

SUMMER 2023

VOL XIX ISSUE 107 ISSN: 1323-0190



New research commissioned by FOLA

“Public libraries are essential local institutions that, when properly resourced, deliver measurable educational, social, and economic benefits to their communities. In rural Australia, public libraries are systemically and unfairly underfunded and disadvantaged relative to their larger regional and metropolitan counterparts.”

“Week in and week out, year after year, Australia’s 1,700 public libraries provide essential educational and lifelong learning experiences to millions of people.”

The national voice for 15 million Public Library Members

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Executive Director

TOWARDS BETTER LIBRARIES

Fifty years ago, one of the many issues being debated in the public library world was the inequity in library funding. This often resulted in variations in services, buildings, staffing levels, collections and a general delivery in a range of services to the community. At this time, the variations were both in city and country, whereby some city-based library services had per-capita funding five times more than a next-door neighbour. In the country, the variations were even more marked, as some country councils did not in fact have a public library service as such.

Around the mid 1970's the Australian Library Promotion Council (a community and library professional body) commenced national campaigns of awareness of such inadequacies. In Victoria, the challenge developed further, whereby an interest in community-based bodies were established to form greater advocacy at the local level. Some of these groups in time developed into Friends of Library groups. At around the same time in South Australia, a network of formalised Friends groups sprang-up around the State.

The formal body we know as FOLA (Friends of Libraries Australia) came into existence 30 years ago in 1994. It was from the Library Promotion body in Victoria which had formed a sub-committee for Friends groups in the 1980s, due to inequities of funding and service delivery, that formed part of the catalyst for FOLA being created.

Over the past 30 or more years, Friends have impacted in communities by challenging these inequities, contributing to new buildings, increased funding levels and generally improved library services both in city and rural communities. FOLA can list some significant success stories with Friends groups at – Port Macquarie (NSW), Toowoomba (Qld), Echuca (Vic), Stirling (SA), Launceston (Tas) and many more.

The demand for better library services continues, both in metropolitan and rural communities. It is with this understanding, that FOLA commissioned our latest research study – *Overlooked, Underfunded, Outsized Social and Economic Impact: Why Australia Needs to Invest in Country Libraries*.



“some city-based library services had per-capita funding five-times more than a next-door neighbour”

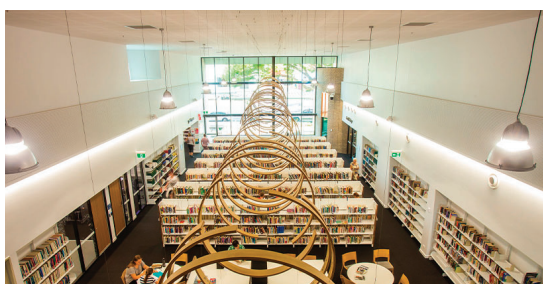
“Over the past 30 or more years, Friends have impacted in communities by challenging these inequities.”



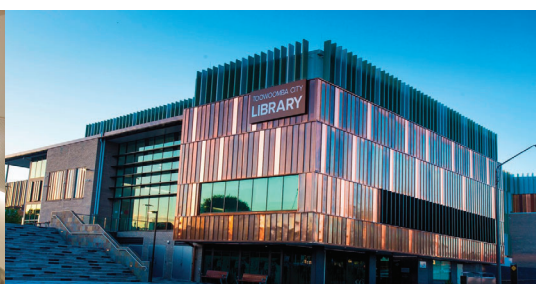
HILLTOPS LIBRARY, YOUNG NSW



“FOLA can list some significant success stories with Friends groups at – Port Macquarie (NSW), Toowoomba (Qld), Echuca (Vic), Stirling (SA), Launceston (Tas).”



TOOWOOMBA CITY LIBRARY, QLD



Libraries in regional towns are building community **ON A SHOESTRING BUDGET**

“People are asking more of the local library and for that reason we’re encouraging councils to extend services and space”



The town hall and library in Mudgee, central-west NSW

“libraries are increasingly called on to deliver a broad range of services. As the social cohesion index plummets to its lowest level in 16 years, they play a vital role as a social hub.”

Despite a record increase in public funding by the NSW government, most operate on the cost of a few new books per resident a year. In Kyogle, the council budget allocated \$473,000 to the library in 2023-24, with the state government contributing \$94,154. It’s a “priceless” investment in the community, says Kyogle’s mayor, Kylie Thomas.

