



Prison library staff celebrated as inmate reading booms

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Staff working in the state's prison libraries are being celebrated next week for assisting inmates to access more than 175,000 books and magazines when reading boomed during the COVID pandemic.

Additional regional content below and images here:

<https://spaces.hightail.com/receive/g7cTFJFlcp>

Corrective Services NSW Commissioner Peter Severin said Library and Information Week, marked nationally from 17-23 May, was a good opportunity to thank the professional librarians and library liaison officers at the state's 42 prison libraries.

"Books and reading play an important role in the rehabilitation of people in custody, providing them with education, entertainment and an escape from prison life," Mr Severin said.

"Maintaining access to books in a security environment does pose many challenges, but our enthusiastic librarians and support staff ensure inmates continue to have access to thousands of titles on a wide variety of topics and genres."

Library Services Manager Rebecca Bollen Manalac said borrowing rates increased during the pandemic by 24 per cent, with 57,997 books checked out in 2020, compared to 46,625 the previous year.

"Reading allows inmates to learn new things, expand their understanding of the world and learn empathy. Books also provide an escape from reality, so they are much valued by inmates, particularly during the pandemic," Ms Bollen Manalac said.

"It has been a very busy time for our staff in meeting the increased demand for prison library services and I'm very proud of the hard work they've put in to ensure inmates' had continued access to a diverse range of titles.

"Library and Information Week gives me the chance to thank them for their dedication and is an opportunity to remind the wider community about the services that our libraries offer."

The Brush Farm Corrective Services Academy also houses a library, which is available to all staff and trainees.

It features an extensive collection of more than 100,000 titles and online resources in the areas of criminology, penology, forensic psychology, management and training. External users may join the Library through an annual subscription arrangement.

The most popular books for inmates are fantasy and thrillers, while self-help books, fitness and legal information lead the non-fiction field.

Library and Information Week was first celebrated in 1968 to build awareness and promote all types of library and information services in Australia.

CSNSW media inquiries: 0419 258 290 – calls only, no SMS



Location specific content: library liaison officers

Belinda Francis, Education and Services Coordinator High Risk Management Correctional Centre, Goulburn

“Libraries are extremely important in society but even more so in gaol. From my experience books have provided an opportunity to break down barriers between inmates and support staff, as they are a catalyst for discussions and ongoing engagement.

“I believe it has helped build trust and rapport by generating discussions outside the usual day-to-day.

“Books provide an opportunity for inmates to continually learn, connect with others, serve as a distraction and develop their imagination outside of these walls.

“I have lots of favourite books, but one book that stuck in my mind and changed the way I think is *Night* by Elie Wiesel. Elie was a child during the Holocaust and was sent to concentration camps in Auschwitz and Buchenwald.

“This book helped me to put difficulties in my life in perspective and reminds me about the power of resilience and hope even in the darkest of times.”

Craig Picklum, Assessment and Planning Officer Wellington Correctional Centre

“Prison libraries are very important, as they provide an ongoing opportunity for inmates to access a vast array of reading materials and resources.

“Libraries support inmates educational and informational needs, help pass time constructively, provide mental stimulation, and help raise literacy levels. Libraries can also help calm and manage anxiety and stress, which the inmates may have in their lives.

“I believe the overall goal of having libraries in a prison, is to support reform, rehabilitation, and education.”

“My favourite book is *Winx: The Authorised Biography*, by Andrew Rule. It is hard to put the book down when reading this magnificent story of an animal that is a champion.

“It won 33 consecutive races and four Cox Plates, the pinnacle weight-for-age race in Australia. The incredible record of the four Cox Plates won by this horse, is something every race enthusiast, would be amazed at.

“To read about the people involved in owning, and training, this wonderful mare, is a joy. The story is enlightening, fascinating, and riveting.”

Kristy Donlan, Education Services Coordinator Bathurst Correctional Centre

“I believe that libraries are especially important within our gaol walls for a number of reasons:

“Escapism - a good novel can transport you through time and space to anywhere, for the time that you are engrossed in your novel you can forget that you are here.



“Improvement of literacy skills - I believe the more that you engage with written text the better your reading, spelling and language will become.

“Safe space - our libraries are safe spaces to attend, there is a sense of calm when you enter, it is a positive place to be.

“My favourite book is *Wuthering Heights*. I can read it over and over again.

“When I was a teacher in correctional centres I used to read an abridged version of *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck with my English classes.

“The themes are always relatable, as we all have that friend that we would do anything for. I always find that this book challenges our view of right and wrong – it is not so black and white. What would you do to help a friend, where would you draw the line?”

**Steven Davies, Assessment and Planning Officer
Bathurst Correctional Centre**

“I have been looking after the Library in the X-Wing at Bathurst Correctional Centre for the last couple of months.

“While working with the librarians I have noticed many inmates who are avid readers and regularly loan books out to keep reading.

“I find that libraries are an important piece of the puzzle for the inmates. The inmates who use the libraries can take their minds away from their current situation and transport themselves to a different place or reality by reading a book.

“Libraries can also assist those with low reading skills to improve their reading which in turn can help them with future endeavours. Libraries can also give inmates a quiet place to relax or read a book while getting away from the confines of their cell or unit.”

**Kristy Tindall, Manager of Offender Services and Programs
Hunter Correctional Centre**

“I have always been a reader and love book shops and libraries. I was lucky enough to become the library liaison officer about three years ago and it’s been fun and interesting to do something different within my work week

“It is hard for me to say what my favourite book is, however one of my favourite authors is Jodi Picoult. Each of her books takes on a different topic with either a controversial theme or moral dilemma. She writes about complex characters and situations that make you wonder what you would do if you were facing this situation.

“One of my favourites is *The Storyteller*, which really exceeded my expectations and I was surprised I liked it as much as I did.

“It is written from the point of view of three different people and time frames but ultimately tells the story of the Holocaust and its impact and fallout on generations. It’s about assumptions, forgiveness and mercy.”