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15/11/2013

GRLC Administration
30 Brougham Street
Geelong 3220

ATTENTION: CHERYL HERVEY [sic]

You may recall I spoke to you on Monday (11/11) regarding concern I had about a particular book being displayed on the recommended reading shelves in the young adult section of the Chilwell library.

Since then I chanced to visit the library in Lara on Tuesday where I found another copy of the same book being displayed there in the same fashion.

One can only conclude, unless of course one is determined to be obtuse or deliberately misleading about it, that this book and others (both contemporary with it and preceding it), being displayed on the recommended reading shelves in such a fashion, are part of a co-ordinated and cohesive policy of promotion much akin to those of standard marketing techniques – the kind that might be found practised by any kind of commercial retailer for instance, from grocery stores to book stores. i.e. the periodic singling out of certain products on distinct 'display' shelves and perhaps most characteristically, the simultaneous placement of same product in likewise manner, in the various outlets/branches across the region covered by the interested organization.

I draw your attention to this, because, as you may also recall, when I spoke to you on the phone you referred me to the Strategic document – Collection Development Policy on the GRLC web site, in response to the interest I expressed regarding library procedures.

I would like now to quote, if I may, from Appendix 2 of said document (Australian Library and Information Association Statement on free access to information) on pg. 15:

“The Australian Library and Information Association believes that library and information services have particular responsibilities in supporting and sustaining the free flow of information and ideas including:

[I refer in particular to item 4]

4. catering for interest in contemporary issues without promoting or suppressing particular beliefs and ideas;” [underline is mine]

Clearly then, the use of display/recommended reading shelves akin to those one might find in commercial book stores, for any particular book and the beliefs/world view/ideology/philosophy contained therein, in direct contravention of the statement regarding access to information of the GRLC's strategic document.

As such, and as a member of the Geelong community, I would like to take this opportunity to request here formally, in writing, that the use of such promotional shelves in our community libraries be discontinued immediately.

In this way, and according to the GRLC's own stated guidelines, no particular book (and the beliefs/views contained therein) might be singled out for the public's particular attention at any time over any other particular book in the collection.

As such, genuine impartiality regarding library content can be properly maintained. Surely the confines of a community based non-profit and (ostensibly) non-political library is no place for vulgar techniques borrowed from the world of advertising and marketing. If a patron wishes to

search for a book according to title, author, subject or other criteria then surely that is what the catalogue is for. In this way too, patrons are encouraged to use their own initiative in their learning and research activities (or even entertainment ones), and that is important.

Important, because if genuine democracy is to actually exist, the participants must have some capacity to exercise their own minds intelligently and independently. Obviously. Otherwise it is just a meaningless sham. And independent mind means one free and quite apart from the 'leading the witness' tactics, persuasion, suggestion, rhetoric, and psychological manipulation of shallow consumerism, the entertainment industry and the political circus; with which our senses are beset continually otherwise in our society, mostly through the mass media, and largely unconsciously, which is alarming.

Might I suggest that the library be the one exception to the rotten rule?

Might I suggest that the library be one place in our community free of *any* kind of partiality such as selective promotion? Is there anyone in the library administration or the Geelong community itself, and capable of making the intelligent and informed observation of an independent mind, who would deny that this is how it ought to be? The choice of collection material is one thing, the promoting of any particular item from it, at any particular time, co-ordinated simultaneously and deliberately across the region, is another.

Please note that I am not here questioning the issue of censorship regarding collection material selection. That is another matter entirely, and though important in my opinion – particularly with regard content aimed at the physically and psychologically immature members of our community – it is not my intention to discuss that here. Here I am questioning the use of promotional techniques used for particular items of the collection in contravention of the strategic document of the library. Nevertheless I do wish, if I may, to refer you to pg. 8 of the Collections Policy document where we are told:

“Powers of censorship are vested only in Federal and State governments.”

