



**READER
ENGAGEMENT
ADVOCACY &
DEVELOPMENT
STRATEGY**

2021-2025

GEELONG
REGIONAL
LIBRARIES



CONTENTS

Acknowledgement of Country	4	STRATEGY ONE:	
Valuing Diversity	4	READING AND WELLNESS	11
Executive Summary	4		
Introduction	5	STRATEGY TWO:	
About Geelong Regional Libraries	5	READING DIVERSITY	12
Geelong Regional Libraries' Mission	5		
Situation Analysis	6	STRATEGY THREE:	
Scope	7	BUILDING A READING COMMUNITY	13
Methodology and Engagement	9	STRATEGY FOUR:	
		A TAILORED APPROACH	14





“The library has already helped me to diversify my reading choices as it allows to try new authors and genres ... I read so much more broadly now that I have ready access to the library”

– Belmont Library member

Acknowledgement of Country

The Geelong Regional Library Corporation acknowledges Wadawurrung and Eastern Maar Original Owners of the lands on which our library services operate. We pay respect to Wadawurrung and Eastern Maar Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge and celebrate First Nations Peoples of this land as the custodians of learning, literacy, knowledge and story.

Valuing Diversity

Diversity refers to understanding that each of us is unique, and our individual differences are welcome. Geelong Regional Library Corporation (GRLC) acknowledges and celebrates diversity within the community and strives to deliver a service that is supportive, respectful, balanced and inclusive; where all people can engage and participate without judgement or inhibition.

Executive Summary

Reader Development has been defined, developed and endorsed at an industry level by Public Libraries Victoria¹. In essence, it is a reader centred body of professional practise which encourages the love of reading and libraries to be at the heart of a reading community.

At GRLC, our agile and responsive service has seen us evolve and adapt to community needs, yet reading is still our core business. As such, a Reader Advocacy and Development Strategy was prioritised as part of our *Reading Ahead - Library Plan 2017-2021*. The aim of the strategy is to focus on improving literacy at all ages and to foster a continued love of reading throughout people's lives. This in turn will increase library membership, increase use of the library collection and confirm the library's role in a strengthened, flourishing and thriving community.

The strategy has been informed by stakeholder and community engagement identifying key themes of which four clear strategies have evolved:



Within each of these strategies, goals and objectives (or promises of intent) have been defined. In addition, an action plan clearly outlines the work GRLC commits to complete over the next two years to meet our reading engagement, advocacy and development goals.

¹ <https://www.plv.org.au/>

Introduction

The *Reading Ahead: Geelong Regional Library Corporation Library Plan 2017 – 2021*, prioritises the development of a Reader Advocacy and Development Strategy including ways to build adult, family literacy and a reading region. This is echoed in the *Reading Ahead Annual Priorities of 2020-2021*.

The *Reader Engagement, Advocacy and Development Strategy* confirms the Corporation’s continuing commitment to contribute to its large and diverse community.

Strategies are identified to support the Corporation’s commitment to optimise the tailoring, take up and impact of our collections and build the region as a reading community. Using an evidence-based and reader-centred approach, the strategy is consistent across all of GRLC’s service pillars; to provide a coherent and, where possible, tailored experience. It will be adaptable, equitable, inclusive and supportive and striving towards creating readers, improving literacy, enhancing and diversifying people’s reading experience and fostering the love of reading for pleasure.

In a time where there can be a myriad of distractions, barriers and stresses in our daily lives, reading can become a personal sanctuary and a powerful tool to enhance wellbeing, positive mental health and a rediscovered alternative to connecting with oneself and community.

The strategy aligns with priorities of our Member Councils and provides a roadmap for GRLC to review current services, identify key service principles and priorities, and provide a starting point for service planning and delivery.

About the Geelong Regional Library Corporation

The GRLC provides library and information services to residents and visitors in the G21 region. One of 47 public library services in the state of Victoria, the Corporation was formed in 1997 under the provisions of Section 196 of the *Local Government Act 1989*. The GRLC is governed by a Board of members made up of representatives of its five member councils – the Borough of Queenscliffe, the City of Greater Geelong, Colac Otway Shire, Golden Plains Shire and Surf Coast Shire.

Our Mission

To be an exemplary library service.

