



Coventry Library, Stirling, in South Australia, is seen as a great example of the productive relationship a library can have with their Friends of the Library group.

FRIENDS BUILDING COMMUNITIES

During the past 20 years, Friends of Library groups have developed in every state and territory of Australia, some delivering remarkable results to their communities and building a greater awareness of the role public libraries play in our daily life.

With the help of our present patron, Tom Keneally, Friends of Libraries Australia (FOLA) celebrated 20 years at a function held in Queen’s Hall, State Library of Victoria late last year. Twenty years ago, the same venue was the location for the Hon Justice Michael Kirby AC, CMG and inaugural FOLA patron, to launch FOLA as only the second Friends of Library organisation in the world.

Some fine examples of community building can be found at Balmain (NSW), Port Macquarie (NSW), Toowoomba (Qld), Stirling (SA), Mount Gambier (SA), Altona (Vic), Launceston (Tas) and the National Library of Australia (ACT).

Successful Friends groups embrace some common factors, including partnerships with stakeholders, community programs, high level of political judgement, ability in persuading decision makers, marketing excellence and building new and sustainable markets with the community.

Another important feature has been leadership of the Friends group – it makes a difference. Here, Balmain has been both fortunate and maybe lucky. Few groups in Australia have been able to build and sustain a committed leadership team for such a period. Another group in Australia which stands ‘above the pack’ is Stirling in South Australia. Here we can witness the strong partnership between Friends and library management, along with mayoral support. This has enabled them to achieve one of the outstanding public library buildings in the state, along with a strong community program of activities, and a membership of nearly 800.

The early years of FOLA were spent in assisting the establishment of groups around the country. Our role today is to challenge Friends and decision makers, to improve the services we have and more importantly, see that more adequate funding is allocated to public libraries.

Friends do not operate in a vacuum. They are part of a global network, operating in many countries, that strengthens civil society upon which much of our world’s wellbeing depends.

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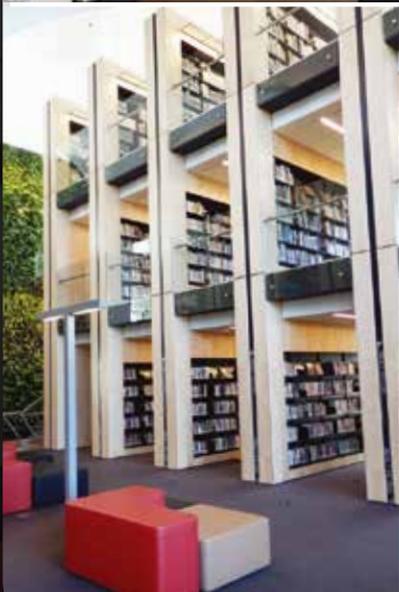
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