

World Link Cairns

In 2007 Cairns Libraries delivered the *World Link Cairns* project, funded by a State Library of Queensland 'Library Strategic Development Grant'. *World Link Cairns* aimed to engage with diverse community groups, encouraging the production of their interpretation of the Australian story. This was achieved by hosting a number of author events that represented the various cultural groups in the Cairns community. The project was managed by the Special Services Librarian, Marketing and the Children's Librarian in consultation with Branch Coordinators and Team Leaders.

The five authors chosen for the project each explore a different aspect of Australian life within their own literary works. Leonie Norrington's writing for children and young adults focus on her experiences of living within an indigenous community. Gabrielle Wang and Archimede Fusillo write about the experiences of second generation Australians while both Shane Maloney and Robert G. Barrett evoke a more iconic Australia.

World Link Cairns targeted three audience groups: aspiring and emerging authors, primary and secondary school students, and avid readers. The events during each author's three day visit were chosen to appeal to at least two of the audience groups with a range of writing workshops, author talks and informal receptions. These were held at various branches of Cairns Libraries and at a number of both primary and secondary schools. No entry fees were charged during the events, providing equity for all socio-economic groups within the community.

The events were publicised externally through radio and print advertisements, media releases, bookstores, writers groups and school networks. Within Cairns Libraries, the events gained exposure through posters, handouts, library newsletters and on the library's webpage.

During the authors' visits, the project gained further exposure through interviews on local radio including ABC Far North, 4CA FM and HOT FM. Information about the project was also distributed more widely through interviews published in the Queensland Writers Centre's magazine *Writing Queensland* and the Children's Book Council of Australia's journal *Reading Time*.

The target audiences responded positively to the publicity that was circulated. School bookings were finalised within days of releasing information, necessitating the increase of school visits from one to two days. Demand was so high that class groups chose to book into events held at Cairns Libraries' branches as well as the visits to schools. Many teachers requested advance information about future literary projects.

The response by aspiring and emerging authors and avid readers was more measured. However, all workshops, talks and informal receptions for this target group still attracted a satisfactory audience.

The success of the project is evident from the statistics: during the 15 days of events, 1046 people attended 33 sessions. Of these, 675 attendees were school students from 15 different schools.

World Link Cairns had many positive outcomes. Participation by members of the diverse Cairns community forged a strong link between the community and Cairns Libraries. The distinct personalities of each author endeared them to many members of the community, resulting in the request for further literary events.



Kristie Jones

The promotion of literary works written by the authors involved led to an increase in the lending of these resources within Cairns Libraries. It also led to an increase in the purchase of the titles, often exhausting the stocks of local bookstores prior to the actual events.

Perhaps most satisfying of all, the project promoted an interest in literacy amongst young people increasing writing skills and encouraging imaginative thinking. Reluctant readers from various schools responded with an enthusiasm for literature after attending author talks and workshops. One of the participating schools, Gordonvale High School, was inspired to host an author tour themselves after such a positive response from their students. Cairns Libraries have been involved in mentoring the school in regards to choosing an author and the organisation of the tour.

Hosting *World Link Cairns* delivered many benefits to Cairns Libraries. It increased the library's connection to the community, adding new directions to the core business of Cairns Libraries and forging stronger relationships with local schools. The response was so positive that Cairns Libraries have included further author tours within next financial year's operational plan.

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