



YOUTH ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

2021-2025

GEELONG
REGIONAL
LIBRARIES





“I really enjoy the warm and welcome environment here, along with the services available, it's an ideal spot for me to go after school to do work and hang with friends.”

2018 Library User Survey 12-17 Year Olds
Respondent

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INTRODUCTION



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Geelong Regional Library Corporation (GRLC) 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

GRLC acknowledges and celebrates its diverse community of young people. We acknowledge our programs, services, collections and resources will be respectful, accessible and inclusive of:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth
- Culturally and linguistically diverse and newly arrived youth
- Young people with disabilities
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and or questioning, asexual and many other terms (such as non-binary and pansexual) (LGBTIQ+) youth.

ABOUT US

The GRLC provides library and information services to all 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 library 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. Through a network comprising a central library – the Geelong Library & Heritage Centre – 18 community libraries, three mobile libraries, community outreach services and a website offering a wide range of eServices and eCollections, the Corporation provides free, universal access to reading, and lifelong learning.

The GRLC's 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. Goal Two of the plan affirms the Library's commitment to foster a love of reading in people of all ages and increase our engagement with young people, to support development of transliteracy¹ skills, increase lifelong learning and build 21st Century skills essential for future success.

¹Transliteracy - the ability to read, write and interact across a range of platforms, tools and media from signing and orality through handwriting, print, TV, radio, and film to digital social networks.

PURPOSE

The GRLC's Youth Engagement Strategy affirms the Library's commitment to contribute to positive outcomes for young people aged 12 to 18 years who live, work and study in the municipalities served by the GRLC. The strategy articulates GRLC's commitment for all young people to have access to resources, spaces and programming that create opportunities for them to grow intellectually, emotionally and socially. It positions the Library as a space where young people are welcome and supported, and as a partner, helping young people build positive futures for themselves and their communities.

Furthermore, it provides a strategic approach to youth engagement, ensuring that young people are at the centre of policies, services and activities that are developed for them. It sets out principles that ensure young people's diverse experiences, needs and views are valued and incorporated into our planning. It provides a roadmap for GRLC by reviewing current services, identifying key service principles and priorities, and providing a starting point for service planning. The Strategy sets the stage to provide a more comprehensive, progressive and responsive service that will meet the evolving needs of young people. Building on our customer service focus and innovative practices, we will concentrate on youth engagement, capacity building and partnerships.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

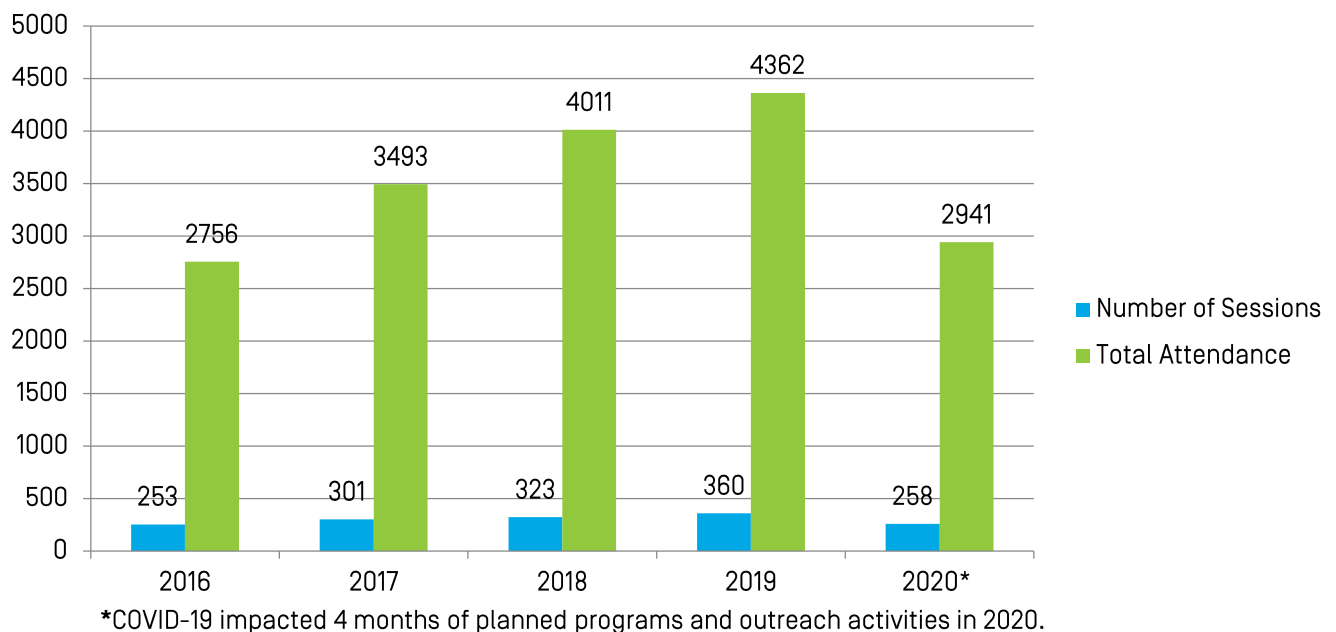
The contexts within which young people live and learn are vastly different from a generation ago, with economic changes transforming work through automation and globalisation. GRLC's commitment to providing quality children's and youth services is reflected in the organisations' structure. The GRLC employs a dedicated team of children's and youth services specialist librarians geographically dispersed across our library network and led by the Manager, Children's and Youth Services. Together, they support the management of children's and young adult collections, resources, library services, and develop and deliver a broad range of programming opportunities, including outreach to schools and other service providers.