Apparently then, the only question regarding censorship of library material is not whether there is censorship or not, but only in whom it actually resides. And this is in clear contradiction of the same document (Appendix 9, pg. 24):

“Collections and services should not be subject to any form of ideological, political or religious censorship, nor commercial pressures.” [underline is mine]

Are we really to believe that censorship by Federal or State government is not political in nature? Or that books and other collection material that are coming almost entirely from enormous and monolithic commercial enterprises such as book suppliers and publishers are not subject to the censorship of commercial pressures? Or that the 'political' and the 'commercial' are quite distinct and apart from one another and not inextricably intertwined? By 'political' I mean, of course, not merely the superficial bi-party political circus, but the actual psychological environment with which we live, and which to the discerning observer is far more unilateral in nature. Actually a clear and definable ideological pattern is decipherable in the ideological content of the promoted recommended reading shelves material – might we not conclude that to be indicative of the collection in general? Clearly that ideology reflects the values of those vested with the powers of censorship regarding the collection, namely and chiefly those of government and the commercial enterprises that control book supply. Patrons – actual members of the Geelong community – have according to the GRLC's strategic document itself, no such power. We may suggest an inclusion, (not an exclusion), from a narrow range of available titles, decided by book supplier/publisher

(commercial pressure) censorship at one end, and then that suggestion itself is subject to further censorship at the other end by government agents (employees) who make the final decision regarding it. (And of course this applies also to other library material such as DVDs, CDs, newspapers, magazines etc.) The key question is this: do the values of these censorship groups really reflect the values of the Geelong community? Or more importantly and to the point, since 'values', like 'consent', can be manufactured, especially in our shallow mass-media oriented culture, do these values reflect those that are actually beneficial and healthful to the members of the community or do they reflect another agenda entirely with goals unrelated to overlying rhetoric? Perhaps it is best if I leave that an open question.

In any case I draw your attention to the censorship issue because when I spoke to you on the phone you seemed to be labouring under the (excuse me for saying so) vulgar impression that no 'censorship' existed regarding the collection. I trust you now realize how utterly naive such an impression is. Censorship is choice and where there is any 'collection' there is censorship according to the values of those we entrust with the choosing. Obviously.

Finally, I would like, if I may, to raise one other issue with you which has been of some concern to me for some time, as a regular user of the Geelong Regional Library Service, and which I did not discuss with you on the phone on Monday. That is, the actual library environment. In particular, I refer to the general noise level.

It seems to me that not too long ago a library was a place to which one could confidently expect to go and find a quiet haven for reading, research and education. In fact I would be inclined to believe that the utter deterioration of this state of affairs were something quite general and not specific to the GRLC; except that in my extensive road trips around Australia I have had ample opportunity for comparison with other library services around the country and can thus with regret inform you that the GRLC libraries are particularly noisy affairs. *[Additional note not included in original letter: the increase in noise in libraries seem to be however, in varying degrees, generally widespread and not confined only to Geelong.]*

I don't know how often you personally spend time in a branch of the GRLC, but almost as often as I do I find an environment more akin to a cafeteria or even an arcade or a children's play centre than a genuine library environment. And this despite noise reduction devices I wear for the purpose of study in such environments. Though the quality of the study/reading environment is sometimes better than at other times, and better in some branches too than others, the overall quality I find is really quite low. There is, you are perhaps aware, an old saying 'empty barrels make the most noise', and I can't help thinking that a community in which one cannot find a quiet space even in the library is one which has been either considerably 'dumbed down' already, or is the progress of being so. And this despite the 'glorious' rhetoric of strategic documents – surely the genuine participation of community members in a democracy depends on them having an environment available somewhere, no matter their social or economic background, where they can learn and inform themselves in that quietness so essential for the exercise of intelligence. I would suggest that those in the community (or out of it) antagonistic to that quietness are, consciously or unconsciously, antagonistic to the principle of genuine democracy itself.

As such, I would like, if I may, to make the following suggestions and comments regarding this problem, first to yourself as representative of library administration and also, if I feel it necessary in the future, to those you answer to, regarding this:

1. Could you please advise librarians to monitor noise levels in the library at all times and where necessary to politely, but firmly, ask those patrons who cannot respect the need of other patrons for a genuine library environment, to be quiet. Obviously, those who persist in

being noisy or rowdy should be asked to leave.

