers who are experienced in working with hard-to-reach young people. They are also likely to have contact with the kind of young people you want to involve.
- 2 Spend time building up relationships with young people. It may take time for them to trust you.
- 3 Get to know young people on their own territory before inviting them to the library. This might mean spending time doing things which are completely unrelated to reading, such as playing pool or going climbing.
- 4 Spend at least twice as much time listening to young people as talking.
- 5 Don't try to be cool! Be yourself. Young people respond well to people who are genuine and caring, regardless of their age or 'street cred'.
- 6 Persevere. Hard-to-reach young people are used to being let down by adults and may try to test you. Keep going back for more and you will earn their trust and respect.
- 7 Don't try to impose your own values on hard-to-reach young people. 'Bad' language is part of their culture and through questioning it you will instantly lose their interest. If you feel responsible for them when in public situations, such as the library, politely point out that their language could be offending other people.
- 8 Smile! A friendly smile goes a long way to breaking down barriers.
- 9 Keep rules to a minimum. If you need to set ground rules for behaviour, involve young people in formulating their own group code of conduct.
- 10 Be positive. Offer praise for every achievement, however small it seems.
- 11 Consider how you position yourself in relation to young people. Avoid standing over them or positioning yourself behind desks or at the front of classrooms. Join young people on their level by sitting on the floor or arranging chairs in a circle. This helps young people to relax and dispels any school associations.
- 12 Bear in mind that the world of books and libraries is likely to be very alien to hard-to-reach young people. Don't expect them to have read anything at all. Never try to get to know them by asking them about their reading habits.

- 13 Don't assume that young people are able to read and write. A large number of hard-to-reach young people struggle with literacy. Never rely on young people to read things out, take notes or understand written instructions.
- 14 Don't make judgements or assumptions about young people. They are all individuals and their interests and experiences are endlessly surprising.
- 15 Ask young people for their views about libraries and demonstrate that you will take them seriously. Hard-to-reach young people love to feel listened to and valued.
- 16 Get to know young people's interests and gradually introduce books which they will personally relate to. This shows that you have listened and that you care.
- 17 Ask young people what activities they would like to do and see if they can help you put on those activities in the library.
- 18 Use incentives such as refreshments and vouchers.
- 19 To share reading materials, start with magazines. Look at quizzes, facts and horoscopes – these will open up discussions.
- 20 Many hard-to-reach young people will have previous defaults on library materials. A clean slate approach will take away a huge barrier.

Sighthill Library Youth Work, Edinburgh City Libraries and Information Service, Scotland

This project has successfully removed barriers that were contributing to the social exclusion of young people in Sighthill, and has given them the opportunity to access services that have helped them to develop reading, literacy, learning and life skills (Milne 2006).

Sighthill Library is a small community library that serves one of the more deprived communities in Edinburgh, where 18% of those available to work are unemployed and one-quarter of households are classed as being below the low-income threshold. The work of the library is extremely community centred and library staff regularly work with key partners in community education, youth work and community safety.

For several years, the library service had suffered from an increasing amount of antisocial behaviour involving young people – a problem that impacted on the effective operation of the library as well as affecting the local community in general. It was recognised that simply excluding young people from the library was having no impact on their unacceptable behaviour, and was only moving the problem outside the library and encouraging a culture of confrontation between local young people and library staff and users.

The Library Officer Team devised a strategy to enable library staff to address the antisocial behaviour in the community in a more positive way. This involved working closely with key partners to deliver a program of imaginative activities and events for young people. This has included:

- A youth video project – Staff work with 16- to 18-year-olds to make videos about local life. This trains them in professional skills, such as creative writing and filming, before they go to college, and it does wonders for their confidence.
- The Reading the Game activity – Participants who play football as Sighthill United against other youth and local teams also take part in football-related reading and literacy projects.
- Setting up a number of clubs and groups – These encourage young people to use the library in a positive way; they include a fortnightly Gamers Workshop, where library staff show young people how to design computer games and improve their gaming skills.
- Youth Boox – This harnesses young people's own tastes by allowing them to choose CDs and books for the library within a set budget.

