



Australian Library and
Information Association

Submission in response to the Senate Inquiry into *Issues facing diaspora communities in Australia*

19 June 2020

1. About us

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) is the professional organisation for the Australian library and information services sector. On behalf of our 5,000 personal and institutional members, we provide the national voice of the profession in the development, promotion and delivery of quality library and information services to the nation, through leadership, advocacy and mutual support.

2. Libraries and diaspora communities in Australia

The Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee has been charged with exploring the issues facing diaspora communities, including strengthening the resilience of vulnerable groups, removing barriers to full participation, strengthen communication and partnerships between government and communities.

We would like to draw the Committee's attention to the success of public libraries, as government entities on the frontline of service delivery for these communities. While public libraries are very much involved in this field, they are rarely recognised for this work.

In June 2019, ALIA and its Australian Public Library Alliance group published a [report](#)¹ detailing how libraries across Australia are working to support new arrivals to Australia. It describes how public libraries collaborate with their local communities to develop culturally appropriate programs; to provide books, magazines, newspapers and other resources in languages other than English; to celebrate diversity; to facilitate a greater sense of connection and build mutual understanding; to make physical spaces into culturally safe places; to support skills development for example with digital literacy and English as a second language.

The report contains examples of festivals, conversation classes, health information provision, assistance with citizenship tests, obtaining drivers' licences, enrolling for study, and other ways that libraries help people settle into their new home.

¹ <https://read.alia.org.au/services-migrants-and-refugees>

3. Recommendations

- That the Committee acknowledge the role of public libraries in addressing many of the issues facing diaspora communities.
- That the Committee encourage federal government agencies to explore opportunities for closer collaboration with public libraries.

We are grateful for the opportunity to provide input into the Senate Inquiry and look forward to hearing the outcome.

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SERVICES FOR MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES



AUSTRALIAN
PUBLIC LIBRARY
ALLIANCE



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Services for migrants and refugees

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The Australian Library and Information Association acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to lands, waters, cultures and communities. We pay our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; and to Elders past, present and emerging.

ALIA would like to acknowledge the assistance of the contributors, including Libraries ACT, Parramatta City Library, Wagga Wagga City Library, City of Canada Bay Libraries, Sunshine Coast Libraries, Libraries Tasmania, Hume Library, City of Belmont Library and the Centre for Urban Research, RMIT University.

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Introduction

In 2017-2018, more than half a million people arrived to live in Australia. While two thirds were temporary visa holders, others were looking for a longer term home, contributing to the 7.3 million people living in Australia but born elsewhere.¹

When people arrive in Australia, whether through choice or for reasons of hardship, as migrants, international students, refugees or humanitarian entrants, they seek to make a place for themselves and their families in their new communities. They have to set up home, find employment, become familiar with cultural norms that are second nature to Australians but alien to new arrivals, and often their first language is not English.

For library users, coming from a country where there is a good public library network, the local library is an obvious place to find essential information, sign up for English language conversation classes, use the public computers, engage with other children and families at storytime. Joining the library is part of the settling in process. For others, coming from countries where there may not be a library network, libraries are an unknown quantity and it can be hard to build up the courage to step over the threshold.

Australian libraries recognise the needs and the barriers for migrants and refugees and are working to fulfil the first and break down the latter. This report shares just a few examples of the library projects to be found in different states and territories.

United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Australian libraries are strong supporters of the 17 global Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Libraries' work with migrants and refugees supports many goals including Goal 1 No poverty, Goal 3 Good Health and Well Being, Goal 4 Quality education, Goal 8 Decent work and economic growth, Goal 10 Reduced inequalities, and Goal 16 Peace, justice and strong institutions.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 3412.0 Migration, Australia 2017-2018



Australian Capital Territory

Children's Sanctuary at the National Multicultural Festival

Libraries ACT

During the National Multicultural Festival, Libraries ACT partnered with Child and Family Centres, the Canberra Museum and Art Gallery and the ACT Bilingual Education Alliance to provide a Children's Sanctuary.

This sanctuary ensured that children and their families could escape from the sometimes-overwhelming excitement of the festival and engage in a range of family friendly activities including Bilingual Storytimes and learning to write their name in other languages.

Through these activities, children were able to explore the wonders of different languages and cultures at a less hectic pace, and families were introduced to the library's multilingual resources.

Harmony Day at the library

Libraries ACT

In March, to celebrate Canberra's diversity, Libraries ACT hosted a Harmony Day networking morning tea, to allow people to meet each other and hear what work is being done to support and promote the benefits of multiculturalism.

