

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into the progress and future direction of life-long learning

Submission no: 26

Received: 18/06/2004

Submitter: Ms Anne Hall
Secretary MPLA

Organisation: Metropolitan Public Libraries Association (NSW) and
Country Public Libraries Association

Address: PO Box 424
BONDI JUNCTION NSW 2022

Phone: 02 9725 0358

Fax: 02 9728 4617

Email: ahall@fairfieldcity.nsw.gov.au



The Metropolitan Public Libraries Association (NSW) (MPLA) and the Country Public Libraries Association (CPLA) represent the concerns of local government libraries in NSW to the State and Federal Governments, in local government forums, and, where appropriate, to other bodies and the wider community. Membership is open to all councils that have adopted the NSW Library Act, and to the State Library of NSW. The Executive of the Associations are led by a President and Vice-President (both local government councillors) who are elected at each Association's AGM.

The MPLA and CPLA jointly submit the following comments on the progress and future direction of life-long learning addressing the terms of reference as follows.

(a) policies and strategies aimed at addressing the life-long learning needs of an ageing population;

Public Libraries are already providing for the life-long learning needs of the aging population. Independent learning has always been a charter for public libraries that developed from the Mechanics Institutes. The printed word in the form of books, magazines and newspapers has long enabled people to educate themselves at their own pace. For the majority of the population who can't afford nor wish to purchase their own resources or who don't attend an educational institution, public libraries have been the key to their learning. The advent of the Internet has expanded the potential for independent learning but comes at a considerable cost. These costs include the purchase of hardware, software and communication charges to connect to the Internet as well as the associated costs of printing. There are also fees involved in learning how to use this technology and accessing online databases. The public library has provided free or very low cost access to the Internet, as well as the training in how to use computers and the Internet. The older members of the population have found a familiar and safe place in which to learn this new technology. Library staff provide ongoing support that relates to their specific interests eg. online shopping and banking, email to keep in touch with relatives and friends and special interest groups. Public libraries already provide a service to the housebound and that contact with these clients often provides their only access to life long learning opportunities. Community Information directories compiled by public libraries assists people to locate like-minded groups to pursue hobbies or learn new skills. Public library statistics indicate a high usage by the aged so they are comfortable and familiar with public libraries and the services they provide.

One of the most important demographic groups involved in lifelong learning are retirees with available time to devote to further education and understanding. The blossoming of such groups as the University of the Third Age (U3A) is testament to this. Add to this the fact that the population is aging, and there is a situation where a very active group of library users is growing in numbers and seeking wisdom. It is not a great step to take to realize that the lifelong learning process has impacted on and will continue to impact on public libraries. (Appendix A. is from Great Lakes Library Service that has the highest median age in NSW.)

The public library environment is further complicated in many Local Government Areas by the diverse nature of the community. By responding to the demand to be "all things to all people", the public library must supply resources in multiple community languages and alternate formats to suit users from non-English speaking backgrounds and those with special needs. (Appendix B is from Fairfield City Library Service where 54% of the total population were born overseas in non-English speaking countries, 71.3% don't use the Internet at all and the median weekly income is \$200 - \$299).

(b) the ways in which technological developments, particularly the Internet, have affected the nature and delivery of life-long learning since 1997;

Public libraries have embraced new formats and new technologies and now support life-long learning by providing videos, compact discs and dvd's, hear-a-books, e-books etc. as well as access to computers and the Internet. These new materials and technologies have not replaced the traditional print resources so add to the libraries financial burdens. There has also been a dramatic change in the way both informal and formal education is being delivered. On-line learning has become mainstream and impacted financially on public libraries. There has been no recognition from the relatively well funded federal educational institutions i.e. universities of the impact this has had on students from low socio-economic backgrounds let alone public libraries. University registrations are now online so the only place for students without the technology at home to register for their courses is the public library. Students can go online and obtain lectures and tutorial notes and access online databases. Students that don't have access to a pc and the Internet at home use the public library. This usage is particularly high in low socio-economic areas such as Western Sydney. Even students with access at home use the public library for assistance that is not provided at their institutions. These same factors also apply to school and TAFE students as well as any one of the courses from the vast range of private and public institutions that have sprung up in the Internet age. The latter appear to have little or no resources so the public library has, by default, been forced to fill the gap.