2. It is remarkable how effective simple example is. If the librarians themselves speak both to patrons and amongst themselves in hushed tones, and not excessively, this in itself will be at least as effective as any other measure, if not more so, in keeping noise levels down in general. It will serve to remind patrons that a library is not a place for casual conversation at normal speaking volumes – obviously.
3. A couple of strategically placed posters reminding patrons to respect the quiet reading environment would also be of significant benefit, I am sure. There is a conspicuous lack of any such posters or notices in any of the branches of the GRLC at the moment. Why? Am I to understand that this reflects some kind of deliberate policy of library administration? If so, it is clearly insane, and please revoke it.
4. Patrons might be asked to turn off their mobile phones when entering the library. The sound of ringing phones and subsequent conversations, usually at normal speaking levels, are obviously inappropriate in a library. To this end a simple poster again could be placed at the entry to the library reminding patrons to turn off their phones. Monitoring by librarians would also be helpful.
5. Patrons who are using the Internet for activities more commonly associated with casinos, or the local pub or TAB or video game arcades or even internet cafes might be reminded (again by librarian, poster or notice) that their behaviour and noise level must nonetheless reflect the fact that they are in a library and not any of the above. (The use of headphones should of course be obligatory at all times when using audio-inclusive media.)
6. Parents who bring children into the library are presumably responsible for the noise their children make – especially if they are little children. I have been in the library often when children were actually running about and screaming. The other day I watched and listened while a mother swung her young child up and down over her head with 'whoops' and 'whees' and the child screaming in delight – this went on for several minutes. Is this appropriate behaviour in a library? Yet in not one of the cases of rowdy parent/child behaviour I have been privy to did the librarian make any move to curb the behaviour except when asked to. Perhaps the problem with parents and children, and also the librarians' approach to them is exacerbated by the activities (presumably) organized through the week in various branches of the GRLC for parents and their babies/toddlers and including singing and clapping and reading aloud – all quite noisy activities. Could this be setting a standard for noise level and activity in the library that parents and their little children (and onlookers too) are then translating across (with further regrettable embellishments) into times other than those designated for such activities? Could this also be a determining factor in the librarian's sense that similar noise levels in the library (from parents and their children in particular) are in fact appropriate at all times? If so, and it seems likely to me, might not an alternative venue be found for such activities? Are we to believe that the library is the only place in the community where such activities might be accommodated?

And whose idea was it anyway to have a noise-based activity in the middle of a quiet-based environment such as a library? It is absurd.

In any case, might I ask you to advise librarians that parents and their children are not exempt from the general standards of behaviour and consideration for other patrons, appropriate to a library, and that apply to everybody else?

It seems to me that there is nothing more essential we need to teach our children (and adults too) than the value of quietness. And we do that by setting an example that also serves ourselves, that is, if not actually valuing quietness then learning the value of it. Which means making time and

space for it. And insisting on it in our libraries is a part of that; an important part, for where else, if not in our libraries, might we find quiet in the community? And if we know nothing but noise, electronic and otherwise, from the cradle to the grave, no matter where we go, what is to become of us, and what have we become?

Please respond to this letter at your soonest possible convenience, at the address above, regarding steps you have taken or will take in response to the issues I have raised herein. You will, I trust, forgive me its somewhat lengthiness, but these are serious concerns I have about library administration of the GRLC and I have felt compelled to be as concise and comprehensive as possible regarding them. I trust too, that you understand the serious responsibility of your own position in the community and as such welcome the serious input of those who belong to it.

Could you please furnish me also with contact details for the Chief Executive Officer (as mentioned in the Collection Policy document) should I feel it necessary to write him/her regarding this in the future. Also, as discussed on the phone, the statistics regarding the portion of items in the library collection resulting from actual patron requests.

And finally, please note, that I am keeping a copy of this letter for my own reference.

