

Re-imagining customer service in Western Sydney Institute TAFE Libraries

TAFE clientele necessitate a unique library environment. A good proportion of the TAFE library's clients are people that have decided to make a difference in their lives. These students may have come from overseas and have little English, they may be living with a disability, or are simply ready to make a career change or return to study after a long time away from the workforce.

Western Sydney Institute TAFE Libraries have embraced the changing face of customer service delivery by adopting a holistic approach with a theme of education. By recognising the differences in our clients and adapting the way we deliver services, we are able to build strong working relationships with staff and students.

A student of Blacktown College Library recently remarked on the completion of his course that the librarians made him feel "valued and important", demonstrating the relationships TAFE libraries can foster with their students. The TAFE library allows itself the flexibility to offer the sometimes special care and attention needed to build a student's confidence and help them thrive within the educational environment.

It is common practice at Western Sydney Institute College Libraries to see beyond the basic textbooks and passwords and endeavour to provide a service and environment that keeps up with changing vocational training delivery methods while acknowledging the individuality of the students' needs.

Western Sydney Institute College Libraries cover seven college campuses across North West and Western Sydney, as well as providing an invaluable remote library service by flexible delivery through OTEN.

Emerging technology is always being considered and used as a viable way to deliver services, like Adobe Captivate sessions for off-campus students to learn how to use the catalogue. A future consideration is the use of podcasts to provide start of semester library orientations to staff and students alike.

In the last eighteen months, Baulkham Hills College Library has had to address the issue of serving students at the new Castle Hill campus which does not house a library. They have introduced an online request process and delivery service for both students and staff. They have also taken on the role of providing ongoing display material for this campus.

Blacktown College Library remains committed to providing a non-threatening flexible service for the high population of students from NESB. This college is split into two campuses and the library has adapted by providing a Mobile Library that travels to the classrooms, enabling students who may have not even considered using the library to borrow, and increase library awareness. Blacktown College Library also has embraced the TAFE students of the future by working with the adjacent childcare centre and providing storytime and craft sessions. Beautiful new children's books are available for the centre to borrow; this of course has a flow-on effect to the children's parents, most of whom are currently studying, to see the library as a comfortable and comforting learning environment.

Each of the campus libraries houses a Learning Centre. In some libraries, these rooms are used as shared computer rooms, but in all cases they are primarily for running tutorials on subjects from computing to resume preparation. These are very popular with students who may need out of classroom support, and provide

access to learning support teachers who are able to cater to an individual or small group of students. Blacktown College Library has just introduced a library tutorial that is available for those that need extra assistance with research skills, referencing, or searching online databases.

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A grown-up Library Lovers Day

Building relationships through events such as Summer Reading Club, Story Time, Home Work Help, You Tutor, and Library Lovers Day are busy but fun forms of customer service.

Having noticed that most of our events had been aimed at our younger members, we thought it was time to focus on an event for the adults. Library Lovers Day seemed the perfect choice. Unfortunately we left our run a little late, so we weren't able to roll it out in all our 11 branches. Mareeba staff jumped right in and decided on a champagne breakfast on February 15th and "Blind Dates" with a book. Blind Dates were available for two weeks starting from February 8th and helped to create a buzz. What was all this blind date business? It really got people talking and bookings for the breakfast filled up fast.



The champagne breakfast was a huge success; we even got to sing Happy Birthday to one of our guests as it just happened to be his 87th birthday. A small survey was handed out in the shape of a heart card asking guests what they loved most about our library, bellies were filled, and a pretty but simple paper heart craft was offered. We catered for 40 people.

Interaction at these events is such a personal and fun way to build relationships. It definitely reinforces in our borrowers a sense of ownership of the library, its resources, and its staff. The time staff and customers spent together having a cuppa and chat allowed us to get on a personal level with members of the library. This sense of familiarity makes the customers feel more comfortable about asking for any help they may need now or in the future.

At TRC Libraries we love our work, enjoy customer interaction, and want to promote our libraries as a venue for community fun and learning.

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