IF WE DON'T TAKE THAT WHO WILL: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION OF A LOCAL STUDIES COLLECTION IN AN AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC LIBRARY

A Thesis submitted by

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ABSTRACT

With Australia's diverse population, it is important that each local studies collection reflects and represents the heterogeneity of its community. Research suggests that collecting practices can contribute to bias, such as limited collection of digital original materials. A wider investigation of how collecting bias contributes to unrepresentative local collections has not previously been undertaken. This thesis addresses this problem through an ethnographic investigation of local collections policies and practices in an Australian public library and argues for a social justice approach to collecting. This study is positioned within a critical theory paradigm, a research tradition focused on questions of power, inequity and social change, directly relevant to the research question. The research findings identify the opportunities for, and difficulties of, collecting diverse-content for local studies collections. They also identify factors that make it difficult to implement a strategic approach to local collections. Local studies collections are rarely able to reject unsolicited donations, which limits the capacity of staff to implement more proactive collecting. Drawing on the idea of mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors, the thesis highlights how a social justice framework for local studies collecting in public libraries can ensure greater inclusivity and equity. Such approaches can amplify voices that may have been silenced and make people and themes with little visibility much more apparent within local studies collections. A social justice approach to local studies has the potential to provide a more representative record of the community as a wider range of voices and stories are documented, collected and preserved. This would be beneficial to the local communities that libraries serve, ensuring greater engagement from and ownership by underrepresented groups. It also serves to ensure that local studies collections have greater depth, representation and range of content for research.

CERTIFICATION OF THESIS

I Ellen Forsyth declare that the PhD Thesis entitled *If we don't take that who will: an ethnographic exploration of a local studies collection in an Australian public library* is not more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. The thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated this thesis is my own work.

Date: 20 May 2023

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABBREVIATIONS

ALIA Australian Library and Information Association

NSLA National and State Libraries Australasia

NSW New South Wales

VRM Visual Research Methods

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Many public libraries in Australia have local studies collections which aim to collect, keep, preserve and make available information local to the area served by the library. Public libraries collect information about their communities, including the ecology, economy, history, geology, geography and social life of the area. Each library takes a different approach to what it chooses to collect based on factors including collecting policies, staff time and interest, budget and availability of published local information. Some public libraries will create content because information about their community is not being documented. This can include undertaking and recording oral history interviews and taking photographs or videos. This document provides an overview of a research study that explored the current local studies collection practices of public libraries with a view to understanding and informing how these practices can be developed to ensure that as well as recording the historical past, recent and current concerns and interests of the community are appropriately collected.

This first chapter introduces and provides context for the study. After detailing the background of the phenomenon under investigation, it describes the research problem, articulating the research question the study addresses. The research method and paradigm for the study are briefly explained and the rationale for their selection is provided. An overview of the study's key findings and the contribution they make to new knowledge and practice are discussed. Finally, the key terms are defined and the thesis structure is outlined.

1.2 Background

In February 2023, the Australian government released its national cultural policy with the title *Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place* (Office for the Arts, 2023). The tag line of *a place for every story, a story for every place* is well suited to local studies collections in public libraries, as these collections help to tell the stories of their communities; however, it hints at there being a single story for each community when in fact there are many stories, at times overlapping at and times completely separate. The policy has five interconnected pillars:

- Pillar 1 – First Nations first
- Pillar 2 – A place for every story
- Pillar 3 – Centrality of the artist

- Pillar 4 – Strong cultural infrastructure
- Pillar 5 – Engaging the audience.

These pillars are relevant to local studies collections in public libraries, while not being specifically designed for them. This helps demonstrate the importance of local studies collections in public libraries, as for each community these collections can work to include First Nations people and their experiences (Pillar 1). In a local studies collection that has a social justice focus, there is also a place for every story (Pillar 2) – not simply the stories of the influential or powerful but also the stories that document the recent and current concerns of a community. Pillar 3 is not so directly connected to public libraries, but some are documenting the work of artists in their communities, and there is the potential to include local music and art in collections. An effective and well-run local studies collection will be backed by strong cultural infrastructure so that the collections are accessible to the community, cared for and made available into the future (Pillar 4). The final pillar (Pillar 5) – that of engaging the audience, or, for local studies collections, engaging the community by having a diverse and inclusive local studies collection where people can see their stories reflected – is critical. For local studies collections, a better tagline would be *a place for every story, stories for every place*, acknowledging a range of experiences and perspectives rather than potentially a single story about a community.

While some information about a local area may be collected by organisations like the National Library of Australia or a state or territory library, this may not provide consistent coverage about a local area as such organisations' collecting priorities are items of national, state- or territory-wide significance. Legal deposit is another way for national and state libraries to collect items of local significance; this requires publications to be provided to them either in print or electronically. However, legal deposit, while important, focuses on published items in book or book-like format. In some communities there are other local collecting institutions, such as First Nations keeping places, local and family history societies, local museums, and sport, environmental and other community groups. These each have key roles as they collect and sometimes document information about an area, or more usually about their organisation; however, they do not undertake the role of a public library, especially one with a social justice approach to collecting that can bring together diverse, equitable and inclusive stories about a whole geographic area.

