

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

Report Two: Logging the Benefits



Library Board
of Victoria



Libraries Building Communities is the first comprehensive Australian study of the value public libraries add to their communities. It includes all 44 public library services in Victoria and draws on the views and ideas of nearly 10,000 people.

The research aims to increase community awareness of the range of public library services and show government how public libraries can help achieve governmental policy goals. For library staff it:

- presents clear new data on the contribution libraries make to their communities;
- provides case studies that show how Victorian public libraries lead in innovation;
- identifies groups that are not currently well served by their libraries, and offers solutions;
- builds awareness of the critical social capital and community building role of public libraries.

Findings are presented in 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 for 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.

Project Team

Project Management: Debra Rosenfeldt and Damian Tyquin, State Library of Victoria

Research: New Focus Research Strategy and Implementation

Analyst and Writer: Carol Oxley, I&J Management Services

Editor and Typesetter: Barbara Vaughan Publishing Services

Design: Dianna Wells Design

Project Advisory Committee: From Victorian public libraries – Ben Conyers, Sue Gray, Neville Humphris (co-Chair), Elisabeth Jackson, Jennifer Khan, Katrina Knox, Patti Manolis (co-Chair), Julie McInnes, Jenny Mustey, Gayle Rowden, Janet Salvatore, Michael Scholtes, Julie Smith, Libby Woodhouse

Published February 2005 by

State Library of Victoria

(for Library Board of Victoria)

328 Swanston Street

Melbourne Victoria 3000 Australia

Telephone 03 8664 7000

Website <http://www.slv.vic.gov.au>

Email webinfo@slv.vic.gov.au

Enquiries can be addressed to: Public Libraries Unit,
State Library of Victoria

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ISBN 0 9750153 3 8

TABLE 1: TELEPHONE SURVEY SAMPLE BY LOCATION
SOURCE: LBC STUDY

		Non-metropolitan		Metropolitan		Total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
Group	Users	52	65	182	57	234	58
	Non-users	28	35	138	43	166	42
Total		80	100	320	100	400	100

The telephone survey initially determined whether a respondent was a user or a non-user of Victorian public libraries, and the subsequent question stream was tailored accordingly. Several questions regarding the benefits of libraries to the community and awareness of library services were asked of both groups so that comparisons could be made between users and non-users. Library users were also asked questions regarding satisfaction with the services provided by their library and areas of excellence of library service. Non-users were asked about the reasons for non-usage to determine the major barriers to library use. Demographic questions were asked of all respondents so that profiles of users and non-users could be developed.

Non-English-speaking households were largely excluded from the telephone survey. Instead, their access and attitudes to Victorian public libraries was elicited via face-to-face interviews (see below).

Those under the age of 16 years were not included in the sample for the telephone survey due to laws requiring permission from parents or guardians for those under 16 to participate in market research.

It should be noted that by its nature the telephone survey was a random sample of households rather than individuals. This is reflected in the fact that among those interviewed there was a much higher proportion of women than would be expected if a random sample of

individuals had been taken – 65% of respondents were females and 35% males – this compares with general population statistics of 51% female and 49% male.

Interviews with community leaders

Thirty-five interviews were conducted with community leaders such as local councillors, bureaucrats, business people, school principals and teachers, and people working in key community organisations such as maternal and child health and religious groups. Key influencers from the CALD community were included specifically because this group had been under-represented in the focus groups and telephone survey. The people interviewed were drawn from across a wide variety of local government areas, covering inner metropolitan Melbourne, the middle and outer suburbs, regional towns and rural areas.

The purpose of the interviews was to document what people considered libraries to do well, what they could do better and what the gaps were in the services they provided. The interviews explored what people in the community think is the value of the public library and the contribution the library makes to literacy, community confidence, community networks, health and economic growth. The interviews also probed for ideas on the future role of public libraries, in particular the role libraries should play in community development, and in turn the impact those changes will have on libraries.

