

Libraries and Learning Cities

Exploring varying roles of engagement across the globe

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Introduction

'Libraries and Learning Cities' explores the varying and vital roles that libraries play in learning regions, cities, communities and towns; it also showcases the ways public libraries met the learning needs and interests of residents during the COVID-19 pandemic and are now futureproofing them for future crises through lifelong learning. It is written by learning-city practitioners for practitioners interested in learning about the varying roles of engagement between public libraries and learning cities; what's more, it shines a light on the libraries' contribution to promoting lifelong learning for all, especially during times of crisis. The terms *'learning communities'* and *'learning cities'* are used interchangeably throughout the paper.

Background

This paper is grounded in the pioneering work of Ron Faris and Adele Kenneally in the early 2000s as they can teach us about the emergence of learning communities around the world and the roles that libraries played, respectively. It should be noted upfront that there are limitations in basing a paper on the work of two individuals from 20 years ago¹; however, through this targeted approach we are able to develop a framework for understanding the different models of engagement between libraries and learning cities in 2022 and beyond. Looking back at the definitions and examples in Faris and Kenneally's work, it appears that libraries were seen to play one of four roles in learning communities (Figure 1):

- **Libraries as a 'Resource'**: A facility offering some expertise for lifelong learning in a learning community.
- **Libraries as a 'Contributor'**: An asset that actively contributes to a learning community by reporting its lifelong learning initiatives.
- **Libraries as a 'Partner'**: An actor in cross-sector initiatives under a learning community strategy with shared responsibilities for reporting to a governing body.
- **Libraries as a 'Leader'**: A leading role in the establishment and governance of learning city.

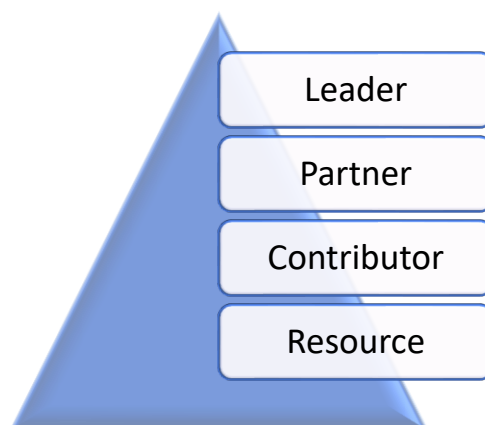


Figure 1 Hierarchy of roles that libraries play in learning cities

¹ Find out more about the emergence of learning cities in the 1990s and 2000s at the [PASCAL Observatory Learning Cities Network](#), [UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning](#) and [the Australian Learning Communities Network](#).

Libraries as learning resources in learning communities

Ron Faris is world-renowned for his work in the development of place-based learning communities in British Columbia Canada since 1998. In 2003, Faris published the article “*Learning Community by Community: Preparing for a Knowledge-based Society*” in which he offers a definition of a learning community based on research by UNESCO and the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). In this definition, libraries are identified as ‘*learning resources*’:

“...neighbourhoods, villages, towns, cities and regions in which the concept of lifelong learning is explicitly used as an organizing principle and social goal as the **learning resources** of every one of the five sectors of the community – civic, economic (private-cooperative enterprise), public (e.g., **libraries**, museums, health and social agencies), education, and voluntary – are mobilized to foster environmentally sustainable economic development and social inclusion.”²

In 2004, Faris expanded on this concept where libraries are recognised for their ‘*resources and expertise*’ in an asset-based approach to building community capacity through lifelong learning concepts³. Through these concepts, Faris continues to provide us with a baseline for libraries in a learning community: libraries are an important *resource* in a learning community.

Libraries as contributors to learning communities

In Faris’ 2008 paper *What are Learning Communities?*⁴ he highlights the key role that two unique libraries played in the establishment of learning communities in Australia and Canada.

The first example is Hume Learning City in Australia. In the year 2000, the State Government of Victoria launched a state funded ‘Learning Towns’ strategy through the Adult Community and Further Education Division of the Department of Education.⁵ Hume City, a rapidly growing community located on the rural fringe of Melbourne, was chosen to participate. The Hume Global Learning Village (HGLV) was established in 2003 by Hume City Council to increase learning opportunities and encourage lifelong learning in Hume through the development of a shared learning strategy. From this, funding and key partnerships were secured to establish the [Hume Global Learning Centre](#) (HGLC), in Broadmeadows, a highly diverse community with significantly lower levels of educational attainment compared to metropolitan Melbourne.⁶ The HGLC was the first public library in Broadmeadows and its establishment increased the membership and circulation of Hume’s public library system by 50% within the first two years

² Thomas, A & Faris, R 2003, “Education and Training Float on a Sea of Learning” *Learning Community by Community: Preparing for a Knowledge-based Society*, Education Canada vol. 43, no. 1, viewed 14 October 2022, <https://www.edcan.ca/wp-content/uploads/EdCan-2003-v43-n1-Faris.pdf>

³ *Lifelong Learning, Social Capital and Place Management in Learning Communities and Regions: a Rubic’s Cube or a Kaleidoscope?* | PASCAL International Observatory n.d., pascalobservatory.org, viewed 14 October 2022, <http://pascalobservatory.org/content/lifelong-learning-social-capital-and-place-management-learning-communities-and-regions-rubic>

⁴ *focus on Knowledge & Learning n.d.*, viewed 14 October 2022, http://lcn.pascalobservatory.org/sites/default/files/knowledge_learning_0.pdf

⁵ Martin, J 2004, “Learning Towns” and Local Government: Kindred Spirits or Conspirators in State-Sponsored Community Development’, *Australasian Journal of Regional Studies*, vol. 10, no. 3, viewed 14 October 2022, <https://www.anzrsai.org/assets/Uploads/PublicationChapter/228-Martin.pdf>

⁶ Wheeler, L & Manager, G n.d., *30 Hume global learning village: a creative learning community*, viewed 14 October 2022, <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2011-12/apo-nid27412.pdf>

of operation for the HGLV.⁷ Faris uses this outcome as a measure of success for Hume as an emerging learning community, demonstrating the key role that libraries play as a resource and asset in a learning city. In this instance, we see the library taking the role as a *contributor* as evaluation data from the library was used as a measurement of success in the establishment of the HGLV under the 'Learning Towns' strategy.