Public libraries have always provided the print resources for self-directed learning e. g. boat-building, how to publish a novel, parenting skills, learning another language, to mention just a few, and will continue to do so and will also provide access to online databases and recommend internet sites.

This transition from print based learning to technology-based learning has had high cost implications for local government and students. Local government needs financial support to enhance, and indeed continue, its ability to provide funding to public libraries to keep pace with community demand and expectations.

(c) the adequacy of any structural and policy changes at Commonwealth and state or territory level which have been made in response to these technological developments;

The thinking of management in state and federal departments and other organizations, such as the banks, is along the lines that the Internet can improve access for the end user as well as deliver efficiency and financial savings. This has resulted in services and information being "pushed out" to users electronically but who will now pay for these services? The reality is the end user needs to pay for access (hardware, software, communication connection) and printing costs. For those financially unable or those who need training, advice and support, which is a considerable proportion of the population, the only place they can go is the public library. The public place has high expectations on the staff in public libraries to assist them in using computers and the Internet. The impact has been so profound that the NSW State Library is currently funding the research *E-Government: Issues and Implications for Public Libraries*. The Executive Summary can be found at www.sl.nsw.gov.au/pln/projects.cfm

Appendix C from Holroyd Council Library Service shows how English Conversation classes are sometimes the first step for migrants to commence life long learning in English.

(d) technological barriers to participation in life-long learning and adult and community education, and the ways and means by which these might be overcome;

The most significant barrier is access and equity. The more financially well off, can afford access to technology and education. Those who can't will continue to be disadvantaged with the educational gap and ability to find employment and an acceptable quality of life becoming further out of reach. Public libraries are the only point of access to education and technology and increasingly, government information for this growing proportion of Australia's population. Technological barriers are also significant for those with disabilities. Public libraries have recognised this and supplied adaptive technology for those with special needs e.g. zoom text for sight-impaired users. Rural and remote communities have all of the problems associated with providing quality connectivity and services over vast distances. Public libraries are a long established and cooperatively based network with a proven track record e.g. NSW.net. Investing in public libraries would ensure a wide take up of any lifelong learning initiatives. Many public libraries already have partnerships with TAFE outreach and Adult Community Colleges with classes being held in meeting rooms at public libraries. Public libraries are open longer hours than most educational institutions and support organizations. Public libraries (with the support of Council IT sections) are able to support and update technology infrastructure unlike many community based organizations. Public libraries are non-exclusive and represent the community they serve, both culturally and professionally.

Statistics on Public Libraries in Australia¹

- 505 local government library organizations, with 1,510 library locations
- 93.3 million visits to local government libraries

¹ ABS 8561.0 Public Libraries, Australia 1999-2000

- 39.4 million library stock of which 36.4 million is available for loan
- Total expenses for local government libraries was \$456 million
- In NSW there are 376 service points providing a public libraries service
- Over 50% of the population are registered library members.
- Public libraries (along with the State Libraries) are the most significant publicly accessible information infrastructure in the community.
- Public libraries provide unique spaces for their users.
- Public libraries are consistently rated 1 or 2 in importance to the community as a cultural venue.
- Public libraries are also part of a complex Information Industry (includes media, research, education, online information, consulting and IT). This sector contributed 8.5% of the Gross Domestic Product in 2000.

Conclusion

Local and international research indicates that public libraries are amongst the most highly valued local community services, supporting individuals' information needs for education, **lifelong learning**, social inclusion, recreation and well-being. Public libraries enjoy a respect and appreciation that is recognised across all communities regardless of the frequency of an individual's visitation.

The Public Library network is collaborative by nature with libraries being committed resource sharers. Public libraries were also early adopters of new technology and are thus uniquely positioned to continue to support life-long learning in an environment that is known to be safe and available to all and which will endure over time.

