

Media Release



Free WiFi and quirky services behind staggering growth for public libraries, according to new report

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The number of people visiting public libraries in NSW is at an all-time high with internet and online usage going through the roof, according to the latest statistics released by the State Library of NSW*.

“Public library visits and loans continue to rise at an impressive rate, but it is free WiFi usage, virtual visits and, surprisingly, non-traditional library services that are delivering the most staggering results,” says NSW State Librarian & Chief Executive, Alex Byrne.

Physical visits to over 360 public libraries across NSW have increased by 30% since 2000, with 35 million visits recorded for 2013/14. Loans are up 5% with 45 million loans recorded last year.

“Public libraries are to be congratulated on introducing more adventurous and quirky programming to their diverse offering of existing library services, with a 40% increase in attendance recorded since 2008 - 1,538,019 people participated in over 67,000 programs in 2013/14,” said Dr Byrne.

“In Port Macquarie-Hastings there’s a seed library and ukulele kit and exercise equipment for loan; in Wyong-Tuggerah there’s meditation workshops led by a local Buddhist monk; Ryde Library clients can practice on the grand piano; Blue Mountains still offers a Book Express Service for commuters at Springwood and Katoomba; and Camden is in the process of setting up a telescope collection for loan.”

Internet use and online services have experienced extremely high growth over a short period. Virtual visits to public library websites grew by 3 million to 12 million between 2012/13 and 2013/14. And onsite Internet usage has doubled between 2009/10 and 2013/14 to 7.8 million sessions, largely due to free WiFi offered by libraries where people can use their own devices.

“Over the past four years WiFi hotspots were delivered to public libraries in 126 rural and regional areas thanks to the NSW Government’s \$2million Revitalising Regional Libraries program, giving local residents access to free WiFi for the first time,” says Dr Byrne.

“It’s vital that country residents enjoy the same level of connectivity offered by public libraries in metropolitan areas, and they are now able to take full advantage of the many electronic resources offered by the State Library such as local and international newspapers, full-text journals and databases.”

NSW public library statistics have been gathered, collated and published by the State Library of NSW since 1973.

*Public Library Statistics have been produced from reports provided to the State Library of NSW by local councils for the period July 2013 to June 2014.

Dr Alex Byrne is available for interviews.

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