We will create opportunities for our community to read, learn, work and connect with each other and the world:

- by providing safe, welcoming and inclusive places and spaces
- by facilitating equitable access to collections, programs, information and technology
- by nurturing discovery, creativity and innovation
- through the knowledge, expertise and encouragement of library staff

The *Geelong Regional Library Strategic Plan Reading Ahead: Library plan 2017 – 2021* articulates our vision for a thriving regional community that is enriched by reading, empowered by learning and inspired by information and ideas. The *Reader Engagement, Advocacy and Development Strategy* will work under GRLC’s service pillars of:



Situation Analysis

The *Victorian Public Libraries 2030 Strategic Framework* concentrates on a number of developed scenarios that provide Victorian public libraries with a structure to guide strategic planning. Published in 2013, the framework explores alternative futures, identifies tipping points and considers strategic responses to perceived global trends. The framework, as considered through a post-COVID-19 lens highlights and accelerates the Corporation's response to our communities changing information and literacy needs. By remaining agile and responsive, GRLC is well placed to continue to provide services and resources that support 21st century literacies and "champion lifelong learning and brain health"².

GRLC's foundation practice of reader development in the early years is already a key priority in building early literacy capacity within our region. Baby Time, Toddler Time and Story Time are all regular program offers, and support the needs of a growing reader. Regular school holiday programs, afterschool activities, outreach, access to emerging technology and the introduction of collection activators all encourage the use of the library collection by young people.

Our children's and youth services programs provide a solid basis on which to build a more structured approach to support adult and family literacy and the future reading needs of the community. Research indicates that adults who model good reading practice can benefit the whole family and facilitate lifelong learning.

The Corporation has already invested in solid foundation practices for adult reader engagement; the most significant of which is the *Word for Word National Non-Fiction Festival* held in November each year. Regular programs such as author events, community facilitated events, book chat, support sessions facilitated by staff and specialist librarians, the availability of over 130 book club kits and the Home Library Service have all contributed to GRLC's responsive service to the community's reading needs.

The Geelong Regional Library User Survey in 2018 also showed that reading is considered by community to be at the heart of the library service. Books and reading remain our core business with 95% of users identifying value in and borrowing printed books.

Recent work in supporting the introduction and growth of the eBook has consolidated access and use of the library's eCollections; increasing library members' choice and discovery of reading material. Despite an increase in eBook use, physical book loans remain in high demand and make up the majority of loans. In 2018/2019, out of a total of 2,487,771 loans, 2,329,475 were physical copies.

Increase in population of existing communities and the acquisition of a new Member Council highlight a need for our library services and resources to be robust and responsive to our growing region. Some pockets of the region are expected to increase in population by as much as 75% by 2041³. Six major capital work library projects also highlight the GRLC's and local Councils' commitment to a growing reading region.

"Both organisations will continue to work in close partnership in any library infrastructure planning"⁴

"A recent Council feasibility study and Geelong Regional Library Corporation (GRLC) infrastructure plan found that the existing Torquay Library needs to be expanded to meet current and future population and expectations"⁵

"We used your feedback from three rounds of consultation to design a building that met the needs of everyone. Representatives from the Library, Museum and the Visitor Information Centre have endorsed this plan, which has now been granted formal approval by Council"⁶

² Victorian Public Libraries 2030 Strategic Framework Summary Report Page 8

³ <https://forecast.id.com.au/golden-plains>

⁴ CoGG LIBRARIES – Social Infrastructure Plan – Generation One 2020 – 2023 Page 4

⁵ <https://www.surfcoast.vic.gov.au/About-us/News-and-media/Council-determines-location-and-features-of-future-cultural-facility-in-Torquay>

⁶ <https://www.queenscliffe.vic.gov.au/Your-Council/News-and-projects/Current-projects/Queenscliffe-Hub>

Impact of the COVID-19 Global Pandemic

Despite the challenges that COVID-19 presented for delivery of library services, GRLC adapted to continue to meet the needs of the community.

During the unprecedented global pandemic, the GRLC responded to directions from the Victorian Government and closed its doors to the public from 19 March to 8 June, and from 6 August to 26 October 2020. During this time, use of the GRLC's eMembership and eCollection dramatically rose with unprecedented increases in eMembership of more than 170%. It is yet to be determined whether this translates into an ongoing trend.

In response to this sudden surge, GRLC significantly increased its supply of eBooks to the collection.

