



The Role of Libraries

What is this?

Public libraries hold collections of resources for the community to access and borrow. These resources include newspapers, magazines, books in multiple languages, e-books, audiobooks, CDs, cassettes, vinyl records, maps, videotapes, DVDs, Blu-rays and databases. Resources can usually be accessed physically in the library building and digitally or online via the library website. In addition to lending resources, libraries provide people and communities with a range of services and are far more than just a collection of books or a place to read.

Libraries are a public space and are mostly publicly funded through taxes and rates. They often provide space and activities such as jigsaws or colouring in for people who may be waiting or sheltering from weather such as tourists or homeless. They offer computers, printing, photocopying, internet access and free wifi, as well as educational programmes, fun activities such as children's playgroups, craft groups, and book clubs. Some libraries have facilities such as meeting rooms or cafes, which provide opportunity for people to meet, learn and connect, as well as enjoy social and cultural activities. Libraries also fulfil a statutory role by holding electoral rolls and local government documents, and also have a role as a keeper of heritage by maintaining historical collections.

Christchurch City librarians have many skills and specialist knowledge in a number of areas. They provide education programmes and free drop in sessions such as iPads for beginners and Windows for beginners that help people to develop skills in the use of technology. They create displays and offer education on various topics, as well as running fun groups for parents with babies and toddlers. Librarians also offer support with preparing CVs and finding information that people may need.

Why is it important?

By providing easily accessible and inclusive spaces, libraries contribute to community health and wellbeing in a number of ways. They encourage and facilitate community connectedness, empower people to access and use information, support literacy, reduce isolation among older people and support young people to learn and develop.¹

Research has found that library usage is associated with higher life satisfaction, increased happiness and a higher sense of purpose in life, as well as an increased likelihood of good general health.²



Data

There are 20 community libraries and one mobile library in Christchurch and Banks Peninsula. Most libraries are open until 6pm on weekdays but some are open for longer hours and on the weekends.³ A new central library to replace the one lost in the February 2011 earthquake is currently under construction and is due to open in 2018.⁴ As of June 2015, 191,874 people were members of Christchurch City libraries.⁵

The Christchurch City Council conducts an annual Point of Contact Service Satisfaction Survey. Results from 2015-2016 show that respondents reported consistently high satisfaction with library services, programmes and events. 93% were satisfied overall, 98% were satisfied with programmes and events, while 94% agreed that council made it easy to use the library service and programmes.⁶



Impact on inequalities

Membership of Christchurch City Libraries is free to all Christchurch residents. The costs of some services such as overdue fees and hold requests are also free for some people, such as children under 18 years and concession membership holders. This ensures equitable access to the library's resources, regardless of income.

A large longitudinal study in the United Kingdom⁷ found that by age 11 there is a gap of four years in the verbal and reading ability of children from the highest and lowest socioeconomic groups. This gap has been linked to differing economic outcomes later in life. Reading to young children daily is one of the four



recommended interventions to address this gap and having books available to borrow from libraries can help.

The physical accessibility of libraries is important. They should therefore be located in the community where they can be easily accessed via multiple transport modes. The design of library buildings should ensure they are easily accessible for people of all ages and abilities. Furniture design and building layout are important.

Solutions

As new libraries are built or upgraded, universal design and barrier free approaches should be used to ensure accessibility.

The geographic spread of the 20 libraries in Christchurch, as well as the mobile library, makes their services accessible to residents of all suburbs. In addition to the mobile library, there are other services that ensure resources are accessible to people who cannot travel to a library building. There are rest home outreach programmes and supported customer service where a librarian can select books based on a person's interests which can then be picked up by a family member or friend.

For people with English as a second language, there are ESOL resources including magazines, adult and children's books in both hard copy and online. There are also resources for new settlers. Large print books are available for people with visual impairments. Resources and support are available for people with dyslexia. Anyone can 'book a librarian' for assistance.

Reading in Mind⁸ is a book scheme that helps people to manage and treat mild to moderate mental health issues. It is a joint project run by Christchurch City Libraries, Pegasus Health and the Mental Health Foundation. Book lists on a variety of topics such as stress, worry, anger and many more are available.

Data limitations

Library usage by different ethnic and socio-demographic groups would be useful to understand users better.

Connections with other issues

Urban Design and Planning, Community Initiatives, Public Transport, Social Connectedness.



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References

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Read about the Te Pae Mahutonga Māori Health Model at
<http://www.hauora.co.nz/resources/tepaemahutongatxtvers.pdf>

