Libraries Connecting Communities

Annual Highlights 2023-2024

NORTHERN TERRITORY GOVERNMENT

City of Darwin Libraries - Therapy Dogs

Front cover image: Ramingining Library – East Arnhem Regional Council

Contents

1. Acknowledgement of Country

Library & Archives NT acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia. We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands and waters and recognise their enduring connection to Country, culture, and community. We pay our respects to Elders, past and present.

2. Introduction

The Northern Territory Public Library Sector consists of thirty-one libraries. Thirty are provided at physical locations; one is digital and delivered across thirteen remote communities in the MacDonnell Region. In addition, forty-eight Community Internet Sites across the Northern Territory provide free internet access to remote First Nations communities. This report presents the achievements of Northern Territory Public Libraries during the 2023/2024 financial year and outlines how those achievements contribute to the successful implementation of the *Libraries Connecting Communities Strategic Vision 2023-2028*.

Jabiru Public Library – West Arnhem Regional Council

3. Key statistics 2023-2024

759,096 library visits

428,154 website visits

298,477 Wi-Fi sessions

332,535 hours of Wi-Fi usage

4,652 programs attended by **62,669** people

1,132 early literacy sessions attended by **27,266** people

725 digital literacy sessions attended by **6,177** people

499 economic and workforce development sessions attended by **1,691** people

900,888 total loans

654,705 physical loans

246,183 eLoans – eBooks, eAudiobooks, eMagazines

100,441 hours of public device usage

4. Strategic Vision 2023-2028

This report is the first for the *Libraries Connecting Communities Strategic Vision 2023-2028*.

The Strategic Vision outlines the six national outcome reporting areas as well as six strategic goals for the NT public library sector with several guiding principles that align with the *ALIA Guidelines, Standards and Outcome Measures for Australian Public Libraries 2021*. Collectively these outcomes, goals and principles inform the provision of public library services in the Northern Territory to meet the purpose of creating contemporary library services that foster literacy and learning and build stronger communities through empowerment, accessibility, and inclusion for all.

City of Palmerston Library - School Holiday Program

4.1. National outcomes

- Literacy and lifelong learning
- Digital inclusion
- Personal development and wellbeing
- Economic and workforce development
- Stronger and more creative communities
- Informed and connected citizens

4.2. Goals

1) Literacy and learning
2) Online Services and digital inclusion
3) History, language, and culture
4) Welcoming places
5) Diversity and inclusion
6) Strengthening our sector

4.3. Principles

1) We serve our communities with a focus on equity and free universal access.
2) We design services for a great user experience.
3) We engage with communities to provide sustainable, place-based library services that are reflective of their needs and aspirations.
4) We include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in co-designing culturally safe services, programs, and collections with a focus on strengthening language and culture wherever possible.
5) We build diverse, accessible, and safe services and facilities for all and for our most vulnerable.
6) We collaborate and share across the community and library sectors.
7) We nurture partnerships with communities, agencies, and organisations to deliver mutual benefit and achieve key outcomes.

5. Sectoral support

Library & Archives NT (LANT) provides significant support to the public library sector through:

- Operational grant funding to local councils and authorities for 31 public libraries via the Public Library Funding Agreement 2023-2028.
- Funding for hardcopy and electronic collections and eResources for research and study
- A Territory wide library management system – LibrariesNT
- Free public Wi-Fi access to support digital inclusion and access in 48 remote First Nations communities through the Community Internet Service (CIS)
- Learning development opportunities and advisory support services
- Support for some of the most remote libraries in the world, serving culturally and linguistically diverse populations in diverse settings – from cities to remote communities.

In 2023-2024 LANT visited remote and regional council libraries in person to provide on the ground support and training to public and community library services. In-person library visits are an essential element of developing connections and strengthening relationships with colleagues across the library sector.

Library & Archives NT continued its partnership with the Department of Education through administering the Chief Minister's Reading Challenge, providing advice and booklists for the different age groups, as well as allocating $12,000 to the purchase of eBook and eAudiobook titles on the challenge booklists.

A number of sectoral working groups were convened by Library & Archives NT throughout 2023-2024, to meet, collaborate and progress initiatives under the Connected Communities Strategy including:

- Public Libraries Strategic Development Committee
- Library Management System User Group
- Collection Development Working Group.

In 2023-2024, Library & Archives NT continued to provide a range of learning and development support to the library sector, including online professional development session in collection management, as well as both informal and formal training on use of the Library Management System.

