

LIBRARY SERVICES FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES: A NEW ERA**Bulletin 1 – Friday 15 April 2016**

Goldfields Library Corporation is planning significant improvements to service delivery in the Loddon Shire and northern areas of the City of Greater Bendigo.

Planning is about to begin on the introduction of seven ‘bricks and mortar’ library agencies aimed at replacing and increasing the level of service provided by the mobile library truck service.

Under the new model, communities in the region will have access to more than 100 hours of library service per week, in comparison to the 15.5 hours currently provided by the mobile library. The new model is expected to be operational by early 2017.

The Pyramid Hill Neighbourhood House currently houses the Corporation’s only library agency, and provides an additional 24 hours of service per week to the region. It will continue to operate, with the seven new library agencies expected to have a similar structure as part of shared community spaces and hubs.

Previous surveying of mobile library customers indicated that, although the mobile library was valued, the service stopped for very short periods of time that did not suit many parts of the community and was not able to host programs.

The new approach to library services reflects the outcomes of this consultation process, and also addresses the low membership levels and usage statistics for Loddon Shire, where currently less than 10 percent of the population are active library members. The geography of the area is also considered in proposing multiple agencies across several townships in an environment where population is low and distances between townships are significant.

Under the new service model, customers will have more hours available to browse and loan from the library agency collections; collect and return loans and reservations. Some agencies will also present free programs, with a focus on children’s literacy and digital literacy for adults.

“The new model heralds significant improvements in the way rural areas will experience library services. Libraries have shifted from being solely about a collection of items for loan. They are now closely aligned with the values and activities of community hubs, providing places for people to meet, connect and participate in programs,” said Ms Chris Kelly, Goldfields Library Corporation CEO.

“Our survey results showed that people want more hours of library service in rural and remote locations. This new approach is aimed at enabling greater access to local libraries and community spaces for a larger number of people.”

Expressions of interest will soon be sought from local community organisations and groups to partner with the Library Corporation in operating the new library agencies. This will offer groups the opportunity to play a pivotal role in delivering a highly valued service to their communities.

“As part of our commitment to providing high quality accessible library services to the region we are working closely with member councils and the councils that purchase mobile library services to ensure a smooth transition,” Ms Kelly said.

The concept of library agencies has been successfully implemented in other parts of Australia and is particularly suited to rural and remote locations. The model is currently used in the shires of Campaspe and Gannawarra in Victoria. Agency locations for Loddon Shire include Boort, Dingee, Inglewood, Tarnagulla and Wedderburn, with Pyramid Hill remaining an existing agency. In the City of Greater Bendigo, agency locations include Axedale and Elmore.

The Corporation will publish regular progress updates to keep the community informed. These will be available via the library website, email and in printed format from selected locations throughout affected areas. For more information visit: www.ncgrl.vic.gov.au/rural

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Will there be job cuts?

No, the changes will not result in any job cuts for any of our staff.

Are the changes due to budget cuts?

No, the changes are not budget driven. The changes are focussed on providing a wider range of library services to a greater number of people in rural communities.

Will there be a reduction in services to rural communities?

No, there will be increased services to rural communities in the following form:

- The hours of service currently delivered by the mobile library are 15.5 hours per week, which averages approximately 1.5 hours per week per stop. Under the new model, we aim to have similar opening hours to the Pyramid Hill Neighbourhood House which is open 24 hours a week.
- Library agencies will have the capacity to offer spaces to deliver regular programs. There will be a focus on early childhood literacy programs (e.g. story time sessions) and adult digital literacy.
- We want to offer the community welcoming and inclusive spaces that enable people to work, connect, learn and relax. We will endeavour to make this a reality at as many of the new library agencies as possible.
- Members will still be able to place reservations and pick up and drop off loans. The longer hours will make this much more convenient.
- Customers will still have access to technology.

What size will the collections be in the library agencies? I like to browse the collection.

The collections physically located at each agency will depend on the space available. We are in the planning phase currently looking at what space and collection sizes are possible.

Collections will be regularly refreshed and will be comprised of items from the complete Goldfields Library Corporation collection of 300,000 items.

As is the current arrangement, items can be reserved online or in a library or library agency, and customers will be notified when they are ready to be picked up.

How often will reserves be delivered?

We are aiming for reserves to be delivered to agencies every week.

Has Goldfields Library Corporation consulted with the affected communities?

Yes. We held listening posts and conducted a survey in March 2015, asking rural communities for their feedback on the library services. The overwhelming response was that customers who used the mobile library liked the service but that other members found the short hours restrictive and would like more hours of service.

Where will the agencies be located and how was this decided?

Agency locations for the Loddon Shire will be Boort, Dingee, Inglewood, Tarnagulla and Wedderburn, with Pyramid Hill remaining an existing agency.

