

Townsville - Our journey to becoming a Learning City

Our learning city journey began at the former city of Thuringowa in 2005 with strong support from the Chief Executive Officer, who asked the Library to provide leadership in the development of a learning community. At council level, Thuringowa City Council in its Corporate Plan 2005-2010 adopted a strategy "To develop Thuringowa as a learning community". At that time Thuringowa had a significant Indigenous population, a high proportion of young people and a large area of the city was characterized as semi-rural.

In the Library we took three initiatives as part of our initial planning and implementation process: first, we organised a national workshop with the assistance of a strategic development grant from the State Library of Queensland to explore the role of the public library in developing learning communities; a consultant, Veronica Lunn, undertook a review on several aspects of the library's development, including its role in developing a learning community. Another consultant, Kim Harrington, subsequently undertook a community learning audit. Learning audits provide essential information for planning purposes. Townsville City Council undertook a subsequent learning audit in 2011 after amalgamation with Thuringowa City Council.

The most important action taken by council in 2006 was the formation of a leadership group to steer development of the learning community. The group was formed with several prominent community leaders invited to join the leadership group. Representatives were from the Chamber of Commerce, the technical college and university, industry, sport, Thuringowa City Council and the voluntary and community sector. The Manager Library Services and the Coordinator Lifelong Learning, together with the CEO represented Council. Administrative support was provided by library staff. The Leadership Group was not established as a committee of council but as an independent group that charted its own destiny and sourced its own funds. It developed a strategic plan that had goals of:

- a shared vision of a learning community;
- an engaged community with learning opportunities for all;
- good governance and sustainability.

Just as the leadership group was finalising its strategic plan, the Queensland Government announced its plans for forced amalgamations of local governments around the state. As a result, and after considerable discussion, the leadership group decided to incorporate and became Learning NQ Inc. A key component of Learning NQ Inc's vision was the development of networks and partnerships that build on the synergies of organisations that have learning as a common interest and purpose. To this end it connected with learning providers and enlisted over ninety "learning partners". A website was established and a regular newsletter was sent out to learning partners and a number of learning forums held.

Learning NQ incorporated in early 2007 to allow the organisation to take advantage of funding opportunities and to develop separately from council. CityLibraries provided ongoing administrative support to Learning NQ Inc. throughout the course of its incorporation. The strategic plans of both CityLibraries and Learning NQ Inc. concentrated on social inclusion through advocacy and providing access to lifelong learning opportunities in the library and as outreach in community centres as well as in partnership with community organisations.

While the leadership group that drove Learning NQ Inc consisted of leaders in the fields of education and community capacity building this did not contribute to Learning NQ Inc, as an organisation, gaining recognition as the lead agency in developing Townsville as a learning city. The cause of this was threefold.

- Firstly, Learning Communities Leadership Group had taken a long time to realise its primary role as an advocacy group rather than as a facilitator and coordinator of learning opportunities.
- Secondly, Learning NQ Inc did not have the resources necessary to develop a media campaign that would not only highlight the value of learning but also raise the profile of the organisation.
- Thirdly, as the positions of CityLibraries and Learning NQ Inc were aligned there was some duplication of actions which was unnecessary. For example, both CityLibraries and Learning NQ Inc were surveying learning opportunities in the region, advocating for lifelong learning and developing partnerships.

This group of leaders in education, information and community capacity building were passionate about lifelong learning and about developing Townsville as a learning city. They had a wealth of knowledge and experience to contribute and worked as a cohesive group. However as Learning NQ Inc they lacked the impetus to deliver the idea to the wider community including the business sector. For example, the group met monthly but as a high-level advisory group they were not able to resource the ongoing reinforcement of the lifelong learning message and progress the organisation through marketing and programs. This task was undertaken by CityLibraries, Coordinator of Lifelong Learning who actioned monthly tasks set by the group. It was considered that for Townsville to be established as a learning city, it needed the profile and backing of the council. Thus Learning NQ was wound up and the leadership group has now become a community forum of council. A terms of reference has been developed for the group and representation continues to come from formal education, business and the community sector.