GRLC aims to provide flexible, dedicated youth spaces that are welcoming, inclusive and that provide access to coveted study spaces. We understand the challenges young people face and the vast array of competing demands on their time. Thus it is vital that the GRLC is present in the spaces young people already inhabit. Our specialist librarians collaborate and partner with youth service organisations and key stakeholders in the region to connect with young people and inform them about the library services available to them.

In the GRLC's *2018 Library User Survey: 12-17 Year Olds*, respondents told us that they value and use library services that benefit them in different areas of their lives. GRLC currently employs a multifaceted approach to programming which is centred on an ethos of informal education support. Our programs function as a critical tool to facilitate engagement with a focus on the development of 21st Century learning skills necessary for an uncertain future workforce. Through curriculum-aligned workshops, author encounters and hands-on activities, the GRLC provides a variety of opportunities that support young people to develop and pursue their own interests and passions and collaborate with like-minded peers. A review of attendance at library programs and activities over the past five years (Table A) shows the success of this approach, however, the GRLC is committed to building on this success and recognises the need for a Youth Engagement Strategy to further realise this vision.



Youth Programs and Outreach 2016-2020



[Table A]

The COVID-19 pandemic and government-imposed restrictions during much of 2020 severely disrupted and limited GRLC’s capacity to connect and engage with audiences through traditional programming and outreach activities. Whilst these circumstances posed many challenges, it also presented the unique opportunity to reimagine services, explore new ways to connect with young people and meet some of their needs in a virtual environment. Whilst engaging virtually through the Library’s website, online programming initiatives, eCollections and other services such as *Click & Collect* and *Click & Deliver* services, GRLC was also able to respond to a gap in service. The *2018 Library User Survey: 12-17 Year Olds* showed that when using social media, 56% of survey respondents preferred using Instagram above other social media platforms, with YouTube [54%] and Snapchat [43%] the next preferred platforms. In response to this feedback, GRLC introduced a new Instagram profile called *checked.in.ya*; allowing us to provide reader recommendations and connect with young people in a space they already occupy.

To continue to effectively reach this cohort during and post COVID-19, the GRLC will review this new level of engagement to fully understand the changing needs of young people as they journey into adulthood. By building a narrative around this changing need, GRLC has an opportunity to evolve *together* with young people; to be present and approachable, to consult, to involve, to listen, and to act. GRLC will continue to respond to young people in both the physical and virtual realm by building the capacity of our staff, designing spaces young people will want to use, delivering programs that inspire and inform, partnering with others who share our vision, providing access to diverse collections, and providing access to technologies that meet their evolving needs.

