



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT
AND CITY SERVICES**

(Reference: [Inquiry into ACT Libraries](#))

Members:

**MS S ORR (Chair)
MISS C BURCH (Deputy Chair)
MR J MILLIGAN**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

WEDNESDAY, 17 OCTOBER 2018

**Secretary to the committee:
Ms B McGill (Ph: 620 50124)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 9.05 am.

MCKERRACHER, MS SUE, CEO, Australian Library and Information Association
BARNES, MS NICOLE, Director, Corporate Services, Australian Library and Information Association

THE ACTING CHAIR (Miss C Burch): I declare open this first public hearing of the Standing Committee on Environment and Transport and City Services inquiry into ACT Libraries. The committee announced this inquiry on 2 August 2018 and has received 76 submissions, which are available on the committee website.

Today the committee will be hearing from eight witnesses: the Australian Library and Information Association, Women with Disabilities ACT, People with Disabilities ACT, the ACT Bilingual Education Alliance, Legal Aid ACT, the Canberra Multicultural Community Forum, the ACT government and the Council on the Ageing ACT. On behalf of the committee I would like to thank all the witnesses for making time to appear today.

Before we begin, on behalf of committee I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on. We respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region. We will now move to the first witnesses appearing today: Sue McKerracher and Nicole Barnes from the Australian Library and Information Association. On behalf of the committee thank you for appearing today and for ALIA's written submission to the inquiry.

Can I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the pink coloured privilege statement before you on the table. Could you confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Ms McKerracher: I do.

THE ACTING CHAIR: Can I also remind witnesses that the proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes and are being webstreamed and broadcast live. Before we proceed to questions from the committee would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms McKerracher: Thank you. I will be responding to all your questions today.

Ms Barnes: I am here to take note of any questions taken on notice.

Ms McKerracher: Our opening statement is: we would like to thank the committee for providing the Australian Library and Information Association, ALIA, with the opportunity to provide evidence in response to its inquiry into ACT Libraries. We are the peak body for libraries in Australia and we work closely with public libraries in every state and territory to develop programs, campaigns, standards, advocacy and other initiatives.

Through ALIA's Australian Public Library Alliance, there is an active and effective

national network which helps spread ideas, share best practice and create the critical mass that enables major projects to be undertaken. While there are always financial challenges for government-funded services we would like to focus on the opportunities offered by public libraries to promote key agenda items.

To restate some of the figures in our submission, Australia has more than 1,500 central, branch and mobile libraries, with 9.3 million registered members and more than 113 million customer visits each year. Around Australia, capital cities are investing in libraries as a very visible sign of their aspiration to embrace the smart cities ethos.

Sydney has the Customs House library on Circular Quay, a trendy tourist magnet; the multi-award winning, sustainable design Surry Hills library; and the new Green Square library featuring a six-storey glass tower, subterranean garden and open air amphitheatre. Melbourne has the library at the dock, Australia's first six-star green-rated public building, with creative editing suites, performance spaces and a recording studio. It was shortlisted for the international public library of the year award in 2015.

Perth has its new city library, the first major civic building to be constructed since the Perth concert hall 45 years ago. Built in the round over seven levels, it has meeting spaces, a roof terrace and Perth's largest living green wall. I could go on. Brisbane, Adelaide, Geelong, major metro and regional cities, and smaller towns are all investing in modern libraries, which will help bridge the literacy and digital divide for future generations.

But it is not just about stunning design. It is also about the conceptual considerations that sit behind these statement buildings. The people behind Dokk1 library in Aarhus, Denmark are considered to be some of the world's foremost library thinkers. They talk about years of driven innovation, libraries as part of the fabric of the city and libraries as homes for communities of interest. This approach has created an energised, community-focused, multimedia centre for knowledge and culture—the library as the citizens' house. This is the kind of potential that can be realised by libraries in the ACT.

In our submission we describe Libraries ACT as a well-used, highly valued, tightly managed, efficient library service. We also flag that there is little capacity to embrace new opportunities as they arise, and this does come down to funding. ACT Libraries' total expenditure per capita is the lowest in Australia, at just over \$34, compared with the highest expenditure per capita of more than \$62 for South Australia.

For Libraries ACT to fulfil its potential, Canberrans need to be closely engaged in the evolution of library spaces, programs and services. There needs to be a greater emphasis on digital formats, digital inclusion and tech services. There needs to be recognition of the vital role played by libraries in early childhood learning, language and literacy development. And there needs to be consideration of a funding model which will compare with that of other large city library services in Australia.

On a final note, other states and territories benefit from legal deposit legislation which ensures that all published materials are lodged with the relevant state or territory

library. The ACT sadly lacks this legislation which, if in place, would ensure the safekeeping and long-term preservation of the documentary heritage of the territory.

MR MILLIGAN: Thank you for your submission to this inquiry. My past profession was a publisher and so I do have an interest in this field. Legal deposit, I am quite familiar with that. We have the National Library here. All publications go to that library. In the ACT we do not currently have any legislative requirement for legal deposit here. I suspect that most publishers would automatically send a copy of what they produce to the local libraries in the area. Do you still think that we need that requirement here, considering we have the National Library?

Ms McKerracher: Absolutely. The National Library collects the nation's published materials, but at a state and territory level the state and territory libraries collect the smaller organisations' materials, the work of that community. The work of the ACT Heritage Library is to collect for the ACT as a community rather than as a national capital. Without that, we are putting at risk important community documents, annual reports of organisations that otherwise will not necessarily be preserved.

MISS C BURCH: You were talking about smart cities and some of the opportunities there. Did you want to expand a bit on what you think some of the big opportunities are for Canberra and where we can be expanding in that space?

Ms McKerracher: I think Canberra is an interesting city. We have very advantaged people within the city. We also have people who live with disadvantage. I think it is easy for those of us in a job which has technical aspects to it to believe that everyone has internet connection, has access to devices and can engage with government and also on a personal level with sites, that we would be online all the time. That is not the reality for a lot of people.

Libraries bridge the digital divide. In a smart city sense we need people who are able to engage with the knowledge economy. We need people who are comfortable, confident, safe users of the internet. If we do not give people those skills very early on then they need those libraries to pick up the services. We provide the devices, we provide the training, we provide the internet. That is a really strong contribution.

The other thing is around literacy, because you cannot be digitally enabled if you cannot read or write in English. That is the other role that libraries play.

THE CHAIR: I want to pick up on your submission and the recommendation that the government undertake a more deliberative co-design approach to future planning for Libraries ACT. You have referenced the Aarhus model within that. What practices were used to design the Aarhus library in Denmark and how do you see those being applied to the ACT and also, more broadly, what the ACT could do in moving to co-design?

Ms McKerracher: I think the Aarhus model fits very nicely with the approach that the ACT government has taken to better suburbs and involving citizens in conversations. Aarhus created a conversation around a world cafe-style consultation and also a village square kind of conversation, which is detailed in the link

THE CHAIR: In your submission.

Ms McKerracher: Yes.

THE CHAIR: You have mentioned the better suburbs process. Are you looking at a more deliberative citizens engagement-type model? Is that what you are suggesting for the co-design?

Ms McKerracher: Absolutely. I think better suburbs went to a certain point, and obviously libraries were part of that consultation. I think it should be a focused community consultation around libraries but within a framework. Of course what happens is, if you say to people, “Would you like a library?” everybody says, “Yes please, and within walking distance.” I think you need to provide a framework to say, “This is what is up for discussion but within these parameters.”

MISS C BURCH: Touching on that point, do you think that, from a community perspective, it is better to have larger town centre libraries or smaller community libraries that are in walking distance?

Ms McKerracher: There are two models. There is the model, for example in Brisbane, where you have a major city library, very well resourced, very well staffed, and then you have branches around that benefit from the oversight of that city library. But that is quite an expensive model to operate.

The other version is to have a few anchor libraries that people do have to travel a short distance to reach, but that is a more sustainable model. Having a lot of branches is a very expensive way to go. A few very well-resourced libraries is possibly more cost effective.

MR MILLIGAN: On the publishing industry, printed books, material—it is a declining industry and we are moving towards e-books and resourcing online—what type of investment do you think the ACT could look at to get on top of this digital world that we are heading into, to provide a proper portal even for someone to access any publication that is at a local library in the ACT online and not necessarily be required to go to a physical library itself?

A lot of institutions—universities and so forth—are scanning and digitising their publications. Is that something, do you think, that the ACT government should invest in with ACT Libraries: to digitise what we do have and then have a portal that anyone can access and get those resources?

Ms McKerracher: It is a massive question. I will start by saying: actually the printing industry—the publishers that I speak to—are not seeing a declining market. Actually what we have found is that print and digital have kind of balanced out in the retail market so that for print, I believe—and I will take this on notice for the exact figure—about 25 per cent of sales is digital. But actually the print market has not been decimated as was thought back in 2013. In fact, print is very much loved, including by teenagers. There is definitely still a big role for print.

On the digital front, when you talk about digitalisation there are platforms for fiction

and non-fiction provided by OverDrive, Bolinda and other aggregators. The difficulty with those is that people have to go into the library catalogue and then go out to those platforms to download the items, and that can make it clunky. With an open API from the library management system to those things, it is possible to overcome that. Some work on that through the library management system would be good.

The materials you are talking about from universities, research—what we would call grey literature, the unpublished, not published by HarperCollins or Hachette but unpublished works—yes, having that digitised and made available is a valuable service but of course that has to be prioritised because there is a mass of information that could be digitised. It is an expensive process that needs to be a priority.

THE CHAIR: I do have one more question but I might give it to you on notice, if that is all right, because we are out of time. Thank you for appearing today. Can I run through a few housekeeping things just before you run off. When available, a proof transcript will be forwarded to witnesses to provide an opportunity to check the transcript and identify any errors. If witnesses undertook to provide further information or took questions on notice during this hearing, while the committee has not set a deadline for these responses, answers to these questions would be appreciated within one week of the hearing if possible. Thank you.

Short suspension.

MOORE, MS CLARE, Chief Executive Officer, Women with Disabilities ACT

THE CHAIR: We will move to our second witness appearing today. Ms Moore, on behalf of the committee, thank you for appearing today for Women with Disabilities and speaking to the written submission made to the inquiry.

I remind you of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the pink privilege statement before you on the table. Could you please confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement.

Ms Moore: Yes, I do.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. I remind you that proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes and are being webstreamed and broadcast live. Before we proceed with questions, do you have a statement to make?

Ms Moore: I do.

THE CHAIR: Please proceed.

Ms Moore: The ACT has, by many measures, the most well educated and most connected population in the country. Libraries are used by a greater portion of Canberrans than any other state libraries. But libraries are changing and modernising. We really welcome this opportunity as a way to shape the future of Libraries ACT to be a more accessible and inclusive service.

Encouraging a supportive and inclusive community through our public facilities is essential to fulfilling the vision set out in the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, article 19, “Living independently and being included in the community”, which says:

Community services and facilities for the general population are available on an equal basis to persons with disabilities and are responsive to their needs.

At the moment, there is not really a way to know if Libraries ACT is indeed responsive to all the needs of the community, as it currently does not have a disability action plan, nor is disability mentioned at all in the strategic plan.

I was pleased to see in the ACT government’s submission to this inquiry that an accessibility audit will take place and a plan will come from that, but I do encourage further engagement with the disability community to tackle issues beyond just physical accessibility, for example, better resources and activities for people with cognitive and learning disabilities.

That is not to say that there are not physical issues with the libraries. Hopefully this audit will go some way towards making sure that all parts of facilities are fully accessible. Many of the ageing facilities are in need of an upgrade, and some, for example, Woden and Civic, are only partially accessible. We also have heard of

multiple instances where women with disabilities have, for example, not been able to access the disabled toilets, for one reason or another.

