

Surveys — an exercise in patience

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In March 2000 the need to review and reassess the services offered by the Hervey Bay Library was identified. It was suspected that the library's traditional methods of statistical measurement — the door-counter and loans statistics — were not delivering as complete a picture as required. Staff also knew that the library was being used for many more tasks than just borrowing books. It was decided to survey users to determine what patrons were using the library for, as well as how long they stayed when visiting the library.

All library patrons were given the opportunity to take part in the survey. Those who accepted were given a survey form with the time that they entered the library recorded on the front. The patron kept the form with them while in the library and handed the survey to volunteers who recorded the time that the patron left. Participants could also complete a checklist of what they did whilst in the library on the survey day.

The assistance of the Hervey Bay Friends of the Library was enlisted in the dissemination and collection of the survey forms. Volunteers also assisted patrons in completing the checklist within the survey. I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to the Friends of the Library for the support and willingness to assist in the library in so many areas.

Branch library patrons were surveyed during April and May. A report of the results of each survey were compiled.

Survey findings

Duration of stay in library

The results indicated that at all three library sites, the majority of people stayed in the library for less than thirty minutes. However, more than thirty per cent of respondents spend up to five hours or more in the library. Some of the respondents indicated that if branch libraries had comfortable seating and space, that they would certainly stay longer in the library.

Computer services

The main library at Pialba has certainly proved the necessity for computer services and the importance of these services to the Hervey Bay Community. The main computer usage involved the library's catalogue, however, accessing the internet is increasing in popularity with nearly twenty per cent of those surveyed making use of this service. The two free internet terminals are consistently booked out. The availability of a word processor and scanner is proving to be an appreciated service. The Hervey Bay Family History Association's move into the library has already been seen an increase in demand for these services. The Family History area has an internet terminal dedicated to Family History research. Currently, Howard and Burrum Heads branch librar-

ies each have one internet computer. It is imperative that this service be maintained and possibly increased to include another computer dedicated to word processing.

Communication

The library is also proving itself to be a central location for e-mail and fax communications, as well as photocopying services. Many patrons use the library as a meeting venue with friends. With the many facilities that the library has to offer, this could well indicate that the library could, given extra staff, assist in developing the 'one stop shop' concept, for example rates being payable at the library. This should actively be encouraged in order to make the Civic Precinct a focal point for the Hervey Bay Community.

Use of library

Many of the respondents also used the library to relax, study and read — illustrating the versatility of what a library is in the 21st century. Consideration should also be given with regard to the 'youth space' within the library.

Library services

As to be expected the most well used resource in the library is the borrowing of materials. This is to be strongly encouraged as the materials, in many different media, supply the community's needs be it recreational reading, to the preparation for secondary, tertiary or life-long learning.

General questions

When you visit the library now, do you do more during your visit, than you did 1 year ago? More than sixty per cent of respondents answered 'yes' to this question, illustrating that the library is not only perceived as being a book lending service, but it is actually fulfilling a many faceted role for the community.

Customer service

The results of the customer services area showed that 98.67% of respondents found the staff to be ranging from 'helpful' to 'exceptional'. All staff are to be congratulated for this achievement. Even though our frontline service is at a desirable level, I wonder if it is sustainable due to the lack of staff time available to do the workroom ground work for the operation of the library.

These findings have confirmed the thoughts of management, but they have also allowed us to benchmark our own library service. Surveys will be conducted again in future years, and keeping with this format, they will allow comparison with previous years and how the Hervey Bay Library can continue to improve its service to the community. ■

Folk-rock icon boosts libraries

Though they may not know it, librarians have friends in all sorts of places. Legendary singer-songwriter Bob Dylan was last year voted one of *Time Magazine's* twenty most important artists of the 20th Century. He has been a popular culture trend-setter for almost forty years. But since he renounced the role of spokesman for the 1960s generation he rarely speaks at all. Dylan concert-goers are all-too familiar with his renowned inscrutability. Small talk he does not do.

So it was a notable event when, during his recent concert in the Gorge Amphitheatre, in Washington state, Bob suddenly instructed his faithful followers: 'don't forget to support your public library'. Nobody knows why. But given his

long-standing reputation as the master lyricist [British poet-laureate Andrew Motion last year selected a Dylan lyric — 1966's *Visions of Johanna* — as the greatest popular song lyric ever written] you can bet he has read a book or three. Perhaps Dylan just remembers that the public library is 'where it all got started'. But don't expect an explanation. He does not do those either!

[note: for this item we are indebted to the dauntingly well-informed international Bob Dylan web-site <http://www.expectingrain.com>, expertly created and energetically managed by Karl Erik Andersen of the Norwegian National Library's Sound and Image Archive.]

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