2 Profile of library users

During 1999–2000 there were 99.4 million visits to local government, national and state libraries. Visits to local government, national and state libraries have increased by 11% since 1996–97. Of all library users more than 60% visit a library on six or more occasions in any one year. Four times as many people attend a library in any given year as attend a cricket match.

ATTENDANCE AT SELECTED CULTURAL VENUES, AUSTRALIA, AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS, DECEMBER 1999, CITED IN THE AUSTRALIAN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION ASSOCIATION SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE INQUIRY INTO THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN THE ONLINE ENVIRONMENT, 2002.

Public library usage is widespread across metropolitan and regional Victoria. The telephone survey indicates that about six in ten English-speaking Victorians over the age of 15 years are current public library users (i.e. have used a local public library in the past twelve months). About two in three public library users over 15 years visit their library at least monthly.

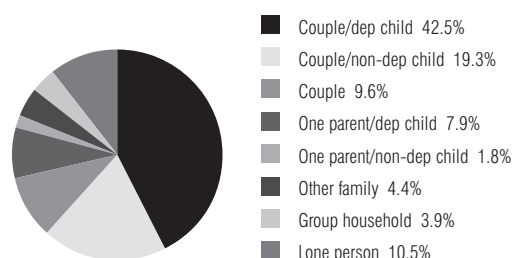
The survey also indicates that about 27% of Victorians do not use public libraries for lifestyle reasons. For example, they may have independent access to books and other resources; they may be working full-time with access to the Internet and library services at work; or they may have different priorities for use of their recreational time. On the other hand, there are about 13% of Victorians who are currently not using public library services yet who stand to gain significantly from this service. This includes people who are socially or economically disadvantaged, face physical barriers to accessing the library, or are not well catered for by the library.

More detailed data on the profile of library users and non-users can be found in section two of LBC Report Three: *Bridging the Gaps*.

2.1 Who are the main users of libraries?

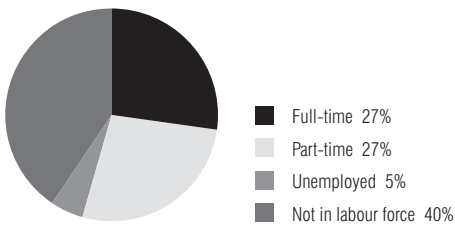
As shown in Figure 1, young children and their parents form the backbone of library users. About half of all users come from households with a dependent child. A further 21% of users come from households with non-dependent children. Couples without children account for about 10% of users and single people about 14% (if we assume that a significant proportion of people in group households are single people).

FIGURE 1: LIBRARY USERS BY HOUSEHOLD TYPE
SOURCE: TELEPHONE SURVEY



As Figure 5 shows the greatest proportion of library users are not in the labour force (NILF). This includes people who are retired, students and parents caring for children. There are equal proportions of users in full-time and part-time work.

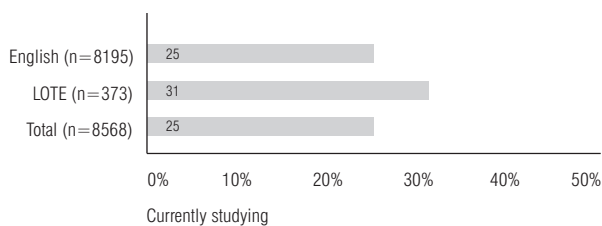
FIGURE 5: LIBRARY USERS BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS
SOURCE: TELEPHONE SURVEY



In metropolitan areas a higher proportion of library users are in full-time employment (30%) compared with non-metropolitan areas (19%). Balancing this, we find that a higher proportion of non-metropolitan users are not in the labour force (46%) compared with metropolitan areas (38%).

The online survey shows that about one-quarter of all library users were studying (see Figure 6). This figure is higher for CALD users (31%). A significantly higher proportion of female library users in this category (41%) were attending a university or other educational institution than were male users (34%). A significantly higher proportion of CALD users were studying at a technical or further education facility compared with English-speaking users.

