

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public

Individual

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Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

Investment in reading is needed.

Reading provides better education and employment outcomes, reduces our stress and loneliness, supports social connection, and increases our empathy for others.

In my role as a public children's and youth librarian, I have seen how free reading support and literary programs offered through the library strengthen community, support families, develop creativity, and feed engagement with the world around you.

In my own childhood, reading offered me an escape from situations I had no control over, it allowed me to live so many lives through perspectives I would otherwise not have experienced, and it gave me confidence and space to develop my own creativity and voice. Free public libraries meant that growing up poor didn't limit my access to these opportunities.

As a parent of children with additional needs (neurodiversity and dyslexia), I have seen firsthand how a love of stories and books and reading nurtured from an early age can be passed onto ANY child. My child's struggle with reading but passion for stories has shown them they can do hard things, reading is now their safe space and this has been heavily supported by free resources from the library and by accessing different formats (graphic novels, audiobooks). They would not be doing as well as they are today without having developed a passion for books and stories from infancy but not everyone knows how important this is.

Reading rates are in decline. 30% of Australians didn't read or listen to a book last year, 1 in 3 students can't read proficiently, and 25% of Australian kids don't get a bedtime story. The culture of reading needs to be supported for everyone, it is a fundamental development for a strong, educated, engaged society.

Urgent action from the Albanese Government is needed to turn Australia into a strong reading nation. This action needs to ensure all Australians have access to the life-changing benefits of reading, the National Cultural Policy needs to include interventions that provide:

National reading campaigns for adults, children and young people, helping them overcome the barriers to regular reading.

A library and qualified library staff in EVERY school, with collection budgets and more support for educators and parents to create strong reading cultures for students.

Greater community access to books and reading through author touring initiatives, voucher schemes, and book club programs, and fully resourced libraries.

Promotions that showcase Australian voices, highlighting contemporary titles and First Nations creators.

Kind regards,

Bec Shelberg