Libraries as partners in learning communities

Faris uses a second example to illustrate the role of a library in a learning community in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. According to Faris, the Greater Victoria Public Library was one of five partners in the South Island Learning Community (SILC) literacy project that targeted 'First Nation' people, established by Literacy Victoria, the Songhees Band, and Camosun College. Each partner had a role to play in the project:

- corporate partners collaborated on a workplace literacy initiative.
- Victoria City Council established a Youth Advisory Council and sponsored an annual Lifelong Learning festival; and
- Victoria Public Library appointed a Literacy Coordinator and established a literacy collection; the library also supported SILC literacy learners, including 'street people', who created their own 'e-portfolios' and individual learning plans.⁸

This example highlights the important role public libraries can play in meeting the diverse needs of a community through an agile workforce and strategic relationships. In doing so, Victoria Public Library proved itself as an important *partner* in this learning community in promoting access and inclusion for First Nations people.

Libraries as leaders in learning communities

Adele Kenneally's 2003 research paper '*Public Libraries in Learning Communities*' is extremely valuable in unpacking the varied roles that libraries play in learning communities. This project, funded by The Library Board of Victoria, Australia and supported by The Glenelg Regional Library Corporation, involved a 2003 study tour of Canada and the UK to explore the different approaches and models in various successful learning communities and the roles undertaken by participating public libraries. Most models see libraries as actors or resources in learning communities; however, one example stands out as a library playing a more strategic role in the establishment of a learning community.

In Whistler, British Columbia (Canada), the Director of the Whistler Public Library was one of the twelve representatives on the Steering Committee of the Whistler-Mt Currie Learning Community Partnership (WMCLCP). This group comprised representatives from all five sectors of the community - civic, economic, public, education, and voluntary/community – and was led by the Resort Municipality of Whistler and the Whistler Chamber of Commerce. The WMCLCP Steering Committee was established to develop a pilot proposal over a 12-month period, and each representative consulted the organisations and individuals in their respective

⁷ *focus on Knowledge & Learning* n.d., viewed 14 October 2022, http://lcn.pascalobservatory.org/sites/default/files/knowledge_learning_0.pdf

⁸ *focus on Knowledge & Learning* n.d., viewed 14 October 2022, http://lcn.pascalobservatory.org/sites/default/files/knowledge_learning_0.pdf

sector to ensure that the proposal was community-driven. In this example, we see libraries take on a more strategic, leadership role in the development of a learning community strategy.

Reflecting on a study tour of 11 learning communities across Canada, Kenneally's concluded, "*Sometimes public libraries are involved in the partnerships and are 'sitting at the table', but mostly they are not*"⁹, and offered four possible reasons to explain this observation:

1. *The location of the library within the council structure: libraries situated in the Education Department, or that have community learning integrated into their areas, are more likely to be partners in the strategy and have access to the funds and programs.*
2. *The size of the community: in smaller communities there is less bureaucracy and libraries tend to have a larger profile.*
3. *The overall vision of the local government authority: the ability of library management to align the library with the vision of the council and to promote the library as the vehicle to assist the council to achieve it.*
4. *The networking skills and abilities of the senior library staff: this includes the profile of the library both within the broader community and the local government authority.*

Faris and Kenneally have laid the foundation for exploring the varying roles that libraries can play in learning towns, communities, regions and cities; libraries can play the role of a resource, a contributor, a partner or a leader in a learning city. Let us fast forward and examine the varying roles that libraries play in learning cities and communities in Australia, New Zealand and Finland in 2022 through five current case studies.

Case study 1 – Wyndham Libraries & Community Learning

The Wyndham Libraries and Community Learning Unit sits within Wyndham City Council's City Life Directorate, one of five council departments. Wyndham, located in southwest metropolitan Melbourne, Australia, is one of the fastest and most diverse Councils in both Victoria, and Australia. This is reflected not only in the people who inhabit Wyndham for work, education, transit, or play, but in the landscape which incorporates coastal, city and rural components.

The library is a key partner and driver in the cross-sector initiatives occurring under the [Learning Community Strategy](#). The Libraries and Learning Unit is led by a manager with strong leadership, library operations, and learning community skills and passion. This manager is supported by several coordinators including the Coordinator Learning Community, Coordinator Collections, various library Branch Coordinators, Coordinator Library Operations and the Coordinator Library Programs. The manager and coordinators form the Senior Library Leadership team, working together to achieve the goals of both the Wyndham Library Service Strategy 2018-2040¹⁰ and the Wyndham Learning Community Strategy 2018-2023¹¹.

⁹ Kenneally, A. 2004, Public Libraries in Learning Communities, *APLIS*, Vol.17 Issue 3 p104-112

¹⁰ Wyndham City Council 2018, Wyndham Library Service Strategy 2018-2040, retrieved January 2022 from: <https://www.wyndham.vic.gov.au/libraryservicestrategy> .

¹¹ Wyndham City Council 2018, Wyndham Learning Community Strategy 2018-2023, retrieved January 2022 from: <https://www.wyndham.vic.gov.au/learning-community-strategy-2018-2023>

Wyndham is an accredited member of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities, joining the network in 2019, and awarded with a Learning City Award in 2021. The current learning strategy is Wyndham's third iteration of a learning strategy, showing the Council's commitment to lifelong learning. Evaluation of the current learning strategy will commence in late 2022, leading to the development of the next learning strategy in 2023. Through the placement of the learning community team within Wyndham's Libraries and Learning unit, lifelong learning is naturally embedded into library programs such as Storytime and reflects the important work that libraries do in promoting lifelong learning in the community.

In order to strive for excellent social, health and economic outcomes, Wyndham City Council is committed to building and maintaining a lifelong and life-wide learning culture which is dynamic, diverse and accessible to residents across all life stages.

Meeting the learning needs of the community during the pandemic

Several initiatives arose from the learning community unit during the pandemic contributing to ongoing learning during lockdowns and the strengthening of the community's resilience.

