

Administrative Principle –CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE in UPPER HUNTER SHIRE LIBRARIES

Policy

Upper Hunter Shire Council is committed to serving the information and recreation needs of children and young people in its library branches by providing a welcoming and safe environment, with targeted resources and programs for these demographics, aimed at fostering an appreciation of literature and to promote the development of information literacy skills.

Objective

This policy provides guidance on the management and provision of services to children and young people in our libraries.

Background

Children and young people are core public library clients in their own right, and are potentially the future adult users and supporters of public libraries. Upper Hunter Shire Libraries at Scone, Aberdeen, Merriwa, Murrurundi and Cassilis provide a wide range of services to children and young people in our libraries.

The State Library of NSW has developed guidelines for a Children's Policy in NSW Public Library. This Administrative Principle is based on those guidelines Version 4 (December 2018)

Public libraries offer a wide variety of services to young people, including:

- fiction and non-fiction collections in a range of formats including hard print, magazines, e-books, audio books, e-comics, e-magazines, Music CDs and DVDs
- early literacy programs (for example storytime and related activities)
- access to computers and the internet
- information services such as reference assistance and homework help
- public space for meeting and study
- events and performances
- games and computer games for in library use
- Access to technology
- Special interest groups

Public libraries do not include services provided professionally by other agencies, for example child care and formal education. Libraries do not have the facilities or appropriate licences to attend to children who are sick, injured or hungry.

Procedures/Practice

1. Access to Resources

Upper Hunter Shire Libraries' general collection may contain publications that have been classified 'Unrestricted' and films and computer games that have been classified 'G' (General), 'PG' (Parental Guidance) or 'M' (Mature) in accordance with the Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995 (Cth). This material is available to all persons, including young persons, without restriction. The library has no censorship role in its choice of the library resources that form the collection.

Upper Hunter Shire Libraries may also offer access to films via streaming services, which may include films that have been classified 'MA' and 'R'. Members under the age of 18 are not permitted to access films with an 'R' rating, and members under the age of 15 may only access films rated 'MA' with the consent of their parent or guardian. Parents/guardians are responsible for ensuring that their child's selection and use of materials in the library's general collection accords with any restrictions the family may wish to set. Upper Hunter Shire Libraries encourage parents/guardians to consult with their child to develop clear rules regarding access to resources that accord with the family's personal values and beliefs. The library promotes and supports young people's access to information, including electronic information through its internet facilities. Library staff are available to assist young people in the use of the Internet, and to

recommend websites on particular subjects. A number of appropriate websites have been selected for inclusion in the library's electronic collections.

Public libraries observe the Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Enforcement Act 1995 (NSW), which restricts the extent to which certain publications, films and computer games may be made available to the public, with particular restrictions for young people (under the age of 18). Section 53 of this Act has specific requirements for public libraries and staff in respect of any MA material (a film or computer game classified MA 15+) or restricted material (a film or computer game classified R 18+ and a publication classified Category 1 restricted or Category 2 restricted).

- the display or perusal of MA material and restricted material, and access to this material by members of the public must be restricted in an appropriate manner;
- MA material and restricted material must not be screened or demonstrated in the library in the presence of members of the public;
- a young person (under the age of 18) must not be permitted to borrow or access restricted material; and
- a young person (under the age of 15) must not be permitted to borrow or access MA material without parental or guardian consent.

Upper Hunter Shire Libraries may place further age restrictions on resources for some projects in accord with best practice advice or other relevant factors eg. Use of Virtual Reality equipment in libraries.

2. Unattended Children

Unsupervised children can be at risk in any public place, including public libraries. Staff of Upper Hunter Shire Libraries do not supervise children in the library, and there is a risk that unattended children may leave the library at any time, hurt themselves, or be approached by strangers.

Upper Hunter Shire Libraries requires that children under the age of 13 years, must be supervised by a parent or guardian, or an adult who is at least 18 years of age, who is authorised by the parent/guardian to be in charge of the child.

Children left unattended in a public library may be classed as a child or young person at risk of harm under section 23 of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW) and may be reported as such to the Secretary of the Department of Family & Community Services. Parents who leave a child unattended in a public library are exposing their child to potential harm, and may be committing an offence under section 228 of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW).

Young children left alone in a library can become distressed, bored or disruptive. Young people who disturb other library users may be removed from the library under clause 17 of the Library Regulation 2018 (NSW).

References

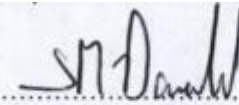
https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/childrens_policy_guidelines_0.pdf

Relevant Legislation

- Library Regulation 2018 (NSW) - Removal under clause 17 gives library staff the power to exclude library users who interfere with any other person's use of the library.
- Library Act 1939(NSW)
- Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 - Child or young person at risk of significant harm
- Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Enforcement Act 1995 (NSW)

Review Date

This Administrative Principle will be reviewed by the Manager Community Services in July 2021

Authorised by: 
Steve McDonald, General Manager

Date: 