



Indigenous Knowledge Centres - The Queensland Experience

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Abstract:

The State Library of Queensland's *Indigenous Library Services Strategy* was adopted in June 2002. Implementation of the five very broad objectives commenced at that time and is still continuing.

The major priority has been the establishment of Indigenous Knowledge Centres in remote communities where there are no library services. In two years 9 Centres have been established, 6 on Cape York Peninsula and 3 on islands in the Torres Strait.

Sustainability of Indigenous Knowledge Centres is a critical component for long term success

of the Strategy, and is the greatest challenge. A number of programs are being implemented to address this issue, and to develop the potential capacity of the Centres.

As the State Library of Queensland embarked on the implementation of its *Indigenous Library Services Strategy*² in 2002, it was essential firstly to acknowledge that there are many barriers to overcome, and many bridges to build to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and draw them into the library world in ways never thought of before. Equally important was an understanding that past social and political histories and events denied, excluded, and or discouraged access for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people wishing to participate in the simple pleasures of reading a good book, or seeking to find knowledge in the written word in a library, and this has impacted negatively on individuals over many years.

The strategy (copy attached) is very wide ranging, encompassing five (5) major objectives:

1. Establishment of Indigenous Knowledge Centres in Cape York and the Torres Strait Regions
2. Improved service delivery to Indigenous peoples through public libraries across Queensland.
3. Increased employment and training opportunities in libraries for Indigenous peoples
4. Inclusion of services for Indigenous peoples in the Millennium Library Project.
5. Ensuring that Indigenous Collections and Culture are represented in public library spaces.

Indigenous Knowledge Centres:

"Indigenous Knowledge Centres are breathing places...they keep our culture strong for our children...look after our traditions, songs, language, stories and artwork...bring back the things

that guide us today for the future...combining a meeting place for traditional business with modern library services..." Richard Gundhawuy

Indigenous Knowledge Centres (IKC) will complement traditional library services with services based on the oral and visual traditions of Indigenous culture. The Centres provide training programs, help to preserve local history, act as a community meeting place and provide employment opportunities to local communities.

Indigenous Knowledge Centres are shaped by the way a particular community articulates their knowledge needs. It is a partnership between the SLQ and the local Indigenous Community Council.

The whole community can determine what their IKC will be for them –

- Special places to look after songs, language, stories and traditions of their culture
- A means to reach out the wider global community

The local community builds on the basic library's social role and meeting information needs and then builds capacity (through options for Indigenous Knowledge Centre enhancement).

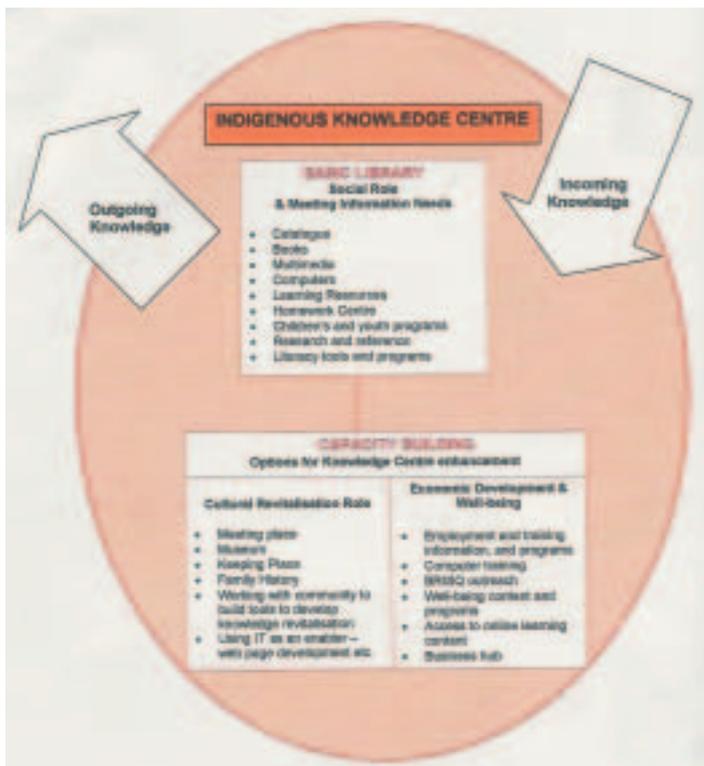
This capacity building may be through either cultural revitalization or economic development or elements of both.