Libraries, including public libraries, are not neutral in what they collect and how they make it available (Gibson et al., 2017, p. 753; Jaeger, 2007, p. 35). They may not take a social

justice approach to collecting, but they are potential place for the information of an area to be documented and collected. Public libraries are organisations open to everyone, with the possibility of collecting the stories of an entire community. Local studies collections are defined as being

> inclusive of local history and so the local collection should support studies that look at the historical past, both distant and recent, or at current concerns in the community, such as local environmental issues, or plans for the future development of a locality. (Dewe, 2002, pp. 1–2)

This definition highlights collecting current and historical material and indicates that content should reflect community concerns and interests, hinting at possible consultation or collaboration. It implies that there can be many stories of an area providing different perspectives, so that the complexity of a community is seen, not with one unified view, but from many perspectives.

In contrast to this definition, all too often information 'organization is a matter of sociopolitical and historical processes that serve particular interests' (Noble, 2018, loc 2277). This process of serving 'particular interests' does not reflect a social justice approach to documenting a community. In relation to archives, which are relevant to local studies collections, Foster and Evans (2016, p. 353) state:

> Traditionally archivists collected material years following an event. This is no longer the case. Digital content and documenting current events both require information specialists to act quickly and be involved in the initial development of potential collections to ensure they are identified, described, and preserved for future retrieval.

They highlight the importance of an agile approach to collecting, acting quickly and making sure that current information is available for the future. Ham (1975), in writing about archivists states that their role is

> to make an informed selection of information that will provide the future with a representative record of human experience in our time. But why must we do it so badly? Is there any other field of information gathering that has such a broad mandate with a selection process so random, so fragmented, so uncoordinated, and even so often accidental? (p. 5)

It is possible to see this fragmented, uncoordinated and at times accidental approach applying to local studies collecting in public libraries as well.

How large are the local studies collections in public libraries in Australia? At present, that question cannot be answered. In Australia there are '1,690 public library service points

and outlets with 1,419 branches, 71 mobile libraries and 200 other outlets[1]', with $1.287 billion spent annually to provide these services (State Library of Queensland, 2022, p. 3). The statistics provided by National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA) do not contain any detailed collection data, so no national data is available about local studies collecting in public libraries. There is some NSW information from a survey[2] that shows most public libraries in that state have a local studies collection (State Library of New South Wales, 2021, p. 12).

Guidelines and standards commissioned by the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) (I & J Management Services, 2016) include a possible reference to local studies collections, without naming them, stating that:

> Strong communities build knowledge about themselves, their culture and unique history. The public library also has an important role in the collection and preservation of stories and materials that have a special relevance to its community – often doing this in collaboration with the local historical or genealogical society, or museum. The outcome is that community memories are kept safe; diversity is respected, and community identities are strengthened. (p. 21)

This suggests the importance of local studies collections in public libraries for community resilience. It highlights the need for diverse collecting as part of the building of knowledge about each community and the possibility of partnerships in collecting.

As well as the ALIA guidelines, some states, including NSW and Queensland, have standards or guidelines about the management of local studies collections in public libraries. *Living learning libraries* provides standards and guidelines for NSW public libraries. They suggest that communities with a population of 50,000 or more have a full time local studies staff member and it includes a section on some standards for local studies collections (State Library of New South Wales, 2020, pp. 16, 47). This indicates that local studies collections are regarded as making a valuable contribution to public libraries for their communities even if they are not mentioned in the *NSW Library Act 1939*. There is mention of local studies in benchmarks for public library services for multicultural communities that help position the importance of diverse, equitable and inclusive collecting (State Library of New South Wales, 2018). For Queensland public libraries, local studies collections are encouraged to include contemporary material as 'a high priority to ensure the preservation of an accurate reflection of the community for the future' (State Library of Queensland, 2020, p. 39) as well as collecting

[1] 'Includes self-service kiosks (in separate locations from library branches), automated vending machines, deposit and unstaffed depots and all other outlets' (State Library of Queensland, 2022, p. 4).
[2] NSW data is used as data is not available from all states and territories.

information about people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to include their information (State Library of Queensland, 2020). Northern Territory Library, in its vision for public libraries, finds that there is a need to improve both local studies and cultural collections (Northern Territory Library, 2017) with people in remote Aboriginal communities describing 'a preference for audio-visual and photographic formats to document community history and culture, such as recordings of elders and community leaders and of song and dance' (Northern Territory Library, 2017, p. 18). This shows interest in collecting recent content for local studies collections, especially for public libraries in Queensland and the Northern Territory.

The formats collected may influence whose stories are collected and preserved, impacting a social justice approach to local collecting as some stories and people become invisible through deletion of online content and information (Allard & Ferris, 2015). It is not possible or reasonable to collect everything, but consideration should be given to developing a representative local studies collection using a social justice perspective.

1.3 The research problem and question

There has been little research on practices for including recent content in local studies collections. However, research into local studies collecting practices is important, as current practices may lead to bias in collections with the result that local studies do not adequately reflect the many voices and stories of the communities the public libraries serve. This possible lack of diversity is an issue given that, as of the 2021 Census, 3.2% of Australia's population were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, 29.3% were born overseas and 22% had one or both parents born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022b). In the same Census, looking at disability, almost 1.5 million people identified as 'requiring assistance with core activities' (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022a). Statistics about people who are LGBTQIA+[3] are harder to source, and not as recent; however, up to 11% of Australians 'may have a diverse sexual orientation, sex or gender identity' (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2014). These statistics address only a narrow range of diversity but they help demonstrate the diversity of Australia.

The small amount of research on local studies collections indicates that few Australian public libraries are collecting or creating recent content for their local studies collections

[3] LGBTQIA+ is an acronym that includes people who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex, or Asexual, with the + representing those who do not identify with the other listed terms (Litvins-Salter, 2020).