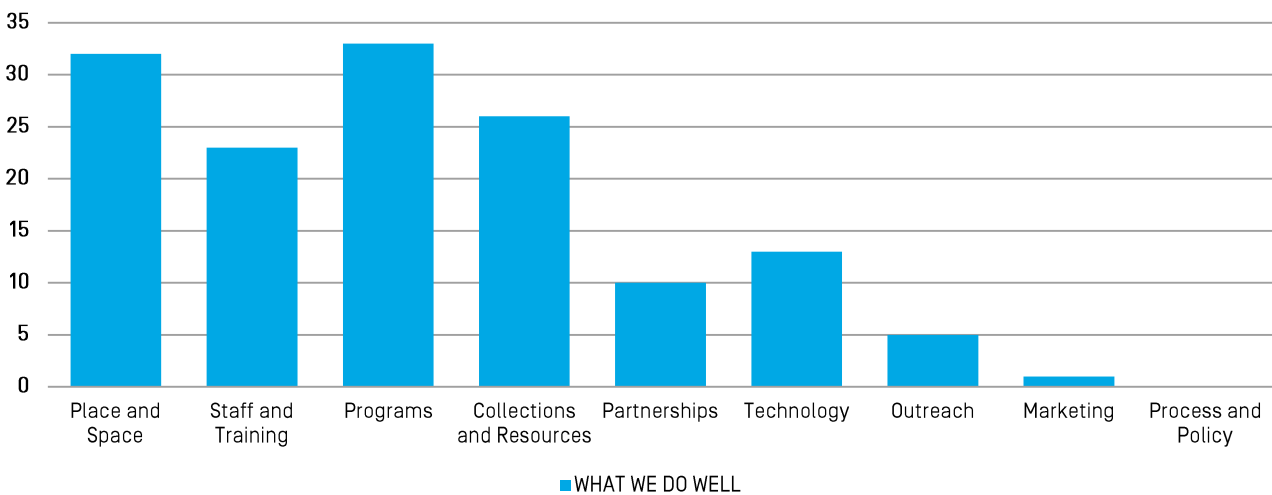
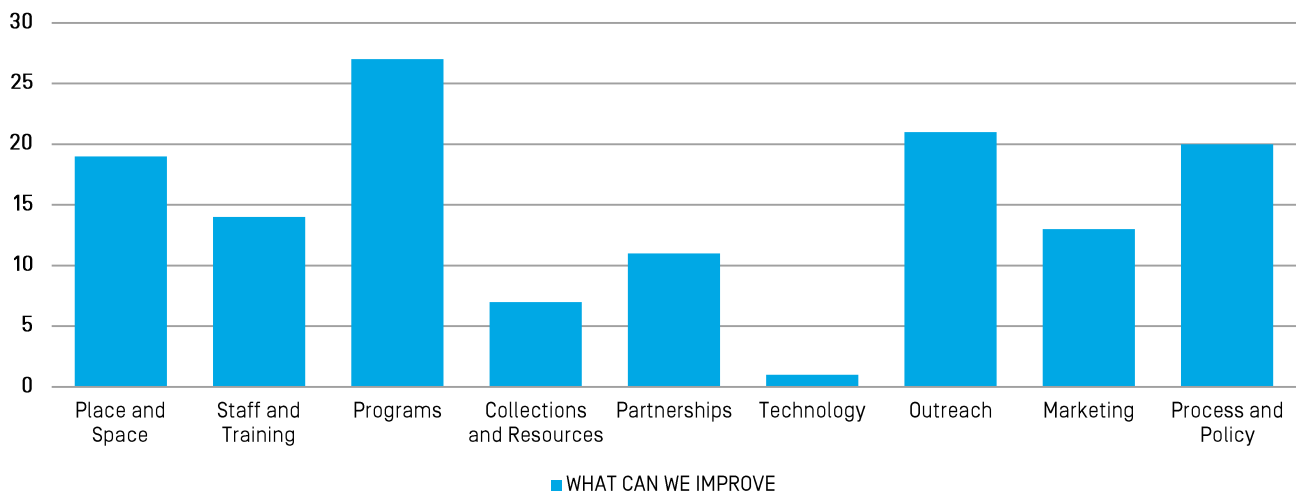
METHODOLOGY

