Library services to Baby Boomers

Part of the Shared Leadership Program, an initiative of the State Library of Victoria and Public Libraries Victoria Network Inc (PLVN)

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Introduction

The Shared Leadership Program is an initiative of the State Library of Victoria and the Public Libraries Victoria Network Inc. (PLVN) The program offered 10 days of training for aspiring leaders from all Victorian Public Libraries. 20 people were selected to participate in the inaugural PLVN program. As part of the learning program, participants were asked to choose a project that would enable them to engage and learn in a team environment. The topics put forward for consideration were proposed by the PLVN and highlighted issues facing Victorian public libraries.

Our action learning team consisted of Janet Aumann (West Gippsland Regional Library Corporation), Fiona Baranowski (Geelong Regional Library Corporation), Justin Edwards (Moreland City Libraries), Maresce Jones (Melton Library & Information Service) and Janet Palmer (East Gippsland Shire Library). The action learning topic chosen by our team focused on the Baby Boomer generation and the services public libraries can offer to this generation as they move towards retirement.

In this paper, we aim to support some of the recommendations of "Next chapters: public libraries for older adults in Australia and New Zealand", a conference held at the State Library of New South Wales in May 2009. These include recognising the role of public libraries in "providing volunteers with meaningful community roles" (Bundy 2009) and supporting a program that provides library staff with an understanding of the needs of the boomer generation.

We also acknowledge and aim to build on the work undertaken by Lesley Fell and the report she produced for the Margery C. Ramsey Scholarship, awarded by the Library Board of Victoria, entitled "More than a few large print books: Baby Boomers public libraries and lifelong learning". (Fell 2007)

We will propose a number of initiatives that we believe public libraries in Victoria should consider implementing in order to meet the demands of the Baby Boomer generation.

Background

From 1946 to 1965 (inclusive) there were 4.2 million births in Australia. This 20 year period is generally referred to as the "Baby Boom". While other periods are occasionally quoted when referring to the post-World War II baby boom, the ABS endorses 1946 to 1965 as the definitive Baby Boomer birth years. (ABS 1)

Baby Boomers represent "more than one-quarter of the Australian population" (Williamson 2009). In 2009, the ABS estimated that there would be 989,843 Baby Boomers in Victoria, representing 18.23% of the Victorian population. (ABS 2)

The Baby Boomers are a generation that is "numerically greater as well as wealthier, healthier and better educated than any previous generation." (Volunteering Australia Subject guide) They have "more physical ability than previous generations and think some of their most important contributions lie ahead." (Aldrich 2009) They do not want to be regarded as elderly, retirees or seniors. As they move towards retirement, Baby Boomers "are looking forward to having time to devote to themselves and other activities." (National Seniors Australia 2009)

In retirement, Baby Boomers will lose the network offered by the workplace. Public libraries now have an opportunity to position themselves as the "key information and recreational resource for this group." (Williamson 2006) The concept of the library as a village green (Williamson 2009) is worth developing for Baby Boomers. Libraries can provide a place that is "free, accessible, welcoming and comfortable" (Joseph 2009). Baby Boomers also want to enjoy the pleasures of life and part of this lifestyle is the opportunity to sit and chat over coffee. Libraries have the opportunity to meet this demand by providing "good coffee with ambience" (Williamson 2006).

Our team discovered that there is a gap in the services provided by public libraries in Victoria to the Baby Boomer generation. Currently libraries offer programs such as rhymetime, storytime and teenage book groups aimed specifically at babies, children and young adults. However services to those aged 18 to 100+ are ineffectively combined.

We found that not one Victorian public library website had a section dedicated to the over 55's. Library web pages had links for the Home Library Service, book clubs, children and even a separate section for youth/teenagers but nothing dedicated to Baby Boomers. Many libraries have special events or offer computer courses yet there is no indication of the potential audience. On several library websites there was information about how to volunteer, which at least provides some information if someone was interested.