Representation of the Northern Territory Library sector is a key role of Library & Archives NT. Through its partnerships with the Australian Public Libraries Alliance (APLA), Australian Library & Information Association (ALIA) and National & State Libraries Australasia (NSLA), Library & Archives NT has worked on several key committees for the benefit of NT Public Libraries.

Sectoral visit to Ti-Tree Library – Central Desert Regional Council

6. Outcomes

During the 2023-2024 financial year, Northern Territory public libraries collectively delivered diverse individual and community outcomes. The libraries reported on how they had provided library services to their communities following the *Libraries Connecting Communities Strategic Vision 2023-2028*, aligned to the *ALIA Standards and Guidelines for Australian Public Libraries*.

6.1. Literacy and lifelong learning

Public libraries, through their resources, programs, and spaces, provide numerous opportunities for everyone in the community to develop their reading and literacy skills, encouraging and enabling people to pursue formal and informal lifelong learning. Public libraries have a positive effect on individuals and their communities by enabling people to become lifelong learners. This is integral to developing people's knowledge and skills in order to support their ability to make informed choices for employment, health and well-being.

Tennant Creek Public Library - Craft Critter Program

6.1.1. In focus

Katherine Public Library, Katherine Town Council

The Katherine Public Library enriches environmental and safety awareness by hosting engaging events. "Croc Day" featured themed Storytime sessions and a visit from Ranger Stacey, who delivered CrocWise safety messages. Similarly, during Water Safety Week, Boof the Barra from Royal Life Saving Australia led Storytime sessions to increase water safety awareness, equipping participants with essential life-saving knowledge they could share within their communities.

Tennant Creek Public Library, Barkly Regional Council

Tennant Creek Public Library provides regular offerings to promote literacy and lifelong learning. The library runs Rhyming and Storytime programs for the community on Friday mornings, and for the Pikka-Pikkakari Playgroup visits on Tuesdays. Library staff also joined in on a collaborative Radio Storytime with the local 8CCC radio. Representatives from the local Girl Guides group approached the library to volunteer on Saturdays for two months to earn a community service badge; this ran from March to April and was very successful. The girls loved visiting and contributing to the library, with one of the girls remarking, "*I never used to like reading, and now I love it!*"

Images from top left clockwise:

1. *Katherine Public Library - Croc Day*
2. *Adelaide River Library – Coomalie Council*
3. *Bookclub winner, City of Darwin – Young Territory Author Awards winner*
4. *City of Palmerston Library – Frillies*

6.2. Digital inclusion

Public libraries have become essential community resources for digital inclusion and supporting those affected by the digital divide. Digital inclusion contributes to enabling everyone to access technology and safely and effectively, including computers, the internet, and portable digital devices such as smartphones. Public libraries also enable free access to online resources and services, which promotes digital equity.

6.2.1. In focus

City of Palmerston Library, City of Palmerston Council

The City of Palmerston Library gives young people free opportunities to experience and develop with technology through school holiday programs and weekly programs. Digital Inclusion School Holiday Programs included a robotics workshop, virtual reality, DJ Charly workshops in the Gulwa Recording Studio and Mobile Phone Film Making. The library facilitates volunteers to run Code Club on Saturdays, where participants aged nine to twelve years learn coding in a fun and creative way. On Tuesdays, the library runs Gadgets and Games, a STEAM-based after-school program for children aged five to fourteen. Activities include robotics, STEAM gadgets, puzzles, board games, and video games.

Ramingining Library

Galiwin'ku Library

Alice Springs Public Library, Alice Springs Town Council

Alice Springs Public Library hosted drone programs for children and children at heart. Their Try Fly Drones sessions allow beginners to learn the basics of drone flying and safety. The follow-up Advanced Drones program takes things up to a more complex level, teaching participants programming and coding skills to tackle more advanced challenges. The goal is to get participants curious about technology and confident with new skills. The library is also deeply involved in RoboCup Junior as a committee member and event co-host. They have hosted robotic soccer tournaments, where students build and program their own robots to play soccer. It's a fun way for local children and youth to show off their creativity and coding skills while working together in teams.

Katherine Public Library, Katherine Town Council

To enhance digital literacy, the Katherine Public Library collaborated with NBN and COTA to host a seminar covering essential topics like media literacy, scam awareness, and technology usage. Additionally, three BorrowBox support sessions were held for seniors, offering personalized guidance on navigating the platform and discovering new stories efficiently. For younger patrons, Red Dirt Robotics delivered a workshop introducing kids to robotics and programming. Known for hands-on teaching, Red Dirt Robotics engaged children through games and challenges, blending play with technology education.