The strategy builds on many years of experience working with young people and on research into this important life stage. It is informed by ongoing dialogue between library staff and young people, internal stakeholder focus groups, survey responses, and customer feedback obtained through programming and outreach activities. Furthermore, the strategy outlines a framework for ongoing and enhanced consultation with young people.

259 respondents completed the *2018 Library User Survey: 12-17 Year Olds*, and provided feedback on their library usage habits and satisfaction with library services. Survey responses show that 89% of respondents access services by visiting a physical library space (including mobile libraries). They access the space for a variety of reasons, including studying, internet/WiFi access and hanging out with friends. 75% of respondents use the Library’s computers or free WiFi despite 82% having access at home. 87% rated their satisfaction as ‘very satisfied’ with many enjoying the range of books, having access to study spaces and the friendly staff.

In developing this strategy, five focus groups were held with internal stakeholders consisting of four focus groups of customer-facing staff and one focus group of non-customer-facing staff. In total, 44 staff participated. Following this, an all staff survey was generated, returning 34 responses. Staff identified the following strengths and areas for improvement. The draft strategy was then distributed to targeted external stakeholders for consultation and feedback.

Internal Stakeholder Responses



ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

Youth engagement requires adequate thought, planning, time and resources. It must be intentional and sustained. "Youth engagement has to be delivered in a meaningful way which values the contribution, ideas and expertise of young people. Tokenistic youth engagement in many ways can be more damaging to young people than no engagement at all."²

IAP2³ is the International Association for Public Participation and had been endorsed as the theoretical basis for stakeholder engagement. The IAP2 engagement spectrum represents the most widely accepted participation definitions across government and industry, and meets the requirements set out by the Victorian Auditor-General's Office. The IAP2 spectrum shows that different levels of engagement are legitimate, depending on the requirements of each project.

The stages of the IAP2 spectrum and the principles which are generally agreed to underpin meaningful youth engagement and participation are:

Inform

- Providing information to stakeholders.

Consult

- Obtaining stakeholder feedback on alternatives for potential courses of action or decisions made.
- Young people have the opportunity to take on valued roles to address issues which impact them, and can create real change.

Involve

- Working directly with stakeholders to ensure that concerns and aspirations are understood and reflected in proposals or policy.
- Young people all have the opportunity to participate.

Collaborate

- Partnering with stakeholders at each stage of a project.

Empower

- Young people have greater control over their lives through participation, placing final decision making in their hands.

"I love how when I walk in I feel so relaxed and happy. I can feel all stress from the world leave as it takes me away from my thoughts. I also like it when me, my mother and my grandmother come together as a girls' outing. I love to help them find books and we have a great time there. My grandma has a disability which means she is limited to what she can do. She can only read as a past time and loves the library. Without this amazing facility for the community she wouldn't be able to enjoy her life"

2018 Library User Survey 12-17 Year Olds Respondent

² Golden Pains Shire Youth Engagement Guide – Golden Plains Youth version 1. June 2019

³ [c] International Association for Public Participation www.iap2.org

BACKGROUND



THE YOUTH EXPERIENCE

DEVELOPMENT

Young people generally experience three key stages of development, and whilst they mature dramatically throughout this period, they are also more vulnerable to stress. Many face pressures related to body image, school, friendships, career path and independent living. Emotions are experienced more intensely and concurrently their self-esteem can be negatively affected. Their capacity for self-regulation, assessing risks and planning improves, and as they move toward adulthood, they begin to struggle for independence and control. Peer influence and acceptance becomes more important and they are increasingly motivated by their internal values. During this period, they are rapidly constructing their own identity by:

- understanding themselves in relation to others
- understanding the dynamics of relationships
- building resilience
- learning to negotiate peer relationships
- learning through role-modelling
- learning and experimenting with risks
- developing their own unique style.

