

WARM OFF THE PRESS

After several false starts due to Melbourne's COVID lockdowns, Kingston Libraries has finally been able to carry out its plans for a short story revolution, starring two automated Short Story Dispensers, the first of their kind in Australian public libraries. Titian Brady shares how the dispensers are already fostering community connection through storytelling.



In February 2020 Kingston Libraries, based in the southern suburbs of Melbourne, was delivered two Short Story Dispensers. With the wave of a hand, the elegant and futuristic dispensers print a short story on environmentally sustainable papyrus, and readers can choose from stories that take approximately one, three or five minutes to read. The stories, selected by the editorial team at French publishing house Short Édition, can be filtered by age, subject, literary form or the way they make you feel. The Short Story Dispensers are the first of their kind in Australian public libraries, and in early 2020 we were ready to launch a short story revolution, bringing the power of storytelling to the people of City of Kingston.

The plan was to take the dispensers into the community via cafes, community centres, surf clubs, farmer's markets and festivals. Our Short Story Dispensers would feature alongside a stellar line-up of authors for our Mystery and Mayhem festival. Then March 2020 happened.

Undaunted, we planned our launch, which finally took place in May 2021 at Highett Library. It was a bright flash of community connection between lockdowns. One of our dispensers was dispatched to a local cafe in the suburb of Mentone and

SURVIVING LOCKDOWN BY JENNA DAVEY BURNS

Icy cold water rushed across her toes, wrapping around her ankles, the feeling of melting into the scratchy sand a relief after a day spent bent over a laptop.

Laughter peeled out across the water as the three little ones cartwheeled across the sand banks and ran through the shallows, droplets splashing their clothes.

In the darkness only stars were visible. Mordialloc pier lights twinkled in the distance.

It was 7:31. A whole 29 minutes before curfew began. But in that moment, they felt unlimited. Wild and free. The entire world stretched out in front of them across the water.

we were delighted when it was an instant favourite for locals picking up their morning coffee. We noticed the chatter on social media as people shared their excitement for something that wasn't another screen, something different when so many days felt the same. We watched the tickers go up: so far over 4000 stories have been shared to date.

Following this first success, we are now turning to local writing groups and asking them to create something new with us. We want stories with a sense of place and belonging. We are offering a unique way to share writing with others, as well as the opportunity to be published, to sell the rights to have your story distributed on dispensers around the world. Kingston Libraries is seeking diverse voices, First Nations writing groups, asylum seeker writing groups, local history groups, groups for people recovering from the trauma of family violence through writing, and any other writing group we can find.

We have opened up our story submission platform (kingston-library.short-edition.com/) to all, with the hope that locals will soon start to see their own voices reflected in the stories we are telling, fostering a sense of connection, the importance of which we could never have imagined back when we began prior to the pandemic. 🌟

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