Even with that increased funding, Cameron Morley (head of public library services for the State Library of NSW) says, services in regional libraries can still be “a bit patchy”, with some not able to open five days a week or provide more than one staff member.

“People are asking more of the local library and for that reason we’re encouraging councils to extend services and space,” says Cameron Morley.

“Pretty much all our libraries do computer assistance for older people, often funded through the tech-savvy service programs we administer.”

Providing access and affordability to all as the digital divide widens is a priority, says Cathie Warburton, CEO of the Australian Library and Information Association (Alia).

From *The Guardian* newspaper:

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/dec/31/libraries-in-regional-towns-are-building-community-on-a-shoestring-budget>

Read FOLA Report into this public library funding divide on Page 5.

“In 2022-23, the library ran and hosted nearly 250 programs, events, meetings and groups ranging from adults’ colouring-in to a Lego club, says Corinne Hughes, who has worked at Kyogle library for 23 years.”

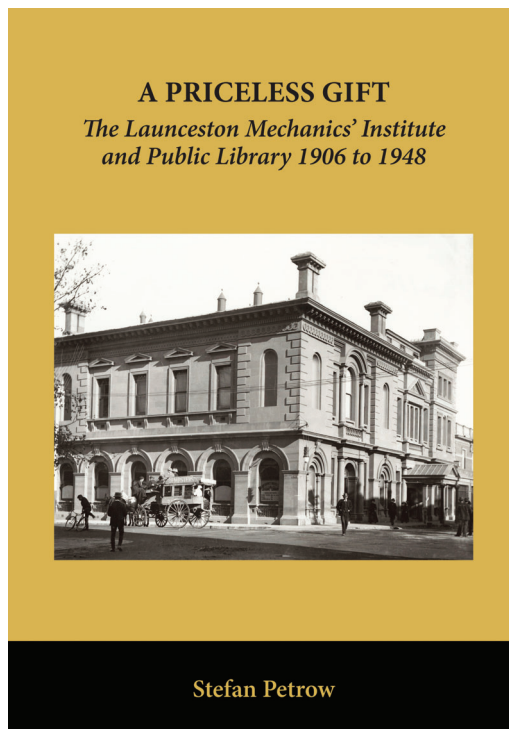
Friends of the Library Launceston Publishing Program

The Friends of the Library Launceston has recently revived its local history publishing program with the launch of 'A Priceless gift: the Launceston Mechanics' Institute and Public Library 1906-1948'. The book is by Emeritus Professor of History at the University of Tasmania, Dr Stefan Petrow.

The launch of the book on 27 October was attended by the Director of Libraries Tasmania, Sue McKerracher; Friends of the Library Patron, Mayor Matthew Garwood; former Mayor and Patron Albert van Zetten; members of the Friends of the Library and members of the Friends of the Launceston Mechanics' Institute. The book was launched by Dr Eric Ratcliff, noted local historian, and is on sale through Friends of the Library Launceston and local booksellers.

The book follows on from a previous book by Dr Petrow, 'Going to the Mechanics: a history of the Launceston Mechanics' Institute 1842-1914' which was published in 1998.

The new book covers the time when the subscription library model was giving way to the idea of a free library service with Council and government support, set against the background of local issues in Launceston. In particular, it charts the influence of one man, Joe Forward, who was librarian from the entire time period covered by the book: 1906-1948. As Dr Petrow notes, Forward 'was largely responsible for turning the Launceston Public Library through its



"The book was launched by Dr Eric Ratcliff, noted local historian, and is on sale through Friends of the Library Launceston and local booksellers."

different phases into arguably the best run and most progressive library in the state.'

The book is A4 in size, 173 pages in length and costs \$35.00. Postage is \$15.00 for one or two copies. For enquiries or to purchase copies, please email launceston.friends@gmail.com or phone 0363272540.

Prue McCausland
Secretary
Friends of the Library Launceston

"Joe Forward, who was librarian from the entire time period covered by the book: 1906-1948"



Dr Stefan Petrow, Dr Eric Ratcliff, President Heather Crosbie, Launceston Library Manager Garry Conroy-Cooper

Report:

OVERLOOKED UNDERFUNDED OUTSIZED SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT

Why Australia Needs to Invest in Country Libraries

A National Report commissioned by Friends of Libraries Australia 2024.

Research and analysis by Future Creation Australia Pty Ltd, Robert McEntyre, Director.

Background and guidance provided by FOLA.