Jabiru Public Library – International Women's Day event

6.3. Personal development

In addition to promoting the personal wellbeing and health benefits gained through reading for pleasure, public libraries support personal development in an inclusive, non-judgemental, and safe environment. Public libraries provide resources and services to their communities where individuals can go to seek information, support, human connection and develop their life skills.

6.3.1. In focus

MacConnect, MacDonnell Regional Council

MacConnect emphasized personal development and wellbeing by fostering safe, inclusive spaces for cultural expression, community connection, and individual growth. The *Kanini* (Care) initiative focuses on preserving oral histories and cultural practices through immersive VR and 360° video recordings. These resources connect younger generations with their heritage while honouring elders' contributions, creating a strong sense of cultural continuity and pride. The *Arrkene-Ileme* (Play) program further strengthens community bonds through interactive VR sessions. These activities bring together families and community members to share joyful, virtual experiences, promoting collaboration and social cohesion. Often evolving into group events, these sessions not only reduce isolation but also build a shared understanding of emerging technologies.

Participants, MacConnect program

Alyangula Community Library, DoE

The Alyangula Community Library offers a welcoming and safe space for community members to relax, read, and engage in hobbies. One of the most successful initiatives is the monthly book club, which provides participants with a literary and social outlet. The book club has become a source of emotional support and community bonding by fostering discussions and building connections among members. Furthermore, the library has hosted a series of health-related talks in partnership with local health professionals. These sessions cover mental health, nutrition, and exercise topics, encouraging attendees to make positive choices for their personal wellbeing. Through these activities, the library contributes to the community members' overall social and emotional wellbeing, creating a supportive and inclusive environment for personal growth.

Taminmin Community Library, Litchfield Council

Taminmin Community Library runs a number of programs to enhance personal development and wellbeing. Passive programming supports this outcome through flexible "Anytime Activities" during school holiday periods. The initiative enables families to attend and engage in library activities at a time that suits them. The initiative has increased library visitation and program participation through crafts and community collaborative projects. The popular Bookmark Competition demonstrated an innovative way to incorporate Anytime Activities whilst increasing community ownership of the library and promoting the Funky Chicken Reading Club. Two winners had their artwork printed as new TCL free Bookmarks.

Taminmin Community Library - Funky Chicken Coop

City of Darwin Libraries

Gaming After Dark, hosted at Casuarina Library on the last Friday evening of each month, focuses on XR and VR gaming experiences. This event provides a welcoming environment for young people to connect and unwind. It offers a space where youth can pursue their passions, make new friends, and build lasting memories. "*My son absolutely loves meeting up with his longtime friends at Gaming After Dark. It's become a highlight of his month, giving them all something fun and exciting to look forward to on a Friday night after a long, tiring week at school. It's the perfect way for them to unwind, connect, and make lasting memories.*" – parent

City of Palmerston Library, City of Palmerston Council

The Late Nights @ the Library program is a Friday night program in Palmerston markets off season which provides adults with social activities in an alcohol-free space. Activities included- Murder Mystery night, Drag Queen Bingo, Polymer Clay Jewellery workshop, Origami Earrings workshop, Paint and Create, Zumba and hulahooping. The library facilitated Nerf Wars, a 15+ event that used the library space as a skirmish arena in the library after hours. The program promoted fitness, strategy and socialisation. City of Palmerston also ran a number of Bilingual Storytimes as well as a special AUSLAN Storytime for the Week of Deaf People.

City of Palmerston Library – AUSLAN Storytime

Jabiru Public Library - STARS program playtime

6.4. Stronger and more creative communities

By providing their communities with inclusive spaces supportive of creative and cultural expression and identity, public libraries contribute to strengthening communities and building social capital. Libraries offer free programs that are place-based and intended to promote local creativity, talent, stories, and inspiration. Public libraries contribute to a sense of belonging and community identity by collecting, promoting, and celebrating local histories.

6.4.1. In focus

Barunga Community Library, Roper Gulf Regional Council

In an exciting collaboration, the Barunga Library has become part of a community project to transform its exterior with a vibrant mural. Working with the children from Barunga and Manyallaluk communities, the mural's design draws inspiration from two beloved local books, *Our Barunga Dogs* and *Shordy Creek*. With guidance from a local Territory artist, the children helped conceptualise and paint the mural, bringing stories from their community to life on the library walls. This creative project enhanced the physical space and deepened the connection between the library and the local community. The children's involvement in the mural has helped solidify the Barunga Library as a vital hub for learning, creativity, and cultural expression. By reflecting the community's stories and talents, the library continues to demonstrate its positive role in community life—fostering literacy, artistic expression, and a sense of pride in local culture.

