We know Students Need School Libraries, but how do we make it happen?

By Holly Godfree

> ### Snapshot
> Holly Godfree, the SNSL Campaign Manager, describes the campaign to date and ways you can be involved.

I'm hoping that, since you work in a school library, you've heard of the ***Students Need School Libraries*** campaign. One way or another, read on, gentle reader, and get ready. This is your chance to dive in and swim with us!

I ask only one thing as we go: That you consider it genuinely possible for all Australian students to have access to an excellent school library. Together we can do this.

Campaign objectives

Our Mission: To ensure student access to high quality school library services.

Our Vision: To ensure that every student has access to a dynamic, well-resourced school library run by qualified library staff.

These are ambitious goals, yes, but there are signs that the time is right for this campaign. Headlines from around the world confirm that there is a growing awareness about the importance of all students having school libraries run by qualified staff. We are a part of that growing momentum.

Not sure what I mean? Take a minute to look up the national strategy for school libraries in Scotland, pending legislation in Michigan, and what Cressida Crowell said when she was named the U.K.'s newest Children's Laureate in July. We are a part of a bigger movement, and that can only be a good thing.

How it all started

The roots of the ***Students Need School Libraries campaign*** are intertwined with the formation of the School Library Coalition in 2015 when official representatives from seven Australian school library associations and a few other individuals (like yours truly) came together to meet at ALIA house in Canberra. Those associations were: Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), Australian School Library Association (ASLA), School Library Association of New South Wales (SLANSW), School Library Association of South Australia (SLASA), School Library Association

of Victoria (SLAV), Queensland School Library Association (QSLA), and Western Australian School Library Association (WASLA).

Attendees at the inaugural meeting were Barbara Combes and Phyllis Paioff, WASLA, Carol Grantham, Hajnalka, Molloy and Sue Johnston SLASA, Michelle Jensen and Katie Cripps, SLANSW, Cindy Tschernitz, Di Ruffles and Rhonda Powling, SLAV, Isobel Williams, Anne Lockwood, ASLA, Shirley Birrell, SLAQ, Anne Plowman and Holly Godfree, ACT, Damian Lodge, Anne Girolami, Sandra Ryan, Sue McKerracher, ALIA.

The 'School Library Coalition' was formed as a cooperative working group of representatives from these associations. We meet remotely once a term and face-to-face once a year. These associations actively support the campaign by promoting it with their members, providing funding (e.g. the payment for the campaign website platform) and taking the lead on direct state/territory-specific actions.

The tipping point

For me, the crystallisation of the campaign as we know it was two-fold.

First was a conversation with a lady on a plane to South Australia for the 2016 Coalition face-to-face meeting who asked me, 'So, what are you doing in Adelaide?' 'I'm saving school libraries,' I replied. She was shocked; 'What's wrong with school libraries?!?' As I spoke, watching her madly scribbling notes to find out more about her child's school library, I realised with sudden clarity that most people have no idea that there is even any problem at all. Their child brings home the occasional book to read, and they assume that all is well in that school library.

Second was a decision made there in Adelaide where we decided to throw open the virtual 'doors' to anyone who wanted to help reverse the trend of declining resources for school libraries around the country. We embraced the fact that there were large numbers of intelligent, passionate, well-informed, experienced people outside that particular room in Adelaide who cared deeply about this situation and were ready, willing and able to throw their shoulders behind the cause. But, more importantly, we acknowledged that trying to make large-scale change with just the small group of people who happened to be in leadership positions at the time was simply not going to work.

Biggest wins so far

- ## People power

Stats include:
- 200+ people from all states/territories signed up to an email listserv of those willing to actively help with small/medium/large tasks as they can.
  - *Contact us via the website if you'd like to be added to that list.*
- A committed leadership group: Madison Dearnaley (QLD), Carol Grantham (SA), Sue Johnston (SA), Hajnalka Molloy (SA) and I (ACT) are in regular contact about big decisions and tasks.
- Talented volunteers: there are too many to mention, but people like Susan Stephenson (better known as The Book Chook) and Deb Robins put in countless hours last year building up a mountain of memes for us to drip out on social media. Madison Dearnaley works with a small team to create and maintain our well organised, visually stunning website. Many others have completed specific small and medium-sized tasks that have added other pieces to the growing mosaic.
- As of press time: Facebook = 3700+ followers, Twitter = 1500+ followers, YouTube = 100+ subscribers.

- ## Getting help from some 'big' guns.

- High profile endorsements: Too many to mention…. But of particular note are the interview of authors Jackie French, Jack Heath, Morris Gleitzman, Harry Laing and Michael Salmon featuring in the 17 short documentary films on our website.
  - *These films are absolutely fantastic! My *unbiased* opinion is backed up by the fact that they are fast approaching a combined total of 10,000 views in less than one year. The films are intended to be advocacy tools. Use them!!*
- High quality visuals are essential for a polished, professional campaign. The staff at Softlink and Syba Signs have been proactive and keen to offer their support to help us with graphic design (among many other things).

Important learnings so far

- ## Creating a campaign is only the first step

My role, as the campaign coordinator, is shifting from 'creation' to more actual 'coordination'. This is where you come in. We've worked to build a toolbox for you, but those tools need to be used. Social media plays its role, but it's my view that actual *face to face* conversations are what's really needed to get us where we want to be.

What you (yes, you!) NEED to do

- **Distribute the *7 Signs Your Child Needs Their School Library* flyer** to at least 10 businesses, organisations, workplace kitchen areas, anywhere the general public might linger and see it.

