



2020-21 Summary Report

Reporting period: 1 July 2020 – 30 June 2021

First 5 Forever is an initiative of the Queensland Government, coordinated by State Library of Queensland and delivered in partnership with local government. In the years since its launch in 2015, First 5 Forever has been successful in highlighting the significance of public libraries and Indigenous Knowledge Centres (IKCs) as important and trusted sources of early literacy support, and the value of enabling parents and caregivers to embrace their vital role in developing their child's literacy.

This reporting period continues to have been impacted significantly by the COVID-19 pandemic with libraries reopening programming to families in restricted deliveries and limited numbers and lockdowns occurring in January, March and June 2021. Although these lockdowns impacted mostly on south east Queensland councils, all libraries and IKCs responded to the possible risk, and maintained COVID-19 safe practices.

In response to this new environment of reduced contact and face to face delivery, State Library support, creative solutions and dedicated public library and IKC staff have continued to keep the First 5 Forever program active, however overall, there have been declines across all indicators of approximately 30-40% less than the previous year, which itself was a 25% decline from 2018-19 (an overall decline of 52% from 2018-19.) With immunisation rates increasing in regional communities, and Queensland easing restrictions in 2021-2022, it is predicted that that impact of COVID-19 will decrease for the next reporting period however with COVID-19 potential variations may have unforeseeable impacts on program delivery and councils will respond accordingly.

This report provides a snapshot of the five 'business as usual' deliverables for First 5 Forever and highlights the trends and progress of the program across Queensland.

At a glance 2020-2021

100% of eligible councils in Queensland participating in First 5 Forever (74).

460,078 total attendances at First 5 Forever activities, down 36% from previous year.

First 5 Forever was represented at **1,954** outreach events, down 30%, with **68,290** estimated attendances at outreach events, down by 32% from previous year.

46 councils reporting participating in outreach events, down 6%.

1,084 partner organisations and agencies engaged with First 5 Forever, down 14%.

469 registrations from **43** councils attended professional development opportunities, up 40%.

4 professional development workshops were delivered in **3** locations plus **5** webinars and **2** new online modules developed.

12,732 First 5 Forever Facebook page followers, up 13%.

163,063 page views on the First 5 Forever webpages.



1. Increasing access to early literacy experiences

In 2020-21 **12,197** in-library and online sessions took place across the library network with **391,788** attendances reported at in-library and online First 5 Forever activities (a decrease of **44%** in the number of sessions and **37%** decrease in attendances from 2019-20).



With libraries re-opening with COVID-19 plans in place in July 2020, families were eagerly welcomed back into spaces where numbers could be managed and distanced and outdoor areas where there was more room to facilitate safe deliveries.

Compared to last reporting period, libraries provided evidence of the growth of “play” sessions using resources provided by State Library through First 5 Forever grants and the “Libraries as play based spaces” project.

This significant investment in play resources last financial year was delivered to libraries during shut down periods and are now being taken out of storage and managed through COVID-19 safe plans.

Scenic Rim: ‘The play based resources received late in 2020 have been successfully organised into play based kits for use and circulation among libraries. Feedback from staff regarding these kits has been very positive. The kits have allowed staff to focus on connections with families and children to be able to better deliver those important early literacy messages while playing. Big books and Covid safe resources have made providing outreach programs safer. The play based kits have been well utilised by all libraries and are rotated between sessions. These kits will continue to be improved upon as we receive feedback from staff.’

Anecdotally the standard Baby Play, Rhyme Time and Story Time offers are also being supported through the addition of play based resources as this has been supported through State Library webinars and tip sheets. Due to the restrictions in sharing items, councils are also using funding to purchase “sets” of resources to use with groups of children. For example:

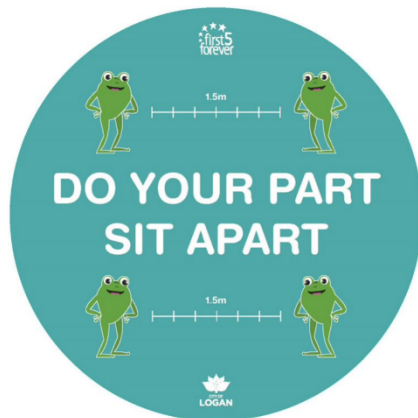
Noosa: ‘New ‘Baby Explore’ baskets were created for our Babes-in-arms sessions to promote independent play and exploration, this also mitigates the sharing of materials during COVID restrictions. Explore baskets include items of varying textures, sounds and shapes, we included lots of natural materials such as wooden bowls, clapping sticks, spoons and toys.’

