



Evaluation Report

APRIL 2008

Griffith's Living Library: Evaluation of launch – 19 April 2008

Introduction

Griffith City Library (GCL) began to think about launching a living library after staff had seen Andrew Denton's program *Enough Rope* in November 2006. The program detailed how a living library held in Europe had been successful in breaking down social and racial barriers within a community. Proper planning for this event began in late 2007, a year when community relations had become an issue and Griffith City Council was very interested in implementing new programs and initiatives to deal with the issues. At a library staff meeting GCL decided that 2008 was to become 'The Year of the Living Library'.

A Living Library is a community based initiative. It works like a normal library – readers come and borrow a "book" for a limited time (30 minutes). There is only one difference, books in a Living Library are people, and the books and readers enter into a personal conversation. After finishing a 'book' borrowers are able to borrow again.

The books in a Living Library are often people representing groups frequently confronted with prejudices and stereotypes, people with unusual professions, or people who have had interesting experiences. The readers can be anyone who is fascinated in learning new and interesting things. Books are able to tell their story, answer reader's questions and learn other perspectives, with library staff present at all times.

Early 2008 saw GCL set a date for the first Griffith's Living Library. Titles, aims, and finer project details were also explored. During this time GCL and Griffith City Council held a meeting with the National Living Library coordinator Shauna McIntyre, from Lismore City Council, and other community groups and members.

Saturday 19 April 2008 became the launching date for presenting Griffith's Living Library '*Don't judge a book by its cover!*' for Youth Week 2008.

Project overview

Initiated by GCL, this community program formed its organising committee with the intention of launching the program on 19 April 2008, 1pm - 4pm. Our aim was to recruit living books, promote the program, out source the designing of the logo and planning the day of the launch.

A submission to Griffith City Council for \$1700 to fund this project was successful. As it had previously been decided that this event was to be run for Youth Week 2008, all living books were to be between the ages of 16-25. It was hoped that this would encourage youth involvement and also foster relationships between the different age groups of the Griffith society.

Initial meetings were held with Library staff and staff of Griffith City Council, in particular the Youth Liaison Officer and Emerging Young Artist and CRYT Youth Advisor. Meetings became brain storming sessions for possible youth books.

Due to the continuation of these meetings and their results Griffith's first living library was ready to be launched.

On the day of the launch 18 Youth books were launched, involving 20 youth (due to two books being co-authored). These inspiring young people represented a cross-section of the Griffith community including: Australian cricketers, the multicultural community (Indian, Fijian, Tongan and Afghani), Aboriginal youth, students, musicians, former homeless person, traveller, ex-journalist and a Griffith Miss Showgirl.

'Borrowers' were a diverse range of community members including those from service clubs, school students, families and the general community. The local media, The Area News and GO Magazine were also available on the day to record the event, continue its promotion for the future, and to borrow living books.

Griffith's Living Library was officially launched at 2:30pm by Mayor Dino Zappacosta and Amanda Martimbianco.



Mayor Dino Zappacosta and Amanda Martimbianco launching Griffith Living Library

Around 30 borrowers were officially registered on the day, with approximately 50 in attendance. Some families borrowed books under a family member's card.



Living Book 'Growing Up' and Griffith's Living Library borrower

Following Living Library sessions books and borrowers were asked to fill in a 5 minute questionnaire to assess the effectiveness of Griffith's Living Library. 21 readers (70% of

registered borrowers) and 19 books (95%) completed the surveys for this evaluation. All responses indicated that the Living Library was successful in achieving its aims of building community relations between youth and the larger community and of breaking down social and racial barriers.

Evaluation of Griffith's Living Library launch

Between the hours of 1pm and 4pm approximately 50 people visited and participated in Griffith's Living Library, with 30 registered borrowers, 18 books and 88 borrowing sessions.

Following on from the launch it has been clear that Griffith's community will continue to support this community based initiative well into the future. Its overwhelming success has contributed to changing the perspectives and thoughts of some of Griffith's community. With the collation of the surveys it was decided by GCL staff that Griffith's Living Library would be held again within the near future. Every survey that was submitted by a borrower also provided staff with contact details to promote and inform people of future Living Library sessions. This was a major achievement for staff as it showed how much borrowers had enjoyed and appreciated the opportunity to borrow a living book.

Survey Results and Feedback

Living books' survey responses indicated that they all enjoyed talking about their experiences and all would recommend being a living book to others. From a planning perspective this was wonderful as for future Living Library sessions we would be able to recommend the experience to other potential books and in some cases refer them to past living books that would be able to share their experiences. Griffith City Library also appeared to be the best location for the launch and continuation of this program due to the large amount of space that was able to be provided and its central locality for the Griffith community. The library was also able to provide a safe and often familiar environment for books and borrowers to converse allowing for a smoother and more comfortable flow of conversation.

100% of readers stated that they learnt something by borrowing a book and most said that they were inspired by the youth they borrowed. One borrower also commented that the living library taught them to 'put more faith in young people'. This comment achieved many of Griffith's Living Library aims, such as bridging the generation gap, creating an outlet for people who do not normally have the occasion to speak to each other and also to provide Griffith citizens with the opportunity to learn and understand our city's current youth.

One popular living book sent the following email a few days after the event:

Lots of thanks to you and living library staff for organising the "living books".

It was such a great events. And a great time for us to share our experiances. our experiances is for people so i believe we should proudly share it with our other fellows, may be it can also help them sometime in lifetime :)

You all gave me a great apportunity to relieve my pain. Sometimes my chest gets smaller and heartbeats rejects to stay anymore in cage of ribs. I have to set them free, there is no other choice. this is a good way to get relaxed while talking to some one else about it.

Many Thanks!

This email reinforced the benefits for both borrowers and books of this community based program.

Griffith's Living Library Future

Following the success of the launch, Griffith's Living Library will be occurring again during 2008. It is hoped that a follow up session will be held in early August possibly for Adult Learners Week. GCL staff are now able to identify which titles and stories are more popular then others, and will therefore strive to provide the types of living books that the community want to borrow. Following on from the media coverage we have also had nominations from the community for future living books and some people have also already volunteered their services.

In the future GCL will also endeavour to better educate borrowers about what their roles are in a Living Library session. This issue arose only after the launch day, when some books mentioned that borrowers talked more then they did which meant that they were not really experiencing their stories. For future living library sessions we hope that those who have experienced a session will understand the process and also educate new borrowers. Staff will also try to educate borrowers before their first sessions, and remind books how to turn conversations around if they feel they are not progressing how they expected they would.

GCL staff will continue to hold meetings and plan for future Living Library sessions, with a possibility of holding sessions quarterly from 2009.



Two Living Library Book and Borrower sessions

For further information on Griffith's Living Library please contact:
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