Aside from the facilities themselves, access to parking and major public transport hubs needs to be considered, and improved where possible, for example, at Belconnen, where the library is situated quite far away from parking and other services.

In terms of social issues, we know that social isolation is a problem for women with disabilities in the ACT. Libraries, with their high patronage and range of locations, could certainly contribute to reducing this by ensuring that regular social activities are supported to include women with disabilities. Indeed, in one of our surveys, women with disability indicated that they were interested in more community activities, group learning opportunities, similar to those already found at libraries. If Libraries ACT could work towards ensuring that all their events are accessible, and visibly so, reaching out to the community, it may facilitate greater inclusion.

Libraries ACT has made a noticeable effort to boost technological literacy, in older people particularly. As stated in the library strategy for 2015-19, a goal was to create digital hubs in libraries with state-of-the art digital and ICT equipment and access. This goal should be further enhanced to improve the technological literacy of people with disabilities and there should be consideration of incorporating accessible technologies.

In a recent “What’s on?” from the libraries, I was pleased to see that one-on-one internet training is now available at nearly all libraries, not just Woden. People with cognitive and learning disabilities could particularly benefit from these programs being tailored for them. Facilitating this through libraries would also be done in a way to promote inclusion in communities.

Because libraries in the ACT are quite widespread, having consistent, reliable services through them will cover most of our population. This is one of the reasons that in our submission we also suggested that the inclusion of hearing loops should be considered for library meeting rooms. That would make a big difference for community organisations that wish to hold accessible events.

Another suggestion was having something like videoconferencing to allow captioning or interpreting, considering the dearth of Auslan interpreters in the ACT.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Other submitters have raised the potential of a co-design for a new library strategy. If such a process were undertaken, what role would you see this process having to benefit women with disabilities, and how could women with disabilities be engaged in such a process?

Ms Moore: Several other projects being run by the government have engaged us directly to co-run consultations and things like that. We would certainly welcome running actual community consultations with our members.

An open submission process with something like your say would also invite access by

a wide proportion of the community. And having questions focused on people with disability to kickstart that would be great. Potentially some direct engagement with organisations such as mine or People with Disabilities ACT to get our perspective on all aspects of the design going forward would be quite welcome.

MISS C BURCH: You touched on improving accessibility to resources. Do you have some specific examples around that?

Ms Moore: In the UK, the University of Birmingham did a study, which is available online, about how people with learning disabilities can use other materials that are already available in libraries quite effectively. ALIA also have some guidelines on this. Labelling those existing materials, for example, English as a second language materials, which are high content, low vocabulary materials, could really make a difference, but that would require a bit of work in assessing the existing collection. There are also books available specifically for people with cognitive and learning disabilities. And there are ways that you can do things, like having displays to highlight those books, things like that. It is not necessarily buying new resources, though that would be welcome.

MISS C BURCH: Thank you.

MR MILLIGAN: In relation to facilities, it would be good to hear some examples of where some of the libraries here lack facilities and how you would prioritise what should be worked on first and what is most needed, most urgent?

Ms Moore: The terms of reference talked about collocating other government services with libraries. The area where registrations are available for car rego and stuff in the city library is not wheelchair accessible, so for one thing there is that. For another thing, in my submission I highlighted that there was even a Twitter exchange about a woman who went to use the accessible toilet at Belconnen and the light was not working and had not been fixed. Because many facilities lack these, libraries may be the only accessible toilet in the area. That is a big thing to consider, basic stuff like that. One of the meeting rooms at Woden is only partially wheelchair accessible, which is a bit of a mystery.

THE CHAIR: Kind of half a wheelchair?

Ms Moore: You cannot hire it, knowing what you will get.

MR MILLIGAN: If I can go to a slightly different topic, could you talk a bit more about creating digital hubs in library branches and then including more equipment and accessibility in this space. Can we talk a bit more on that?

Ms Moore: Equipment for accessibility could potentially be quite expensive for members of the community and may be a barrier to some using it at home. We know that there are still six per cent of households who do not have the internet, so the library may be their only way to access it. But for people with print disabilities, having access to screen readers on library computers would be quite useful, as well as having information on keyboard access to using the websites that are available, with things like BorrowBox, and how you navigate that using a keyboard for people who

cannot use a mouse for one reason or another. There are a whole range of accessible technologies available depending on people's disabilities. It would require a bit of work to work out exactly what we could bring in.

THE CHAIR: How can libraries best work with Women with Disabilities to improve their digital literacy? What is the best way to engage?

Ms Moore: Because we are a systemic organisation, we do not have many direct clients whom we work with, but we would certainly welcome the opportunity to perhaps put some questions to our constituents and ask what facilities could be made better, to bring those back.

THE CHAIR: I guess as an organisation, but also more broadly, with women who do have disabilities, what are the things that Libraries ACT could better consider in working to improve digital literacy?

Ms Moore: With one-on-one sessions with the internet and things like that, having those specifically labelled as accessible. Making sure that staff are trained in working with people with, say, intellectual disabilities and making sure that that is visible to the community so that they can access those services and know that they are safe, they are suitable, would be quite helpful. Even if their staff may already be trained, it is not necessarily visible in any way.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for appearing today on behalf of Women with Disabilities ACT. When available, a proof transcript will be forwarded to you to provide an opportunity to check the transcript and identify any errors in the transcript. I do not believe you have taken any questions on notice, so you will not have to get back to us. Thank you very much for coming in; it has been quite a good interview.

Ms Moore: Thank you very much.

Short suspension.

ALTAMORE, MR ROBERT, Office Manager, People with Disabilities ACT

THE CHAIR: Our third witness is Robert Altamore from People with Disabilities. Thank you for appearing today and for the submission to the inquiry. I remind you of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege. I understand, Mr Altamore, that the committee secretary provided you with an electronic copy of the privilege statement before today's hearing, is that correct?

Mr Altamore: That is correct, and I have read the statement and I understand it.

THE CHAIR: I also remind you that the proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes and are being webstreamed and broadcast live. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr Altamore: Yes. I am now the office manager of PWD ACT, and the new executive officer of PWD ACT, Rachel Sirr, has asked me to do this appearance for her.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. The submission from People with Disabilities ACT highlighted the importance of Libraries ACT as an avenue for social inclusion for people with disabilities. What areas for improvement to the inclusiveness and accessibility of library services and programs are you aware of or would you like to see?

Mr Altamore: Libraries are very important to people with disabilities just as they are to people in the general community because we are people first and our disabilities are second. They are repositories of information, both hard copy and in electronic forms and centres of learning and education and digital access. They are also very important as meeting spaces for community organisations and places of social interaction.

Libraries have key roles in promoting social participation and in lessening social isolation. This is especially so for those of us who experience social and economic disadvantage, many of whom are members of People with Disabilities ACT.

The ACT library service has a number of community access initiatives. However, the current strategic plan does not mention people with disabilities. It is important that the ACT library service in its new strategic plan actively engage with our organisation and other organisations representing people with disabilities.

We are very pleased to hear from today's hearings that one of the recommendations in our submission is being implemented, that is, that there be a comprehensive access audit of libraries in the ACT. We hope that that will reveal the access problems, some of which have been detailed in our submission and particularly well detailed in the submission of Women with Disabilities ACT. We commend that submission to the committee and its analysis of those access difficulties.

We point out that access is more than physical access; it includes access to the library's information holdings in accessible formats and that the library programs are fully accessible and inclusive. We hope that audits will be done not only of the

physical access but also of the information holdings and the library programs and that they will identify access issues or issues where the programs are not as inclusive as they should be and set out action plans with time frames to remedy those problems. That is the nub of our submission.

THE CHAIR: Other submitters have raised the potential to co-design a new library strategy. If a co-designed process were undertaken, what role would you see people with disabilities having, and how would that benefit you and the people you represent?

Mr Altamore: Because of the role libraries play in our community for people as citizens in the community and as participants in an active, vibrant community—which Canberra needs to be—people with disabilities have a role. They are best placed in bringing to bear their lived experience of their disabilities and in giving accurate and practical advice to policymakers in the library space on how libraries, their information holdings and their programs can be made accessible and inclusive.

MISS C BURCH: You spoke about accessibility being about more than just accessibility to the premises and increasing accessibility to programs and information holdings. Specifically around information holdings, how do you think that accessibility can be improved?

Mr Altamore: I think the ACT library service can do a lot to improve the range of material it holds. It should look at its information holdings in terms of do they meet the information needs of the various segments of the community, particularly people with disabilities including people with disabilities from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and people with disabilities from the LGBTIQ community.

Libraries should look at their holdings to see how well they are catering for people from these backgrounds. Also they may need to look at the holdings as they are for people with disabilities who are from the younger audiences and the youth audiences.

MR MILLIGAN: I would like your insight on addressing the digital divide. Can you explain a bit more about what computer literacy training would be most preferred in libraries, the programs on offer that would help assist people with disabilities, vision impaired and so forth, and what staff training is required for someone to be able to assist people with disabilities using these services?

Mr Altamore: As for the digital divide, it is a very real issue for people with disabilities. Our anecdotal evidence and practical interaction with our members shows that a higher percentage than normal of our members do not have access to the internet or digital information. Libraries can play a central role in that. If people cannot have the internet at their home, libraries can provide them with that internet access.

In terms of access, we believe libraries should have various adaptations to make internet information accessible, such as screen reader technology and technology to allow people who cannot input by keyboard or mouse to use the internet, such as programs like Dragon dictate.

It is very important, though, to be aware that it is no use as a person with disability to come to a library to use the computer and the staff member does not know about the adaptive software used and cannot help you out of a problem. Unfortunately, electronic information as it is presented on the internet is not always fully accessible and sometimes you need to be able to work the technology itself, the adapted programs, to make the information accessible.

MR MILLIGAN: What libraries in the ACT currently have these programs or staff who are adequately trained to assist anyone?

Mr Altamore: I am not sure that any particular library currently has a comprehensive program in this regard.

MR MILLIGAN: So that is definitely an area the government could address.

Mr Altamore: It is an area that can be addressed, yes.

THE CHAIR: Are you aware of any other places where digital literacy exclusively for people with disabilities is taught that the ACT could look to and learn from?

Mr Altamore: Special literacy service organisations provide one-on-one training, either as an NDIS service or as a service to the client. It is particularly so in the blindness field which I am most familiar with, but also in other disability fields. That is the main source of technology training.

THE CHAIR: Are you aware of any other library services around Australia that offer additional training or partner with organisations that offer training?

Mr Altamore: Not exactly; I would need to come back to you. I am aware disability access plans are being developed by Victorian, New South Wales and Queensland libraries that may include that. One of the areas I did not fully explore in our submission—and maybe I should have because it is an area which I think is worth taking on notice—is the potential for enhanced cooperation between the ACT library service and specialist library services such as libraries specialising in materials for people with intellectual disability or easy English materials or libraries for the vision impaired, such as the Vision Australia library.

THE CHAIR: There are no further questions.

Mr Altamore: If the committee would give me leave, there is one matter I want to raise which has fallen outside my submission but I think it is important.

THE CHAIR: Please proceed, yes.

Mr Altamore: This matter is particularly relevant to people who are blind or vision impaired, and I want to make the committee aware of the Marrakesh Treaty, of which you may or may not be aware. The treaty addresses the issue that worldwide only between three and five per cent of published materials are accessible to people who are blind or vision impaired.

The Marrakesh Treaty aims to make it easier for people who are blind or vision impaired to access published and printed material by requiring countries who are signatories to the Treaty to look at their copyright laws to remove barriers to prevent the free flow of accessible format information between countries. For example, the Marrakesh Treaty requires Australia to look at its copyright laws so that copyright material produced in America in accessible formats can be used in Australia and vice versa.