GRLC's creative and innovative response to the challenges of COVID-19 and a speedy 'pivot' to an increased online service offering, also included taking our events and programs online. The program now offers a combination of online and in-person events.

GRLC has honed how it presents its online resources bringing more scope for showcasing and promoting the collection linking reader's advisory with digital programming. As a result, the collection has now become more homogenous or "modality agnostic" where patrons see all our collection formats as one seamless resource offer.

The social displacement that inevitably comes with an economic and social emergency has also amplified and emphasised the need to focus on identifying vulnerable, marginalised and disadvantaged library users and the importance of reading as a social connector and *how* we give access to this valuable resource in the time of crisis. Through our *Click & Deliver* and *Click & Collect* services, GRLC was able to personalise and tailor its service and enhance well-being and mental health in our communities as a result.



Public libraries in the post COVID-19 era will become even more valued as community and creative space – “The People’s Place” where people will continue to come to learn, unlearn, relearn, reskill and reconnect. The desire for personal connection will ensure our service continues to move from a passive product based to an active service based customer experience.
Steve Tighe – Futurist

Scope

AUDIENCE

GRLC will continue to create, advocate and engage with all its members and visitors encompassing *all ages* from birth to end of life. For the scope of this *Reader Engagement, Advocacy and Development Strategy*, the target audience is focused on adult readers and families as stated in the *Reading Ahead - Library Plan 2017 – 2021*.

GRLC is also committed to supporting vulnerable and marginalised people within its diverse community by identifying and helping to remove literacy and reading challenges and barriers to accessing our service. In doing so, GRLC will contribute to the fostering of social cohesion, community harmony and the building of a reading region.

DEFINITION OF LITERACY

According to [UNESCO](#), literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society.



DEFINITION OF READER DEVELOPMENT

Reader development is 'reader-centred'. A body of professional practice, especially in public libraries, which encourages readers to open up their reading choices, share their reading experiences, raise the status of reading as a creative activity and widen participation in reading. Reader development as an initiative can:

- Strengthen readers' confidence, enjoyment and engagement with reading
- Increase, enrich and diversify readers' choices
- Provide opportunities for readers to connect through their reading experiences
- Increase people's health and wellbeing and support their brain health

Reader Development Framework for Victoria Public Libraries – PLV Reader Development SIG 2020

Methodology and Engagement

A workgroup was established to drive the process of developing this strategy. After initial research and mapping, the core team facilitated workshops with internal stakeholders consisting of a number of focus groups across all areas of the organisation. A follow up staff survey was generated and sent to all staff seeking comments on the role libraries play in improving literacy and developing lifelong readers.

STAFF ENGAGEMENT

Much of the feedback and commentary from staff during the internal engagement process was “action” based and as a result much of this data has been included in the *Reader Engagement, Advocacy and Development Action Plan*.

Staff passion, knowledge, expertise and commitment to our organisational values and mission statement were highlighted as was a genuine desire to continue to improve our services to our community. Key themes identified were:

- Servicing Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)
- Servicing English as a Second Language (ESL) communities
- Developing Language Other Than English (LOTE) collections
- Identifying and removing barriers to the access of our services.

Staff also recognised reading engagement with youth as a particularly challenging area. There are many consistent reasons why this cohort disengages as readers at this particular stage in their development. Youth go through a drastic shift in their reading habits when they transition from primary to secondary school and it is often not until they become parents themselves that they re-engage with the library after a period of disengagement. One of the biggest misconceptions about this cohort is the belief that “digital natives” are more comfortable or prefer reading eBooks on their devices. Recent research reveals that many young adults prefer reading for pleasure with a physical copy.

“When children move from primary to secondary school, reading for pleasure is no longer a key focus and it is at this point that many young people disengage. Reading becomes a device for learning about different subjects. At home, parents who read to their children when they were younger, no longer read to them”⁷.

“Specifically considering reading eBooks, the primary reason our sampled teens say they do not read more on their digital device is a preference for print books”⁸

The *Youth Engagement Strategy 2021-2025* can be found on the Geelong Regional Library website.