Kind Regards, [etc etc](#)

P.S. Could you please, if possible, send a copy of your reply also to the following email address: [etc etc](#)

- response to letter sent 15 November 2013 to GRLC from Stuart [redacted]

(pg. 1 of 2) ★

● **Cathy Ferencz**

25 Nov 2013 ★

Dear Stuart

Thank you for your letter detailing your concerns regarding the book displays and noise levels in the libraries. Sherrill Harvey forwarded your letter to me as it is clear these issues are causing you some disquiet and need to be addressed by the Executive Management. I am also sending a copy of my response to the Executive Assistant to file in the correspondence register.

Regarding the issue of "co-ordinated and cohesive policy of promotion", you are correct – when we have a partnership in place such as we do with the Geelong Adolescent Sexuality Project (GASP) to ensure the public library is a place to find appropriate reading material for young people in a situation where they have questions regarding their sexuality, then we will promote any new additions to the collection to ensure they are visible and accessible. Coordinated displays are often seen around the libraries to promote community events or projects as part of our role and responsibilities as a community institution.

It is normal practice to display new additions to the collection on display shelves and normal practice to make those display shelves as visible as possible. This is part of a practice called "readers advisory" and is not new to libraries or librarians. Promotion generally includes marketing to our customer base and we use the physical space in the libraries to do this as well as the virtual library space on the website, including our social media platforms. New additions to the collection, regardless of their subject or genre are placed on our display shelves in all our libraries. As we generally purchase more than one copy, I am not surprised that you found the same new addition on display in two different libraries.

In addressing the noise levels in libraries, I acknowledge it is difficult at times in a modern library to find a quiet space, especially at certain times of the day such as Story Time and Toddler Time. Libraries are increasingly becoming places where people meet to engage with each other as much as the collections and this is changing the nature of public libraries both in Australia and around the world. You will be pleased to know that in the new Geelong Library and Heritage Centre there will be places for quiet study and endeavour as well as spaces for discovery and exploration.

[\(Continued on next page\)](#)

● response to letter sent 15 November 2013 to GRLC from Stuart [REDACTED]

(pg 2 of 2) ★

You may have noticed that in the Geelong Advertiser on Saturday there was a notice calling for comment on the draft Collection Development Policy 2013-17. This is the process whereby you may submit in writing to the CEO Patti Manolis your comments on GRLC's collection development and management. Please know that the policy has been developed using the statements and guidelines of Australian and International professional bodies as a framework and includes measures by which to assess the performance of the collection in responding to our customers' needs. The recently published GRLC Annual Report contains information and statistics relevant to public interest. Operational statistics and information is not made available to the public.

Best regards

Cathy Ferencz



**Geelong
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23/12/13

Cathryn Ferencz
Executive Manager Collection and Technologies Access
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Dear Cathy,

Please note that I only received your letter of November 25th the other day via email - I have been camping in the Victorian Alps for several weeks and have had no access to any form of mail or electronic communication in that time. Hence the delay in my response.

Regrettably, I note, that despite your preamble about 'Executive Management' addressing the issues raised in my letter of 15 November, this seems to have consisted entirely in the concoction of some shallow rhetoric about 'normal' practices, 'reader's advisory' and the presumably inevitable metamorphosis of a library into a place 'where people meet to engage each other' - that is to say, by definition, some kind of socialising lounge. Apparently the GRLC must feel that there is such a shortage of such venues in our community that we simply must give over our libraries too to such a purpose.

What you have *not* done, however, is to meaningfully or sensibly address the actual issues raised by my letter, the first being the contravention of the GRLC's own strategic document, namely Appendix 2, item 4 of the Australian Library and Information Association Statement on free access to information (pg. 15, Collection Policy), which I feel obliged to repeat again here for your benefit:

The Australian Library and Information Association believes that library and information services have **particular responsibilities** in supporting and sustaining the free flow of information and ideas including:

[I refer in particular to item 4]

4. catering for interest in contemporary issues **without promoting** or suppressing particular beliefs and ideas;

[emphases are mine]

Since all books (and other information media), necessarily contain particular beliefs and ideas, and furthermore worldviews in fact, usually reflecting those of the author and/or whom the author represents, it is clear that any kind of promotion or marketing techniques used with regard to them, new item or otherwise, contravenes your *particular responsibility* not to do so as stated clearly in your own Collection Policy strategic document. That is the simple fact of the matter. Not rhetoric, fact.

