

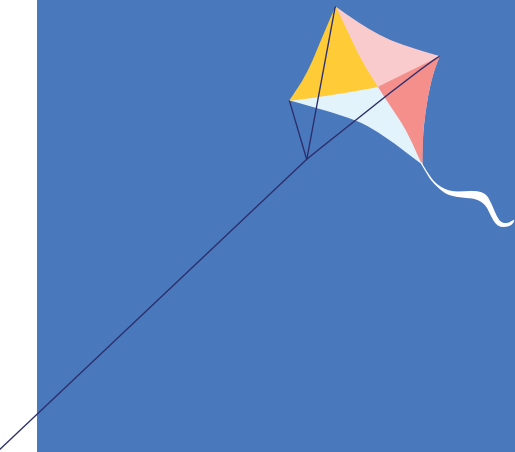


Darebin
Libraries



Darebin Libraries and Learning Strategy 2020–24

Outcomes 2021–22



INTRODUCTION

The *Darebin Libraries and Learning Strategy 2020-24* (Strategy) directs the focus of Darebin Libraries services, programs, technology and spaces. Annual action plans bring the Strategy to life operationally, delivering on community priorities and responding to emerging issues and community feedback. This is the second annual report on the Strategy's progress and outcomes addressing the 2021-22 action plan.

The Strategy builds upon our previous work and focuses on access and equity, embeds lifelong learning, and aligns activities with Council's strategic priorities including: responding to the climate emergency, furthering Darebin's commitment to reconciliation with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities, and supporting the community through the COVID pandemic, via four goals:

- » **Goal 1:** Equity of access
- » **Goal 2:** A thriving and resilient community
- » **Goal 3:** Welcoming safe spaces
- » **Goal 4:** Responsive services

Darebin Libraries has delivered considerable positive community outcomes throughout 2021-22, despite the challenging impacts of COVID lockdowns and restrictions, operating within the vaccinated economy, and ultimately transitioning to living with COVID in the community.

Throughout, the Darebin Libraries team was adaptable and creative: in reimagining service delivery, to understand and respond to evolving community needs, and to draw upon collaborative determination, resilience with a successful safety-first approach to deliver services that benefit our community.

UN Sustainable Development Goals

The Strategy and annual action plans are influenced by the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. The 2021-22 achievements and associated outcomes contribute to targets in 13 of the 17 goals via the delivery of topical workshops and talks, provision of targeted collections and information, access to welcoming, inclusive and free community spaces and technology, opportunities to learn, engage and connect, and through partnerships and initiatives.



The year in numbers

The impacts of temporary library branch closures and changes to the way the community engage with and connect in public spaces is reflected in our 2021-22 statistics.

Borrowing habits, collections access and loans

In the first half of the financial year, Melbourne experienced 90 days of lockdown, throughout which libraries closed our doors, offering digital resources, online events, online or phone support and, when permitted, a Click and Collect service for physical items. While many in the community valued Click and Collect, borrowing was not as high as when branches were open. However, when library branches did reopen in November as part of the 'vaccinated economy', only those under 16 years old and those over 16 years old with full vaccination status or a valid medical exemption were lawfully allowed to enter branches. The vaccinated economy ended in late April and, community engagement with our libraries began to increase in the final months of the financial year.

The good news is that more items were borrowed in the past year (840,574) than the previous year (717,007). However, this is still 29% below pre-pandemic total loans. It is clear the lockdowns and restrictions have impacted both the community's ability to access physical items and their borrowing habits, the latter affecting both physical and digital collections.

Not surprisingly, over the pandemic the borrowing of physical items has declined. In 2021-22 half as many physical items were borrowed than before the pandemic. However, with fewer days in lockdown and an improved Click and Collect service, the 542,076 physical loans are still greater than the previous year.

While access to digital items remained available during lockdown, digital loan

numbers also dipped during lockdown. It should be noted, that while the larger social impact of lockdowns is the likely cause of this decline, there are also those who rely on access to our in-branch computer services to access digital items. The total of 298,498 digital loans this year demonstrates a significant all over increase in borrowing of digital items. While not as extraordinary as last year's total, this year's figure is 70% higher than digital loans in pre-pandemic times (175,636 in 2018-19), which validates our refocus of spending on digital items to meet community needs.

