

Not all the time - quantitative data is only part of the story

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Abstract:

This paper discusses the specialised collections at City of Gold Coast Libraries in Queensland, Australia that have been established since 2016. These collections are an indigenous, surfing and LGBT+ collection. The intent of each collection is to highlight the content available in each area of interest to our indigenous, surfing and LGBT+ communities and other customers. The success of each collection is perhaps best measured in qualitative data rather than quantitative data.

The loan statistics are not high and probably never will be. The reason being that each collection is very small however is immeasurable in value to local communities. The feedback in particular from the LGBT+ community has been very positive.

Keywords: LGBT+, inclusiveness, targeted collections, indigenous, surfing

Introduction

City of Gold Coast Libraries, as at December 2017 had a physical collection of 1,011,844 items and 208,902 digital items as at. There are 12 static libraries and a Mobile library, a Local Studies library, a Special Needs library are co-located within branch libraries. In the last year a small standalone space has been dedicated to an early years lending library with a focus on play-based learning.

There are approximately 275,000 registered library members as at 30 April 2018.¹

The City of Gold Coast had an estimated resident population of 592,330 in 2017 and is a major tourist hub. The estimated resident population was 450,075 in 2006 so the rate of population growth has been significant. The City covers an area of 133,372 hectares (1,334 km²). The population density is 4.44 persons per hectare.² There is higher density in the coastal areas and a concentration of population along the coastal corridor.

Like all public libraries, City of Gold Coast Libraries caters for ages 0 to 90 and beyond. City Libraries aim to offer welcoming spaces and collections that exceed expectations. The library service endeavours to connect communities by offering ‘.....opportunities for social participation especially for seniors, marginal groups and new residents.’³ These principles underpin City Libraries Strategic Framework.

The collection is primarily a floating lending collection. The reference collection has been reduced in recent years due to both the reduction in the publication of print reference titles and the decrease in demand for authoritative texts as so much knowledge can now be accessed online.

The physical collection segments, in particular: DVDs, large print, adult fiction, magazines and the junior collections all performing solidly. In each instance the percentage of loans is greater than the percentage these collections account for in the entire library collection.

Digital collections continue to increase in popularity. City Libraries subscribes to 87 online databases, a music streaming service, 2 e-magazine platforms and 4 major e-book & e-audiobook platforms. The demand for print items is still high and many customers report using both print and digital resources for their reading pursuits.

A significant investment has been made since November 2016 to increase the available selection in the e-book and e-audiobook platforms. This increased investment has had a corresponding increase in loans. A shift towards digital audiobooks is evident in the 2017 loans statistics when e-audiobook loans/downloads (115,465) outstripped the physical audiobook loans (95,061).⁴

Specialised collections

So what collections does City Libraries have that aren’t pulling big loan statistics but are worth having?

¹ City of Gold Coast (2018) City Libraries. Library Activities CY 2018 statistical report

² City of Gold Coast Community Profile retrieved from <https://profile.id.com.au/gold-coast/home>
16 May 2018

³City of Gold Coast (2014). City Libraries. Strategic Framework 2014-2018: Inspiring imaginations, creating possibilities.)

⁴City of Gold Coast (2018) City Library. Library Statistical Profile – Whole of City 2017

In the last 2 years City Libraries has created three special collections, an Indigenous collection; a Surfing collection and an LGBT+ collection.

Why so many in a short time span?

A review of usage statistics, customer requests, high demand on certain collections and staff feedback resulted in an evaluation of the collection profiles. While profiles and standing orders were reviewed on a yearly basis and minor changes made, it had become evident that they required a major overhaul. The tightened profiles combined with more generous demand driven acquisition guidelines have resulted in a better collection for our customers.

The idea for the Indigenous and Surfing collections had been considered for some time. Both subject areas are known to have limited print runs of titles, some of which are unlikely to ever be reprinted.

The number of indigenous titles presenting in the discard reports due to low usage was worrying. We know there is strong interest in indigenous culture so how could we make the collections more visible? The idea of having a non-floating lending collection based at one library would bring the indigenous titles together. This less fragmented approach means customers can browse the collection getting a better idea of the scope of the content. This collection was reassigned a call number prefix of IND regardless of format and audience.

Both the Indigenous and Surfing collections are lending collections so they are not about preserving titles until the end of time. The Local Studies collection retains last copies of any book that has Gold Coast content.

The Gold Coast is a world class surfing destination and some of the best surf breaks are within walking distance of Coolangatta Library where the Surfing collection is located. Coolangatta Library has many visitors and this collection is popular with browsers and borrowers alike. This collection was reassigned a call number prefix of SUR regardless of format and audience.

The most recent special collection created by City Libraries is the LGBT+ collection. This collection was created as the result of consultation with a local LGBT+ community youth group who indicated a dedicated LGBT+ collection would have a positive impact for local LGBT+ youth. This collection was reassigned a call number prefix of LGBT+ regardless of format and audience.

