Improving library services
for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be aware that this publication may contain the image(s) of people who have passed away.

Contents

Introduction

Libraries across Australia are focused on improving services for people identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, whether they live in cities, towns or remote communities.

This document has examples of initiatives that are already underway, while highlighting opportunities for further improvement.

It shows that libraries are maximising the use of their facilities, developing thoughtful programs, taking a more respectful approach to collections and expanding professional development opportunities for library and information professionals.

The report provides ideas for libraries that may not be so far advanced in their approach, and it prompts discussion about ways in which Australian libraries can work together to make further progress.

Foreword

For the 2018–2019 presidential year, our ALIA theme is Indigenous matters. We have chosen this theme, partly because of my personal commitment to improving library services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, reflected by my day job as part of the team at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS); partly because of ALIA's focus on the same objective, and partly to highlight the way that libraries around Australia are rising to the challenge.

As you will see from the case studies and examples featured in this report, we are making some headway in terms of programs, collections, access to physical and digital resources.

One area where we have seen less progress, though, is in employing more people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds to work in libraries. We need their knowledge and expertise to help shape our delivery of culturally appropriate and respectful services, and to guide our collection management approach.

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) has prioritised five areas of focus:

- Finding ways to ensure more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are qualified for employment in professional library roles.

- Initiating a review and revision of the ATSILIRN (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library and Information and Resource Network) Protocols.

- Supporting libraries and library and information professionals to acknowledge and celebrate the International Year of Indigenous Languages in 2019.

- Creating ALIA's first Reconciliation Action Plan.

- Producing guidance for libraries and library and information professionals seeking to improve library services for Indigenous people.

These projects are being undertaken by ALIA in partnership with library and information science educators, National and State Libraries Australia, AIATSIS, ATSILIRN, the ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance and other stakeholders.

Thank you for your support in achieving our goal.

Lyndall Osborne
ALIA President 2018-2019

Australian Capital Territory

Introducing local languages

Libraries ACT

Libraries ACT runs the nine public libraries in Canberra and also provides extensive online services, including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Pathfinder. This features books and other items, created for, by and about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In 2017, the library service celebrated Mother Language Day with a special storytime hosted by Glenn Freeman from the Koomurri Ngunnawal Aboriginal Corporation. More than 50 children and their caregivers heard the story of why the emu can't fly, learned some Ngunnawal words and shared *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* in the Ngunnawal language.

Following this event, Libraries ACT has continued to incorporate first language in programs and has developed an acknowledgement of country specifically for children.

Mother Language Day, Libraries ACT

Uncovering hidden histories

National Library of Australia

In the early part of the twentieth century, sick Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were routinely removed from families and country and taken to lock hospitals. Melissa Sweet, a public health journalist, became interested in the history of lock hospitals when approached by members of the Carnarvon and Palm Island communities to investigate the history of this medical incarceration.

Working with local communities, Ms Sweet used Trove to investigate the harsh conditions in the hospitals, the high death rates and the stories of the people who worked in the hospitals. More than 70 people from Malgana/Yawuru communities were involved in the activity, people who are still experiencing the impacts of this period in history.

When the research began, there was no public memorial or information available in Carnarvon about the histories or the people who suffered in these hospitals. Ms Sweet compiled folders of the articles sourced in Trove to give to community members and research participants in Western Australia and Queensland.

Carnarvon Shire Council now has a working group looking to develop memorials to pay respects to those taken to the islands. Ms Sweet says that without Trove 'This research project would not have been anywhere near as extensive, and, most importantly would have been less able to meet the community's needs.'

Providing family history support resources and services

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)

AIATSIS, Australia's only national institution focused exclusively on the diverse history, cultures and heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples, is located in Canberra but its service delivery is national. Its Collection Access Unit provides research assistance and access services, including through its free Return of Indigenous Material to Indigenous Communities (ROMTIC) program.

The Family History Unit provides support and research assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who are researching their family history. Research requests can begin through the free 1800 number or online, using the Finding Your Family Indigenous family history toolkit, which is available to everyone. This is supported by specially curated resources from the AIATSIS and other collections and services. AIATSIS also supports family history research through the online Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Biographical Index records available through Trove; professional training through the Certificate IV Stolen Generation Family History and Casework; as well as ad hoc training sessions provided at AIATSIS in Canberra. AIATSIS specifically supports the Stolen Generations in their research through Link-up services.