Recommendations:

1. That public libraries have access to subsidised hardware, software and communication costs as per Recommendation 7 of The Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts References Committee 2003 report *Libraries in the online environment*

Recommendation 7

- a) *that the Australian Government negotiate with telecommunication carriers to establish an 'e-rate' or discount rate for broadband access to public libraries and that, if negotiations are not successful, consider imposing a requirement on carriers under Universal Service Obligation arrangement; and*
 - b) *that further funds be allocated under an expanded National Broadband Strategy for expanding broadband access in libraries*
2. Public libraries be given financial assistance to provide training in the use of computers and the Internet for the aged as public libraries have the infrastructure and the reputation for providing quality services.

3. That recognition be given from federal, state and private educational institutions to the significant support role of public libraries.
4. That federal and state governments match the funding provided by local government to public libraries.
5. That the recommendation 11 from the The Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts References Committee 2003 report *Libraries in the online environment* be actioned.

Recommendation 11

Where there is shared responsibility for public library funding from state and local government, the Committee recommends that the States significantly increase their share of public library funding, moving towards matching local government levels of contribution.

6. That the recommendation 9 from The Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts References Committee 2003 report *Libraries in the online environment* be actioned.

Recommendation 9

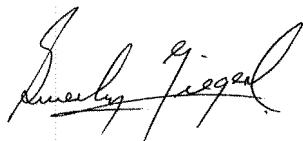
- a) *that the National Library of Australia identify a number of key databases for which national site licensing might be desirable; and*
- b) *that additional Australian government funding be extended to the National Library of Australia for this purpose.*

7. That the recommendation 5 from The Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts References Committee 2003 report *Libraries in the online environment* be actioned.

Recommendation 5

If there are no alternative funding mechanisms for ongoing research into the identification and testing of adaptive technologies for the use of online equipment in public libraries by persons with disabilities, the Committee recommends the funding of another round of Access Ability grants.

8. That public libraries be given financial assistance to provide life-long learning resources in non-traditional formats and relevant community languages.
9. That recognition and support be given to public libraries for their role in providing access to government information and services



Clr. Beverley Giegerl
MPLA President



Clr. Kath Knowles
CPLA President

Appendix A

Thoughts on Lifelong Learning from Library Manager, Great Lakes Library Service, Breese Parade, Forster 2428 (PO Box 450)

The Inquiry appears to have a focus on the impact of technology on Lifelong Learning. This I will address later, but mention must be made first on the impact of lifelong learning on traditional public library services. I am not certain which term of reference to place this under but I think it bears consideration:

Impact of Lifelong Learning on Traditional Library Services

The role of public libraries in lifelong learning is regularly overlooked, which is surprising considering the similarities between those involved in lifelong learning and library patrons.

In Great Lakes, the local government area with highest median age in NSW, 25% of the population is aged 65 or more and 26% of library patrons are in this same age category. And though detailed borrowing levels by age are not available, it is clear that this age group are very active users of the library. It is no coincidence that library stock at Great Lakes has the highest lending rate in NSW.

One of the most important demographic groups involved in lifelong learning are retirees with available time to devote to further education and understanding. The blossoming of such groups as the University of the Third Age (U3A) is testament to this.

And to this mix the fact that the population is aging, and we have a situation where a very activity group of library users is getting larger and seeking wisdom. It is not a great step to take to realize that the lifelong learning process will impact generally on libraries.

The Role of Technology in the Lifelong Learning Process

A brief article in the January 2003 edition of the magazine Internet.au refers to the fact that though seniors have the fastest uptake of the Internet they had significant barriers in doing so, key amongst these being *“lack of access to appropriate training.”*

The truth of this fact has been profoundly felt by the Great Lakes Library Service as it is has such a high representation of seniors in its community. As the library expanded its Internet access several years ago constant requests were received for help in using the Internet. This phenomenon bears some reflection. Patrons of the library do not ask for assistance in reading before borrowing a book and yet they are quite prepared to ask for aid in surfing the web.

As a result of this pressure for assistance the library worked with the Friends of the Great Lakes Library Service (FOGLLS) to lodge an application to the Department of Aging, Disability and Home Care (DADHC) to run a series of training courses on the Internet and IT for seniors. This was part of the DADHC's Seniors and IT Grant Programme. The application was successful and the course was run for around 15 months, from late 2002 to the end of 2003. It involved short courses in different levels of Internet and IT expertise and proved remarkably popular. Around 700 seniors participated over the 15-month period, and all courses were fully booked.

