

FRIENDS OF
LIBRARIES
AUSTRALIA

NEWS UPDATE

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The national voice for 15 million Public Library Members

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Saving

THE WORLD'S OLDEST LIBRARY, IN VERONA



A former merchant banker and chartered accountant, Nina Fiorenza from northern Queensland's Atherton Tablelands is helping to save this 1500-year-old institution. Along with catholic priest, Monsignor Bruno Fasani, president of the Capitolare's foundation who is the driving force behind an international campaign to save and revive this library, regarded as the oldest continuously operating library in the world.

It has survived the fall of the Roman Empire, plagues, floods, fires, invasions, Allied bombing, and time itself. Its origins are fixed by one manuscript: the *Codice Ursicino*, completed in the year 517. The library is tucked away in a corner of Verona's historic centre, along the Adige River. This is no ordinary library – it is a place where the modern world fades into silence and the ancient past whispers.

A journalist and Catholic priest, Fasani found himself in charge of the institution in 2010. Despite Verona's wealth and cultural prominence, Fasani's appeals for resources went unanswered.

With the help of Nina Fiorenza they now have access to regional and national funds for works

and restorations as well as ever-increasing income support from the flow of national and international visitors and students. A handful of donors have stepped in. The Bauli Group, who brought Verona's panettone and pandoro to the world, contributed to establish the library's foundation. Cartiere Saci – a European leader in the production of recycled packaging paper and where Nina's husband, Cusumano Giannicola sits on the board, also opened its coffers. Several banks have made large contributions. Fiorenza is leveraging her extensive global network, connecting the Capitolare with influential figures and institutions.

Technology will be key. The technologies that we have today can make the library come alive. "The goal is to bring it from the history to today," says Nina Fiorenza. She has become an unlikely figure in this rarefied world of Latin texts and spectral scans. One of her favourite discoveries in the collection is that of German cartographer Johann Gabriel Doppelmayr and astronomer and engraver Johann Georg Puschner. "Oh my ... that's a map of Australia," she said when she spotted it. There it was, a sketch continent with no east coast to be seen, chartered decades before Cook's landing in 1770.

"It has survived the fall of the Roman Empire, plagues, floods, fires, invasions, Allied bombing, and time itself"

"Despite Verona's wealth and cultural prominence, Fasani's appeals for resources went unanswered."

"Fiorenza is leveraging her extensive global network, connecting the Capitolare with influential figures and institutions."

"Verona – It was 12:33 a.m. on 4 January 1945 when an Allied air raid hit and destroyed the Biblioteca Capitolare.

The bomb fell right in the centre of the building and exploded inside after piercing the roof. Monsignor Giuseppe Turrini, who was the prefect of the Capitolare at the time and was responsible for the heroic rescue of the most precious volumes, recalls the event in his diaries."



The LBW Trust and FOLA Country Libraries

WINNERS FOR 2024

“\$101,429.16 was distributed to 79 libraries to support a diverse range of projects”

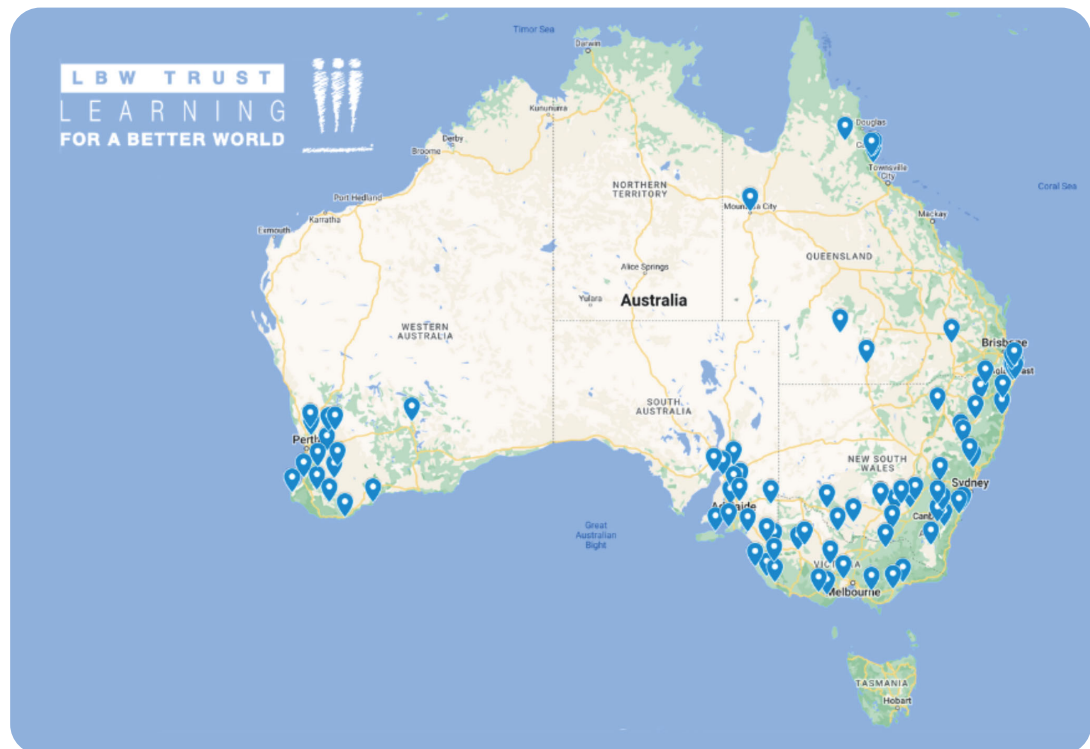
“it is wonderful to be able to combine our love of cricket with supporting country libraries”