I note further that actually you do not even attempt to deny this contravention and hypocrisy (indeed how could you - it is blatantly obvious), but rather offer by way of excuse that it is 'normal practice...not new to libraries or librarians'. What this amounts to in simple terms are those age old maxims of mediocrity and corruption that if 'everybody is doing it' or if it has 'always been done so' then it must be alright - which is of course no valid justification for anything. Actually the item in the strategic document forbidding the promotion of particular books over others is there for a very good reason - it is nothing less than an assurance to the public that our libraries will not be used for tawdry propaganda purposes of government; an assurance we are entitled to after all, as part of a community in which we are led to believe our individual right to think for ourselves is respected; and an assurance which no lame excuse about 'normal practice' ought to nullify.

The 'partner' you mention, GASP, who is apparently responsible for some of the books being currently promoted in the Geelong libraries in such a fashion, simply has no right to use our libraries as a vehicle to promote its particular beliefs and ideas to the Geelong community. Neither has any other group or organization. Nor the unelected social scientists/engineers who give them their agenda, unasked, on our behalf, funded by public money. According to the assurances made to the Geelong community by the libraries' own strategic document they have no such right or mandate - assurances which you are flagrantly flaunting in our libraries as you seek to turn them into yet another billboard for 'government' values. Please just try to understand that even if the strategic document didn't exist, these assurances would still be the ones based on sound principles - which is presumably why they have been made. Just as your present policy of particular promotion of the values of particular groups remains unsound and unjust no matter the rhetoric and sophistry you dress it up in.

After all, what kind of values are 'government values' anyway: 'everybody's doing it' or 'it's always been done so', so it's alright? Normalcy? Conformity? Imitation? Or superficial non-conformity which is actually just another form of conformity and imitation? Apparently. You, for instance have adopted it, haven't you? (At least insofar as to do your government job and get paid for it.) Have you ever wondered how it got in your head in the first place? And is this what we can expect GASP to tell our adolescents regarding their sexuality? Apparently. And who asked government or its 'partners' and their hired servants for their advice anyway?- on *anything*, let alone our sexuality. Surely sexuality is a private and personal affair, both as an adolescent and as an adult, certainly not the domain of mere hired servants - social scientists and engineers. Is it possible that you do not even know the difference between that relationship which has no motive, and which alone is capable of uplifting and healing and edifying us, and mere vulgar professionalism which is necessarily cold and automatic (no matter the phony smiles and banter that may accompany it) and *essentially* ineffectual (at best), for its principal motive has actually nothing to do with profound relationship? Perhaps if the government is genuinely concerned about our psycho-sexual health they might do something about the appalling misuse of the mass media to exploit sexuality for all kinds of plainly nefarious purposes, particularly when we are young, in the constant barrage of hyper-sexualised content, coming at us from think tanks comprised of abovementioned social scientists and engineers, both in advertising and programming/editorial content. Are we to believe that the problem is also the solution? (I think that is what is called a *racket*. Like 'geo-engineering' for example....) And are we really to believe that the 'science' being practised by these 'scientists' is really science at all when the content of their diagnostic manuals is subject to a vote and their pathology demonstrably based on lies and misrepresentation? Hardly science is it? Do you know the difference? Do you even think about these things?

In short why doesn't government (and its partners) just butt out where they don't belong? They couldn't do any better than that, I assure you. Their interference is unwelcome, except where the recipient is brainwashed to suppose otherwise - the fact, however remains that uninvited interference (however subtle) into the private lives of individuals by hired servants subject to dubious (to say the least) political and commercial pressures constitutes a disgraceful abuse of fundamental human rights.

