

Helen Thomas and Changes in Libraries

Helen started at the Wainuiomata District Community Council Library at the tender age of 16 years. She was blessed with a Mum and Dad who taught her the value of lifelong learning from a very young age and before it was in vogue. She was also very fortunate that her first and most treasured Library Manager, Helen Beattie, was of the same thinking. With so much love, support and encouragement Helen flew through the ranks from a young children's specialist to become the Communities Library Manager, taking care of the 7 branch libraries in Lower Hutt and then onto the role she now has as the Service Delivery Team leader in Upper Hutt Libraries.

In her library lifetime Helen has tackled sheep that escaped from the Gear Meat works and ended up in Petone Library, stopped bare-knuckle brawls in many of her branches, relieved a young bloke of his samurai sword after an argument with his girlfriend and on it goes.....

"a nice little library job"YEAH RIGHT!!!

Helen stressed that you cannot be a shrinking violet in libraries when you are on the front line. Every day is so very different and every day she gets to help someone in some way that makes a difference to their life. It could be finding a job or a recipe, finishing an assignment on time or tips on fixing their car but the fulfilment is always amazing no matter what the need.

The Changes:

- Wainuiomata, Petone and Eastbourne are amalgamated with Lower Hutt to become Lower Hutt City in 1989
 - This change brought redundancies, mergers and much more but Helen confirmed that it was wonderful for libraries because they were updated, upskilled and invested in
- Technology arrives – Librarians had to give up their rubber stamp/pen and card catalogues in favour of a computerized system
 - This was not totally embraced at first by either the public or the library team but it was here to stay so hard to be got used to!
- Service Centres merged into libraries across Hutt city – we are now a one stop-shop where rates and power bill can be paid, dogs registered, rubbish bags purchased and indeed all the service that were previously done at Council.
 - cost cutting but had its good points although was found to be even more cost-effective when outsourced to the Post Shop.
- Library Hubs – now you can knit, paint, play ukuleles at your library as part of the programmes on offer now that we are hubs.

- Great for most communities but the free internet access brought many problems until those who had never used libraries before were taught the boundaries(once again you cannot be a shrinking violet when dealing with the great unwashed)

The changes facing libraries will change themselves in the future but the most important thing that keeps Helen focused, engaged and energized each day are the people who may have changing needs and demands but who come to the library because it's a destination where everyone is treated fairly and welcomed no matter your background.

Helen still wakes up every morning loving her journey in her library career.