(Bundy, 1999; Johnston, 2013; Pymm, 2013; State Library of New South Wales, 2021), while older items continue to be collected in greater numbers (Gregg, 2002; Johnston, 2013; Reid & Macafee, 2007; Watmuff, 2012). Observation, searching and anecdotal information provide some evidence for the collection of recent or current information. Local studies collections are critical for recording and telling the stories of each community, but to do this well they need to reflect many aspects of their community (Fraser et al., 2020; Shilton & Srinivasan, 2007). The staff at each public library manage their local studies collection differently; some will focus on print publications, others will include photographs, oral histories, archives or other items or objects (State Library of New South Wales, 2021). The different priorities may be influenced by many factors and, in turn, impact what information is kept for the future. The local studies collections may be influenced by whom the library staff are connected with, and who knows about the local studies collection, making the process of collecting potentially more about who knows whom than a social justice window on the community.

If a local studies collection does not represent the whole community the library serves, it is collecting and preserving a biased account of a community. This can lead to people being unaware of other people, events or issues, and renders them invisible for the future. Collecting practices may contribute to bias by, for example, under-collecting digital original materials (State Library of New South Wales, 2021). These digital items may not be around in future decades to be added to the library collection, unlike items produced on paper or in other analogue formats (Barbuti, 2021).

By including items in local studies collections, value is attributed to them as being worth saving and worth people knowing about in the future. Shilton and Srinivasan (2007), in commenting about archives, state that:

> Archivists choose which records to preserve and discard, using the power of appraisal to consciously or unconsciously assert chosen narratives as truth while ignoring or reframing others. (p. 88)

This attribution of value described for archivists is relevant for local studies collections as well. Other authors describe libraries as well-intentioned but note the importance of ‘deliberately changing our work to include voices and viewpoints that truly reflect the communities we serve’ (Askey & Askey, 2017, p. 145), because good intentions are not leading to sufficient action for diverse collections, and are preserving a biased history. Sheffield (2016) states that there is a

> renewed professional imperative to position information centers as central locations for social justice work has also turned our attention to the need to preserve materials that support a diverse and pluralistic society. (p. 573)

Given Australia's diversity, it is important if a social justice approach to collecting is adopted that each local studies collection reflects and represents the diversity of its community as well as being equitable and inclusive. If this approach is not used, it could, for example, lead to a local studies collection that is predominantly about men, especially colonist or settler men, rather than showing a range of experiences and stories from people of different ages, life experience and gender. It could be focused on events from long ago and not include recent and contemporary concerns and perspectives. The collecting of recent and contemporary items and information can support social justice, if appropriately collected, by being representative of the whole community, and not a narrow selection of perspectives. It has the potential to document diverse, inclusive and equitable views of the community, because people are alive to tell their stories and the collecting does not depend on what was left behind. It also has the potential for a social justice perspective of the community as public library staff can demonstrate the importance of representative collecting making sure many voices and stories of their community are collected.

There is a gap in research related to collecting practices– in particular, what kind of recent material is added to local studies collections, what subjects and formats are collected, and how they are catalogued or organised, digitised (if needed), preserved (regardless of format) and made accessible (Smith & Rowley, 2012). While aspects of recent content have been explored in the literature, a holistic investigation of local studies collections is lacking. Given the context outlined above, the aim of this research is to investigate how public libraries in Australia include recently created content in their local studies collections. It aims:

- To understand current collecting practices and paradigms and their impact on what is included in these collections.
- To assess the effectiveness of current practices in terms of addressing current contextual issues and of developing collections that document and reflect local communities.

To explore this, it will respond to the following questions:

- What are the practices of public libraries in regard to acquisition, creation and curation of recent content for local studies collections?

- How might these practices need to shift in order to ensure that as well as recording the historical past, that recent and current concerns and interests of the community are appropriately collected?

1.4 The method

To investigate these questions and to understand how libraries actually go about creating and curating local studies collections, an ethnographic approach was selected. Ethnography is a qualitative research method that studies a particular group or culture with the aim of better understanding it from an 'insider' perspective (Fetterman, 2010). It is a multifaceted approach that seeks to tell a 'credible, rigorous and authentic story' (Fetterman, 2010, p. 1) using a range of techniques to 'document what people know, feel, and do in a way that situates those phenomena at specific times in the history of individual lives, including pertinent global events and processes' (Handwerker, 2001, location 139). It provides the opportunity for longer-term investigation of a research area and 'enables a holistic approach to research' (Miller et al., 2016, p. xi), including detailed descriptions of what happens as well as why it happens (Koning, 2010, p. 46). In other words, it enables a 'deeper *immersion* in others' worlds' (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 2; original emphasis).

This study is positioned within a critical theory paradigm, a research tradition that is focused on questions about power, inequity and social change. Critical theory encourages rethinking assumptions and investigating other ways of considering a topic, rather than following the usual way that things are done. Critical theory can widen our thinking and expand how we think about library-related research (Buschman & Leckie, 2010). It also has the potential to deliver change, as its 'intention is not merely to give an account of society and behaviour but to realize a society that is based on equality and democracy for all its members' (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 26). This approach of equity is a consideration for local studies collections in public libraries and provides a relevant point for this research because of the social justice lens being brought to local studies collections. Because critical theory 'confronts and interrogates the power structure inherent in institutions' (Highby, 2016, p. 148), adopting this paradigm for this research is advantageous when examining the practices of public libraries in regard to acquisition, creation and curation of recent content for local studies collections.

