



Darebin
Libraries



Darebin Libraries and Learning Strategy 2020-24

Outcomes 2022-23



ANNUAL HIGHLIGHTS

The 2022–23 financial year has been the first year uninterrupted by lockdowns since the beginning of the pandemic. The ability to offer undisrupted services has seen Darebin Libraries reengage with our community through targeted programming, promotions and outreach activities.

Fines Amnesty

In October 2022, Council resolved to implement an overdue fines amnesty from 7 November 2022 to 30 June 2023, and recommended the removal of overdue fines from 1 July 2023.

The amnesty was embraced by our community and staff, supporting Darebin Libraries to become more equitable and accessible. Our community were encouraged to 'visit the library' to 'discover something new and we'll wipe your fines'. In the eight months of the amnesty, 2,145 community members reconnected with the libraries and \$62,514 in fines were waived. Overdue fines were discontinued from 1 July 2023.

“I am so happy that you took away the fines. Finally, I am able to borrow books for myself and children. Reading is so special to me. It has brought me so much joy. With so much uncertain in the world, knowing I have my library makes so much difference.”

Darebin Community Member

DISCOVER Darebin Libraries

DISCOVER Darebin Libraries, a showcase of all the goodness the libraries offer (and tied to the fines amnesty) was held between 6–19 March 2023, and saw an increase in community engagement with the libraries.

The program of over 90 events and information sessions offered opportunities for lifelong learning, digital support, social connection and employment support. There were information sessions for those new to public libraries and for those who would like to learn more, or those keen to collaborate with us and connect on common ground. DISCOVER also included a mini CALD film festival (with catering from local businesses), along with author talks, creative workshops and early years literacy programming.



Revitalised Outreach and Partnerships

Outreach and partnership activities returned and thrived, with a strong focus on communities at risk of exclusion. This included partnering with Darebin's Best Start Team CALD preschool field officers who attended Rhyme Time and Storytime sessions to connect with families and link them to Council and community services.

Darebin Libraries partnered with Youth Services, Yarra Libraries and Yarra Youth Services to deliver Hearts and Minds: a co-designed project with young people of colour exploring how public libraries can support youth mental health. This was funded by a Libraries for Health and Wellbeing Innovation grant.

A collaboration with Economic Recovery and Resilience and Swim Victoria resulted in digital classes for older Aboriginal community members, connecting them with employment opportunities in aquatic centres.

And, libraries partnered with North East Citizen Advocacy to provide monthly drop-in sessions at Reservoir Library aimed at connecting people with disability and their carers with NDIS support services.

Further outreach and partnerships are detailed in the following pages.



THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

Visitors

Visits to library branches grew throughout 2022-23, to a total of 407,447 visits for the year. This is almost twice as many visits as the previous year. Efforts to reengage our community included DISCOVER Darebin Libraries, a large-scale community engagement campaign held in March. DISCOVER saw an immediate 13% increase in library visits, which continued to build in the following months.

Loans

Reengagement with libraries is also reflected in our borrowing figures. The number of physical items borrowed increased by 40% for the year, with 763,677 physical loans, up from 542,076 in 2021-22.

The year also saw a 12% increase in eBook loans (67,146 in 2022-23 compared to 59,968 in 2021-22) and a 9% increase in eAudiobook loans (119,467 in 2022-23 from 109,690 in 2021-22).

When compared with pre-pandemic figures, the 2022-23 figures suggest that demand for physical items may not return to previous levels as reader format preferences may have changed. While we still expect physical loans to rise in the coming year, the adoption of eBook and eAudiobook formats increased dramatically during the pandemic and continues to grow. eAudiobook loans have more than doubled with a 132% increase in loans between 2022-23 and 2018-19. eBook loans have increased by 72% since 2018-19.

eResources

Other digital items were also well used. Film screening service, Kanopy, continues to be popular and eResources such as Encyclopedia Britannica and Press Reader had strong engagement figures. The only resource that declined in usage was Freegal music, by 20%, due to increased availability of free music streaming services.

Events

Event caps and mask requirements continued until early 2023, which limited the reach of our programming for the first six-months of the year. Darebin Libraries transitioned most programming back to face-to-face delivery as this has been the preference of community. However, some events remained online to support those who were housebound. Over the year, 686 events were held for 12,908 attendees.