The Marrakesh Treaty at the moment has been ratified by the European Community nations, 28 of them currently, plus recently by Japan, and Donald Trump has just signed the laws for America to come on board.

I mention it because I think the ACT library service needs to be aware of the Marrakesh Treaty and its potential to enhance a range of information-accessible formats that can be made available to library users. Information on the Marrakesh Treaty can be obtained from the Blind Citizens Australia website, from the Vision Australia website and from the website of the World Blind Union.

THE CHAIR: Has Australia ratified the treaty?

Mr Altamore: Australia was one of the first countries to ratify the Marrakesh Treaty.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. Given that there are no further questions, we will conclude. Thank you for appearing today. A proof transcript will be forwarded to you to provide the opportunity to check and identify any errors in the transcription. Thank you again for appearing today.

Mr Altamore: Thank you for the opportunity.

Short suspension.

WILLIAMS, DR KATARZYNA, Vice President, ACT Bilingual Education Alliance

SCOTT, DR MANDY, Secretary, ACT Bilingual Education Alliance

THE CHAIR: We will now move to our fourth set of witnesses appearing today. On behalf of the committee, thank you for appearing today and for providing the alliance's written submission to the inquiry.

I remind both witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the pink privilege statement before you on the table. Could you please confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement.

Dr Williams: I understand.

Dr Scott: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. I remind witnesses that proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes and are being webstreamed and broadcast live.

Before we proceed to questions from the committee, would you like to make an opening statement?

Dr Scott: Yes, that would be great, if we could.

THE CHAIR: Please do.

Dr Scott: Thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to speak to our submission. We were very happy to see the inquiry, because we think libraries do a great job which is often not recognised and perhaps not capitalised on enough in society.

As we said in our submission, we think that they have a big part to play in lifelong learning. It is well known that the number of books in homes and the amount of reading that children do for pleasure are big indicators of success in the education system. Libraries do a great job in encouraging the love of books and the use of books, and making resources available to people—a wide range of resources.

We mentioned giggle and wiggle and things like that for young kids, which are very popular activities, I know. The library had to split them in half because they had so many people coming and there was the problem with all the prams. It is quite difficult to get them all in.

We are also very happy that there are now bilingual story times as well as English language story times. Obviously, one of the aims of the ACT Bilingual Alliance is to promote the benefits of knowing more than one language. It is very important in our mainstream institutions like libraries to see other languages on display and being used, being heard and seen, so that we can make everybody welcome in the community. Their language resources, whatever they may be, are very welcome. Also, it is very

important for young people to be encouraged to continue learning the language of their family if they speak another language at home.

Just under 22 per cent of the population speak another language at home. The vast majority are also proficient in English, which is a very important point to put across. If you come from a non-English speaking background, you are in no way discouraged; in fact, you have a lot of advantages. We would like those advantages to be passed on to the next generation.

But if there are 85 per cent who speak English well or very well—this is according to the 2016 census—there are, of course, up to 15 per cent who do not speak English well. Again, in our submission we talked about the great job that libraries do in providing assistance with learning English and the English conversation groups which are run by volunteers.

We think libraries do a good job for children, or possibly do. They have potential. They do a good job, but Katarzyna has some ideas for where we could build on it. Also, because reading for pleasure is such an important part, the holdings libraries have in other languages are also important, or access to them online, so that adults can continue to read in the language which they find easiest to read in.

For older Australians, for example, access to newspapers, information and pleasurable things in their own language keeps the brain going. We also know that if you have two languages, you can put off dementia by four or five years. That is very important for the older generation as well. And of course there is the opportunity for them also to improve their English if they are one of the small percentage who do not have very good English skills.

Dr Williams: Do we still have time?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Dr Williams: Mandy provided a very good background and emphasised that ACT libraries are doing a really good job. We have been thinking about what we can do to improve the practices in libraries even more. We have been thinking about how to develop the resources that are already there.

Libraries started introducing bilingual books and textbooks and texts in other languages. We see benefits in it. We see people using their resources. We would like to encourage libraries to keep developing and expanding resources, particularly now, when we can have e-books and audiobooks, things that would not provide problems with storage, for example.

We know that libraries are very useful in providing English development programs. Volunteers are teaching there, and we know that the groups of people attending are quite big. So there is a demand for learning English. We would also see that there is more demand than spaces in volunteers. There could be volunteers—I know them—but there was not any kind of suitable arrangement to organise.

There are wonderful language activities in ACT libraries. Mandy already mentioned

bilingual story time. As a mother of two bilingual kids, I can say that they loved it. They are getting a bit older, and for their age group, there is not enough. That would be a wonderful opportunity to also involve different age groups.

The last point I want to make is that there are very many community language schools in the ACT. They are different. They have collections of books of different sizes and types. We do not know about them. I only know about my community school, which is the Polish Language School. There are some random collections. The community members are doing what they can to improve them, to maintain them. But we see that there is space for collaboration between Libraries ACT and community libraries in various ways, even advising community members about how to maintain resources, for example, or actually promoting community language schools' resources for the broader community who might also be interested in using them. Thank you.

MISS C BURCH: Going back to what you were talking about just then about volunteers, you said that there were not enough volunteers but that you knew people who were willing to volunteer but there were not suitable arrangements.

Dr Williams: Yes. Sorry for making it a bit confusing.

MISS C BURCH: That is okay. I just want to know what you mean by that.

Dr Williams: The point I was trying to make is that I think there is a possibility to provide more courses or conversations for non-English speakers or for people who would like to develop. For example, in my case, I wanted to volunteer, but there was no location. The group that was meeting was at the other side of the city, and it was not possible for me to commute just for this particular time and not for other times. I offered that I could have smaller groups or individual classes, but there was no structure or flexibility developed. I know they are working on that, so it should be encouraged and somehow helped.

MR MILLIGAN: Along those lines of providing extra courses or conversations for residents to go along to local libraries, could we locate areas around the ACT where we have a lot of residents from non-English speaking backgrounds and provide those courses in the libraries nearest to them? What sort of uptake do you think we could get to these courses or conversations?

Dr Scott: I just want to say something about reaching out to the communities. As I say, 85 per cent of people who speak another language at home also have good English skills. But I think there is scope for communicating in other languages to groups. Perhaps they are the groups that really need to know more about libraries. The people who are using libraries are probably the ones who are proficient in English and confident to go in and join the library.

We ran something at the library last weekend; it was a workshop on raising children in more than one language. One of the parents said they found it quite daunting to go in to join the library because all the information is in English. I do not know whether library staff are trained to be quick to use the telephone interpreter service. It is a right for people using government services to be able to speak to an interpreter on the phone.

It is quite easy to find out information through the stats, the census. Of course it is 2016 but, even so, they put things by areas so you can see where the different language groups are. So that would be a good idea, and maybe reach out to community groups themselves and ask them to promote what is going on and in other languages.

Dr Williams: I do not have the data that I would love to present. I can speak for Gungahlin area, where I live and this is the library I use. I know that there are great big communities of people speaking languages other than English. At the same time, the library is providing services. I do not want to give you the wrong information, but I think once a week there is a conversation class there. I wanted to talk about whether we can make another group or split the group, because it is a big group for one person. We were discussing it, but maybe ACT Libraries would need some help in doing that.

I know ACT Libraries are organising English language conversations in various libraries across Canberra. I cannot unfortunately say where the biggest group is. I would guess Gungahlin, but that is only a guess.

THE CHAIR: I want to pick up on the comments you made about the community libraries, for example, that the Polish club has a community library and so forth. Are there any suggestions you can make as to how ACT library service can reach out to those groups and build linkages between them? How could they better share their resources, which you alluded to in your comments?

Dr Williams: That is a good question, and that is how we can help to facilitate this collaboration. First of all, ACT Libraries should be aware of what communities we have, what languages are we talking about, what community language schools exist in the ACT and whether they have any resources or libraries or collections.

Usually these are really random, scattered collections of what people brought with themselves. Sometimes these are still private collections because somebody keeps them in the cellar because there is no space.

Dr Scott: For example, there are organisations like the Goethe Society for German and the Alliance Francaise for French. I do not know whether there are links on the ACT library website—I know the website is being updated—to make people aware of those resources if they are interested in learning languages. We promote English speakers to learn other languages as well as families to maintain their own language.

The other thing is, I have given talks at, for example, the Charles Conder school in Coombs, and they have bilingual books in their school library. I asked if they knew that the ACT libraries have a vast range of picture books in other languages, and there did not seem to be any link between school libraries and the ACT libraries. So that would be another area.

Bilingual books are often quite expensive and there are so many languages, as well. You try to cater for the main ones, but things change. You may have a big group of Hindi speakers this year and then the following year it is somebody else. It would be good if there were some way of at least finding out what is available to be borrowed. I

do not know if schools can borrow from ACT libraries, but at least parents should be made aware of what is available in ACT libraries.

We need to find out what groups there are. The Canberra Multicultural Community Forum—I think they are presenting this afternoon—have 100 members. We know community language schools have an association, so they have links to all the schools. So there are some umbrella groups that could help.

Dr Williams: It is maybe not enough communication between these groups. So if ACT Libraries know what community collections or resources there are in the community, it should use the website perhaps or other ways of promoting or communicating this.

As I mentioned before, the Polish community has a medium sized collection for community, the resources stored in the Polish club. It is open at random times, whoever can help. I think many members of the community, even those speaking Polish, are not aware that there are books they can use.

And also not necessarily Polish language speakers, but let us say students or community members. Broader community members may be learning the language. In the Polish language school, there are three groups of adults, many of them with no Polish connections, who are willing to learn. They know about these books through us. Perhaps there are other people in other languages. So I think communication would be the first step.

THE CHAIR: Other submitters have raised the idea of doing a new ACT strategic plan for the library through a co-design project. Given the conversation we have just had, do you think the co-design project would be useful and how would you see it benefitting organisations such as yours?

Dr Scott: Sorry, could you repeat that? I do not know what reference you are making.

THE CHAIR: Other submitters have brought up this idea of a co-design process.

Dr Scott: Coastline?

THE CHAIR: A co-design process to develop a new strategic plan for the libraries. The better suburbs strategy has been referenced. The Aarhus library project, if you are familiar with that, has also been referenced. I am trying to get a feel for whether groups think that a more inclusive co-design process would help in shaping the next strategic plan for ACT Libraries.

Dr Scott: I think you would find that if you let people know about it, a lot of people would be more than willing to take part. It is certainly worth trying.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Are there any other questions?

Dr Scott: Can I make one more point?

THE CHAIR: Yes, please do.

Dr Scott: One of the things Kassie was saying about other people learning who are not from the heritage background is the big role being bilingual has in community harmony. It is very good in Canberra that we do not have enclaves of different language groups that do not connect with others. We have a very harmonious multicultural community here. It is very good to keep that conversation going. And so that is one good thing if people are encouraged to learn another language.

And the other thing is that we forgot to put in the submission that last September in the Assembly all parties agreed to a motion when they were talking about mother language celebrations. They were talking about corners in every library to display and collect books in other languages. I have not seen any follow-up from that. Some people were calling them ekushey corners, which I think is the Bengali word for 21, because the 21st is International Mother Language Day. But that was in September last year.

THE CHAIR: Given that we are out of time we will finish there. Thank you for appearing today on behalf of ACT Bilingual Education Alliance. When available a proof transcript will be forwarded to you to provide an opportunity to check the transcript and identify any errors. Thank you very much.

BOERSIG, DR JOHN, CEO, Legal Aid ACT

THE CHAIR: We will now move to our fifth witness appearing today, Dr John Boersig from Legal Aid ACT. On behalf of the committee, thank you for appearing today and for Legal Aid's written submission to the inquiry. Can I remind you of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the pink coloured privilege statement before you on the table. Can you confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Dr Boersig: I do.