The LBW Trust in collaboration with Friends of Libraries Australia announced that 79 country libraries throughout regional, rural and remote Australia were the recipients of much needed funding through the Trust’s Australian Country Libraries 2024 Program.

\$101,429.16 was distributed to 79 libraries (NSW 25; QLD 8; VIC 9; SA 17; WA 20) to support a diverse range of projects including back to nature programs; storytelling through puppetry; resources and activities for neurodivergent young people; textile waste awareness workshops; digital literacy programs for seniors;

and a community seed library for bush fire affected Snowy Mountains area.

“Cricket holds a special place in Australia and it is wonderful to be able to combine our love of cricket with supporting country libraries” says The LBW Trust Director and National Backyard Cricket Chair Marek Ristwej. “Funding has been made possible by the generous donations of individuals who participated in the National Backyard Cricket events, plus great support from The LBW Trust supporters. We look forward to seeing the projects come to life and the difference they will make in their community.”



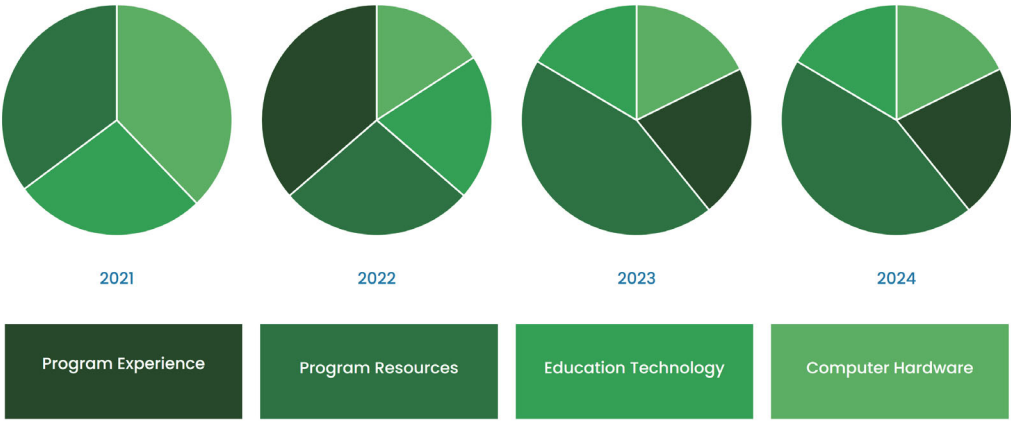
2024 Funding Initiatives Across Australia



The LBW Trust and FOLA Country Libraries

WINNERS FOR 2024

(Continued)



“ These grants are another example of the exceptional projects being run by Australia’s under-funded and under-valued country public libraries.”

FOLA President Jack Goodman says “Country libraries are at the heart of the community, providing havens where people of all ages and backgrounds can come together to share ideas,

learn new skills and connect with each other. These grants are another example of the exceptional projects being run by Australia’s under-funded and under-valued country public libraries.”



Libraries are becoming **COMMUNITY LIVING ROOMS**



“Libraries are evolving to become the ultimate third space.”

From tiny sheds in outback town to state of the art facilities on the urban fringe, libraries are evolving to become the ultimate third space, offering a “community living room” to people who need it most.

