

Moreland Reading Project

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Reading is one of the fundamental building blocks of learning as well as one of the great pleasures of life. As librarians we embrace this statement but our challenge lies in spreading the 'reading message' to the wider community. The Moreland Reading Project is an innovative approach to encouraging people to read more and is modelled on the National Reading Campaign in the United Kingdom. 'Reading' is interpreted in its broadest sense and includes other languages and formats such as talking book and screen-based mediums.

In 2000, the project's framework featured monthly themes and related activities to promote reading. Monthly activities were organised by small volunteer 'theme teams' across the five library service points, giving staff the opportunity to expand their skills and use their imagination and creativity in a way that is not often possible with their existing job roles. A project officer with an events and marketing background, Nicole Wiseman, was employed in late 1999 and has shared her considerable marketing and promotions knowledge with staff, again increasing the staff skills base.

From the topical and informative, to the escapist and experimental, the Moreland Reading Project has hosted a vast range of activities in English and other languages to appeal to the diverse Moreland community. Events have included talks by local and international authors including Shane Maloney, Arnold Zable, Carmel Bird, Barry Dickins and Michael McGirr as well as workshops varying from recording your own music, poetry writing, parenting, tracing the history of your house to self-publishing.

Other activities have included film nights, fun monthly competitions, launches of new materials in other languages, special children's storytimes and workshops. Another feature has been highly successful cultural activities including Croatian, Indonesian and Sinhalese launches and cultural performances.

The highlight of the project is the BookStart Kit launched in August 2000 which is modelled on a British scheme aimed

at encouraging parents and carers to read to babies. The BookStart Kit is distributed to every newborn Moreland baby in co-operation with the Maternal and Child Health Nurses. The kit, complete with calico library bag, features a board book and advice on developing children's reading skills from an early age as well as information on parenting resources. Where possible, a bilingual board book is provided for LOTE speakers. The library's booklet contained in the kit — *Reading is forever: how to develop your child's reading skills and have fun together* — is also available free to all Moreland residents, schools and centres.

A community-wide initiative, although co-ordinated by the library, the Moreland Reading Project has provided a focus for community groups to promote their own reading-related activities. Neighbourhood Houses, Moreland Adult Education Association, the environmental park Ceres and the Italian Drama Company are some of the groups to date who have linked into the project. Student groups and local residents have also utilised the promotion of the project to organise their own reading writing related activities.

A variety of methods are being used to promote the project including press releases, radio interviews, t-shirts, postcards, the library's internet home page and colourful brochures and flyers. In addition, targeted promotional events have occurred with staff dressed as theme related storybook characters who distribute flyers in shopping centres and parks. Publicity in other languages has been particularly successful with segments on SBS Radio in Chinese, Croatian, Indonesian, Italian and Turkish as well as other LOTE media.

The 2000 project was immensely successful on several levels. It received positive support and feedback from the community as well as lifting the library's profile with Council. It increased the standing of the library as an important community centre and built or strengthened links with other groups and Council departments. The project increased the staff skills base as well as boosting staff morale, particularly after the library was awarded the 2000 ALIA Award for Innovation in Public Libraries.

The success of the project has warranted its extension into 2001 and beyond. The focus is changing to the implementation of longer-term programs similar to the BookStart Kit. A six-week study tour of the United Kingdom by the community relations librarian commencing in May 2001 should yield more innovative long-term projects for Moreland in 2002. ■



February's image promoting Information to go...! which was also made into a postcard