In particular, this year has seen a significant increase in use of eAudiobooks with 109,690 loans, compared to last year's 97,027. Music streaming and downloads have also increased to 62,759 loans from 54,984 last year and 32,163 in 2018-19.

Active library borrowers, branch and website visitors

On 4 November 2021, Darebin Libraries reopened after the longest lockdown of the year. Many restrictions remained, and new restrictions were introduced: full vaccination status was required by most to visit branches, and COVID Marshals were recruited to check vaccination status and to assist community to 'check-in' for contact tracing purposes.

While restrictions continued to impact who could fully engage with the library, a social wariness of public places became increasingly clear and can be seen through our Active Library Borrowers ratio of 10.90%, decreasing from 12.30% in 2021-22, and from 15.60% in pre-pandemic times (2018-19).^{*} These effects are also apparent in our branch visitation

numbers with 244,156 visits this year, down from 261,130 last year and 626,599 in pre-pandemic times. The number of new members dropped significantly during closures. To address this decrease in participation, Libraries have refocused marketing efforts and are participating in the Public Libraries Victoria *#ReturnYourself to the Library*, which will continue to expand in 2022-23.

To support communities at risk of exclusion during the 'vaccinated economy phase', libraries offered valuable vaccination evidence digital support stations, which were promoted at vaccination clinics and other Council services in Darebin. To provide access to physical collections to those who were not vaccinated or were not comfortable entering occupied spaces, Click and Collect continued. And while face-to-face programming was gradually reintroduced with COVID-Safe plans, some online programs continued to support those who wanted or needed to remain at home.

Events and Programs

Darebin Libraries offered 223 online events and 163 face-to-face events in 2021-22. This total of 386 events, was slightly higher than the 339 offered in the previous year, and 43% less than the 680 offered in 2018-19.

Face-to-face events remained challenging due to attendance caps, lockdowns and uncertainty impacting planning. We made significant changes to our online events model. In the previous year, online events were typically pre-recorded and distributed through our Facebook channel, remaining available all year and therefore viewed multiple times, some with an extraordinarily high number of views. This drove our high attendee figures over the previous year (98,266). In response to community feedback, particularly regarding our early years programming, we changed our online events to interactive programming. This

approach offers deeper, more personalised engagement, with increased outcomes in areas such as literacy and social connection, however as these are 'live' online events, attendance figures are smaller. In 2021-22, there were 2,874 attendees at face-to-face events and 7,457 attendees at online events, totaling 10,321 attendees.

Technology usage

Changing restrictions meant library branches were opened for slightly more days in 2021-22, than in 2020-21, and therefore, access to library technology increased, with 22,496 wifi sessions, compared with 12,260 last year, both down from 64,119 in 2018-19. PC sessions rose to 15,076, from 12,173 last year, but still well below 75,506 in pre-pandemic times.

The introduction of laptop device kiosks upon our reopening in November have been embraced by community members, seeing device loans more than triple from 437 last year, to 1,453 this year, demonstrating this initiative has addressed a community need.

Continuing impacts of COVID

The 'vaccinated economy phase' also marked the beginning of the 'living with COVID' phase, as the virus circulated within the community. This shift has seen nationwide impacts on workforces with a rise in retirements and career changes, which the Libraries also experienced.

Throughout the pandemic, the team's commitment to COVID safety has been exemplary, and while we are confident these practices have resulted in no workplace transmission of the virus, our team members have been impacted by illness, compromising our ability to deliver on our action plan. Despite this, the achievements listed in the following pages are considerable within the context of another challenging year.

*This Local Government Performance Reporting Framework (LGPRF) measure calculates the percentage of the municipal population that have borrowed a library collection item (book or other defined resource) each year for the past three years. (This measure excludes event attendees and usage of free technology services such as computers and wifi).

GOAL 1: EQUITY OF ACCESS

We will provide services, resources and facilities that enable all community members to access our libraries.