This training was also supported by the presence of an Internet assistant who was available in the library each morning for two hours to help people on a one-to-one basis.

This was one of the most successful undertakings the library has been involved with in recent years and clearly demonstrated a need for training in the technology and the Internet.

It is essential that all levels of government understand what an important role the library plays in the lifelong learning experience, and that increasingly this involves a technological training aspect.

The library is a public forum, it places no expectations on people and delivers no judgment. It is a zone of comfort, it is a zone that the elderly patronize heavily and it is a gateway to knowledge for all. And now it provides the technology to surf the web. There could hardly be a more likely candidate for playing a role in the lifelong learning process. They represent an established system that works remarkably well and is ubiquitous in communities across Australia. If the Federal and/or State Government ever wanted to play a wide-reaching role in lifelong learning public libraries present them with the ideal opportunity.

Appendix B

Literacy at any Age: Library Based literacy programs. Carolyn Bourke, Community Outreach Librarian, Children and Youth, Fairfield City Library Service and Mary de Bono, Family Literacy Teacher.

An overview of Fairfield City

- Fairfield has nearly 182,000 people and is the third most populous LGA in Sydney. (State of Community Report, 2004)
- 52.5% of the population were born overseas and 95% of those were born in a non-English speaking country. (SoCR)
- Fairfield has the highest number and proportion of LOTE speakers in Australia, as well as the highest number and proportion of people who do not speak English well or at all. (SoCR)
- Almost 20% of households are single parent households. (SoCR)
- 37.1% of people aged over 15 have incomes below \$200 per week. (SoCR)
- The unemployment rate in Fairfield in June 2003 was 9.5% compared to 5.2% Sydney wide. This is common pattern over the last few years. (SoCR)
- For the September quarter of 2003 the youth unemployment figures for Fairfield were a staggering 29.8% (October 2003 ABS media release)

Challenges

The statistics above give some idea of the challenges faced by Council, educators, social workers, community agencies and the library service in Fairfield.

We have a community who face roadblocks of poverty and social exclusion on a daily basis. The library service sees itself as a community hub which encourages the socially excluded to be included. The library is a place where free access to information, resources and community life may be found. However, these lofty ideals need to be backed up by practical applications to assist people in their daily lives.

Literacy has been identified as one of the key issues for our community. There are approximately 75% of children in our schools, both High School and Primary, from non-English speaking backgrounds. The basic skills tests results and HSC results in Maths, Science and English are lower in Fairfield than in other parts of Sydney. Schools in Fairfield work incredibly hard but face language and literacy issues, large class sizes and other restraints. The Library Service has the opportunity to reach all age groups and also to have direct contact with parents so we have implemented a range of programs which cover babies right through to the elderly.

Family Literacy

The literacy program started ten years ago at Liverpool City Library under the auspices of the Macarthur Community College. As it was the Year of the Family it was decided to design a literacy program which involved both parents and children. The program was the brainchild of Librarian Johanna Plummer who unfortunately didn't live to see the fulfilment of her dream. As the program commenced it became clear that having both parents and children together was not going to work! Two problems surfaced – one was space and the other was language. Some parents could not speak English, and so tended to talk among themselves, distracting the children. Adjustments were made which meant that only the children attended the classes. Parents had the opportunity to discuss their child's work with the teacher on a regular basis and to offer support and encouragement. The program has developed from there.

In July 2000 Fairfield City Library Service ran the first Family Literacy class at its Wetherill Park Branch. From that first class we have expanded to offer the service at three branches. Classes are always well attended and we often have to put students on waiting lists. The program is funded through the Community Development Support Expenditure Scheme.

The program consists of short comprehension pieces for children to read and respond to, reading aloud to the teacher, phonics when necessary, work on improving communication skills, memory training and reporting on their work to the class at the end of the lesson.

We aim to make each child feel important, so a graduation ceremony is run at the end of each course where each child gets a certificate and parents are invited to watch their child give a short speech.

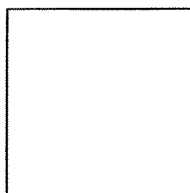
One of the guiding principles of the program is to encourage and praise the children often. Even a little breakthrough is significant e.g. a child who lacks self-confidence will, after only two lessons, be able to speak in front of the class. However, while children are encouraged as much as possible, satisfactory standards of work are expected and each child is required to present work which is neat, legible and thoughtful.

