

Reading with the Rockstars

Janet Martin found that when you hit the right wavelength you get results

During September and October last year, 156 public libraries in Queensland participated in a statewide reading program aimed at teenagers. *Reading with the Rockstars* was designed by staff of the Public Libraries Division in the State Library, and was based on the success and popularity of a teenage summer reading program among teenagers conducted in Mishawaka, IN., USA.

It was our perception, writes Janet, that there were few programs in Queensland aiming to encourage teenagers to read. Around 10% of the population are aged 13-18 years old, but use of libraries by this age group is largely restricted to study facilities and non-fiction requirements for school assignments.

We set out to design a promotion with several goals in mind:

- to promote public libraries to teenagers;
- to boost membership and issues in the teenage area;
- to improve the image of reading to teenagers;
- to introduce teenagers to the new and exciting fiction being published;
- to improve the knowledge of library staff in Queensland about new teenage fiction;
- to foster cooperation between public libraries and the State Library;
- to promote public libraries and the State Library to the wider community.

We knew that the task would not be easy, but we were convinced that a positive start could be made in Queensland. Many library staff, especially in SE Queensland, encouraged the endeavour as an exciting boost to an area of public library service which usually receives little attention.

We designed the activity with the interests and culture of teen-

agers in mind. A rock music theme was chosen, and recording artists throughout Australia were approached for donations of autographed photos, posters, recordings and memorabilia to be offered as prizes for teenagers. We also approached publishers of popular paperbacks and magazines, and a range of companies

Most had a good sort-out of their YA collection, and renewed contacts with local schools.

Once teenagers came to hear of the promotion, they could simply visit their local public library to participate. At the library, teenagers could pick up booklists and a simple entry form. Each time they visited the library and borrowed books to read, they could fill out another entry form to become eligible for prizes.

Teenagers could also contribute to, and pick up copies of a magazine we produced called *'RAVE ON'*. The magazine included reviews of books written by teenagers, new book news, author profiles, writings by teenagers, and many other bits and pieces. It has proved a popular magazine actively requested by many high schools, and has attracted over 350 reviews written by teenagers!

Was it all worthwhile? Some libraries found it difficult to measure the effects, and so found little in the way of increased usage, but many reported greater YA activity—a 25% increase in membership or a doubling of issues to teenagers... Long-unused memberships were reactivated, and it may be that the long-term effects will be important. And, across the board, there was a heightened awareness and a new spirit of cooperation between the State Library and Queensland public libraries. ■

Reading With THE ROCK STARS

whose products were considered to be sought after. The response was tremendous! Over \$17,500 worth of products were donated as prizes to be offered on a statewide basis, and local sponsorship in addition to this was also secured in several locations.

With great support from State Library, we were able to produce 55 000 lists in a series of ten booklists on orange fluoro-coloured stickers, about the size of bookmarks. Each booklist represented a different genre or area of publishing, and were given snappy titles such as *Grim pickings* (horror), *Wizards of Oz* (Australian authors), *Lights out* (mysteries) or *Brief encounters* (short stories). The lists emphasised recent Australian books, and included titles which would tend to grab and interest new readers. It worked—teenagers were even selling the lists to their peers outside the library doors!

The University of Queensland Press sponsored some great posters. Public libraries got masses of promotional material. Teenage radio stations gave air time. Some libraries organised rock groups to play in or near their building.

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