A larger collection of indigenous, surfing and LGBT+ material is dispersed across the general lending collection. All items in these special collections are easily discoverable via the online catalogue & can be reserved with any library as the nominated pick-up location. This ensures that customers who are unable to visit the libraries where the collections are located can still browse the collections.

Creating the collections

The collections were created using a combination of methods. Some items were reallocated from the general lending collection to the indigenous & surfing collections. This occurred when titles were identified as being out of print or if there were multiple copies already within the collection.

These collections are not definitive. It is not unusual for indigenous and surfing titles to have had limited print runs, making it difficult to include titles that are considered enduring or that cover a particular topic. The collections do not include academic texts as the level is not suitable for our intended audience.

The surfing collection was particularly challenging. The collection is focussed on Australian surfing culture although it does contain titles with a wider focus. In print materials are limited. Some print titles are niche, limited editions and above our established price limit. There are also a plethora of surfing DVDs produced by the major surfing brands, eg Billabong & Quiksilver, but it has been difficult finding a supplier who will supply via our major library supplier.

New editions of enduring titles and recent publications were also purchased for the indigenous and surfing collections.

The LGBT+ collection was all newly purchased and includes recently published materials, classic texts and works of enduring value. This model of creating a specialised collection proved to be easier than the model that has been used for creating the Surfing and Indigenous collections. Creating those collections had involved recalling titles, changing bibliographic records and updating spine labels. In creating a new collection entirely by purchasing we were able to avoid this as all items are delivered shelf ready.

All collections have their own collection profile and are being continually added to via supplier profile selection. Titles are also selected by staff and customer demand driven acquisition. These acquisition models assist in creating balanced collections and are our preferred method for all collections.

City Libraries actively adds digital content that either replicates the physical collections or supplements them. These specialised collections are aimed at public library customers. They are not research collections although some of their content could be used for those purposes. They are not collections with content that will be preserved forever. They will be subject to assessment and possible weeding based on condition and/or usage.

Statistics

The specialized collections are not large and do not occupy much shelf space. The collections are being added to and future shelf requirements can be accommodated.

The number of items in each collection is indicated below

Indigenous	703
Surfing	467
LGBT+	495

Loans statistics for each collection are as follows

	2017	2018to April
Indigenous	1722	445
Surfing	1054	302
LGBT+	85	521

The usage statistics will probably never be high for the majority of items in these collections but the value to the Gold Coast community of having these collections is immeasurable.

Inclusiveness and the LGBT+ community

Of the three collections, the LGBT+ collection was created with a purpose of promoting City Libraries as a safe and welcoming space for LGBT+ youth from the local community. The importance of libraries as safe and welcoming spaces has previously been recognized. (The Library Dividend Key Findings: a study of the socio-economic value of Queensland's public libraries, 2011) ⁵

In creating a LGBT+ collection that was shelved near the young adult space and decorated with rainbow bunting, accessing LGBT+ content became easier. LGBT+ content has always been in our collection but here was a quicker way for often marginalized youth to see the content available in fiction, non-fiction & DVD format. A LGBT+ collection resource guide was compiled to assist users in accessing digital content. The digital content includes online databases, e-book & e-audiobook platforms, streaming films and e-series.

The launch of the collection had been planned for several months. The event unintentionally occurred days after results of the *Australian marriage law postal survey* were announced.

All persons over the age of 18 in who were registered voters were asked to participate in a voluntary postal survey in 2017 They were asked, "Should the law be changed to allow same-sex couples to marry?" ⁶ The overall response was yes, marking a transformational moment in Australian history.

Positive feedback has been received regarding the LGBT+ collection. The following comments were provided by library customers after the launch event;

- *I love the inclusion of LGBT+ books into the collection.*
- *This collection is amazing! Go you good things*
- *Amazing to have this program. I am sure it will help so many LGBT+ people and open the door to discovering the plethora of LGBT+ cultures and lifestyles. Amazing, thank you.*

Conclusion

The Indigenous, Surfing and LGBT+ collections are being browsed, borrowed and expanded.

City of Gold Coast Libraries will continue to assess all collections, both general & specialist, and purchase in accordance with customer demand and interest. There is an

⁵ State Library of Queensland (2011) The Library Dividend Key Findings: a study of the socio-economic value of Queensland's public libraries.

⁶ <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/1800.0>

expectation that demand for digital content will continue to expand with a parallel continued demand for print materials.

The quantitative data for the specialised collections is unlikely to ever reflect the value or impact these collections are having on the local Gold Coast community. The concept of transforming societies by transforming libraries may not be measurable by statistics but is immeasurable to local communities.

Acknowledgments

Staff of the City of Gold Coast Library Service who have been proactive in suggesting content and supportive of each specialised collection.

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