

Public libraries report spike in demand for books in language

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NSW residents are reading more and more books in languages other than English than ever before with the State Library of NSW reporting a 20% increase in requests from public libraries for multicultural material just in the last 12 months.

According to the State Librarian John Vallance: “We’re seeing a trend right throughout NSW, from Liverpool to Wagga Wagga, where some of the most popular collections with readers are books in languages that are not English.”

“For some libraries, the multicultural collections are in such high demand that they need to be replaced annually because the books are being read by so many people,” says Dr Vallance.

With almost one in three NSW residents born overseas, and around one in four speaking a language other than English, the State Library supplies books in 43 community languages to 374 public libraries in NSW.

Public libraries also hold their own collections which cater to the specific needs of their community. Over 50 languages are represented across NSW in collections that include books, ebooks, health information and newspapers, as well as English as a Second language (ESL) resources to support the independent learning of English.

At Wagga Wagga City Library, the demand has been so high that recently they’ve had to borrow nearly 1000 items in 11 languages from the State Library’s language collection. According to Library Manager Claire Campbell, “Wagga Wagga has really embraced the diversity of our community.”

“With the help of the State Library we’re able to support residents who read a range of languages, including Nepali, Arabic, Spanish, Bengali, Chinese, Gujurati, Croatian, Hindi, Polish, Burmese and Sinhalese, and demand continues to grow,” says Ms Campbell, who recently won the Multicultural Excellence Award for her tireless work with the community.

“Providing access to materials in different languages is just another example of how libraries continue to play a central role in suburban, regional and remote communities across the state,” says Cameron Morley, the State Library’s Manager of Public Library Services. “Libraries are responsive to the communities they serve, so it makes sense that as Australia becomes more and more diverse so too do library collections and services.”

Libraries across the state are celebrating Australia’s cultural diversity during Harmony Week (15 – 21 March) with talks, displays and cultural events.