1.5 Key findings

This research focuses on the importance of a social justice approach to local studies collections in public libraries to ensure the representation of the diversity of a community for

future understanding and potential use for research. Practices identified in the research undermine the policy intentions and impact the ability of the library to develop a diverse, equitable and inclusive local studies collection. While policy expressed intentions to focus on diverse collecting, other priorities disrupted this, meaning there was a disconnect between plans and outcomes. There were some weaknesses in how the planned collecting was described, as it had the potential to be very general. Some staff were seeking other ways of addressing collecting issues; however, for the staff member most seeking change, focusing on this was only a small part of his work, and day-to-day choices by other staff restricted changes to behaviour.

The pressure to accept unsolicited donations, the snowball effect from repeat donors, and the wish to be up to date with cataloguing all impacted the practices of a public library in acquiring, creating and curating the recent and current concerns of the community. The findings show that rarely or never saying no to unsolicited donations was the dominant characteristic of collection practices. This had a negative impact, including preventing the local studies collection from representing the full diversity of the community. This shows the importance of planned collecting and demonstrated both visibility and invisibility in the collection (RQ1).

The relational approach to accepting donations provides a risk of collecting from cliques, and this could result in collection bias. This study explored whose voices and whose stories were being valued by being collected, preserved, and made available for the future, as well as how the community is reflected in the local studies collection. This led to the use of the metaphor of windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors as a framework to better understand how to shift current practices away from this dominant underlying characteristic to enable a social justice approach to local studies that will better document the community (RQ2).

1.6 Contribution of the research

The findings of this study make a contribution to knowledge and to practice. The gap in research literature is twofold. Firstly there is little written for public libraries or by public librarians about contemporary collecting of local studies items. Secondly there is a lack of empirical research providing an evidence base to inform practice. This second point is particularly important, as it means there is little evidence available about the need for public library staff to shift their collecting practices so that local studies collecting has a deliberate and planned social justice focus and becomes inclusive of the community.

This research draws on a metaphor from studies about reading, that of mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors. This framing of mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors for local

studies collections provides an image of exclusion and discrimination contrasting with reflections, understanding and inclusion. The research highlights the relevance of using social justice for local studies collecting in public libraries as a way of reflecting and including the diversity of a community, and of amplifying voices that may have been silenced or people or areas who may have little visibility or be invisible within these collections. A social justice approach to local studies, as suggested by these terms, has the potential to provide a more accurate record of the community as a wider range of voices and stories are documented, collected and preserved.

The findings of this research have the potential to inform changes to local studies collecting policies and practices. This could lead to a social justice approach to collecting, using the ideas of mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors to provide greater diversity, equity and inclusion in collecting that would preserve a wider range of perspectives on the recent history of an area. Changed local studies collecting practices may deliver a more nuanced view of a community. This would be of benefit to researchers of public and community history through the greater depth and range of content for research, as well as providing a wider selection of local studies material for recreation. This research demonstrates the use of ethnography to research local studies collecting in public libraries. This method has been used little in public libraries, including in relation to local studies.

1.7 Key concepts

This section describes three key concepts for this research to provide relevant information and context.

1.7.1 Public libraries

In Australia, public libraries are freely available for people in the community to use. They are funded and managed by different combinations of state, territory and local government depending upon their location. They provide collections, services and programs for local people. Many include local studies collections to document their communities. Public libraries are the most directly accessible libraries for people, as they are based in local communities. Being located in suburbs, towns and villages across Australia makes them more accessible for recreation and research than other libraries. While anyone in Australia can join the National Library of Australia, and people can join their state or territory library, for many this will be for online access rather than onsite access given their distance from these libraries.

1.7.2 Local studies collections

Local studies collections are the focus of this research and will be described in more detail in later chapters. Local studies collections are defined as being

> inclusive of local history and so the local collection should support studies that look at the historical past, both distant and recent, or at current concerns in the community, such as local environmental issues, or plans for the future development of a locality. (Dewe, 2002, pp. 1–2)

These collections are where information about a local area is brought together and made available for the community. It may be in many formats, analogue as well as digital. The library staff may document the community through oral history or photography or may rely on other people to record and document an area.

1.7.3 Social justice

Social justice can be a very broad term. In this research, the concept is used to help explore the importance of equity of representation in local studies collections in public libraries. The definition of social justice adopted comes from the work of Cooke and Sweeney (2017), two academics from the United States of American who teach people how to become librarians. They, in turn, use the definition of social justice provided by Rodriguez and Cummings (2007), which says:

> Social justice is about educating ourselves and others, and taking action to change the status quo. Social justice is about giving voice to communities who have been forced into silence; social justice is about equity and equal access. (p. 12)

The equity aspect will be explored from a perspective of local studies collections in public libraries. This definition of social justice was selected because it is centred on the importance of social justice in libraries, including in the education of library staff. This selection helps to demonstrate that ideas of social justice can be learned and implemented. It shows that our actions can force others into silence – for example, by their stories not being collected or documented for the future.

1.7.4 Recent and contemporary collecting in local studies

Throughout this thesis the terms contemporary and recent are used. Collecting contemporary items can be described as preserving the present for the future (Marselis 2021), while recent refers to a time which has passed, but is still near in time to the present (Budzak 2010). Contemporary is used to described items which are created and collected now, while

recent is used to describe items which have been created in the last few years but are collected now. This provides the opportunity to document societal change (Malone 2020) and may provide a counter-narrative to items in archival or library collections (Barrowcliffe 2021).