Public library staff also have an interest in the services provided to the boomer generation. Work done by Phil Teece of the Australian Library and Information Association in 2005 found that "60 per cent of the library workforce is 45 years and older". (Joseph 2006) Libraries will need to investigate ways of managing their aging workforce and ask what do library workers want from their public library when they retire.

Our aim is to put forward a proposal that addresses the needs of the Baby Boomer generation and also raises the awareness of their needs within the public library network in Victoria. Our research has focused on healthy Baby Boomers and we deliberately did not break this cohort into smaller specific populations, so our comments are general in their basis.

Setting the scene

Baby Boomers in Australia

Public libraries do not operate in isolation, but are in fact affected by government agendas at all levels and they must understand these policy developments so as to position themselves as relevant and up to date. The Federal government has had the Baby Boomers on their collective minds for a number of years, with a plethora of reports being published on the topic. It has been well documented

how this group is approaching either semi or full retirement, in fact, as DeLong (2004) comments "You would have to have been living on the moon over the past few years not to know that Baby Boomers are fast approaching retirement age". This of course has caused both the federal and state governments to implement changes in an effort to plan for increased health funding and aged care costs.

The Federal Government is encouraging Baby Boomers to stay in the workforce, by increasing the eligible age for the aged pension to 67. Older Australians are being encouraged to stay in the workforce for as long as they can, as this will decrease the government requirement to fund as many old age pensions. Individuals will gain a few more years to build up viable superannuation. This will allow for individuals to recover from the Global Financial Crisis of 2009.

The Federal Government is also combining its economic strategy with social strategies to enable older people to maximize their health and well being. Evidence of these policies is prominent on the Department of Health and Ageing website. The following quote encapsulates the benefits of lifelong learning.

> *"Lifelong learning can exercise the brain and help it stay younger. Getting involved in learning can also reduce stress and isolation, and provide opportunities to meet people and make friends. You learn new things by participating in a wide variety of activities including reading, learning a new skill, doing voluntary work in your community or joining a discussion group".*

This statement fails to mention that these benefits are offered when a Baby Boomer joins and participates in activities at their local public library.
The quote below from the Libraries Building Communities (LBC) report commissioned in 2005 illustrates how public libraries share the same objectives and offer all of these benefits.

The LBC study shows

"that libraries and librarians make a fundamental contribution to our communities in four key areas: they provide free public access to computer and information technology resources; by helping people locate information they create better-informed communities; they run programs that promote lifelong learning and literacy in the community; and they build connections between individuals, groups and government." [Libraries building communities: executive summary]

The Federal Government has recently formed the Social Inclusion Board (May 2008), which follows a worldwide trend of governments developing social polices around Social Inclusion and to minimize the converse Social Exclusion. The Federal Government vision of Social Inclusion is of a society in which all Australians feel valued and have the opportunity to participate fully in the life of our society.

The Board reports to the Social Inclusion Minister and sits within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. The Board's vision endeavours to ensure that all Australians will have the resources, opportunities and capability to:

- Learn, by participating in education and training
- Work, by participating in employment or voluntary work, including family and carer responsibilities
- Engage, by connecting with people, using local services and participating in local civic, cultural and recreational activities and

- ▪ Have a voice, in influencing decisions that affect them." (Social Inclusion Board)

In January 2010, the Social Inclusion Board sponsored a national conference to commence a national conversation about effective and innovative social inclusion policy and practice.

While we acknowledge that the Federal and State governments have not specifically mentioned public libraries in their agendas, public librarians are fully conversant with the social inclusion agenda. In fact, it is public libraries that can best accommodate those issues identified by the two levels of government.

There are also a number of non government organisations and statutory bodies that are interested in the Baby Boomer generation such as Great Connections, which links 'mature-aged volunteers who have professional skills and business experience with not-for-profit organizations in need of help'.

Great Connections supports the Federal Government's new Golden Gurus program, which started operating in January 2010. 'Golden Gurus is an initiative of the Federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. It is based on an idea presented at the Australia 2020 Summit and forms part of the Australian Government's social inclusion agenda.