The [Global Learning Festival](#), co-hosted by Wyndham City Council and Melton City Council (both in Victoria, Australia), was delivered for the first time in September 2020 as a response to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the areas of learning and community connection around the world. Many cities around the world experience the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic which significantly affected the way we live, work, socialise and learn.

Creating and delivering the 2020 and subsequent Global Learning Festivals gave many people around the world an opportunity to continue learning and collaborating but also fostered a sense of comradery by building a network of global learners as we all navigated uncertain times within our communities and lives.

The inaugural [LearnWest](#) Learning for Earning Festival was held in May 2021 and was organised by The Learn West Network, comprising representatives from Wyndham City Council and 5 other neighbouring local government areas in the western and inner-northern suburbs of Melbourne. The members of the LearnWest network are united in the belief that lifelong learning drives growth in communities' economic, civic and social capacity in the Western Metropolitan Region.

The festival was developed in response to the similar challenges faced by these communities in the face of the pandemic. By pooling resources, networks and contacts, the Network were able to maximise outcomes for their respective communities.

As a result of the pandemic, the communities in the West had lost jobs, and confidence; mental health issues were increasing; and the low levels of community well-being were indicating that our communities were facing huge challenges.

The 2021 Learning for Earning Festival featured 30 free practical and inspirational virtual workshops over the three days, to help upskill and motivate community members and offer the opportunity to explore different pathways for learning. The LearnWest festival focused on six key themes: Learning; Skills; Career Planning and Pathways; Employment; Industry; and Business and Entrepreneurship.

The festival was designed to provide participants with the knowledge and skills they need to upskill and look at different pathways to employment and to gain knowledge about starting or

changing careers, learning about leading and emerging industries and discover opportunities for the future.

Being online, the festival ensures access to a greater number of community members.

The Network modified the format of the 2022 Learning for Earning Festival in response to the changing economic and social climate over the subsequent year of the pandemic, targeting current issues facing the communities in the West. A more streamlined and curated program was offered featuring three online forums scaffolded by a series of live events held in each Council's library featuring mock interview workshops; resume help; an introduction to online job searching; and social media workshops. All events were free.

Wyndham Libraries modified their offering of digital resources in response to the pandemic. It was recognised that digital inclusion is critical to maximising and sharing the benefits of the digital revolution. Wyndham libraries offer free public wi-fi, and a range of digital programs, training, resources, and online-safety courses to ensure everyone in the community can participate and benefit.

Popular pre-covid digital literacy workshops (that had offered community members a tailored opportunity for device help and helped many technology-newcomers to get connected) were switched to a phone help service at the start of the pandemic to assist people to get online. Many "How To" instructional videos on getting connected to the internet, your digital device and library e-resources are offered on the library YouTube channel. Importantly the support to be digitally connected and literate has continued throughout and post lockdowns, to support access and equity.

Ever popular story times were flipped online during lockdowns. Wyndham libraries provided a large offering of digital content like ebooks, Borrow Box, and more recently free digital streaming service Hoopla! and also Kanopy for documentaries with social and cultural value and a range of foreign language films.

Another service offered through Wyndham libraries is Studiosity - access to "live" expert assistance with subjects like writing, maths, science, economics and more.

Weekly Code Club sessions delivered by the library aim to provide young people with an opportunity to learn the basics of coding in a supportive and collaborative online environment amongst peers.

Coding Champs, a competition delivered by the library is aimed at providing an opportunity for children to design a game, or animation. The competition features workshops in both coding introduction, and animation and media design. These structured workshops and competition provide a fun and engaging way for children to learn about coding, animation, as well as game design.

Wyndham Libraries also offer weekly language cafes providing the opportunity to participants to practise their English skills, meet new people, and learn from others. They are also a great way for the newly arrived to connect with the community and a chance to make new friends. These were offered online during lockdowns.

The Library Home Delivery service ensured residents were able to get what they needed delivered to their homes in a contactless way. Hundreds of orders were placed and met

weekly. The feedback gathered was overwhelmingly positive, with the Libraries in Wyndham Facebook page being flooded with comments thanking staff.

Online programming also continued during lockdowns, filling the void left by in-person programs being cancelled. The numbers for Online Story Time and Online Rhyme Time indicated that members of the public embraced this content, with feedback being overwhelmingly positive.

Other library programs, including Language Café, Family History Chat, Youth Resume Writing Help, Read with Me, and more, continued in a virtual setting online. Importantly, some offerings of programs continue in the online format, in response to a new appetite in the community for this format.

Future-proofing the Wyndham community for future challenges

Each iteration of the [Global Learning Festival](#) continues to build on the opportunity to promote lifelong learning to our respective learning communities and those across the globe. We know that lifelong learning contributes to improved health and wellbeing, economic and cultural prosperity, as well as making communities more adaptable and resilient.

The ongoing, local annual celebration of lifelong learning, the [Wyndham Learning Festival](#), was moved online during the two years of lockdowns, and returned to a hybrid celebration in 2022 offering in-person and online learning events.

With the theme of “*Building a Resilient, Sustainable Wyndham*” in 2022, the free festival offered something for all ages and interests from **1-7 September** and celebrated and encouraged lifelong learning with over 70 activities from across the Arts, S.T.E.M, Environment and Sustainability to Health & Wellbeing, Families and Children and more! Events were as varied as a Young Scientist of Wyndham Competition; Thai Cooking; a Photography Workshop; Recycling; a Multicultural Sports Expo; Lawn Bowls; Building Resilience in Children; Gardening; Sustainability; a Farm tour and a Werribee River walk. Wyndham Library contributed to this event with an author talk with Morris Gleitzman.

Further Information: copies of reports, stories and projects can be accessed here:

<https://www.wyndham.vic.gov.au/services/wyndham-learning-city/learning-city-resources>

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Case study 2 – Dunedin Public Libraries, City of Literature

Dunedin is a city of approximately 130,000 people in the lower South Island of New Zealand. It is home to the University of Otago, New Zealand’s oldest university and the Otago Polytechnic as well as being a member of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (City of Literature) since 2014.