Children are assessed so that a suitable level of work is given. This is done so that their self-esteem is built while at the same time their skills are also being built. Once they have achieved at that level they are then able to move on to the next. Children are also encouraged to develop listening skills as they get more complex instructions to follow. Results of surveys completed by both parents and students show that the children's schoolwork shows marked improvement.

Babytime sessions and training program

These programs came about because we were inspired by Mem Fox to teach parents about reading to babies. The overwhelming amount of research showing the benefit early exposure to hearing stories read has on children's literacy and numeracy skills was compelling. Given the issues we faced in Fairfield, this seemed like an obvious place to start. Much research was done into the brain development literature and in September 2002 we started running Babytime sessions for parents and carers. These were times when Mums could bring their babies along to a program which used stories, songs, rhymes and finger plays to model to parents what they could be doing with their babies.

We soon discovered that this wasn't going to meet the needs of more than a very small group of people and so started running training sessions through our local community college, TAFE Outreach Step Forward program, playgroups, family day care and any where else we could. The main aim is to teach parents, childcare workers, grandparents and other carers the important role they can play in their child's pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills. A particular concern was to encourage parents to use their family language so that their children became fluent in that language and therefore more easily able to learn English.



Carer reading to children

Storytime

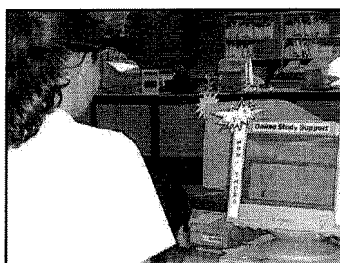
This is considered a core service in all public libraries. However, we often don't really consider the benefits of what we are doing. Some of the advantages for children attending storytime sessions are: learning to love reading, to experiment with language and to become familiar with rhythm and rhyme. Storytime also encourages fine and gross motor skill development and uses music, singing, dance and movement to aid learning. All of these are building blocks for literacy and numeracy as well as helping children to develop social skills.

Homework Centre

The Homework Centre was set up in our Wetherill Park branch in 2002 with an initial grant from the Library Council of NSW. It has now become a core Library service and as such is funded directly through the Library budget. The Homework Centre aims to support families and schools by offering students from Yr 3 – Yr 8 professional help with their homework and assignments as well as preparation and revision of work. Many parents feel unable to help their children due to language and literacy issues and appreciate having expert help available. The Homework Centre operates Tuesday and Thursday afternoons from 4pm to 7pm. Students are signed in and out by their parents. A significant number of parents choose to stay with their children in order to learn themselves.

Online Homework Help

This program was launched at Fairfield in March 2003 and was the first of its kind in Australia. Students from Yr 4 to Yr 12 can get online help with Maths and Science questions by logging in to a dedicated PC at any of three branches. The service operates Monday to Thursday 4pm to 7pm. The student selects their year level and subject e.g. Yr 12 Chemistry and the best rated tutor is connected to the student online. Students and tutors can use the whiteboards to draw diagrams, write formulas or type text in order to work through the question. At the end of the session (normally about 20 minutes) the student can print all dialogue and whiteboards for future reference. Currently about 80 students a month are using this service.



Student using Online Homework Help

English the Movie

This is our newest literacy program and is designed for High School students. It is based around movies in order to broaden the appeal to students. Each course will run for 7 weeks and students will view short films, read and write movie reviews, look at different genres of film, read and write scripts etc. This program is particularly aimed at Year 11 and 12 students doing ESL English and needing a bit of extra assistance. The aim is to build literacy levels while keeping students engaged. At the completion of the course each student will receive a movie voucher.

HSC lectures

HSC lectures are run each June and cover topics such as English Areas of Study, Maths, Business Studies, Exam Strategies and Essay Writing. The aim of the lecture series is to get high profile lecturers, particularly those who are Study Guide authors and examiners, to deliver lectures and workshops in the local area at an affordable price. These are run on a cost recovery basis, with the Library Service paying for staff time, promotion and advertising.

