



## GEELONG IS 'CONNECTION CENTRAL'

*In Geelong, library staff are involved in a range of projects to build connections, including a collaboration between staff at Geelong Regional Libraries, Deakin University and the Gordon Institute of TAFE to develop the region's professional capacity overall, and the Geelong Regional Library's project designed to improve understanding and services for disabled patrons.*

### Regional partnerships to build professional capacity

Maximising training and development opportunities for library staff in the Geelong region is the aim of a collaborative project between Deakin University Library (Geelong Waterfront and Waurn Ponds campuses), the Gordon Institute of TAFE Library and Geelong Regional Library Corporation. By working together, the partners are better placed to attract specialist facilitators and guest speakers to the Geelong region in Victoria and therefore collectively provide broader learning and networking opportunities.

This project began with the establishment in 2009 of a small steering committee from the three organisations. The committee developed and delivered the pilot program of information sessions, networking opportunities and training programs in customer service, communications (including presentations, telephone skills, and visual communications), information literacy, inclusive workplace principles, library metrics and library design. Almost 130 staff have participated in these workshops.

### Working together

Over time, we have developed informal guidelines and roles for each steering committee member organisation, alternating hosting of events and sharing costs based on contributions to the budget. A followup survey of participants found that the ability to network with staff from their own and other organisations and to attend training locally were considered to be significant benefits of the program.

In the second year, we added topics such as disaster response and recovery, time management, professional relationship development and emerging themes for libraries to the offering. All library networks across the region receive invitations to our social and networking events and in 2010 this also included a library and information students' network meeting and an end of year social evening at the recently refurbished Deakin Waurn Ponds library. Perhaps the highlight of the year, the Emerging Technology Forum, had a strong turnout from even further afield - including Swan Hill and Melbourne.

The combined program of professional development workshops and networking events has attracted over 200 participants.

Ultimately, as with so many partnerships, this initiative works due to the goodwill within the steering committee and a shared desire to make it work. (We also think the enjoyable lunch planning meetings might be a contributing factor.)

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### Connecting library services with disability support agencies and their clients

The Geelong Regional Library Corporation (GRLC), in partnership with the City of Greater Geelong (CoGG), was selected for the State Library of Victoria's 2010 Pierre Gorman Award to develop a Disability Awareness Training Scheme for library staff (DATS).

### Getting the facts together

The information gathering involved a number of consultation sessions with people with disabilities and their carers and staff from local support agencies and organizations, providing us with information about specific types of disabilities, how to respond to visible disabilities and how other disabilities may manifest themselves through behaviour. They also provided information about how we might adjust our services and programs to enable broader inclusion of people with disabilities. This stage also included a staff survey to identify some of the issues that staff have experienced when providing services to community members with disabilities.

### Workshops target service delivery

A program of two half-day workshops was developed and delivered to GRLC staff in October and November with 60 staff members participating. The workshops were focused on service delivery rather than physical access. Workshop 1 included information about people with blindness and low vision, deafness and low hearing, mobility issues and the use of communication boards. The presenters were experts from a range of local organisations including Gateways, St. Laurence, the Geelong Mood Support Group, Better Hearing Australia, SCOPE and Vision Australia. Clients of some of the participating agencies also presented which provided a very personal perspective to the issues being discussed.

### What we learned

- Awareness is key - our staff are much more aware of all types of disability and actively applying that learning to our customer service environment and our programs and events. We are also developing book clubs and providing board games.
- Technology helps – all our libraries have now been provided with communication boards and we are currently investigating hearing loops and other adaptive technologies to facilitate the use of our PCs.
- Let the community know – we shared details of our disability awareness training program and information about our library services at joint celebrations of the 2010 International Day of People with Disability.
- Build relationships with the experts – our positive interactions with disability agency staff has resulted in the development of some close relationships that will continue beyond the DATS program.

As inCite goes to press we will be completing our evaluation of the workshop and the full project report will be presented shortly to the GRLC Board, the State Library of Victoria and Public Libraries Network Victoria.

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