When children transition from primary to secondary school, there is an inherent period where reading habits dramatically change. Reading material broadens becoming a tool for learning and schoolwork, but at the same time, it also narrows, as books are seldom read as a form of recreation. During this time, the library can play a pivotal role as “informed intermediaries”⁴ to help identify the trigger that will keep youth motivated to continue to read for pleasure. Encouraging the celebration of reading and developing practical and effective strategies to open up pathways that lead teenagers to books is fundamental to their future lives and society as a whole.

With these transitional and transformational development periods in mind, it should be acknowledged that any youth engagement strategy cannot be ‘one size fits all’.



⁴ Teen Reading in the Digital Era – Launch 25/11/2020

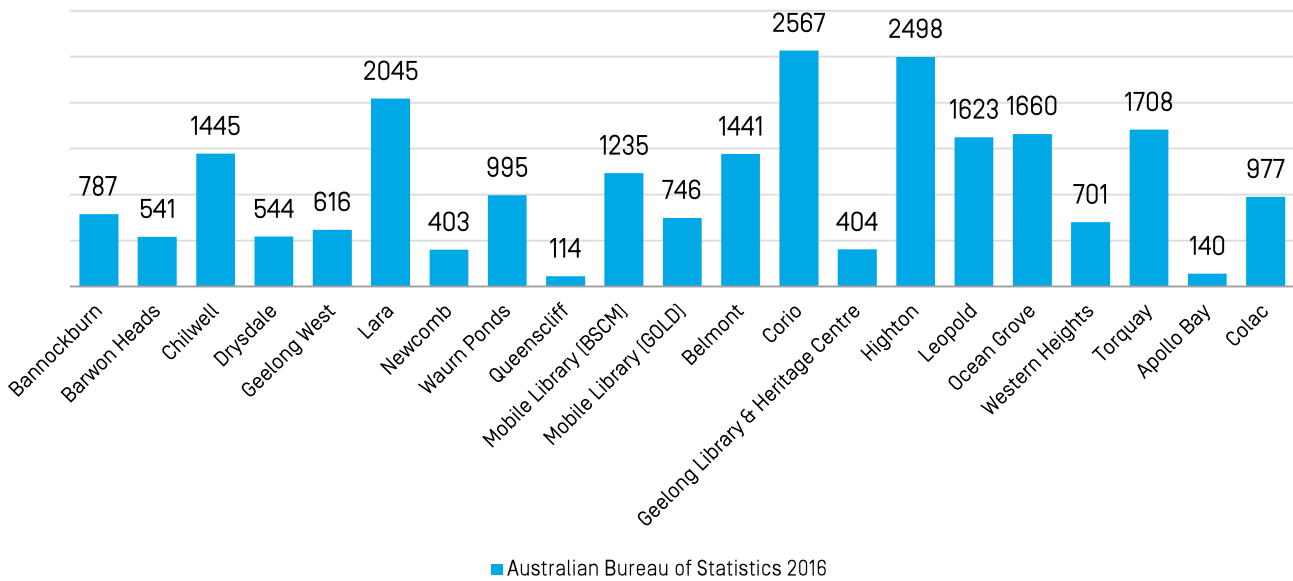
DEFINING YOUTH

There is no universally agreed international definition of the youth age group. The National Strategy for Young Australians (2010)⁵ defines youth as 12-25 year-olds; however, the GRLC recognises that under general Australian law a child becomes an adult at the age of 18. For the purpose of this strategy, we will be focusing on young people aged from 12 to 18 years of age. This definition closely aligns to the GRLC’s membership categories, which use the following age groupings: Teens (12 – 14 years) and Youth (15 – 17 years) thus enabling us to remove false divisions and align the strategy to our collection development and resources strategies.