Family History Unit staff providing advice, National Native Title Conference, AIATSIS

New South Wales

Embedding Aboriginal priorities in NSW public library services

State Library of New South Wales

Indigenous Spaces in Library Places: Building a Vibrant Public Library Network Inclusive of Indigenous Peoples and Communities[1] has been developed by the State Library of NSW to provide guidance to public libraries, as part of its ongoing commitment to enhancing services dedicated to the NSW Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.

The aim of the strategy is to create interest and awareness in the way public libraries across the state can provide a safe and welcoming space for Aboriginal peoples and communities, building inclusive collections and services. In this strategy 'Library Places' refer to a conceptual arena where libraries engage not only with Aboriginal peoples accessing the library building, but also with their history, issues and perceptions across the community.

The State Library works closely with public libraries building cultural competence, providing ongoing support and making available free online resources (such as the *Indigenous Spaces in Library Places* online toolkit[2]).

The work of the Indigenous Services and Public Library Services teams in providing information on Aboriginal family history research provides a good example on the use of the Strategy.

Aboriginal family history information requests are among the primary reasons people contact the Indigenous Services team at the library. With the aim of reaching as many people as possible across NSW Aboriginal communities and public libraries, the team has created the program *Connecting Culture – Tracing Ancestors*, which is designed to assist people in starting their research. Since the launch of the program in 2016, requests from libraries across NSW increased quickly, showing a clear need of training on this subject.

Activities and resources in NSW public libraries

- The Blacktown City Libraries Indigenous collection began in 2017 with a donation of a few books from the local Rotary Club. In the 2018 financial year, funding was made available and a further $2,000 worth of content was added. There are now more than 200 items in the collection and areas for display have been created at Blacktown and Mount Druitt libraries. The branches have also hosted presentations on the local Dharug language and a talk by author Bruce Pascoe about his book *Dark Emu*.

- Cessnock Local Government Area is the traditional land of the Wonnarua, Awabakal and Darkinjung people and some 7% of the population are Indigenous. With a high demand for help researching family histories, Cessnock City Library's local studies librarian produced the guide *Do I have Indigenous heritage?* accompanied by a practical workshop, which was fully attended.

Indigenous collection, Blacktown City Libraries

---

[1] https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/public-library-services/services/indigenous-spaces-library-places

[2] Ibid
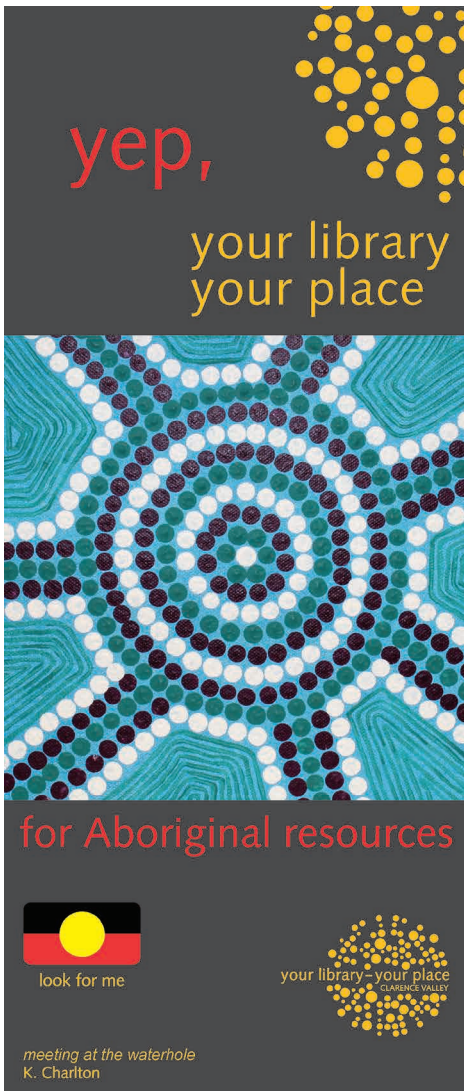
Banner for the Aboriginal collection, Clarence Regional Library

- Clarence Regional Library identifies Indigenous items in the collection with an Aboriginal flag spine label and makes the *Koori Mail* available at all its branches. It also promotes services for Aboriginal people through its website[3] and runs Aboriginal writing and family history workshops.

