

**School-community libraries of South Australia**  
**The lived experience**  
**A report of 2018 research results**

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## Introduction

There are multiple benefits to be gained from a dynamic and innovative network of public libraries based in the heart of communities. These include a more literate society, social cohesion and tolerance, informed decision making and a best start in life for our children....The public library is at the centre of the free exchange of ideas, deliberation and citizen engagement central to our democracy. (Libraries Board of South Australia & Local Government Association of South Australia, 2015)

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) considers the acquisition and improvement of literacy skills throughout life as critical if people are to fully participate in and contribute to society (UNESCO, n.d.). In his book *Social Capital* (2005), David Halpern asserts that spaces which facilitate interaction but do not force people to do so, help to build social networks that enable self-governance and support individual mental and economic health. As public institutions, libraries are ideally situated to support the development of those networks (Khoir et al., 2017). In addition to helping build community and social capital, access to libraries improves the literacy skills and educational and employment prospects of individuals (State Library of New South Wales, 2012; Becker et al, 2010; Celano & Neuman, 2001).

However, providing library services in rural and remote communities is challenging. Rural areas do not “have the critical mass to support public infrastructures that are fiscally sound” (Bushy, 2002, 105). They also face challenges recruiting and retaining qualified staff, staff training and development, and establishing and sustaining technological infrastructure (Asthana & Halliday, 2004; Bushy, 2002; Rideout & Reddick, 2005). Specifically, libraries require space, library materials, furnishings, technology, and staff expertise which can be difficult to access and often costly to provide.

One response to the challenge has been the establishment of joint use libraries (libraries developed in partnership to serve multiple constituencies, e.g. a public and academic library, a public and school library, or other combination).

[B]ringing two libraries together in a single building leverages their resources. Collections are employed for greater effect and reach a wider audience than two separate libraries would be able to achieve. Reference Services have increased scope and better serve the community. Access for both audiences is enhanced. Perhaps most importantly in these uncertain financial times, when the inevitable budget crisis strikes, the burden of funding the library is shared. (Agee, 2014, 528)

While financial motivations for creating joint use libraries are clear and well-documented, the benefits of joint use libraries are more than economic (Kluever & Finley, 2012). The establishment and success of a joint use library can help both of the library partners achieve their mission and objectives in their community (Olliver & Anderson, 2001). Joint use libraries can become an important site of community building and help to improve quality of life (Casstevens, 2016; Hart, 2011; Haycock, 2006; Kluever and Finley 2012).

## Research Project

Australia has widely embraced the joint use library structure. Many Australian states have guidelines around joint use libraries (e.g., [New South Wales](#) and [Queensland](#)) and the Australian Library and

Information Association has developed its own policy ([Joint-use libraries](#)). In particular, the state of South Australia has over forty joint use libraries and is unique in its statewide programmatic approach to school-community libraries. The purpose of this research project was to learn from the robust South Australian experience in establishing, working with, and managing rural and remote joint use libraries.

Initially the research project aimed to look broadly at the variety of joint use library models in place in the state. Visits to joint use libraries near Adelaide and in the southeastern corner of the state, initial discussions with the Interim Director of the State Library, and further reading resulted in a narrowing of the project's focus. Ultimately, the project explored the potential of the South Australian school-community library program as a model for rural and remote community libraries. Research questions focused on what is working well with the program and where there are challenges.

This report is a summary of what was heard during the project's data-gathering phase, between August and December 2018. The report contains no recommendations, as the purpose of the project was to learn from the current school-community library program in South Australia, not to review it. Future dissemination of this research is anticipated through conference presentations and peer-reviewed publications.

The research will also help to inform the development of a framework for establishing joint use libraries in rural and remote communities. As Jim Dwyer stated: “[T]he conversion of a single-type library service to a joint facility or the initial provision of a joint facility is a far more complex matter than merely deciding it would be a good thing and then proceeding to set things in motion without adequate planning” (Jim Dwyer quoted in Bundy, 1997, 106). The complexities of the partnerships and agreements necessary for success make the joint use library vulnerable to failure (Bundy & Amey, 2006). In order to mitigate the possibility of failure, the South Australian research data, along with information gathered in earlier research about joint use libraries in northern Manitoba, Canada (Sarjeant-Jenkins & Walker, 2015), will be used to inform the development of a framework for establishing joint use libraries in rural and remote communities.

This research would not have been successful without the support of Geoff Stempel, State Library of South Australia; Veronica Mathews, Public Library Services, South Australia; Leonie Pech, Department for Education, South Australia; state-level representatives for the Libraries Board of South Australia, the Department for Education, and the Local Government Association; and the many library managers, community library assistants, principals, and local authority representatives from communities across the state who agreed to meet with the researcher and spoke freely. My thanks to all of you. Funding support for the project was received from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (Canada), managed through the University of Saskatchewan.

## Methodology

The research used an interpretivist approach. Interpretivism is characterized by six principles: naturalistic inquiry, temporal nature, interpretive analysis, researcher as instrument, use of expressive language, and hermeneutic cycle (Bhattacharjee, 2012) and proposes a relative ontology with multiple realities, those of the researcher, the participant, and the reader or audience of the research. According to interpretivism, research needs to take into account the impact of human situations, behaviours, and

experiences in constructing those realities (Brooke, 2013; Creswell, 2007). The researcher and the participants have differing realities that impact and inform each other and together constitute the whole of what is known. (Thorne et al., 2004).

Three principles of interpretivism drove the research methodology. Naturalistic inquiry assumes that social phenomena occur within, and cannot be separated from, their social context; therefore, phenomena must be studied in their natural settings (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Naidoo, 2011). Interpretive analysis relies on the insider perspective where data is interpreted through the eyes of research participants (Brooke, 2013; Bhattacharjee, 2012). Finally, the interpretivist approach acknowledges the role of the researcher in data collection and analysis. According to Bhattacharjee (2012, p.106), the researcher is “part of the data collection instrument in that they must use their observational skills, their trust with the participants, and their ability to extract the correct information.” In addition, it is through the researcher’s knowledge and experience that the data is interpreted (Bhattacharjee, 2012).