Students are surveyed each year and consistently report a high satisfaction rate with the value of the lectures.

English Conversation classes

For adults, we run English Conversation classes. These classes are run by volunteer tutors. The tutors trained by Mission Australia and the Library Service. Classes are free and are available to anyone with basic English skills who wants to improve their conversational abilities. Participants have the opportunity to make friends across a wide range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds as well as building their confidence in English usage.

Let's celebrate!

One of the most important elements of all of the programs is celebration. Each of the people who attend are encouraged to celebrate their success. We hold end of year parties for English Conversation classes, Family Literacy and Homework Centre with guest speakers and the Fairfield Mayor and/or Councillors. We also run mid year pizza parties for the Online Homework Help.

Building social capital is about more than just providing programs to assist people in their life long learning – it is about sharing in their joys and successes and celebrating with them. Fairfield City Library Service sees both the programs we run and the way we deliver them to our community as building blocks for a healthy and happy community.



English
Conversation class
at Fairfield Branch

Appendix C

**Holroyd City Council Library Service
Cnr Miller & Newman Streets
Merrylands 2160**

ENGLISH CONVERSATION CLASSES

Summary

The purpose of this report is to inform Council of the proposed running of English conversation classes to be held on a weekly basis at Merrylands Central Library. The classes are aimed for persons from a non-English speaking background who wish to improve and develop their English language skills.

Background

The Special Needs Librarian has been approached by a variety of community groups (such as the local Arabic and Spanish groups) to organise English conversation classes at the library. Both groups suggested that these classes should be free as they would not attend if a charge was incurred.

Investigation

The Special Needs Librarian sought advice from other public libraries in New South Wales who are currently running English conversation classes. These libraries are Auburn, Botany, Fairfield, Liverpool and Willoughby.

It was common to call these classes *English Conversation Classes* as opposed to English Classes, so they would not become confused with formal English classes conducted at TAFE colleges.

English Conversation Classes

Many libraries investigated initially held classes once a week and have increased the number of classes offered. For example, Liverpool City Library began with one class per week and now run six classes per week. Classes at the above mentioned libraries usually run for two hours at a time and in the majority of cases are held in the morning. Public libraries from Botany, Willoughby and Liverpool run their classes during school term only. These classes are held in the public reading area, meeting rooms or the children's area.

English Conversation Class Tutors

All English conversation classes are run by volunteer tutors, with no expense to the library. The tutor at Botany Library is a TAFE teacher from an Outreach

Program. However, the tutors at Fairfield, Liverpool, Willoughby and Auburn became tutors after responding to library fliers or advertisements in the local paper requesting for volunteer tutors. These persons are unqualified tutors but have a genuine interest in helping others improve their English skills. Once an appropriate staff member had interviewed these persons, they were sent to an agency to achieve their accreditation in tutoring. For example, the Literacy Network or Mission Australia are able to provide an accredited training course for persons wishing to become qualified tutors.

The Special Needs Librarian attended a meeting with Robin McClean from Mission Australia (Home Tutor Service and Enhancement Program) on Tuesday 22 August 2000. Mission Australia have dealt with other public libraries in setting up English Conversation Classes (Liverpool and Fairfield libraries) and provided the Special Needs Librarian with information on organising such classes for the Holroyd City Council Library Service.

Ms McClean cited two options for locating tutors.

1. Mission Australia can provide an accredited tutor, free of charge.
2. The library can advertise for volunteer tutors, who will be sent to accredited training.

Ms McClean suggested that it would be best for the Library Service to find appropriate persons interested in becoming volunteer tutors and then send them to Mission Australia for the accredited training, as this was successful at both Liverpool and Fairfield libraries. At present, Mission Australia are unable to provide the Library Service with an accredited tutor, as there are none available. If the library was to select the first option, the introduction of classes would have to be postponed, due to the unavailability of a Mission Australia tutor.

If the second option was selected, the Special Needs Librarian would interview all applicants wishing to become a volunteer tutor. The applicants deemed suitable by the Special Needs Librarian would then be sent to Mission Australia for accredited training.

