



## Powerful partnerships

*...the ability to process and use information effectively is more than a basic tool for the empowerment of school students: it is in fact the basic survival skill for those who wish to be successful in the 1990s and beyond. (ASLA/ALIA statement)*



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The City of Wyndham is located in Melbourne's south-west, approximately 35 km from the CBD. In June 2003, Wyndham's population was estimated at over 100 000 residents. It is one of the fastest-growing local government areas in Victoria and is supported by one of the most dynamic and progressive local authorities in the state. The Council's commitment to forward planning led to the development of the Wyndham Quality Community Plan (QCP).

The QCP was developed by the Wyndham community to identify their preferred future. It started with almost 600 stakeholders working on the vision of what Wyndham could be, and could achieve, by 2015. The result was *Our Vision of Wyndham in 2015 – the Quality Community Plan*. It contained 14 areas identified by the community as priorities for action, one of which was education and skills development. This priority promotes libraries as the centre of the education/information network.

Librarians have a passionate interest in developing literacy and numeracy and have always provided Storytimes and picture books to encourage a love of reading from an early age, but the QCP challenged us to expand our role. Many children start school without the constructive exposure to literature that is essential in learning to read. We want to use 'the library and other community resources to promote pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills, so that all children start school with the skills they need'.

To achieve this goal, we developed the Early Childhood Literacy Framework, which outlined new programs for the library and potential community partners. These included:

- Developing literacy and numeracy collections at each library (the Learning Resources collection);
- Introducing Rhyme Time for children aged 0–36 months;

- Increasing to five the number of weekly Storytime sessions ;
- Developing active partnerships with Maternal and Child Health (MCH), kindergartens, primary schools, Family Day Care, Youth Services and training centres to promote early childhood literacy and numeracy development.

Considerable effort has been invested by the Children's and Youth Services department in developing these community partnerships, and the results have been very worthwhile. The most rewarding developments to date have been:

- In conjunction with MCH, providing 'Babies and Books' talks for new mums in-house, as well as at MCH Centres. Hosting talks at the library reinforces the focus on literacy and results in many new mums joining the library and regularly coming to Rhyme Time. Staff have watched with pleasure as women develop networks and friendships from their regular visits;
- Hosting transition programs in conjunction with local primary schools. Parents of kindergarten\* children come to the library and are shown ways to bridge the gap between kindergarten and school using the Learning Resources Collection;
- Hosting information literacy talks to Prep and Grade 1 children from local primary schools on what the library has to offer them and how to access information they need;
- Taking Storytime to kindergartens, where children participate in an interactive story through the use of props, learn a little about the library and are given a flyer to take home of the rhymes they have learned. To date these Storytimes, renamed 'Star in a Story', have been taken to over 35 kindergarten sessions, reaching more than 1000 preschool children;
- Information exchange between library staff and other early childhood professionals.

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Tania giving a 'Star in a story' session at a Wyndham kindergarten

Some very tangible results are apparent. Picture book loans have increased by 20 per cent in the past 12 months. Attendances at Storytime and Rhyme Time continues to rise: figures from July to September 2005, compared to the previous year, show an attendance increase of 20 per cent in Storytime and a massive 176 per cent in Rhyme Time.\*\*

#### A final word

This article has focussed strongly on early childhood literacy, because it is the area where the most progress has been made. Other literacy projects being progressively implemented by the Children's and Youth Services department include:

- Providing information sessions to child care students;
- Contacting schools to find out yearly curricula topics, to improve weak areas of the collection;
- Forming collaborative partnerships with local schools for the Victorian Premier's Reading Challenge, encouraging them to register and promote it to students;
- Attending regular 'Book Chat' sessions to interact with Year 7-10 students;
- Regular enhancement of the Learning Resources collection, containing structured readers and blackline masters, as well as numeracy resources;
- Development of 'Info Connexion', a community partnership program between the library and a local community centre, designed to provide homework help and teach students research skills with online resources;
- Investigation into a literacy outreach program, held in the library, to provide information literacy sessions to targeted disadvantaged schools where children, for economic reasons, have little or no access to library services.

These projects are a strong predictor of greater things to come.

**For more information, contact Tania at**

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**A full copy of the Quality Community Plan can be downloaded from <http://www.wyndham.vic.gov.au/community/qcp/2002/> or contact Tania on the above e-mail to have a full-colour version posted out.**

\* In Victoria, kindergarten refers to the year prior to children commencing school. Some states refer to this year as 'preschool'.

\*\* These figures only include children, not parents or carers present at the sessions.

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