Three qualitative methods were utilized to gather data:

- An online survey consisting of open-ended questions to allow participants to use their own words to describe the challenges and strengths of the School-community library (SCL) program’s structure, governance, funding, and staffing. Ninety-eight people started the survey; fifty people answered all of the survey questions. Responses were anonymous and grouped only by respondent role.
- A two-hour workshop with SCL managers and community library assistants to build a shared understanding of the SCL program. With guiding questions to initiate discussion, thirty-five participants explored the strengths of the program and its challenges.
- Face-to-face semi-structured interviews to further investigate the experiences, benefits, and challenges of maintaining the school-community libraries. Interviews were held with stakeholders of nine SCLS, including library managers, council representatives, community library assistants, and principals, and representatives from the Libraries Board of South Australia, Public Library Services South Australia, the South Australian Department for Education, and the Local Government Association. Twenty-one interviews were conducted individually, three interviews involved two people, and two interviews involved three people (thirty-three total participants).

## Themes

While the differing experiences of research participants did result in a variety of responses and perspectives, four themes were consistent across all participant groups and data gathering methods.

*Sharing services results in improved access.* The SCL model provides small communities with a library that has longer opening hours than just a school library or just a community library. It would be unlikely that these small communities would be able to sustain both a school library and a community library. The SCL model maximizes resources and provides schools with access to the public library collections across the state through the OneCard system.

*The SCL is a bridge between the school and the community.* The community has a connection with the school, leading to increased awareness and understanding of what is occurring in the school, and the

school is more engaged in community life. The SCL is a way to transition young children into the school environment; students see adults as readers and learners. In fact, the SCL is a means for true life-long learning from preschool, through school, and into adulthood.

*The SCL is a tri-partite partnership model, but governance is not equally balanced among the partners.* With the library situated on school grounds, all staff reporting to the principal, library facilities managed by the school, and the primary funding coming from the Department for Education, the school is the dominant partner voice. The least vocal partner is the council; this may be by choice, lack of engagement, or limited understanding of council's role.

*Library location is key.* The SCL should be on the edge of school property, ideally with an entrance for the public directly from the street and with public toilets separate from school toilets. Because school location was not determined based on public traffic, sometimes the school is not centrally located within a community. This can be problematic for community access to the library.

## Research Results

The importance of using an interpretivist approach to this research project is reflected in the research results. While there were some themes consistent across all participant groups, the expressed strengths and challenges of the SCL model vary based on participant role, experiences, and relationships with other SCL stakeholders. As McKenna et al. (2011, p.150) state: "rather than one truth to be discovered that might be used as a guide to action, there are multiple, socially constructed truths". These different realities need to be taken into account in reading and interpreting the results.

In addition, it is important to acknowledge the role of the researcher as instrument in data collection and analysis. In the workshop and the in-person interviews, the level of trust between researcher and participant affects the openness and thoroughness of responses. Comments that elicited probing questions, and the structure of those questions, were shaped by the researcher's "personal insights, knowledge and experience of the social context." (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p.106)

## Survey

The online survey was distributed between September 4<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, 2018. Privacy procedures limited access to participant email addresses; therefore, the survey was distributed to school and library employees through local school administration and to council representatives through the Local Government Association of South Australia (LGA). Due to this distribution method, it is unknown how many people actually received the survey invitation. Ninety-eight people started the survey; fifty people answered all of the survey questions. The survey collected only anonymous responses and participation was voluntary. The survey (Appendix A) was approved by the University of Saskatchewan (Canada) Research Ethics Board and the Research Unit of the Department for Education, South Australia.

The survey consisted of 16 questions divided into six sections. Most questions were open-ended to allow participants to use their own words to describe the strengths and challenges of the SCL program.

Of the 98 respondents, 35% self-identified as library managers, 26% as other library employees, 19% as school employees, 6% as principals, 3% as elected council members, and 9% as council employee

responsible for libraries. Ninety-five percent of the respondents consider the SCL an effective structure for delivering library services to community members and the school population.

Survey respondents saw the following advantages to having the school and public library brought together into one library:

- The SCL builds connections between school and community, bringing people together; it helps the community see what students are doing, and for students to see adults reading and using the library.
- The SCL serves as a community hub and central place for learning, helping to build lifelong learning and lifelong library use.
- Bringing together the school and public libraries means that there are more resources available than either a school or public library might have on its own.

All respondents acknowledged that most small communities would not be able to sustain two separate library facilities. Even in communities where both a public library and a school library may be possible, the SCL model allows for longer hours of library service (especially than those delivered by a small town public library) and is considered a way to increase access to services while reducing cost and service duplication.

I think [SCLs] are incredibly valuable in small, rural, remote communities, particularly when services are being removed as populations decline. They provide a great opportunity for social interaction, and for people to feel connected with the broader world. School community libraries are becoming one of the very few agencies remaining in rural areas. They provide a small, concise version of the public library service provided in larger towns and cities. People are able to feel connected to the larger public library network through one card. We need to accurately understand the uniqueness of each community though, and remember that our perceptions of what is relevant and appropriate for one, isn't necessarily so for another. Regardless of size, I think it is about striving to best serve our communities.

- Survey respondent, September 2018

Respondents also recognized some disadvantages to the SCL model:

- Schools are often located away from the central business area of a community, making community access to the library more challenging.
- Sometimes community members do not feel comfortable using the library when students are present due to student behaviour, noise, or a feeling that they are disrupting the students, or the community members may have had a negative relationship with school.
- School expectations and governance can affect the level of library service and support. It can be challenging to balance the expectations of senior school administrators for teaching and support for students with community expectations for full public library service.