"Public libraries in all mainland states are funded overwhelmingly by local governments, with only modest and historically diminishing contributions from state governments."

"Country libraries face multiple systemic disadvantages that limit their capacity to meet the educational, social and cultural needs of their communities. This report provides irrefutable evidence that properly funded, resourced and staffed country libraries are essential to leveling the playing field of educational and social outcomes in rural and remote Australia. It should be required reading for all politicians and policy makers at the federal, state and local levels."



The Honourable
Michael Kirby AC CMG
Founding Patron, FOLA

"the public libraries that serve the millions of Australians who live in small, isolated communities are often housed in repurposed facilities."

"As a nation, we should be investing in delivering equal libraries for all Australians, especially those in rural and remote areas. Why is this necessary? Because the child or citizen accessing books and digital information at a remote library has the same right as an urban reader to use the modern resources of scholarship and news of the world. This document puts the library where it belongs, as a central gauge of equal opportunity and equal access for people in the bush."



Thomas Keneally, AO
FOLA Patron

**BETTER COUNTRY
LIBRARIES FOR A
MORE EQUITABLE
COUNTRY**

**EDUCATION IS THE
BEDROCK OF OUR
DEMOCRACY.**



Why Australia Needs to Invest in Country Libraries

HOW DID THIS INEQUALITY BECOME SO STARK?



Week in and week out, year after year, Australia's 1,700 public libraries provide essential educational and lifelong learning experiences to millions of people.

More than 13 million Australians are members of their local library, making them far more popular than any other club or sporting organisation.

Public libraries are popular for many reasons. They are welcoming, accessible to all, free of charge, staffed by skilled knowledge workers who collect and curate physical and digital collections and services that all can enjoy. In addition to their physical resources, they are also safe, comfortable spaces with free and ready access to technology, including reliable, fast internet.

However, not all public libraries are equal. For the majority of Australians who live in capital cities and the largest regional centres, the local library is likely to be well stocked with a large, diverse collection of physical and digital materials, staffed with professional, trained knowledge experts, and open extended weekday and weekend hours. For those who

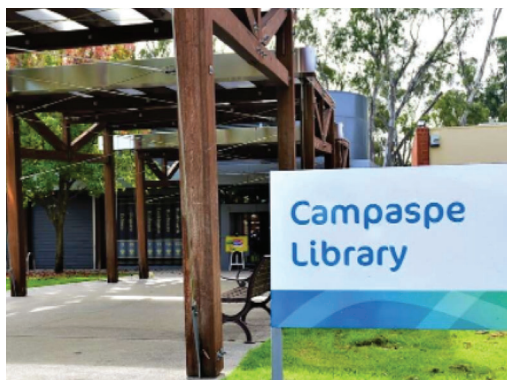


live in the country, especially in communities of 20,000 or fewer residents, their public libraries are more likely to offer diminished access, collections, services and support, even though these communities need to resources the most.

This report is the first of its kind to document the systemic underinvestment and disadvantage of country public libraries relative to their larger metropolitan counterparts, featuring a meta-analysis of data from the three largest Australian states, New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland. In the same way that two "Gonski" Australian education sector reviews have galvanized a national understanding, this report has been commissioned by FOLA to draw national attention to the unfairness of existing arrangements, and also to recommend several mitigation strategies.

"For those who live in the country, especially in communities of 20,000 or fewer residents, their public libraries are more likely to offer diminished access"

"this report has been commissioned by FOLA to draw national attention to the unfairness of existing arrangements"



Key Findings

KEY FINDING FOR DECISION MAKERS



“Underfunded and under-resourced country public libraries are a significant factor underpinning the gap in educational outcomes between rural and urban Australia”

“As a nation, we should commit to improving the resourcing of country libraries so they deliver improved quality of life for the 15 percent of Australians who live in rural and remote towns”

1

Public libraries are essential local institutions that, when properly resourced, deliver measurable educational, social, and economic benefits to their communities. In rural Australia, public libraries are systemically and unfairly underfunded and disadvantaged relative to their larger regional and metropolitan counterparts.

2

The systemic under-resourcing of country public libraries is a result of the over-reliance on funding by local councils. Rural councils serving small populations frequently lack capacity to invest sufficiently in their libraries to deliver the educational, social and economic benefits that larger communities and Australia’s capital cities often take for granted.

3

This underfunding has profound follow-on implications in terms of the diminished well being for the 4,000,000 Australians who live in these communities. Underfunded and under-resourced country public libraries are a significant factor underpinning the gap in educational outcomes between rural and urban Australia.