Limited numbers have also had the benefit of creating strong links between staff and families through the benefit of much small groups creating connections with participants and higher levels of engagement.

Redlands: ‘Redland City Council Libraries First 5 Forever program success has come from limited program numbers in branches as a direct result from COVID-19 restrictions. This has developed some very strong connections between families and the library team providing opportunities to message the importance of early literacy individually and providing opportunity for staff to engage deeply with families.’



Through the variety of public libraries there has also been a variety of strategies shared in maintaining social distancing for families with signage using First 5 Forever branding being used, in addition to physical space making resources.



In last year's report it was noted that smaller library services were starting to report a growth in numbers in their programs. This has continued this year with five RLQ services reporting increases in attendances from last year with highlights such as Barcaldine more than doubling their attendance, and Balonne reporting a 37% increase from last year.

Balonne 'We have completed training with First 5 Forever delivery programs for staff at the library, We have had an overwhelming amount of new families who now join us for First 5 Forever programs.'

Barcaldine: "Our First 5 Program is very well supported by our parents/grandparents and continues to grow. The sessions are delivered by council staff with the main aim of providing a strong early literacy foundation for our children five and under and supporting their parents. These sessions connect our families with staff and other community members, giving an opportunity to form health habits of the library,

its surroundings and resources, as well as feeding a social opportunity for our children, parents and grandparents.”

Other councils included Croydon, Douglas and Goondiwindi, all with significant increases (Goondiwindi reported an additional new casual First 5 Forever staff member working across their three branches made a significant difference). Burdekin (31%) and Cairns (59%) were the only two Independent councils to report an increase from last year.



From the feedback received from libraries, this can be attributed to smaller library services being able to pivot more easily into outdoor areas, as smaller libraries with fewer participants require less spacing requirements, plus being more remote or further north resulted in less restrictions and ease of access to families. Also, Cairns did report a significant marketing campaign in the previous year, and this has continued into 2020-21 so an increase in participation may be a direct result of the investment in outreach.

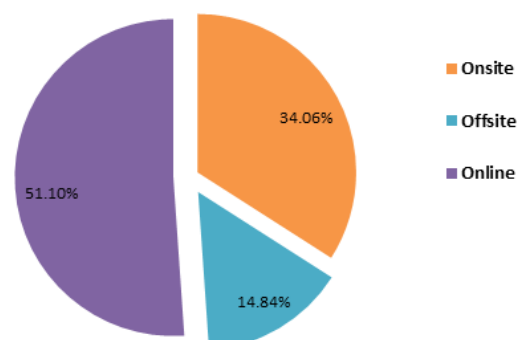
Weipa: ‘First 5 Forever programs continue to be an integral part of the activities available for young families in this remote area. Internally, a major highlight has been the successful recruitment of a new part time Library Officer to assist with programming. Outwardly, attendance numbers have once again reached pre Covid levels with recent groups sessions attracting up to 30 people (12 families). Staff conducted Rhyme time sessions at the Easter markets and once again in partnership with the local Kindy and Playgroup, ran NSS offsite at a venue to cater for over 60 children.’

Digital Delivery of First 5 Forever programs:

Digital delivery is still being managed as a regular offer for some councils based on the ability to reach more families and the opportunity to promote general library services to a wider audience. In 2020-21 councils were requested to provide figures for online attendance at First 5 Forever programs for the first time. Councils reported attendance figures of 235,090 for the year across 20 councils (27% of councils participating) so this will now be tracked in subsequent years to see if the online First 5 Forever program becomes a standard delivery across Queensland. In the reporting period, most participation by families (51.1%) was provided by online First 5 Forever sessions.



