

## Highlighters, Badges and Information? It's in the Bag!

By Sarah Love

Libraries are changing, we need to keep relevant, we need to keep moving forward and we need to keep up to date! This is not news to any of us – we work in libraries, we know that things are changing, we are constantly finding new and exciting ways to maintain relevance to our communities and we are all busy trying to keep up! But do our school staff know what we are doing? Do they know what we can offer them? Do they use all the resources we research, select and curate for them? With a staff of 170 and a student body of nearly 1700, getting the message to everyone in our community is a challenge we are embracing daily.

At Mandurah Catholic College we have tried various ways of getting information to all our staff: we have stood up at staff meetings and training days with beautiful, informative, amusing presentations; we send emails of new items in the library, new ebooks, new videos on Clickview; we invite staff to morning tea and showcase the library and its resources; we host and regularly present to learning area meetings; we meet with Heads of Learning Areas; and we chat to individual staff constantly. But I can guarantee that every time we show something, various members of the audience will say 'that's so great, I wish I'd known about this before', even if this is the fourth time this information has been made available to them! The fact is that staff are busy – their minds are elsewhere during presentations. If information is not relevant to them that day, that minute, then it is easily lost. I'm sure this is something we have all experienced both as presenters and audience.

I saw an idea in a Facebook post in the middle of 2016 and thought I would try it for the start of 2017 – 'Welcome Back Bags' for every member of staff from the cleaners through to the new Principal. (And, yes, our new Principal did receive his bag hand delivered by me in order to get the library on his agenda in his first week!)

I was delighted to see Maxwell (2017) talking about the idea in his article in *Connections* this term. I fully agree with him that this is time consuming but very worthwhile idea. The bags contained various 'freebies' from some of our suppliers and partners: The Literature Centre in

Fremantle, Overdrive, Dymocks in Busselton and Clickview were all excited by the project and were very generous in their support. The items, which included bookmarks, highlighters, pens, badges and posters, were placed in an environmentally friendly paper bag with various book loving quotes and a 'Welcome to 2017' message glued to the front. However, for us, the most important item in the bag was the information we included about the services we offer from the library. This gave all staff basic information about the library itself including the various teaching and learning spaces we have and how to book them, information about all the online services that are available to staff through our library catalogue, and details for all the online databases and ebook platforms we subscribe to.

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Putting the bags together was a huge task. Luckily we have access to amenable teenagers who helped out (yes, these lovely teenagers all happen to have a parent who works in the library!). The finished bags looked amazing and were very well received by staff, with a huge number of thank you messages and comments finding their way to us.



*One of our helpful teenagers with some of the finished bags.*

Better than the thank you messages though were the questions about how to use services mentioned in the bags, or staff telling us they had found a resource, using one of our services, which they had then used in class.

The general trend for all our services this term has shown an increase which is of course a very welcome, positive sign, and I would love to give the credit to the Welcome Back Bags. However, I have also talked to nearly every high school student from years 9 to 12 about our library catalogue and its links through to our databases so a lot of this increased usage has been students logging on during my classes with them!



*The finished bags in ready for collection in staff pigeon holes.*

So, I decided to send a survey to staff about the Welcome Back Bags and their usefulness. The response numbers were a little on the low side, but all of those responses were very positive. Over 50% of respondents recalled getting information about the library in amongst their pens and highlighters. Over 20% of respondents had used our library catalogue so far this year; this may not seem many but the survey also showed that less than 10% of respondents had used it during the whole of 2016! Staff also reported making more use of the online journals so far this year, again nearly double compared with the whole of 2016.

I asked staff what information they would like in future and resoundingly, they wanted information about new resources, both print and electronic, as well as access to more LibGuides. These results were very useful as these are areas we had already decided to focus on for 2017. So it is good to know that we are on the right track.



*The finished bag.*

However, I think the best testament of the usefulness of the information we provided is the fact that in nearly every staff office across the College at least one person has pinned the information from the Welcome Back Bag above their desk so it is ready to use when they need it. Sending the information by email or standing at the front of a whole school staff meeting does not seem to have the same result.

My biggest worry now is how to top this next year!

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## References

Lucas, M. (2017) 'Guerrilla Book Fair: Getting Staff Involved in Your School Library' in *Connections*, (100), pp 8-9.

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