1.8 Overview of the document

This thesis is presented in seven chapters. *Chapter 1 Introduction* provides an introduction to the research, the context, research problem, method, contribution of the research and an overview of this document. This is followed by *Chapter 2 Literature review*, which provides a review of relevant literature about local studies collections and related research that demonstrates the research gap and further refines the research questions. *Chapter 3 Method* discusses the method of ethnography and why it is appropriate for this research, and introduces critical theory as the research paradigm. It provides the rationale for the use of pseudonyms as well as naming conventions. *Chapter 4 People and place* introduces the location, the library, community groups and, importantly, the people involved in interviews. The findings are presented in details in *Chapter 5 Findings*. The final two chapters, *Chapter 6 Discussion* and *Chapter 7 Conclusion*, bring together a discussion of the findings, and outline the research contribution and its significance, as well as the assumptions, delimitations, and limitations as well as future research directions.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of literature relevant to this study. This review provides an overview of research related to local studies collections in public libraries, with a focus on understanding collecting practices for current or recent content. There is little research about local studies collections in public libraries, including relevant collecting practices, particularly regarding acquiring and managing current or recent items. This chapter explores local studies collecting and potential collecting, cataloguing, access and preservation. It includes insights from the associated fields of archives and museums as well as collecting recent and contemporary content, including rapid response collecting.

2.2 Local studies

This section explores literature about local studies collections, or about possible collecting for local studies collections in public libraries. It first explores definitions of local studies collections in public libraries before examining research on collecting, potential collecting, cataloguing and other metadata, as well as questions of access and preservation. Istvandity (2021) notes that

> protection of cultural heritage (including intangible cultural heritage) is the subject of global doctrines from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO); however, the complexities of day-to-day engagement with heritage reveal more inherent, practical issues concerning the safeguarding of cultural heritage. (p. 332)

It is these practical and day-to-day issues that can be a focus for local studies collections in public libraries, although, as shown below, local studies is not restricted to a focus on heritage.

Local studies collections generally comprise older items that record, make accessible and preserve the past. Local studies collections may contain official published histories of an area as well as published histories from historical societies, sporting, service and other groups, and from individuals (Leigh, 2012; Watmuff, 2012). These are mostly printed rather than ebooks, although there is an example of a recent local studies etext book for high school students in West Java (Saripudin et al., 2021). Photographs, slides and some archives are often collected (Calis, 2010; Morris, 2001). Oral histories (Wynne, 2009) and other audiovisual items (Gregg, 2000), are a way of creating content and recording information about people and events who may not otherwise have their stories documented and included in local studies collections.

Much of the writing about local studies collections provides descriptions of older items in collections, as well as services or programs from individual libraries (Astle & Muir, 2002; Bateman, 2012; Budzak, 2010; Gregg, 2000; Johnston, 2013; Leigh, 2012; Nichols, 2012; Oliver, 2011; Topping & Evans, 2005).

White, implicitly describing the importance of collecting recent information, writes of the 'closeness' of history (2000), stating that the

> assumption that material of historical importance is in itself old, defies the rapid movement of time. What happened yesterday is history, what happened this morning is history. (p. 98)

This statement speaks for the importance of collecting current information now rather than waiting until the items or memories are old. A contemporary local studies item can take many forms. It could be a book about quilts made to commemorate deaths (Trail & Wong, 2021), an autobiography with recipes (Singh, 2018), a book of photographs taken of local residents during the 2021 lockdown in Sydney (O'Dowd, 2021), a book about methods of making pasta (Bennison & Lee, 2019), an oral history recording, a map, a digital video or a photograph. In this thesis, given there is not an extensive body of research exploring local studies collecting in public libraries, research from relevant related disciplines, including archives, museums, independent publishing and social media, has also been included.

Definitions provided for local studies collections in public libraries tend towards the descriptive, with a wide range of ideas being brought together. Reid (2003) writes that local studies libraries

> exist in order to recognize the social, economic and cultural activities of the local community. They exist in order to record, preserve and celebrate these activities and achievements … the purpose of a local studies collection … should cover all aspects of the locality, both the physical and built environments, and all aspects of human activity within that locality in the past, present and future. (pp. 1–2)

Wyatt (1991) suggests broad topics for local studies collecting, including themes exploring the social, political, cultural, educational, economic and environmental aspects of an area, looking at current as well as past information. The broad approaches suggested by Wyatt and Reid are not new, as Hobbs (1948) described the role of what he calls a local collection as attempting to accumulate

> all recorded matter concerning the area – its indigenous characteristics, its historic and social background, its change and vicissitudes through the ages, its adaption and development by

> the inhabitants … to present a unified picture of the area, past and present … [especially] the humbler topics of commerce, industry, economic and social life. (pp. 22–23)

This reinforces Reid's and Wyatt's descriptions of potential collecting for local studies; however, it may be an incorrect aspiration for a local studies collection to present a unified picture, as when undertaken effectively – especially with a social justice approach – they may provide many pictures of the area as different facets of the community are explored, rather than telling a single story (Adichie, 2009). The explicit inclusion of so-called 'humbler topics' by Hobbs is relevant, as these could otherwise be forgotten or not documented for an area. In 1948, when Hobbs was writing, it may have been possible to collect all recorded matter for an area. This is unlikely to be possible in 2023, especially considering digital content and social media.