Feedback from this event was extremely positive, with many people delighted that they had been able to connect with organisations that they previously didn't know existed, and in some cases are working towards similar goals as their own.

New South Wales

Health awareness talks

City of Parramatta Library

City of Parramatta Libraries provides services and facilities to a diverse population, 52% of whom speak a language other than English at home.

One of the services that the library provides is regular health talks in various languages. In partnership with the Westmead Institute Storr Liver Centre, Multicultural Health, and the Western Sydney Local Health District, a health awareness talk was offered to the Cantonese speaking community on 'Understanding Hepatitis'.

The purpose of the session was to inform, educate and increase awareness of the Hepatitis B virus and encourage participants to discuss testing, immunisation and suitable treatment with their general practitioner.

The health talk was hosted at City of Parramatta Library and was attended by 36 participants. The talk was delivered in Cantonese by a hepatology clinical nurse consultant.

More than 70% of the attendees were over 65 years old, and at the end of the talk 97% of participants who evaluated the session indicated that their knowledge of the subject matter had improved. When asked to nominate the one thing they would change, more than 26% of individuals reported that they would visit their general practitioner to obtain a Hepatitis B blood test. Over 27% expressed recognition of the need to eat healthily and exercise regularly.

All participants reported that they would share the information that they had learnt with family and friends. Health awareness talks provide an invaluable opportunity for the community to receive advice in their own language and offer the chance for them to make long-lasting changes to improve their own health and that of their families.

English conversation practice and volunteer training

Wagga Wagga City Library

Wagga Wagga is both a Refugee Welcome City and resettlement area, as 6% of the population of more than 64,000 is cultural and linguistically diverse (CALD).

The city has 99 language groups and is composed of recent arrivals, including asylum seekers and people on skilled migration visas. Key issues for the growing CALD community are social and cultural isolation, developing English language skills, loss of their cultural identity, mental health issues and low employment.

Wagga Wagga City Library has actively engaged with the CALD community and service providers to build relevant English as a Second Language (ESL) collections and to use programming opportunities such as the annual FUSION multicultural festival to host multicultural storytelling. The library also purchased numerous ESL learning resources and increased the volume and scope of community languages on loan from the State Library of NSW.

In 2017, the Library Manager decided to activate the library's ESL and community language collections. To address the increasing demand for English conversation classes, the library researched and established the Language Café English Conversation model in order to train 40 volunteers to work with groups and individuals who wanted to improve their spoken English. Since the official start date of 3 July 2017, the sessions have been held three times per week and more than 1,000 CALD members and volunteers have attended the Language Café.

The Language Café program has many benefits. It increases the social network for new arrivals; they are exposed to regular opportunities to engage with their new community and overcome their feelings of social isolation; they pick up local knowledge; and it provides a safe space for participants to make mistakes as they practise their conversational English.

The TAFE NSW Riverina Institute trained the first group of 20 volunteers in June 2017 and an additional 20 volunteers were trained in March 2018. Multicultural service provider partners were essential in spreading the word and translating flyers into community languages.

They included the Red Cross; the Multicultural Council Of Wagga Wagga; the South Eastern Asian Migrants group; Centacare; St Vincent de Paul; the State Library of NSW; and both local and state government departments.

The community volunteers assist on a rostered basis and their feedback confirms that they feel enriched by the experience and have a greater awareness of the vibrant cultures that the CALD communities have brought to Wagga Wagga.

Social engagement is very evident, and the regular Language Café participants and volunteers often form new friendships. Some of the volunteers



Volunteers and attendees at the Language Café

are also ESL speakers and they share their own personal journeys as they give their time to help the latest arrivals.

Language Café was Highly Commended in the Multicultural Awards at the NSW Public Libraries SWITCH Conference in 2017. The Language Café volunteers were the 2018 region-wide winners of the Riverina Regional Library Reading Culture Award, for their work fostering literacy in the CALD community.

Other CALD program opportunities have evolved from the Language Café. These include Arabic language classes for children held on Saturdays, and Tech Savvy Senior computer classes in Mandarin, Arabic and Dari held over six-week periods.

The library is looking to expand the available space and multicultural programs to increase the capacity for Language Café and to arrange for regular presentations by service providers such as the Migrant Resource Centre. Libraries are community hubs and make ideal locations for lifelong learning and building community engagement.

The program has now expanded to other NSW regional libraries. Volunteers can undertake free online training and deliver the program in their libraries.



The Learning Space

City of Canada Bay Libraries

City of Canada Bay Public Libraries facilitates the Learning Space at Rhodes in Western Sydney. Rhodes is a high rise, high density suburb, with a high proportion of migrants. Members of the community are predominantly students and young families with educated urban backgrounds from countries such as China, India, Korea and the Middle East.