There is active collaboration between the Dunedin City Council, the University of Otago and the Otago Polytechnic through the Tertiary Sector Steering Group and the Tertiary Sector Planning Group to develop a Tertiary Sector Development Plan. The overall mission for the development plan, as outlined by the Tertiary Sector Steering Group, is: “...to contribute to the creation of a quality, sustainable campus environment and a vibrant tertiary precinct, ensuring Dunedin’s place as the Education Capital of New Zealand.” Find out more about the role of the education sector in Dunedin [here](#).

The role of the library in the city

Dunedin Public Libraries offers the Dunedin community a broad range of library services, facilities, and programs across six physical libraries, two mobile libraries, a home library service and digital library through its [website](#). Dunedin Public Libraries was also a driving force for the designation of Dunedin as a UNESCO Creative City of Literature.

Dunedin became New Zealand’s first UNESCO Creative City when it was awarded ‘City of Literature’ status in 2014. The [UNESCO Creative Cities Network](#) (UCCN) is designed to develop international co-operation among cities and encourages partnerships that deliver on UNESCO’s global priorities of culture and development, and sustainable development. The seven different UNESCO Creative City Network themes are folk art, gastronomy, media arts, design, film, music and literature.

The vision to establish Dunedin as a UNESCO Creative City was borne from collaboration between staff at the Dunedin Public Libraries and elected representatives of the Dunedin City Council, staff at University of Otago and representatives of the literary community in Dunedin, with informal community consultation with over one hundred literary stakeholders through a collaboration group who are still connected with the initiative via a mailing list.

Following Dunedin’s designation as a UNESCO City of Literature, the Dunedin City Council has appointed a 1.6 FTE role to maintain and manage its City of Literature status. Organisationally, these roles sit within Dunedin Public Libraries structure and liaise with stakeholders and representatives at a local, national and international level.

Libraries and Lifelong Learning

Dunedin Public Libraries takes an active role in supporting lifelong learning in the community through innovative programmes, resources, and facilities, like many libraries in Australia. More specifically, Dunedin Public Libraries works in partnership with a broad range of national, regional, and local community and government organisations to support its lifelong learning programmes and initiatives.

One partnership is with the Digital Inclusion Alliance Aotearoa (DIAA) through the Stepping Up programme. It provides the Dunedin community with free access to over 30 short training courses developed to improve digital skills and ranging from computer basics to social media, photo editing, smartphone features, Facebook, and home finances. The DIAA partnership also includes home broadband connectivity through a free modem and subsidized, pre-paid Wi-Fi. Free public access to the internet, printing and scanning through the Aotearoa Peoples Network Kaharoa has been valued by the community.

Another partnership brings together the Dunedin City Council, Methodist Mission Southern, the Ministry of Education Otago/Southland Regional Directorate and the National Library of New Zealand, as well as Te Rūnanga o Ōtākou and Kāti Huirapa Rūnaka ki Puketeraki. The

partners collaboratively developed a series of strategies focused around delivering >10,000 children's books in English, Te Reo and community languages which have been freely given to children and their families through community events, early childhood education centres and community spaces, including the Dunedin Public Libraries. The programme has been branded as *Read Share Grow | Te Mana o te Kupu* and supported with a range of marketing collateral.¹²

In summary, Dunedin City Libraries promotes lifelong learning in the community through a broad range of services and programs; however, it enhances its efforts through partnerships including with libraries. Partnerships are crucial for public libraries to extend their community engagement and achieve outcomes that would not have been possible alone. Dunedin is not a member of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities; however, it has many of the attributes outlined in the [UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities Guiding Documents](#). It has established governance for and a strategic approach to managing education in the city and it works in partnership with organisations to build social capital.

Meeting the learning needs of the community during the pandemic

During the pandemic, Dunedin City Libraries' staff met the learning needs of the community and:

- Assisted customers with downloading their Vaccine Passes to their digital devices and/or printing.
- Created an online tutorial for staff and customers on how to download their Vaccine Pass.
 - <https://my.nicheacademy.com/dunedinpubliclibraries/course/40000>
- Established a Click & Collect service at all libraries for members of the community who did not have a vaccine or preferred a contactless service
 - <https://www.dunedinlibraries.govt.nz/services/click-collect>

Future-proofing the community for future challenges through lifelong learning

Dunedin City Libraires is future-proofing the community for future challenges and:

- Increased purchases of eBooks & eAudiobooks to respond to increased demand for eContent, particularly while libraries were closed or had restricted access during varying alert levels and COVID-19 Protection Framework settings.
 - <https://dunedin.borrowbox.com/>
 - <https://dunedinlibraries.wheelers.co/>
 - <https://lote4kids-com.ezdunedin.kotui.org.nz/member-home/>
 - <https://storyboxlibrary.com.au/login>
 - <https://www.pressreader.com/catalog>
 - <https://www.romancebookcloud.com/Home.aspx>
- Commenced a subscription to the *Beamafilm* online video streaming service

¹² 2022, Govt.nz, viewed 14 October 2022, <https://natlib.govt.nz/about-us/collaborative-projects/communities-of-readers/south-dunedin-communities-of-readers-project>

- <https://beamafilm.com/instructions/dunedin>

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Case study 3 – Brimbank Libraries and Learning

The City of Brimbank is in the western and north-western suburbs of Melbourne. The Brimbank community have set an ambitious Community Vision that they hope to achieve by 2040. The Community Vision 2040 captures the priorities and aspirations for the community:

By 2040, the Brimbank community will be healthy and safe, and we will be united through a sense of belonging and pride. Our City will be inclusive, resilient, innovative and vibrant and our people will share equally in the City's prosperity and opportunity. The environment and heritage will be protected and enhanced and Brimbank's diverse neighbourhoods and housing will offer something for everyone.

Libraries and Lifelong Learning

'Creating a community of lifelong learners' is a key strategic direction for Community Wellbeing in the *Brimbank Community Plan 2009-2030*. Learning is a driver for change and is recognised as a means of addressing disadvantage, including through library initiatives.