Barunga Community Library

Batchelor Community Library, Coomalie Council

Batchelor Community Library introduced a Sunday Jam Session where participants could bring their musical instruments, join a creative jam session, and learn more about the music. Participants could bring themselves along and borrow instruments to play or sing. The sessions were primarily ukelele-based; however, participants could use any instrument to join in. The library had guitars, drums, and even a keyboard come along to join in the fun and music sessions!

City of Palmerston Library, City of Palmerston Council

The library celebrated and showcased NAIDOC Week, delivering indigenous-centred programs such as Dreamtime Storytime, Cultural Wildlife Encounters, boomerang throwing, bark painting, mural painting, screen printing, Storytelling through Poetry event with Melanie Munungurr and a movie screening.

Lajamanu Library, Central Desert Regional Council

The PAW Media organisation donated a computer to the Lajamanu Library and install videos and movies in Walpiri which is a great partnership beneficial to the school and the community at large. A plan is in development to expand the partnership to incorporate further engagement and training on digital designs and media productions by the PAW technicians.

City of Palmerston Library – NAIDOC Week event

Jabiru Community Library, West Arnhem Regional Council

West Arnhem Regional Council supports library initiatives to provide cultural safety with the Kakadu Collection and language resources and hosts various cultural programs and events. A week of local culture is celebrated during NAIDOC week. Additionally, the library hosted Reconciliation Week Storytime with a special guest reader from the community, followed by morning tea; the school and Childcare attend these events. Bininj Kunwok language group utilise the library for language sessions and book launches for Kunkodj, Kunkarlang, Kunbard, and Kundenge which the FaFTs and Jabiru Childcare attended.

6.5. Economic and workforce development

Public libraries provide communities with services and programs that support improved employment outcomes and quality of life. By assisting people with job seeking and resume preparation and providing free access to computers and the internet, public libraries provide important bridges across digital and economic divides that may otherwise inhibit some people from finding employment. Public libraries also run programs in collaboration with local government economic development programs to promote small business development and provide those businesses with business and government information.

6.5.1. In focus

City of Darwin Libraries, City of Darwin Council

The City of Darwin Libraries held multiple Job Club workshops, which helped community members develop essential job application skills. The workshops offer personalised guidance on creating effective resumes and CVs, including formatting tips, advice on content length, and layout recommendations. The City of Darwin Libraries collaborated with Anglicare to deliver job readiness programs focused on improving cover letter writing and job interview skills, giving participants the confidence and tools to succeed in job finding. Additionally, participants received assistance with digital platforms that support job training and skill development, including using Microsoft Word to format their resumes. These sessions have proven valuable for individuals looking to enhance their employability, as they provide practical skills that directly impact job readiness.

Mataranka Community Library, Roper Gulf Regional Council

The Mataranka Library is the gateway to the Never Never Museum, showcasing exhibits on First Nations history, the Northern Australian Railway, the Overland Telegraph Line, and World War II. Acting as an information hub for Mataranka, the library becomes a popular stop for tourists during the dry season, offering insights into local attractions and businesses throughout the region. To support this, the library provides comprehensive information on local businesses, including profiles of local authors and artists contributing to the township's economic development.
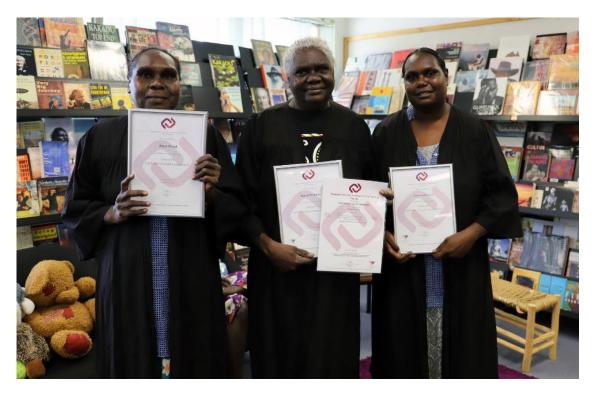

Mataranka Library/Never Never Museum   *Lajamanu Library - Paw Media partnership*

Alyangula Community Library, DoE

Alyangula Community Library actively contributes to the economic and workforce development of the community by providing essential resources and programs to improve employment outcomes and support small business owners. The library offers regular resume and CV writing workshops, as well as job-seeking assistance sessions, where patrons receive guidance on job applications, interview skills, and accessing online job portals. These workshops have benefited young job seekers and those re-entering the workforce after extended breaks. The library also partners with employment support organizations to provide tailored services for job readiness. Additionally, the library promotes the use of community rooms for small business owners who need space for meetings, training, or networking events, fostering entrepreneurship at a grassroots level. The library collaborates with local government and employment agencies to host information sessions on starting small businesses, accessing grants, and managing finances. Through these initiatives, Alyangula Community Library has significantly impacted the economic resilience of the community, empowering individuals with the skills and resources they need to succeed in the workforce.