Now more than ever, GRLC will need to “generate internal and external belief and buy-in to a shared vision for the future role of Victorian public libraries” and “to develop a flexible and inclusive culture that attracts and retains people with the right skills and attitude to deliver public library products and services into the future”⁹

⁷ <https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/Keeping%20Young%20Australians%20Reading%202009.pdf> Page 33

⁸ https://teenreadingdotnet.files.wordpress.com/2017/04/teen-reading-folio-report_email.pdf Page 7

⁹ <https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/VPL-2030-strategic-framework-summary.pdf> Page 6

EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT

Utilising a user-centred best practice approach, an external stakeholder survey was also distributed and promoted via the GRLC's website and social media channels. Hard copies were provided to the branches.

The external survey received 228 responses and results highlighted the importance of the GRLC collection to the community; the need for dynamic, active learning, creative interest; and the importance of the relationship between our library members, our collections, our resources and our staff. Use of collections and readers advisory emerged as key themes, with 15% of respondents providing feedback in these areas.

The extremely successful introduction of "book bundles" for our Click & Collect and Click & Deliver services was identified as a service that respondents hoped would continue into the future, with both staff and library members very much enjoying participating in a more personal, tailored service during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Member desire to diversify reading choices and to be recommended new reading material determined by automated technology (by loan and browsing history) was identified and the survey highlighted some personal anecdotes of the challenges and obstacles our members face when reading. Library members with physical disabilities were candid about their struggles and how their enjoyment of reading can be impacted. Disability, being time poor and loan periods emerged as key themes, as were access to technology, the ease (or lack of) of making reading choices and the anxiety caused by being a "slow reader".

FEEDBACK FROM SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Book clubs organised through local libraries, where people can meet together. Especially now, people want face to face social interaction. A chance to share ideas, reading experiences, and recommendations. A way to be inspired, or find something new.

- Newcomb Library member

I am a slow reader - Dyslexia. It influences my reticence to belong to a Reading Group. I do read for pleasure at times - but I know it takes more time for me & I know there are those who don't understand my hidden disability.

- Geelong Library & Heritage Centre Library member

Reading is a lifelong habit already.

- Queenscliff Library member

More content (books) for men. Also library displays to celebrate International Men's day, and Movember, and men's health awareness.

- Geelong Library & Heritage Centre Library member

I have read many different books this year due to reviews I have read. I THOUGHT I knew what I liked, until I read something different!

- Lara Library member

I had been anti-ebooks prior to COVID but found using BorrowBox a great way to access the library resources. Now I am a convert. Also I have arthritic hands and reading on my iPad is so less painful for my hands.

- Lara Library member

I only read print format books... I don't like too much screen time, I enjoy being away from phone or computer.

- Torquay Library member

I love, love, love listening to eAudiobooks, when I'm driving, weeding the garden, doing the dishes and sometimes when I'm working on the computer.

- Bannockburn Library member

STRATEGY ONE: READING AND WELLNESS

The link between reading and good health is well established. We know that reading to infants is the first activity in a reading life and in doing so, neurological pathways are stimulated. Research suggests that reading can reduce stress and can literally change lives. It follows then, that the GRLC has a major part to play in the wellbeing of the community via its services and resources.

To cultivate a reading habit “improves brain connectivity, increases vocabulary and comprehension, empowers people to empathise with others, aids in sleep readiness, reduces stress, lowers blood pressure and heart rate, fights depression symptoms, prevents cognitive decline and contributes to a longer life”¹⁰

“If reading is to become a lifelong habit then people must see themselves as participants in a community that views reading as a significant and enjoyable activity”¹¹

“Reading is good for you and literacy changes lives. It affects personal and social developments, happiness, behaviour, relationships, education, employment, financial well-being, health and community and cultural participation”¹²

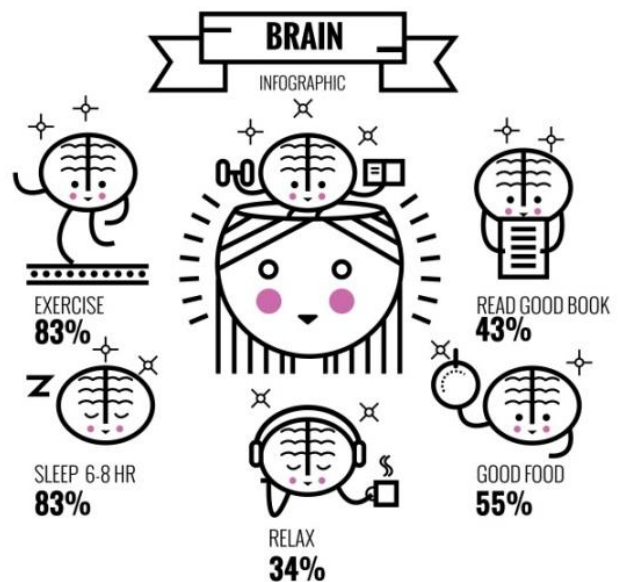
Public Libraries are well placed to provide services and resources that underpin “literary intervention, especially for children and young people, will significantly improve personal and community wellbeing in the long term, and have a flow-on effect for our national and state economies”¹³

GOAL

The GRLC will play a significant role in the health, wellbeing, happiness and success of our library members.