These descriptions of local studies highlight a broad range of topics that could be included in local studies collections. They speak of the importance of collecting a range of viewpoints and experiences, not simply documenting the actions of the famous and influential. When this is applied to local studies it could facilitate a social justice approach to collecting, as the entirety of the local community is included in the scope for collecting, thus helping to provide a more comprehensive record for everyone now and into the future, contributing to an 'informed citizenship' – an idea discussed by Gibson, Cooke, Dahlen, Lee and Shorish (2017, p. 760).

While not writing specifically about local studies collecting in public libraries, Gibson et al. (2017) comment that an

> active, critical approach to engaging with community needs that explicitly acknowledges the influence of social, cultural, financial, and political power on information access and information behavior is necessary for librarianship to confront limitations to freedom of speech and informed citizenship. (p. 752)

This description highlights the research need to explore collecting current items using strategies to include many viewpoints and stories. It speaks to the importance of using critical theory to consider local studies. It also describes the importance of active connections with the community, not a passive acceptance of what is possible.

While there is limited literature exploring collecting practices for recent and current concerns of the community, the need for public libraries to collect a wider range of subjects and formats in local studies, including recent content, is described in the research literature. Collecting practices that do not represent the diversity of a community risk reflecting an inaccurate or biased account of an area. The risk of bias is highlighted by the acknowledgement

that libraries ‘are not, and have never been, socially or politically neutral institutions’ (Gibson et al., 2017, p. 753). Building on this understanding, Sheffield (2016) states that there is a

> renewed professional imperative to position information centers as central locations for social justice work [that] has also turned our attention to the need to preserve materials that support a diverse and pluralistic society … [and] as a duty to steward unexplored histories. (p. 573)

This ‘duty to steward unexplored histories’ is a way for the local studies collection to include a wider and deeper range of information about and with people in the community, including those who have been historically, intentionally and traditionally marginalised (Khatri & McGary, 2022). It suggest that ‘there may be a benefit to all members of the community of being exposed to materials about other ethnic cultures, as part of the reflection of a culturally diverse society’ (Birdi et al., 2011, p. 126). Purkis (2017) makes a similar point, noting that

> actively documenting unofficial personal stories contributes to academic discussion of wider issues concerning identity and its connection to place in terms of how such stories of real lives can question cultural stereotypes. (p. 434)

Continuing this idea of the importance of including diverse collecting about an area, Caswell (2014) asks the following questions that are relevant to public library local studies collections:

> What does it mean to be omitted from history textbooks? What are the implications of not being able to find any (or very few) traces of the past left by people who look like you, share your cultural background, or speak the same native tongue? What impact do these archival absences have on how you might understand your place in society? (p. 26)

These questions may cause library staff to think about how absences from local studies collections in public libraries may influence community thinking. Does it imply that your information is not important to this permanent collection? Does it demonstrate bias in the collection? This highlights the importance of library staff thinking critically about their collecting practices.

First Nations people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds or who speak English as an additional language or dialect, people with a disability, people who are LGBTQIA+ are all among those under-represented in local studies collections (Allard & Ferris, 2015; Kelly, 2010). Rhodes (2014), in an article that mentions public libraries collecting with a social justice approach, highlights the need for people to see others like them in collections. The discussions by Wyatt (1991), Hobbs (1948) and Reid (2003) all encourage

collecting about the whole of a community, but this requires deliberate action by library staff rather than the accidental accumulation of items.

These descriptions highlight the importance of an equitable, diverse and inclusive approach to local studies collecting. This idea has been reflected in calls to create archives of digital local news (Allen & Johnson, 2008), an investigation of the research value of photographs on social media (Alanyali et al., 2016) and an exploration of the digital preservation of photographs on social media (Copeland, 2014). The potential for audiovisual content for local information has been investigated (Conrad, 2013; Pietrobruno, 2013; Pymm, 2013) and the value of collecting recent local information by recording oral histories described (Featherstone et al., 2008; Groce & Lyons, 2013). Alternative publishing in Scotland and how public libraries collect this as a reflection of community diversity (Brookens & Poulter, 2007) is another area that has been studied. Each of these researchers describes the potential of collecting recent content that may lead to a wider range of stories, perspectives and information being included in public library local studies collections.

Collecting online news (Allen & Johnson, 2008), videos and audio (Conrad, 2013; Featherstone et al., 2008; Groce & Lyons, 2013; Pietrobruno, 2013; Pymm, 2013), digitisation (Smith & Rowley, 2012), online access (Barry & Tedd, 2008; Fenlon & Varvel, 2013), the subject potential of photographs on social media (Alanyali et al., 2016; Copeland, 2014), archives (Evans et al., 2015; Halilovich, 2016; Shortall, 2016) and alternative publishing in print (Brookens & Poulter, 2007) have all been the subject of some empirical investigation. The collecting of social media, and other digital content such as music or other audio content, photographs, and alternative publishing in digital form, has been little investigated. These areas will be further described in the next section.