Jabiru Public Library hosting Kakadu Community Care graduation

6.6. Informed and connected citizens

Public libraries are community spaces where everyone can connect and become informed about their communities. With the information landscape constantly changing, misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation, in conjunction with barriers such as paywalls, have resulted in many people turning to their local library to access information and develop their information literacy skills to navigate these changes.

6.6.1. In focus

Alice Springs Public Library, Alice Springs Town Council

The Read Write Chat program at Alice Springs Library empowers migrants and refugees by enhancing their English literacy and equipping them with essential life skills. The program provides one-on-one language tutoring, pairing each participant with a volunteer, determined by individual needs. With thirteen volunteers and twenty-five participants, the program goes beyond traditional literacy services to address practical challenges newcomers face daily. Most of the participants are non-native English speakers and receive tailored support to improve their language skills and navigate essential services such as healthcare, government paperwork, and driving license requirements. For instance, volunteers help participants fill out forms, prepare for theoretical driving tests, and practice job applications and interviews. Volunteers come from diverse backgrounds, including retired educators and professionals, ensuring a wealth of knowledge and experience. We match volunteers and participants, considering cultural and religious factors to create a comfortable and supportive learning environment. The program contributes immensely to helping mutual understanding and cultural exchange, leading to long-lasting connections between participants and volunteers.

Alice Springs Public Library - Read Write Chat Program

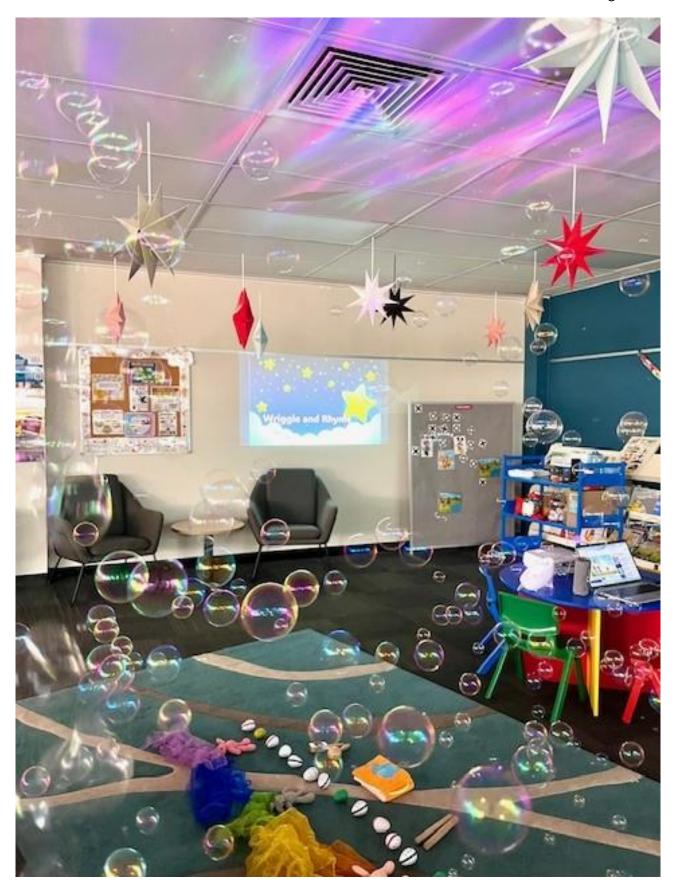**Pine Creek Public Library, Victoria Daly Regional Council**

Local senior citizens visit the library to host a social gathering over Morning Teatime & Coffee. It's a lovely time for the local senior citizens to catch up, interact and socialize in the library space surrounded by books and magazines. The senior members of the community often come to utilise the library space and resources to create the local community newsletter.

Taminmin Community Library, Litchfield Council

The monthly Student vs. Seniors intergenerational program, in partnership with Taminmin College, continues to be well-attended through FY2023-24. The program connects the older rural generation and youth, addresses ageism bias, and finds common ground through shared topics and activities. Taminmin Community Library is also seen as the place in the rural area for sharing local information, new programs or events, and general community notices. Staff also provide ad-hoc advice and assistance to community members to access online government services.

Taminmin Community Library - Little Buddies and Big Buddies Program

Katherine Public Library - Wriggle and Rhyme Program