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Collections that meet the needs of the Darebin community

Consult with our community to better understand their evolving needs and preferred collection formats

- ✓ Collection items purchased based on feedback and loans analysis to reflect the diverse needs of the Darebin community
- ✓ Consulted with Hindi community representative for guidance on shaping collection profile and future engagement with Hindi community
- Prepared collection survey to better understand our community's information and format needs. *Survey rollout deferred to 2022-23 due to impacts of COVID*

Increase the number of community languages in our collections

- ✓ Added 900 eBooks and eAudiobooks in Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Hindi, Italian, Japanese and Spanish to our digital collection
- ✓ Hindi items purchased to meet Hindi collection profile following consultation
- ✓ Expanded Spanish and Macedonian collections (new in 2020-21) following community consultation

Balance the transition from physical to digital collections in line with community use and need, responding to the evolving COVID impacts

- ✓ Premiers' Reading Challenge funding allocated to digital titles
- ✓ Introduced a monthly digital bookclub
- ✓ Continued to promote digital collections resulting in increased awareness and usage

Increased library access

Review library fines and charges to reduce barriers to use

- ✓ After consideration in the 2021-22 budget deliberations, fines were reinstated on 1 July 2021. To support community members to remain engaged with libraries:
 - members could continue to borrow items regardless of outstanding fines
 - payment plans were encouraged to support those experiencing financial difficulty
 - book recovery activities paused
 - communications focused on how to avoid library fines
- ✓ After consideration in the 2022-23 budget deliberations, library fines remain
Please Note: A Library Fines Amnesty was implemented in November 2022
- ✓ Extended existing loans and held reservations during COVID lockdowns

Review library opening hours

- ✓ Implemented Sunday 1-5pm opening hours at Reservoir Community and Learning Centre
- ✓ Expanded Libraries After Dark to include Reservoir Library on Tuesday nights, and continued Preston Library on Thursday nights to 10pm

Expand the reach of the home library service to include socially isolated groups

- ✓ Contactless home library service delivery ensured continued support of vulnerable community members during restrictions
- ✓ When deliveries were paused, staff called customers to maintain social connection
- ✓ Implemented promotional plan for home library service through new channels to engage groups at risk of exclusion
 - brochures printed and distributed in two additional community languages: Hindi and Spanish
 - promotion through partners, eNews and social media (in community language)

Increased awareness of library services, especially by communities at risk of exclusion

Collaborate with our partners, community and other Darebin City Council departments to raise awareness of Darebin Libraries services, especially with communities at risk of exclusion

- ✓ Participated in Public Libraries Victoria's Return Yourself to the Library campaign including a [promotional video](#) focusing on diverse programming and inclusive events
- ✓ Collaborated with and presented to Council teams representing at risk groups to connect and promote library services
- ✓ Promoted Darebin Libraries to Spanish communities resulting in 1,378 loans
- ➔ Develop and implement engagement plans to promote Darebin Libraries to Hindi communities. *Deferred until 2022-23 due to impacts of COVID*
- ✓ Researched how to best communicate and engage with people with disabilities to increase their awareness, interest and use of Darebin Libraries services, resources, events and spaces, including:
 - partnered with Vision Australia to deliver online interactive programming for children of all ages for International Day for People with a Disability
 - redeveloped *Welcome to Darebin Libraries* brochure to be more accessible
 - created new website content in accessible language to improve readability and ease of access for all
 - refreshed accessibility website content
 - included captions on all new online videos
 - improved in-branch homepage user experience based on outcomes from Autism Friendly audit



- selected a body diverse model to represent the *Reservoir Now Open on Sundays* campaign
- promoted social stories and branch maps showing high and low sensory spaces
- ✓ Commenced research on how to best communicate and engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to increase their awareness, interest and use of Darebin Libraries services, resources, events and spaces. Including:
 - established regular meetings with Aboriginal Partnerships Officer for ongoing guidance on engagement, promotion, programs and collections
 - partnered with an educator from Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation on children's programs
 - met with Dardi Munwurro to introduce Darebin Libraries and to understand needs



GOAL 2: A THRIVING AND RESILIENT COMMUNITY

We will promote and support the wellbeing and resilience of our community through increased opportunities for lifelong learning and social connection.