LIBRARY USERS

Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2016 census⁶ shows the number of youth living in suburbs which have access to a public library (Table D). When compared to GRLC youth membership statistics for the same locations, it becomes clear that young people do not necessarily use the library which is closest to their home (Table E). A number of factors could contribute to this trend, including proximity to educational facilities attended, access to transport or public transport, cultural influences, negative experiences and fit for purpose spaces.

Youth Population by Branch

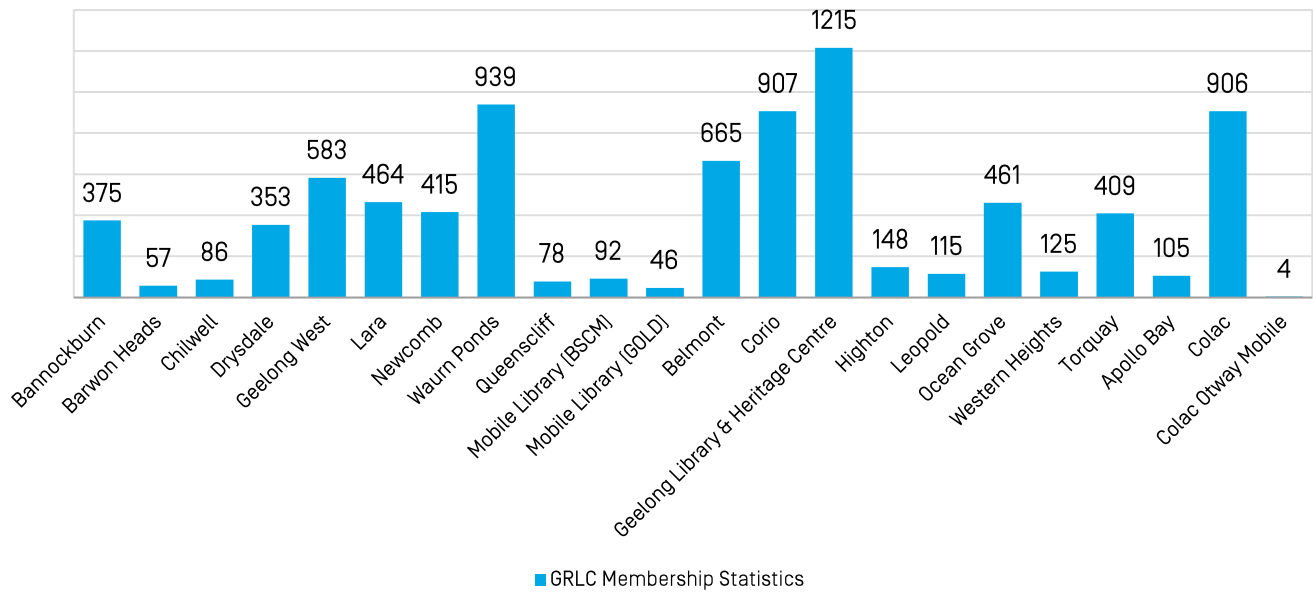


(Table D)

⁵ https://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Australia_2010_National_Youth_Strategy.pdf

