



LITTLE LIBRARY IN A CAFÉ

Little Free Libraries, an organisation that started in the US eight years ago, now has branches all over the world, including in a café in Albany, WA, as SORAYA MAJIDI reports.

In 2015, Albany Public Library entered into a partnership with the Alkaline Café to set up a Little Free Library (LFL). The thinking behind this collaboration was to promote the library's services to non-public library users and recycle surplus or deaccessioned library materials. The benefit to the café was that they had a lovely library collection freely available to their customers.

The LFL concept is a grassroots initiative that began in Wisconsin in 2009 to encourage people to share and exchange books. This community-building enterprise involves setting up small book exchanges, housed in different types of receptacles (which are often very creatively designed) outside the homes of individuals or in community spaces. The motto 'Take a book, Leave a Book' forms the basis of the exchange process. According to the LFL website there are over 50,000 registered LFLs throughout the world. The mission of the LFL concept is to promote literacy, the love of reading and to build and strengthen community relationships.


Despite the idea of the LFL being a grassroots endeavour, driven by individuals, Albany Public Library saw an opportunity to extend its reach into the wider community, especially to non-library users, by setting up an LFL in close partnership with a community business. As a very busy and cherished community resource, Albany Public Library is heavily patronised by the local community and visitors, who know the services and programs it offers. For people in the community who don't engage with the library space, setting up an LFL in partnership with a local

café was an opportunity to reach them where, in addition to obtaining free books to promote literacy, information about Albany Public Library would also be made available.

The Alkaline Café is a popular place – beautifully decorated with recrafted and recycled materials – that serves delicious and healthy food. The partnership between Albany Public Library and the Alkaline Café is an easy fit, in which the café supports a philosophy of nourishing the body to promote good health and wellbeing, and the library provides books to encourage, through reading, an engaged and active mind.

Like most public libraries, Albany Public Library has a surplus collection of deaccessioned books, and it receives donated items that do not make it into the library's collection. With these abundant resources freely available, the library was able to supply the Alkaline Café with items to fully stock the LFL. The library also paid for the LFL sign and arranged for library information to be promoted through flyers and brochures. The Alkaline Café provided the bookshelves and embellishments – such as plants and signs – and maintains the collection, asking for additional supplies as needed.

To date, the collaboration has been successful, and it's hoped that this pilot partnership will open up other opportunities for collaborations with other businesses or local community groups.

For more info go to littlefreelibrary.org. 

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