Proposed English Conversation Classes at Holroyd

Upon investigation, it is recommended that Holroyd utilise the expertise of Mission Australia to assist with organising classes at Holroyd. The Library Service will advertise for volunteers, interview them and then send suitable persons for accredited training at Mission Australia.

English conversation classes at Merrylands Central Library will start with one two-hour class per week with a possibility of increasing the frequency of classes, depending on public demand and tutor availability. Classes will more than likely

initially be held in the morning, with further classes being offered in the evenings if required.

The best possible venue for the classes will be the Multi-Purpose Room located at Merrylands Central Library, on the mezzanine level. This room offers privacy and easy access to the rest of the library and its facilities.

Most importantly, the classes will be free to the community, and will bear no cost to the Library Service or Council.

It is hoped to commence classes in the beginning of the school term in 2001. This will allow time for the Library Service to advertise for volunteers, train them and advertise and promote the new classes to the community.

Conclusion

The Special Needs Librarian will continue to finalise preparations for organising an English conversation class for the Holroyd City Council Library Service. The class will be held at Merrylands Central Library in the Multi-Purpose Room for two hours a week, with a possibility to include extra classes, dependant on public demand and tutor availability. The day and time will be confirmed once a tutor is made available.

24/10/2001

ENGLISH CONVERSATION CLASSES UPDATE

Summary

The purpose of this report is to inform Council of the progress of the English conversation classes that are held on a weekly basis at Merrylands Central Library. The classes are aimed for persons from a non-English speaking background who wish to improve and develop their English language skills.

Background

The Special Needs Librarian was approached by a variety of community groups (such as the local Arabic and Spanish groups) to organise English conversation classes at the library.

Mission Australia (Home Tutor Service and Enhancement Program) has been providing information and support to the Special Needs Librarian in the organisation and preparation of such classes for the Holroyd City Council Library Service.

A total of nine volunteers were initially trained by Mission Australia. The first term of classes was held from Tuesday 22 May 2001 until Thursday 5 July 2001. Four classes per week were offered to the public.

Response to the classes was overwhelming, with classes averaging a total of 22 students.

Current Situation

Classes

The second term of English classes was from Tuesday 24 July 2001 until Thursday 27 September 2001. Four classes were again offered to the public. These were:

- Tuesday mornings 10.00am to 12.00noon
- Tuesday evenings 6.00pm to 7.45pm
- Wednesday mornings 10.00am to 12.00noon
- Thursday mornings 10.00am to 12.00noon

Student attendance has been constant. Even though numbers have decreased from an average of twenty-two students in each class in Term 1 to thirteen students in Term 2 in each class, the enthusiasm of students remains high. Tutors have commented on the positive feedback received from students.

Volunteer Tutor Meetings

Meetings for volunteer tutors are arranged monthly in the Multi Purpose Room at Merrylands Central Library. Currently, there are 9 English class volunteers. These meetings enable tutors to discuss issues relating to the English classes and to provide feedback to one another and offer any advice or suggestions in preparing for a class. Seven volunteers attended the meeting on Monday 30 July 2001 and three volunteers attended the meeting on Monday 10 September 2001. The next meeting is scheduled for Monday 15 October 2001.

Future Directions

In addition to the four classes currently being run, a new class will be offered on Wednesday evenings from 6.00pm to 7.45pm in Term 3. The dates for Term 3 are from Tuesday 16 October 2001 to Thursday 13 December 2001.

Due to current popular demand, classes have been organised throughout 2002. These dates are:

- Term 1: Tuesday 29 January to Thursday 11 April 2002
- Term 2: Tuesday 30 April to Thursday 4 July 2002
- Term 3: Tuesday 23 July to Thursday 26 September 2002
- Term 4: Tuesday 15 October to Thursday 19 December 2002

Conclusion

The second term of English conversation classes at Holroyd City Council Library Service has concluded. Four classes are offered per week during school term. A fifth class, on a Wednesday evening, will be offered during the third term of classes. The classes are held at Merrylands Central Library in the Multi Purpose Room for two hours a week.

Monthly meetings are organised to facilitate adequate communication between the Special Needs Librarian and the volunteer English tutors and to ensure the effective running of the classes. Feedback from both volunteers and students has continued to be most favourable. It is envisaged that this positive feedback will continue in 2002.