Connecting Youth with the Community through Technology
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Libraries have a unique strength within their communities, catering specifically to their local population as well as being of vital national importance. Through access to certain technologies, resources, and services, libraries contain an array of learning potentials. Coupling this with the patronage of a wide spectrum of demographics, a library has the capacity to improve a community's social cohesion. Of concern here are ways to improve the local digital literacy through partnerships between adults and youth. By utilising knowledge of the more technological savvy to teach those lacking such an understanding, libraries can assist others in engaging in an advancing, technologically dependent era.

Another aim of this initiative is to break down some of the barriers that continue to exist among different age-groups. With specific targets of such programs being the younger teaching the older, the relationships between these groups could improve. In other words, younger people would appreciate the experiences and wisdom of their seniors. Simultaneously, seniors would appreciate the significance of future generations' capacity to affect and further improve society.

Younger people could better learn to work amongst themselves and with people of different backgrounds and perspectives, positively influencing the general well-being of the community. The ultimate value gained from such an initiative would be to transcend typical stereotypes of all age groups. By utilising the skills of children and the learned wisdom of adults, the foundation of local communities can only strengthen.

There exists in society a particular type of division caused by the perceived biases of different age-groups (Norman, 2001). As technology progresses, youth and younger adults may be better suited to their use and professional implementation. Subsequently, this may lead to older adults or seniors without such understanding to view these advancements as unnatural or unnecessary. Instead of allowing technology to exacerbate such biases, there exists a unique opportunity to bring people together in new, yet still meaningful ways. Rather than relegating the latest trend to younger people or traditional methods of interaction to the older generations, technology can unite all members of communities and cultures.

Younger people, specifically in Australia, generally know how to use and/or have access to many different technological devices (ABS, 2014-15). Where libraries employ a variety of digital resources in service provision and public access they may not necessarily have the capacity to teach their uses. Where younger people have specific skills, and libraries have access to such resources at little to no cost, a potential partnership can bridge this gap In knowledge. As society is increasingly dependent on these technologies for everyday purposes, libraries could provide avenues to learn such skills through available resources and existing social capital (Frazer, 2013). A library can use its access to technology for digitally literate youth to teach those of less knowledge and as a result, illustrate their own value (CGD Positive Ageing Strategy, 2017 & SA Youth Engagement Guide, 2016). The effect of this would be to not only improve intergenerational knowledge but an appreciation of the difference among age-groups.

Due to the aforementioned societal divide, the most difficult obstacle to tackle is the engagement of youth, as well as the perceptions of them by adults. Where younger people do in fact use the library as a study or gathering space, there is little programming directly catering for them. When there is, these programs often do not address relevant needs or desires of these individuals (Frazer, 2013). Through effective partnerships between libraries and youth, these issues could be better communicated and resolved. When youth see that libraries are willing to give some autonomy to them, they will become better engaged citizens. Giving younger people a measure of control and methods of expression improves their self-esteem. As a result of such positive engagement, younger people experience higher rates of school completion and an increased sense of ambition (Zia et al, 2011).

Community institutions often assume what younger people desire, with these misunderstandings leading to a lack of engagement. This should be viewed as an opportunity to establish better relationships and support between professional adults or community leaders and youth. It is through adults engaging in appropriate dialogue and adequate representation that youth can feel relevant to their communities (Norman, 2001). This also needs to extend beyond tokenism, where adults still consider themselves experts, by actively listening and providing an appropriate implementation of youth ideas. Once there is a working association between the adults and the young people they are supporting, further achievements and learning can begin. When such a foundation exists, the potential to tackle other community issues can occur. In this case, the opportunity to address intergenerational learning.

Another aspect of this initiative is to investigate possible curbing of anti-social behaviour among youth via active community participation. Appropriate and adequate engagement of youth can improve their self-esteem and levels of academic achievement, affecting relational attitudes. In this case, libraries as community centres can help prevent bullying, particularly cyber-bullying. This is

one such key issue already identified by the Australian government and the Alannah & Madeline Foundation, targeting libraries through their eSmart initiative. Libraries as important community establishments have the capacity to assist individuals and other institutions in exposing social messages to perpetrators as well as victims (Donegan, 2012). By creating these positive spaces for youth they will feel supported and less likely to respond negatively. For those that are still targets of such abuse, they can recognise that libraries are places that will support them.

By developing youth-adult partnerships and developing adequate role models of appropriate behaviour in a professional setting, anti-social activity could be minimised. By giving volatile youth something to do and feel in control, it may also prevent them from needing to lash out at their peers, while also giving the more vulnerable some strength through achievement (Juvonen et al, 2003). Libraries can assist with instilling this sense of cooperation and appreciation of others through these partnerships. In doing so individuals as well as the community benefit by reducing the potential for this type of behaviour to flourish.

Having discussed benefits of intergenerational learning, this leads to questions of inter-cultural learning. It is amongst those children born from migrant parents, or those who arrived at a young age, that have the potential to gain the best of two-worlds; to gain from their parent's culture (or the one they were born into) as well as the country in which they reside. For many migrants, it is through engagement with a variety of communication technologies that they could retain their identities as well as add to them in their new cultural landscape (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Razfar & Yang, 2010 cited in Rosen, 2014). The benefit would be illustrating differing cultural perspectives and how technology increases the contact between them.

