



South Taranaki District Council
Real Energy



Businesses Behind Books



THE 2005 NEW ZEALAND POST MANAGEMENT EXCELLENCE AWARDS
The New Zealand Post Community Relationships Award



Businesses Behind Books

Businesses Behind Books is a nationally recognised project which is already proving successful in the library world. Recently nominated as a finalist in the 3M Innovation Awards for Libraries it is growing in enthusiastic support.

Following the success of the 2003/2004 Summer Reading Programme, South Taranaki District Libraries Children's and Young Adult Librarian, Pamela Jones along with a South Taranaki businessman, Fred Schwacke identified a project that would be beneficial to local businesses, the library and local children.

Fred Schwacke had been speaking to South Taranaki Business people who were concerned at the lack of children coming through the educational system with employable skills necessary to enter local businesses. Skills required were mainly in math, science and related fields. He felt the South Taranaki libraries were working well with children, and approached us for help.

Through collaboration between Fred Schwacke and Pamela Jones, it was decided to develop a project aimed at enticing and inspiring young readers into a greater enjoyment of these subjects.

The partnership of South Taranaki businesses and South Taranaki Libraries Plus to develop a library collection that reflected the needs and employment issues of the community has been identified as unique and a New Zealand first.

Situation Analysis

The South Taranaki District Council services a population of 27,537 (census 2001), and provides an extensive combined library and Council service throughout South Taranaki district via its Library Plus facilities located at Opunake, Eltham, Hawera, Kaponga, Manaia, Patea and Waverley.

Following Fred Schwacke's conversation with the business people we endeavoured to determine the community's needs. Firstly we looked closely at the 2003 Community Development Plans for Council's seven communities which highlighted community aspirations and concerns. As a result of reviewing these, the following information was obtained:

- There was a shortage of skilled workers in electrical, engineering and building trades; and administration and management staff with appropriate technological experience;
- Educational expectations of industry were rising and that with the introduction of new technology, high standards of literacy and numeracy were basic requirements of most employers;
- Many young people were leaving school too early and this was limiting their capacity to achieve personal goals.
- To continue developing opportunities for employment so that we have real jobs;
- Our activities are fun and all involving;
- Our unique assets are developed and promoted;
- Those who contribute to our community be recognised and valued;
- Local opportunities for continued education and personal development.
- They expressed a desire for a progressive and sustainable economy which:
 - Is recognised as a centre of technical excellence and research and development in our specialist fields;
 - Encourages young people to remain in the community;
 - Provided opportunities for residents of all ages to acquire the skills to gain employment.



The community's views supported the South Taranaki District Council's social and economic outcomes.

A recently released Education Taranaki report at the time also focused on school leavers without qualifications that clearly defined a lack of interest in engineering courses. The Western Institute of Technology at Taranaki (WITT) identified that despite placements available they were unable to fill their quota of student intake for engineering courses. After discussion with local business people it became evident that while New Zealand had a history of developing 'backyard scientists' – children from the rural sector growing up with a natural inclination toward the sciences, this was gradually fading away to the detriment of the community.

South Taranaki business people were concerned that the educational system was also switching kids off to the sciences and now children had a belief that these subjects were boring and too hard.

Mr Schwacke said, "One of the basic rules of engineering is 'define the problem before you try to solve it'. If children spend their early years being taught that math is hard and science is boring why are we surprised that they shun professions that are based upon them?"

"Part of the problem in rural New Zealand is the societal change from one where a very large percentage of parents worked at home on the farm or in blue collar occupations and possessions were repaired and/or redesigned rather than replaced – to a throw away economy where both parents work and the back shed is simply used for storage", said Mr Fred Schwacke.

"In an age where children can not fix a flat tyre on their bike, it is no surprise that they do not appreciate engineering as a career to strive toward", he said.

With strong backing from South Taranaki businesses the Hawera Library set out to capture the interest of the children in these subjects through developing a special collection at our libraries that was fun focused and would turn the tide on how children viewed these subjects.