- Several years ago, Lake Macquarie Libraries liaised with the local sewing group Na Ya Boo Larng (Women coming together) to create a story quilt called Naruta-ka-wa. The creation of this quilt took seven months, and upon its completion told local elder Uncle Jim Ridgeway's story of the *Great Sky Lizard of Pulbah Island*. The quilt has since been used for storytimes and for significant events.

  Lake Macquarie Libraries are part of IDX Flint. This national program is designed to spark the interest, ideas and talent of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in exploring digital technology through robotics, drones, 3D printing and virtual reality. And the Toronto Library has been home to an Aboriginal Knowledge Centre since 2008, celebrating heritage and culture through collections, oral histories, artistic expression, music and stories.

- As a part of the Better Reading Better Communities program, MidCoast Libraries has funded the training of literacy tutors within the Indigenous community. The library service has also worked with a local high school and Aboriginal elders on an Aboriginal family history project; commissioned local Indigenous artists to create prominent artwork in the Forster Library, and Taree Library holds regular storytimes at Girrawong, a local Aboriginal pre-school, with return visits by pre-schoolers to the library.

- Port Macquarie Library staff make regular visits to the local Aboriginal Land Council to discuss the library needs of the Birpai people. This relationship is reflected on the website[4].

- For NAIDOC Week 2018, Snowy Valleys Council ran a series of programs in the five Snowy Valleys Council Libraries in partnership with the Wiradjuri community, for people to learn about, understand and celebrate the significance of local Indigenous culture.

Possum Skin Cloak educational kit, Lake Macquarie Library

Speaker event, Lake Macquarie Library

IDX Flint program, Lake Macquarie Library

---

[3] https://www.crl.nsw.gov.au/services/research/aboriginal-resources/

[4] http://mnclibrary.org.au/biripi/

Northern Territory

Programs and collections designed around communities

Alice Springs Public Library

The Alice Springs Public Library caters for the local population and the 260 remote Indigenous communities surrounding the town. Collection development takes place with a strong focus on Indigenous needs:

- Akaltye Antheme (Giving Knowledge) is a collection of books and magazines produced for and by the Aboriginal people of Central Australia since 2002. This includes a small digital library called IndigiLinks.
- The local languages collection of early reader texts and books for adults is available in up to 14 different Central Australian languages.
- The Alice Springs collection comprises items published in and about Central Australia or by Central Australian authors.

Programs are also designed around the need of communities. Significant days and weeks are celebrated and there are outreach activities in Town Camps, for example, STEAM into Alice; storytime at Yipirinya School; and regular programming for young people with CAYLUS (Central Australian Youth Link Up Service). The library and CAYLUS jointly fund a part-time youth worker at the library.

Feedback has been positive: 'The library is a great place, it is like "Our own Sacred Site". You have lots of people from different groups, clans, tribes and they all come in here together. Not fighting or silly business, it is all peaceful.'

Classifying library collections according to local cultural concepts

Northern Territory Library

In 2017, a new classification system was introduced, changing the way the remote community of Galiwin'ku on Elcho Island utilised its local community library.

The Northern Territory Library and East Arnhem Regional Council partnered to develop a new way of classifying Aboriginal community collections in Yolŋu Matha according to local cultural concepts at the Galiwin'ku Community Library.

It is believed this was the first time in Australia that a public library had arranged its collections using Aboriginal cultural concepts rather than Western classification systems, such as the Dewey Decimal System.

Naming knowledge according to local concepts has had a positive impact on community members. Rather than spending time trying to understand how to search their collection, community members can now simply enjoy the library and look for books easily and in language. The Northern Territory Library plans to expand the program to other community libraries.

Internet services in remote communities

Northern Territory Library

The Northern Territory Library (NTL) provides free public Wi-Fi to 46 remote Aboriginal communities in the Territory as part of the NT Government's expenditure on centralised services for the public library sector.

The library started to provide public Wi-Fi services to remote Aboriginal communities through a Commonwealth grant funded program in 2009. In 2016 the NT Government committed to funding the program on an ongoing basis, expanding the reach to 46 communities and installing new NBN services.

The project is managed by NTL in cooperation with regional councils, who in turn collaborate and consult with local authorities in remote communities to recommend the best locations for the Wi-Fi infrastructure.

The impact of this service is significant. Increasingly government and community services are delivered and accessed online. Issues of affordability and accessibility are paramount for citizens living in remote regions of the Northern Territory. Whilst the small size and geographic isolation of many communities means that a library often does not exist as a physical entity, the program recognises that access to the internet is a core public library service to address issues of digital inclusion and one that can be delivered in a variety of community locations.