2020-21 attendance by type



Larger councils such as Redlands, Brisbane, Moreton Bay and Sunshine Coast will continue to include digital programming, and utilise the new skill sets of staff. But their use will now be evaluated and targeted to gain best returns.

Sunshine Coast: 'The development of online programming showed that young parents predominantly engaged with Libraries via Facebook. Two series of 10-week toddler Sign and Sing classes were delivered which gained 9614 online viewers. 25 Rhymes with Ryan sessions have been created gaining over 12000 online views, and 24 Toddler Tuesday early literacy programs were created on a range of topics from music to yoga that attracted 12125 views. An online community engagement initiative also created: Sofa Storytime. The concept featured numerous families reading stories on their sofas which were edited into an online video program. The four Sofa Storytimes gained 7967 online views across multiple platforms, including Facebook and YouTube.'



Now that face to face programs are planning to return, the capacity for staff to deliver both online and physical programs is something that each council will be evaluating over the next 12 months. Also, with the pandemic copyright relaxations for performances and recordings ending for many publishers, there is more scrutiny on the content shared online, and currently only the titles available via the ALIA Story Time pilot project are available to libraries without prior consent from the publishers. State Library has supported the pilot through encouraging Queensland libraries to participate using their First 5 Forever funding and providing the *Stories for Little Queenslanders* series. This series has been overwhelmingly positively received as it provided quality content for libraries to use to continue their online programming while the ALIA pilot gathered quality titles to share. The *Stories for Little Queenslanders* series has now been added to the ALIA pilot list so that it can be used for online programming nationwide.



2. Reaching all families with children aged 0-5

In 2020-21, libraries collectively ran or participated in **1,954** outreach sessions (**30%** decrease) and reported **68,290** attendances. Attendances at outreach events have predictably decreased from the previous year by **32%**.



Even with the impact of COVID-19, 62% (46) of councils continue to provide outreach for non library users, creating access opportunities to First 5 Forever. This is a **6%** decrease on the previous year.

It is worth noting that, in line with their limited decreases in onsite attendances, smaller councils reported only minor decreases in RLQ/IKC services that deliver outreach sessions. It is positive to see these councils are still continuing to support outreach in 2020-21 and connecting with families in smaller communities where support is more limited.

Outreach sessions include both regularly scheduled sessions held in public areas hosted by library staff and participation in community-based family friendly events. Regular outreach sessions continue to include a variety of “pop up” libraries in parks, swimming pools and shopping centres where possible due to local conditions or council restrictions.

During the reporting period councils that had invested in Story Walks, sidewalk stickers or outdoor trails as outreach strategies noted their value as a connection to families and early literacy practice when libraries were unavailable. Story Walks were also valuable in creating social media as they provided an opportunity for local images and positive parent messaging.



Burdekin: ‘We have had the opportunity to extend our reach into our local nature play park with two micro innovation grants. With these grants we have developed a local Burdekin Nature Play Passport and installed three signs at our local nature play park. The passport is designed to take families on a journey throughout the wonderful natural areas we have here in the Burdekin and focusses on the different play areas in the nature play park. It contains First 5 Forever tips, songs and book suggestions whilst also highlighting our local Indigenous lore and knowledge. The signage provides families with information on the different types of play and the developmental benefits that come with outside play.’





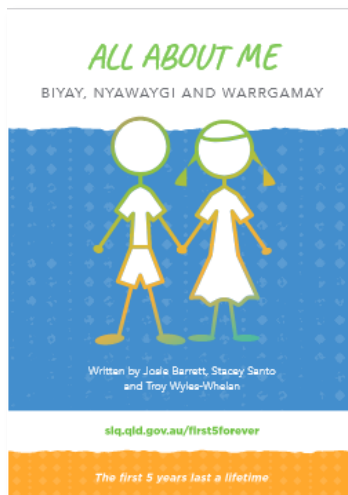
Mackay: 'The creation of the strolling stories has been a huge success and one that continues to grow. This project not only has created an incredible language rich experience for our local community it was a truly collaborative project within our Council departments and external stake holders.'