OUR COMMITMENT

1. Commit to playing a significant role in our members’ health, wellbeing and happiness by fully understanding the link between reading and a thriving life.
2. Advocate the importance of the link between reading and a prosperous and meaningful life.
3. Be open to new ideas and changes in reading trends and habits as they relate to supporting a healthy community and evaluate and reflect this in organisational practise.
4. Contribute to a healthier region and community by promoting and increasing literacy and reading as an alternative to more obvious forms of recreation and entertainment.
5. Provide a balanced and diverse collection that encourages reading by the whole community and enriches the lives of all.⁵



¹⁰ <https://www.healthline.com/health/benefits-of-reading-books#takeaway>

¹¹ https://tra-resources.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/entries/document/2277/The_Impact_of_Reading_for_Pleasure_and_Empowerment.pdf

¹² <https://www.publishers.asn.au/news/reading-is-good-for-you>

¹³ https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/Reading-and-literacy-for-all-strategic-framework_2.pdf Page. 5

STRATEGY TWO: READING DIVERSITY

Today, the definition of reading is broadening and there are many options available for how we read, reasons for why we read, and when, where and what we read.

Whether reading a printed book, reading online, accessing and using adaptive technology, reading audio books or being read to, these different options have the potential to help create new readers and enhance the experience of people already reading within the community. Providing resources and a collection that represent and reflect a diverse community is also key to providing a meaningful and useful service.

Public libraries in general are well placed to service their communities as “dynamic and socially responsive institutions, a nexus of diversity, and a lifeline for the most vulnerable among us”¹⁴.

“Advancing a culture of reading, writing and learning should be part of all literacy and lifelong learning strategies. This is about not only building supportive conditions but also identifying and removing impediments to literacy and learning. Furthermore, it is about the creation and use of spaces that bring learning closer to people’s everyday lives, which is the central idea of the lifelong learning principle”¹⁵

GOAL

Our communities can access what they want to read, when they need it, and how they need it.

OUR COMMITMENT

1. Take a leadership role as a trusted institution in building a service that meets and responds to a range of reading needs in our diverse communities.
2. Keep abreast of new industry trends in relation to adaptive and assistive technology and new reading formats.
3. Develop the depth and breadth of our collections and access to niche collections that are new, relevant, representative and responsive to community need.
4. Support Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities by providing access to resources, materials and programming in Languages other than English.
5. Increase community knowledge and understanding of new and existing collection formats and content, and how they can be used.
6. Provide support and training for all staff to keep informed about and respond to the region’s growing diversity and their integral role in promoting and encouraging reading.
7. In line with *GRLC Cultural Protocols and Action Plan 2020-2023*, extend and further develop relationships with First Nations Peoples in our communities.⁶

¹⁴ <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/pdf/10.1377/hlthaff.2016.0724> Page 2035

¹⁵ <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000257933> Page 8

STRATEGY THREE: BUILDING A READING COMMUNITY

Cultivating and supporting a reading culture within the Geelong region will bring benefits to the whole community. A community that is better informed, imaginative, resourceful, cohesive, empathetic, tolerant and sustainable.

GRLC will continue to emphasise its important role and foundational work in early years literacy to support families as their child's first educator, increase reading enjoyment and support lifelong learning. Literacy today has broadened in scope, and people need an increasing range of literacies to participate fully in society. By continuing to facilitate the improvement of multiple literacy skills and fostering a love of reading, our diverse communities will directly benefit.

Library staff are in the privileged position to be trusted “sentinels” in our communities where needs are identified and responded to on a daily basis and “libraries contribute two particular strengths to advance a culture of health: accessibility and trustworthiness”¹⁶

“If reading is to become a lifelong habit then people must see themselves as participants in a community that views reading as a significant and enjoyable activity”¹⁷

GOAL

Create a reputation whereby the Geelong region is synonymous with reading. Think Geelong? Think reading!