THE CHAIR: Can I also remind you that proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes and are being webstreamed and broadcast live. Before we proceed to questions did you have an opening statement you would like to make?

Dr Boersig: Just briefly.

THE CHAIR: Please proceed.

Dr Boersig: I want to thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry. One of the major aims of legal aid is to connect with the community and to meet need where it arises. Our partnership with ACT Libraries has worked really well and I love being able to tell that story. We think that people make better decisions when they get the information they need about their rights and responsibilities, and one of our major roles is providing that information.

You will see there that we essentially run two programs with ACT Libraries. One is where we go each week to a different library and so every month we are at one of the libraries. Secondly, we utilise their mobile book services to access people who are housebound. This has been a tremendous boon because getting to people, particularly around issues of elder abuse, is very difficult.

You will see in our submission that we have got this little bookmark and other information that allows people to contact us. My underlying point is that it is great to have an opportunity to connect and partner with ACT Libraries and we want to do more of it.

MR MILLIGAN: Thank you for your submission. My question is in relation to the collocation concept of moving other services and whatnot into libraries. In here you suggested that staff at ACT Libraries, you believe, have the potential to identify and potentially provide advice for people who are visiting these libraries. Can you explain to me exactly what you mean by that? I do not know that it would be any different to anyone working in hospitality behind a bar, that sort of work with a clientele base. If you could elaborate a little on that?

Dr Boersig: The value of collocating services is that—and we do this around Canberra; we fund 12 to 14 outreach services and we partner with a whole range of organisations from University of Canberra to Communities@work to the hospital at Woden, just to name a few—the staff in those places meet on a first-hand basis a

whole range of people who wash through them.

Libraries in particular, as you note, are hubs where people seek information, pass their time and so forth. We think that there is potential not so much for advice but for information to be available there. For example, we launched the *ACT Law Handbook* last week. That has 38 chapters. Whatever you want to know about the law is there—and anything you want to know. We would like them to be able to say, “Here is a resource,” and point to that resource. The role we would expect for them is fundamentally as a referral point.

We provide referral services to social services as part of what we do. Last year we took over 15,000 calls on our helpline. A lot of our work is not just providing legal information but is providing referral to the right places so that people can get the help they need.

When we talk about collocation, it is in that context of partnership. We cannot be everywhere all the time. Getting the libraries to organise a function, be it story time or through a CALD function, allows us to intersect with particular communities at particular times. I think that is, in essence, how I would respond to that.

MR MILLIGAN: And training of staff at the libraries obviously would need to be a key component that would need to be provided. How would that be provided and by whom, do you think?

Dr Boersig: In a way that is most comfortable for ACT Libraries. We could do it on a one-to-one basis. Sometimes that is happening now in terms of the way we are dealing with individual library members. It can be done at their regular recalls. I assume they have continuing education. There would be a range of ways. It would be piggybacking on their current processes. For example, they probably do things like we do, which is dealing with difficult people or dealing with people from non-English speaking backgrounds. We could partner with them. Essentially libraries are knowledge hubs and we want to plug into that so that we can provide a better service to people on the ground.

MR MILLIGAN: And has anyone from Legal Aid ACT spoken to staff at libraries about this concept and got their feedback?

Dr Boersig: On an informal basis it is certainly happening now. We are reviewing our current program. We will be meeting with ACT Libraries later this year. We took the opportunity to make a submission to put our views across about what can positively be done. We will certainly be following that up with Vanessa Little. She is the person we would follow up with.

MISS C BURCH: Following on from that, you spoke about the partnership with the Older Persons ACT Legal Service. Are there other specific services or areas like that which you would particularly like to see in partnership with libraries?

Dr Boersig: A few years ago we developed a cultural liaison unit and in that context we were focusing on people of Arabic-speaking Muslim background, particularly out in the Gungahlin area. Those kinds of partnerships, whether it is with migrant

resettlement services or with Companion House, are the other avenues we would like to partner with in that context. Again, because ACT Libraries operates the way it does, which is trying to welcome people from other backgrounds—even here in Civic we provide these services—it just provides that venue where we can connect in some systemic way.

THE CHAIR: You have spoken a little about the partnership that you currently have with ACT Libraries. What opportunities are you aware of to extend that partnership with Libraries ACT?

Dr Boersig: I mentioned earlier the *ACT Law Handbook*. I would love to see a portal at libraries, schools, hospitals and a whole range of places so that people can get that information readily at hand. You might Google family law matter and you will end up with the laws of Alaska. We want people to go to the right portal to get the right, updated information. The handbook is quite comprehensive and it provides a whole range of commonwealth, federal issues but it has also got a whole range of territory-specific matters as well. I think that would be the first port of call for us.

Certainly there have been some preliminary discussions around that with the libraries and there seems to be receptiveness to that approach, getting information to people. We know that giving people some information will also mean more work for us because people will see they have a legal problem. But that is okay because we will provide the information in a whole range of ways.

I have not appeared before your committee but I can underline that—it is a point I have made to other committees—we are there for your constituents. I have no doubt that people contact your offices with issues and concerns. We can catch those calls if they have legal or social concerns and really feel free to help them to the helpline. I have had this conversation with members of assemblies and parliamentarians for about 30-odd years now and we want to be a place where you can refer people to in this way. I just want to make absolutely clear that you know we are a resource that is available.

Legal aid provides assistance not just to the most vulnerable. That is our core work. But through helpline and advice services we see a whole range of people. There is an incredible justice gap here in the ACT. A lot of people still cannot afford a lawyer but they need some information and we can provide that portal. It is one of my main themes. I cannot resist putting that in.

THE CHAIR: Are there any other community services or groups that you are aware of that may benefit from a partnership with Libraries ACT similar to what you have?

Dr Boersig: Yes. We would like to work with the department of education, the department of health. We are all going to be providing services in the hospital. We provide some limited services through education through CC Cares, which you are probably familiar with—it works out of Woden—for young women who are having a baby and are trying to work out how to get back into school and so forth. We have a long-running association with them. I think that there are a range of places where we would like to provide that access.

THE CHAIR: I think we have concluded the questions. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Dr Boersig: No, but thank you for the opportunity and keep those people coming to us.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. As there are no more questions, we might finish there. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for appearing today and thank you very much for Legal Aid's submission. When available, a proof transcript will be forwarded to you to provide an opportunity to check the transcript and identify any errors in the transcription. I do not believe there have been any questions on notice today; so you will not have to answer those. Thank you once again for appearing.

Short suspension.

GUPTA, MRS JAYANTI, Committee Member, Canberra Multicultural Community Forum

THE CHAIR: We will now move to our sixth witness appearing today, Jayanti Gupta. If Mahesh Scaria arrives, we will also hear from Mahesh. On behalf of the committee, thank you for appearing today and for CMCF's written submission.

I remind you of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the pink privilege statement before you on the table. Can you please confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement.

Mrs Gupta: I do.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. I remind you that proceedings are being recorded for Hansard and transcription purposes and are being webstreamed and broadcast live.

Before we move to questions, do you have an opening statement?

Mrs Gupta: Yes. I prepared the submission for this inquiry, and I have pretty much said all I wanted to in the submission.

I may add that I am a very regular and frequent user of libraries. I go to different locations, though Woden is the area where I live, so I go more frequently to Woden. Because of this inquiry, I visited the one in Tuggeranong as well as the one in Gungahlin. I know the Civic and Belconnen locations, which I do go to.

Mostly I use hard copy books; I am not very fond of e-books or audiobooks, which may be the preference for other people. I wanted that to be put to the committee: please do not take away the paper copies from the library. I have been to Civic library a few times and I find empty shelves. I do not know if they have added more shelves or they are removing hard copy books. That is a matter of concern for me.

Another issue is that because Canberra's population is increasing, maybe we could have more locations for libraries, other than the main town centres. Some of the people I spoke to also had concerns about mobile libraries being taken away. That is very important for people who do not have adequate transport or are unable to take a bus to go to libraries.

When I have been in a library, I always find people of all ages using it. If I go after 3 pm or 4 pm, I find students using the library and I feel really nice that they are able to find a safe space to do their homework or research their assignments.

As a community member, I have booked rooms at the Gungahlin library in the last couple of years. There are various categories of rooms available for various groups. The ones that we booked were free of charge at that time, because whenever there is a learning outcome and it is for a not-for-profit organisation, it is free. Or it used to be; recently I found that it has become a bit more difficult to book. Maybe that could be looked into by the libraries and some solution found.

I place requests for books using the library website. Sometimes when I do a search, the book comes up but it is not available to be requested. Maybe they need to update the resources section or make the books available. Sometimes I find that even books by Australian authors are not available, and that is really very sad.

I have my own collection of Agatha Christie; the library has very few books of Agatha Christie. I also like to read the Perry Mason books by Erle Stanley Gardner, and they hardly have any. When I try to place a request for purchase, I need to provide the ISBN, name of publisher and so on, which I feel is a big job for a consumer to do. I have put that in the submission as well. The library has the staff who may be trained to look at all these things, but when we place the request they want us to fill all this in. And unless we do that, it does not get submitted. I feel that is an onerous thing to expect from a consumer.

THE CHAIR: We might move to questions.

MISS C BURCH: You talk about increasing services that are of particular assistance to new arrivals. Do you have any specific ideas around services that could be increased in that space?

Mrs Gupta: Other than being a member of CMCF, I wear other hats. I have been an interpreter with TIS, and sometimes there are refugees or new migrants for whom I used to interpret. Based on that experience, and also as chair of the Integrated Women's Network, which is another role I play, I find that information is available out there, but sometimes it is difficult to find or people are not aware of where to go to find certain things.

With our family, one of the first few things we did was join the library when we came to Australia. At that time, my younger son was just three years old. He was so proud to have a library card in his own name. I feel that if new migrants or refugees go to libraries, a range of information could be provided there for them—

MISS C BURCH: So primarily providing information to access other services?

Mrs Gupta: Yes. They do ask community members, but maybe it is more reliable if it comes from a well-known source.

MISS C BURCH: Thank you.

MR MILLIGAN: Are you able to talk me through the process about your experiences in booking and reserving a room, particularly in Gungahlin? What did you find difficult during that process, and how can you see that it could potentially be improved?

Mrs Gupta: The Libraries ACT website has the information about the various rooms and the locations. We found that we would like to have some of our workshops for women in Gungahlin, because we found that is more convenient for them and also parking is free as compared to the city. We used to book the multicultural centre before.

There is a form that needs to be filled. Because it requires a signature, you need to print it, sign it, scan it and then send it via email to the library. There is a generic email address. We do not know who the staff are because the email is generic. Then somebody gets back to you to say whether the room is available on the day or at the time that you requested it for or it is not available.

MR MILLIGAN: By phone or email?

Mrs Gupta: By email. A few months ago when I wanted to book the room, I was sent an email asking me for my not-for-profit status of the group or association and whether we have public liability insurance, whether that certificate could be provided and so on. At that point, I wrote back and said, “I used to book previously, but these things were not requested. Has something changed? Is anything that is different happening over here?” We had some exchange, but I thought it was too much paperwork and red tape, and I just did not continue to book.

MR MILLIGAN: It is a bit of a disincentive, really, to go through that process.

Mrs Gupta: Yes.

MR MILLIGAN: You would not think that just reserving a room at a public facility would entail such detail. Would an over-the-phone booking system be much easier than having to fill out forms or actually having a person to contact and speak to someone? Would that help the process, particularly in the multicultural situation?

Mrs Gupta: Yes. Speaking to somebody over the phone would be much preferable. But, again, you cannot contact each library separately. There is one number, and when you call, you are put on hold and then directed to a particular location. Then you speak to somebody there. So it takes a while.