⁶ https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/203?opendocument

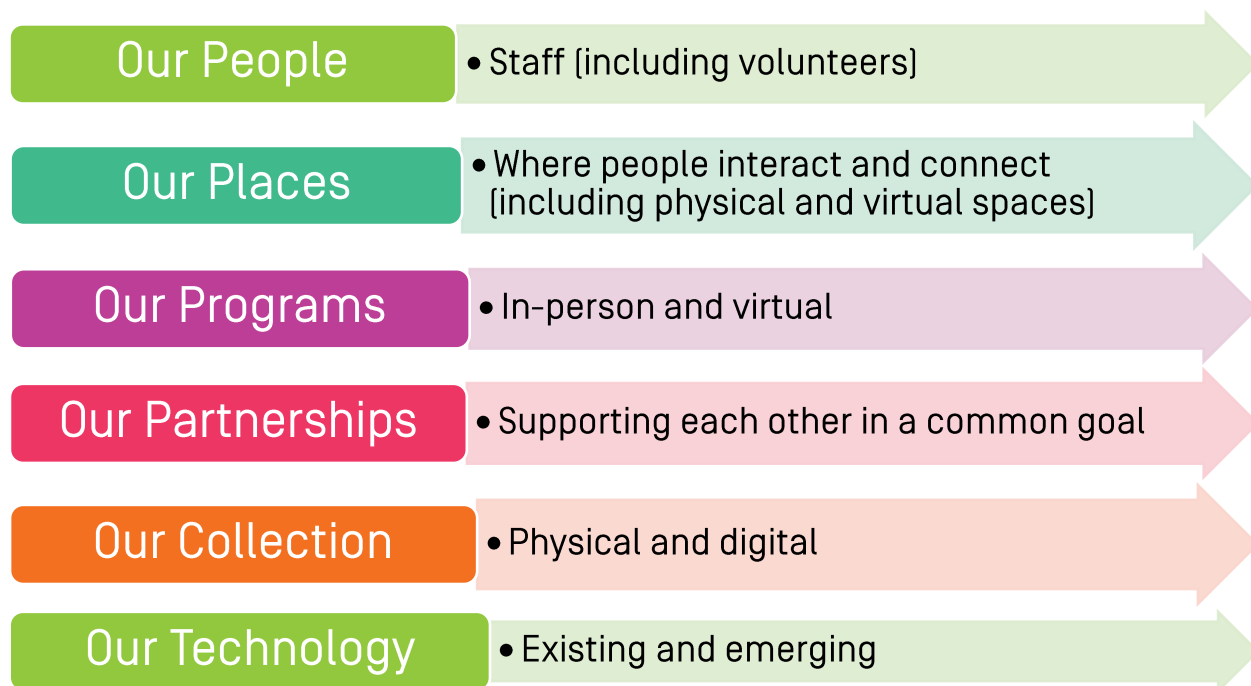
Youth Membership by Branch (2019-2020)



[Table E]

CORE PRINCIPLES

To ensure that more young people benefit from our services, we will raise awareness and prioritize accessibility as well as youth-friendly and supportive spaces. We will also refine and enhance our services through community consultation and strategic partnerships, increasing and diversifying opportunities for young people to engage and inform library services. The Youth Engagement Strategy will inform GRLC's work under the pillars of:



The years from 12 to 18 include critical stages of development. People in this age demographic face major decisions which affect their future and need information, ideas and experiences to guide their thinking and inform their choices. For young people to thrive, they need a range of supports from the entire community to build the personal competencies needed to transition successfully into adulthood. These core principles drive the development of library services and programs for young people.

- Child safety is fundamental to all aspects of GRLC services.
- Young people have important strengths and skills to contribute and should be actively engaged as experts in their own interests and needs.
- Self-directed, interest-based and experiential learning contributes to a young person's skill development and future success.
- Being a digital native does not equal digital literacy. Literacy today is a much broader term that transcends reading and writing. Young people require multiple literacies to support active participation in a vastly global society.
- Libraries contribute to community health and wellbeing, reaching the most vulnerable community members and working in partnership with other organisations.





“The librarians and staff are the most warm and welcoming people I know besides my friends.”

**2018 Library User Survey 12-17 Year Olds
Respondent**

OUTCOMES



GRLC is committed to creating an evidence-based and youth-informed library service that will enable GRLC to develop and deliver services across all its service pillars; to provide a consistent experience that is equitable, inclusive and geared toward supporting young people for future success.

GRLC will be recognised as a trusted, progressive service provider and community partner for young people, dedicated to meeting developmental needs, celebrating and building on strengths and supporting young people as they transition to adulthood.

GRLC will provide opportunities that are accessible and support participation of the entire community, including: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, people with a disability, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, remote and rural communities, and LGBTIQ+ communities.

BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT

Although young people have much to contribute to society, and are resilient, they are not always treated with respect. Young people can be stereotyped, dismissed and rejected. Some face multiple barriers and challenges that arise from systemic inequities, including marginalisation, discrimination, racism, educational setbacks, social and cultural isolation, unemployment, poverty, mental health issues, disability, addiction and homelessness.