Although not a new concept, as this was highlighted by social researcher Hugh Mackay back in 1993 in *Reinventing Australia*. It is a concept that has been re-worked due to our digital and AI age.

Across the country, there are more than 1,400 public library branches, offering all manner of literature, internet access and everything from craft clubs and citizen science corners to “seed libraries” and story telling for free, and they’re an essential public space, perhaps especially in regional and remote Australia. And this is a reason why FOLA has been investing in partnerships to strengthen rural and remote libraries in particular, with our LBW Country Libraries Grants.

The idea of the library as a place of safety and community is a common thread in research around the value of public libraries across rural Australia.

In towns with little more than a pub and a post office on the main street, libraries are often “the mainstay”, according to Griffith University researcher Amber Marshall. Dr Marshall, whose work focuses on digital inclusion and rural development, recently co-authored a report on a survey of more than 100 Australian librarians in outer regional and remote communities.

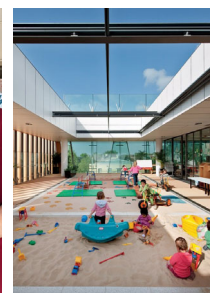
It found rural libraries are especially valued by their communities and seen as a key facilitator of social inclusion and interaction.

Dr Marshall, alongside Charles Sturt University’s Philip Hilder and Simon Wakeling, will head out to regional libraries across Australia from the end of this year to conduct a long-term qualitative study.

ABC article on the topic: www.abc.net.au/news/2025-05-31/libraries-offer-safe-space-and-inclusion-in-regional-communities/105312932



“It found rural libraries are especially valued by their communities.”



Friends Around Australia



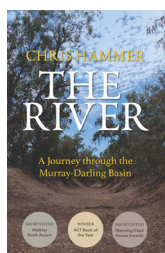
FRIENDS OF EAST GIPPSLAND LIBRARIES (VIC)



Her Excellency the Hon Sam Mostyn AC, Governor-General visited Bairnsdale Library, learning from Manager Naomi Barr and Mayor White about the vital role libraries play across East Gippsland. From book clubs to Friends of Libraries and people working with Lions Club to improve literacy.



WOLLONGONG



Literary Dinner with author, Chris Hammer on 23 June. The author of several bestselling novels and series, including his new book, *The River*.

STATE LIBRARY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA (SA)



Tuesday Talks

Rex Patrick – Books in My Life

In our May session of Books in my Life, Rex Patrick, the self-styled “public interest troublemaker”, introduced us to the book that changed his life

PAYNESVILLE (VIC)



King's Birthday Weekend Booksale

BENALLA (VIC)



Very good Friends of the Benalla Library: Betty, Christine, Geraldine and Corrie.

BALMAIN (NSW)



In April, a group of FOBL members were fortunate to have a tour of the Daniel Solander Library in the Robert Brown Building at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney.

“Her Excellency the Hon Sam Mostyn AC, Governor-General visited Bairnsdale Library.”



Focus on Friends

FRIENDS OF WOLLONGONG CITY LIBRARIES (NSW)

"The Friends work to encourage an interest in books, build links between the library and the community."

The Friends of Wollongong City Libraries are an independent group who support and promote our libraries. They also arrange regular events that anyone can take part in. New members are always welcome.

The Friends work to encourage an interest in books, build links between the library and the community and provide practical support such as fundraising for library equipment, facilities and staff training.

You can read more about this group at:

https://www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0025/45961/WCL-Friends-Constitution.pdf

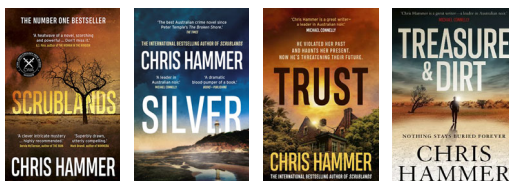
Upcoming Friends events

A Literary Dinner with Chris Hammer – Friends of the Library

<https://www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/library/library-events/for-adults/a-literary-dinner-with-chris-hammer-friends-of-the-library>



"Our goals are to serve as a link between the library and the community, and foster an interest in books and an awareness of library services. We organise author luncheons and dinners throughout the year. At these events we can gather with friends and other enthusiastic readers to hear popular authors talk about their books and their writing."



Membership Application

CATEGORIES

Membership fee incorporating
News Update

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Friends of Library groups in Australasia*

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