Agency locations in the City of Greater Bendigo will be Axedale and Elmore.

The locations of the agencies within the townships is yet to be confirmed, and will depend on the availability of suitable accommodation and the community groups that will partner with us to run them.

These locations were selected so that the agencies are at least 20km apart, to distribute the service to the widest area possible in our rural communities. We intentionally selected the larger population centres which are most frequented by community members.

Customers also have access to City of Greater Bendigo libraries located in the Bendigo CBD, Eaglehawk, Heathcote and Kangaroo Flat.

What will happen to the existing mobile library truck?

The existing mobile library truck will be sold.

Why has the decision been made?

The decision has been made to improve library services in rural and remote communities. Currently library membership in the Shire of Loddon is around 17% (with only 10% of the community using the collection in the last 12 months), which falls well below the state average of 47%. Clearly this indicates that the current model is not working. By taking steps to change to the new model, we can give more rural community members access to 'bricks and mortar' library services for more hours with more services.

Figures also indicate that a significant number of rural library members choose to borrow from libraries located in Bendigo. This indicates that the limited number of hours offered by the mobile library are inadequate, which the new model will address by offering significantly more hours of service.

The new model is also based on extensive research into best practice library service delivery in rural communities. This research indicated that there are several similar library agency models operating successfully in Victoria and that the mobile library model is declining in Victoria. Factors contributing include:

- Mobile library sites are being replaced by new or expanded static libraries
- Elimination of sites within static branch catchment areas and
- A general rationalisation of mobile library operations to improve effectiveness

[Read more background on the supporting research.](#)

Why don't you have all the answers?

We don't know all the details because we are still in a planning phase but we want to communicate early and often regarding what's proposed so that community are informed and engaged in the process.

How will the changes impact the existing library agency at Pyramid Hill?

The Pyramid Hill library agency will continue to operate as normal. This is an existing example which we have learned from and will continue to improve as part of the Rural Communities project.

Are there any towns who won't have a library agency? How will they access library services?

There will be some towns that do not have a library agency however the distribution of the agencies aims to cover a broad catchment and be open for more hours in key townships. For those that cannot access library services, we are working on a home library delivery service model across the region.

When can we have more details?

We will be working through the details through the remainder of 2016 to ensure the best outcomes for all involved. We will publish regular progress updates so you can be part of the journey.

These will be available via:

- The library website: www.ncgrl.vic.gov.au/rural
- Email – subscribe through the library website: www.ncgrl.vic.gov.au/rural
- In printed format from:
 - Goldfields Library Corporation Mobile Library
See www.ncgrl.vic.gov.au for library stops
 - Bendigo Library
259 Hargreaves St, Bendigo
 - Eaglehawk Library
1 Sailors Gully Rd, Eaglehawk
 - Heathcote Library
125 High St, Heathcote
 - Kangaroo Flat Library
267 High St, Kangaroo Flat
 - Pyramid Hill Neighbourhood House
22 Kelly St, Pyramid Hill
 - City of Greater Bendigo offices
195-229 Lyttleton Tce, Bendigo
 - City of Greater Bendigo offices
125 High St, Heathcote

- Loddon Shire Council offices
37-41 High St, Wedderburn
- Inglewood Neighbourhood House
33 Brooke St, Inglewood
- Boort Resource and Information Centre
119-121 Godfrey St, Boort

Who are potential partners?

We will soon be seeking expressions of interest from local community groups in the seven locations to partner with us to operate the library agencies. We will let people know when the expressions of interest process is open via this bulletin. We are open to ideas and proposals, and will work through a transparent process to engage with groups who can deliver the best outcomes for each individual community.

If you are part of a community group who might be interested we would like to hear from you! Please contact ncglib@ncgrl.vic.gov.au to register your interest.

Who can I contact for more information?

Enquiries can be directed to ncglib@ncgrl.vic.gov.au or phone 5449 2785.

Will the agencies be volunteer run? How will they be staffed?

We will partner with local community groups to operate each individual service. The existing Pyramid Hill library agency is overseen by a paid coordinator with support from community volunteers. The new agencies will probably work on a similar model, but this will be dependent on the community groups we engage with and other factors as the project develops.

How will the changes affect communities currently serviced by the mobile library in the Central Goldfields Shire and the Shire of Buloke?

We are working closely with member councils, the Central Goldfields Shire and the Shire of Buloke, to ensure a smooth transition of service.

What is the timeframe for the changes?

We anticipate that the mobile library will continue service as normal until Christmas 2016, and the new library agencies will begin service in January/February 2017 (note that the mobile library normally takes a break between Christmas and Australia Day).

Keeping communities informed

As we work through the process of planning and implementing the new library agencies, we will publish regular progress updates to keep communities informed and involved. Updates will be available on our website and via email. See www.ncgrl.vic.gov.au/rural to register your email address or read updates online.