

LAPD – Library Assisted Personal Development

Attracting non-library users to the library — a Library Board of Queensland 2000 Innovation Grant project

It is always difficult to convince non-library users that the public library has anything to interest them. In a survey conducted on behalf of Logan City Council Libraries in 1997, unemployed people were identified as a sector who do not take advantage of public library resources or services. Logan City Council Libraries decided to promote the benefits of libraries to this sector through the provision of free personal development classes. It was hoped that these classes would encourage unemployed people to use free public library resources and services for both recreational and career enhancing purposes.

The idea of LAPD — Library Assisted Personal Development — was born. The next step was to apply for a Library Board of Queensland 2000 Innovation Grant to employ professional course facilitators. The application was successful and the project began.

What is LAPD?

The library organised personal development courses run by professional community facilitators. The courses highlighted how public library services could improve job-searching skills and how resources such as internet access, books, newspapers and reference services are freely available to all members of the community.

The objectives of LAPD are:

- to provide the unemployed with the opportunity to attain skills which would help them enter, or re-enter, the workforce;
- to remove perceived barriers to library participation for isolated and marginalised people in our community; and
- to tap new avenues for library promotion and highlight the variety of services and resources available free of charge to library patrons.

How did we reach the target group?

The library publicised the courses through a number of avenues. We contacted Job Network providers to ask them to inform their clients, put articles in the local press and had interviews on local radio. We left fliers at community centres and in the libraries, and included the information on Logan City Council's telephone on-hold service.

Value for money

LAPD was extremely cost-effective. The total cost of \$3900 (of which \$3360

was provided from the Innovations Grant) meant that each course cost less than \$1000, and since 186 people attend the courses, this is perceived to be excellent value for money and a great way to attract new people to the library. I have not factored the cost of staff time into this calculation because I believe that encouraging use of public library services is our core business.

Integration of skills development and library promotion

The course facilitators were professional teachers with experience in teaching the topics offered. The facilitators worked closely with library staff, ensuring that the message of the library as a community asset was re-enforced. An integral part of the programs were handouts of booklists relevant to the topics covered, training in the use of the library's computers for word-processing and internet access, and library orientation sessions conducted by library staff.

Attracting new members

Twenty-five percent of participants were not members of the library before the classes began and joined the library during the program.

Real benefits to individuals

So far, three people have obtained full-time work as a direct result of using the skills obtained through LAPD. Others felt a lot more confident about themselves and their skills. The benefits are demonstrated in the comments from participants:

'I found the course very helpful. I was impressed with the amount of information and handouts.'

'I became more aware of avenues of getting information, particularly using the internet. I am able to write my resume in a more impressive way after attending this course. Certainly I will recommend this course to my friends.'

'The best thing I have ever done for myself!'

'Yes! Excellent! Definitely an aid to a better way of living your life — I have been helped in many ways. Thank you. Please put on more courses of this kind.'

Participants were surprised by the depth of collections and the services that are designed to assist people access information. The perception that libraries are only for people who read for pleasure has been shown to be inaccurate.

What could have been improved?

At first, it was difficult to get the message about the availability of the courses to those who would benefit from them. The Job Network providers were enthusiastic when approached, so

I sent fliers and course outlines to fifteen organisations so that the word could be spread. When bookings were slow, I contacted them again only to discover I was speaking to someone else. When offering similar courses in the future, I will be prepared to make contact three or four times to reinforce the message. The people who attended really appreciated the chance to participate. The skill is finding out how to contact those people in the first place.

Fourteen steps to success

- Consult community about needs.
- Call for expression of interest from facilitators/education providers.
- Select appropriate facilitators.
- Decide on venue and dates for courses.
- Design course outlines.
- Contact local Job Network members, community centres, Centrelink and other community stakeholders.
- Produce flyers and other advertising material.
- Advertise in library and non-library venues.
- Produce and distribute press releases.
- Design and produce book lists, website lists and other resource information for distribution to course participants.
- Develop library orientation tours for course participants.
- Organise venue, ensuring there are enough chairs, tables, whiteboards, overhead projectors, stationery and refreshments.
- Design evaluation sheets for both participants and facilitators.
- At the completion of courses, debrief staff and course facilitators.

The Library Assisted Personal Development program proved to be a cost-effective way to promote public library services and resources to a sector of the public who traditionally do not believe that libraries have a place in their lives. For those libraries looking for ways to encourage non-users, I would recommend providing similar courses.

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