4

Properly funded, staffed, equipped, and resourced public libraries are proven to deliver improved learning, employment and skills for individuals and communities. Public libraries are also one of the most effective and economic ways to invest in community well-being.

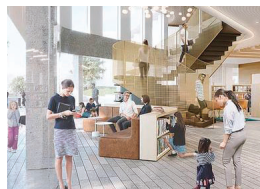
5

Australia needs a “Gonski” for Public Libraries. As a nation, we should commit to improving the resourcing of country libraries so they deliver improved quality of life for the 15 percent of Australians who live in rural and remote towns. Failing to commit to improved educational outcomes in country communities risks a growing economic and cultural divide, with rural Australians more likely to miss out on full participation in Australia’s knowledge economy.

“Failing to commit to improved educational outcomes in country communities risks a growing economic and cultural divide”

Report – Conclusion

BETTER COUNTRY LIBRARIES BUILD BETTER LIFE CHANCES



Australia's country libraries are, on the whole, deeply disadvantaged relative to their better-funded urban and regional counterparts. Rural and remote local governments with small populations lack the capacity to invest in the facilities, staffing, collections, technology and programs that deliver the kinds of social cultural, and educational benefits that larger, more populous communities expect.

There are three key steps that can and should be taken as a matter of priority to ensure every Australian in every community has access to a high quality, professionally staffed, well resourced library that will improve the quality of their life and that of their entire community.

1

Shared Resources

Where possible, and where geography permits, it makes sense to develop “hub and spokes” models with larger regional libraries supporting service delivery in smaller, outlying communities. This model is in operation in many parts of regional Australia already, though arguably it more often results in a well-resourced main library with underinvested branch libraries. The solution is not to redistribute funding from the hub to the spokes but rather to ensure every library has sufficient capacity on its own to meet the essential educational, social and cultural needs of its community.

2

Joint-Use Libraries

In small communities, it makes sense to build and maintain one large library rather than two or even three subscale and under-resourced ones. This model of joint use libraries has

been developed extensively in South Australia, where many communities have joint school or TAFE and public libraries. In New South Wales, the Hilltops Library is an example of a partnership between the NSW Department of Education and the local council to build a facility that would not have been achievable separately.

To-date, too little has been done to pursue joint use libraries in country Australia. The challenges of collaborating between state education bureaucracies and local governments can appear off-putting. But as the Hilltops and other examples have recently shown, exceptional results are achievable when these logical strategies to pool resources are pursued.

3

“Gonski for Country Libraries”

Acknowledging the unfairness of the current situation will require us to also commit to meeting a best-practice standard for all country libraries, which will include:

- A modern, purpose-built facility (where none currently exists), featuring spaces for programs, activities, meetings, and study
- At least one qualified librarian
- Opening hours that include some evenings and weekend access
- Physical and digital collections that are of sufficient size, currency, and reflective of local needs.

“To-date, too little has been done to pursue joint use libraries in country Australia.”

“The solution is not to redistribute funding from the hub to the spokes but rather to ensure every library has sufficient capacity.”

Full Report available at:
www.fola.org.au

Friends Around Australia



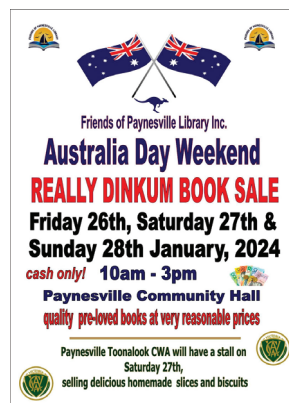
WAGGA WAGGA (NSW)



Items are \$2 for adult books, \$1 for children's books, or you can fill a bag for \$10. Friends of the Library bags will be available for \$2. We also have a large range of DVD's to give away for free.



PAYNESVILLE (VIC)



The Friends of Paynesville Library was formed in 2009 by a small group of library users. It aims to support and encourage full use of our excellent free East Gippsland Regional Library Service.

Its various activities include book discussions and recommendations; guest speakers; encouragement of members of the community – young and not so young – to use the library and learn what a great asset the library is; and most of all, to extend companionship to other readers in the community.

VICTOR HARBOR (SA)



The Friends of the Victor Harbor Library are a hard-working group of volunteers who generously donate their time and energy to run fantastic events (including Book Sales and workshops) that raise awareness for the #vhlibrary in our community and they kindly support Library run programs and events.