The Department for Education through the local school, the LGA through the local council, and the Libraries Board of South Australia, represented by Public Library Services, share the responsibility for SCL governance. Respondents saw the strengths of this structure in shared costs and a shared voice in governance, with no one party able to make a wholesale change in the program or service; however,

these strengths were also seen as challenges. Some challenges were logistical, for example, local government and state government have different reporting requirements and fiscal years. Multiple partners can also mean differing priorities and expectations; one respondent used the phrase “too many masters”. In the SCL model, the school covers the majority of the library’s operating costs. This can result in an expectation that the library and the teacher-librarian should be focusing time and resources on the needs of students and teachers, rather than striving for an equal balance between school and community support.

While many respondents felt that the current governance structure for the SCL works well, there were a number of suggestions for revising the structure:

- Clearer roles and expectations for all the partners, including in areas of governance and funding. Some respondents felt that there should be equal responsibility for decision-making between the three parties – if three parties are contributing to the SCL then all three parties should be making decisions. Others felt that the school should determine library resourcing and services as the school covers the majority of the operating costs.
- Ensure that both the school principal and the local council understand the role of the SCL in the school and community.
- Regular meetings between the principal, the library manager, and the council representative.
- Recognition that being a teacher-librarian in a SCL is different than being a teacher-librarian in a school library
- Improved communication at all levels, within the school, between the school and the council, locally and at the state level.

Funding for the SCLs is directly tied to the governance model. Currently staffing and facilities are paid for by the school, the council pays a per capita amount based on a formula devised a number of years ago, and the Libraries Board of South Australia funds public library resources and provides technical and other support, training, and networking opportunities. There is a general feeling that having multiple sources of funding allows for flexibility. However, to have the model work well, there is a need for all parties to be engaged and supportive. Survey questions about funding raised further questions from participants. What happens if a funding partner withdraws? Could there be different funding formulas for SCLs that better reflect the local situation?

The comments about the proportion of funding that each partner should provide fell into two groups. Some stated that the funding should be equally distributed between the three partners; others focused on the local council portion of funding and the need for that to be increased. When asked what factors should be considered in determining funding proportions, responses included library usage and population size (both community and school). Some respondents also felt that SCLs in more remote communities require higher funding support from state funding bodies.

Currently all SCL employees report (directly or indirectly) to the school principal. While respondents did comment that the success of the reporting structure is dependent on the degree that the principal supports and understands the library, most respondents felt that this reporting structure was the only viable option. With the library situated on school premises, this structure ensures that:



- library employees have all the required training (such as child safety) and abide by the requirements that all workers in a school have to follow;
- all the people working in the school work for the same employer so have the same benefits and working conditions; and
- senior administrative support is close at hand if needed.

The primary issue with the reporting structure is the Department for Education agreement for employee hours. Because the SCL has different hours than a school library (or a school) it is sometimes challenging to provide library staffing during school holidays. This can be compounded by the funding model, which does not provide a clearly articulated process to follow if a library requires additional staffing, staffing for after-school and holiday hours, or replacement staff when one of the regular staff needs to go for training.

When asked about the necessary education requirements for library managers, a number of respondents said that the library manager should have library qualifications or experience along with a teaching degree, while others felt that a teaching degree was not necessary unless the person had to teach school classes.

The final section of the survey looked at library space and location. Accessibility and ease of access were raised as key considerations when establishing a SCL. The library should be on the edge of the school grounds, close to parking, and ideally have separate entrances for students and the public. This ensures that the public is never required to be in the school grounds. Related to library location was the issue of toilets. Nearly every respondent mentioned the importance of having separate toilets for the public; there is significant concern about libraries where the only available toilets are those also used by students.

Respondents were also asked about the most important spaces to be included in an SCL. Of the ten spaces options listed, the top five were:

- Space for books, movies, audio – selected by 95% of respondents
- Computer workstations – selected by 81%
- Staff workspace – selected by 78%
- Relaxed/casual space – selected by 69%
- Flexible/multi-function spaces for presentations, programming, etc – selected by 63%

The survey ended with the option to suggest changes to the model or final comments. Many respondents reiterated their support for the SCL model and that it is working well. Suggestions for change to the SCLs included improved internet, increased funding particularly to support new technologies, bigger and/or redesigned spaces to reflect changing use, increased community engagement, improved community access, and the possibility of integrating local community and tourism services into the library. One respondent felt that there should be one community library within a council area, rather than multiple local libraries.

SCLs have worked to the advantage of all stakeholders for many years and are a unique example of very positive outcomes for many. The future requires vision from a State

Government level to expand their function as the primary interface for govt. agencies and life long learning for citizens.

- Survey respondent, September 2018

### *Workshop*

A workshop was held in Adelaide on 5 November 2018. The University of Saskatchewan (Canada) Research Ethics Board approved the workshop structure and questions (Appendix B). The session was originally envisioned as a focus group, with guiding questions to initiate discussion. However, 35 participants (primarily teacher-librarians/library managers and Community Library Assistants along with two representatives from Public Library Services) attended the session. This required a revised session format, with table-based discussion followed by each table reporting back to the larger group.

Participants seated themselves at six round tables. Where people sat was voluntary, not assigned. In many cases, people who worked together and/or traveled into Adelaide together sat at the same table. Following an overview of the research project, participants were asked to discuss two topics – the strengths of the school community library structure and the challenges of the SCL structure. Four guiding questions were provided to assist in the table-level discussion:

- what is working well or not working well,
- the benefits and challenges of library employees being Department for Education employees with a community service role,
- the strengths and challenges of the SCL management structure, and
- one aspect of the SCL structure that they would hate to lose or that they would love to change.

Clear themes surfaced in the table discussions, many of which complement the survey responses.