By opening up new opportunities and reducing antisocial behaviour in the area by up to 60%, the library's work has had a dramatic impact on the lives of the young people and the community.

Breaking barriers: libraries and socially excluded communities, Canada

In this paper, Annette DeFaveri (2005) examines what stops socially excluded people in Canada from using

the public library and she examines approaches for overcoming these barriers. DeFaveri notes that low-income young adults frequently associate the library with their school experience, which may have been hostile and isolating. They feel that, like their schools, the library is an authoritarian institution, which imposes its values and behavioural norms on them. The challenge for the libraries is to show young adults that the library is an inclusive and respectful organisation that strives to represent and include all community members. DeFaveri notes some possible approaches to achieving this inclusion:

- Host youth events and ceremonies in the library. For example, invite young adults to hold their graduation ceremony at the library or host an evening of readings by young people.

Once the young adults felt comfortable in the library, once they believed that they were part of the community entitled to use the library, the library could offer access to its collections, programs, and services (DeFaveri 2005, p. 3).

- Put more emphasis on welcoming new users.

New patrons can be welcomed graciously as the jewel in the service model crown. Librarians could register people in person, take the opportunity to talk about the patron's reasons for coming in to the library, to ask if other family members need cards, and give a tour of the branch resources (DeFaveri 2005, p. 2).

DeFaveri believes this investment of time would help personalise the library and make it relevant to new patrons.

- Host public information programs on social issues. DeFaveri notes that hosting programs offsite and establishing book clubs that initially meet offsite, perhaps in local neighbourhood centres familiar to people who live in poverty, is a starting point to get these families interested in public library services.

She suggests that at first the librarian or volunteer coordinator might read short selections to the group aloud and lead a discussion of them, then work towards having the group members read the selections aloud. Eventually the group might feel comfortable enough to meet at the library.

DeFaveri argues that encouraging community inclusiveness should be promoted to staff as an added skill rather than an added duty. To accomplish this, she notes that staff needs to understand the advantages of bringing new users to the library and how this is a reflection of the library's core mission and values and not an extracurricular activity.

finding MY place!, Ruth Faulkner Public Library, Western Australia

finding MY place! aims to retain students in education by showing them how exciting learning can be. The program is a partnership between the Ruth Faulkner Public Library in the City of Belmont and the Department of Education and Training; it assists at-risk students aged 15 to 19 years to remain in a learning environment. finding MY place! uses the public library as an alternative 'no stress' learning environment as the setting for a series of 10 library-based workshops. The workshops are designed to motivate and engage students in activities that highlight their natural abilities. Students get a chance to explore careers in art, music, sports, fitness, make-up, and apprenticeships and traineeships in many occupations. In motivational workshops, students learn of the consequences of alcohol and drug abuse, the importance of health and wellbeing, and why it is better not to be on the 'bad' side of the law.

Since its beginnings at the Ruth Faulkner Public Library this initiative has been taken up by many public libraries across Australia, including several in Victoria (e.g. Darebin Libraries (see below), Yarra Plenty Regional Library).

For more information see: www.vetinfonet.det.wa.edu.au/vet/find-my-plac.aspx

finding MY place!, Darebin Libraries, Victoria

In 2007, Darebin Libraries and Reservoir District Secondary College trialled the finding MY place! program to provide better career guidance and employment preparation for local disadvantaged youth. Based on an initiative developed by the West Australian Department of Education and Training and the City of Belmont Library Services (see above), ten workshops were run for a group of year 10 students during school hours at the local library. Workshops were run by a variety of presenters on topics including: goal setting, self-esteem, interview skills, further education, creative skills, health and personal presentation. The workshops were designed to enable students to experience an alternative learning environment, and encourage them to remain in learning and to motivate them, foster self-esteem and prepare them for life beyond the classroom and entry into the workforce. As a central and widely known community service accessible to young people, the public library is able to complement existing education, training and career development opportunities.