FIGURE 6: LIBRARY USERS WHO ARE CURRENTLY STUDYING
SOURCE: ONLINE SURVEY



2.2 Usage rates

As well as considering who are the main users of libraries, it is important to get an idea of the extent to which different groups in the community are using libraries. This is estimated by either:

- comparing the proportion of people in a particular group who are library users with those who are not users;
- comparing the proportion of library users in a group to the proportion they represent in the population.

As Figure 7 shows there is a much higher proportion of users than non-users among couples with dependent children and one-parent families with a dependent child. For all other household types the proportion of non-users is greater than the proportion of users.

Couples are the least likely type of household to be using library services. This group would include a proportion of ‘empty nesters’. Low usage may relate to having ample financial resources to buy reading material or source information online.

The telephone survey also indicates that use of libraries is more widespread among females than males: 62% of females in the survey were users of libraries while only 52% of males were. Females with dependent children – either in a couple or single-parent family unit – have a particularly high rate of library usage: 72% of women in this group use the library.

The online survey also found high rates of library usage by females in the age range 30–49 years. Typically these users are born in Australia, tertiary educated, with dependent children and either not in the labour force or employed on a part-time basis. While CALD users account for less than 5% of survey respondents, they too were typically in the age range of 30–49 years and were married with children. CALD users are less likely to be working and one-third of users were studying.

As Table 3 shows, the focus groups confirmed that, when compared with non-users, a greater proportion of users are either not in the labour force, are in part-time employment or are unemployed.

TABLE 3: USERS AND NON-USERS BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS
SOURCE: FOCUS GROUP

	Users (n=86) %	Non-users (n=82) %
Full-time employment	10	45
Part-time employment	36	23
Unemployed	13	10
Not in labour force	41	22

Of focus group participants who were in part-time employment, 52% were library users; of those who were unemployed 58% were users; and of those not in the labour force 66% were users. This contrasts with only 20% who were in full-time employment who were users.

English was the primary language spoken at home for 85% of respondents to the online survey. This compares with 75% of Victorians in this category in the 2001 Census. However, given that CALD library users were surveyed using paper-based copies of the online survey and that the survey was only translated into six languages, it is likely that the online survey presents an underestimate of the number of CALD users.

Compared with English-speaking respondents a higher proportion of CALD users were:

- married
- male
- had lower weekly household income.

They were also less likely to be members of their local library. This may be due to difficulties in requesting membership forms or filling out forms.

Library usage was found to be more common among non-metropolitan Victorians than among those living in metropolitan areas. The telephone survey shows that 65% of people in non-metropolitan areas were library users compared with 57% in metropolitan areas.

People on low incomes were found to be more likely to use public libraries than those in the highest income groups. The online survey shows that 42% of households with weekly incomes of \$499 or less use library services while this group makes up only 27% of households in the 2001 Census. In contrast, the online survey shows that only 4% of households with incomes over \$2,000 used a public library, although this group constituted 8% of households in the Census.

Access to the Internet at home or in the workplace does not appear to be a factor that determines whether people use their public library or not. The telephone survey (see Table 4) shows that in terms of access to the Internet about 70% of both users and non-users had access either at home and/or work. The majority of the remaining 30% of respondents who did not have any access to the Internet are in the older age groups.

The focus group results suggest that key user groups are:

- Time-rich and income-poor:
 - retired people
 - part-time workers
 - lonely and isolated (often elderly)
 - disability pensioners
 - people who have previously been in institutional care
 - struggling families
- Mothers and young children:
 - Some libraries see this group as an increasing proportion of their users, given the quality and popularity of children's programs.