Isaac: 'Sidewalk stickers were installed in communities across the region in parks and high pedestrian traffic locations. Three rounds of installations in July, September and November were popular with families re-emerging from COVID restrictions and assisted in keeping the First 5 Forever messaging out in the community whilst inhouse programming was unavailable. Middlemount, Clermont, Glenden, Nebo and 3 separate sites in Moranbah were chosen. Where possible a Pop Up @ the Park was also held to highlight the installations.'

Outreach Spotlight

Hinchinbrook: The First 5 Forever Innovation Grant enabled the Hinchinbrook Shire Council to deliver the highly successful First 5 Forever in Hinchinbrook project a major highlight in the event calendar. The vision of the First 5 Forever project was to bridge the gap between Indigenous families and the library.

To do this, consultation was undertaken with leaders and elders, of the First Nations peoples of Hinchinbrook Shire to develop a resource which was launched at the Baby Welcoming Ceremony. Each baby who was welcomed received a special tote bag featuring the totems of the three First Nations groups



of Warrgamay, Bandjin and Nwaigi, and included a concertina style brochure featuring the Heads and Shoulders rhyme and booklet titled 'All About Me' translated into the three languages.

Outreach Resources:

Take home packs for outreach and to support families during periods of lockdown continued to be produced with an increase of 12% of councils reporting some sort of "pack" activity during the reporting period. Packs vary from preprepared take home activities with provided materials, and ideas for early literacy activities in the home, promotional items with links back to the library and the online First 5 Forever program, or borrowable book sets or play based resources. Examples of packs include:

Moreton Bay developed 1000 Indigenous First 5 Forever packs featuring the "Big Fella Rain" book.

Gympie: Designed new material for their First 5 Forever packs, which included a handout of scarf play songs and rhymes, and a new Gympie Regional Libraries First 5 Forever brochure.

Isaac: Busy Bags - The bags were made available to families when they borrowed a picture book at their local library or at a Pop Up @ the park event. The bags were designed to provide parents and caregivers with activity ideas they can do with their young children, using items that can be commonly found around the home. The messaging was that quality time does not need to cost dollars and that early literacy opportunities can be in the everyday interactions they have with their children. Each bag also contained items for an activity the families could use time and again at home straight away. On average approximately 100 bags were issued each month. Left overs have been utilised as promotional tools at events such as the Clermont Show, St Lawrence Wetlands, Community Days where the programs team have been present.

Lockyer Valley: Busy bags: Each month our libraries offer 0-5 years First 5 Forever Busy Bags. These bags offer a different theme each month, full of fun things for little ones to do. Inside each bag you will find crafts, games, colouring, songs and more. The bags have proven to be very popular. With positive feedback from parents and carers, we have decided to continue them indefinitely at this stage. Each month over 60 bags are collected by customers.

Maranoa developed take home packs bags based on the *Stories for Little Queenslanders* made available with loans for families.



Redland: Indigenous language and early literacy has been promoted through the development of 700 Jandai Literacy Bags containing a copy of the local book “Whale dreaming”. Both in-branch and online programs introducing the local language and culture at a grass roots level have been supported by this resource, and have been positively received by the community



3.

Collaborative partnerships and coordination

In 2020-21 public libraries and IKCs reported partnering with **1,084** community partners which is a **14%** decrease from the previous year.

This decrease is again a result of the pandemic; however it is not a significant decrease. This demonstrates the value of First 5 Forever for partners and their relationship with libraries, as local businesses and services would also have been impacted by COVID-19 restrictions and financial costs, however they were still actively supporting the program where possible.



Surat Library staff member, Sue Ware with Errol the Frog and Kathy Morrow from Healthy Communities



Ann Maree Dyer and Brittany Lauga, MP – Romp in the Park community event, Rockhampton

First 5 Forever funding continues to provide libraries with the opportunity to connect with local steering groups, businesses and organisations and develop partnerships that extend the reach of libraries with families. Councils reported ongoing local successes with early childhood and/or community development groups as the First 5 Forever business as usual model builds strong local connections through consistent support.