Youth Strategy, West Torrens Library Service, South Australia

When the new Hilton Library in Adelaide was opened in 2004, young people, including many who were newly arrived in Australia as refugees, were quick to adopt it as their space. However, as library staff note, this was accompanied by a number of behavioural issues that had to be addressed:

Behaviour included rowdy, sometimes threatening actions towards staff and other customers, fights, obscene language, damage, furniture throwing etc. Police visits were becoming commonplace along with a growing file of complaints from other customers (Cathcart n.d., p. 2).

To tackle these issues, library staff and partners developed a package of strategies, including:

- A Code of Conduct – This sets out some basic rules of behaviour. To ensure their credibility, the rules were developed in collaboration with the youth themselves.

These have been produced in a simple and pictorial format.

- Partnerships to assist the library to develop strategies to deal with behavioural problems and develop the skills for managing these:
 - The Multicultural Resource Centre located an African youth worker who was in the library for a few nights each week. His brief was to facilitate mutual understanding between young people and library staff and explain the Code of Conduct. He also worked with the young people on developing and performing a concert; this provided an opportunity for him, and library staff, to work closely with the young people and foster the beginnings of a relationship. The youth worker was able to correct some very basic misunderstandings that had been caused by miscommunication.
 - South Australia Police Cadets have run weekly youth games nights at the library, which provide an enjoyable activity for young people while reinforcing the Code of Conduct.
 - Through a partnership with two local schools, the library ran a finding MY place! program providing weekly sessions on life skills. The sessions varied from basic cooking and nutrition to where to buy secondhand clothes for job interviews and where to get advice on drugs issues.
- Development of a youth area and facilities – The library purchased some more Xboxes and added a sound post to enable listening to music and a games PC. Additional collections were established to cater for youth interests, including CDs, DVDs, graphic novels and magazines, as well as the traditional youth fiction collection.
- Homework help sessions – Two sessions are run each week, one specialist session for newly arrived students (in partnership with the Australian Refugee Association) and another session for all comers.

Since adopting this approach, complaints from library patrons decreased, there is greater acceptance and understanding between young people and other library users, and staff have a more confident and comfortable relationship with young people.

verbYL, Livingstone Libraries and Arts Services, Queensland

Livingstone Shire Council on the central Queensland coast operates full service and small community branches, with a special emphasis on young people. verbYL is a youth lounge provided by the youth and library services of Livingstone Shire Council for all youth between the ages of 13 and 25. verbYL (www.verbYL.com.au/hp-what.html) was first conceived of by the council's library and community development departments after consultation with the youth of the area about the lack of services and activities for young people. What they wanted most was a place of their own where they could meet, relax and enjoy themselves in a safe, secure environment where everyone was welcome.

Together the youth council and shire council developed verbYL, which is staffed by both youth workers and library staff and provides many combined services – including information referral, counselling, study help, tax help and general fun. Within the space at Yeppoon are Internet-capable computers for chat, gaming or study; a Nintendo Wii, PlayStation, Xbox, Xbox 360 and handheld Nintendo DS; and board games for loan within the space. DVDs, books, console games, graphic novels, CDs and magazines are available to use, both within verbYL and for borrowing. verbYL holds regular games and events for young people. Membership is free for all young people between the ages of 13 and 25.

One library coordinator's blog, Real Public Librarian (2006), includes many posts on the issues of attracting young people to libraries and looks at the challenges and opportunities of offering a totally inclusive youth library. A 2006 post notes that when librarians talk about inclusive library services:

In many cases attention is focused on the resources needed in existing and new libraries to attract youth – funky furniture, some electronic resources, the Internet, maybe some music listening posts. These are thought to be some of the necessary ingredients for a successful 'hang out' space within the library (Real Public Librarian 2006).

For libraries that are serious about engaging with young people, including those that may bring some behavioural problems with them, and noting that librarians are not social workers, the blogger argues:

... you need the serious help and commitment of human service professionals working with you. In fact it takes the efforts of the whole community to help these youth, and there are incredible opportunities for librarians to make a significant contribution ...