There is also the potential for young people to become disengaged simply because of the overwhelming effects of issues beyond their control, such as climate change, environmental issues, job prospects, fear of the future, the cost of further education, or the after-effects of the global pandemic.

Mission Australia's *Annual Youth Survey 2020*⁷ identified the top three most important issues in Australia today as:

- Equity and discrimination
- COVID-19
- Mental health

These issues provide the Library with very clear 'markers' to improve its engagement with young people on issues that are important to them.



⁷ <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/what-we-do/research-impact-policy-advocacy/youth-survey>

STRATEGY 1



INVOLVE

GOAL

Strengthen relationships between the GRLC and young people through open communication and by creating opportunities for active participation.

Young people are experts in what matters to them. The GRLC will develop an understanding of the characteristics, needs and priorities of young people through respectful, authentic, open and honest communication. We will encourage young people's contribution to decision making to facilitate the long-term sustainability of positive youth participation.

OUR COMMITMENT

- Young people are everyone's customers. Support staff with expanded, flexible and meaningful professional development so they can best serve the needs of young people.
- Create opportunities to involve young people in planning processes, service development and facilitating youth-led initiatives.
- Create opportunities to involve young people in the development of library spaces to ensure that concerns and aspirations are understood and reflected.
- Place young people at the centre of library decision-making and create opportunities to involve young people in program planning.
- Encourage active collection development with a youth voice through direct consultation.
- Work with key stakeholders to increase reach and meaningful engagement with young people.
- Provide young people with targeted employment, work experience and traineeship opportunities within the Corporation.

STRATEGY 2



THRIVE

GOAL

Identify and address systemic barriers for youth in accessing opportunities, resources, services and participating in programming.

GRLC recognises that a number of factors can affect outcomes for young people. Limited access to safe spaces, housing, education, employment, mental health and civic participation can result in fewer opportunities. Young people experiencing vulnerability need improved access to learning opportunities and services to reach their potential. Their sense of place and connection to their local community can help them to foster resilience, personal identity and build social connections.

The ability to understand, communicate and transfer information in a knowledge-rich society is built upon the foundation skills of reading, writing and digital competence. Literacy is an essential life skill; it is fundamental to all learning and integral to economic, civil and social participation. Literacy today has broadened in scope, it is multimodal, tied to technology and culture, and young people need an increasing range of literacies to participate and communicate effectively.

OUR COMMITMENT

- Align the Youth Engagement Strategy with other relevant GRLC policies, plans and strategic documents.
- Identify and remove barriers to youth membership and library use.
- Ensure spaces meet the diverse needs of young people; they are welcoming, safe, inclusive and culturally safe.
- Identify and deliver services in spaces young people already inhabit and prioritise outreach to areas of disadvantage.
- Develop programs which address issues that are important to young people and engage young people experiencing disadvantage.
- Facilitate programs to support the development of transliteracy and 21st Century learning skills.
- Ensure collections represent and respond to the diverse interests and needs of young people.
- Provide access to new and emerging technologies that address systemic barriers and support the development of multiple literacies.

STRATEGY 3



BELONGING

GOAL

Support young people to develop a sense of social connectedness to community and peers.

GRLC understands that young people need a sense of belonging, to feel part of their community and to have opportunities to participate in programs and events that support them to develop relationships with others. GRLC is committed to promoting a relaxed, inclusive and stable environment where bonds are made, relationships built and friendships are born; where young people feel supported to find their place and pursue their passions and interests amongst peers.

OUR COMMITMENT

- Positive role modelling is embedded in staff professional practice.
- Facilitate collaborative spaces (both virtual and physical) that promote broader social interactions and create a sense of belonging.
- Celebrate the achievements of young people.
- Provide opportunities for young people to share their stories and experience.
- Enhance access to technologies that supports civic participation and the development of social connections.
- Provide access to new and emerging technologies that support skill development, the pursuit of personal interests and creative passions.

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




Colac Otway
SHIRE


GOLDEN PLAINS SHIRE


Surf COAST
SHIRE