The responsibility of implementing the *Brimbank Lifelong Learning Strategy 2018-2023* sits with the Library Unit of Community Learning and Participation (CL&P), which in turn sits in the Community Wellbeing Directorate of Brimbank City Council. CL&P currently has three units – Arts & Culture, Libraries, and Neighbourhood Houses, with learning the common thread across the units. This structure has changed over the years, beginning with Libraries becoming *Libraries and Learning* when the strategy was first adopted, with two part time staff employed to build the profile of Brimbank as a learning community, and establish relationships and partnerships to support the development and implementation of the strategy.

When the Learning team grew to eight staff, incorporating the *Brimbank Youth Jobs Strategy* and the development of Brimbank Learning Futures, it became a separate unit. It has since been realigned once again, and currently, whilst there is no 'Learning' unit, the work continues across the department. As a result of the realignment the implementation of the Youth Jobs Strategy and management of Brimbank Learning Futures sits within the Neighborhood House Unit. The Learning strategy is implemented by the Learning and Partnerships Coordinator and Learning Officer, who are based within the Libraries Unit and work across council and the community

Brimbank City Council developed its first Community Learning Strategy 2010 in recognition of the importance of learning: *Brimbank Community Learning Strategy 2010-2013*, and in response to a high percentage of children in Brimbank being developmentally vulnerable on several domains of the Australian Early Development Index, as well as low completion of school and further studies, and high unemployment. The Learning Strategy was developed to address this through a partnership model, with the first iteration being supported by the Brimbank Learning and Employment Steering Committee (BLESC), which ended in 2016. This

consisted of an external chair, Brimbank Council Secretariat and 12-16 members from various organisations who met quarterly to advocate for learning. This was a labour-intensive model that was not effective due to various demands on professionals involved. The model then tried to transition to a community of practice for all life stages model, and this was also a resourcing challenge internally and externally.

The second Community Learning Strategy 2014-2017 built on the achievements of the first. Evaluations were conducted on each Strategy and feedback incorporated into new editions. The third Brimbank Lifelong Learning Strategy has developed from the experiences of the previous strategies and identifies specific priorities and outlines a framework for future work. The *Brimbank Lifelong Learning Strategy* supports learning in all life stages and is a long-term approach for Council and its partners to improve the social and economic outcomes of individuals and the community. A rights-based framework underpins this Strategy to ensure appropriate and high-quality education, training and learning resources are available to all in Brimbank. These learning resources are particularly important to those who face barriers in engaging with learning. The third Brimbank Lifelong Learning Strategy aligns with priorities identified in the Brimbank Council Plan (2017- 2021) and Community Vision 2040: “*People are able to access quality education and lifelong learning opportunities*” as part of Strategic Direction 3: a Prosperous Community.

An example of a learning city initiative

Brimbank Learning Futures, located in the heart of the west, is a place where young people and others in the community can get information and services to help with education, training and employment. This is in response to high unemployment rates in the region, especially for young people. The community can drop in 9am-5pm Monday to Friday and speak to staff about their training, education and employment needs.

The services offered at Brimbank Learning Futures include pathways counselling advice, development of community program and partnerships and access to a team of staff to help support understanding across other cultures. The dedicated Brimbank Learning Futures webpage has further detail on programming¹³. They also offer a variety of spaces available for hire at low rates for the community. The spaces are used for meetings, training sessions, social groups or small events and include a multi-purpose seminar room/auditorium, formal and informal learning spaces, an IT suite with 8 computers and a flexible open learning space.

The role of the library in the learning community

Eleven years since the first strategy was launched, learning is widely embedded across council and there is a shift in how people consider their work and how learning is an important consideration. The role of the library in this learning city is of leader. Much of the work across council feeds into the Learning strategy. Through different iterations, the strategy has landed in the library portfolio, where it is not only a natural fit, but a sustainable one. Previous models were reliant on Local Priorities funding and the position of Learning Coordinator was a contract position. Absorbing it into the Libraries Unit secures its longevity and is supported through the work of library planning teams, as well as council wide – benefits have been more intentional programming for events and activities, with proposals linked to the strategy. Library staff

¹³ RossM_241 2019, *Brimbank Learning Futures*, www.brimbank.vic.gov.au, viewed 14 October 2022, <https://www.brimbank.vic.gov.au/map/brimbank-learning-futures>

benefit from the work of the Learning staff and in turn, being part of the libraries team helps to be heard and to share learning intentions and objectives for the benefit of the community.

Meeting the learning needs of the community during the pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Brimbank City Libraries met the learning interests and needs of the community and:

- Published lifelong learning videos for people on [Brimbank Libraries - YouTube](#):
 - [Baby Bounce](#)
 - [Kids Zone](#)
 - [Fun for Young People](#)
 - [Young People: Work, Study and Life Skills](#)
 - [Adult Literacy and Learning](#)
 - [Book Reviews](#)
 - [Author Talks](#)
- Offered a 'Library to Your Door' service delivering books, DVDs and audio items to people's homes while maintaining social distancing practices.

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Case study 4 – Espoo Libraries in a UNESCO Learning City

The City of Espoo, located in the capital area of Finland, is a fast-growing city with over 290 000 inhabitants. Espoo has an incomparable urban structure of five city centers, boasting good levels in health and well-being and other favorable socio-economic characteristics. Nevertheless, the second largest city in Finland has challenges of poverty, loneliness, socio-economic differences, and integration of immigrants and asylum seekers. There is a high level of diversity with 47 000 (16%) speakers of foreign languages in Espoo.

Espoo is an accredited UNESCO learning city. The [learning city vision](#) in Espoo is to create a positive place to live, learn, work, and do business in; where its citizens can fulfill their potential and participate in developing their community. Espoo Learning City Strategy is integrated into the city strategy, the Espoo Story, which is led by Espoo City Council.

The Espoo Learning City Advisory Board governs Espoo's learning city strategy. It is made up of the Chair of the City Board, leading City Officials, learning partners from universities, and vocational schools and business sector representatives. The Advisory Board identifies and advises on joint learning city issues. Espoo City Library is not directly involved with Advisory Board; however, selected library activities have been reported to UNESCO, contributing to the learning city strategy.