... the ideal is to maintain a critical proportion of 'mainstream' kids to 'at risk' kids who are using the space ... So you need to be fighting on two fronts – tempering the behaviour of the 'at risk' youth, while at the same time fostering understanding, tolerance and resilience by the broader youth community and encouraging them to keep coming. You may have to face the harsh reality that some mainstream kids will not feel sufficiently safe or resilient enough to want to use the space under any circumstances (Real Public Librarian 2006).

Tupu Youth Library, Manukau Libraries, New Zealand

Tupu Youth Library in Clover Park, a growth suburb on the outskirts of Auckland, opened its doors on 14 August 2001. It was New Zealand's first, and remains its only, public library dedicated to young people aged 5 to 19 years old.

The need for a library in Clover Park had been identified by the local council in 1996. At that time, the neighbourhood was characterised by its ethnic diversity (approximately 53% of the population were Pacific Islanders and 25% Maori); its youth (43% of the population were aged under 20 years); low education levels (48% had no formal qualifications); high unemployment and very low incomes (38% received unemployment benefits) (Dorner 2003). It was an area of extreme disadvantage.

The idea behind the Tupu Youth Library was to help break the poverty cycle by supporting learning among young people. For this reason, it was intended to have a strong information technology focus and an emphasis on resources for youth (Dorner 2003). It needed to provide space for study and learning, as well as a place for young people to ‘hang out’; it also needed to be located in a place where residents of all ages felt comfortable gathering. A site in a local park was chosen for its proximity to schools, homes and other recreational facilities that were already well-used by the community, such as basketball courts and a children’s playground.

In 1996, and again in 2000, the council undertook an extensive program of consultation with the local community to gain a full understanding of the needs to be addressed by the new facility (Dorner 2003). Hundreds of interviews, focus groups and meetings with community groups took place. Those consulted included local residents, both library users and non-users; school principals; church groups and not-for-profit groups providing support services to the unemployed; as well as school students at all levels. A local gang, on whose ‘turf’ the library was to be built, was also consulted, resulting in a decision by the council to build a new basketball court adjacent to the new library to replace the court that would be removed when the library was built.

Many features of the Tupu Youth Library reflect the wishes of the community to provide music listening posts; a homework study centre; an information technology centre with access to the Internet and a wide range of software, online and print non-fiction collections to support the curriculum; large paperback youth fiction collections; and Maori and Pacific Island collections maintained by people in the local community. Many programs are run for young people, including literacy programs and homework help clubs supported by qualified teachers supplied by the Ministry for Education.

Most importantly, in response to advice from the community, Tupu Youth Library both looks and feels Polynesian. It is a long narrow building with floor-to-ceiling windows throughout to reflect a *fale*, a Samoan

house. The internal walls and carpet feature a bright floral design. The tops of the service desks incorporate a *tapa* (bark) cloth decorated with traditional Samoan motifs. Pacific Island and Maori artworks are dotted throughout the library. Most staff members are Polynesian. The library even has a Polynesian name: *tupu* means ‘new growth’ in many Polynesian languages. Tupu allows Polynesian people, especially youth, to feel welcome.

In 2003, Tupu Youth Library won New Zealand’s 3M Innovation in Libraries ‘Supreme Award’ and was also showcased at the 69th World Library and Information Congress in Berlin.

B4 Accessing and using library services

The Connecting with the Community research conducted focus groups with young people from disadvantaged areas and community organisations with an interest in supporting their access to public library services. These identified a number of significant factors that influence the use of libraries by disadvantaged young people. These are summarised below.

Factors influencing library use: Disadvantaged young people	
Engagement	Perceptions of libraries as old, quiet and bookish places of learning. Do not feel physically or emotionally comfortable in libraries. Authority figures promote library use.
Collections, programs and services	Limited interest in services provided by libraries.

Perceptions of libraries

Young people generally see libraries as big, old, clean buildings that are quiet places of learning attended and staffed by bookish, ‘nerdy’ and often older people. These perceptions are, of course, coloured by their individual experience, but across a range of young people from

disadvantaged areas interviewed during this research these perceived attributes of libraries were the most widely shared.