Usage of the service increased nearly ten-fold in 2017–18 and is expected to increase significantly as NBN upgrades are completed.

A striking example of the human impact of this service occurred in the wet season of 2018 during the Daly river floods. All telecommunications were disabled by flood waters except for the free public Wi-Fi provided by Northern Territory Library. This service provided a reliable and effective communications link for emergency services as well as for residents wanting to receive updated information about rescue and evacuation procedures and contact family members.
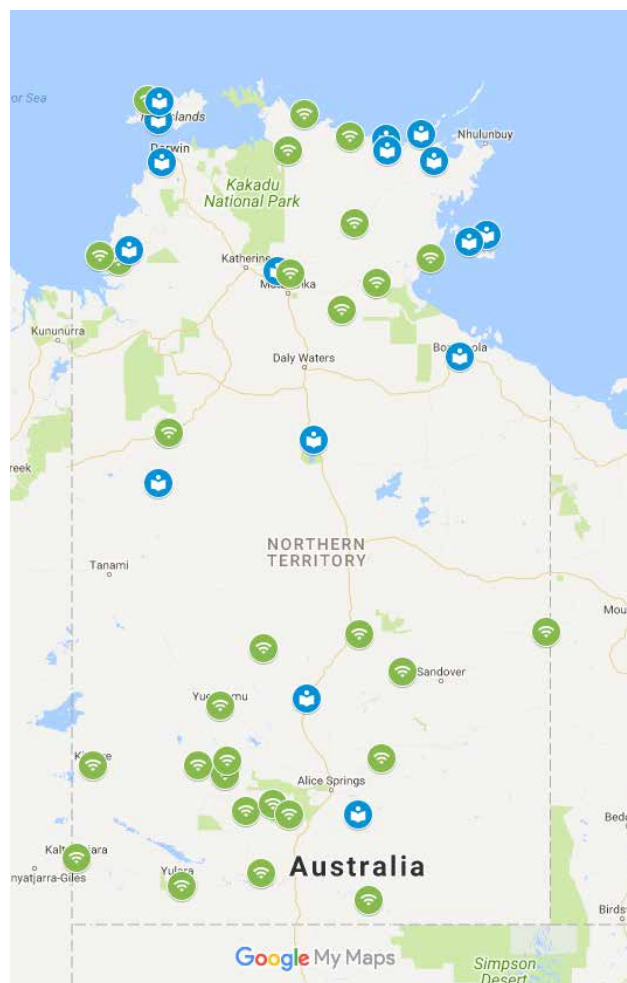
Community internet service sites, Northern Territory Library

Queensland

Murri Rainbow Book Club

CityLibraries Townsville

The Murri Rainbow Book Club was started in 2011 by Townsville Library's Indigenous Resources Officer and continues to meet every month for lively discussions about books, reading and the oral tradition. It was based on the State Library of Queensland's earlier Reconciliation Reading Group model.

Examining the University Australia's Indigenous Strategy 2017-2020

Queensland University Libraries office of Cooperation (QULOC)

In 2017, QULOC created the Indigenous Strategy Reference Group (ISRG) to examine and review the actions, activities and targets outlined in the Universities Australia (UA) Indigenous Strategy 2017–2020, released on 1 March 2017. They were charged with identifying current practices and approaches in QULOC libraries against the actions, activities and targets outlined in the strategy and exploring potential actions and activities to support the proposed targets for QULOC libraries to consider.

Opportunities were identified where libraries might support the goals of the UA Strategy beyond the established schedule. Some opportunities involve developing and sharing information about local Indigenous groups and broader cultural information in collaboration with Indigenous students, staff and academics. For some, there is an opportunity to improve and extend the use of the library as a venue and host for art and design. Many ISRG representatives noted how they could improve engagement with Indigenous students, staff and researchers/academics. The group is developing a survey tool for QULOC member libraries based on the maturity model to assist with the process. The ISRG will continue to meet during 2019.

Indigenous Knowledge Centres and Ideas Box

State Library of Queensland

Since 2002, the State Library of Queensland has partnered with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils to support a network of Indigenous Knowledge Centres (IKCs) in remote communities of Queensland. IKCs provide library and library-related services.