In 2017, the Learning Space opened as a library without print books, in the community and cultural precinct in Rhodes. The main space has furniture to facilitate work, study, gatherings, and programs. The space also includes a digital classroom and a digital gallery.

Programs on offer include bilingual Storytime in Korean and Chinese, and Tech Savvy Seniors sessions in Mandarin and Korean. There are computers available for public use, but users predominantly bring their own devices.

Patrons at the library primarily use the services to engage with materials in their first language, to catch up with international family, friends and co-workers, to work or to study.

In 2018, the Learning Space ran a series of networking sessions for freelancers and small business owners. The space also functions as a welcoming venue where disadvantaged members of the local community can feel safe and learn

Queensland

Library services for multicultural communities

Sunshine Coast Libraries

Sunshine Coast Libraries has been delivering the Read and Write for Life program across the Sunshine Coast region since 1989. The program assists people in the community to improve their literacy, numeracy and conversation skills.

This empowers them to move forward in their lives and gain skills to help them progress in areas such as gaining employment, passing their citizenship test, obtaining their driver's licence or enrolling to study.

The program delivers an individualised learning plan to each learner through weekly group classes or one on one sessions held across various libraries on the Sunshine Coast. Each learner has their own trained volunteer literacy tutor working with them at their own pace.

Learners are interviewed and assessed prior to joining the program, then matched with an appropriate tutor. The learners periodically complete mentor plans with their tutors, making note of their achievements, and challenges and planning together for their next goals.

Approximately 50% of the students have English as their second language. Conversation circles are offered to people from non-English speaking backgrounds and provide an opportunity for participants to meet in an informal atmosphere to practise their conversation skills under the guidance of a qualified English as a Second Language teacher.

Participants can 'drop in' to their library and join in the circle. The circles are often filled with robust conversation and laughter. Learners have the option of also joining the tutoring side of the program once they are more confident with their speaking and listening skills.

South Australia

Ongoing engagement with migrant and refugee communities

Public Library Services South Australia

The South Australian Public Library Network allows adults and children to find books and other material in around 50 languages other than English via the One Card catalogue, including a great tool which has pre-set searches for 34 different languages. Migrants and refugees can search for material in their home language thanks to catalogue records with diacritics, and select from many thousands of titles, to collect from their local public library.

Library staff regularly meet with representatives from local migrant communities to ensure that the collection reflects the needs of that community and to encourage participation in the selection of resources. These can range from titles written by local authors (from their country) through to translated new releases and best sellers by international authors. Non-English digital content is set to be added as a service in the near future with collections to be curated in a number of languages.

Local library initiatives include Tech Help provided in other languages, bi-lingual storytimes and a wide range of English language and literacy services for adult migrants from non-English speaking countries or adult literacy students. These services include information about English language and literacy education, referral to local classes and provision of resource collections for students and teachers. A digital subscription to the Road to IELTS training is also available to South Australian public library members and very popular, especially around exam time.





Harmony Day at Libraries Tasmania

Tasmania

English conversation classes and Harmony Week

Libraries Tasmania

Libraries Tasmania connects people to knowledge, ideas and community through its libraries and archives, delivering contemporary services and programs online and through 49 libraries throughout the state.

Libraries Tasmania supports migrants and refugees through its programs, services and welcoming spaces. Libraries Tasmania provides English Conversation Group programs and digital literacy programs, as well as coordinating and enabling inclusive Harmony Day and Neighbour Day events at library sites.

English Conversation Group

The English Conversation Group program is delivered and supported at 14 Tasmanian public libraries, with an average of 11 attendances per session. Clients attending the sessions find their way into these friendly and supported groups through joining their local library and through word of mouth within their community. While people come to improve their everyday English conversation skills, and sometimes link into digital and even literacy programs, many find lasting connections through the friendships they make in their groups.

At Glenorchy Library, in the northern suburbs of Greater Hobart, classes are provided at different levels to target learning for each person's English

language and written skills. This immersive program assists migrants, refugees and new arrivals in discussions about everyday situations, including making appointments, seeking medical attention, shopping, casual conversation and filling out forms. The program is delivered by volunteers, who are supported by the library's literacy coordinators, and each session is focussed through fun and engaging topics.

Harmony Week

Libraries Tasmania hosted Harmony Week events, with close to 400 children and adults attending the events held across five Tasmanian public libraries.