By the way, I glanced at the web page for GASP (Geelong Adolescent Sexuality Project) the other day, ostensibly a group dealing with issues of 'adolescent sexuality' in the Geelong community. I could not however find any reference to anything but homosexuality. Am I to understand that the government, Geelong council and GRLC is under the impression that healthy, adolescent boys and girls in Geelong are no longer interested in each other sexually and that therefore no such issues exist? Apparently. (Not that I would welcome their 'input' there anyway.) Shall we put this down to those apparently inevitable changing times that you would have me believe are currently metamorphosing our libraries? In any case can I suggest an alternative name for the GASP group

more in keeping with what appears to be its *actual* purpose: GP-PHAD, or the Geelong Project for the Promotion of Homosexuality in Adolescents? It's catchy you must admit, and apt - I know the penchant of government for clever, punny acronyms with innuendo/double meanings. But then, I guess there would be no hypocrisy or misrepresentation in it would there? And this, as far as I can see, is practically a requirement in 'government' and GRLC policy, it appears. Not to mention that the sheer honesty of it would render the group transparently inappropriate as a tax-payer funded/supported (and promoted) group to those of us in the community with any intelligence left to see the obvious.

Regarding the noise issue, I see that you have no intention of actually implementing any of the suggestions I made in my previous missive for ensuring a reasonably quiet space for patrons in our own libraries. This despite the fact that all the suggestions were either low or no cost and were simply the most basic common sense. Instead you have given me yet another spurious excuse and circular argument about libraries 'increasingly becoming places where people meet to engage with each other', which according to you is the reason for the changing of the nature of the libraries both here and abroad. Since I have already discussed the invalidity of any kind of justification of essential principle based on time or place I might just ask you personally, if I may, if you have ever questioned why libraries are increasingly becoming socialising lounge type places as opposed to actual library type places? Do you really believe this to be the result of some kind of inevitable and unplanned law of the progress of time? The 'modern library', as you put it. And if you do, I must say I do pity your ignorance. The changing of the nature of libraries is of course the result of deliberate social engineering and that *deliberate* engineering is the *cause* of the libraries becoming increasingly like socialising lounges and not the other way around. This is important to understand because that which is engineered can be unengineered, obviously, and is not something inevitably set in stone as you (and your masters) would apparently have members of the public, like myself, believe.

One and one is two is always true, no matter the place or the time one finds oneself in, past, present or future. That quietness is valuable and essential to the exercise of intelligence is always true because it is an essential principle of human consciousness. It too will not change with time or place or any kind of social engineering, by any kind of myopic, hired quacks. But if you cannot see the fact of that, what can be done for you? Exercise of intelligence is a question of actual *experience*, not mere words. You have made a distinction between 'study' and 'endeavour', and 'discovery' and 'exploration', but which of these does not in fact require the exercise of intelligence if it is to have any real *quality* to it? Quietness is essential to quality. One either knows this or one doesn't. It is a fact. But if one knows then why would one deny the public a space called a library in which they might experience it? And if one doesn't know then why should one occupy any responsible position regarding the public in the first place? It seems regrettable to me that government both local and otherwise seems to be staffed from the top down, for the most part, with unthinking automatons who don't really know anything essential at all for themselves, but can only repeat back parrot-like what they have been told to say by others. In fact I am increasingly convinced that it is *actual policy* to include only such people on government staff. It seems to be a requirement. Because after all, even if they were not like that what good would it be? - they would still have to follow orders and repeat what they are told like parrots anyway, right? That's what they are paid to do. That is indeed the essence of their professionalism - mechanical mindlessness. But if, and I'm sorry to say it, the fact is that the policy makers giving these unthinking bureaucrats their scripts both know what is actually good for the public and deny them it anyway then what good are the policy makers I ask you? None at all, they are worse than useless, and it's time we removed them and the lackeys that serve them.

Yours Sincerely, [etc etc](#)

- Response to letter (23 December 2013 to GRLC)



● **Cathy Ferencz**

7 Jan ★

Dear Stuart

Thank you for your letter of 23 December 2013.

Your views have been noted and your correspondence has been kept on file. Unfortunately, I am unable to assist you with your requests, however, I acknowledge your response and wish you well for the future.

Regards,

Cathy Ferencz



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