And because they are open during working hours and many of us work full time, we have to squeeze that time into our schedule during working hours. Sometimes email may be preferable, because we could do it in the evening or on the weekends, but we cannot speak to a person then. Then it just takes a couple of days from our side and a couple of days from their side, and then it just gets delayed.

MR MILLIGAN: What about after-hours access? You reserve a room; the library is closed. What is that like?

Mrs Gupta: For Gungahlin library—that is where we have been booking rooms for the past two years—the rooms are available even when the library is closed. But the key has to be taken during the time the library is open. When you close the room and the library is closed, there is a chute through which you put the key, so you do not have to go back to return the key. But if your event is after hours, you do have to go once before to collect the key.

In Woden, which would be more convenient for me to book, you cannot book after hours. You can only use it during the library hours, because the location of the room is within the library. When I go, sometimes I find the room is empty and I really

would like to use it for something.

THE CHAIR: I want to get a bit of an idea of how the library services are being advertised and promoted to the ACT's CALD community. Are you able to provide any information on how the services the libraries are offering are being promoted to the CALD community?

Mrs Gupta: This is one I picked up recently from the library. It has all the events from October to November, which is really very useful. If I do pick it up—I do two radio programs now—sometimes I announce it. I am not sure if a hard copy is available at the radio station or it is provided by the library, but this particular copy I picked up at the library. It is not like the *Canberra Weekly* or other free papers that are readily available at major centres that one can pick up; one has to go online. They do have Facebook, Twitter and other facilities.

THE CHAIR: Are there any avenues or opportunities you see for the promotion of library services to the ACT CALD community that are not currently being used that could be used? Are there opportunities that you see for outreach?

Mrs Gupta: As Mandy Scott, the previous witness, also said, Canberra Multicultural Community Forum is well placed, because it has a lot of other associations that are members. We could offer our services to work with libraries. Our association is also with Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services. I do not know what the current arrangement is or how it works, but one would expect that they could work together with MARSS or even Red Cross, where new refugees might go for training or other purposes.

THE CHAIR: Just to clarify, there is not an existing relationship between Canberra Multicultural Community Forum and ACT Libraries that you are aware of?

Mrs Gupta: No, there is no existing relationship.

THE CHAIR: But potentially there could be. Given that the Canberra Multicultural Community Forum has a lot of non-English-speaking background members, are there any programs that you can see a need for within the library service for the CALD community within Canberra?

Mrs Gupta: Can you please repeat that?

THE CHAIR: Yes, I can. It was not very clear. I am just trying to get an idea. With your membership, are there any services, programs or resources that the library could provide to better assist the wider CALD community?

Mrs Gupta: One could be to provide more books in other languages. I put in the submission as well that as we enter the library they have a nice desk there with a lot of books that you can quickly pick up, but they are usually in English; they are not in other languages over there. I was also thinking that we are having a multicultural summit here on 23 November and maybe somebody from Libraries ACT could come to talk to us at the summit and promote their activities. There will be a lot of multicultural leaders and members there at the summit that they could work with.

There is a multicultural advisory council in the ACT that could liaise with libraries.

In terms of the summit, there is the ACT multicultural strategy. They provide a snapshot of multicultural Canberra, and a few languages have come up as the most spoken in Canberra, from the recent census. Those could be considered when buying language resources, perhaps. I know that the profile could change every five years or 10 years, but at least if that is the current profile, and we do have the data, those resources could be provided for the community.

I am afraid I do not borrow that many books in other languages, though I do speak three other Indian languages. Mostly I borrow books in English, so I am not personally aware of availability even in the languages that I can speak.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for appearing today and thank you for the CMCF submission. It is very comprehensive.

When available a proof transcript will be forwarded to you to provide an opportunity to check the transcript and identify any errors in the transcription. I do not believe we have had any questions taken on notice today, so you will not need to reply to those.

Mrs Gupta: Thank you for the opportunity.

THE CHAIR: The committee will now adjourn; we will reconvene later today.

Hearing suspended from 11 am to 3 pm.

STEEL, MR CHRIS, Minister for City Services, Minister for Community Services and Facilities, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and Minister for Roads

LITTLE, MS VANESSA, Director, Libraries ACT

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon everyone. I thank our witnesses for appearing today and for the written submission from the ACT government. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege in the pink privilege statement on the table. Can you confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Mr Steel: Yes.

Ms Little: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I also remind witnesses that the proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes and are being webstreamed and broadcast live. Minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr Steel: Good afternoon, committee members, and thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee's inquiry into Libraries ACT. Libraries change lives in the ACT, from educating parents as their children's first literacy teacher, to enabling the joy of reading and books, to providing unemployed people with assistance to seek work, to teaching digital literacy to seniors. Our libraries impact on the lives of people of all ages, interests, and personal circumstances.

Around 60 per cent of our growing population are library members, and while the loan of materials has declined over the past few years in line with national trends, visits are still strong and participation in learning programs is high.

The roots of our library service go back to 1948, when the National Library of Australia offered the first lending collection of fiction books. Small libraries were then established in the early 1950s, focused mainly on services and collections for children. Today we have nine branch public libraries and the amazing ACT Heritage Library as well.

Our public libraries are open almost 412 hours per week to support literacy and lifelong learning in our city. The libraries provide about 550,000 physical items for loan, and last year, more than 42,500 digital items were downloaded as well. Our public libraries hold books, magazines and newspapers in around 18 languages other than English, and a review of this is currently underway to ensure that new and emerging languages in the Canberra community can be considered.

The ACT Heritage Library collects, preserves and makes accessible the social, cultural, and environmental history of Canberra as a place and a community. A visit to the Heritage Library introduces you to 106,500 publications, photographs, diaries, maps and other items about our lives as Canberrans. There is even the Canberra board game to look at. Historians, students, researchers, and the media use this rich collection of items that speak of Canberra and Canberrans, and the collection places the ACT in the national record of Australia as well.

Public libraries are the community's living room, and Libraries ACT offers not only its wonderful collections to the community but our libraries are also places for the community to meet, share, learn, and be engaged.

In a time of rapid technological advances, our libraries offer access to the digital world through internet, computers and wi-fi. About 72,000 hours of free internet use are accessed by the community each year. Our libraries are also embracing the digital world in terms of their collections. The use of e-books, e-audiobooks, e-magazines, and digital music recently surpassed for the first time the loans made at each individual library branch.

Lifelong learners are people who are able to navigate life in our complex world most effectively; they have a growth mindset and know how to investigate an issue or learn a new skill to help them adapt, change or address a problem. Libraries facilitate lifelong learners, and our libraries in Canberra offer a broad range of learning programs to support this.

One of the most important programs our libraries offer is giggle and wiggle for babies from birth to two years of age and their parents and carers. This might sound like a lot of fun—and it is—but there is a very serious side to giggle and wiggle. This program reaches almost 36,000 people each year and it teaches parents how to interact with their babies so their early literacy and language skills are well developed during a time when their brains are most sensitive to that early language development that sets the foundation for all later cognitive development and puts children in their best position for later learning and literacy.

Giggle and wiggle sessions will increase in 2019. After feedback from the ACT government's better suburb consultation and statement, sessions will be held on weekends to increase the availability of this program to more Canberrans.

Libraries ACT has 11 story times a week for children from three to five years of age and the library offers regular bilingual story times in Farsi, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Arabic, Indonesian and Thai.

Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is also very important to our library services. Libraries has an Aboriginal and Torres Islander learning coordinator who works with the local Indigenous community to promote library services as well as facilitating celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in the broader community.

To celebrate International Mother Language Day, special story times are held in Ngunnawal language to share the stories and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women who served in the Australian defence services. The library hosted a recent photographic exhibition called *Serving Country* earlier this year.

Our library service enjoys a great relationship with the ACT government's child and family centres, providing programs and support to the community that accesses those services. The library even provides its deleted children's books to these centres so

they can be given free to families so that kids can have more books to read in their homes no matter what their families' financial circumstances are.

Learning programs are offered for all ages and interests. Our library has a team of staff who investigate community needs in partnership with branch staff and identify presenters who can come and deliver learning programs to meet those needs. In October and November alone you can learn to live your best life, raise your child bilingually or design a quilt.

Library staff offer many one-on-one sessions to help those in the community who are not digital natives. You can learn how your smartphone works—something that perhaps my mother should get engaged with—how to use Skype and FaceTime so you can do digital story time with your grandchildren on the other side of the world, and discover what social media is all about.

The library plays an important role in assisting the community young and old to be cyber safe. Our library is an accredited eSmart library under the Alannah & Madeline Foundation Telstra eSmart libraries program.

Programs for non-English speaking adults include the very popular regular English conversation classes, and the library's partnership with Global Sisters provides an online privacy security training program to women from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Sadly, there are adults in our community who are English speakers but who have difficulty reading and writing., and I am proud that our library service has stepped up to assist learners in this situation through the volunteer literacy program conducted in partnership with a range of local community organisations. Learners are being supported to develop their reading skills in a respectful way that is relevant to learners' needs.

Libraries ACT has also decided to add to the lifelong team with a new disability learning coordinator. This position will be advertised soon. And, like the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and multicultural positions, this person will engage with people with disabilities to ensure that they are able to fully access our library services.

National research conducted in 2013 found that Libraries ACT offers the best return on investment for the community of any state and territory in Australia. For every dollar the ACT government puts into libraries, there is a \$4.10 benefit return to the community.

The ACT government recognises that the library's computer system and website need updating, and funds have been provided to update both of these important tools. We expect a new integrated library management system to be operational in early 2019 and for the website to be live soon.

Towards the end of this calendar year we are also expecting to relocate the ACT Heritage Library from the mezzanine level of Woden Library to 255 Canberra Avenue, Fyshwick. This move is necessary as the heritage collection has outgrown the Woden site, and preparations are being made to the new site so that the collection

is secure and held in the right climactic conditions.

In 2019, Libraries ACT will be developing a new strategic plan for its public libraries. Its current plan, “Renewing libraries: libraries, literacy, and learning,” concludes in 2019. The library hopes to collaborate widely with the community to develop this new strategy as well as looking to best practice in libraries from across the world and in other jurisdictions of Australia. Of course, the findings of this inquiry will also inform the libraries’ next strategic plan.

The ACT Heritage Library released its strategic plan, “A capital identity”, recently. This plan sets the course for collecting and preserving materials in both physical and digital forms for the students and researchers of the future.

I thank the committee for the opportunity to discuss the important services delivered by Libraries ACT. Libraries really do change lives. I fondly remember going to Woden Library myself as a very young child. Libraries inform, educate, inspire and support our community. They are havens for some, places of excitement and discovery for others. Our libraries perform well compared with other states and territories and are much loved by Canberrans, as evidenced by the many notes and comments received when we were recently able to partially reopen the Dickson Library after works to repair water damage.

Our libraries will continue to embrace the digital world while not forgetting the importance of the physical book. Library staff will continue to embrace the collaboration they are well known for, and the ACT Heritage Library will continue to gather, preserve and make available our unique ACT identity. In essence, our libraries will continue to deliver their vision of literacy and learning for life.

THE CHAIR: I might kick off with the first question. Can you briefly outline the best performing libraries and how each library performs against others?

Mr Steel: Woden, Dickson, Gungahlin and Belconnen are some of the strongest performing libraries with the most staff members and the most visitors and are among some of the best value in the community in terms of cost per visit. We outlined that in a table in the report as well.

THE CHAIR: I noticed in the submission that non-employee cost at Kingston and Civic appears to be a larger proportion of total costs compared to other libraries. What is the main contributor to this non-employee cost?

Mr Steel: The major contributor at those particular locations is rent. Non-employee costs make up about 48 per cent of the cost at Civic library, and that is understandable given it is a city location, and about 38 per cent of costs at Kingston. This compares to an average of around 20 per cent of non-employee costs across other libraries in the ACT. Certainly rent is a major part of that. I might pass over to Vanessa to provide some more detail about that.

