

READING SERVICES: MAKING IT HAPPEN IN INNER MELBOURNE

SLIDE 1

I'm going to talk briefly about some of the things we've been doing in Reading Services at Yarra-Melbourne Libraries. I hope these ideas will give you something to take away with you and put into practice in your library service.

SLIDE 2

Yarra-Melbourne currently supports 10 adult book groups across the region. We have a dedicated collection of book group sets – 10 books in each set - that are lent out to book group members with an extended borrowing period of 6 weeks. As well as the traditional contemporary literary fiction focused groups, we have a crime fiction group that meets at the Collingwood library. In the past, we have had the Boys, Blokes and Books group – for 10-14 year old boys and their dads – an online book group and a BG for teenagers, run as a reading circle.

SLIDE 3

We have formed strong partnerships with affiliated agencies in Melbourne. These are the main ones.

- **Text** - We work in partnership with Text to secure authors for our events - Text supply speakers for many of events. A pilot mini Reading Partners project took place with the Carlton Library Tuesday afternoon book group. The Book Group members read a manuscript of new book. In their next book group meeting, feedback was given to the editor and author. Their comments helped develop the Book Group notes in the back of the book.
- **Readings** donated prizes for the last year's summer reading promotion. We have also been given discount rates for advertising in their monthly newsletter and we cross promote each other's events. 10% discount on all full priced books was offered in February 2006 at Readings Carlton for all Yarra-Melbourne and City Library members. All they had to do was show their library card.
- We liaise with **Scribe** for author events and they assist in the publicity and promotion of the events. They recently supplied door prizes of some of their newly published books for our Cate Kennedy talk.

SLIDE 4

We have developed a 'Recommended' branding for our resources. The best ideas are usually the simplest. The recommended book marks shown here are for kids, young adults and adults. We have also designed one for the Chinese collection, following on from our Chinese readers' month in July 06. We have used the star branding from our library logo.

Our recommended book marks are very popular with our borrowers. They are designed to be put into books on the shelf by staff or patrons. This is another good way to harness the reading knowledge of your BGs, for groups that meet during library opening hours, give them a handful after their book group meeting and let them loose in the library!

Many of our borrowers, especially those short of time, have said that this is how they choose their books now. They also say that they've had great reading experiences and read things they wouldn't normally choose for themselves.

You can adapt this idea into comments slips to be placed in selected books on the library shelves. These books can be chosen by staff or patrons. It usually a good idea to write the first comment to set the ball rolling.

SLIDE 5

Something libraries have been doing for years but kind of reinvented for the new millennium! Again, we have used the 5 star branding.

Our 'If you like..try..' shelf talkers are slightly different in that they sit on the shelf in fiction where the author is, or should be – instead of them being on yet another flyer. We do 2 new ones a quarter and focus on authors that are currently 'hot' and have a new book out. We choose the kinds of authors that will have a long reservation list for their latest title, so people have something else to read while they are waiting. The alternative authors we choose must have a decent body of work too so that it is likely they can be found on the shelf. The lists also appear on our web site. They can be used by staff for readers' advising but they can also be used independently by the browser looking for books by their favourite author. We also try to feature Aus authors as many of the print or online readers' advising resources are usually American-centric.

We try to keep them fresh. We do 2 new ones a quarter and when the new ones come out, we replace the oldest ones. We only ever have 6 out at one time. Again, borrowers have commented on what a good idea they think they are. Some people copy down whole lists of recommended authors.

If anyone is interested in receiving guidelines for these, please let me know.

SLIDE 6

We have tried to make our events reader, rather than writer-centred. Of course people are interested in hearing what the author has to say about how they wrote the book but, at some point in your event, it's good give the audience the opportunity to say how they responded to the book, what it meant to them, etc. We also made our Reading Victoria events reader-centred.

SLIDE 7

Think of the author as a reader. I ask the authors that speak in our libraries to come with a list of their top 5 favourite books. We feature these books in promotions for the event and put them out for borrowing on the evening of the talk. We also put the lists on the Reading Room of our library web site. Encourage the author to discuss their favourite books in their talk. This idea, again, was used in the RV Victoria program. The authors that gave events for us spoke about their favourite reads and books they enjoyed from the RV list. Authors also filled in reading profiles that appeared on the RV web site.

SLIDE 8

We have built up a dedicated following to our events for adult readers by:

- Providing a regular program of events. There is something happening in one of our libraries at least once a month. People start to look out for what is happening and ask what's going on
- We have developed a strong branding for our events flyers, making them instantly recognizable (apologies for picture quality)
- We have established an email notification system for upcoming events. We send one email when all the publicity comes out, 3-4 weeks prior to the event, and then another one about 5 days before the event is due to happen.