The program aims to harness the skills and experience of Australians aged 50 years and over to help meet future skill needs, address current skill shortages and respond to the challenges of an ageing workforce. It will be delivered by a community of quality organisations across Australia, including Great Connections.' This provides another excellent opportunity for public libraries to participate in delivering services to the Baby Boomers.

The role of the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) is to represent and advocate to the state government on behalf of Victoria's 79 local councils. The MAV has a representative on the Ministerial Advisory Council (MAC) on Public Libraries. The MAC is auspiced by DPCD (Department of Planning and Community Development) and meets 'approximately every two months' and provides advice to the Minister for Local Government, Richard Wynne. Membership of the working party includes Chief Executive Officers, Councilors, representatives of the PLVN and Human Services Directors.

The MAC Vision is:

"...that The Library will be your consistent partner throughout your journey of lifelong learning, acting as a broker and trusted guide to a wealth of valuable content".

And

"... that The Library is seen by decision makers as one of the most important and effective investments in building an innovative state with caring communities".

The MAC Vision on Public Libraries includes the following aims:
- • To be a lifelong, authoritative and trusted information broker
- • To provide places for innovative and inclusive communities to be formed
- • To enable resource and information sharing." (MAC vision 2008)

In addition, the PLVN (the peak body representing Victoria's 45 public libraries) Strategic Plan 2009-2013 includes the following aims and objectives:

- To collaboratively promote and advocate for the interests of public libraries and the provision of services by Victorian public libraries to their communities.
- To assist, encourage, protect and promote the interests of people using the library services and the staff of libraries.
- Promote the services of libraries to the communities they serve.
- Act as a support group for members.
- Foster and provide continuing education for members, library managers and staff.
- Advocate to improve the resources of libraries to enable them to enhance
- Informal self-education.

Whilst both the MAC and PLVN visions do not specifically mention Baby Boomers, their longer term plans, aims and objectives support each member of our community, and in particular the Baby Boomers.

Overseas experience

From the literature read for this project, it is obvious that western countries see social inclusion as a key priority. As described in the section on Australian context many public libraries also see themselves as organisations that support social inclusion practices and philosophies.

Margaret Sloan believes that most libraries in the UK have services and activities for older people (Sloan 2008). Sloan also makes the observation that the definition of being an older adult (Sloan 2009) varies but can be from anywhere up from 50. UK public libraries have strategically combined with other cultural institutions to form an organisation named "The Network." This organisation has developed training that is strongly aligned with the British Government's social inclusion agenda. The Network also offers training to public library staff designed for specific groups including a one day course for working with older people. The organisation also aims to share and develop good practice not just between libraries but also across other connected cultural institutions.

Of incredible significance is Margaret Sloan's and John Vincent's manual "Library services for older people - good practice guide." This resource was initiated from a one day seminar, when it was recognized the benefit of drawing together all of the resources in one publication. It contains relevant resources, data and facts about older people in the UK, a "how to" manual, and a comprehensive check list for what you have and what you need.

In his foreword, Tony Durcan, the President of the Society of Chief Librarians, comments that "This manual helps create a new strategic framework" to plan for this large sector of the population. The manual succinctly states that libraries play a strong role in supporting the wellbeing agenda, which is integral to a social inclusion agenda.

In particular, a library provides stimulation, bringing older people together, reducing isolation and socialisation.(Sloan 2009) The guide's development was funded by the Department of Health, which illustrates recognition from this department of the important role libraries play.

Prior to the publication of Sloan's manual for the UK, she visited both Canada and the Netherlands on a Winston Churchill Memorial Trust in 2007. The Canadian Library Association has an interest group for older people that stresses that older adults are not a homogeneous group, that there are several generations among them with different life experiences and expectations. (Sloan 2008)

Sloan discovered that Canadian libraries have large programs dedicated to older adults, which reflect a broader trend of increasing program development for all

ages. Canadian libraries also offer Information Technology courses specifically designed for older adults. Canada and the Netherlands are also increasingly designing web space for the 50+ age bracket.