Ms Little: Certainly the biggest non-staffing cost at those two branches is rent, because they are full commercial rent.

THE CHAIR: And is comparison between branches used in the planning of any future branches?

Mr Steel: I might pass over to Vanessa there but the table is on page 26 of our submission.

Ms Little: Yes. Obviously we do look at the performance of each branch in terms of planning and in terms of deployment of staff and also in terms of services and activities that are provided. The most effective way of measuring that is per loan and per visit. As we have just discussed about rent, that can skew performance; so we look at performances per loan per visit.

MISS C BURCH: Your submission talks about a program that you have to increase privacy and security awareness for culturally and linguistically diverse women, and we heard from some witnesses this morning about efforts to increase digital literacy for elderly people. I was wondering: is anything else being done to extend that kind of program to other culturally and linguistically diverse people—people from English-as-a-second-language background—and also to people experiencing disabilities?

Ms Little: Yes, there is always more demand than there are resources to be able to meet that demand. The program that I think you are referring to is along with global sisters, which is a partnership where we have worked with culturally and linguistically diverse women to make sure that they have the skills to be cyber safe.

But our library staff do that on a daily basis with whoever walks through the door. Our accreditation with the e-smart library program, the Alannah & Madeline Telstra Foundation program, has all our staff trained in how to help people maintain their cyber safety. We do that on a one-on-one basis, on an informal basis. We also do the programs and yes, there is always capacity to do more.

We are very much hoping that the new disability learning coordinator will be able to reach out much more into the disability community in the same way as our culturally and linguistically diverse coordinator has been able to do.

MR MILLIGAN: Welcome, Mr Steel, to your first public hearing. My question is in relation to strategic planning. You are currently getting towards the end of the current renewing Libraries ACT literacy and learning strategy plan 2015 through to 2019. You mentioned that you would take feedback from people who use the services in numerous ways, via surveys, websites and so forth. Can you give me any indication on the common theme that is normally put through these feedback channels in relation to the services you offer?

Mr Steel: I am not sure that we have formally kicked off the process of consultation on a new plan yet but I will pass over to Vanessa to talk about the general feedback.

Ms Little: Generally feedback is around wanting us to maintain our collection size and to maintain our service levels. People are wanting better access to our community rooms, which is something that we have taken on board and we are trying to implement a new system, a new online booking system.

We get lots of good feedback, I have to say. Sometimes it is very hard to get people to give us negative feedback because they love libraries so much. Sometimes we get some feedback about opening hours but when we do open longer hours, particularly in the evenings, people do not come. It is really interesting. People think that they will but when it is July and it is Wednesday night and it is 7 o'clock they do not want to come out. We do get that feedback every once in a while.

We get a lot of feedback about our collections and about what people want to see in the collections. We get some feedback from new and emerging communities, language communities, about wanting to have collections in their languages. That is often difficult because sometimes those particular new residents have come from places where there is no publishing industry. They have come from a place where war is happening and no-one is publishing books. That is always a challenge as well.

MISS C BURCH: On the new room-booking platform, we heard from some witnesses this morning that the changes require a lot more information when they are trying to book rooms and they find that quite difficult. What has been the driver for those changes?

Ms Little: There actually have not been changes; what has happened has been a centralisation of the function and we have discovered that some of our staff, bless them, have been doing things a little outside of policy, and we have needed to tighten that up. But I do take on board the fact that some of those groups have found that a bit challenging. We are always trying to improve that for people.

There is a thought that we charge a very reasonable fee for those rooms, as you might know. People are often asking us for them for free and whilst that might be nice it is not policy at the moment. Certainly we would need to have a better mechanism for managing demand if we were to go down the path of not charging.

THE CHAIR: Going back to the partnerships that you have got there, we had Legal Aid come in this morning. We have got COTA coming in later. We have had other groups who do not have an existing relationship but have indicated that they would be very open to having one. I want to get your perspective on how those partnerships with community organisations are progressing and how they are being facilitated through the library and also adding to the library services offered.

Ms Little: Sure. Certainly we are always open to creating more partnerships. We are limited by the hours we have in the day. The partnerships that we do have already are extremely useful for us and really deliver to the community, particularly the relationships we have with the child and family centres. There are a lot of people in Canberra who are library users, traditional library users; they are readers. Some of the people who access those services that the child and family centres offer are sometimes not library users. We are able to introduce a whole new cohort into the library by partnering with them, with the various parent groups that they have and children's activities that they have.

The JPs is one of the services but we do tax help as well around tax time. That is a program that is auspiced by the tax office. People who are having trouble doing their

online tax can come in. Yes, we are always open to many more partnerships and, as I said, limited only by the number of hours that we can put into it.

THE CHAIR: On partnerships, the ALIA submission and in their appearance this morning brought up the idea of a co-design principle in putting together the libraries. The example they cited was Aarhus. I do not know if you are familiar with that one.

Ms Little: Aarhus, yes.

THE CHAIR: Noting that the strategy for ACT Libraries does end in 2019, do you see any opportunities to bring in a co-design process for the next strategy?

Mr Steel: I am certainly very interested in that idea of a co-design process. I have spoken with ALIA about that and the Aarhus model, from Denmark, I believe. Vanessa might be able to expand on exactly what the co-design model might involve.

Ms Little: The one in Aarhus was a very deep and rich co-design process with their community and it was actually over quite an extended period, which I would not be recommending here. But certainly it was a way of making sure that there was, as I said, deep and rich consultation with people and it meant that the majority of people in the community really embraced that library.

In the submission one of the things that came out of that was that beautiful bell in Aarhus. When a baby is born in the local hospital the parents press a button in the delivery suite, and the bell in the library rings. Everybody stops and goes, “New life.” It certainly creates a connection between those parents and the library at the time that their baby is first born, and it is very powerful.

MR MILLIGAN: I have a question in relation to other library services sought by the community under this section in your submission. You state that the library is planning to introduce a consumer council or group to enable subject matter experts from the community to provide input into new library initiatives. Can you explain a bit more about what that is?

Ms Little: Yes. The idea behind it would be to bring together people from various sectors—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the disability sector, the women’s representatives, representatives that work with young children—to use them as a sounding board for planning, for programming, for services and that kind of stuff; so, separate from a co-design process, which is a very big and deep planning process, this consumer group would be a regular group that we would talk to about all of the new initiatives we are planning and get advice back from them about what it is that their communities really need from us.

MR MILLIGAN: When do you expect this will commence?

Ms Little: This is being tied very much to the implementation of our new library management system, so I would be expecting in the first half of next year.

MR MILLIGAN: How do people get involved? How can people express an interest?

Ms Little: We have not got to that level of detail yet. But I would be expecting that we would be contacting a whole range of community groups that we can identify and that we would also be talking to our colleagues in the Community Services Directorate and other directorates about their ideas.

MR MILLIGAN: Would this contribute towards, say, a 2020-25 strategic plan once the current one ends?

Ms Little: It could. The co-design process that ALIA has been talking about is a big, broad, out-into-the-community kind of co-design, whereas this group would be a representative group that we would use on an ongoing basis. So once we had our strategy in place, we would use these people as a sounding board.

THE CHAIR: I want to go back to looking a little more at locations of libraries within Canberra. How have locations for branches previously been determined?

Mr Steel: So on page 22 of the government's submission you can see the current locations. I will allow Vanessa to provide some more historical detail that I do not have on me, but you can see that most regions of the ACT are fairly well served by libraries. Catering for areas of growth in our community I think is the next challenge, but I will allow Vanessa to talk about the current locations.

Ms Little: I cannot really speak to a number of the branches because I was not here, but I can speak to Kingston and Gungahlin. Kingston, as you might know, is a result of the ALP-Greens first agreement and it was put in place after community concern around the closure of the Griffith library. Gungahlin was very much about we have a series of growth suburbs and we need a library there. That library was designed to cater to the then expected 90,000 people, so that is why it is lovely and big; it is a big regional library.

Dickson turns 50 next year, so it has been around an awfully long time. I believe it was built on the first Canberra airstrip. How did I know that weird piece of information? I cannot explain about the others, but we can take that on notice if you would like us to.

THE CHAIR: No, that is sufficient. Have any recent reviews been done of population projections to anticipate the necessity of future branches servicing the area? Another way to phrase it is: what future areas of growth are there for libraries in the ACT and are there particular areas that you have identified that would be better served?

Mr Steel: Most areas are served by current libraries. Some of them will serve growing populations, and Kippax Library is a great example of an existing library that is quite well placed to cater for the growing population of west Belconnen and Ginninderry into the future.

We are looking at what the areas of growth are across the ACT. Obviously Molonglo is going to be a very significant community, so I would imagine at some point in the future there will be a library there. That potentially may cater for the broader region as well, including Weston Creek, which is currently served quite well by Woden Library.

I am not sure that there has been any detailed analysis; Vanessa may have some further detail on that.

Ms Little: Probably the one that has had a little bit of analysis done on it is Dickson. With the growth of the Northbourne corridor we have been looking at that library and its capacity. As I said, it is a 50-year-old building so we have some constraints around it as well. But at the moment, no other plans.

Mr Steel: Some further detail on that, chair, a lot of our current library locations are heritage listed, as you probably would know. For example, Belconnen. Belconnen Library, certain aspects of Woden Library and, of course, the Enrico Taglietti building at Dickson. That provides some constraints on what is possible in those libraries in terms of future expansion, so that needs to be taken into consideration.

THE CHAIR: Are there any particular services that work better as collocations to libraries than others? Is this something you consider when you are looking at the planning considerations?

Mr Steel: If we were looking at a future library, collocation would certainly be part of that. It would be part of a co-design process, but collocation is critical, whether that be retail—there are some great examples of that elsewhere, and we have referenced in our submission some really great analysis of the benefits to retail precincts of having collocation and benefits to the library in terms of foot traffic—or community services as well.

I was recently in Bathurst for a 70th birthday, and they have a located library there collocated with a regional arts centre. Orange does the same thing. So there are certainly models around of having that collocation that provides benefits for both types of services. I will pass over to Vanessa to provide some further information.

Ms Little: When we did the research for Gungahlin Library we did a very extensive community survey and something like 73 per cent of people wanted to park the car, do their shopping and go to the library. I think that is one of the reasons why Gungahlin is so successful now; people are able to do that. Collocation for foot traffic is that one.

As I said, collocation with community services organisations very much helps us target the people who are not currently library users. It depends on which number you take—whether you take our library management system or whether you take the recent TCCS survey—but somewhere between 60 and 67 per cent of people in the ACT are members of the library. That leaves that 35-odd, 40 per cent of people who are not. Out of that we have quite a feeling that some of those people are clients of community services or health services where a partnership and a collocation would help people understand what libraries do and that libraries are for everyone.

MISS C BURCH: Your submission references bilingual story times and that they have been expanded into other languages. We heard quite a bit about that this morning from witnesses. What do you do at the moment to promote these programs into those communities? Do you communicate with them in their languages as well as their outreach in that regard?

Ms Little: Yes, it is very difficult when English is not their first language. However, we have the multicultural learning coordinator and part of her job is to get out with all of those communities and talk to their representatives and to get the message out. It is not perfect, but we find the person-to-person approach is probably the best.

MISS C BURCH: You spoke before in terms of the co-design of talking more with those community groups. Is that something you are doing in terms of promoting programs?

Ms Little: If we were to do a co-design process, absolutely we would be wanting to connect with those communities.

Mr Steel: There is currently an exhibition at Woden Library, *Sharing Stories*, which is going to be touring around Australia. It is a collection of library books from both Australia and around the world in different languages. It is designed to promote those books to children here and around Australia. The books were specifically chosen with promoting diversity and inclusion in mind.