### *Strengths of the SCL structure*

- The continuity of library services from babies to elderly, with a particular focus on the role the SCL plays in helping young children transition into the school environment
- The benefit of training and networking, particularly the role that Public Library Services plays in bringing people together and supporting the SCL staff
- Shared library resources, particularly the OneCard system; in some cases this is highlighted as particularly valuable to the school
- Longer opening hours than if just a public library or just a school library

### *Challenges of the SCL structure*

- Sense that the library is not a valued part of the school, not viewed as part of the core business
- Teacher-librarian hours are not protected so can be redeployed for teaching
- The lack of understanding by principals of how school community libraries work and what the expectations are for all the partners
- The impact of relationships on the success of the SCL: library manager and principal, principal and council, council and library manager, library manager and community library assistant, library staff and school staff
- The lack of approved guidelines for SCLs

- Staffing challenges: being able to find relief staff, finding (and keeping) qualified teacher-librarians
- Department for Education policies and procedures that don't work well with the unique structure of the SCLs

### *Interviews*

Face-to-face interviews occurred 6-19 November 2018. In keeping with interpretivism's principle of naturalistic inquiry – the assumption that social phenomena occur within, and cannot be separated from, their social context (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Naidoo, 2011) – all but one interview took place in the interviewee's work setting.

The University of Saskatchewan (Canada) Research Ethics Board and the Research Unit of the Department for Education, South Australia, approved the interview-based research approach (Appendix C) and associated communications. Letters were sent to the principals of nine schools with SCLs to request interviews with the principals and their library managers. The local council was also contacted to request an interview with an elected member or council representative responsible for each of the nine libraries. Unfortunately, the interviews were scheduled leading up to and during local council elections; this may have affected the participation of elected council members.

A total of 26 interviews were held involving eight SCL library managers, four SCL community library assistants, four principals, four elected council members, six council representatives, two representatives of the Libraries Board of South Australia, one representative of Public Library Services, one representative from the Local Government Association, and three representatives of the Department for Education. The interviews ranged in length from twenty to ninety minutes. Nineteen interviews were recorded and those interviews were transcribed during the months of January and February 2019.

The researcher summarized transcribed interviews. Unrecorded interviews were documented through the researcher's hand-written notes. To mitigate researcher bias and pre-conceptions, all interview participants were asked to review their own interview summary to confirm that it accurately reflected their experiences and perspective.

The value of using the interpretivist lens to gather and analyse data is particularly evident in the interview method. The impact of the interviewees' roles within the SCL structure on their perspective of the strengths and challenges of the SCL model and the role of the researcher as instrument becomes more apparent in the deeper exploration permitted in face-to-face interviews. These "multiple, socially constructed truths" (McKenna et al., 2011, p. 150) are best reflected in common themes based on interviewee group.

### *Principals*

Overall, the principals agreed that the SCL model provided value to the school as well as the community. Local library collections and the state-wide OneCard system were deemed valuable to both students and teachers. Principals acknowledged that the SCL helps transition young children into the school environment and connect the school with the community.

However, principals were mindful of their responsibility to the school, both in meeting the needs of students and teachers through flexible staffing models and for managing the school budget in a fiscally-responsible manner. While the hours for the community library assistant are funded directly by the state's Department for Education using a population-based formula, the state's student-centred budgeting model requires the principal to fund the teacher-librarian out of the local school budget. The principal, therefore, is always trying to balance classroom teaching needs with the needs of the library.

Teacher-librarians are paid as teachers with their positions often split between the library and classroom teaching. Principals felt that there is potential for the teacher-librarians to do more in the classroom than currently occurs, such as working with teachers on resource-based learning initiatives. The integration of the teacher-librarian in curricula would mean that learning outcomes were more obvious and the value of teacher-librarian role less likely to be questioned. One principal mentioned that they would like to have more dedicated library time so that the teacher-librarian could actually go out of the library and into classrooms.

There was a sense that basic library operations do not require a qualified teacher; the administration of the library could be the responsibility of a non-teaching position. Removing the administrative role from the teacher-librarian would allow the teacher-librarian to focus on working with teachers, leaving the community library assistant responsible for the community services role. One principal wondered about the possibility of having a qualified librarian that had oversight for a few school libraries in a council area, including SCLs, as a way to bring librarian expertise to smaller communities.

#### Teacher-librarians and community library assistants

Overall, the teacher-librarians and community library assistants believed that the SCL model is an effective way to provide library services in small communities. Many small communities cannot afford to have two libraries, and even in those that could, the hours for the public library would be minimal. In fact, one teacher-librarian noted that the SCL provides more hours than many public libraries in larger centres as the SCL opens to the public at 8:30am. Bringing public library programming into the school helps to build community connections with the school; the school is seen as welcoming the community to be part of the learning and is transparent about what is taking place in the school. Programs such as storytime not only ease the transition into the school environment for young children, but can also help parents who had negative school experiences by creating a positive relationship with the school through the library. In fact, a number of SCL employees see the continuum of library service – from before a person starts school, through their time in school, and throughout their adult life – as one of the strengths of the SCL model.

A number of interviewees spoke of the importance of relationships to SCL success. The personalities of the principal, library manager, and council, their relationship with one another, and their commitment to the library all affect how the library is seen in the school and in the community. Some mentioned the challenge of meeting the differing expectations of the community and the school and that finding a balance is key. There was concern with the flow of communication; however, most library managers who had gone through the recent library review led by Public Library Services said that their relationship and communication with council had improved.

A number of library employees highlighted the critical nature of the principal and their role. For the SCL model to be successful, principals must understand the mandate, structure, and governance of the SCL and its role in serving the needs of both the school and the community. The principal is responsible for library staffing and operational oversight. Because of the high level of autonomy for the principal, the principal's perception of and commitment to the SCL significantly impacts the level of support the library receives. Some library managers felt that the principal's focus is on the work of the teacher-librarian as a teacher, not as a librarian.