Transforming Life after 50: Public Libraries and Baby Boomers was a statewide initiative launched in 2007 in California. Key initiatives of this program were:

- a field survey – "to gain insight into current thinking, activities and plans of California Public Libraries when it comes to Baby Boomers"
- a 3 day Institute whose "purpose is to assist public libraries in redefining, creating and delivering new and innovative services to our state's growing population of active, older adults"
- a local assessment undertaken by libraries their own community.

The *Transforming Life After 50* initiative identified, through local community assessments, the vast potential for engaging the talent and experience of Baby Boomers in volunteer roles that support libraries and the community.

In response, the *Get Involved: Powered by Your Library* statewide initiative was designed. Its goals are to:

- Raise awareness among public libraries about how volunteer engagement can benefit both the library and the community.
- Train public libraries to create diverse and meaningful volunteer positions that will attract a broad range of community volunteers, especially Baby Boomers.
- Build the capacity of public libraries in California to recruit and support volunteers more effectively.
- In partnership with local volunteer recruitment and referral agencies, position California public libraries as community "hubs" for civic engagement.
- Assist community members in finding volunteer opportunities that match their individual talents, passions and interests in public libraries or in the community.

In 2009 Social Networking sites were introduced and in 2010 a year long Fellowship will be offered to Library staff to enable library professionals to create new models of engagement and deliver innovative services to the growing population of active, older adults.

As part of the TLA50 initiative a social network (powered by Ning) was created. It is a community of library professionals and library users who are working to transform how libraries serve and engage their communities, especially active, older adults between the ages of 45-63 (or Baby Boomers).

The State of California "believes that public libraries, as information centers and community "living rooms," can serve as hubs for civic engagement. Through partnerships with existing volunteer resources, or by taking the lead where none exist, public libraries can encourage and attract more community members to service in libraries and throughout the community".

Proposal

After the research and discussions undertaken by our project team over the past six months, we have observed that Victorian public libraries have a limited

awareness regarding the services the Baby Boomer generation will expect. We propose that the PLVN investigate the development of a pilot training program for Victorian public library staff with the aim of raising the awareness of all staff to the needs of the Baby Boomer generation.

Our research included the Conference proceedings from *Next chapters: public libraries for older adults in Australia and New Zealand* held in Sydney on 1-2 May 2009. The *Next chapters* conference "was intended for Library managers, public librarians and other practitioners concerned to improve public library services for and engagement with, older people – from the Baby Boomers to the frail aged." (Next chapters)

The recommendations of this conference included supporting a program that provides library staff with an understanding of the needs of the boomer generation.

Stacey Aldrich, the Deputy State Librarian from the California State Library explained the *Transforming life after 50* project at the *Next chapters* conference. This project was created by the California State Library to "inspire public library innovation in redefining, creating and delivering services to and engaging with the state's growing population of Baby Boomers".

Adapting the *TLA50* program to Victorian circumstances will give the PLVN a successful base for the pilot training program. The website resource devoted to *TLA50* is www.transforminglifeafter50.org
All the presentations and tools used in the 3 day Institute are available on this website.

As part of this pilot program, PLVN may want to conduct a field survey of all Victorian public libraries as a means to gain an insight into the current thinking, activities and plans of Victorian Public Libraries when it comes to Baby Boomers.

We believe that developing a pilot training program will put Victorian public libraries at the forefront of the Australian library community with regards to services for Baby Boomers and training staff on the needs and demands of the Baby Boomer generation. We have obtained in principal support from the convener of the Community Participation and Engagement Committee of PLVN to pursue the development of the pilot program.

