

Wollongong Living Book



SNAPSHOT

Real Stories, Real People

**PEOPLE WHO SHARE THEIR LIFE EXPERIENCES THROUGH CONVERSATION.
CHALLENGING STEREOTYPES, CONNECTING AND INSPIRING.**

A program of Wollongong City Council since 2008

Wollongong City Council launched Wollongong Living Books in 2008, inspired by the Human Library movement which began in Denmark in 2000.

The program brings to the community a group of people from diverse backgrounds, known as 'books', who share their life experiences.



The program aligns with Council's Community Strategic Plan: Wollongong 2022 objectives:

- The visibility of our cultural diversity is increased.
- Our residents feel an increased sense of community.
- There is an increase in the mental health and emotional wellbeing of all our residents.

How does it work?

'Readers' choose from a selection of living 'books'

'Readers' participate in 30-40 minute conversations in small groups

Events are held in a safe and open environment

'Readers' are encouraged to ask questions

Events are held in a school library or community hall



Living 'Book': Shadow of the Black Dog

Why?

an opportunity
to challenge
stereotypes and
reduce prejudice

a fresh view
into the
diversity of our
community

experiences
that inspire, give
hope and develop
resilience

encourages
new ways
of thinking

an opportunity
to talk to people
you otherwise
wouldn't meet



Dapto High School

What do 'readers' like about Living Books?

- Talking to real people
- Honesty and openness of the 'books'
- Ability to ask questions of the 'books'
 - Learning something new
- Feeling inspired by the stories



BIRDS NOT BOMBS
- a refugee's journey



SHADOW OF THE BLACK DOG - one man's story of depression and anxiety



RISING ABOVE
- overcoming child sexual abuse and domestic violence

"Open, honest and personal"

"Fascinating and inspirational"



I HAVE A DREAM
- being proud of your culture



THE 'F' WORD
- What feminism has done for me



MICK ON WHEELS
- a wheelchair musician: follow your passion

"Meaningful and from the heart"



WHEN LIFE GIVES YOU LEMONS
- a successful high school dropout



GONE SURFING
- life as a double amputee



OVERCOMING THE ODDS
- ice addiction and my rainbow journey, a rollercoaster ride to happiness



A KING'S TALE
- impact of addiction and domestic violence. Living with blindness



EVERY CLOUD

- masking my sexuality, no one knew I was gay

"Real life experiences"



TRUST YOURSELF

- from Peru to gangs in LA, and the rich and famous in Beverly Hills



THINGS CAN CHANGE

- growing up in a family with mental illness: overcoming isolation and fear



FIND YOUR CHEERLEADERS

- from Zimbabwe to Australia, the people that help you see things differently



LIMBO SPACE

- depression and substance abuse

"Storytelling... an effective learning strategy"



ELIZABETH'S STORY

- journey of a Sudanese refugee



I HAVE ADHD

- An adult story



YOU CAN'T BEAT ME

- overcoming anxiety, bullying and an eating disorder



FINDING THE STRAIGHT PATH

- being a Muslim woman in Australia



MY TRANSGENDER CHILD

- a mother's story of love and strength

"Opened up my choices, expanded my mind"

What
'readers'
think...

[illegible]

A word cloud on a yellow background. A dotted white line starts at the top left, curves around the right side, and ends at the bottom right. The words are in various sizes and colors (black, brown, red, orange). The largest words are 'stories', 'different', 'students', 'person', 'interesting', 'ask', 'hand', 'face', 'insight', 'questions', 'story', 'nature', 'compassion', 'talk', 'learning', 'see', 'aware', 'open', 'religion', 'Everyone', 'Insight', 'talking', 'Everything', 'eyes', 'sympathetic', 'needs', 'resilience', 'problems', 'get', 'hearing', 'much', 'Sharing', 'Live', 'differences', 'perceptive', 'personal', 'able', 'Informative', 'inspiring', 'honest', 'kindness', 'overcoming', 'many', 'boundaries', 'take', 'Meeting', 'Interesting', 'class', 'give', 'well', 'observant', 'lines', 'understand', 'contact', 'bodies', 'odds', 'matter', 'ADHD', 'get', '1st', 'presenters', 'treatment', 'gases', 'open', 'bodies', 'contact', 'aware', 'Opportunity', 'learning', 'see', 'nature', 'story', 'person', 'interesting', 'ask', 'hand', 'face', 'insight', 'questions', 'stories', 'different', 'students', 'person', 'interesting', 'ask', 'hand', 'face', 'insight', 'questions'.