These perceptions of libraries were not always expressed negatively, with young people also saying that libraries seemed to be relaxing, calm and peaceful places for learning, researching and listening. Libraries were seen to be most relevant to people wanting to learn, school kids and ‘nerds’, or older adults and senior citizens. This, for some young people, adds up to ‘boring’ and not a place where they want to be.

Comfort levels

To some, a place with the attributes described above might have enormous appeal. However, to many young people, and in particular those with limited interest in learning, this sort of library is not a place in which they feel physically or emotionally comfortable, and is not a place they would choose to be in their spare time.

While finding it hard to explain what they meant by not being comfortable, young people did make the following comments:

It smells funny; too geeky; it doesn't feel right; I don't want to be seen at the library; there are people watching; I got told off; you've got to walk past the front desk; couldn't we just sit on the floor.

The factors that contribute to these feelings of discomfort among some young people are related to building structures and design, furnishings and décor (‘If I read at home I don’t sit on the kitchen chair’); expectations about noise levels and behaviour; and lack of immediacy in accessing computers and resources (‘I can’t just jump on a computer’).

At the same time, for some disadvantaged young people the fact that libraries are open, warm and safe makes them an inviting place to be. This is a level of security that they may not find in other places.

Authority figures promote library use

Parents and teachers are generally the people most likely to encourage a young person’s access to and use of library services. Their motivation for promoting library use is primarily educational, perceiving benefits in developing good reading habits, enhancing information skills and supporting leisure interests.

Young people’s attitudes and behaviours are increasingly being shaped by peer behaviour and ‘group think’. Advice from persons in positions of authority is not always an encouragement to engage, and in some cases is a clear disincentive to use libraries. For disadvantaged young people, where relationships with parents and teachers may be even less supportive, or in conflict, the influence of peers may be even greater.

This, of course, creates challenges for library staff when young people are at the library because staff are also clearly in positions of authority, power and knowledge in the library environment.

Limited interest in library services

Young people participating in this research indicated a moderate level of awareness of the sorts of services offered by most modern libraries. Young people generally knew that they could go to their library to access computers and Internet free of charge, read magazines, get books, borrow DVDs and CDs, use photocopiers and printers, study and participate in library programs. These young people commonly had a family member or friend who was a library user, although interestingly these persons tended to be female – mum, a sister or grandmother. This knowledge of library services was not equally shared, but the feedback suggests that, unlike many other hard-to-reach groups for whom lack of awareness of what services libraries provide is a critical issue, this is not a factor that limits engagement of disadvantaged young people with public libraries.

The more significant finding is that many young people have limited interest in what libraries have to offer them. Their primary information and resource needs revolve around technology: the main reason they might

use a library would be to access computers to gain information, access support and government services, or assist with study if they are still in the education system. Accessing DVDs, CDs and magazines is of some interest as these also engage young people through visual and spatial attributes. Although the 2006 Libraries Building Communities survey of Victorian public library users found that more than 90% of adult users access books when they come to the library, books and other information resources tend to hold little appeal for young people once they are out of school and a formalised learning situation (State Library of Victoria 2006). In fact, almost all young people who had not been to a library for some time said their last library use had been for study purposes. Access to books is almost never the main reason a young person would want to go to a library.

The next issue is that depending on the level of disadvantage experienced by a young person, if there are other places where a young person feels more comfortable accessing technology to get the information they want (e.g. a friend's or relative's place, a neighbourhood house, an Internet café), then public libraries are seen as being of limited value.

B5 Connecting with the community

A range of potential responses from Victorian public libraries to the findings of the Connecting with the Community research project with regard to disadvantaged young people is presented below.

