



The University of Sydney
Faculty of Medicine

BROKEN HILL DEPARTMENT OF RURAL HEALTH



Submission to: Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools.

Terms of Reference Addressed

- the future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy;
- the factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians;
- the role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians;

Summary Main Points

Rural and remote workforce shortages are a cross sector challenge. Shortages in the areas of education, health, and industry provide a unique opportunity for cross sector collaboration and the sharing of resources, knowledge and skills to enhance local and regional workforce sustainability and growth.

This submission outlines a regionally responsive approach to addressing librarian shortages in Wilcannia Central School. This approach has been made possible through existing partnerships between the Broken Hill University Department of Rural Health (BHUDRH), Wilcannia Central School, the western region Aboriginal Education Consultative Group and Primary Schools within Broken Hill.

These partnerships have enabled a comprehensive approach to resolving the librarian shortages confronted by Wilcannia Central School. A shared vision and ethos to improve the educational and health outcomes for children residing in Wilcannia have provided a strong foundation for the long term investment in creating supported career pathways for local residents into school librarian roles.

Submission

Access to librarian services is critical if we are to address the literacy inequities confronted by rural and remote students, and specifically Indigenous populations. The challenges confronted with the recruitment and retention of librarians into remoter public and central schools within these communities needs to be addressed through innovation and regionally responsive interventions that draw together knowledge, skills and resources from across local/regional sectors and communities.

This submission outlines such an approach that has resulted from a partnership between the Broken Hill University Department of Rural Health (BHUDRH), Wilcannia Central School, the western region Aboriginal Education Consultative Group and Primary Schools within Broken Hill.

The BHUDRH has been working collaboratively with regional primary, secondary and central schools since 2007. These partnership evolved from leading documents that highlighted the need for academic entities to step back into the education system to assist schools in the promotion of aspirations and skills attainment to enhance further educational pathways, specifically for Indigenous school students.

Programs that have been developed through these partnerships include a comprehensive health career education program, speech pathology in schools program (an undergraduate student approach), mental health and well being programs for secondary and primary school students, student participation in the Federation of International Space Education (FISE) United Space School Program and most recently librarian support to Wilcannia Central School.

In February 2010 staff from the BHUDRH visited Wilcannia Central School to discuss existing collaborative programs. The school Principal raised concerns relating to the lack of formal librarian assistance available within the school. This situation had resulted in the closure of the school library in late 2009. The situation was viewed as distressing by the Principal, school staff and community.

The BHUDRH employs 3 staff members with librarian qualifications. 2 of these staff members are active librarians and 1 staff member undertakes an evaluation and project management role. It was identified that the existing partnership could be expanded to explore strategies to assist the Wilcannia Central School in re-establishing their library services.

Program Approach:

1. The Wilcannia Central School identified an existing administrative staff member, who was a local resident, and held a strong commitment to library services within the school.
2. The BHUDRH committed to releasing a librarian staff member to work collaboratively with the Principal and identified school staff member to progress discussions.
3. A site visit to Wilcannia Central School was undertaken by the BHUDRH librarian and Indigenous Community Development Officer to progress discussions with key stakeholders

Program Development:

The following strategies were identified and actioned;

1. The BHUDRH committed to releasing their librarian and Community Development Officer on mutually agreed days to undertake a stock review of existing library resources and supports and to explore the establishment of a mentoring role (librarian) with the identified local staff member.
2. Initial dates for ongoing site support visits were identified and have been actioned.
3. Stock take and library update were undertaken collaboratively between the organisations;
4. Local and regional residents donated their time to refurbish and decorate the existing library area;
5. Negotiations have been facilitated by the BHUDRH with librarians based in Primary schools in Broken Hill to enable the Wilcannia Central School staff member to visit a functioning school library and review the processes in place.
6. The BHUDRH staff member has committed to undertake an ongoing mentoring, tutoring and support role with the Wilcannia Central School representative;
7. Educational pathways leading to librarian qualifications are being explored to enable the Wilcannia Central School staff member to progress to recognized librarian qualifications.
8. The identification of additional librarian support functions that can be supported by the BHUDRH to assist the Wilcannia Central School have been identified eg Ordering of stock, approaches to making the school library a centre for community engagement
9. The partners have committed to long term collaboration on this program.

Benefits of this Approach

1. Community engagement and capacity building;
2. Sharing of resources, knowledge and skills;
3. Shared vision between partners;
4. Enhanced communication between organizations;
5. Increased sustainability and promotion of continuity of library services;
6. Enhanced opportunities for additional partnerships.

Future Actions

1. Identification of rural and remote responsive educational pathways to librarian qualifications;
2. Identification of tutorial and mentoring support requirements and integration into educational timelines;
3. Ongoing site support visits by relevant BHUDRH staff;
4. Ongoing collaboration on sustainability of program;
5. Review of program outcomes for key stakeholders.

Policy Implications

1. Career education pathways are tailored to be responsive to the educational needs of rural and remote residents wishing to aspire to librarian roles;
2. That a combination of promoting local/regional resident attainment of librarian skills and urban based librarian exposure to rural and remote settings be explored (adaptation of a locum placement model for disadvantaged schools).
3. Consideration be given to the development and integration of extended rural and remote placement experiences for undergraduate librarian students in disadvantaged communities that integrate a supported placement model and orientation period.
4. Were regional librarian staff resources exist outreach models to disadvantaged remoter sites be developed (Hub and Spoke approach to service provision, student supervision and local support structures).

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