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Events that meet diverse community needs

Revise the Events Framework to increase the number of events that focus on the needs of communities at risk of exclusion and delivered in partnership with other Darebin City Council departments and community organisations and groups

- ✓ Revised the Events Framework to deliver online and face-to-face events
- ✓ Delivered online programs for young people
 - collaborated with Queer Gathering community at Bridge Darebin for Darebin's LGBTQIA+ Youth event in Transgender Awareness Week
 - delivered monthly writing workshops for young writers
 - partnered with Youth Services to deliver a range of programs designed specifically for young people
- ✓ Reestablished outreach and incursions with organisations and groups to promote libraries with focus on communities at risk of exclusion
 - connected with Your Community Health to provide resources and assistance to families with young children isolating with COVID
 - Storytimes held at East Preston Mosque in-person and online with Islamic Society of Victoria
 - delivered gender equity and respectful relationships online Storytimes in English, Arabic and Chinese for 16 Days of Activism in collaboration with Council departments and community organisations
 - rainbow families Storytime delivered to celebrate IDAHOBIT
 - established partnership with Croxton School, including the development of sensory Storytimes
- ✓ Implemented event feedback mechanisms for online programs, analyse feedback and build into future planning including introduction of email-based and child-friendly feedback surveys



Increase the number of events delivered in community languages

- ✓ Delivered events in community languages including:
 - *Tales of last days in Anatolia* author talk with Terry Stavridis in Greek
 - Vietnamese bilingual Storytime
 - multisensory online AUSLAN Storytime in collaboration with Vision Australia
 - Lunar New Year Storytime in Chinese
 - Woi Wurrung Storytime for Reconciliation Week
 - Edward Caruso poetry reading in Italian
 - monthly Greek bilingual Storytimes
 - Greek poetry reading by Angela Costi with music by Irine Vela
 - wellbeing talks by Esther Xu in Mandarin
 - Spanish collections launched with music performances by Alejandro Florez and Alejandra Zilberberg
 - screening of Italian movie 'Pinocchio'

Opportunities to participate in lifelong learning

Expand programs that foster lifelong learning, using digital delivery in response to COVID impacts

- ✓ Delivered 220 online events and programs, including:
 - weekly Storytimes and Rhyme Times
 - weekly Conversation Café
 - sessions on job seeking
 - regular craft activities
 - wellbeing sessions and programs focused on mental health and wellbeing
 - partnered with local organisations, such as the Merri Creek Management Committee to deliver Discovering the *Frogs of Darebin* webinar

Increase digital literacy support across a variety of online platforms and in partnership with community organisations

- ✓ Partnered on digital divide project with Equity and Diversity team and East Preston Community Centre
- ✓ Partnership with Juno Outreach Services to deliver one-on-one digital literacy support
- ✓ Delivered digital learning support, integrating eSmart principles, including:
 - phone and online digital literacy support during lockdown
 - Device Advice sessions
 - vaccination certificate support for participation in the vaccinated economy
- ✓ Delivered targeted digital literacy sessions on Darebin Libraries resources at Conversation Café
- ✓ Developed and implemented digital literacy training and support for staff:
 - vaccination certificate support training delivered to library and other Council staff to support participation in the vaccinated economy
- ✗ *Investigate and implement digital literacy for seniors using young people including at aged care facilities and through fostering partnerships with local organisations. Deferred due to impacts of COVID, in particular safety concerns regarding access to aged care facilities; is a future focus*

Implement volunteering opportunities within the library

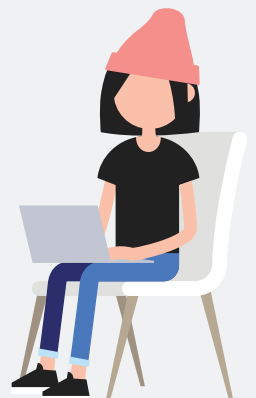
✘ *Deferred until 2022-23 due to impacts of COVID*