Partnerships with Queensland Health continue to add value to the impact of First 5 Forever, and work to increase links to public libraries and early literacy and in some communities providing First 5 Forever resources including take home packs. Examples include:



Bundaberg: ‘In partnership with Child Health Nurses, a First 5 Forever trained staff member attends each new parents group to provide information about First 5 Forever, share parent messaging, give out free resources that link to libraries, and conduct a mini “Baby Wiggle and Giggle” session to share with parents what sessions are like and make a connection with new parents and invite them to join their local branch.’

Moreton Bay: ‘Partnerships include outreach to Homeless shelters and work with families at the Domestic Violence Prevention Events at Redcliffe, Caboolture and Strathpine.’

Redland: ‘Strong partnerships have formed with childcare providers, Redlands Maternity Hospital and associated playgroups.’

Fraser Coast: ‘During lockdown, due to our strongly established link, Child Health continued to promote the First 5 Forever messaging to parents and they also encouraged families to follow our on-line Rattle & Rhyme and Storytime sessions accessible via our Facebook page and Library website. We also notified Child Health regarding our available Activity Packs (and sample of pack dropped off to Child Health) so that Child Health nurses could encourage parents to drop into the library and pick up a pack. Packs were also delivered to Child Health for them to give out to new parents of little ones under six months.’

Lockyer Valley: ‘This year we have welcomed a Child Health nurse into our library. For child health advice and breastfeeding support, a Child Health Nurse is now available in the Gatton library every Tuesday from 9 to 11am. This coincides with our Rhyme Time and Story Time programs. The partnership is proving beneficial for both parties and has been very exciting.’

Examples of other First 5 Forever partnerships:

McKinley: Hosted a First 5 Forever information day which included a chat with Allied Health North and West Remote Health staff regarding children’s well being. This event was supported by Queensland Country Women’s Association Country Kitchen members for helpful ideas on healthy snacks and meals to keep toddlers at their best for learning and playing.

Brisbane: ‘Library Services has continued to collaborate with Council’s Environment Centres, contributing to their existing ‘Bush Kindy’ program. This ongoing relationship has delivered a very positive partnership blending the Environmental Centres, learning, literacy and libraries. Library staff from Bracken Ridge, Chermside and Inala Libraries have continued, whenever possible, an arrangement with Bush Kindy’s at Boondall, Downfall Creek and Karawatha Forrest to provide a storytime session as part of the Bush Kindy program...A new collaboration commenced between the Mt

Coot-tha Botanic Gardens Library and the Sir Thomas Brisbane Planetarium in 2020-21. National Simultaneous Storytime was held at the Planetarium in the May 2021 and was a successful booked out event. Mt Coot-tha library is continuing this relationship with the planetarium and are exploring further partnership opportunities with other areas in the precinct including Mt Coot-tha Botanic Gardens events and the Visitor Centre.'

Scenic Rim: 'Our ongoing partnerships have continued with fifty four community agencies and our partnership with Mununjali Housing and Development Commission continues to be an outstanding success with many joint projects being facilitated.

The Yugambeh Language Project and Community Literacy Champion projects, funded through State Library grants, have been very successful in allowing the creation of simple rhymes and resources in the local Indigenous Language of Yugambeh with First 5 Forever messages.

In addition, the First 5 Forever Community Literacy Champion project has allowed us to develop an excellent literacy program involving a local Indigenous football player (Jamal Fogarty pictured) to promote resources and the First 5 Forever message. The support of Jamal Fogarty in working with the Scenic Rim Libraries and in his devotion and genuine commitment to deliver literacy messages has been outstanding.'