We named our project Businesses Behind Books.

Project Management

1. Firstly we recognised the need within our community.
2. We then established objectives to fit the need.

Objectives

- To develop a collection of resources at South Taranaki District Council libraries that will entice and inspire young readers into a greater enjoyment of math and sciences. These resources needed to be varied to meet the different learning needs of children and should include books, magazines, lab kits, DVD's, videos and CD ROMs.
- To increase children's knowledge of these subjects and encourage learning of the skills required for employment in local business.
- To place these materials in communities relevant to the businesses sponsoring the collection.
- To encourage innovation and experimentation.
- To add value to current library collections with more resources for children to use while having a collection targeted at specific sciences.
- To provide a unique marketing / promotional opportunity for businesses and the library.
- To keep businesses informed of progress and the success of the programme.
- To keep the collection updated and current with annual renewable sponsorship between contributing businesses and libraries.



3. Promoting the idea to local businesses to get their buy-in was the next step.
 - The initial strategy was to understand the educational gap in the community and also the needs of businesses, to establish the type of collection we wanted to create. We then needed to show businesses how this project could benefit them.
 - We developed a proposal outlining the aims and objectives of the project, how this could be implemented and what would be involved. It also included a proposed budget.
 - The idea was then taken to the Council Executive Management Team and the Community Services and Development Portfolio Group (which comprises four councilors whose interests include library operations) to get the go ahead for the project.
 - We established guidelines and financial parameters for management of the collections
 - Key businesses were identified within the community to target with our proposal. Visits were made to these businesses outlining the scheme and providing them with the bound proposal. Both Fred Schwacke and Pam Jones also spoke to service clubs and professional business clubs to promote the idea. Over the following months businesses financially responded and the budget was met.
4. Once a few businesses came on board with sponsorship we approached local media to promote the concept. Media coverage of sponsorship, launches and activities kept the project before the community and provided publicity for the supportive businesses. – (see newspaper articles in attached evidence).
5. The media quickly realised the potential of the project for the community, (see attached newspaper articles) Local media promotion sparked National radio coverage, which in turn created a buzz throughout other NZ communities wanting information on the establishment of the project.
6. Background information was sought on the types of material available and where they could be obtained. This included the purchasing of lab kits. Therefore the collection was slowly put together.
7. It was also decided to hold holiday 'hands-on' workshops where the children could put into practice what they were reading.
8. Transferability of the idea was very important. We wanted to be able to recreate this project in each of our communities. It was decided to launch the project at the district's largest library as a pilot scheme with the intention of expanding out to the other communities at a later stage.
9. Monitoring and reviewing the project enables us to determine the project's success. Statistics show that during the initial six months, children's issues at the library had increased by 21.9% opposing a national trend of declining library issues.

Regular analysis of the material has meant we can delete items that are not working within the library forum .Therefore we are able to tailor the collection to both the children's needs and ours. We have had to eliminate some kits that have components easily lost. Six months into the scheme we have replaced videos which have been worn out by enthusiastic borrowers. We have also cancelled one of the journals which is too specialized and targets an older age group than we are aiming at. We noticed it had remained on the shelf while all other items have steadily issued. We have replaced it with a more appropriate journal.

Reviewing the highly successful workshops has meant that yet another South Taranaki born initiative has arisen.



It became apparent very early that the material was a hit with the children but they wanted to be able to do it. Many said they needed help with the lab kits, which parents couldn't provide. We began holiday programmes for hands on activities associated with the materials provided in the scheme. Business people offered both resources and their time to work with the children. These were such an overwhelming success that the business people are presently forming a Technology Trust to establish an ongoing club. The club will stay affiliated with Businesses Behind Books but not necessarily held in the libraries.. It will offer practical weekly gatherings for children to make science projects to enter at Science Fairs.

Innovation

The idea to establish the Businesses Behind Books collection was motivated by the identification of an obvious need in our community – children turned off to the sciences, fewer students following career paths in these subjects, therefore a lack of employable youth in the district or returning to the district. We then set out to meet those needs directly by developing a special collection funded through sponsorship from local business people.

