

The Annual Report: your ticket to greater advocacy

A growing number of school librarians are jumping into the task of creating an annual report to present to their school leaders and community to celebrate the great work they have been involved in through the year. In my opinion, one of the most important ways you need to be spending your time through the year is collecting data and documenting what your team achieves through the year.

The annual report is a record of a year's work and activity in your library. It consolidates what you planned for and achieved and what did not go so well. It allows you to showcase the diverse roles and activities you take on and the range of students you work with. It is a record I often refer to well into the next year and beyond to make comparisons, to view growth and to remind myself of successful events when things may not quite work out as planned.

The annual report can take on many forms depending on how much time you have, how much data you have to include and your talents. Some time ago a Google Doc of annual reports was collected and you can see the range here <http://bit.ly/WdadKK>. I am sure there will be something that appeals to you.

Benefits

What are annual reports good for other than taking up time and giving the principal something to look at?

Through the process of collecting and analysing data you are able to be informed and inform others about your workload, your services and how your budget is being spent. This data will be in a form which is understood by those who control the purse strings. If you can prove with data what your needs are, they will more likely approve your request.

An example of collecting and using data is counting how many students and staff use your library on a daily basis. For one week of the year we give each person a sticker as they enter the library for each visit. At the end of the day and week we count how many stickers have been used and use this as a snapshot of our weekly traffic through the year. This is easy to do, everyone loves a sticker and you have important data at the end of the week. This data can then be used to support a request for more space, staff, furniture or resources. It is much more compelling stating you have 500 visitors a day compared to 'we are getting really busy'.

Including a breakdown of where money has been spent is another important piece of data. At a glance you can see where most of the money is being spent and what percentages are going where. This allows you to create a plan for the year's spending. Knowing what you have spent the money on allows you to see if you have met your goals or if there is an imbalance. With this evidence you can justify where the money is being spent and appeal for more.

Ways to collect different data

Statistics of daily borrowing gives an idea of how much shelving is done in a day and how much time is spent on circulation. This allows for time and productivity analysis - would a self-checkout system be a worthwhile investment to direct library staff time elsewhere? Could student or parent volunteers be used for these jobs, freeing up library staff for other more technical roles? Without data, these decisions cannot be properly informed.

Something we tried that was quite successful was a time-sheet snapshot of how the library staff time was being utilised, as we felt we were very busy but not achieving much. The technicians recorded how much time was taken up by troubleshooting the printer, picking up books, shelving, circulation, managing top-ups for the smart-card system, managing the AV equipment, helping students and staff etc. After one week we did an analysis and found that an extraordinary amount of time was spent completing the paperwork for the card top-up. This allowed us to develop a simpler system to present to the accounting department, which freed up the time. This was included in the annual report of what changes were made and why.

Recording the number of hours parents and students help in the library allows for an overall analysis of what is being done by whom. Being able to report on this in the annual report, in terms of how many hours is equivalent to full-time staff, gives an idea of how understaffed your library may be, giving you ammunition to support a request.

Part of our annual report includes the annual plans for the year just over and the next year. This allows for linking to and discussing what was achieved the year before, and where the program will go for the next year, with areas of the focus being quite clear. This will give evidence of continuity, and having and working toward fulfilling a plan illustrates you are not just messing about reading books all day.

As a school using many online resources, I am particular about how well our resources are being accessed by our school community. Databases are expensive, so I need to justify their purchase through numbers. By keeping a record of what is

being accessed and when, I can see where improvements need to be made in teaching about the databases and how they can be used by students and teachers. Including these numbers in the annual report gives a snapshot of how the library is accessed 24/7.

Keeping a record of the small improvements through the year also helps us in our reflection on what we have achieved and how the staff are spending their time. An online document was created where the jobs were entered as they came up, a person was nominated to get the job done, and the date of completion was entered. In one document we can view the small incremental steps we have taken to improve services. This information will also be included in the annual report.

Taking photographs through the year is also important data collection - take photographs of activities, students reading, working and just chatting. These are a powerful way of portraying your students enjoying the space.

Our annual report also includes a space for the contributions library staff made to the school and library, what professional learning they undertook and what their specific roles were through the year. This is great for reflection and ensuring staff are given responsibilities that they can work with.

Some of the data you may wish to start collecting now includes the following:

- daily individual and class visits to the library
- classes you work with in and out of the library
- parent and student volunteer hours
- jobs/projects through the year
- circulation
- lunchtime snapshots of number of visitors
- parent borrowers
- new resources purchased
- number of disposed resources
- special days and events the library celebrates through displays
- professional learning undertaken by the staff, and staff development by the library for other staff
- online resource use
- initiatives taken through the year.

It takes all year

Creating an annual report is a year-long process with data being collected along the way. It is a time-consuming but important process to complete, that will enhance the library profile in the school. To maximise exposure, ensure your annual report is shared through the school community and beyond. Be positive with what you were able to achieve, and keep the appeals for more money or staff for a later time and place; however, including plans for the next year and areas for improvement can't hurt either! Make sure the report is appealing with photographs, colourful graphs and short sentences so that it is easy and interesting to read.

You may find that when you produce your annual report, your principal will see you with new eyes. Be prepared for this with your requirements, and back them up with data! Can't afford the time to devote to this project? I don't think you can afford not to spend the time. a growing



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