Whitsunday: 'Whitsunday Regional Libraries partner with the local PCYC branch managers and Stackelroth Farms as their Community Literacy Champions. Library Stations were created at Bowen and Whitsunday PCYC branches with monthly visits by library staff to coincide with KinderPlay and KinderGym sessions run by the PCYC. We also held library sessions with the Police Sergeants and local farmers as special guests during Term 1 and farm visits in Term 2 providing the opportunity for children and their families to learn about farming practices and the production of food in the local region. Resource kits were also developed to extend children's learning, allowing them to explore and engage in topics raised during the program. The program finished with a stall at the local Show.'

Wujal Wujal: 'The Mums and Bubs group, in partnership with Apunipuma was a great success with many young mothers and expectant mothers attending and learning how to engage in early literacy with their child whilst also having the midwife and child health nurse available for information and advice. The combination of the two worked really well as a holistic program to engage young mothers to be able to allow their young children to bond, play and learn some early literacy along with learning the milestones and health requirements of young children.'

4. Family and community awareness campaign

In 2020-21 statewide support focused on the *Stories for Little Queenslanders* series, which was welcomed by the library network in addition to their continued development of local campaigns. State Library provided an extensive suite of new digital resources to support the series and their use and promotion. Photographs and videos were commissioned of families sharing the stories together, authors and illustrators involved

in the project, photos of the books themselves plus two social media videos and a 30 second promotional video.

As the popularity of the books grew, a suite of Songs for Little Queenslanders was commissioned with accompanying videos and AUSLAN interpretation. Hardcopy posters were also printed and distributed to councils along with the Story Telling Kit booklet that provides creative ideas for activating each story in First 5 Forever sessions.

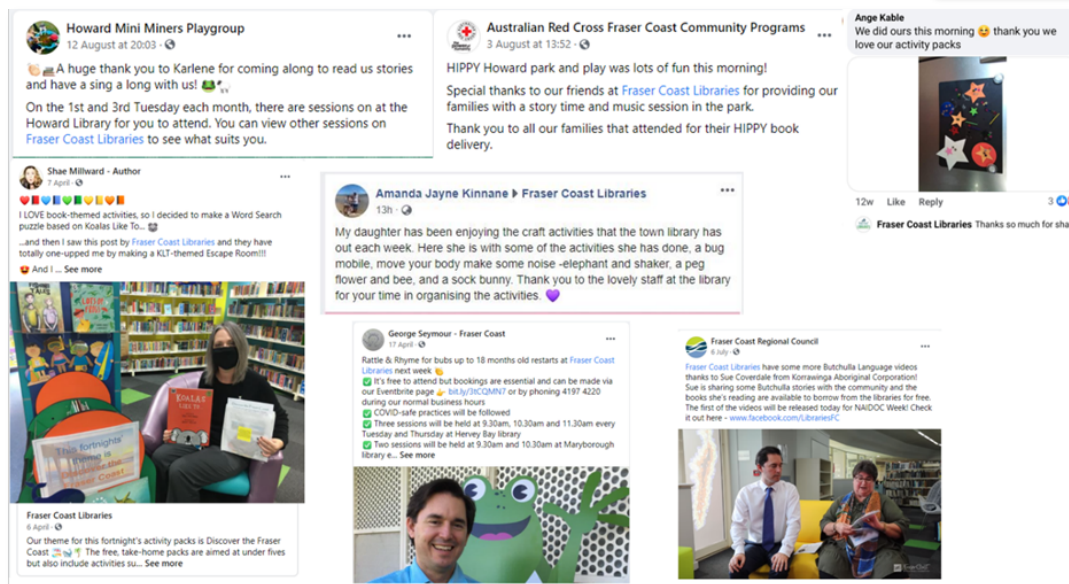
An [updated brand guide](#) for First 5 Forever was made available, with new examples of how and where to apply logos and more information about using fonts, colours and the extended suite of Errol the frog illustrations.



Visitation to the First 5 Forever website, generated **46,374** visits and **163,063** page views – remaining steady from the previous year). The dedicated First 5 Forever Facebook page had **12,732** followers at 30 June 2021 (13% increase from the previous year). The 'Watch' page launched last year had 9,609 views but the blog pages are the most accessed part of the site with 46,275 page views.