However, these need to be prefaced by acknowledging one interpretation and response to the findings of this research that is in essence also true of all population subgroups who individually have diverse information and resource needs. That is, some disadvantaged young people tend to have limited interest in libraries as they currently exist, especially if they are no longer at school and do not have specific learning objectives. These young people do not see libraries as a comfortable place, and, with access to technology their main reason for using a library, if alternatives exist they are more likely to go elsewhere. For some young people libraries are a place they choose not to be:

When library staff already feel stretched in trying to serve people who do use the library, it's easy to understand why some might feel that hard-to-reach young people are one group whose needs might be better served elsewhere (The Reading Agency 2008).

Opportunities for libraries to reach out to communities: Disadvantaged young people

Engagement	Take libraries to the young people.
Library programs and collections	Leverage interest in computers to extend use of library services. Provide entertainment for young people.
Policies and procedures	Make libraries more comfortable for young people. Expand access to library resources and services.

Take libraries to young people

Young people generally know what libraries have to offer. They know where their libraries are. Yet they do not come in significant numbers. If libraries want to reach out to disadvantaged young people, they may need to consider possible outreach services, access to 'virtual' library services or in some cases ways of offering transport to the library. We need to 'reach young people where they are – not where we want' (Vincent 2000, p. 158).

Public libraries can make stronger links with schools and other education providers as a way of reaching disadvantaged young people. In addition, links can be made with other community organisations (e.g. social workers and youth workers, council officers, youth clubs and programs, Centrelink) that already interact with disadvantaged young people to try to reach those who are already distanced from education and employment.

Leverage interest in computers

If access to computers and technology are seen by young people as the main service libraries have to offer, these should be positioned as the 'hook' for attracting

young people to libraries. Libraries have information and resources that young people, and especially disadvantaged young people, need. Any engagement strategy should have technology as a central component.

Libraries could also ensure that they are able to quickly assist disadvantaged young people with accessing information that might be of particular relevance (e.g. information about housing services, job search websites).

Magazines are also a library resource of special interest to young people, although the types of magazines vary across gender and age group – comics for younger teenage boys, *Dolly* magazines for younger girls, car and sport magazines for older male teenagers, fashion and entertainment for older females.

Provide entertainment for young people

Libraries are not entertainment venues. But to attract young people, and thereby give them access to information and resources that are useful and valuable to them, it may be necessary to introduce some entertainment value to the library experience. Some Victorian libraries have already done this, with the introduction of Xboxes, creative activities and bands. This does not have to extend to providing music, a disco or band every Friday night, but activities and facilities that involve music, movies and food (e.g. a café or sausage sizzle) might get young people to come to the library. A key feature of these activities is that they also contain a social component, which is very important to young people, especially those who are often disengaged from other activities.

Make the library a more ‘comfortable’ place for young people

One way to give young people a feeling that they belong in the library is to give them some ownership of the library, and in particular the library space they occupy. As was found in West Torrens in response to an initially combative relationship between young people and the library, opening up the conversation as to how the library can be used and giving young people some input into these decisions can promote engagement.

Factors that might be considered are:

- codes of conduct, outlining acceptable behaviours for young people, relationships with other library patrons, and responses from library staff;
- access to youth spaces;
- a ‘look and feel’ that is comfortable, less conservative, interesting and able to be changed from time to time (e.g. zones, themed spaces);
- furniture that young people can ‘kick back and relax in’ (e.g. beanbags, rugs and comfortable chairs);
- not ‘cleaning up’ the young people’s space each night.

Taking into account the impact of peer behaviour on young people it was also notable, in a ‘catch 22’ sort of way, that one of the things young people saw that would attract them to use libraries was seeing more young people at libraries.

Expand access to library resources and services

Young people made a number of suggestions that would make them more likely to access and use libraries. These cover a range of different policy and program areas, and may not be able to be implemented when balanced against other library objectives and patronage:

- expand opening hours;
- extend borrowing time beyond two to three weeks;
- have more copies of each resource and more computers (‘So we don’t have to wait’);
- have more staff at the desk (‘So we don’t have to stand around for 15 minutes for one book’);
- lower or abolish fines;
- offer incentives for frequent use (e.g. of the Internet);
- allow food and drink in the library.

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