GOAL 1: EQUITY OF ACCESS

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

Collections that meet the needs of the Darebin community

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

- Collections survey developed and translated into Chinese, Arabic and Vietnamese to be delivered in 2023-24

Increase the number of community languages in our collections

- ✓ Two new language collections, Hindi (520 items) and Punjabi (255 items), were added
- ✓ 600 new digital titles added to our collections to support learning languages, and reading and listening in community languages, including Punjabi, Urdu, French and German

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

- ✓ Promoted engagement with eBooks and eAudiobooks throughout the year with events as part of the DISCOVER program, eNews and social media articles which resulted in increased usage

Increased library access

Review library fines and charges to reduce barriers to use

- ✓ Offered an overdue fines amnesty, reengaged lapsed members and empowered those previously concerned about fines to use our libraries which resulted in over 6,000 new members
- ✓ Designed and implemented the DISCOVER Darebin Libraries showcase program to promote the fines amnesty and encourage reengagement with the libraries. This saw library visits increase and continue to build in the following months

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

- ✓ Continued working with Supported and Connected Living, Vision Australia and residential aged care to promote the service to socially isolated groups and provide accessible resources, including trialling Envoy Players



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

- ✓ Worked with Access and Inclusion to develop a Disability-inclusive Communications Toolkit to better communicate and engage with communities living with disability
- ✓ Developed and distributed bespoke promotional material for the DISCOVER program in English and community languages to targeted groups via Maternal and Child Health Centres, neighbourhood houses, training organisations, schools, kindergartens, Aboriginal organisations, and health centres
- ✓ Collaborated with Supported and Connected Living to develop a Digital Literacy for Seniors program with State Government funding to deliver digital literacy support in 2023-24
- ✓ Partnered with Foundation House and Council's Best Start Team, Kindergarten Team, Your Community Health, Settlement Services, East Reservoir Foodbank and the Brotherhood of Saint Laurence to form a Communities of Practice to facilitate sector capacity building of staff across Darebin in Early Years services to improve inclusion and participation of children and families from a refugee background in Darebin
- ✓ Collaborated with the Keon Park Children's Hub Early Years' improvement team, attending regular meetings and delivering storytime sessions at Keon Park Children's Hub
- ✓ Reintroduced outreach to new parent groups in partnership with Maternal and Child Health



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

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

- Completed an Equity Impact Assessment as part of a review of the Events Framework to achieve better alignment with strategic priorities. Review continuing in 2023-24
- ✓ Continued to deliver Libraries After Dark at Preston Library and Reservoir Community and Learning Centre with a focus on tackling social isolation in Darebin
- ✓ Developed partnerships with North East Citizen Advocacy and Merri Health to promote and facilitate access to the NDIS and to deliver health awareness programs in 2024
- ✓ Increased focus on engaging youth, queer youth and their allies
 - Delivered youth writing workshops and a jewellery making workshop
 - Collaborated with Youth Services to establish a monthly youth games night at Reservoir Library
 - Partnered with Youth Services to run events at The Hub in Northland for CALD youth and their carers
- ✓ Delivered outreach and incursions with organisations and groups to promote libraries with a focus on communities at risk of exclusion
 - Rainbow storytimes delivered to celebrate IDAHOBIT
 - Weekly online Storytime sessions throughout July, August and September to support families who were immune compromised or isolated
 - Delivered three outreach visits to Croxton School
 - Partnered with Darebin's Early Years Playgroups to provide vulnerable families with play-based storytelling and literacy development games
 - Partnered with Professional Migrant Women and Adult Migrant English Program to deliver 'Undeclared' an author talk and panel discussion celebrating the experience of migrant women
 - Collaborated with Council's Best Start (Early Years' team) to have CALD Preschool Field Officers attend Library Rhyme Time and Storytime sessions to inform and link parents to specialist early years services

- ✓ Collaborated with Economic Recovery and Resilience and Swim Victoria to host digital classes for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people guiding them into work at recreation and aquatic centres across Darebin and the Northern suburbs

Increase the number of events delivered in community languages

- ✓ Delivered Vietnamese, Greek and Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung storytimes
- ✓ Delivered a range of movies for children and adults in languages including French, Chinese, Greek, Italian, Spanish, Hindi, Vietnamese and Arabic
- ✓ In partnership with the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health delivered health sessions, three in Mandarin, two in Arabic
- ✓ Delivered Multisensory AUSLAN Storytime in collaboration with Vision Australia