Often the teacher-librarian experiences a tension between community demands and school demands. There can be pressure from the school because the teacher-librarian is not involved in team teaching and dual programming. The teacher-librarians acknowledged the importance of connecting with teachers to find out what they are doing in the classroom and how the library and library resources can fit in. They need to build awareness in the school and with teachers about what the teacher-librarian can do. This could be done by attending school meetings and working collaboratively with teachers. One teacher-librarian felt that they needed to prove their worth to classroom teachers, to show that the librarian and the library is indispensable and can do aspects of reading promotion and digital literacy skill development that the teachers cannot do. However, engaging with teachers requires time, a requirement made even more challenging for teacher-librarians because of community demands.

According to the interviewees, the library manager generally has control over collections and programming in the library space but no control over staffing and facilities. Staffing was highlighted as a particular challenge. Initially teacher-librarian positions were centrally funded and protected, but when the Department for Education moved to student-centred funding, responsibility for how staffing funds were allocated moved to the individual schools. Interviewee comments centred on staffing reductions – both of teacher-librarian time and of support staff time. At the same time, interviewees acknowledged that the core business of the school is the children and education not the library.

During the last 10 years in a lot of libraries the role of Teacher Librarian has diminished drastically and then of course the Community Library Officer has had to step up to meet expectations and carry the load so that the Library can function to some degree as before. This can have a flow on effect especially in the smaller libraries where because of diminished staffing extra activities engaging our library customers may not be offered, as staff are only able to manage the basics.

- Interviewee, email correspondence, July 2019

The SCL requires different staffing than a regular school library because it is open in the evenings, on weekends, and during school holidays. Staffing for school holidays is particularly difficult. As teaching staff, the teacher-librarian is expected to take vacation during school holidays, often leaving only one staff person in the library. In addition, cleaning is scheduled based on the school terms; therefore, there is no cleaning taking place during school holidays.

Some interviewees spoke of the challenge of having governance shared between the school, the council, and Public Library Services (PLS), although the school has "more power". While council expectations are not high, communities need to understand that the SCL functions as a Department for Education entity.

In addition, the library has to work with two fiscal years – the academic year is used by the school, the calendar year is used by the council and PLS. Despite the differing standards and expectations from PLS and the Department for Education, all interviewees appreciate the support that they receive from PLS. PLS is seen as an essential advocate between the governing bodies and provides advice, central information technology support, and a network structure deemed critical for small libraries. Many interviewees expressed frustration with the lack of a handbook and guidelines ratified by all the parties to the SCL. This means that there is no minimum standard regarding service levels, facilities, or staffing.

Other comments from interviewees included:

- The impact that the location of the school, and therefore the library, can have on community access and use.
- The library is being used differently – the school and students are borrowing physical items less, but use of the computers and participation in programming is increasing.
- Concern with the SCL structure only arises when the school gets pressured by the Department for Education to alter pedagogy or alter how space is allocated in the school.
- Traditionally the teacher-librarian has been the library manager but many Community Library Assistants could manage day-to-day operations. A future staffing structure could have the Community Library Assistant as the library manager, allowing the teacher-librarian to focus their time on working with teachers and students.

#### Local authority representatives

Local authority representatives were positive about the SCL model and feel that it works well. Many commented that they would struggle to have just a community library and that these kind of partnerships are an effective way for small communities to meet community needs. The library is very important in small communities, and is seen as a community centre, a provider of educational programming, and a way to stop the community from getting “left behind.”

There was consensus that the community couldn't afford to run the library on its own. Interviewees see the SCL as easy and cost-effective, good value for money. Most consider the funds as a grant from the council to the school to provide public library services.

I'm actually amazed that it works.... But it works so well. There's a real sense of cooperation between all of the organizations and if something has to happen one says, “right, how do we make that happen” everyone gets in, then you work out how to do it. I think it's a real cooperative, collaborative idea that really works on the ground. And we know that we couldn't afford to run that facility full-time by ourselves. If we were doing it, it probably would die gradually if not quickly. And I think the school are probably in the same position; if they had to run it all by themselves it certainly wouldn't be the facility it is with all the technology. So it's one of those things that we all get together and cooperatively it really works well.

- Dean Johnson, Kimba, interview, November 2018

One interviewee compared the council's role to that of an equity investor. Council sits at the strategic level; the operational level is with the school and the principal. However, another interviewee

mentioned that council might want greater involvement in the SCL, but has been unable to get a breakdown of costs for staffing and services. Council does not have a voice in how the library is staffed but is still asked for additional funds.

According to the local authority representatives, the SCL provides more open hours than a stand-alone community library could and improved access to resources, particularly trained staff – often a challenge for rural remote communities. Similar to other interviewee groups, local authority representatives recognized that the SCL helps ease the transition into the school environment for young children, as they are already familiar with the library. Having the library in the school, and as part of it, is seen as advantageous from a staffing perspective. The SCL is backed by a state-level government department, there is greater support for having a librarian, and all library employees report through the school and, therefore, have the same employer and employment conditions. While some interviewees felt that there is more emphasis on the SCL as a school library than a community library, they felt that this makes sense because the biggest library users are school-aged children.

While there was no interest in changing the governance structure, interviewees did mention that there were sometimes challenges in having the library fully under the school's control. Some interviewees mentioned the lack of evening and weekend opening hours and that there are not enough staff to provide the community programming that public libraries might deliver. As the majority of library funding and expenses are paid through the school, there is not always transparency in budget reporting. Many SCLs were not purpose-built; instead, they were adapted from existing buildings on school grounds. It is important to think about the two uses of the space – serving the needs of the school while providing public library programming – and the potential concerns around uncontrolled access to the school grounds by the public.

Additionally, having the library on Department for Education property can make changes to space difficult. As a state-level ministry, the Department for Education has procurement and process requirements that can be onerous and lengthy. Location can be challenging because the library is located where the school is, rather than where the best location might be for the community.

