



Media release

Mayor: Richie Williamson
General Manager: Scott Greensill

LOCKED BAG 23 GRAFTON NSW 2460
Telephone: (02) 6643 0200
Fax: (02) 6642 7647

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Huge growth in library visits

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*.

NSW state librarian and chief executive, Alex Byrne, said public library visits and loans continued to rise at an impressive rate, but it was free wi-fi usage, virtual visits and, surprisingly, non-traditional library services that were delivering the most staggering results.

Physical visits to more than 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. In the Sir Earle Page Library and Education Centre in Grafton there has been a 63% increase in visitation since 2012/13. Across the region there has been a 3% increase in visitation from 2012/13 and 2013/14.

Dr Byrne said public libraries were 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.

Clarence Regional librarian, Kathryn Breward, said the figures for the Clarence Regional Library were just as stunning, with the number of events increasing between 2012/13 and 2013/14 by 43% with more than a 100% increase in attendance during this time.

Dr Byrne said that in Port Macquarie-Hastings there was a seed library and ukulele kit and exercise equipment for loan; in Wyong-Tuggerah there were meditation workshops led by a local Buddhist monk; Ryde Library clients can practise 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 three 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 wi-fi offered by libraries where people can use their own devices. The Clarence Regional Library has experienced a 44% increase in hours of internet usage through our library computers and a 60% increase in visits to our website between 2012/13 and 2013/14.

Dr Byrne said that over the past four years wi-fi 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 wi-fi for the first time.

"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," he said.

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.*

Release ends.

For media inquiries contact Clarence Valley Council communications coordinator, David Bancroft, on 6643 0230 or 0429 104 118.