2.2.1 Collecting and potential collecting

In lieu of an extensive body of research exploring local studies collections in public libraries, some research highlights a range of projects that can, it is argued here, be extrapolated to a public library environment. Collecting digital local news stories could be a way to record current digital information. Public libraries often collect local print newspapers (Leigh, 2012; Wyatt, 1991), although there have been disruptions with COVID-19 pandemic-related closures or temporary closures of some newspapers or changes in their frequency or format. Some newspapers have been digitised on Trove, which is a database managed by the National Library of Australia where library, museum, gallery, archive and other organisations collections can be researched. A major feature of Trove is the ability to search digitised as well as some digital

newspapers. Looking at how to document current information Allen and Johnson (2008) explore the need to preserve digital local news. They investigate the challenges for libraries in collecting, preserving and making accessible digital local news from newspapers and television, with a focus on the USA but with ideas relevant to Australia. Allen and Johnson (2008) discuss the value of local news stories, and the small number of these stories that currently are made available for research.

Using a case study investigating content from Pennsylvania, USA, Allen and Johnson (2008) estimate the volume of news and storage requirements for other local areas. This helps them estimate the cost of digital preservation for these news stories. They acknowledge the challenges of:

- capturing the diverse formats of the news
- selection of what to keep
- storage and access
- the importance of using a 'save lots' approach (pp. 391–395).

While the volume of online news is likely to have increased since their research was completed, the description of the value of collecting, preserving and making local news accessible for research remains valid. Their research highlights some of the challenges of collecting recent content about a community, and issues that need to be addressed by public libraries for this collecting to happen. This includes rights management, storage, cataloguing, access and digital preservation. It also includes questions of whose responsibility it is to collect, as it can be all too easy to see the responsibility as belonging to another kind of collecting organisation.

The research of Allen and Johnson (2008) aligns with White (2000) in stating the importance of collecting a range of views for a public library local studies collection, noting that

> we must actively pursue records from outside of the media hegemony, because the economic imperatives of modern mass media clearly dictate the social debate seen in these outlets (p. 99).

In the years since this was written, the options for local media have changed; however, it is still important to collect local news stories, as Allen and Johnson recommend.

Another example of such a project is research examining informal news reporting, involving posting to Flickr and tagging photographs with the term 'protest'. Alanyali et al. (2016) use a case study to explore geotagged photographs on the social media platform Flickr and investigate their ability to track protests this way. Through the analysis of 25 million

geotagged photographs taken in 2013, and the tag ‘protest’ in 34 languages, Alanyali et al. were able to draw connections between events and photograph sharing. This research aim was to measure human behaviour, but it also demonstrates the potential for public libraries, through combining searches of geotagged photographs and tags or subjects, to be able to source item for their local studies collections. Like the research of Allen and Johnson (2008), this research shows the potential of collecting current and recent content for public libraries.

Copeland (2014), in another case study involving Flickr, investigates combining input from people in a community and librarians in the selection of item for digital preservation. Copeland tests the classification of five images from Flickr with sixty people from the Indianapolis (USA) metropolitan area, half of whom were library staff and half from the community. The case study looks at ideas of significance and who determines what is significant and deserving of digital preservation. Copeland suggests that working with community partners can help increase the diversity of the local studies collections because of a wider range of perspectives being included. In focusing on digital preservation, Copeland follows the search and discovery research of Alanyali et al. (2016).

Looking at another area of content, Pymm (2013) suggests the need for a significant increase in the collecting of home movies by Australian public libraries. These domestic videos provide crucial local information such as streetscapes, interiors of buildings, and events. Pymm encourages the collecting of home movies and videos for public library local studies collections. Family stories may document daily life or special events in a community, and this content can have wider research interest because of the information contained in these domestic records. Pymm sees a key role for public libraries to collect these items for their communities, and notes there is little written about film or video in local studies collections. He undertook a brief survey to inform his discussion, with the results highlighting a gap in writing about audio visual content in local studies collections, and possibly in the collecting for this area as well. Pymm’s research is a call to arms, to motivate public libraries to collect film and video content, and to have it digitised for access. While Pymm focuses on collecting analogue formats, there is the potential for collecting digital home movies as well. This research helps to reveal a gap in local studies collections for home video content.

Continuing the exploration of video, Conrad (2013) examines, through the use of a case study, the potential for digital storytelling to be used as a method of collecting for local studies. Conrad argues that digital story telling can encourage the participation of people who had not considered that local studies could include their stories and experiences. Conrad shows the potential for researching new materials for local studies collections, and the role that a public

library can have in facilitating the creation of content with the community. The research shows the importance of an active approach by public libraries to collecting new content, which connects to the research of Pymm (2013). It demonstrates the importance of training library staff, documenting procedures and digital preservation.

Research by Pietrobruno (2013) explores potential local studies information in video format, specifically how the Mevlevi Sema (Whirling Dervish) ceremony in Türkiye is recorded through online archives, contrasting the official record on the United Nations Intangible Heritage website with examples on YouTube. This included investigation of metadata including tags and description, content and any associated text. As part of this research Pietrobruno conducted seventy short online interviews, sixty with former Mevlevi Sema students, and five each with Turkish academics and residents of Istanbul.

This research shows bias in collecting, with some examples of Mevlevi Sema being highlighted that, over time, may cause a narrower range of practice as they may be seen as the approved or preferred examples. The videos on YouTube show an increasing number of women performing the Mevlevi Sema ceremony, while the United Nations Intangible Heritage site shows men only performing this ceremony (Pietrobruno, 2013, pp. 1264, 1266). Pietrobruno explores, using ethnographic research, reasons behind these different depictions and highlights the importance of inclusive collecting practice. This connects to the research of Conrad (2013) and Pymm (2013) for documenting a wider and deeper account of the community, including changes in practice.