Interviewees felt it was critical to have the right people in the partnership: “when it is great it is great, but it is risky.” A positive relationship is fundamental to SCL success. One interviewee spoke about trust – “if the library asks for something then it is needed.” For the interviewees, the primary partnership was between the council and school, although they did acknowledge that having Public Library Services as a partner is good from a back-end support perspective. Some interviewees spoke about the challenges of an unequal partnership. There needs to be complete transparency between the parties, particularly on finances. This is exacerbated in the current context of shrinking budgets where all partners are feeling stretched and there is a concern about cost-shifting between levels of government.

While the general sense from the local authority representatives was that the SCL works well, there were some opposing views. One representative mentioned that although the library is in the school they do not see it as a mechanism for building a relationship between the school and community. Community members just come in, borrow library materials, and leave – there is no connection with what is happening in the school. The representative also did not see the library as having a role in community



programming, education, or as community space; they saw the library solely as a source for reference and reading material.

### State level representatives

As with the other interview groups, state level representatives mentioned that the SCL model meets the needs of the many small communities that would not be able to sustain two libraries.

I don't think there is a viable alternative to the delivery of library services to these remote communities without that shared service of the [school community] library. The fact is that it has to continue. The only hope is to modify the delivery model.

- James Bruce, Libraries Board of South Australia, interview, November 2018

While it can be challenging to balance the needs of the community and the school, both in funding and staffing resources, the school and community have access to a wide array of resources through the OneCard system as well as programming opportunities. Access and use of the library by the public was raised as problematic for those SCLs that were not purpose-built as a school community library. Interviewees also spoke of the importance of the partners being involved and fully committed, stating that success depends on individuals making the model work and wanting to make it work.

The broader mandate of state level representatives was also reflected in their perspectives on the SCL model.

- School community libraries fit into the desire of state government, and the Department for Education, to see government facilities used by the community and to help build the notion of schools as community hubs. Sometimes the SCL is the only form of state government representation in small communities.
- The fact that the SCL program has been running for forty years shows that the SCLs are adaptable and flexible; the fundamentals of the model are sound. For example, the recent change in local governance of the SCL means that now the school principal, representative of the local council, and the library manager are to meet once per term. This change is helping to improve the relationship between the school and the council.
- The SCL program means that communities in rural South Australia have a library. However, the remote nature of these libraries means that training and development can be problematic and local library employees have no peers with whom to brainstorm new ideas and approaches.

A number of interviewees spoke about the funding model and the need for that model to change if the SCL program is going to remain viable and relevant. Currently the model is beneficial for local government as it requires a relatively small financial commitment while allowing the council to say that it is delivering a library service. However, there is a sense that the SCLs barely meet the needs of the community. It is important for local councils to increase their financial contribution to the SCLs and to be active partners in their operations. In addition, it was suggested that the Libraries Board of South Australia funding be changed to reflect the increased expectations of a 21<sup>st</sup> century library. Currently, the board provides money for library materials but no operating funds.



According to one interviewee, it is critical to determine the purpose and role of the library. There is a need to clarify whether the library's role is solely to get books and information into the hands of people or whether the library is also a mechanism to build social capital and community.

## Suggestions and questions

This report contains no recommendations. The purpose of the project was to learn from the current school-community library program in South Australia, not to review it. However, during the data gathering process, participants surfaced ideas and asked questions that may be useful to the SCL partners – the Department for Education, the Libraries Board of South Australia, and the Local Government Association – as they consider revisions to the SCL model to reflect the demands of 21<sup>st</sup> century library users and respond to the current fiscal reality.

Two participants suggested alternate models for managing SCLs.

- Have a qualified librarian shared across a few schools in a regional area to act as a regional library manager, with community library assistants overseeing day-to-day operations. Each school would not need to have a teacher-librarian unless there was a local decision to hire one. Local teacher-librarians would be solely focused on serving the needs of the school.
- Make library management the responsibility of a higher-level community library assistant (CLA) supported by a teacher-librarian. With the CLA managing the library and focusing on the community needs, the teacher-librarian could focus on the students and resource-based learning. This would help to answer the question: If a teacher-librarian is not *teaching* then why is the school paying for a teacher-librarian? It would also ensure that each library had guaranteed staffing; in the current SCL model, the CLA hours are unaffected by student numbers or school priorities.

Both of these suggestions could solve the issue expressed by one survey respondent of the impact of transient teachers, principals, and teacher-librarians on the SCL and the broader community. If the library manager was a local person rather than requiring that it be a teacher-librarian, it might provide the library with the stability so important for remote communities.

The role of the library in a remote community is extremely important from being a safe place for isolated people to connect to being an essential source of internet for people in remote areas to manage their businesses. There is a huge spectrum of needs that local library staff are sensitive to, and I personally think that this should be part of the equation. School staff may not necessarily make governance decisions through this particular lens of community, as they tend to be immersed in the school agenda.

- Survey respondent, September 2018

SCL managers need to balance the expectations of the principal, local council, and Public Library Services, respond to changing user needs, and adapt to new technologies and service delivery models. This can be challenging in libraries with numerous staff, but is particularly difficult in libraries where there may be only a part-time teacher-librarian and a CLA. One suggestion was to have a position (perhaps a portion of one of the current SCL managers) serve as a mentor to SCL managers and as the intermediary between those managers and Public Library Services. That person could work with SCL managers to raise the profile of the SCL in the community and in the school, help them manage some of

the expectations of Public Library Services, assist in strategic planning, and provide guidance and advice on programming and library service.

In a similar vein, there were suggestions for increased learning opportunities and supports for library staff. Perhaps library employees could participate in training offered to council employees by the local council or a mentoring relationship could be established between SCL staff and staff at a larger library.