WINGECARRIBEE (NSW)

Join Friends of Wingecarribee Libraries in January for a free special event. Andrew White, Wingecarribee Library Coordinator will present "Everything Old Is New Again".



Introducing FOKL President

I recently joined the great team at the Friends of the Kiama Library and I'm really thrilled about the events we are planning over the coming 12 months.



Each time I start a new book, either borrowed in hard copy or an audio or ebook from Kiama Library, I get the same rush of excitement I felt when I was a child.

BARWON HEADS (VIC)

“A LIBRARY IS NOT A LUXURY BUT ONE OF THE NECESSITIES OF LIFE.”

Henry Ward Beecher

Books and looks

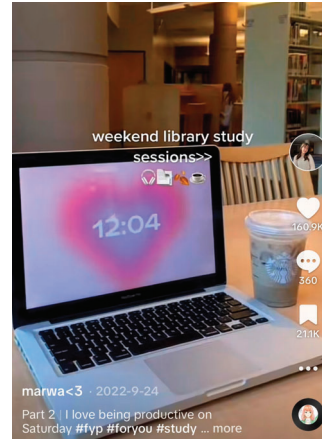
GEN Z IS 'REDISCOVERING' THE PUBLIC LIBRARY



“Gen Z seems to love public libraries. A November report from the American Library Association (ALA) drawing from ethnographic research and a 2022 survey found that gen Z and millennials are using public libraries, both in person and digitally, at higher rates than older generations.”



“I think people my age are craving something more authentic, and looking for something that’s real,” Earls said. “What’s more real than books and physical material?”



“Library-related content does well on #booktok, where young literary influencers – many of them still in high school – drive sales by recommending and reviewing stories.”

“While many young people read digitally, downloading (or pirating) titles, hard copies of books are fetishized on social media. “Ebooks don’t make good props on TikTok,” Kathi Inman Berens, co-author of the ALA report, said. “You need book materiality, a printed book, something that helps visually.” Why buy the title when you can just borrow it at the library?”



From:

[https://www.theguardian.com/books/2024/jan/26/
books-and-looks-gen-z-is-rediscovering-the-public-library](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2024/jan/26/books-and-looks-gen-z-is-rediscovering-the-public-library)

Friends of the **MULTNOMAH COUNTY LIBRARY (USA)**



Since 1972, FOL has advocated on behalf of Multnomah County Library and provided advocacy and funding for critical programs and services, recently committing \$200,000 in future funding to assist with a new branch library building.



Volunteer

Make a Difference in Your Community

Thank you for your interest in volunteering! For over 50 years, volunteers have been the heart and soul of our organization. Each year hundreds of volunteers donate their time to support the Friends of the Library. Every volunteer makes a measurable impact in the funds that Friends raises for the Library's life-enriching programs and services.

Membership

Join Us

Welcome to our member services page. Membership fees are tax-deductible. Friends of Multnomah County Library (FOL) supporters can join, renew, and upgrade their membership here at any time, as well as purchase gift memberships. Members can also set their membership to automatically renew each year.

Events

February 24

February Educator Discount Day
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2024
11:00 AM 5:00 PM
ROSE CITY READS (MAP)



Donate

Yes! I want to support Friends of the Library.

To join FOL or to renew your membership, please visit our [MEMBERSHIP PAGE](#).

In addition to their annual membership dues, or as an alternate if membership benefits are not of interest, many of our supporters choose to make one-time or recurring donations to Friends of the Library, or to make contributions in honor or memory of friends and loved ones.



Shop

Friends Library Store

We are open! Come visit our fabulous new space in the lobby of Central Library. We are open Wednesday - Friday, noon - 5pm. Members get a 10% discount.

801 SW 10th Ave

About

Friends of the Library Supports Multnomah County Library

Friends of the Multnomah County Library (FOL) advocates for and supports our outstanding public library. We provide supplemental funding for library programs and services, and sponsor activities which engage people who value our library.

Membership Application

CATEGORIES

Membership fee incorporating
News Update

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FOL Group —
0-25 Members \$25 ☐

FOL Group —
25+ Members \$50 ☐

Libraries \$105 ☐

Institutions incl. Libraries with multiple
Friends groups \$105 ☐

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Extra copies of
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Published four times a year by Friends of Libraries
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www.facebook.com/FOLAFriends/
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Production/Design: WorkingType Design

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