TABLE 4: ACCESS TO THE INTERNET FOR USERS AND NON-USERS OF LIBRARIES
SOURCE: TELEPHONE SURVEY

		Group				Total	
		Users		Non-users		n	%
		n	%	n	%		
Do you have good access to the Internet at either home or work?	Home	83	35	44	27	127	32
	Work	17	7	16	10	33	8
	Both home and work	65	28	62	37	127	32
	Neither	69	29	44	27	113	28
Total		234	100	166	100	400	100

- Primary school students:
 - Many children were first introduced to their library as infants by their parents. A common reason parents cite for use by children in primary school is to obtain reference material for school projects.
- Book lovers/heavy readers:
 - This segment is heavy consumers of fiction and non-fiction. As a result, key motivations for use of public libraries are financial (money saving) and an affinity with the library environment.
- Self-directed learners without other sources of information:
 - This segment tended to be older women with adult children or unemployed people, without access to university resources or the Internet.
 - Many found libraries useful for their introductory Internet-use classes, which empowered them with the skills to become self-directed learners.

There is a very good understanding of the types of services being provided, including the traditional and those involving new electronic technologies. People understand that libraries are not just about books – they see social interaction as also very important. (LBC participant)

A significant majority (92%) of respondents to the telephone survey (which included users and non-users) were aware of free public library services in their community. Only 6% did not know of such services and 2% said that no services of this type existed.

Not surprisingly users had a higher awareness of library services than non-users. However, among non-users there is still a significant proportion of people who are familiar with libraries and the services they offer. Only 7% of non-users did not know the location of their nearest public library. Almost all (98%) were aware that books could be borrowed at the library and 78% knew of the computer services available. On the other hand, there was lower awareness among non-users of some types of services – only half were aware of story time for children and one-third of reading groups (32%). Only 40% were aware that public libraries have web pages from which they can access the library catalogue and databases.

2.3 Awareness of the services provided by public libraries

The LBC research indicates a high level of awareness in the community of public libraries and many of the services they provide. For many this awareness extends beyond books and other information resources to the less traditional services.

5 Satisfaction with library services

It still seems to come as a surprise to local authorities which engage in surveys of client satisfaction, just how highly libraries typically rate.

A. BUNDY (2003) *BEST INVESTMENT: THE MODERN PUBLIC LIBRARY AS SOCIAL CAPITAL*, PAPER PRESENTED AT THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF FRIENDS OF LIBRARIES AUSTRALIA, ALTONA, VICTORIA, 27 AUGUST 2003.

5.1 Library performance

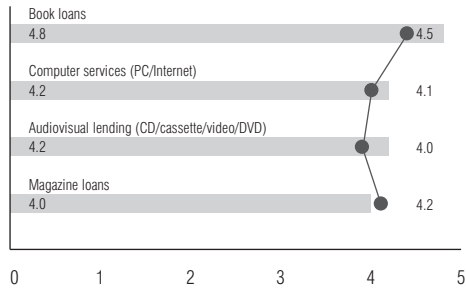
When library users who took part in the telephone survey were asked to rate the performance of public libraries on a range of activities they rated these all highly, with average performance ratings all above 4.0 (corresponding to 'good' – see Figure 13). Multiple regression analyses were run to determine if any library attributes were key predictors of overall satisfaction with library services. Three variables emerged as significant predictors of overall satisfaction: variety of books, customer service, and Internet access and other computer facilities. These attributes all have very high current performance ratings, as does overall satisfaction with library services, which 94% of the respondents rated as excellent or good.

Users who attended the focus groups were also asked to rate their overall satisfaction with library services. Their responses showed high satisfaction ratings, with average ratings of 8.2 on a scale of 1 to 10.

A strong signal of the satisfaction with libraries is that 82% of respondents to the online survey had recommended their library to others. This recommendation was given for information resources, information technology, community information, job search and so on. In other words, a library is recommended for a multiplicity of reasons, including involvement in a community activity.