(Also see digital literacy support below)

Opportunities to participate in lifelong learning

- ✓ Delivered 686 lifelong learning events
- Commenced evaluation of data from previous two years to review events and programming approach, ensuring accessibility for communities at risk of exclusion. Continuing in 2023-24
- ✗ *Develop and implement library induction tours for international students. Deferred due to pandemic*

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

- ✓ In partnership with PRONIA, delivered 18 digital literacy sessions across Preston and Reservoir Libraries in English and Greek for over 100 older community members

Implement volunteering opportunities within the library

- ✓ Developed procedures and guidelines for volunteers working with Darebin Libraries, aligned with Council's Volunteer Policy and piloted with Conversation Café
- Formed a partnership with La Trobe University and PRACE to train volunteers and deliver support with online forms, continuing in 2023-24

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

- ✓ Held four Wurundjeri Storytime sessions in English and Woi-wurrung celebrating and connecting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and stories
- ✓ Delivered a local history walk and talk to students from La Trobe University
- ✓ Better represented our diverse community in our local history resources, content and promotions by developing ten new Wurundjeri history articles for Darebin Heritage through consultation with Council's Aboriginal Partnerships Officer, and collected and prepared stories from Greek and Italian migrants to publish on Darebin Heritage in 2023-24



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

- ✓ Developed and delivered three events to educate children and young people about the local environment including two in partnership with Darebin Creek Management Committee (Waterbugs and Frogs) and one with Northcote Library Food Gardeners (Seed Sphere)
- ✓ Collaborated with the Climate Emergency and Sustainable Transport team to deliver two events: Keeping Cool in Summer and Improving Energy Efficiency of your home
- ✗ *Increase climate change information and resources available through the Darebin Libraries website*

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

- ✓ Partnered with Economic Development and Job Advocates to provide events, training sessions and regular drop-in sessions at Reservoir, Preston and Northcote Libraries to prepare job seekers with tools to find employment at local businesses within Darebin



GOAL 3: WELCOMING SAFE SPACES

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

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

Investigate the feasibility of new/refurbished libraries

- ✓ Advocacy continues for Darebin Libraries: participated in discussions for Preston Central Structure Plan, La Trobe University planning and Community Infrastructure Plan

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

- ✓ A furniture audit was completed resulting in better use of spaces and recommendations to inform purchases in future years
- A review of art spaces was completed with recommendations developed for implementation in 2023-24
- ✓ Collaborated with Access and Inclusion to host Prue Stevenson's Disability Pride Mural at Preston Library

Explore and implement ways to provide both quiet and collaborative spaces

- Consultation and plan developed for a trial of zoned spaces at Preston Library in 2023-24

Appropriate technology to safely meet changing needs

Upgrade the Darebin Libraries website

- ✗ *Implement online services so customers can access online payments from home. Postponed to 2023-24*

Upgrade the Darebin Libraries app

- Completed procurement for app with self-serve functionality to be rolled out in 2023-24

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

- Developed digital memberships proposal outlining considerations and recommendation for implementation in 2023-24
- ✓ Implemented device kiosks at Northcote and Fairfield Libraries



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

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

- ✓ Delivered a co-designed project with young people of colour exploring how public libraries can support youth mental health and wellbeing. Hearts and Minds was funded by a Libraries for Health and Wellbeing Innovation grant and was delivered in partnership with Darebin Youth Services, Yarra Libraries and Youth Services
- ✓ Reactivated the LibArt Gallery at Northcote Library and display cabinets at Fairfield Library with targeted promotions, updated online information and information sessions, resulting in eight community exhibitions across the year

Continuously improving customer service

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

- Commenced an iterative review and update of procedures and communications to improve customer experiences. This included prioritising welcoming and inclusive language in library notices and updating guidance on implementing procedures with empathy
- ✓ Introduced autorenewals to remove pressure of returning items unless they are required by other community members

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

- ✓ Redeveloped and launched a new library information portal as a tool for supporting inclusive and accessible customer service
- ✓ Delivered Responding to Homelessness training tailored to libraries
- ✓ Delivered Conflict Resolution training
- ✓ Delivered Mastering Reader Development training to strengthen the link between our reading community and library collections

Knowing our impact

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

- Evaluated the value of inter-library loans and designed ways to continue to offer this service while responding to changes in costs and delivery model. To be implemented in 2023-24

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Change Lives**



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