stories
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Summary of feedback from 67 Year 9 students, 2013

Event Summary

62 Living Books since inception.
22 active.

94 events:
14 high schools,
20 organisations

8478
conversations:
Average length
35min

4,813
Readers

14 High Schools

Bulli High
Corrimal High
Dapto High School
Edmund Rice College
Figtree High
Kanhooka High
Holy Spirit College
Illawarra Sports High Berkeley
Keira High
Smith's Hill High
Woonona High
St Mary's College
Warrawong High
Wollongong High

Open Community Events

Wollongong Library
Dapto Library
Corrimal Library
Wollongong City Council
Seniors Week Expo
New Outlook

Disability Organisations

Essential Personnel
Vision Australia
Northcott Disability Services
New Outlook

Participation and Support

Wollongong & Shellharbour TAFE Living Books
2009, 2011, 2012, 2016, 2017

Youth Programs

Wollongong Youth Services LGBTQI Support Group,
Wollongong Links to Learning: Kanhooka High,
Dapto High, Illawarra Sports High; Bellambi Links to
Learning, Illawarra Youth Housing, Southern Youth
and Family Services, (SYFS)

Special Events

Mental Health Month - New Outlook, Wollongong Art Gallery
International Women's Day
Seniors Week 2009 - University of the Third Age
World AIDS Day 2010 - Wollongong City Council

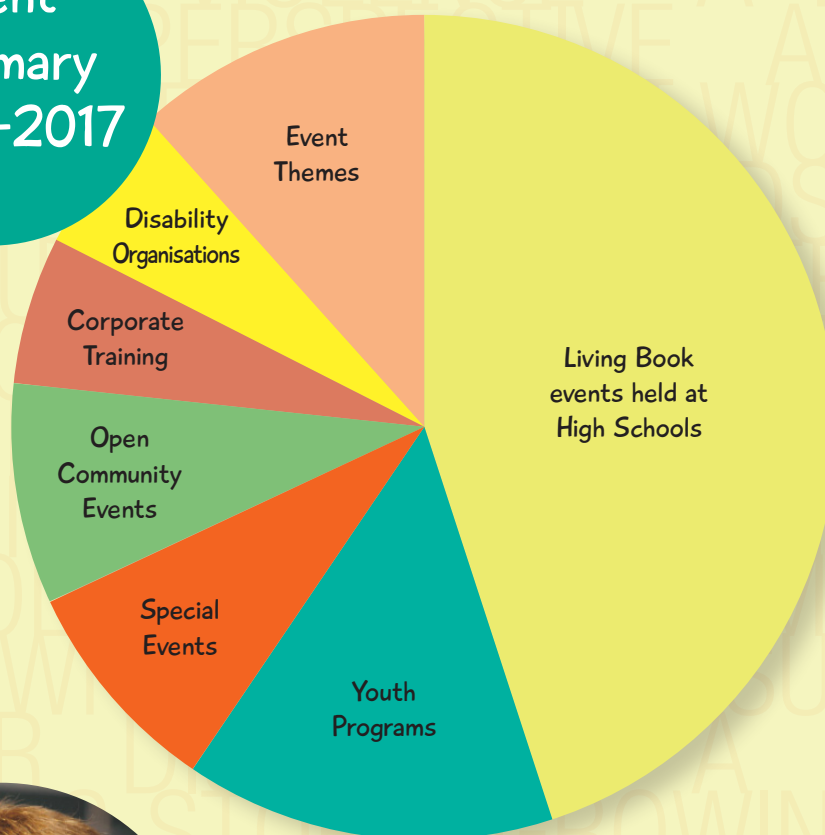
Corporate Training

Wollongong housing and community services sector staff
Dapto Careways staff
Keira High teachers
Wollongong City Council Social Support Services staff