In the Corporate Plan 2009-2014 developed after amalgamation, one of the outcomes was to achieve “a cohesive and self-reliant community”. The outcome was concerned about fostering social inclusion, building social capital and the capacity of the community to own and sustain their community. One of the strategies council developed to meet this outcome was to “Foster the development of the city as a learning community”.

During this period council produced its first [Lifelong Learning Strategic Action Plan 2012-2014](#). This was council’s plan for lifelong learning in the community. It was developed based upon a learning audit undertaken in 2011 with four key priority areas were identified. These were programs and participation, access and equity, advocacy, partnerships and networks. A number of initiatives were also identified including the need for a one-stop-shop for learning in Townsville (now established as the [Learning Townsville Directory](#)), the strategic importance of partnering with community organisations to foster an inclusive approach to learning and increasing participation in digital and print literacy. Townsville Library Services took the lead in developing these outcomes. The library strategic plan also had key strategies and actions to facilitate social inclusion and community wellbeing through a focus on lifelong learning.

Our branches have been refurbished as community hubs, that is, we have paid particular attention to the provision of learning spaces that can be, and indeed are, accessed by community groups for learning purposes. Libraries are ideally placed to lead this as they are:

- » non threatening places;
- » well resourced;
- » in the business of developing literacy; and
- » have well-developed partnerships and networks



Council has supported the library's key role in the development of Townsville as a learning city. The library staffing structure that Council has adopted has facilitated that support and



the library's role as a learning place and community hub. The library has four main program areas each led by a coordinator. One of those units is Lifelong Learning. Within this team sits the children's and youth services team, the local history team, the Indigenous Library Resources Officer, and a learning and programs team delivering digital and print literacy programs and informational and recreational activities for adults. Our aim is to be inclusive and we

deliver programs to areas of community need. For example with an increasing migrant and refugee settlement program in Townsville, we now provide English as a second language classes for adults, as well as homework help classes for high school students from non-english speaking backgrounds. We are also conscious to create awareness of other cultures in the wider community so we provide multicultural storytime monthly. In another area identified need, our Indigenous Library Resource Officer assists members of the "Stolen Generation" to trace their family history through access to the Tindale Collection held by the Museum of South Australia. She hosts the only Murri Bookclub in Australia to raise awareness of Indigenous issues and build reconciliation. We deliver the Early Years Information Service in partnership



with Communities for Children the Smith Family in an area of economic and social disadvantage in Townsville. This information and referral service aims to deliver outcomes that build parenting skills and stimulate early childhood development through interactions between child and care-giver at messy play activities. As part of the program the library has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Queensland Health that places their nurses in one of the library branches twice weekly for Newborn and Family Drop appointments. The Lifelong Learning team



has developed a cohesive approach to strategic planning that focuses their work programs and identifies and builds partnerships to meet the needs of the community.

The library's development as a key player in the development of Townsville as a learning city has been backed up by financial resources. In the current budget about 20% of the total library budget has been allocated to the lifelong learning area. To offset this allocation we have been successful in gaining grants and in partnering with the Together Townsville program, council's program which seeks sponsorship from businesses for council projects.

The library has taken the lead in developing strong internal relationships with community services and with council's corporate communications section to further build the potential for delivering lifelong learning services. In 2006 and 2007 Thuringowa City Council held a Festival of Learning as one of its main council events. Based initially on the festival model used by Albury Wodonga, it evolved into both a place-based and outreach (a week of learning) festival. We have changed the form of this festival into May the Month of Learning. It includes not only learning activities facilitated by the library but also those by other

sections of council and externally by other community organisations. This year saw the seventh delivery of the festival in this form. The library remains the key internal driver for this festival.

The library service has been council's enabler for the development of the city as an inclusive learning community. This has been achieved through council support via the corporate and operational plans, through a staffing structure, and through budget allocations, and through the development of strong internal relationships. Council has now just completed its 2014-2019 Corporate Plan and the library is currently finalising its strategic plan 2014-2017 and the next Lifelong Learning Strategic Action Plan 2014-2017.

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