Injinoo – the Indigenous Knowledge Centre is at the back of the Youth Centre

The highest priority has always been the establishment of Indigenous Knowledge Centres in the remote Northern Cape York and Torres Strait regions. Queensland's population of 3,561,028 includes a significant proportion of Indigenous Australians. The total number of people identifying as Indigenous in the 2001 census is 110,584, which is 3.1% of the total. However, the percentages vary from 1.5% in South East Queensland to 50.1% in the Cape York Region, and 76.8% in the Torres Strait area.

Indigenous Knowledge Centres are established in close consultation with the community. When a community decides to proceed, the State Library of Queensland uses community development processes to engage the council and community to work with them to develop plans for their IKC. Local staff are recruited at this stage, so that they are involved in the entire planning and establishment process.



Communities often give their IKC a local language name to reflect their aspirations for the IKC. For instance, the Wujal Wujal community has called their IKC the *Binal Mungka Bayen*

Knowledge Centre. Sixty-eight percent of the community is using the centre, and a literacy and numeracy program has commenced. This program is targeted at early school leavers, who are using their centre to develop their adult skills and re-engage with education.

To date, nine (9) Indigenous Knowledge Centres have been set up, 6 on Cape York and 3 in the Torres Strait. They are located at Aurukun, Lockhart River, Injinoo, New Mapoon, Pormpuraaw and Wujal Wujal on Cape York Peninsula, and at Mabuig Island, Darnley Island, and Poruma in the Torres Strait.

Training

To ensure sustainability of the established Indigenous Knowledge Centres, the State Library of Queensland is currently implementing a range of projects to provide support and training.

At the beginning of June 2003, 12 Indigenous staff members from seven Indigenous Knowledge Centres commenced an employment and training program orientation week at the Cairns campus of the Tropical North Queensland TAFE. It was an 8 month accredited training program, leading to a Certificate II in Library and Information Service. A number of partnerships and agreements supported this training program. Funding for employment costs came from the Queensland State Department of Employment and Training, the training component was funded through Tropical North Queensland TAFE with funding through the State Government Cape York Strategy, and travel costs for the participants to attend 3 residentials in Cairns were sourced through the Commonwealth ABSTUDY program.

Nine of the students successfully completed the program and were awarded their certificates.

Once again with the support of the State Department of Employment and training, State Library is working to place the successful graduates in Traineeships leading to 12 months employment and formal training through a *Certificate III in Library and Information Services*.

Currently, all Indigenous Knowledge Centre staff are employed under the Commonwealth Community Development Employment Program (CDEP), and therefore the establishment of permanent, full time positions in the Indigenous Knowledge Centres is one of the real challenges for the State Library if sustainability for the centres is to be secured.

Librarians in Communities

A second supporting project which is being established is the *Librarians in Communities* project. The objective of this project is to place qualified librarians or very experienced library workers in communities with Indigenous Knowledge Centres for up to six months to act as mentors to the local staff. The role of the librarians is to work alongside the local staff, transfer the skills to successfully manage a small library, provide assistance to the local staff with their study program, and to assist the IKC staff to develop a range of programs in consultation with the community. These programs could range from children's school holiday programs to Internet training programs for senior community members, to cultural revitalisation programs such as family history or arts and craft programs.

The *Librarians in Communities* program is being developed in partnership with Indigenous Community Volunteers (ICV), an organisation dedicated to providing volunteers to live in

Indigenous communities and assist Indigenous communities by supporting skills transfer projects that have lasting value. ICV takes a partnership approach that helps communities identify their needs, acknowledges their priorities and respects their values.



Oh what a feeling – at the opening of the New Mapoon Indigenous Knowledge Centre

To date, 5 volunteer librarians have spent time varying from 2 weeks to 6 weeks in 4 different communities. Prior to travelling to a community, volunteers spend some days at State Library for an orientation program including cultural components, training in the *Aurora* system which is in use in all Indigenous Knowledge Centres, and training in a number of essential processes. There are many challenges for the volunteers in these small isolated communities, from human issues in the workplace and the community to frustration with lack of infrastructure support and the inevitable delays in remote places.

Building Capacity

Developing the potential of the Indigenous Knowledge Centres is one of the key steps in ensuring long term sustainability. In May this year, State Library conducted a two day workshop in Cairns with attendees including Chief Executive Officers from Community Councils, Council Chairman and Councillors, Indigenous Knowledge Centre Administrators, representatives of State and Federal Government Departments, and representatives from community organizations.

Outcomes to date are very promising, with communities enthusiastic to plan for future services to meet their identified priorities. Information was shared between government agencies which is leading to a more coordinated approach to support for employment and training programs, and there are opportunities to develop partnerships and programs to support long term sustainability.