MISS C BURCH: You also mentioned earlier staff training in regards to cyber safety. What other training do library staff receive? Do they receive any training in relation to assisting people with disabilities, assisting those with English as a second language?

Ms Little: It is a very long list of training that staff are given. Interestingly, only in the past few weeks library staff have piloted a disability awareness training program for TCCS overall. That is something that TCCS is moving into, and library staff have been part of the pilot of that and will roll that out.

We are also part of National and State Libraries of Australia, which is all of the state and territory libraries and the National Library. That group is about to pilot an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander program which is much deeper than your traditional awareness program. It will be specifically focused on libraries because, of course, we have special considerations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The ACT does not hold a huge amount of material that is relevant to those people. But some of my colleagues in other states have a lot of material they have collected over time that may or may not be appropriate for people to see and those sorts of things. Again, some of Libraries ACT staff are going to pilot that program as well.

MISS C BURCH: What was that called?

Ms Little: It is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competency program. It will be an online program and I believe that our director-general is participating in that as well; I am not sure whether our deputy director-general is.

We also train in dealing with difficult people—some people want to argue about their fines—how to give a good reference interview, how to make sure you are finding things that people want, customer service. It is a very long list. We do manual handling—that is very important in libraries; books are heavy.

THE CHAIR: Supplementary to that, we have heard quite a bit about disability awareness that you are doing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I just wanted to go to inclusion. Are there any other inclusion activities or personnel that you have that we can put on the record?

Ms Little: In the lifelong learning team, we have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and multicultural, and we are about to have disability. We also have a person who is an early literacy coordinator. That particular position is vacant at the moment; we are just about to advertise it. That person works basically with the families, with a special focus on vulnerable families. That is where the relationship with the Community Services Directorate is so important.

THE CHAIR: And the primary job of these employees is to do outreach to the communities?

Ms Little: Correct. Their job is to engage with those target audiences or community groups and to work out what we can offer to meet their needs and how we can celebrate them and their diversity through the library so that more people get to experience all of Canberra's diversity.

And we do a lot of digital one-on-one training for seniors. We always laugh at that. In the old days, when I was first in libraries, January was a very quiet time in libraries. It is now a very busy time, because every young person who gets a new iPad or a new iPhone for Christmas hands on their old one to their grandparent, and we get these very bewildered people coming in going, "I don't know how to turn it on." We spend a considerable amount of time sitting down with people and showing them how to use those devices safely and what they can do with them to make their lives better. That tends to be focused on seniors, but we have run some programs for people with disabilities as well: digital storytelling, how to tell your story in digital form, that kind of thing. That is not a regular thing, but the digital one-on-ones are every day.

THE CHAIR: On digital services, a number of submissions have made comments on digital services, and particularly that technology is always moving ahead faster and new needs are always emerging. Are there currently any plans to expand the digital services offerings within the library system?

Ms Little: No firm plans, but certainly lots of discussion. Again, it is as much as we can resource. The demand is there. Interestingly for us, at one level we have to stay ahead of the technology for the born-digital people, but we are finding that with the one-on-one sessions that we are doing, particularly with elderly people, we are often having not the latest technology but the one before that or the one before that, because that is the one that the grandchild passes on, or the child sometimes. So our staff are having to be a bit multiskilled in being able to deal with iPhone 4s, not just necessarily the latest.

THE CHAIR: We heard from Women with Disabilities ACT this morning and also the Canberra Multicultural Community Forum. Both noted that digital literacy classes are needed in languages other than English and also that classes that address living with a disability would be beneficial. You mentioned that while there are no firm

plans, there are discussions. Are those two topics entering into those discussions?

Ms Little: Most definitely, particularly with languages other than English. We are very aware that we run our programs in English. Yes, we are considering that.

MR MILLIGAN: I would like to ask if the government has any plans to expand the number of rooms that are currently available for community groups to hire and so forth. There are a lot in Gungahlin, but are there any plans to extend more rooms down in the southern areas of the ACT, and also open rooms up after hours?

Mr Steel: There was a 2017-18 budget initiative to move the ACT Heritage Library to Fyshwick, which is going to free up space in the mezzanine level of Woden library which can potentially be used by community groups and also to deliver library programs. When Access Canberra moved out of Woden library on the ground level, that also freed up space for a community room, and that has been used by community groups as well.

One of the issues that has been raised with us by groups like Woden community council is getting access to that community space, particularly after hours. It does not currently have a dedicated access point. The centralised access presents access to the whole library, and that is problematic from a security perspective. We have certainly taken the feedback from them and are looking at what options might be available to make sure that there is access to a community space. They are at a premium on the south side, and some of the major clubs have shut down in the area, which has meant pressure on the rooms.

MR MILLIGAN: Earlier you mentioned operating hours and extending those hours in the day. Not many people actually use those extended hours. However, have you considered that during daylight saving, in the warmer months, there could be an increase in customers coming through? Have you considered running a pilot program?

Ms Little: That is certainly possible. That is certainly something that we could look into potentially in some of our new programming. Perhaps with daylight saving we might do a giggle and wiggle or a story time, although kids are often ready for bed fairly early. But certainly we could look into that.

As part of the move from Woden library for the Heritage Library and that ground floor area, we have definitely earmarked some money to try to make that downstairs room available after hours. There is a kitchen associated with that as well, so it could be quite multi-use.

THE CHAIR: On the opening hours, what are the limitations, if any, on extending opening hours in the ACT libraries?

Ms Little: Just cost. We have been quite prepared to wear that cost, but when we did the numbers, we were sometimes opening the library between 5.30 and 8 in the evening for a handful of people.

Mr Steel: There was a trial undertaken 10 years ago on extending opening hours. As Vanessa alluded to earlier, it was not particularly successful. Having said that, if there

were a collocated library in a retail precinct in the future, for example, then the issue of opening hours might need to be reconsidered to align with broader shopping centre hours. That might provide foot traffic to it. It is something that we need to continue to look at, depending on the location of each library.

THE CHAIR: You might have just answered my next question, but you might want to add something. Would additional hours provide more benefit at some libraries over others?

Mr Steel: I think I have answered that.

Ms Little: The three that are currently open in the evening are open because they are busy and they do get the foot traffic: Woden, Gungahlin and Dickson.

MISS C BURCH: I want to go to mother language displays in libraries. There was a motion passed by the Assembly late last year about mother language displays in libraries. We heard from witnesses this morning that they have not seen those yet. Where are they up to?

Mr Steel: As I mentioned in my opening statement, we have materials in 18 languages on the shelves in most branches, but I will pass over to Vanessa to provide more detail about how we celebrate those languages.

Ms Little: Those corners tend to be for little collections, and we have big ones. That is why we have not created the corners. But, as the minister said, we have 18 different languages that are available on the shelves for people. We also do various activities for mother tongue day: bilingual story times and those sorts of things.

We were very interested in the potential for oral histories, but at the moment we have not got the resources for that. And we are moving the Heritage Library so we are a little focused on that at the moment. But that is certainly something that we have been interested in looking at as well.

MISS C BURCH: The concern raised this morning was more that obviously the collections exist—you have them there and they are available—but if they are not prominently displayed, people do not know that they are there.

Ms Little: That is good feedback.

THE CHAIR: On the educational programs, such as the lifelong learning within the library, for the record can you outline the goal and purpose of the lifelong learning program, its success and how many people take part in it?

Ms Little: I think it was 82,000 people last year participated in a learning program. What we know is that if a person is a lifelong learner they are able to learn their way out of any difficulty. They are able to improve their lives. They are able to improve their family's lives. They have got the skill to be able to learn new skills and to learn new information and knowledge. That is why libraries exist. We provide access to the information and the skills to be able to become a lifelong learner.

Very much we understand that in the past if someone wanted to learn something new they would often read about it, but these days you can do a whole lot of other things to learn about something new or pick up a new skill. Not everybody learns by reading, even though that is dear to my heart. Libraries are very much moving into delivering learning opportunities that are reading and doing, listening, participating. Our lifelong learning team create a series of programs for the community that are based on what we have been led to believe by the community are their needs.

We often partner with organisations who come to us and say that they have got an important message they need to get out to the community. With 60-odd per cent of the population who are library members, that is a very powerful market for them. Health messages, personal interest messages, we run the repair your bike program; there are all sorts of different programs that we run that are designed to meet a need in the community or help an organisation that needs to get a message out.

THE CHAIR: Are there any identified areas where you provide more programs in the lifelong learning?

Ms Little: Where we could or where we do, sorry?

THE CHAIR: Let me just read my own notes. Are there any more opportunities, identified opportunities, where you could expand the program?

Ms Little: Many, many opportunities. Again, it is limited only by the number of hours that we have to be able to do these things. You have alluded to some of the submissions and discussions this morning. We could do a lot more in a lot of different areas, and we would love to continue to do that.

MISS C BURCH: ALIA raised this morning the fact that the ACT is the only jurisdiction without legal deposit legislation. Is that a concern to you? Is it something that you think—

Mr Steel: It is not something the government is considering at the moment. We already deposit a range of government materials and we do that, I understand, in conjunction with the National Library of Australia but I will allow Vanessa to provide a little more detail.

Ms Little: Sure. Legal deposit legislation is in place to compel people who publish items and publish publications to deposit them at the National Library and their relevant state library. The issue for the ACT is that that is not what we want to do. The National Library has already got all that mainstream published material. The material that we collect for the Heritage Library is much more community based. Annual reports and newsletters of community groups; we have an extremely strong collection of material around local performing arts, so much so that we had a company, a media company in the UK, get in touch with us for something that we held in our collection.

The legal deposit legislation, if it were ever to be considered in the ACT, would be much more around that community deposit, which is the stuff that the National Library does not want but which is rich for us in terms of being able to talk about

what it is like to be in Canberra.

MISS C BURCH: And that is what they were talking about, the community-based material?

Ms Little: Yes. I am only guessing because I was not speaking for them, but I imagine so.

MISS C BURCH: You are saying that a lot of that has already been collected as part of the heritage?

Ms Little: The mainstream published material goes to the National Library and that is not a place we want to go—why would we?—in this space.

MISS C BURCH: But the annual reports and the community stuff goes to the Heritage Library?

Ms Little: It is the stuff that the Heritage Library has, yes.

THE CHAIR: I want to go a little to the library's spending, because it has been touched on. It has been raised with us a couple of times that the ACT spends the lowest per capita on libraries of any jurisdiction. Is that a reflection of our geography and the fact that we run multiple libraries out of one jurisdiction?

Mr Steel: We have the highest cost-benefit ratio, and that is partially reflective of the fact that we are a city-state and we have quite efficient library services for the investment that we make in them. To clarify as well, I misspoke earlier when I said that the non-employee costs averaged around 20 per cent cross the ACT. I meant to say 27 per cent, for the record. But I will ask Vanessa to provide a bit more detail about the benefits that we are accruing.

Ms Little: The fact that we are a city-state does contribute significantly to that cost effectiveness or however you would like to portray it. When you think about some of my colleagues in other states, they are trying to fund libraries in very tiny communities in very remote places, and that becomes very expensive. I think it is South Australia that is currently the highest per capita. Of course, they have to sustain libraries in places like Coober Pedy and Ceduna, and it is very expensive to run library services in those places. It is very much a reflection of the fact that we are very geographically tight and that we can run one library service. If you think about, again, places like South Australia or Western Australia, each council runs their libraries and there is an overhead in having little, separate libraries in those tiny places that we do not have because we are one library service.

THE CHAIR: The submission makes reference to the return on investment of \$4.10 for every dollar invested in libraries. How is this calculated and how does it compare to other jurisdictions?