With council amalgamations, there are now councils that contain both SCLs and public libraries. These hybrid councils are problematic from a service delivery perspective. If a SCL is part of a council with different *kinds* of libraries in it, how do those libraries work together? What is the relationship between the public library staff and the SCL staff when they work for different employers? For service across communities to be equitable, it will be essential that the service delivery and staff relationship among the different libraries is clarified.

At the state level, there is a memorandum of understanding between the Local Government Association, the Department for Education, and the Libraries Board of South Australia. This has not necessarily translated into clarity in governance, funding, and library service delivery at the local level. One suggestion is to have a set of guidelines that set out the roles and responsibilities of the local partners, however, those guidelines should be flexible in order to reflect local realities. “[I]t’s got to be a partnership and I think what makes sense is local partnerships, local agreements, not one size fits all.” Veronica Mathews, Public Library Services, interview November 2018

## Conclusion

Delivering library services to rural and remote communities can be challenging in terms of staffing, spaces, and resources. Joint use libraries – and the South Australia school-community library program – may be a solution. Based on the data gathered through an online survey of school-community library stakeholders, an in-person workshop with SCL library managers, and interviews with SCL stakeholders in nine communities as well as state-library representatives, the SCL model generally works well in meeting local community and school library needs.

While the advantages of the SCL program are acknowledged by all the stakeholder groups, the challenges are more nuanced, often reflecting the perspectives and experiences of individuals based on their role in the model and their relationships with the SCL partners. There are areas where the model could be tweaked and revised in order to meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century library user and to respond to the fiscal realities of local councils and state government.

Future dissemination of this research is anticipated through conference presentations and peer-reviewed publications. The next phase of the research project is to synthesize the research data to determine key considerations for a joint use library framework. That synthesis, along with information gathered in earlier research about joint use libraries in northern Manitoba, Canada (Sarjeant-Jenkins & Walker, 2015), will help to inform the development of a framework for establishing joint use libraries in rural and remote communities.

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## Appendix A – School Community Libraries survey

### Introduction

The purpose of this survey is to learn more about the strengths and challenges of the School Community Library (SCL) program from SCL stakeholders. This survey forms part of a greater research project looking at joint use libraries – with a particular focus on the South Australian SCL program – as an approach for establishing libraries in rural and remote communities. The research goal is to develop a model or framework for sustainable library development that communities and/or governments could work with.

Results from this survey will be shared with you through your library, school, or local council and will also be shared with members of the Libraries Board of South Australia, Public Library Services, the Local Government Association, and the Department for Education to assist them in determining ways to increase the efficacy of the overarching SCL program.

The survey should take approximately 20 minutes to complete. It can be completed in stages if you use the same device and web browser throughout the survey, as previous responses will automatically be saved. All survey information will be retained and hosted on a third party, SurveyMonkey server. Your information will be stored in [facilities hosted in Canada](#) and is subject to SurveyMonkey's [Privacy Policy](#).

This survey collects only anonymous responses; no identifying information such as names, email addresses, or IP addresses will be stored. Your participation is voluntary; please answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. You may exit from the survey at any time by clicking on the “Exit” button located at the top right corner of each survey page. Partially completed surveys will still be included in the data for analysis. Since the survey is anonymous, once submitted data cannot be removed.

You cannot be identified in any publication or presentation of the research results. However, data will be grouped by respondent-role in order to gain an understanding of role-perspective, which may make it possible for someone to connect the information to you. Any publications and/or presentations resulting from the research will be available through the State Library of South Australia and your local library—either electronically on the libraries' websites or in hardcopy at the libraries.

This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan (Canada) Research Ethics Board. Any questions about your rights as a participant may be sent to them at the Research Ethics Office [ethics.office@usask.ca](mailto:ethics.office@usask.ca) or toll free 1-888-966-2975. The survey has also been approved by Research Unit of the Department for Education, South Australia

Continuing with this survey indicates voluntary consent to participate in this research project.

If you have questions or concerns, please contact the researcher, Rachel Sarjeant-Jenkins at [rachel.sarjeant-jenkins@usask.ca](mailto:rachel.sarjeant-jenkins@usask.ca)

## Section 1 - General questions

- 1.1. What is your connection with the School Community Library (SCL)? [required]
  - a. School principal
  - b. School employee, not including employees working in the SCL
  - c. Library manager
  - d. Library employee
  - e. Council member (elected)
  - f. Council CEO or Council employee responsible for libraries
- 1.2. Do you think that the SCL is an effective structure for providing library services to community members and school students and teachers?
  - a. Yes/No/Unsure
- 1.3. What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of having the public and school library together?

## Section 2 – SCL Governance

Currently, responsibility for the SCL is shared between the Department for Education through the local school (School), the Local Government Association through the local council (Council), and the Libraries Board of South Australia (Libraries Board).

- 2.1. What are the strengths and/or challenges of this tri-partite governance structure?
- 2.2. What changes, if any, would you make to this tri-partite governance structure? Please explain.
- 2.3. When it comes to library operations, what do you see as the role of the:
  - a. School principal?
  - b. Library manager?
  - c. Council?
  - d. Libraries Board?

## Section 3 – Employment and reporting structure

Currently SCL employees are employees of the Department for Education and report to the school principal.

- 3.1. In your opinion, how well does this employment and reporting structure work for SCLs? [not very well, somewhat well, very well]
  - a. Please explain your rating.
- 3.2. What changes, if any, would you make to this employment and reporting structure? Please explain.
- 3.3. SCL employees provide library service to community members, other school employees (teachers and support staff), and students. What do you think are the necessary qualifications and training for all library employees?
  - a. What additional qualifications and/or training do you think are necessary for the library manager?

## Section 4 – Library space and facilities

All SCLs are located within school grounds. Some are near the entrance to the school, some have separate entrances for public and for students, and some are located in the heart of the school. The amount and type of space allocated to SCLs also varies widely.