The role of the library in the city

The libraries in Espoo are much-loved by residents – in citizen surveys, the library services are well known, appreciated and used, and always score high points. The city has a larger library in four of the city centers, the fifth opening in 2022, and smaller libraries around the city.

Many Espoo libraries are in major shopping centres and serve as meeting places in addition to their usual functions. Jukebox is a space for young people to relax, watch performances and create their own programme for the Jukebox Open Stage. The space is well-equipped and can be booked through library staff, who also organize dance evenings and music sessions for young people. Jukebox has about 5,000 visitors a month, some of whom are immigrant and underprivileged children.

[Otaniemi Library](#) is one of Espoo's smaller public libraries located in a secondary school. The co-designing process of Otaniemi Library was both successful and unique and is here presented as our learning city initiative.

Learning city initiative: Co-designing Otaniemi Library

Otaniemi Library opened its doors in August 2019 but there were no books or computers, only some pre-loved tables and chair and sofas. Upper secondary and university students from nearby campuses were invited to use the space, make suggestions, and discuss how they'd like to see and use the library in future, leading to a unique opportunity to co-design the library in situ with young people.

From September to October, a study project, Co-designing Otaniemi Library, service design for interior architects, was realized by Aalto University ARTS, Department of Architecture, in collaboration with Espoo City Library and Otaniemi Upper Secondary School. Master's students from Interior Architecture MA participated and Otaniemen lukio students were invited to join, too.

Spatial and service concepts were developed relating to three themes: reading, gaming and resource suggestion. Resourceful, imaginative, inviting, and participatory methods were used by the students following a collaborative design process. Observing all this was a great learning experience for the librarians involved.

The actual books and the library system arrived, with cheers, in September. The Helmet Library had a new site to pick up reserved materials, and this was immediately noticed by both the students and other nearby users.

Late October, the Aalto University study project was finished. The initial wishes for an inviting, cozy, café-like, lively, functional library, that welcomes all ages and provides places to both study and rest, concentrate, and collaborate, meet and hide, had shaped into a concrete plan. Some new, some repurposed furniture was ordered, and the beginning of 2020 saw a complete Otaniemi Library.

Meanwhile, in the library, all activities that were wished for by young people, were put to action without delay. The gaming club OWL had its first Friday night meeting in the library already in the first school week of August 2019, inviting both old and new members. Library dogs were invited and started visiting the campus during the first big examination days in September, providing relaxation, fighting loneliness, and promoting new friendships, both canine – human and human – human. Students were involved in introducing exciting books for school groups from nearby primary schools. Weekly meetings for peer to peer help with mathematics and natural sciences was established in January 2020.

In summary, our organic, in-situ, co-designing process worked. "*This place is just perfect*" and "*Oh that too is organized by the library – wow*" are phrases quite often heard in Otaniemi. There are two key takeaways from this initiative worth noting.

Firstly, young people's suggestion to use redesigned furniture to establish a unique, café-like atmosphere was a success and has later been taken in larger scale use in the next new library in Espoo. The repurposed furniture and details bring smiles and a sense of uniqueness to the library space. The challenge of tackling the requirements, that use in public space dictate for furniture in Finland, was time well spent.

Secondly, the importance of reporting the process was one of the lessons learned. Despite good intentions, a proper work diary or weekly reports were not maintained. There are a lot of stories to be told – mornings spent discussing both library dog life, good reading habits and perfect places for study – but there is no record of the process to share with others. The libraries were a key partner in this learning city initiative.

Meeting the learning needs of the community during the pandemic

During the pandemic, Espoo City Library, together with the network of metropolitan area libraries, offered:

- vast multilingual eLibrary services and underwent negotiations to expand the [eLibrary](#) collections; digital events were arranged at local libraries.¹⁴
- an online reservation service which was well-utilised by Helmet Library customers¹⁵
- COVID-19 vaccinations at Sello Library¹⁶
- Digital support online¹⁷
- Information about changes to library services as well as up-to-date information on COVID-19 via social media

https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?id=1475991119358754&story_fbid=2384200911871099

Future-proofing the community for future challenges through lifelong learning

Espoo libraries are futureproofing residents by offering digital support in four languages – Finnish, English, Russian and Swedish – helping people of all ages with¹⁸:

- basics of working with a computer and mobile devices
- installation and updating of computer programs and mobile applications
- information retrieval

¹⁴ *An overview of measures taken in Espoo to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic* | UBC.net n.d., www.ubc.net, viewed 14 October 2022, <https://www.ubc.net/content/overview-measures-taken-espoo-tackle-covid-19-pandemic>

¹⁵ *Libraries are ready for restrictions to be lifted* n.d., Helsingin kaupunki, viewed 14 October 2022, <https://www.hel.fi/uutiset/en/kulttuurin-ja-vapaa-ajan-toimiala/libraries-are-ready-for-restrictions-to-be-lifted>

¹⁶ *Covid-19 vaccines available again at the Otaniemi campus in September* | Aalto University n.d., www.aalto.fi, viewed 14 October 2022, <https://www.aalto.fi/en/news/covid-19-vaccines-available-again-at-the-otaniemi-campus-in-september>

¹⁷ www.helmet.fi. (n.d.). *Digital support* | Helmet. [online], viewed 14 October 2022, [https://www.helmet.fi/en-US/Libraries_and_services/Russian_Library/Whats_going_on/Digital_support\(220830\)](https://www.helmet.fi/en-US/Libraries_and_services/Russian_Library/Whats_going_on/Digital_support(220830))

¹⁸ www.helmet.fi. (n.d.). *Digital support* | Helmet. [online], viewed 14 October 2022, [https://www.helmet.fi/en-US/Libraries_and_services/Russian_Library/Whats_going_on/Digital_support\(220830\)](https://www.helmet.fi/en-US/Libraries_and_services/Russian_Library/Whats_going_on/Digital_support(220830))

- Internet, email, and social media
- editing and saving digital images
- e-books and other digital materials
- library's online services
- various other online services

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Case study 5 – Wollongong City Libraries' Learning City Project

The City of Wollongong is a Local Government Area (LGA) about 80km south of Sydney, Australia. Wollongong was originally inhabited by the Dharawal people and today is home to nearly a quarter of a million people. 20% of the population were born overseas in countries like the UK, China, Italy and New Zealand and 78% of the population only speaking English at home¹⁹.