Volunteers

The second element of our proposal is a recommendation that the PLVN develop a generic volunteer policy and position descriptions for and on behalf of public libraries in Victoria. Each library service would then be able to adjust these documents to meet their needs. We also recommend that the PLVN incorporate into the proposed training program, a session on the recruitment and management of volunteer Baby Boomers. The development of a generic volunteer policy would provide a useful basis considering that according to research there are 72,600 volunteers in Australian libraries. (Libraries: library facts and figures 2006)

Volunteering Australia defines formal volunteering as

 "an activity that takes place through not for profit organisations or projects and is undertaken:

- to be of benefit to the community and the volunteer;
- of the volunteer's own free will and without coercion;
- for no financial payment; and
- in designated volunteer positions only." (Volunteering Australia Information Sheet)

Public libraries in Victoria have the opportunity to offer meaningful volunteering opportunities or to act as a referral point for those Baby Boomers seeking volunteer work. It is "anticipated that Baby Boomers will seek to contribute to their communities through volunteering in some way." (Joseph 2009)

The boomer generation "expects to have a variety of choices and volunteering options that are inspiring and provide them with opportunities to contribute professionally." (Aldrich 2009) It is therefore important that any volunteer programs involve more than shelving. Programs need to be designed to allow the boomer to engage with library patrons from different generations or to use their professional knowledge, experience or expertise in a field to provide information to other library patrons.

Lesley Fell in her paper describes a number of volunteer programs being operated in public libraries in the United States of America. In Victoria, for example the Campaspe Regional Library uses volunteers in their successful Words on Wheels program. There is an opportunity for all Victorian public libraries to develop a policy for engaging the Baby Boomers in a volunteer capacity and to develop unique and meaningful programs for them.

Creating volunteer positions will require some initial work by Library services. We believe it is important that the positions have a proper job description and that volunteers are interviewed and assessed for suitability for the role. They will need to be trained and made aware of risks and OH&S issues and other legal requirements. The development of the generic volunteer policy and position description will assist library services in the recruitment and employment of volunteers by reducing some of the initial costs experienced in setting up the volunteer roles.

In the words of Carolyn Bourke 'Volunteers are an invaluable part of the way libraries work in their communities....As the Australian population ages, greater numbers of Baby Boomers will be in the well aged cohort and looking for ways to 'make a difference by helping others'. Public libraries need to be looking at how they can encourage these people to work with them, and with the amazing volunteers who already contribute their endeavours to their communities.' (Bourke 2009)

Conclusion

Our project has focused on the needs of the Baby Boomer generation, which may be considered the beginning of the older age bracket. They are in the main: healthier, educated, wealthier, have higher expectations and are often technologically savvy. This makes them a cohort very different to the pre war and war generation.

Our old standard large print, talking books and home library service will not be sufficient for this generation and as a profession we need to engage our imaginations and theirs, in developing a new or refurbished scene, adopting new technologies and an array of interesting activities as well as providing meaningful

volunteer roles. We must stay relevant and also be a fundamental part of the Boomer's second or third space.

By 2030 all Baby Boomers will be over 65 and the public library landscape must be transformed accordingly so that we have engaged the Baby Boomers permanently. They will also be much more inclined to volunteer their skills and services in a public library that has adapted to the twenty-first century.

Our project team believes that the successful Victorian seminar on library services to Baby Boomers will form a blueprint for public libraries and library networks and associations to follow the project, and in particular, in the areas of developing a unified volunteers policy and provide a vehicle for engaging Baby Boomer's in their lifelong learning. This could then become the basis for a national group.

Many of us as professionals recognise the great positives that a library can offer, but we must also focus energy on getting this good news story heard by wider audiences, such as government and non government authorities.

Finally on the success of our proposal, PLVN could further enhance our service to Baby Boomer's by following Alan Bundy's suggestion that Victoria take a lead role in adapting and re-badging Sloan's Good Practice Guide Library so that we have a specifically designed tool which contains all relevant information in one resource and can be used to benchmark against and review our own provision. Bundy suggests that this will also help in our pursuit of future better funding.

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