Online videos are also shared on First 5 Forever Facebook where they received 51,339 views (approximately 1000 views each week.) Subscribers to First 5 Forever emails increased by **3%** to **6,790** subscribers as at 30 June 2021.

Queensland councils continue to be highly active using their own media releases / social media channels and local campaigns to promote First 5 Forever and target local families. Local First 5 Forever awareness incorporated social media as councils continued to demonstrate their growing ability to utilise this connection tool effectively and strategically in community networks:



Evidence of First 5 Forever branding was again valued in reporting as a significant factor in promoting the program to areas where families are.



Examples of local awareness strategies include:

Ipswich: 'This year included a focus on the design and procurement of marketing and promotional items promoting Ipswich Libraries and First 5 Forever. This included themed headbands, frog finger play cut-outs, story dice and drink bottles. New marketing flyers also featured photographs of local families engaging in First 5 Forever activities. Ipswich Libraries also completed the recording of the podcast series featuring the *Stories for little Queenslanders* and releasing these on Ipswich Libraries First 5 Forever web page.'



Year 6 students at local schools partner with the First 5 Forever team in an initiative to present the *Stories for Little Queenslanders* titles as podcasts.



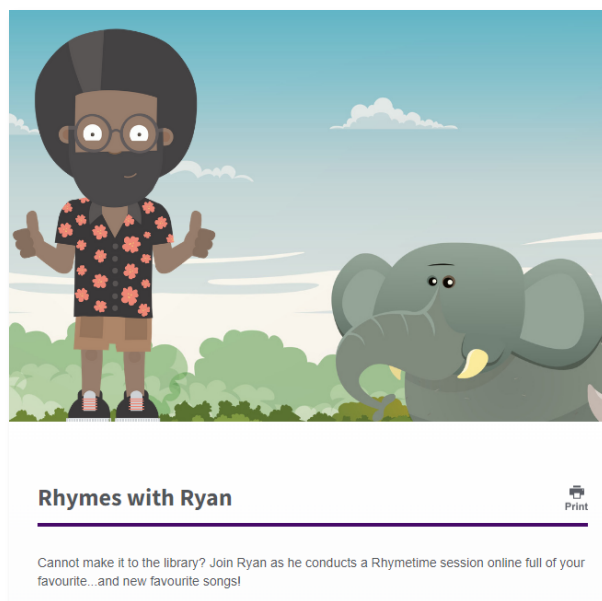


Moreton Bay: 'The very popular "First 50 Books to Read before You're 5" handout was reviewed and significantly updated to offer more titles covering diversity, resilience, and inclusion reflecting current priorities and support for families.'

Sunshine Coast: 'We developed marketing collateral including: A new Kids Only library card for toddlers and young readers to encourage membership. Created by Philip Bunting the card features

a graphic of his Common Bookeater Python (Pythonidae Bookmunchii Sunnycoastius)

Sunshine Coast Libraries also created a rhyme booklet to accompany our popular Rhymes with Ryan programming that features favourite songs and rhymes. A webpage has been created for children with a video to allow children to sing along with Ryan at home. The new membership cards and rhymes booklet are included in First 5 Forever toolkits, outreach packages and pop-up promotions targeting early literacy audiences.'



5. Workforce capability and standards

In 2020-21 Professional Development focused existing training packages and information and support that was relevant to the many challenges faced by libraries during COVID-19. In the reporting period 4 **workshops** were delivered in 3 locations: Cairns, Charleville and Brisbane.

Online support was provided through 6 webinars and Zoom presentations. All webinars are co-delivered with public library staff where possible, and topics are designed to be responsive and scaleable to library services of any size.

Topics this year included: Inclusive practice, Community connections, and Autism friendly story time e-learning program with links to a training package that has been developed by Griffith University in partnership with Brisbane City Libraries.