OUR COMMITMENT

1. Provide programs and services to support the development of literacy skills in the region.
2. Encourage informal reader-to-reader recommendations through considered and thoughtful collection location and programs. Create opportunities for readers to share ideas and reading habits in a safe and communal space either in branch or online.
3. Embed a reader-centric approach with staff to promote and improve the customers' reading experiences.
4. Acknowledge the growth of the region and the broad area in which we serve and endeavour to provide improved access to remote areas via technology, mobile libraries and Home Library Service.
5. Maximise existing partnerships and build new partnerships with genuine long-term stakeholders to build adult literacy and encourage a love of reading.
6. Foster relationships with community advocates, influencers and ambassadors that may drive community driven programs and services and model good reading practice.
7. Identify and remove barriers that may prevent people from accessing our services.

¹⁶ <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/pdf/10.1377/hlthaff.2016.0724> Page 2035

¹⁷ https://tra-resources.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/entries/document/2277/The_Impact_of_Reading_for_Pleasure_and_Empowerment.pdf

STRATEGY FOUR: A TAILORED APPROACH

Reading is a very personal activity that while having huge benefits on the community, is also based on individual taste. Reading is an activity of such infinite variety that not one book will meet the needs of an entire community. GRCL will strive to be responsive to the differing needs of individuals, or discreet groups, by creating a tailored approach to developing the reader.

"Thoroughly enjoyed each of the books in the bundle chosen by librarians. It introduced me to authors I hadn't read before. I like this initiative..." – Waurm Ponds Library member

GOAL

Provide flexible, imaginative and curated reading services.

OUR COMMITMENT

1. Use knowledge of local community to target and customise our programming, services and collections.
2. Recognise and develop partnership opportunities that support and maximise a unique customer experience.
3. Develop curated and personalised services to respond to the individual patron needs.
4. Utilise specialised staff expertise and knowledge to maximise service delivery.
5. Explore and develop outreach opportunities that target and build relationships in the community.
6. Provide opportunities for members and communities to contribute to the future service development of GRCL.





“I had been anti-eBooks prior to COVID but found using BorrowBox a great way to access the library resources. Now I am a convert.”

– Lara Library member



GEELONG REGIONAL LIBRARIES



Geelong Library & Heritage Centre
51 Little Malop Street
Geelong Victoria 3220
T 4201 0600

www.grlc.vic.gov.au

Geelong Library & Heritage Centre
51 Little Malop Street
T 4201 0600

Apollo Bay
6 Pengilley Avenue
T 5237 1013

Bannockburn
25-27 High Street
T 5281 2367

Barwon Heads
Barwon Heads Primary School,
Golf Links Road
T 5254 2143

Belmont
163 High Street
T 5243 2655

Chilwell
51 Russell Street, Newtown
T 5221 5129

Colac
173 Queen Street
T 5231 4613

Corio
Cox Road (cnr Moa Street) Norlane
T 5275 2388

Drysdale
18-20 Hancock Street
T 5251 3855

Geelong West
153A Pakington Street
T 5229 1939

Highton
Roslyn Road (cnr Belle Vue Avenue)
T 5243 4864

Lara
5 Walkers Road
T 5282 4182

Leopold
Leopold Community Hub
31-39 Kensington Road
T 4201 0675

Newcomb
cnr Bellarine Highway & Wilsons Road
T 5248 1802

Ocean Grove
Presidents Avenue (cnr The Avenue)
T 5255 4218

Queenscliff
55 Hesse Street
T 5258 2017

Torquay
Surf City Plaza, Beach Road
T 5261 3049

Wairn Ponds
140 Pioneer Road
T 5244 0048

Western Heights
Western Heights College,
Vines Road, Hamlyn Heights
T 5277 1177

Mobile Library Stops

Aireys Inlet	Gellibrand
Anakie	Grenville
Anglesea	Haddon
Beeac	Lavers Hill
Beech Forest	Linton
Birregurra	Lorne
Cape Clear	Meredith
Coragulac	Portarlington
Cressy	Rokewood
Deans Marsh	Smythesdale
Dereel	St Leonards
Enfield	Winchelsea
Forrest	



LITY OF GREATER
GEELONG

