



ROCKDALE ROCKS WITH A NEW LIBRARY



The reading nooks of the Children's Forest encourage little (and big!) people to curl up and read.



The images in the meeting rooms are of trees found around nearby Botany Bay.



The event and programming space offers great views of the city and the surrounds.



The youth space offers plenty of room to plug in a device, study with friends or just chill out on the bridge overlooking the gardens below.

The journey to build a new Central Library in Rockdale in southern Sydney was a long one, with many stops and starts along the way. So it was with great fanfare and excitement that the doors were finally opened on 31 July 2016. PAULA PFOEFFER and MARK NORMAN give us a tour.

In November 2009, the former Rockdale City Council (now known as Bayside Council) established a working party to investigate a new Central Library. Nearly a year was spent developing the brief for the tender, but it wasn't until a Council meeting in February 2013, in which two community members and Sue McKerracher, CEO of ALIA, spoke passionately in support of the new library project, that the library was finally endorsed by Council by the narrowest of margins – one vote!

Community members, Council's Youth Group and business representatives played a crucial role in developing the concept plans and providing feedback to the community through public workshops and media opportunities. Each stage of the design process was discussed with the consultation team to ensure they were fully informed and that their views were being heard by the architects and interior designer.

The build began in December 2014 and took 18 months to complete. Located next to the heritage-listed town hall, the new library integrates this historic building, enabling large open spaces and natural light to enter the building.

Our library is 2,200 square metres of usable space spread over three levels. It shares an entrance with the Customer Service Centre, so our Council now offers a seamless experience. New features include self-loan kiosks, a smart reserves shelf, smart returns chutes and a print management system. We no longer have traditional service desk but rather an Info Zone Pod that embraces openness, allowing staff to rove the floors and assist our community wherever they are in the library.

Features of the library include a children's reading forest with hideaway spots and nooks to crawl into. This space encourages children (and adults) to find a quiet space in which they can read. We also have an interactive digital floor to encourage play.

It has been very satisfying to watch people use the space as the designer intended it to be used. On each level we can offer different spaces depending on the needs of the community. There are collections on each floor, there are meeting rooms where group or quiet study

can occur and there is a relaxing Chill Zone for young people. Level Two offers a stand-out local studies area, complete with interactive spaces to explore our digital photo and map collections and our public PCs, which are very popular. We also have resident native bees, which live on the balcony in a house made by our friends at the Arncliffe Men's Shed.

Level Three is our event space, with sliding doors opening out onto a balcony that offers outstanding views of the city of Sydney and the surrounds of Rockdale, not to mention the Art Deco town hall.

Our new library has enabled us to make a number of changes to our service provision. We have increased our opening hours, opening on Sunday's for the first time and starting at 8.30 am Monday to Friday (to match the opening hours of Council Customer Service). We have even increased our staffing levels, enabling us to think about new programs and services to offer. Embracing technology has also enabled us to the change our service model from a static to a roving one. With no formal desks and with circulation duties now transformed into self-service, staff are now available to provide enquiry and readers' advisory support to all our customers.

The change process to get there was also a journey. The library staff were involved in designing our service model using UX principles, which promotes design from the customer's point of view. Our service model is very flexible and, as we have discovered new challenges, we have been able to modify our procedures to meet the needs of our customers.

The opening day of the library was celebrated with 3,000 visitors, and since then we have doubled our number of visits, participation in programs and our loans. Perhaps the best comment we received since we opened was, 'This is what my rates should be spent on.' New libraries open a world of possibilities for communities, and our library has now become the destination of choice for our local community. 

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Award-winning author Stephen Michael King not only designed our children's self-service kiosk but also appeared on the opening day. He was a massive hit with our audience.



Audiobook narrator Stig Wemyss entertained the audience with funny stories from the Bolinda BorrowBox collection.