

eSmart Libraries set for evaluation

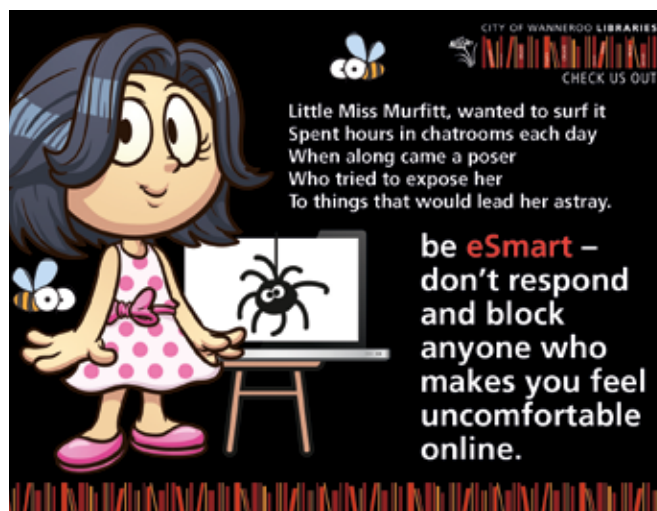
A LIA has long been a supporter of the eSmart Libraries program managed by The Alannah and Madeline Foundation and supported by the Telstra Foundation. One of Australia's most significant community cybersafety initiatives, the program is now poised to achieve an important evaluation milestone.

The eSmart Libraries program aims to help build skills and behaviours for the smart, safe use of technology, along with contributing to digital inclusion and a greater sense of wellbeing in the library community. With over 40% of Australia's public libraries branches now participating in the program and four library services – Bayside, Campaspe, Hume and Wellington Shire – having completed full accreditation, the program is poised to undertake the first phase of the independent evaluation of the eSmart Libraries Framework.

This follows a comprehensive project schedule, including engaging cybersafety speakers, undertaking digital literacy assessments of staff and patrons, locating best practice cybersafe user resources in the eSmart Libraries portal, inducting and training staff and volunteer mentors, providing user guidance, and working through the necessary policy and procedural changes required to embed cybersafety in the library community.

Program Manager for eSmart Libraries, Jacqui Kinder, says the independent evaluation phase will be an important next step.

'Library staff, patrons and management will be asked to complete an online survey, attend focus group meetings or interview to have their say about the impact eSmart is having on internet use and access, safety online and responsible use of technology.'



The City of Wanneroo created this poster to support cybersafety in the library.

'It's critical to understand how we can make eSmart better and enhance library systems in the future.'

While children are an important target group, the elderly are also very much in the mind of the program's developers. As one library team reported, 'we have found through the implementation of eSmart Libraries, seniors who may have been reluctant to adopt technology are now more willing to engage, reducing their social isolation in a digital age.'

The accreditation process takes an average of 12 to 24 months to complete and participating libraries have indicated this is realistic, particularly given the complex and time-consuming process of achieving the necessary organisational endorsement of new cybersafe policies. Across all states, with the current exception of Tasmania, 581 public library branches are now participating in the program. The program aims to reach 100% of public libraries by 2018.

Participating libraries can access a comprehensive library resources tool kit for the program, and they can also track their progress. In the past year, more than 20 bespoke library templates, created by metropolitan and regional libraries, have been added to the collection of video resources created for public library use.

Cr Casey Nunn, Mayor of Hume City Council in Victoria (which has now achieved full accreditation under the eSmart Libraries program) says, 'We believe that due to advancements in technology, making sure our library and library users know how to be cybersafe, is a matter of priority. eSmart Libraries is helping us achieve this by building on and improving our current policies, strategies and guidelines, and empowering us to pass this knowledge onto our users.'

The program is free to libraries. For more details about the program, phone 1300 538 534 and register to participate at www.esmartlibraries.org.au.