  - I'm asking **you** to do this **at least 10 times.**

    - See our website for tips on having that conversation and for the PDFs of the flyer. Then flick us a quick report via social media or our website contact page so that we can celebrate that 'win' and publically thank that organisation.

    - Shy? Uncomfortable? Understandable, but push yourself through that. Do it anyway. This is important.

7 Signs Your Child Needs Help From Their School Library

They use digital media every day but…

FRUSTRATED — They get frustrated with homework and assignments

They feel overwhelmed by research tasks — OVERWHELMED

BORED — They can't find topical, age appropriate digital content

They have trouble knowing which information to trust — CONFUSED

VULNERABLE — They don't understand the privacy settings on their social media accounts and devices

They rarely read for pleasure and their literacy is lagging — POOR LITERACY

POOR RESULTS — Their grades are starting to suffer

Help your child and the future of school libraries in Australia

Students Need School Libraries
studentsneedschoollibraries.org.au

- **Talk to people!**

Put the 'monkey' on your back. Many of you will already have this monkey simply because you are associated with a school library. What does this actually look like?

  - When someone you are with talks about 'fake news', you talk about how school library staff specifically teach website evaluation.

  - When a friend talks about their child's teacher, you ask about the school library services at that school and talk about how collaborating with teachers is core business for the library and how what helps teachers also helps students.

  - When an acquaintance confides that their child is getting bullied, you talk about how the physical space of a school library, the rich perspectives offered by literature and the unique role of school library staff are essential components of the multi-pronged approach for schools to successfully address tricky social issues.

  - When you read an article about Australia's falling scores on literacy, ICT or some other testing, you write in to that media outlet talking about how strong school libraries run by qualified staff are known to improve these outcomes and that ALL students need that, not just the lucky few.
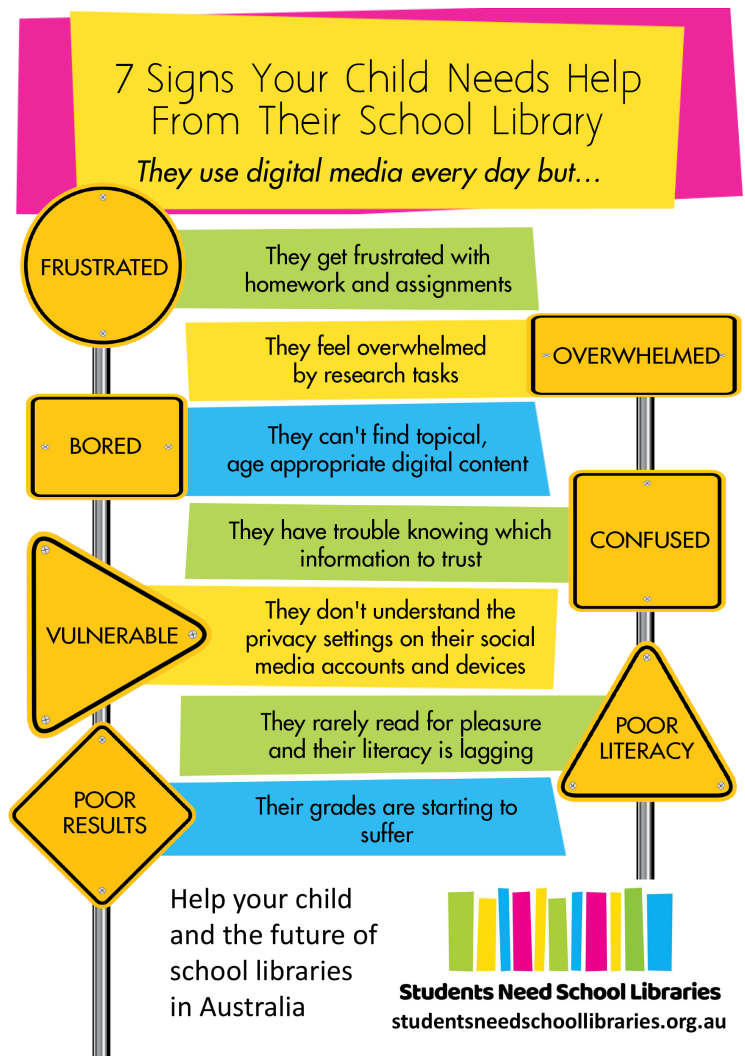
What you CAN do

- **Make a presentation** about what school libraries can and should be like to people who are lacking them or who have decision making power.

  - The parent group or school board of a school with no qualified school library staff
  - Your local council
  - Your Education minister

- **Actively work with your union** on issues related to school library staffing.

  - This is a vital tactic. Education unions know that what benefits educators also benefits students. Unions are democratic organisations - numbers are what matter. A cause like ours is actually easy to get numbers behind because it makes so much sense.

    - Set a goal (e.g. promote the *7 Signs* flyer with all members, get a school library-related item on the list for enterprise bargaining).
    - Write a motion. Speak persuasively asking people to vote for it.
    - Rinse and repeat.

Make no mistake. You have power. We CAN achieve the vision. But, of course, the opposite is also true. We might not get strong school libraries for all students. We might continue down the path of inequity, cuts, increasing stress and declining results. Success will come down to a collective effort, tens of thousands of small/medium/large actions (and some stars aligning in our favour). I am one among many giving it my very best shot. If you're not already an active campaigner, I hope you will join us. The students of Australia need you.

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