Why Libraries?
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Digital technologies have transformed the modern world. With this transformation has come a need and demand for modern, safe, non-judgmental, flexible spaces where people of all ages can mine the world of knowledge supported by a skilled library workforce. This need is greatest amongst our most vulnerable citizens and our young people.

The modern library is a place for self-improvement, from childhood to old age, we offer support, help and education, and encourage a love of reading. Whether you’re applying for a job, seeking a benefit, looking to understand your rights, wanting to understand your health choices or learning to read, the library can assist.

A public library’s greatest strength is its localism – responding to the needs of its community. We provide safe spaces for literacy and learning, but more than that we are the starting point of empowerment for many citizens who lack opportunities at home.

We are the route to digital fluency, playing a significant role in preparing the workforce and others for the digital world.

Libraries belong to every one of us. We enable access to information, we build social capital, we provide vital community facilities, we encourage literacy and learning, and we share local stories and local history.

We are efficient, we enable central and local government to engage with local people in a cost effective way.
What is a Library?

Libraries sit at the heart of communities. We mirror, reflect and service our community according to their needs.

We provide a place to find the resources to learn new skills, to get to know more about what we love, to improve and get ahead, to reach out to loved ones and to make new friends.

Libraries provide an opportunity to fight unemployment, illiteracy, digital illiteracy and loneliness. We connect people, we upskill them, we enable creative learning and we build communities. We are the infrastructure for life-long learning.

A library is the one place a community can’t do without.

We’re not a book barn. We’re so much more.

We’re the place for communities to share resources – space, information, knowledge.

We’re the place for people to connect.

We’re one of the most trusted places in every community.

Even when other social institutions have lost users’ trust, our focus on listening to our users and meeting their needs means we remain trusted and connected¹.

We’re customer focused. We evolve to meet the needs of our community – staying ahead of the curve to make sure services are there when they’re needed.

¹Public Libraries of New Zealand
We are a Community Resource

Our purpose first and foremost is to improve society by helping people understand themselves better. We aim to help every user participate in the world around them.

We strive to make a difference to communities and individuals – economically, socially, educationally and environmentally.

We share resources. We open up a far wider world than any individual, family, whanau or community can access on their own.

Today in New Zealand

Libraries deliver services across the community. We sit at the heart of neighbourhoods and have outreach programmes that ensure all community members can access services and participate in community life.

Libraries own and manage meeting spaces (and other community spaces) – we support numerous community groups to come together.

Libraries provide access to computers and other digital tools (including wifi). 1 in 5 families with children and in some parts of New Zealand half of all homes can’t get online².

Libraries enable access to knowledge, ideas and works of the imagination – through online databases (much of the internet’s best information is behind a pay wall), print books, audio books, ebooks, magazines and DVDs.

Birkenhead Library Learning Centre
© Auckland Libraries
We are Teachers and Enablers

Libraries teach and encourage literacy in all its forms

- We teach older (and younger) people to use computers and access information on the web
- We teach people to use the new technologies they’re faced with
- We introduce pre-schoolers to books and reading
- We enable all New Zealanders to access books (and children who don’t have access to books at home lose reading ability over the long summer holiday – by the end of school they’re up to two years behind the better off students 3)

Libraries enable learning.

Developing new skills throughout life is an important part of New Zealand’s economic growth. Through partnerships with local and national education providers, and through providing a wide range of online and print educational resources, libraries continue to make sure New Zealand can compete in the global economy.

Libraries gather and share community stories.

Every community in New Zealand is richer for remembering our past and libraries are a vital part of this. Our online and print heritage collections have captured everything from memories of the First World War to local events (such as the Rena grounding off Tauranga).
We are Facilitators

Libraries support business and enterprise. We provide research services to businesses large and small and we provide incubator services for start-ups, including access to council support, low cost meeting spaces, access to technology and access to databases. We’re keeping local economies strong.

In short, libraries grow local economies, strengthen communities and promote personal wellbeing. And we continue to have a focus on reducing costs and improving services.

We are always evolving. Our staff are some of the most multi-skilled in local government – they are administrators, information specialists, teachers, digital experts, coders, historians, customer service specialists and so much more.

It’s no wonder that libraries are the most used, by choice, local government service.

We are the natural partner for Government agencies and businesses wanting to reach communities and individuals. We enable democracy, access and participation.

And we make communities work. We make them strong. We help them thrive.
Who uses Libraries?

The short answer? Almost everyone!

More than 100,000 people visit a New Zealand public library everyday. That’s 37.5 million visits every single year.

Almost half of New Zealanders are members of their local library (this varies from around one-third of local residents through to every local resident). And many more people use their public library for our meetings spaces and other non-lending based services.

Library customers undertake over 92 million transactions every year – using our formal and informal meeting spaces, using our computers and wifi, being supported by our skilled and qualified librarians, and borrowing books, magazines, DVDs, and more (libraries are now loaning everything from ukuleles to sewing machines).

The question is more who doesn’t use libraries? The quick answer to that used to be teenagers – not anymore. Everyone uses libraries – from pre-schoolers with mum right through to retired people. We are the community resource for everyone.

And it’s not just about residents. People new to an area, tourists and other visitors are big users of libraries. Linking people to local activities and services is a key role for libraries – helping to grow and support the local economy. And, of course, we link those people with the wider world though our wifi and internet access points.

Libraries are the community resource for anyone – everyone can use their public library.
A snapshot of library stats for 2013/4

- 308 Public Libraries in New Zealand
- 12,247 weekly opening hours
- 594,089 annual opening hours
- 2,286 full time equivalent staff
- 12,731,869 items in library collections
- 48,157,565 items loaned
- 92,546,387 transactions

- 2,131,635 members
- 37,516,033 visits
- 2,103 public internet terminals
- 5,083,080 public internet sessions
- 76% increase in wifi usage
- 127% increase in ebook borrowing (now 805,405 – 2% of all loans)

Note, all figures exclude Central Otago and Stratford public libraries (figures unavailable)
Libraries are the digital future

Digital is a key element of all library services. Thanks to partnerships with the National Library, we’ve been delivering access to a massive range of much needed digital resources for several years. And we’re using digital tools to support our customers in everything we do.

Libraries have led the charge into the digital world. We support many New Zealanders in developing their digital skills. We teach digital literacy, provide the tools to get online and make sure the people who can’t afford to get on the information superhighway can do just that.

The World Wide Web isn’t an encyclopedia of high quality and trusted information. There’s a lot of low quality and inaccurate information out there – librarians teach people to tell the good from the bad. We make sure they can access the best information – the information that everyday users can’t access thanks to pay walls and subscriptions. You wouldn’t expect your free community newspaper to provide the best and most detailed information; neither does the free part of the net.

Libraries are also a vital part of the ebook solution. We’re working hard to make sure New Zealanders can borrow more and more titles. With international licensing issues, many New Zealanders can’t access the number of titles of ebooks that they should – it can be as low as 4% of the print books they can borrow!
Libraries are...

Relevant

Communities have changed. So too have libraries. We’ve evolved to continue to met the needs of local people – creating meeting spaces, enabling access to technology, teaching people to thrive in the modern world, supporting local economic development and developing partnerships to increase the services we can deliver.

Valuable

Libraries already deliver fantastic value – conservative estimates suggest a return on investment of $3 to $5 for every $1 spent on libraries. Libraries impact on our communities in so many ways – economically, socially, educationally and environmentally (surely we were the start of the green movement).

Our Future

We have a part to play in keeping our community and our city/district strong. An investment in libraries is an investment in our future.
References


Why Libraries? was developed by Public Libraries of New Zealand.

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