Provide opportunities for communities to connect with Darebin's local history and culture

- ✓ Local music scene history talk and music delivered by Iain McIntyre and Teishan Aherne
- ✓ Collaboratively developed and implemented website resources, events and initiatives to celebrate and share information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history, through consultation with Darebin's Aboriginal Partnerships Officer, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander colleagues and community partners. This included:
 - Deadly Reads list developed by an Aboriginal team member
 - online NAIDOC Week Storytime
 - online Yarning Circle event
 - conversation with Anita Heiss
 - Wurundjeri Story Trail event
- ✓ Commenced digitization of local history collection to increase digital access
- ✓ Developed a series of events to build customer skills in locating and using family and local history resources including CALD and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities:
 - Introduction to using DNA for family history research event
 - Arnold Zable Writing Workshop 'Writing a life'

Consult local businesses to identify their learning and development needs and implement collections, events and programs to support them

- ✘ *Deferred until 2022-23 due to impacts of COVID*
- ✓ Partnered with Economic Development team to:
 - establish Jobs Advocate program at Preston, Northcote and Reservoir Libraries
 - participated in Mothers' Day Reservoir Precinct activation project with Storytime, craft and book giveaway
 - promoted Reservoir Library in *Reservoir Newsletter* distributed to local businesses



Help the Darebin community meet the challenges of the climate emergency

Collaboratively develop services, collections and programs to increase community understanding and knowledge to meet the challenges of the climate emergency

- ✓ Consulted and engaged with local schools and organisations on environmental issues in the community to encourage young people to take action:
 - delivered school holiday program with Darebin Creek and Merri Creek Management Committees and Sustainability and Bushland teams to educate children about local waterways and protecting local flora and fauna
 - partnered with Banyule Council to deliver Recycle it Right online school holiday program
 - Plant the Seed family Storytime
 - pollinators and bee friendly seed bombs school holiday program
- ✓ Collaborated across Council to provide support for the community to meet, learn about and respond to the climate emergency
 - added four Energy Efficiency Kits and two Thermal Cameras and translated instructions into Greek, Italian, Macedonian and Mandarin
 - participated in Jesuit Service and Darebin Council Building Climate Resilience in the Community workshop
 - provided lockdown access to the Seed Library at Northcote Library through Click and Collect

Help the Darebin community meet the challenges of the COVID recovery

Work with the Darebin Community and Business Recovery Taskforce and other Darebin City Council departments to implement services, collections and programs to help communities understand and meet the challenges of the COVID recovery

- ✓ Reimagined and delivered events responding to COVID, focusing on supporting the needs of communities at risk of exclusion
 - delivered online events focused on social connection
 - provided support to local families in quarantine with online Storytime and activities in collaboration with Emergency Management Team and Maternal and Child Health
 - launched Jobs Advocate Service to support with people reentering the work force
 - delivered employment sessions including *How to Navigate the Job Market*



GOAL 3: WELCOMING SAFE SPACES

We will create welcoming, safe, flexible and inclusive physical and digital spaces.

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Enhanced welcoming, safe, flexible and inclusive spaces to meet diverse and changing community needs

- ✓ Fairfield Library reopened with improved accessibility to shelving, spaces for work, study and reading, an area for young people, and more natural light
- ✓ Evaluated and relocated physical collections using an equity lens to improve customer access, including:
 - Reservoir and Northcote Libraries furniture audited and rearranged for improved accessibility
 - Preston reference collection reduced to expand audiobook collection to meet community needs
 - Northcote reference collection reduced to provide a consultation space for job referral service
 - Preston junior fiction area improved with seating and increased browsing accessibility
- ✓ Implemented disability plan actions to improve services and infrastructure to all visitors, embedding accessibility approaches in our programming:
 - Participated in Disability Awareness Training and applied Accessibility in Public Libraries guidelines to layout of branches
 - Participated in Vision Australia training to support program development for children with diverse neural and physical needs
- ✗ *Implement communication boards for library customer service environment*

See also: Goal One – Increased awareness of library services, especially by communities at risk of exclusion