Event Themes

Refugee Cultural Awareness - Dapto High, Warrawong
High, Woonona High, Wollongong Art Gallery
Aboriginal Cultural Awareness - Lake Illawarra Police
Year 11 Crossroads program - Bulli High, Woonona High
Community & Family Studies - Illawarra Sports High
Belonging, stories of growing up - Keira High
Social Justice - Student Conference, Edmund Rice College
Compassion - Smiths Hill High, student development day

Event Summary 2008-2017



ADHD - An Adult Story



I Have a Dream - being proud of your culture



Community event

Impact of the Program



Elizabeth's Story - Journey of a Sudanese refugee



Gone Surfing
- life as a double amputee

92% of students surveyed in 2017 said they had learned something new.

- "Be proud of who you are". Student, Dapto High, 2017.
- "I learned to not take life for granted". Student, Illawarra Sports High.
- "I learned what it was like living in poverty and war". Student, Woonona High.
- "Failure means you're trying something new. Don't quit." Student, Wollongong High School

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In a 2015 focus group, 90% of students said that the conversations had changed their behaviour.

- "A really integral part of my education. Two years later our group of friends still talk about gay 'book moments'".
- "It really helped me with challenges in Year 10'.
- "I learnt strategies to overcome anxiety and depression I still use them today". (2 years after the conversation)
- "Sometimes I still judge people, but at least now I am aware I am doing it, I try not to".
- "Living Books has left more of a mark on me than any other program".

Wollongong High School Yrs 9-11

School Program

Schools use the program to complement existing school curriculum including topics that deal with identity and cultural diversity.

It's a powerful tool in promoting difference and inclusiveness and often successful in motivating and engaging 'hard to reach' students.

- "Today I did an analysis of last year's student evaluation of the entire Crossroads Programme, the Living Books event was by far the most positively valued. 91% of those who returned the evaluation forms rated Living 'Books' as 'Excellent'. I am very keen to make this happen again". Bulli High School Teacher
- "One student we had not been able to engage said it was the best day of his life". Woonona High Teacher
- "Cleared up so much about a Muslim woman's life here in Australia particularly with what the media portrays". Holy Spirit College Yrs 11-12

Corporate Training

Organisations use the program in their workplace training to raise awareness of specific community and social issues including disability awareness and Aboriginal issues.

- "Good to interact with (Aboriginal Living Books) and get their perspective on life in the Illawarra from an Aboriginal point of view". Police Sergeant, Lake Illawarra
- "Valuable 'life lessons' to take beyond the classroom". Illawarra Sports High Teacher

Themed Events

Organisations and community groups include the program as part of key events such as Refugee Week, Mental Health Month, International Day of People with Disability, International Women's Day.

- "Hearing stories of diversity and adversity ...shed some light on managing difficult, challenging, unique and individual experiences". Staff member New Outlook, Mental Health Month Event
- "This is the first time I had ever seen the girls engage in a positive way with each other. The topics were so relatable to the girls, they have all experienced similar experiences. It allowed them to open up and for the first time share information with other girls". Youth Worker, Young Mums Event, International Women's Day.

Get
involved



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Email: livinglibrary@wollongong.nsw.gov.au

Please contact us if you would like to become a Living 'Book'.

We welcome enquiries from organisations and schools interested in hosting a Living Books event.

Wollongong City Council acknowledges the
invaluable contribution of our living 'book'
volunteers who make this program possible.

Wollongong
**Living
Books**
Real Stories, Real People