



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT AND CITY SERVICES
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Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into ACT Libraries

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Submission to Libraries ACT Committee

Dear Members

This is an informal submission. I am employed as a casual for ACT Libraries via Manpower. Here are a few ideas I have had that may be of use.

I have worked at all the branches in the ACT and have noted a few things.

Library functions can be broken down into a number of categories. These are the forward-facing elements.

- Providing access to borrowing items. Picking up reserves. browsing shelves and displays, searching the catalogue and placing reserves, often with help from staff
- Access to the internet, printing services and skilled assistance, if required
- Providing areas to work, study, be tutored, have meetings, read newspapers...
- Other Services: registering people for MyWay cards, Justice of the Peace visits, general information, toilets, a place to spend time

By examining these activities, we can look at time spent by staff on each area and consider possible efficiencies that could be gained by streamlining some processes.

When pulling requests, the most time spent looking for an item can be roughly ordered this way from most time to least:

- Junior Non-Fiction
- Junior Easy
- Easy Reader
- Journals
- CD's
- Non-Fiction
- DVD's
- Fiction

One way to reduce the time needed to perform this task would be to remove the ability to put holds on Junior Easy, Easy Reader, and Journals.

At the Bega Valley Shire libraries these rules applied and no one seemed to get upset about it.

- Toddlers probably don't care too much what story is being read. Most people borrow many at once.
- Easy Readers are a similar argument.
- Journals: the library is not a newsagency. Searching through a big pile of Time magazines takes time. Some exceptions would apply for scholarly journals.

Doing this would reduce request pull time by a good margin; my guess would be around 25%. Bearing in mind finding some items (fiction) take much less time to locate, so the breakdown of a pull list to time categories would need to be weighted according to how long it takes to locate an item.

There is also an OH&S issue to consider. Most of these children's items are located down low. Some of us are not as spry as we once were and aren't able to bend down for long periods of time. It's bad for you back or knees.

New Libraries for the ACT

The Kingston library seems to be great success. From having worked there I came to realize that it fulfilled all required functions of a library but within a very limited space.

Could a library be built that is small but totally functional? Yes, it can be done by removing the majority of the stacks.

How much time do customers spend perusing the stacks as a percentage of all customer use of the library? Not much at all. The non-fiction section is rarely visited. The fiction section is browsed more but still not bustling with activity. These areas take up a lot of space.

Instead of stacks for non-fiction items, displays of popular subjects, cooking, health, arts and crafts, biographies, latest acquisitions could be used.

For fiction, only recent copies by popular authors need to be kept. Fans of an author will have read the old ones and readers of newly discovered authors will request the back catalogue. Library displays are responsible for a good proportion of impulse lending activity. Make the displays bigger and easy to understand the subject matter as you now have more space.

Catalogue computers could be made more user friendly so patrons can request items with ease, staff are there to help, especially now that they have more time. A heavily patronised request-based lending system is the key to making offsite storage viable. Much like the plastic bag ban in the ACT, people will get used to it.

Without the large number of stacks a smaller library could be setup in some of the now far flung suburbs like Bonner (include Sutton), Coombs (include Uriarra Village) or Banks (include Tharwa} for a smaller cost without compromising services.

Now is an ideal time to pivot from the perception of the library that just lends books and has computers to the library that offers a variety of personal and community services relevant to the demographic of the area.

Centralised Collection Storage and Distribution

Advantages of off-site lending facility:

- Security and maintenance of collection improved
- Reduction in the number of stacks needed in library branches
- No sorting of items for other branches required
- Smaller pull lists
- Less time spent shelving
- Request Items can arrive at branch already processed, shelf ready
- New items can be checked and processed off-site
- No need to end process or weed collection at branch
- Other materials such as brochures, My Way forms, stationary etc. can be requested and sent from there
- Employment opportunities for people not suited to regular work environments

One inefficiency created by this system would be reserved items go to the hub rather than from branch-to-branch. The overall time saved by the system would easily outweigh this. The freeing up of space is harder to quantify beneficially.

The National Library and The ANU are experienced in this model of storage lending and would be an invaluable source of knowledge.

Now there's all this free space in the library, what to do with it?

Whatever you can think of:

- Art Displays
- More private study areas
- Plants
- Community room
- Catalogue search zone
- Displays

The freed-up space means the library can be more agile in adapting to change in customer needs. The ACT Government could be seen as a customer and use the space to foster more community engagement and display programs and services that people may not be aware of.

If you would like to discuss these ideas further or in more detail please feel free to contact me.

Kindest Regards

Paul Dunn