SLIDE 9

We held Australia's first Readers' Day at our Fitzroy Library in June last year. The organization was one of the main tasks of Joanna Kenny, reader-in-residence, from Feb to June 2006. We believe that she was also an Australian first. Both the Readers' Day and the R-in-R were funded by the Ewing Trust fund.

The day began with a panel discussion with the writers talking about their reading experiences, which books have influenced them, etc. We then had a live book group discussion of 'The kite runner'. In the afternoon, we had a series of workshops with Garry Disher, Sophie Cunningham and Mr Lonely Planet, Tony Wheeler. 60 people attended this event which was quite pleasing for a first of its kind and on a cold, miserable day in the middle of winter.

We attracted more publicity for this event than anything else we've ever done before. We had a huge amount of media coverage– local papers, The Age (Saturday and Sunday papers), web sites of Readings, Text Publishing and Good Reading magazine. Joanna and I appeared on Ramona Koval's Book Show on Radio National and Joanna was interviewed on 3RRR.

SLIDE 10

We have developed a virtual presence for readers on our library web site with the Reading Room. The section has a strong branding with the Reading Room logo. And although it's a long way from the amazing reader devt sites I showed you earlier, it is a one-stop-shop for readers and library staff when looking for information about books and our collection.

We Recommend – hand picked recommended reading by staff, borrowers and local writers – where we put the

- 'If you like..' list and author favourites
- Book group information
- Awards
- Be inspired – a collection of links and online databases.

During reference training month in October last year, the RS team delivered training in the use of the RR to all library staff. The RS team has also delivered training for all library staff in the use of our RA print resources – Fiction Guides.

SLIDE 11

We have used staff photos a lot in our promotions. This gives the staff a strong sense of involvement and ownership.

These photos of the Vietnamese speaking Yarra-Melbourne and City Library staff were part of a Vietnamese talking book promotion. It's also important to note that Reading Services goes across the board in our libraries – crossing into different specialised areas. The C&YS team have used many Reading Service ideas in their promotions I mentioned earlier that we had a Chinese reading month last July. Our LOTE team is running a Vietnamese reading month this March.

SLIDE 12

The **We Recommend 2005** promotion was very popular with both staff and patrons. All of the people featured here are Yarra-Melbourne and City Library staff. Staff simply nominated 3 books that they had enjoyed reading that year and we compiled this into a reading list. This promotion went a very long way in developing our staff reading culture. Staff were fascinated by what other staff liked to read. It helped people identify with staff who had similar reading tastes.

SLIDE 13

We also ran a similar promotion in 2006. This is Jo from our Fitzroy Library, reading in a café in Brunswick St. I think you'll agree that this beautifully sells the reading experience: there's chaos all around her but she's peacefully immersed in a book.

Even though we only left the leaflets containing the lists out in the library in Dec and Jan, our patrons are still asking for them. Only yesterday, a lady came to the desk @ Carlton and asked to reserve 3 books from a list she must have taken a couple of months ago. People love to know what librarians like to read. We are, after all, the ultimate endorsers of a good read!

SLIDE 14

These photos were taken of Carlton Library staff for a read@yourlibrary display of staff favourite books. Staff wrote one sentence underneath about why they liked the books. This is quite possibly one of the most successful displays we have had.

SLIDE 15

- I'm sure some of you are part of the syndicate of Vic libraries conducting a community survey regarding library use each year. In 2006 Yarra-Melbourne's scores showed a marked improvement in the areas of lending services and events and activities for adults – indicating that the Reading Services Program has had a positive impact
- Before we put in place our RS initiatives, our libraries would expect around 10-15 people to an author event and were very happy if they got 20. The average attendance to our events this financial year has been 55. We have achieved audience numbers of 70-80 people. We always receive glowing feedback about our events.
- Our book group members have formed strong new relationships with other members of their group. Some members of the afternoon book groups, who are mostly retirees, have even gone so far as to say that the book group has given them a whole new lease of life.
- Yarra-Melbourne Libraries already had an excellent reputation in providing innovative and forward-thinking library services. By playing a lead role in reader development, YMRL has further raise its profile as a leading-edge library service. Yarra-Melbourne Libraries have also raised their profile in the community, as evidenced by the improved satisfaction ratings on the Syndicated Survey.
- Staff have commented that are gaining a great deal of job satisfaction from their work in Reading Services. They enjoy focusing their attention on the readers in our community.