- 4.1. What key factors should be taken into consideration when determining the location for an SCL?
- 4.2. From the following list, please select the five (5) spaces that are most important to include in an SCL.
  - a. Space for books, movies, audio
  - b. Space for study
  - c. Computer workstations
  - d. Meeting rooms
  - e. Dedicated programming/event space
  - f. Relaxed/casual space
  - g. Classroom space
  - h. Makerspace
  - i. Staff workspace
  - j. Flexible/multi-function space for presentations, programming, etc.
  - k. Other (please describe)

### **Section 5 – Funding**

The current funding model for SCLs requires contributions from the three governing parties and the local school:

- The school provides the building, the library manager, and, in some cases, additional personnel hours to support student library needs
- The Department for Education, through the school, funds a community library assistant (CLA) to provide library services to the public and to ensure that the library is open a minimum of 5 hours per week outside of school hours
- The Council contributes an amount according to a set formula to help cover the costs of library materials and some operational costs. Some Councils also help to fund additional CLA hours.
- The Libraries Board provides a grant for library materials to all SCLs along with centralized support for IT, the statewide library management system, materials purchasing and processing, training and development, program support, and statewide coordination of library services.

- 5.1. What are the strengths and/or challenges of this funding model?
- 5.2. What changes, if any, would you make to this funding model? Please explain.
- 5.3. What factors should determine the proportion of funding each partner contributes?

### **Section 6 – Final thoughts**

- 6.1. If you could develop library service in your school and community as you wished, what would you propose? Why?
- 6.2. Do you have any additional comments about SCLs and the School Community Library program?

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts about governance and operations of School Community Libraries in South Australia.



## Appendix B – Focus group

1. Introduction (10 minutes)
2. Overview of purpose and goal of the research project (5 minutes)
  - a. Review consent form and respond to questions/concerns
3. Group discussion:
  - a. Strengths of school community library structure (40 minutes)

Possible questions:

    - i. What is working well?
    - ii. Library staff are employees of the Department for Education with a community service role. What are the strengths of this employee relationship?
    - iii. The SCL works within a management structure involving three parties: the school, the local government authority, and Public Library Services (the state library board). What are the strengths of this tri-partite management?
    - iv. What one aspect of the school community library structure would you hate to lose?

### **REFRESHMENT BREAK (10 minutes)**

- b. Challenges within the structure (40 minutes)

Possible questions:

          - i. What is not working as well?
          - ii. What challenges do you face as the library manager of a school community library?
          - iii. Library staff are employees of the Department for Education with a community service role. What challenges does this pose?
          - iv. The SCL works within a management structure involving three parties: the school, the local government authority, and Public Library Services (the state library board). What challenges does this tri-partite management bring?
          - v. If there was one thing you could change, what would it be?
4. Next steps (5 minutes)
  - a. In-person interviews and observations to get more in-depth perspective of other stakeholders of school community libraries
  - b. Sharing summary of focus group discussion by email
5. Closing (10 minutes)
  - a. Checkout question: Thoughts on the discussion? What struck you? How are you feeling about the discussion?

## Appendix C – Semi-structured interviews

These initial questions were used in the interviews in order to stimulate conversation and discussion. Follow-up questions varied depending on the information provided by the participant(s).

### **Principal/Library Manager**

1. Do you think that the SCL is an effective structure for providing library services to community members and school students and teachers?
2. What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of having the public and school library together?
  - What are the top three things you like or think are good about your library?
  - What are three ways the library could be improved?
3. Do you see the library as a source of/ what is the most important role of the library:
  - Education?
  - Programming?
  - Internet?
  - Recreation/fun?
  - Other?
4. Currently, responsibility for the SCL is shared between the Department for Education through the school, the Local Government Association through the local council, and the Libraries Board of South Australia. What are the strengths and challenges of this governance structure?
  - What have been the challenges in sustaining the partnership at the local level?
  - What is the value of working in partnership?
5. The library serves the needs of both the school and the community, however, all library employees report to the principal. In your opinion, how well do you think this reporting structure works? What changes, if any, would you make?
6. Do you see the SCL model as successful?
  - If yes, what key factors have led to its success?  
(Examples: community support; partnering organization support; state/government support)
  - If no, what do you feel has contributed to its lack of success?  
(Examples: lack of community support/interest; lack of infrastructure)
7. If you could change the SCL program or components of the partnership in any way, what changes would you make?

### **Council representative/Council CEO or employee responsible for libraries**

1. If you were speaking to people from other communities, what would you say about the library?
  - What are the top three things you like or think are good about your library?

- What are three ways the library could be improved? What do you think is a waste of time, money, or space?
  - Is the SCL an effective structure for providing library services to the community?
  - What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of having the public and school library together?
2. Do you see the library as a source of/ what is the most important role of the library:
    - Education?
    - Programming?
    - Internet?
    - Recreation/fun?
    - Other?
  3. Currently, responsibility for the SCL is shared between the Department for Education through the school, the Local Government Association through the local council, and the Libraries Board of South Australia. What are the strengths and challenges of this governance structure?
    - What have been the challenges in sustaining the partnership at the local level?
    - What do you see as the value of working in partnership?
  4. The library serves the needs of both the school and the community, however, all library employees report to the principal. In your opinion, how well do you think this reporting structure works? What changes, if any, would you make?
  5. Do you see the SCL model as successful?
    - If yes, what key factors have led to its success?  
(Examples: community support; partnering organization support; state/government support)
    - If no, what do you feel has contributed to its lack of success?  
(Examples: lack of community support/interest; lack of infrastructure)
  6. If you could change the SCL program or components of the partnership in any way, what changes would you make?

**Public Library Services employees/Department for Education employees**

1. What are the benefits of the school-community library program?
2. What are the challenges of the program?
3. If you could change the program in any way, what would you change?
  - Funding
  - Governance
  - Staffing models