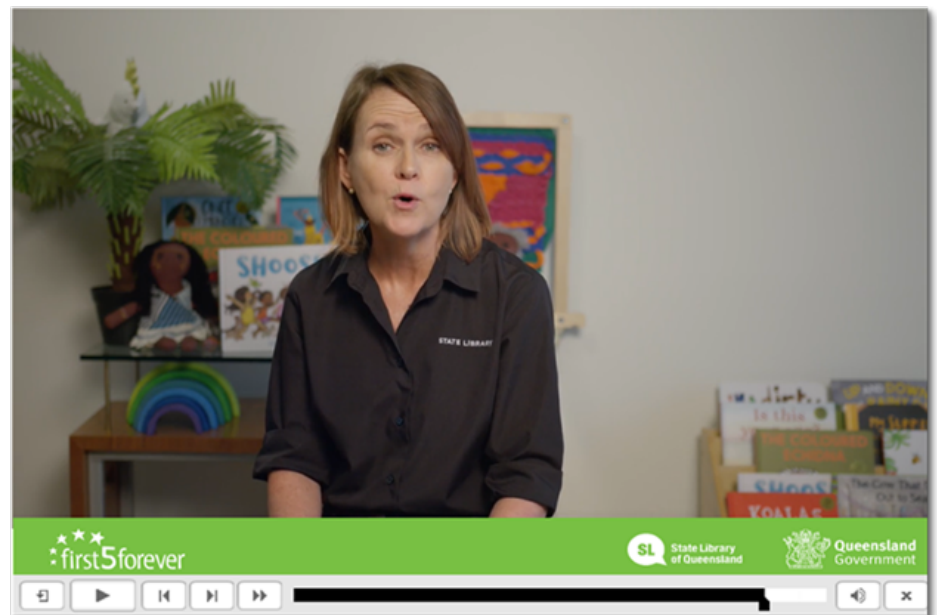
In partnership with the Indigenous Services team a Zoom workshop was developed and delivered to participants on Badu Island in November 2020.



State Library developed two self-paced online professional development modules in response to requests from public libraries. Modules focused on foundational skills and are ideal for using with new staff induction programs, refreshers for existing staff and sharing with partners. The topics were: *Module 1: What is First 5 Forever?* and *Module 2: Early literacy*. The Early Literacy module was also delivered in partnership with Queensland Health Speech Pathology staff who endorsed the content. These modules were welcomed by managers during closed periods for front facing staff to complete, and have enabled ongoing professional development during lockdowns. Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive and more modules will be produced to support this new way of learning.

"These have been great for reinforcing knowledge as it has been some time since I provided sessions - these will increase my confidence."

"I found the way in which module 1 clarified the importance of First 5 Forever really helpful to my role. Knowing that information allows me to better promote the concept to parents. Being confident in the importance of the program helps instil confidence in those patrons who are participating and seeking info."



In total, **469** registrations from **43** councils accessed opportunities for professional development provided by State Library. Feedback continues to be overwhelmingly positive both for face to face and online options, and State Library continues to engage and consult with public library staff to ensure topics meet their delivery needs and are relevant.



In addition to professional development sessions, practical Tip of the Week emails continue to support public library subscribers. These tips are designed to be simple and actionable across a variety of settings and are a direct response to feedback from libraries for new delivery ideas as they can be catering to the same families each week.

Library staff are now also providing their own content for Tip of the Week emails for distribution, enabling strategies sourced from the network to be shared more widely.

Indigenous Services staff are also using the tips as talking points in their support of IKC coordinators delivering First 5 Forever and have promoted them on the IKC Facebook Page. Currently 22 IKC staff and support personnel currently subscribe to the weekly tips.

In 2021-22 State Library plans to continue with a combination of face to face and digital delivery. Regional travel has recommenced, and new online modules are scheduled for release.

Maranoa: 'We were fortunate enough to be able to send a staff member from our Mitchell Library to the First 5 Forever training session conducted by SLQ and held in Charleville. As a result of her attendance at the training, she returned to her library and immediately implemented First 5 Forever storytime/programming. A small but important highlight in our calendar.'

Thank you to all council staff, community partners and local champions who have contributed to the ongoing success of this program.

State Library looks forward to working in partnership with councils to continue delivering First 5 Forever for Queensland children in 2021-22.