There are 24 IKCs operating in Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities across Queensland. Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities without an IKC are trialling an Ideas Box to assist the community. The Ideas Box is a portable mixed-media centre developed by Libraries without Borders. It provides an introduction to library services for the communities currently without infrastructure to house an IKC.

Ideas Box, State Library of Queensland

Ideas Box, State Library of Queensland

Digital literacy initiatives

State Library of Queensland

Digital inclusion programs delivered in Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities through Indigenous Knowledge Centres (IKC) or other community spaces, first commenced in 2006 with the Taking IT On initiative (2006–2008), then continued through the Remote Indigenous Public Internet Access (RIPIA) program (2009–2015).

The 2017 Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) reported that digital inclusion is steadily increasing in Australia, however on multiple digital inclusion dimensions, access to digital technologies and digital skill building is limited for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. To address the ongoing digital literacy issues raised in the 2017 ADII report, State Library of Queensland and Telstra have partnered to deliver the Deadly Digital Communities (DDC) program. The program commenced in August 2017 and is being delivered in partnership with local councils through their IKCs and professionally develops local technology leaders to continue regular digital literacy training through their IKC.

The DDC program encourages Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to dream big through digital literacy to create and unlock new opportunities and new possibilities for themselves and their community. The program provides community-based digital literacy and technology training over two years to 26 remote and regional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Queensland. Participants will learn digital skills like sending an email, using social media, paying bills online, promoting a new business idea and more.

Yarrabah Knowledge Centre, State Library of Queensland

Indigenous Languages Project: Yuwibara

State Library of Queensland

The State Library of Queensland proudly supports the revival of Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. Since 2006, the project has supported 105 languages and dialects from across Queensland. Many of these are considered endangered and require urgent support. Within the project, State Library networks across Indigenous Knowledge Centres and Indigenous Language Centres to provide local assistance.

One such example has been the Yuwibara language of the Mackay Region which was considered 'lost'. Since 2015 State Library in partnership with Mackay Regional Libraries has assisted Mackay communities to rebuild their language from historical sources. The outcome will be a community dictionary and language app with over 1,000 words from Yuwibara and neighbouring languages.

Yuwibara language project, State Library of Queensland

South Australia

Reading projects in remote communities

Public Library Services

The Libraries Board of South Australia allocates annual library subsidies to populations living in remote areas, including the Aboriginal communities in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands. Public Library Services, based at the State Library of South Australia, works with communities to design the best model for delivery.

This has included partnering with the Indigenous Literacy Foundation to provide materials and programs, especially for children and young people, in English and first language, and working with the Kaltjiti Community Administration Support Officer and Community Council to develop a community book swap, using books from the wider South Australian Public Library network.

Tasmania

Making libraries more culturally engaging

Libraries Tasmania

Libraries Tasmania has incorporated the conventions of the Tasmanian Aboriginal and Dual Naming Policy into its cataloguing procedures. The Dual Naming Policy allows for geographical features and places to be given both an introduced and Aboriginal language name, as well as allowing new Aboriginal names and replacement names to be proposed. As a result, Libraries Tasmania now includes Tasmanian Aboriginal features and place names when cataloguing collections.

Libraries Tasmania is also participating in the National and State Libraries Australia Indigenous cultural competency project and to coincide with this work, it is developing a series of exhibitions in partnership with members of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community. These will tell stories of Tasmania's past and encourage thought and discussion about its future.

Victoria

Indigenous children and young people tell their stories

State Library of Victoria

The Making Books, Making Readers program was run by the State Library of Victoria, in partnership with Kids' Own Publishing. Working with Indigenous communities, artists helped create books reflecting local stories. For example, *Wanagaga Yalka: Children of the Bush* was made by Aboriginal students of Guthrie Street Primary School, Shepparton.

Aboriginal family history day

State Library of Victoria

In 2018, the State Library ran an inaugural Aboriginal family history day, which was fully subscribed. Members of the local Aboriginal community had the opportunity to view material from the library's collection, including an 1866 composite by photographer Carl Walter. The work remains important to Indigenous Victorian Aboriginal people because Walter was one of the few people to show respect to his subjects by identifying them with their Aboriginal and English names, and their clan group where possible. Images by photographers from other missions including Ebenezer, Lake Condah, Ramahyuck, Lake Tyers and Cummeragunja were also available for viewing. Manuscript material including word lists, mission reports, massacre maps, and research prepared by a Healesville local that included burial lists from Coranderrk, were of great interest to the family history researchers.

