

Engaging our culturally rich and diverse community

The City of Canterbury, with a total population of 135 000, operates in the fifth most culturally diverse local government area in Australia. The library has a membership which reflects the population itself – 55.6% of our membership is from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) background and 30% of our loans are for non-English material.

It's a busy, vibrant library service which actively engages with its community across a wide variety of fronts and excels in multicultural service delivery. Each day more than 2 700 people come through our doors and in terms of events and programs delivered we rank among the highest in New South Wales.

To ensure we best meet the needs of our community, we developed a strategy to deliver services and collections in a cohesive, inclusive and comprehensive way.

Our strategy

Community building and harmony

- A 'Celebrating Cultures' program – cultural events partnered with community organisations
- Outreach visits to CALD community centres and seniors groups

Encouraging early literacy and a love of reading

- Community Language Storytimes in Arabic, Chinese, Korean, and Indonesian
- Community Language Book Groups
- Providing access to life long learning
- English language classes
- Library tours
- Informational seminars
- Computer & internet training
- Computers with multilingual software and fonts

Current, meaningful, and in-demand collections

- Collections in core community languages reflecting local demographics and demand
- Arabic, Chinese, and Vietnamese collections enhanced by participation in WESCOL (a resource sharing project with five participating libraries)
- Other languages supported by bulk loans from the State Library of NSW
- Community participation in selection
- Community Language Reference Group

Library programs

Celebrating cultures

We conduct a minimum of one cultural event per year for each of our main community language groups. The events are often held to coincide with a special day and are often used to promote newly purchased community language materials.

Well developed networks and partnerships with community organisations are a key part of holding successful events and achieving community engagement.

Community groups have regularly helped us by assisting with catering and either sourcing or providing entertainment for the event. Performances are diverse and range from music, dancing, and poetry to fashion parades, magic tricks, acrobatics, and martial arts.

Along with the often dramatic performances, food to reflect the cultural group is always a highlight. We also aim to have exhibitions of artwork or cultural artefacts on display at the same time as the events.

Community involvement in selection

Our Community Language Reference Group meets twice a year to discuss multicultural services and have input into collection selection profiles. Throughout the year, community selection meetings are held and community members get a chance to choose material for the library.



Jamila Ismail: Libraries are for everyone

English language classes

Our English Language Classes have gained so much in popularity that there are sometimes two classes being held concurrently as students won't fit in the one class. There is now a waiting list and attendance was 1 848 last year – up from 567 in 2002/03

Information sessions

Seminars and information sessions are held each year. Regular topics include health and law. Once again, partnership is important. The Law Society of NSW provides speakers each year on a variety of topics and the local area Health Service has delivered sessions on diabetes, cancer, healthy living, and mental illness.

Multicultural preschool storytimes

Our talented library staff present monthly story times in Arabic, Chinese, and Indonesian. Korean Storytime was introduced in 2005 and has proven so popular it is now run fortnightly by community volunteers. This program has received recognition from the Korean Consulate which has given us a yearly donation of \$500 towards the purchase of new story time resources.

What has the strategy delivered?

Improved programs

'Celebrating Cultures' events now have an average of 120 people attending, and a constantly high satisfaction rating whenever surveys are held. These events do what we hoped they would – they attract people from all backgrounds and the energy and conviviality is a true sign of our role as a community hub.

The range of programs offered has increased and those such as English language classes have absolutely exploded in popularity. Ongoing evaluation helps ensure that we are continually improving programs so they remain relevant.

Increased attendance at multicultural programs
5,034 in 2007/08 – up 143% since 2002/03

Improved collections

Earlier this decade, our collections were old, read out, and clearly not meeting the needs of our people. We've turned this around by:

- Success with substantial grants to improve multicultural services and collections
- Partnering in the WESCOL resource sharing project
- An increased resource budget and re-prioritising our resource spending to fit with community demographics
- Ruthless withdrawal of old stock
- Increased loans - 219,766 in 2007/08 – up 93% since 2002/03
- Increased collections - 26,254 in 2007/08 – up 51% since 2002/03