

## Employee Assistance Programs

It is increasingly common for Australian workplaces to arrange for employees to have access to external Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs). EAPs provide counselling, mediation, and other support services to employees, especially where personal difficulties may have an effect on an employee's working life. EAP organisations also offer workplace mediation services.

The benefit for small workplaces of engaging an EAP provider is that small employers often do not have internal counselling expertise, as distinct from general human resources experience, while for organisations with large numbers of employees the demands on the time of staff advisors can often require supplementary assistance from an external provider.

In addition to assisting with personal and workplace relationships, EAPs can also provide resources for problems such as drug and alcohol dependence.

The cost of EAPs is borne by employers but is not great and is regarded as an employee benefit which can assist both in staff retention and in preventing workplace difficulties from escalating. The basis of an EAP arrangement is that the employer agrees to pay the cost of a number of counselling sessions for employees during a given period, usually twelve months, for which the employer is billed where an employee has approached the EAP. Employees are advised of the arrangement and, if they avail themselves of the service, can contact the EAP provider direct and with anonymity. Invoices for the service provided do not name employees. The cost of individual counselling sessions is in the range of \$160 to \$180.

General information about EAPs is available at <http://www.eapaa.org.au>, website of the Employee Assistance Professionals Association of Australia. The website includes details of individual providers in each state and territory. As well as the EAP providers affiliated with the EAPAA, the organisation Relationships Australia also offers employee assistance. While Relationships Australia (formerly the Marriage Guidance Council of Australia) is probably best known for guidance in personal relationships, it also provides assistance to workplaces, building on the expertise of its personal

counsellors. Further information is at <http://www.relationships.com/what-we-do/services>.

## National Occupational Health and Safety Laws

The September 2008 Workwatch article referred to the work promoted by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to harmonise Australia's occupational health and safety (OH&S) laws. The final report of the National Review into Model OH&S laws was released earlier this year and is under consideration by the Workplace Relations Ministers Council. Under existing arrangements, inconsistent laws cause confusion for businesses operating across state and territory boundaries. Inconsistencies also lead to duplication and inefficiencies for both businesses and governments in providing policy, regulatory and support services.

The proposed model legislation will promote the workplace health and safety of workers as the duties of care will extend beyond employer/employee relationships as currently defined. The recommended duties of care will include all who are involved in the undertaking of work or providing things to enable work to be performed. Those owing duties of care will be persons conducting a business or undertaking; persons with management or control of the workplace; designers, manufacturers, suppliers, installers of plant, substances and structures; officers of a corporation, partnerships or unincorporated association and workers and others within the workplace.

A fact sheet relating to the proposed OH&S regime is at <http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/swa/Modellegislation/Model+OHS+Legislation>

The review process will continue during 2010, leading to gradual implementation of the recommended measures by the end of 2011.

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## Book Week Safari



### Book Week 2009 at St Mary's.

St Mary's Senior School Library in Karrinyup, Western Australia was transformed into an African rainforest for Book Week 2009, and visitors to our library found themselves in the depths of an amazing and surreal jungle. Stunning displays, greenery, and animals galore adorned the reading area. Butterflies and vines hung from the ceiling, and cardboard cut-outs of elephants, lions, and giraffes surfaced from every corner. Masses of stuffed jungle animals and potted palms helped to set the scene.

For Book Week dress-up day, our library staff dressed in pyjamas and lion masks and staff had to guess which book we represented – Graeme Base's *Animalia* (Lazy Lions Lounging in the Library). Other days of the week we dressed in leopard print and added pith helmets, butterfly nets, and binoculars. Staff and students came dressed in theme, or as their favourite book character, and the whole of the Year 12s came dressed as dalmatians. It was wonderful to see how the whole school got into the spirit of Book Week. We also dedicated three lunch hours to Book Week festivities: Story Time, African Crafts, and a Staff vs Student Quiz. All-in-all, it was a very successful Book Week Safari.

We are already planning for next year's theme (Across the Story Bridge) and will use the same successful ideas, plus add a few more.

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### A book safari in a school library

A good time was had by all during recent Book Week 2009 celebrations at Genesis Christian College (a co-educational K-12 school) in Bray Park, Queensland. The safari was close to the heart of our 'Out of Africa' Teacher-Librarian (TL), Mrs Joy Payne. The library was decorated with animal posters of Africa's 'big five' – elephant, leopard, Cape buffalo, lion, and rhinoceros, as well as wild animal footprints, an original artwork (from Africa) of lions and zebras, and other African animal artefacts supplied by our TL who also lovingly painted a safari scene on the large, rear window of our library.

The Book Week celebrations started with a performance of *Jungle Bungle* presented to our students in years 1-6 by *Perform! Educational Musicals*. This fun and interactive program featured Claire and Oliver dressing up as characters from four of the Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) short listed books.

Book Week coincided with our annual Book Fair and Grandparents Day where the grandparents were given a tour of our library facilities and encouraged to buy a book (or two) from the book fair to donate to the library. Over 500 grandparents were also enthralled by our junior ensemble performing in our library.

During the week, library staff, wearing CBCA t-shirts, kept students busy with activity sheets based on selected CBCA short-listed books, bookmarks, and jungle scenes to colour and keep, and even provided a camping chair and tent in the library courtyard (which proved to be a highly popular place to read even among our high-schoolers).

We hope the Book Week celebrations encouraged our students on their own safari (the Swahili word for journey) into a life-long love of reading and books.

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