

Public/community initiatives

Building a stronger community @ Beenleigh Library

According to the *Cultural Diversity in Logan City report* (2008) Logan City has the most diverse community in Queensland with its current population at over 250 000 consisting of more than 50 000 residents from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds.



Massah and Ronice enjoy
'Talk like a Pirate' Day

The Beenleigh Library, as a supporter of cultural diversity, promotes an inclusive and empowered community by extending its already customer-focused services to include specialised multicultural programs and services that meet the needs of the changing cultural demographics of the Beenleigh community.

With so many current residents from CALD backgrounds, and with significant projected growth in this area, the Beenleigh Library has embraced the challenges of multiculturalism.

Cultural diversity is based on moral values such as respect for difference, tolerance and a common commitment to freedom.

Cultural diversity is in fact one of Australia's great social, cultural and economic resources.

– Department of Immigration and Citizenship website

Services and programs developed and implemented since March 2008 include an English Conversation Group, resume classes, participation in an employment day with Assisting Collaborative Community Employment Support Services (ACCES Services Inc), the launch of a multicultural recipe book, citizenship test workshops, and a youth music program. These services are continuing in 2009 along with the development of a multicultural community choir, storytimes for CALD children (in conjunction with Beenleigh State School), and various special events that acknowledge and celebrate social inclusion such as International Women's Day and Harmony Day.

- The **English Conversation Group** was developed in response to interactions with customers, specifically local refugee parents whose children spend a lot of time in the library and who, although having resided in Australia for more than one or two years, still have very limited English language skills. The group is held in a non-threatening and socially inclusive environment (the library) which allows participants to feel welcomed and relaxed. This lack of environmental barriers encourages a diverse group of people to attend. We have had attendees from Chile, Sudan, Hungary, Romania, Japan, Indonesia, and China with differing religions such as Buddhism, Muslim, Christian, and Agnostic all coming together and building social cohesion while improving their English. Particularly pleasing is the coming together of patrons from an English speaking background mixing with patrons from CALD backgrounds. The group meets weekly for one hour. This group is

facilitated by a library staff member with ESL qualifications and a Reference Librarian. A 10-week program is currently being developed which will be available for other libraries to use.

- **Better than Air Guitar**, our five-week music program was initiated and developed to provide youth who practically reside at the library with an opportunity to access musical tuition free of charge. This type of tuition would not normally be within the means of these library patrons and addresses the issues surrounding lack of opportunity for low income community members, such as many of our refugee patrons. Again the environment of the library is important – in the library the youth aren't judged on their ability (it's not school) and use of our space is not dependant on our customer's financial or community status. The program was conceived in late 2008 with local music business, The Music Cavern (with two staff providing tuition).
- Our **Resume Writing Workshops** began as a result of customers from our CALD community seeking help with writing resumes. One Burundian teenager who was assisted with his resume told someone else who then told someone else – the ripple effect was wonderful. Word-of-mouth is still alive and well in this technological age! This has resulted in an improvement in job seeking abilities and renewed interest in the workforce. Specialised classes are now taught regularly by our CLO (Computer Liaison Officer) every month.
- **Citizenship test workshops** and information sessions were offered on an as-needed basis. This need was brought to staff attention when it was noticed that many primary school children were helping their parents at the public access computers to look for information on the citizenship test. During 2009 more formal classes will be developed in conjunction with local community group, Multilink, to meet the growing demand.

Multicultural services at Beenleigh Library were developed over a period of time in response to current needs and through liaison with CALD community members and local service providers. Minimal financial resources have been required to implement these programs. Staff innovation and resourcefulness and community involvement have been used instead. This innovation has been rewarded with the staff at the Beenleigh Library becoming the proud recipients of the Logan City Council Employee Innovation Award for customer service.

The whole process of developing and implementing multicultural programs into our already inclusive library service has resulted in both the community we serve and the staff at the Beenleigh Library having the opportunity to learn and grow with CALD patrons. Relationship building with the community has been a very positive outcome. In the future the plan is to continue to develop and implement programs that further target CALD groups. As the Beenleigh community grows in diversity it is more important than ever that programs are developed to meet and target the needs of the whole community. Cultural diversity is a part of life, particularly for those in customer service-focused fields. The reality for Beenleigh Library staff is that interaction with those from CALD backgrounds make up a significant component of our day-to-day working life.

Our choice is to embrace it.

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