Kingston Library's Harmony Week event included a multicultural story time with close to 70 children and adults attending. Staff and a volunteers read children's books in Italian, Spanish, English and Chinese and, after the stories, the children created a rainbow using paint and handprints which emphasised the multicultural nature of the community.

Glenorchy Library also hosted a Harmony Day event for schools in the local area. Education Ambassador, local actor and ABC radio presenter, John Xintavelonis, spoke to the 130 students about his experiences as a young student from a migrant background. Kristie Johnston, the Glenorchy Mayor, and Dr Lubna Siddiq read *Whoever you are* by Mem Fox in English and Hindi, sharing the book's message of tolerance and cultural harmony.

Victoria

Engaging with the local multicultural community

Hume Libraries

Residents of Hume come from 156 countries and speak 153 different languages. In order to meet the needs of this diverse population Hume Libraries offers a range of programs. These include weekly bilingual storytimes in languages such as Arabic, Turkish and Samoan.

The libraries also host a range of celebrations for diverse celebrations including Eid, and the Turkish National Day.

In one year alone, Hume Libraries offered 55 programs including English as a Second Language (ESL) conversation and literacy help, with more than 250 participants.

The ESL program supports participants to complete the Road To IELTS program using library resources. Weekly English conversation groups provide an opportunity for English language learners to meet and practice their conversation skills in a friendly and supportive environment.

Hume Libraries' collection includes books, magazines, DVDs and newspapers in a range of languages including Arabic, Farsi, Chinese, Greek, Italian, Hindi, Punjabi, Sinhalese, Spanish, Turkish and Vietnamese.

Hume Libraries' bilingual team visits schools, kindergartens, childcare centres, playgroups and community gatherings across the local government area. This program is a partnership between Hume Libraries and the Community Strengthening Department and the Family, Youth and Human Services Department. In 2016-17, this program reached 20,716 children and 10,438 adults.

The library has a particularly strong connection with Collingwood English Language School, a state government English language learning school in Broadmeadows. Students attend this school for two terms, to improve English language skills, before enrolling in a primary or secondary school. Broadmeadows Library provides librarian outreach visits to this school and classes visit the library for activities and borrowing.

The Baby's First Book program provides books and early literacy materials to parents at their four months visit to local maternal and child health nurses. In Hume, these book packs are provided in Turkish, Arabic, Vietnamese, Chinese and English.

Western Australia

New Arrivals Library Support project

City of Belmont

The City of Belmont New Arrivals Library Support (NALS) project was developed in 2011 to offer a 'one stop shop' for specific support services and programs in response to identified needs in the city's diverse community. Prior to this, limited services and programs were available in the city at various locations and were administered by a range of providers.

The program currently includes three elements. Learning English through storytime assists parents and preschool children to practice English speaking skills through rhyme, songs and stories. This program has since been incorporated into the State Library of Western Australia's early literacy training program and has been implemented in numerous libraries across the Perth metropolitan area. The homework club is targeted at migrant students from years 7-12 enrolled at Belmont City College and the Australian Islamic College, and conversation classes are aimed at improving the English language communication skills of patrons through conversation in a relaxed social environment.

The library also hosts an extensive collective of community languages material. This collection includes graded readers for teens to adults, encouraging reading for pleasure; an extensive range of International English Language Testing System textbooks; family literacy kits which include resources to develop vocabulary for families with young children; bilingual picture books, encouraging parents to read in both English and their language of origin, and live online tutoring support to adult library members and school aged students.

In addition to this ongoing program, the local Ruth Faulkner Public Library facilitated a community cookbook project in 2017. This was a cross departmental project in conjunction with the City of Belmont Museum, as well as the local Departments of Community Development and Community Wellbeing.

The City of Belmont Community Cookbook Project was designed to showcase and celebrate the wonderfully diverse local community. Participants submitted family stories and favourite recipes as part of a competition to draw out the universal story of food that brings communities and families together. Ultimately, 18 recipes and six stories were chosen to highlight the varied backgrounds and ethnicities in the city.



Dinner Date event at City of Belmont



Children at the City of Belmont New Arrivals Library Support program



National

Ongoing research on multicultural Australia

In 2018 the Centre for Urban Research at RMIT University began an Australian Research Council-funded research project called 'Representing Multicultural Australia in National and State Libraries'. This project was initiated in recognition of the socio-cultural worth of multicultural collections and the benefits that these collections bring to Australia.

The project aims to 'investigate the representation of histories and cultures of migrants from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in the National Library and the collections of the State Library of NSW, State Library of SA and the State Library of Victoria'. Ultimately, the project will develop new criteria for evaluating and building multicultural collections that fully reflect the richness and diversity of Australian multicultural communities.

