



A DEPARTMENTAL BOOK CLUB

Being a librarian in a federal government department can bring you all types of opportunities and enquiries. CLARE RIX, AALIA (CP) at the Department of Immigration and Border Protection Library was surprised when she was asked a question that she had never been asked before.

In the middle of 2014 I received an enquiry that I had not been asked before: would I like to help start a book club? The answer from me was an emphatic yes! The question came from one of regular patrons, and with the backing of a couple of very enthusiastic graduates and the department's social club, we started to plan the book club.

The first challenge was how to include everyone – from a department that has many national and international offices – who might be interested in the club. This was where our two graduates excelled. They had recently helped set up an online forum for the social club and helped us to do the same. The forums are externally hosted and are available for all staff to discuss a range of topics. We coupled this with face-to-face meetings and even teleconferencing when there was a need for it.

My first role was to conduct a survey of staff to see what they would like the club to read and how they would like to participate. We had over 200 responses to our survey, and this helped us to create genre sub-forums online and to plan monthly meetings when possible. Our first book was Anh Do's *The Happiest Refugee*, which most club members enjoyed, though it sparked a robust discussion on whether or not it was in-depth enough or just a series of anecdotes.

As a librarian I love the idea of book clubs, whether they exist to encourage an existing interest in a genre, or to help encourage people to read a wider range of books. However, what I've also discovered through this experience is that the book club can also provide respite from the stress of work. It is a good excuse to relax with a book and take a little time to think and communicate about a new topic. This is a good way of refreshing the mind and socialising.

The book club is now a little quieter than when it started, but it is still providing staff with a social outlet that is not work related. This provides great stress relief for some and is a good way to challenge ourselves to read materials that we otherwise would not. Recently there was a poetry reading in our head office by a published staff member.

I had never been a member of a book club before and would not have imagined that my work would be the place to start one, so I was pleasantly surprised and hope that maybe we can inspire book clubs in other unlikely places!

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