The role of the library in the city

Wollongong City Libraries (WCL) play a core role in delivering on Wollongong City Council's (WCC) commitment to creating a learning community that is informed, engaged, creative and connected. The [WCL Strategy 2017-2022](#) sets out a clear vision to inspire reading, lifelong learning, creativity and inclusion in the community, with deliverables including "...develop and deliver training and educational programs to meet diverse community needs" (p.15); for example: 'Wriggle and Jiggle' supports literacy development for [preschoolers](#), '[Studiosity](#)' is a free online tutoring service for students, and '[Tech Savvy Seniors](#)' offers programs and resources for older people to learn how to use computers, tablets and mobile phones. WCL is taking its commitment to lifelong learning to the next level by driving a Council-wide, city-wide project to establish Wollongong as a UNESCO learning city by 2024.

Initial investigation has revealed that lifelong learning already plays a central role in achieving many goals in the Community Strategic Plan. A broad range of lifelong learning resources, programs, events and activities are on offer through the [Art Gallery](#), [leisure centres](#), [Botanic Garden](#), [community centres and halls](#), [Organisational Development](#), [Sustainable Living](#) webpages and [Youth Services](#).

The role of the library in building a learning city

Currently, Wollongong's Learning City Project is adopting a [Collective Impact Approach](#) (CIA), bringing together lifelong learning stakeholders to accomplish a population-wide outcome through lifelong learning. WCL takes on the CIA role of the '*backbone*', driving the development and execution of a shared learning agenda, mutually beneficial learning activities and continuous communication on how Wollongong can strategically lead as a learning city.

¹⁹ *Our Wollongong Our Future 2022*, Wollongong City Council, viewed 14 October 2022, <https://www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/your-council/plans-and-reports/csp>

A specialist 1.0FTE role, Project Leader Learning City, was appointed in March 2021 to take carriage of the project. This role was filled by an experienced educator with strong project management skills but no public library qualifications or experience.

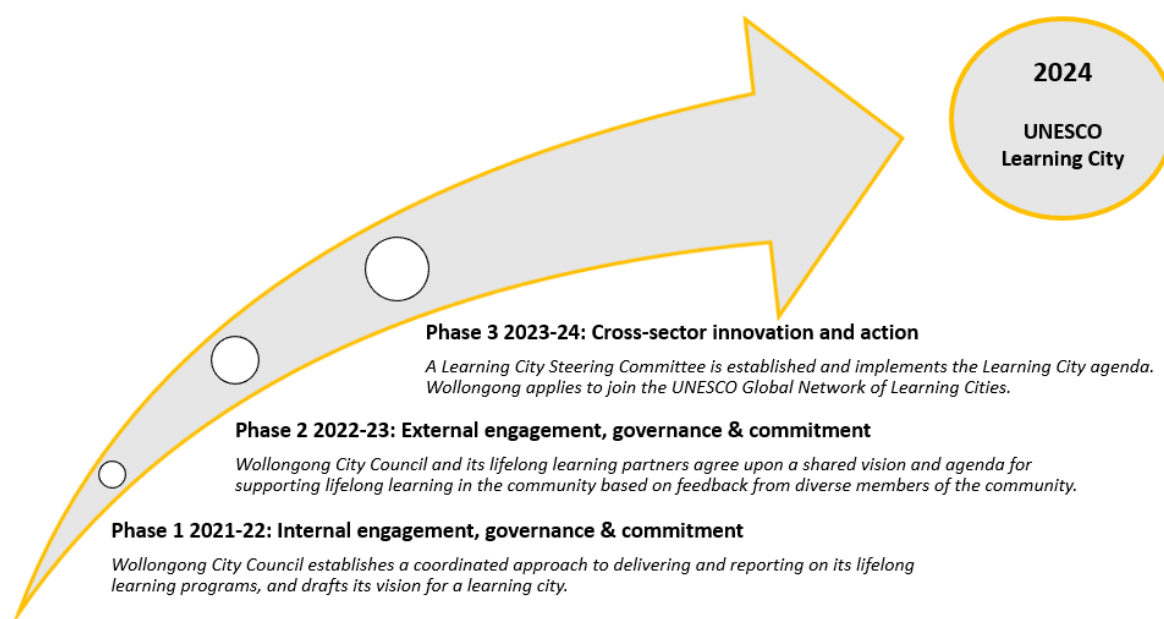


Figure 3 Three phases of Wollongong's learning city project

The Wollongong Learning City Project has three phases (Figure 3). First, it aims to establish internal governance and commitment by bringing together lifelong learning stakeholders from across business units. Phase 1 aims to develop a strong coordinated approach to the design, promotion, delivery and evaluation of WCC's lifelong learning assets. Second, it will seek external commitment from lifelong learning stakeholders from across the city and establish an external governing body to develop and drive the learning city agenda. Phase 2 aims to develop a network of lifelong learning stakeholders in the city and a shared agenda for Wollongong's learning city initiative. Finally, in phase 3, the project will implement the learning city agenda and apply to join the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities in 2024.

Meeting the learning needs of the community during the pandemic

Wollongong City Libraries met the learning interests and needs of the community during the pandemic and:

- Kept people reading. During the period 26 June – 31 October 2021:
 - 11,514 books were delivered to people's homes via the post or by hand.

"Every time I receive a mail package from the library it feels personal. You are looking after me." – Comment from a library customer

- 5,210 books delivered to people's homes via the Home Library Service.
- 117,158 digital loans were made by customers
- Curated all online resources for customers.

<https://www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/library/your-library/using-the-library-from-home>

- Posted 30-50 STEAM Punk kits fortnightly to 5–12-year-olds across the city.

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=927016101261413>

- Held 16 online events for 194 attendees including award-winning online program ‘Starstruck’.