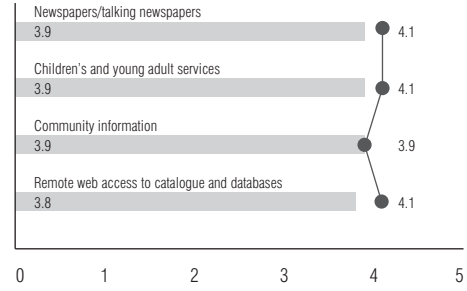
Community leaders from the CALD sector commented on the strong 'feel good' attitude to libraries within the community. It was remarked that the importance of libraries for ethnic groups has been cemented since the terrorist attack in the United States on 11 September 2001 – as even more people are now seeking a safe place to access multilingual material, and libraries are the focus of that search. Opinions among community leaders varied, however, regarding the standard

FIGURE 15: GAP BETWEEN THE LEVEL OF IMPORTANCE USERS ASSIGNED TO LIBRARY SERVICES AND SATISFACTION WITH THESE SERVICES – ONLINE SURVEY
SOURCE: ONLINE SURVEY



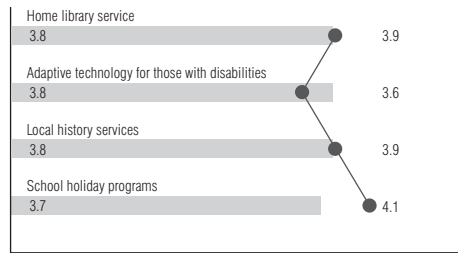
1=low satisfaction, 5=high satisfaction

■ Importance ■ Satisfaction



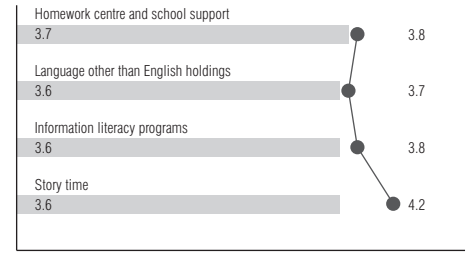
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■ Importance ■ Satisfaction



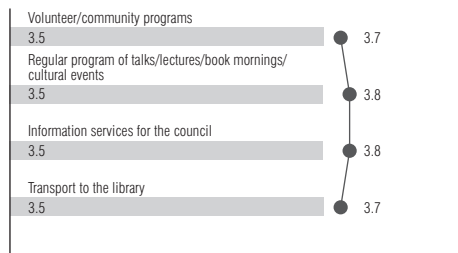
1=low satisfaction, 5=high satisfaction

■ Importance ■ Satisfaction



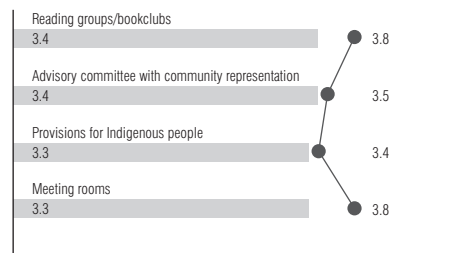
1=low satisfaction, 5=high satisfaction

■ Importance ■ Satisfaction



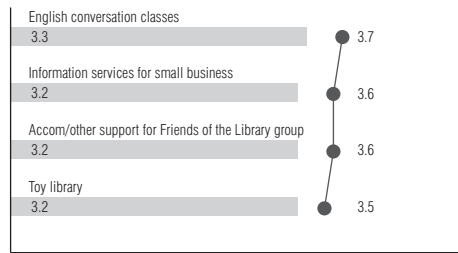
1=low satisfaction, 5=high satisfaction

■ Importance ■ Satisfaction



1=low satisfaction, 5=high satisfaction

■ Importance ■ Satisfaction



1=low satisfaction, 5=high satisfaction

■ Importance ■ Satisfaction

Attachment: Library services rated for their importance by focus group attendees

Book loans
Newspapers/talking newspapers
Magazine loans
Audiovisual lending
Computer services
Children's and young adults' services
Story time
School holiday programs
Toy library
Remote web access to catalogue and databases
Adaptive technology for those with disabilities
Homework centre and school support
Reading groups/bookclubs
Information literacy programs
Home library service
Information services for small business
Language other than English holdings
English conversation classes
Provisions for Indigenous people
Local history services
Transport to the library
Accommodating/supporting Friends of the Library
Meeting rooms
Regular programs (i.e. talks/lectures)
Advisory committee with community representatives
Community information
Information services for the council
Volunteer/community support programs