Regarding the younger generation of migrant families, they may be in a position to offer methods of cultural translation. This would increase understanding between their own families as well as their surrounding community. As seniors may find difficulty in learning a local language, youth can potentially rework digital resources to make them culturally relevant for those sharing their own background. By using modern information and communication technology children are able to expand upon existing or traditional narratives (Cordes, 1999 cited in Rosen, 2014). The goal is for everyone in a community to feel as if they belong to their local and wider communities connected through the multimodal literacy we now have access to (Rosen, 2014).

As libraries have access to such a broad spectrum of resources as well as the community they have a unique opportunity unlike other institutions (Norman, 2001). Specifically they can improve intergenerational relationships, cultural knowledge and digital literacy. Creating effective partnerships with youth and adults allow them to bridge their relationships rather than fracture. This

also extends to the interactions of different cultures. These are all goals that are well suited to the gathering and learning centres that libraries are, unifying the community as a whole (PLVN, 2015).

Considering this summary of potentials and issues, libraries can support the playful, challenging nature of younger people with the learned, lived experience of adults. Adults can provide meaningful examples of how best to channel the energy and future potential of youth so that it is not 'wasted' as is so often mentioned. As a result, this can also help adults to learn or relearn forgotten perspectives and to remain valuable to society, rather than remain a block to changing ways because they are uncomfortable. Adults need to remain a block to unwise decisions, but not label them unwise just because they are new or positively challenge any established value.

Rather than denigrating the young for their immaturity, adults can recognise their internal and external struggles with the people and experiences that surround them. Adults can nurture their potential to develop themselves with positivity, in order to direct societies continuing evolution. Libraries also need to evolve to remain relevant, by adopting digital as well as analogue resources, but also creating ways for individuals to learn their uses. Libraries may have access to a wealth of general knowledge, but it is how the community uses and benefits from it that promotes the continued importance of libraries. A general method of exposure is also illustrating them as learning hubs rather than archival or heritage centres. Furthermore, it is the young, in their own state of change, that can be some of the best help in transitioning to a new form. This may be an important step in maintaining the legacy of libraries as cultural learning and socially cohesive centres.

Having worked in a public library for the last 10 years, and being in my current position for over 6, has led me to be able to make some observations and learn methods of engagement as we move into the future. Having a largely multicultural community and primarily being made up of younger families, my specific library service provides or facilitates a variety of English language services, in-house and outreach programs for early years literacy and a home library service for seniors and individuals not able to visit the library. It is the success of these programs that has led me to believe that it is in a public library that we could bridge this digital divide.

Researching the potential of such an initiative to teach those who have not been able to adopt digital literacy has led me to a European initiative by the title of "Grandparents and Grandchildren". While I had already considered the methodology for such a program for Australian libraries, it was this initiative that gave me a foundation to work on, catering for our own communities and adapting this information for relevance.

Inspiring this research has been the opening of a new Dandenong branch 3 years ago and the beginning of current programs, Learning Help for Adults and Library Tech Assist among others in development. It has highlighted ways that this particular program could work within our own library service, but also applied to others with relevant modifications.

Proceeding is a potential framework necessary for a library to begin working towards an effective strategy of implementation. It is laid out in order of steps that could be taken but should be modified for specific communities as required. The goal is to create a better foundation of cooperation between community members through intergenerational learning. It has been derived from observing the previous references in addition to my personal experience in running and initiating library programs.

-1a. Any program of this nature would need library staff to implement the basic structure, in order to set out any necessary parameters based on existing library policy.

1b. Where staff are not as aware of or in using certain devices, they may need some training to stay up to date: this will be important regardless of program outcome, as libraries frequently adopt new technologies. There may be relevance in understanding contemporary trends among younger people when partnership begins, to better communicate and support each other. This could additionally assist any future developments and uses for technology a library may acquire.

2a. It will be important to begin negotiations with the local population to find those individuals amongst the youth that are willing to participate. Primary targets would be students or youth interested in improving their own CV's or already engaged in community work. This could be additionally supplemented by engaging local schools, youth services or universities through the use of focus groups, self-promotion using existing platforms (local paper, newsletters, the internet, etc.) or presenting at community events.

2b. Provide incentives to those that aren't so engaged with library services by providing other services or programming specifically related to their interests. The program itself may be of assistance to those not having had access to digital resources, connecting them with their own peers.

3. Begin collaboration of program-experienced library staff with interested youth. Through the use of mentoring techniques, students/volunteers can learn the underlying policy when working in their library and providing the relevant customer service. They should also be given some space to raise their own suggestions or advice on how to possibly improve upon the existing service so that their participation is of actual value.

4a. Advertise the program to the local populace, perhaps applying outreach methods to engage nursing homes or other community centres in creating further partnerships. Involving seniors can give them a sense of achievement as well as exposing their continued value and relevance to themselves and others.

4b. Businesses may also wish to become involved, particularly those already invested in information technologies as it would only increase their exposure as well as a potential market for their goods or services.

5a. Ensure that the program involves those with different backgrounds, both in terms of gender and culture, as this would feed into the secondary benefits by increasing access to different perspectives; empathy can only improve by establishing more effective relationships within the community.

5b. For multicultural communities, younger individuals may have the opportunity to challenge concepts that create social inequity. Through exposure to a wealth of knowledge and experience, they may be better situated to appreciate, translate or rework existing cultural ideas.

6. If the program succeeds and progresses, it can become self-facilitated in the sense that the students/volunteers can run it with continuous reporting to the library staff or management to ensure accountability. This would also be a useful way to maintain its contemporaneity and relevance to the community it serves by having the students/volunteers, as well as library staff, update the program as necessary.

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