<https://www.facebook.com/profile/100064380743835/search/?q=starstruck>

- Curated a range of online ‘Tech Skills’ videos to help people meet the digital demands of COVID-19 like ‘How to check in with a QR code’.

<https://www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/library/whats-on/online-programs/tech-skills>

- Put local studies exhibitions online and created online jigsaw puzzles.

<https://illawarrastories.com.au/exhibitions/>

<https://www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/library/explore-our-past/online-puzzles>

One library staff member would like to share this reflection on the role of libraries during the pandemic:

“The lockdown was difficult and changed the way we help people – BUT – It also meant that we engaged with our community in a very valuable way – assisting them with information, library resources and digital guidance.

But even more so, we engaged with them as fellow human beings, going through a tough time. We helped people just by talking on the phone, listening, and empathising. It felt like “we were one” with our community. Building relationships. Yes it was a tough time, but also a big opportunity.”

Future-proofing the community for future challenges through lifelong learning

Wollongong City Libraries is futureproofing of the community for future challenges with a keen focus on vulnerable residents:

- Promoting health and wellbeing for culturally and linguistically diverse members of the community during Multicultural Health Week

<https://www.facebook.com/profile/100064380743835/search/?q=multicultural%20health>

- Promoting digital literacy across the Wollongong community:
 - Tech Savvy Elders for older members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community

<https://www.facebook.com/profile/100064380743835/search?q=tech%20savvy>

- Tech and Tea for all members of the community

<https://www.facebook.com/profile/100064380743835/search/?q=tech%20and%20tea>

- Encouraging connection and participation for isolated community members through programs like ‘Knit, Stitch, Yarn’ and ‘Old Boys Social Club – Classic Games Mornings’.

<https://wollongong.nsw.gov.au/library/library-events/adult-wol/knit,-stitch,-yarn6>

<https://wollongong.nsw.gov.au/library/library-events/adult-wol/old-boys-social-club-classic-games-mornings>

- Supporting Culturally and Linguistically Diverse residents improve their English communication skills, quality of life and understanding of Australian culture. One participant shared this feedback on the program: *'Because of English classes our quality of life has improved drastically and our understanding of the English language as also improved. Coming to English classes allows us to understand the culture.'*

<https://www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/library/library-events/adult-war/english-conversation-classes-warrawong>

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Discussion

These case studies confirm four levels of engagement for libraries in learning cities; it also showcases the ways in which public libraries met the needs of their customers during the pandemic and are futureproofing communities for future crises through lifelong learning.

Libraries as a resource

All five case studies show libraries as a valuable resource to any community. Whether you are in a learning community or not, every library is contributing to a learning community through their suite of programs and literary resources. Espoo's case study demonstrates innovation by co-creating a fit-for-purpose resource for young people, a model that others may draw inspiration from.

Libraries as a contributor

Libraries can contribute to learning cities in many ways. Firstly, library staff can contribute to a formal learning city initiative through project working groups and learning strategies like Brimbank, Wollongong and Wyndham. Secondly, libraries can contribute lifelong learning initiatives to UNESCO GLNC for reporting purposes including for reporting on progress for the sustainable Development Goals like Espoo. In these scenarios we see libraires and library staff actively contributing to formal learning city initiatives.

Libraries as a partner

More and more libraries are developing and nurturing partnerships to specifically address inequities in the community through equitable lifelong learning initiatives. For example, Dunedin library has works in partnership with the Digital Inclusion Alliance Aotearoa, using lifelong learning as a tool to solve problems around digital literacy faced by the community. In another example, we see Wyndham Library contributing to projects with the Community Learning team like the Wyndham Learning Festival, which is led by the Wyndham Community and Education Centre. This partnership is responsible for a key action item in Wyndham's

Learning Community Strategy to promote lifelong learning for all through the celebration of learning.

Libraries as a leader

In the cities of Brimbank and Wollongong in Australia, libraries are taking a leadership role in learning cities. Brimbank Libraries take responsibility for the *Brimbank Lifelong Learning Strategy 2018-2023* and Wollongong City Libraries has employed a Project Leader Learning City to drive a whole-of-council, city-wide initiative to establish Wollongong as a UNESCO learning city by 2024.

Public libraries and crises

Public libraries in Wyndham, Dunedin, Brimbank, Espoo and Wollongong all demonstrated agility and innovation in maintaining service delivery through the COVID-19 pandemic:

- All five libraries satisfied customer needs to keep reading during lockdown through either postal-delivery, hand-delivery or click-and-collect services as well as digital resources like ebooks.
- Many libraries developed and/or promoted online instructional videos on COVID-related matters like *'How to download vaccine passes'*, for example.
- Most libraries developed/curated online resources to entertain and educate people of all ages during lockdown.
- Some libraries held live online events to entertain and educate community members.
- Wyndham City Council delivered two online learning festivals in response to COVID-10, the inaugural Global Learning Festival in partnership with a neighbouring Council and LearnWest Learning for Earning Festival with several neighbouring Councils.

The libraries in these case studies also showcased the ways in which they are now futureproofing residents for future crises through lifelong learning:

- Many libraries play an important role in promoting digital literacy for vulnerable members of their communities.
- Some libraries are promoting health, wellbeing and connection through lifelong learning initiatives like health literacy programs and events, the Global Learning Festival and social programs like the *'Old Boys Social Club'*.
- Many libraries are continuing to expand their online offerings to meet the growing demand from customers.

Conclusion

Public libraries play a critical role in promoting lifelong learning for all around the world. They offer access to a world of information and play an increasing role in supporting and empowering diverse members of any community to lead fulfilling, connected and sustainable lives through lifelong learning. In this paper, we see libraries take their commitment to lifelong learning to the next level through partnerships, leadership and global networks. We see libraries take a step up from just being a reliable resource in the community to a valuable and active contributor, partner or leader in learning city initiatives. The case studies presented in this paper also demonstrate innovation and agility in meeting the lifelong learning needs and interests of their customers during a crisis and the important role libraries play in futureproofing vulnerable residents in learning cities.