Investigate the feasibility of new/refurbished libraries

- ✓ Participated in the feasibility study for a Preston Global Learning Hub
- ✓ Continued to explore a new location for the Northcote Library

Work with communities to co-design spaces that are welcoming, safe, flexible, comfortable, inclusive and accessible for all

- ✗ *Deferred until 2022-23 due to impacts of responding to rapidly changing COVID restrictions*
- ✓ Incorporated feedback from strategy consultation to plan layout of Fairfield Library
- ✓ In response to feedback, implemented USB ports into Northcote Library study spaces and improved access to power at Reservoir Library

Explore and implement ways to provide both quiet and collaborative spaces

- ✗ *Trial zoned quiet and collaborative spaces at Preston Library. Deferred until 2022–23 due to impacts of COVID*
- ✓ Redesigned layout of Fairfield Library to consider quiet working areas and noisier areas

Appropriate technology to safely meet changing needs

Upgrade the Darebin Libraries website

- ✓ Launched the new Darebin Libraries website with revised content, layout, accessibility and information architecture to improve the user experience
- ✓ eResources catalogued to ensure visibility and searchability within library management system
- Migrated 900 Darebin Heritage articles to new platform. *Continuing in 2022–23*

Upgrade the Darebin Libraries app

- ✗ *Integrate self-serve functionality and community language translation into Darebin Libraries app and promote to the community. Deferred until 2022–23*
- ✓ How to use Darebin Libraries app included at customer sign-up
- ✓ Rewrote welcome brochure to promote and support app use

Improve access to digital resources and use technology to support the delivery of services, responding to evolving COVID impacts

- ✓ Upgraded existing library management system to support usability and access
- Implement device kiosk at Fairfield Library. *Deferred until 2022–23 due to impacts of COVID*
- ✗ *Implementation of digital library membership. Deferred until 2022–23*



GOAL 4: RESPONSIVE SERVICES

We will continue to build Darebin Libraries' capacity to provide services to meet our community's needs.

A community-led approach to the design and delivery of library services and resources

Implement Darebin Community Engagement Strategy and Framework

- Implement cross-Council stakeholder management approach to strengthen partnerships and develop new opportunities to engage with our community. *Commenced implementation, continuing in 2022-23*

Identify, encourage and support opportunities for community-led initiatives in libraries

- Through community consultation and using a co-design approach, identify priorities for implementation from the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocols for libraries, archives and information services* in alignment with Council guidelines and protocols. Ongoing:
 - Engaged with the launch of the Council Protocols and applied practices, with a focus on cultural safety
 - Established internal protocols for liaising with Aboriginal Partnerships Officer
 - Liaised across Council to improve approaches to targeted and identified recruitment
- ✓ Commenced Hearts and Minds youth mental health and wellbeing program in partnership with Youth Services, Yarra Libraries and Yarra Youth and Middle Years Services

Continuously improving customer service

Reinvent library service delivery and customer service models in response to evolving COVID impacts

- ✓ Contactless home library service deliveries
- ✓ Click and Collect services established with new functionality in Darebin Libraries App
- ✓ Reopened library branches (when restrictions allowed) with COVID-Safe plans
- ✓ Implemented COVID marshals to operate in vaccinated economy
- ✓ Provided ongoing proof of vaccination digital support



Provide staff with customer service and engagement training and support their ongoing professional development

- ✓ Delivered Click and Collect via Darebin Libraries App training
- ✓ Delivered COVID-safety training
- ✓ Delivered managing challenging situations refresher
- ✓ Commenced homeless protocol and assertive outreach training in partnership with MOSS
- ✓ Completed review of induction training and commenced implementation of changes

Knowing our impact

Consult communities to identify how they are using libraries, what we are doing well and where we can improve

- ✗ *Evaluate current data collection to ensure relevant and timely. Deferred until 2022-23 due to impacts of COVID*
- ✓ Developed evaluation impact KPIs to measure and record impact
- ✓ Delivered regular Strategy updates to celebrate and inform
- ✓ Participated in Victorian Public Library survey and census

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**Libraries
Change Lives**



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