We have found no evidence of this type of project being established before. Inquiring on the Public Library Listserv, Pubsig, revealed that no other libraries in New Zealand had attempted a project of this nature before. Nor had they acquired such a successful partnership between council, the library and local businesses supporting a project that had the potential to be so beneficial to the community.

The innovation of this new project has already been recognized in the library world with the finalist placing in the 2005 3M Innovation Award for Libraries.

The project links in very clearly with the South Taranaki District Council's Mission “..to work to inspire a vibrant and caring spirit of community...”

In South Taranaki Libraries we are trying to address these kinds of community issues.

The partnership with South Taranaki businesses helping develop a library collection that reflects the needs and employment issues of the community is therefore unique.

Successful Results

The first result we achieved was getting the financial support of businesses for the project. It was very clear that they saw this as a very worthwhile project in need of backing. In fact even individuals with any involvement in the sciences began approaching us for information so they could contribute.

The initial pilot project was completed in our largest library, but was designed to be totally transferable to the entire district and beyond. Once the scheme was developed it became possible to then target another library to introduce the concept to.

Six months into the project, costs at Hawera have been fully met and it has therefore been established. One of our smaller rural communities, Manaia saw the benefits for children in their area and provided funding so that we could establish a second collection there. It was launched last week.

A third community has expressed a desire to see the collection established at their library so the first approaches to businesses have been made.

Over the past few months we have had a large number of inquiries from libraries around New Zealand asking for information to set up similar schemes in their localities. These include sharing the project with Palmerston North and Wellington, and the technology workshops with Puke Ariki for Science Week and the Auckland A and P Show.

Based upon past press and radio coverage, combined with the number of inquiries received to date, we are certain this programme will have a major impact on learning and library collections New Zealand wide.



The response from the community using the collection has been tremendous. Parents and children alike are talking about the collection, encouraging others to come in and use it. We receive letters and phone calls continually thanking us for taking the initiative to develop this. – (see parents and children’s views in attached evidence).

Primary schools are including visits to the library during their science modules so children can view the stand and take advantage of the materials.

The collection has enhanced the libraries relationship with schools, complimenting their work with children.

South Taranaki District Council is becoming known as a council which supports its community particularly in the area of education.

South Taranaki Libraries profile is lifting. We are being recognized as innovators in the library world and are being approached for ideas by other libraries and to be regional coordinators of major library promotions.

The NRB survey in April 2005 showed a 94% satisfaction rating with the STDC library plus outlets.

Children’s issues at the library have risen by 21.9% since the launch of Businesses Behind Books six months ago opposing a trend in rural libraries of steadily declining issues. Our door counts show steadily increasing numbers of people choosing to visit the library.

Summary

The project has definitely given added value to our collection. We have a far greater choice of materials than we were providing. The material is popular with the children. Many children comment that they would not normally have borrowed math and science books from the library before. The lab kits, something we would not normally offer, are proving very popular. Fun scientific DVD’s and videos are so popular we don’t allow reserves on them. Statistics show that since launching the scheme every DVD has been issued on average every 10 days.

The businesses participating are receiving a high profile through Businesses Behind Books publicity. Already interviews have been given on National and Regional radio and National and Regional newspapers. At every opportunity businesses participating are mentioned. Even local politicians are promoting the project. – (see newspaper articles in attached evidence)

The working relationship between businesses and local council has been improved with a common focus of working for the betterment of the community being realised.

The new Technology Trust being established in South Taranaki is a direct result of the scheme’s success.

Businesses Behind Books was clearly a project ‘who’s time had come’. We saw a need within our community, acted upon it and have achieved demonstrable results.

We are seeing our libraries turn into the hub of the community, enticing “more kids into more reading and having fun with math and sciences.

”The profile of the South Taranaki District Council is certainly one of a council which “..works to inspire a vibrant and caring spirit of community...”