Mr Steel: As you can see in the ACT government submission and as you would expect from a library submission, that particular source has been fully referenced to have a look at in the submission. It is worth going to the detail of that. But I will ask

Ms Little to give some detail.

Ms Little: That report was done in 2015 by a company called SGS Economics and Planning, and it was under the auspices of the ALIA Public Library Alliance. The national average for general investment from that study was \$2.90 and I think—and I will have to take this on notice—the closest to us was Victoria. We were \$4.10 and they were \$3.80. But I will take that on notice because I would not want to give you the wrong information. We are certainly standouts in terms of our return on investment.

THE CHAIR: So it is clear in my mind, does the lower expenditure that we have allow for greater provision of library services? Just tell me how it works.

Ms Little: We compare very well with other jurisdictions in terms of our output. In terms of our loans and visits and our programming and those sorts of things we compare very well with the other jurisdictions. We deliver bang for buck.

THE CHAIR: There was another one I wanted to ask on a slightly different topic. Are you aware of or have you identified any opportunities to further increase the flexibility of library access? This was in the context of the hours but I wanted to put to you, aside from hours, are there any opportunities for increased flexibility that you might be throwing around as ideas or have—

Mr Steel: In terms of disability access, in particular?

THE CHAIR: Just access to the library, after-hours access and those sorts of things. To be clear—it is getting a bit late in the day—it was within the discussion about the opening hours of libraries. Opening is one way to provide greater access but we have heard from you that that is not always taken up as much as you would like. But my question is: are there other opportunities beyond pure opening hours that you consider or have identified could provide greater access to libraries?

Mr Steel: I might firstly start with the disability access, because I think that is a relevant part of your question. I understand that we are about to undertake a disability audit of our physical library structures. We do have lifts at Civic, Woden and Belconnen, I think as well, which are compliant. But we do need to see what else we can do to make sure that our libraries are fully disability access compliant as well. That work will be ongoing. But I will allow Vanessa Little to expand and provide further detail about the broader access arrangements.

Ms Little: Some of the technologies that are available to people with a disability, as part of our accessibility audit we want to look at that as well. We want to do a package.

In terms of accessibility in a broader sense, one of the things that we find are a bit of a challenge are these heritage buildings. You would note if you had been to Gungahlin library how open it is and how flexible it is and how many spaces there are for meetings and learning programs. That is a little hard to retrofit into some of our buildings.

Those are the sorts of things that make the library more accessible, because people will come to things, to programs and activities, when they may never have walked through the door to actually borrow a book. It is a little constraining sometimes when you are trying to deliver 21st century library services in 20th century buildings.

There are things we can do and there are things we are looking at doing, particularly in relation to Woden. When the Heritage Library moves out we are looking at trying to create the ground floor as a much more flexible space and leaving the mezzanine to be much more of that sort of study space so that people can still come and complete their year 12 studies or their university studies, as they do now, but we will have a much more flexible space on the ground floor.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. Did we have any formal questions on notice?

Ms Little: Yes, just the one on the return on investment.

THE CHAIR: For the questions on notice, we do not have a set time limit on this but within the next week would be greatly appreciated by the committee.

Ms Little: I know where it is. It is fine.

THE CHAIR: Given that there are no more questions, we might leave it there. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for appearing today. When available a proof transcript will be forwarded to you to provide an opportunity to check the transcript and identify any errors. Obviously there is just that one question on notice which we have already covered. Thank you once again for appearing.

Mr Steel: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister, and congratulations on making it through your first hearing.

Hearing suspended from 3.55 to 4.41 pm.

MOBBS, MS JENNIFER, Chief Executive Director, Council on the Ageing ACT

THE CHAIR: Thank you for appearing today and for COTA's written submission to the inquiry. I remind you of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement before you on the table. Can you confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Ms Mobbs: I do, yes.

THE CHAIR: The proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes and webstreamed and broadcast live. Ms Mobbs, would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms Mobbs: Thank you. I am the Chief Executive Officer of the Council on the Ageing there, and I really like leading that organisation. Libraries for our senior Canberrans are very important. Not only are they a place for people to go to read things like newspapers—people these days are finding them unaffordable for the small number of pages they get—but they also help our people understand and use technology.

While we think everything needs to be online for those of us who use technology all the time, a lot of people cannot afford that or they do not have the technological skills, and the library staff can help them do that. For older Canberrans libraries are particularly important not only for technology but as a meeting place for their friends.

In the comments we got back from our members, they love the seniors book clubs that run in the libraries. They also enjoy taking their grandchildren to giggle and wiggle, which is really interesting. I must say that in Canberra I have found that grandparents are particularly important. I have worked in other states, but I have never seen the involvement of grandparents with their children as much as I have here.

I notice that our numbers at COTA, our phone calls even, slow down during school holidays because grandparents are grandparenting. It is really interesting. We also have to finish every session at COTA by 3 o'clock so people can do the school pick-up. That is a spinoff of why libraries are really important.

We also have a very special relationship with libraries because libraries issue the seniors card for seniors across Canberra. Anyone over 61 who is working less than 20 hours can get a seniors card. Libraries will fill out those cards for people and generally a courier picks those forms up at the moment and brings them to us and we run the database for the ACT government.

We are getting to the point now where we are getting a bit smarter technologically and we are going to get the libraries, and also Access Canberra which is in that space, to send those forms to us each day by some magic means—probably fax—and then we will put all the details on to the database.

I was telling James Milligan earlier that our workload in that particular space has

increased by a third over the past year. That is because we have done a lot of publicity about the benefits of seniors cards for travel, for example.

So libraries for us are particularly important. I have been lobbied in the past couple of weeks about ensuring that, in particular, the Belconnen Library remains as an asset in Canberra because there seems to be a rumour out there that that library is not going to exist. So I am just sharing that with you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. We will move to questions.

MR MILLIGAN: I would like to know from you directly what improvements or innovations you think libraries could offer to better cater for older Canberrans?

Ms Mobbs: I think they are doing a pretty good job at the moment. Those seniors book groups are particularly important, as is making sure that they have the newspapers accessible for older people. We have found that is very important for homeless people as well. They do not fall into our category, but we deal a lot with senior women who are between homes or do not have a home.

The other thing we have been asked for is to extend the hours of the library in particular with daylight saving to take it a little bit later. And with the bus service, ACT seniors can travel from 9 o'clock through to 4.30 on a concession rate of free at the moment with their MyWay card, so people are asking if the libraries could be open a little bit more.

MISS C BURCH: Yes, I thought that was an interesting point that nobody else has raised.

Ms Mobbs: It is interesting, and I have heard that even in the past week, after our submission went in.

MISS C BURCH: Because we were talking earlier about later opening hours.

Ms Mobbs: With the daylight saving, it is just marvellous.

MISS C BURCH: But earlier might work as well, though.

Ms Mobbs: Yes.

MISS C BURCH: We have heard a lot today about digital literacy for elderly people. Have you received much feedback on that?

Ms Mobbs: I have. I received a seniors grant to work in that space; it was called get right into technology. We have been working with the seniors clubs and with Canberra seniors club in particular. We have been working there two days a week to work with older people to teach them how to use their smart phone, their computer or their iPad. Yesterday was the AGM, and this week is a particular focus on IT for the commonwealth government, and there is a funded program out. A seniors club advertised for people to come to the AGM, have a nice lunch and then join us—my staff and me—to learn about technology. Seventy-three people turned up.

MISS C BURCH: Wow.

Ms Mobbs: They got a free lunch, which was good, but 73 people came and there were only three of us to do that work. We have taken names and we are going to make appointments from now for the rest of the year, so that is how important technology is.

One of the comments made to me about technology in libraries is that library staff need to slow down a little bit more. I worked with two women yesterday who had brand new computers but did not know how to switch them on. That is how basic it was. And showing somebody how to use the mouse—wow—I had forgotten that you had to learn that. So technology is really important. And when we know Access Canberra is moving to everything online within a couple of years, it is really important we get those skills out to older people.

THE CHAIR: Most of my questions have been covered. Are there any other questions that members would like to ask?

MR MILLIGAN: With some of the feedback that you have received from members of COTA in relation to libraries, what do they want to see? What would they like to see improved? We have operating hours. What about accessibility?

Ms Mobbs: I was going to say that accessibility is the other issue: to have enough parking close enough so that people with mobility issues can get into libraries, so that libraries are accessible that way. I notice, for example, that at Dickson, where I still have my mailbox, which is mad when I live on the other side of town, there are only two disabled car parks available in one little spot and one right down the other end of the car park. For older people, to have only three disabled car parks on that side—I know there are more on the other side of the car park by Woolworths—is difficult. Accessibility is vital.

It is making sure that they are comfortable; making sure that they can cater for all the age groups, the intergenerational stuff, so that grandparents are comfortable with children; making sure that the seating is comfortable for them, that the noise levels are kept down. That was a point that somebody made: once school hours are finished, the noise level in the libraries goes up considerably, because school kids, by their very nature, are a bit boisterous. I think that is lovely, but for older people who still want to concentrate on reading, that is a challenge. So it is thinking about what is around acoustically and making sure that there are little spots for older people to get away and to meet with friends. There needs to be that multiplicity of spaces in a library.

MR MILLIGAN: Would you know which libraries across the ACT are more likely to be used by the members of COTA or older Australians?

Ms Mobbs: All of them.

MR MILLIGAN: All of them equally?

Ms Mobbs: Yes, all of them. There is a big community in the Gungahlin area. Woden library, I believe, is really well used; it has a little cafe, too, a hidden treasure there.

Tuggeranong is easy to access. All of them are used. I mention Belconnen, particularly. I have received several phone calls this week about the rumour that is out there about Belconnen library.

MR MILLIGAN: What would happen if Belconnen library were closed? What sort of effect do you think that would have on the community?

Ms Mobbs: I would probably hear about it with a hundred emails. That is what happened with the bus line changes: 60 emails in a week. I guess it is a long way for people to get from Belconnen to anything else. That would be a challenge for them. Probably the libraries could let people know about their home visiting service that they run, which is absolutely superb. That is not only a way of sharing books but a way of people going out to check to see that those people are okay. Sometimes, for older Canberrans, that is the only company they have in a week, that library visit. So that is a particularly important service as well.

MR MILLIGAN: Are there any particular groups that COTA thinks need particular attention from the government?

Ms Mobbs: I think probably—I hope you have heard from one of my policy committee members; she said she was coming in today—making sure that people can access foreign language material. Canberra is a very multicultural society; those people are getting older and they still want to read rather than get onto technology. So it is making sure that we have still the services in place for those older people from other cultures and ethnic groups.

MISS C BURCH: You mentioned grandparents.

Ms Mobbs: Yes.

MISS C BURCH: Do you have any ideas around what could be done to further enhance programs and so forth?

Ms Mobbs: Probably holiday activities during school holidays. They do not have to be very long; it is probably better for little children not to have very long activities. Probably a morning tea with lots of wipes ready for the hands so that books are not messed up. I know that the giggle and wiggle program is fantastic. We work with Libraries ACT on some of that, particularly when we get to grandparents day, which is next week.

I would love to get into that space and really organise that. It would be a really interesting area to get into. I know that the more you read to young children—the more they have grandparents reading to them every day—the more they pick up and the more they are ready for school. That is really important. I think that bond between grandparents and children is amazing.

MISS C BURCH: Yes, absolutely.

THE CHAIR: We will conclude there. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for appearing today on behalf of COTA ACT. When available, a proof

transcript will be forwarded to you to provide an opportunity to check the transcript and identify any errors in the transcription. I do not believe you have taken any questions on notice, so you will not have to follow those up.

The hearing is now adjourned. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank all the witnesses who have appeared today.

Ms Mobbs: Thank you for the opportunity. It has been amazing; libraries are vital.

The committee adjourned at 4.55 pm.