The day also included sessions with highly regarded Aboriginal family historian Aunty Sandra Smith, a presentation from the Library's Family History team, and a demonstration by Allara Pattison from the Koori Unit on the online keeping place Mukurtu. Aboriginal community organisations Link Up, Connecting Home, and the Koorie Heritage Trust spoke about their roles in supporting the Stolen Generations. The Stolen Generations yarning circle, described as 'a healing experience' by one participant, was another highlight.

Sessions on Aboriginal family history day, State Library of of Victoria. *Image credit: Moorina Bonini*

Collection viewing, State Library of of Victoria. *Image credit: Moorina Bonini*

Western Australia

Family literacy focus in remote communities

State Library of Western Australia

The Better Beginnings family literacy program from the State Library of Western Australia encourages and supports parents to be their child's first teacher, talking, singing, reading, writing and playing with their child every day to develop literacy and language skills from birth. The program reaches 95% of families across Western Australia with new born babies, and 99% of all kindergarten students.

Since 2010, Better Beginnings has been working with early childhood practitioners, parents, health nurses, teachers and Aboriginal Medical Services in 130 remote Aboriginal communities to bring early literacy opportunities to children up to the age of five. *Read to me I love it!* reading packs have been developed specially to support the requirements of children living in remote communities. In 2019–2023 Better Beginnings will build on this approach to include a focus on developing resources in Aboriginal languages to improve engagement in literacy and learning.

Digital access to original materials

State Library of Western Australia

In 2013, the State Library launched the Storylines platform, based on Ara Irititja software, which allows objects, people, places, stories, plants and animals to be tagged and linked, to create knowledge profiles which reflect the many perspectives of Aboriginal Western Australia. This provides for the digital repatriation of photographs and other materials directly to Aboriginal communities, while also helping to legitimise Aboriginal family history and decolonize images within the collection.

The system supports many media types, including documents, images, video and audio, and enables users to adhere to cultural protocols.

One example of where Storylines is being used in community, is at the Mowanjum Aboriginal Art and Cultural Centre, in the far north of the state. Here, the Wurnannangga Storylines collection is continually growing with new recordings, scans and uploaded images of privately-owned items brought to the centre by community members. This instance of Storylines alongside one located in Broome at Nyamba Buru Yawuru Aboriginal Corporation is community owned and managed to ensure preservation of, and intergenerational access to, cultural materials.

Community-level research support and training

State Library of Western Australia

Since 2016, monthly Aboriginal family history sessions have provided support and training to individuals researching family history through State Library resources. These sessions assist clients to navigate different research methods and collections held in various institutions. The State Library of Western Australia also reaches out to clients who are unable to attend these sessions through public libraries and sessions in other regional and metro centres.

A key aspect of this engagement is training public library staff in the use of Storylines. Most Aboriginal families and communities are not aware of the extent of photographs currently held in the State Library's collections and these training sessions have led to a number of dedicated Storylines access points being installed in public libraries throughout the state.

National

Indigenous cultural competency

National and State Libraries Australia (NSLA)

NSLA's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Learning Project is led by representatives from every state and territory, working together to make NSLA libraries more culturally safe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and clients.

Through the provision of training and resources to staff, the project aims to foster culturally safe workplaces for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and public spaces for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients; ensure that the voices and views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations are considered and incorporated in the design, delivery and evaluation of library services and facilities; and introduce culturally informed approaches to collection management, description, access and use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collection materials.

A national approach will improve consistency and continuity of library policy and practice throughout Australia, as part of NSLA's commitment to respectful interactions and collaborations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families, community groups and organisations.

Providing context for education, training and professional development

Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA)

As the professional body for Australian libraries and library and information professionals, ALIA has worked with educators to embed Indigenous matters in the *Core knowledge, skills and attributes for LIS professionals* and in the *Foundation statement for information professionals working in archives, libraries and records management*.

In terms of ongoing learning for library qualified staff, there is an ALIA PD Scheme Indigenous Engagement specialisation and a public library specialisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services, both with a set of competencies and a skills audit checklist.

For staff who are not library qualified, the ALIA Public Library Proficiency program includes a section on Indigenous matters.

United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Australian libraries are strong supporters of the 17 global Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and Indigenous peoples are specifically mentioned in the 2030 Agenda, in the narrative around putting human rights at the centre, leaving no one behind and combatting inequalities, and in SDG 4 'ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for Indigenous peoples.'