Continuing the ideas of Pietrobruno, Blackburn (2013) discusses how individual accounts of history can be presented on YouTube. Using the example of the history of Singapore during World War II, he discusses how individual experiences are shared, with former prisoners of war speaking of their experiences. There are also recordings of people from Singapore and Malaysia telling their memories of this time. More recent recordings are examined to see how they relate to the approved narrative of national history. Some of these are described as counter-memories seen to be challenging authority (Blackburn, 2013). Such recordings are not misinformation but, rather, different perspectives to that of the official ‘Singapore Story’ (Blackburn, 2013, p. 436).

Implications from these research examples are the value of exploring potential collecting areas in social media. It highlights the complementary nature of information from different formats, and the consideration of collecting multiple examples of similar items to show the experiences of an event or a community. It demonstrates the value of including community members as well as specialists in the research, as the information and viewpoints that they can

provide could be different to those of practitioners. The work of Bennison and Lee (2019) in documenting pasta-making styles in Italy reflects this idea of collecting multiple similar examples.

Continuing the investigation of audio visual items, Groce and Lyons (2013) provide a case study into planning for a collaborative online oral history project about work in the USA. Key elements are the proposed online submission of oral histories, and the collecting of associated metadata directly into a cataloguing interface, so that very soon after an oral history recording is made, it is visible on a catalogue and, depending on the access rights, may be able to be listened to online. This is a large collaborative project with the collecting and cataloguing methods that public libraries could use, and it includes the potential for multisite hosting of collaborative projects. It shows the value of collecting ordinary content, such as information from people about their work, as well as the place for a connected and distributed collection. This is similar to the role Trove can play when libraries add their holdings to it for wider discovery.

Research by Featherstone, Lyon and Ruffin (2008) provides a case study of collecting oral history recordings about disasters. Their research is specifically about the roles of library workers in preparing for and responding to disasters. This case study demonstrates that oral history on a specific topic is a valuable method of recording information as well as making content available for research. The research of Featherstone, Lyon, and Ruffin connects to that of Groce and Lyons (2013) in recording ordinary people and their experiences. There is value in collecting oral history of recent events to provide research items as well providing historical information about events. As well as being useful for collecting information about disasters, oral history can be used for other areas that may not be well documented, such as local music (Meghelli, 2013).

Brookens and Poulter investigate alternative publishing in Scotland and how this is collected by public libraries as a reflection of community diversity (Brookens & Poulter, 2007). The authors use a survey of public library staff and alternative publishers, a literature review and an investigation of public library websites to obtain their data. From the publishers there was often interest in having their publications included in public libraries, as well as a desire for more support from public libraries.

This research was not undertaken from the perspective of local studies collecting, but their results have relevance to this area as they describe much of the work of independent publishers as being ‘closely tied to its local community’ (Brookens & Poulter, 2007, p. 597). The authors argue for the inclusion of alternative publishing from a democratic viewpoint,

which aligns with a social justice approach to collecting local information. They suggest that adding alternative publishing is a way of including new, local writers in the collection. This is an effective connection for local studies collections. Of the libraries surveyed some were proactive in collecting zines and other alternative publications; however, generally, these were not added to local studies collections. A research gap is how well zines and other alternative publications are represented in local studies collections. How the alternative publications are catalogued, preserved and made available for use is also of relevance. The implications for this thesis research are the importance of investigating alternative publishers including producers of books, zines and comics, and determining how these items are sourced and added to local studies collections.

Other writing about local studies collections contains suggestions about what could be collected or created for local studies collections (Alexander, 2006; Allard & Ferris, 2015; Bunce et al., 2012; Duff et al., 2013; Kelly, 2010; Leonard, 2013; Morales et al., 2014; Peretti, 2001; Punzalan & Caswell, 2016; Reid & Macafee, 2007; Rhodes, 2014). This writing looks at both format and content. Some of this is empirical research, but may not specifically target local studies collections – for example, considering archives held by a range of organisations – but would be relevant for public library local studies collections (Punzalan & Caswell, 2016). Digital content is proving a challenge to collect (Smith & Rowley, 2012; State Library of New South Wales, 2014, 2021).

This section explored empirical research about collecting or potential collecting of local studies items. Online news, photographs on social media, home movies, videos and oral history recordings could all be part of a local studies collection and be a way to be inclusive of ordinary life and recent content.

2.2.2 Cataloguing and other metadata

This section will explore empirical research on cataloguing collection items. As well as research from libraries, it includes research from archives and museums looking at how metadata is provided to enable searching and other discovery. Martin and Heath (1994) wrote that local studies librarians 'are being challenged to provide adequate bibliographic description of their collections to ensure the widest possible intellectual access for their patrons' (p. 29). Almost thirty years later this challenge continues, and there is a deeper understanding of the descriptive power of how items are catalogued. There is a growing awareness that how library items are catalogued is not neutral. As Noble (2018) states,

> women, Black people, Asian American, Jewish people, or the Roma, as 'the other', have all suffered from the insults of misrepresentation and derision in the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LSCH) or through the Dewey Decimal System. (p. 24)

This has implications for public library local studies material, as offensive or inaccurate terminology may have been used to catalogue certain items in the past. It has consequences for how cataloguing is thought about for the present and future, too, making sure that the cataloguing records have adequate details, and that accurate and not biased or offensive descriptions have been used.

There has been research into cataloguing items created by First Nations people. This is relevant even when it is not secret or sacred items being catalogued and can be relevant for the cataloguing of other collection items, as it demonstrates the need for a wider frame of reference for cataloguing in a public library local studies context. Swanson (2015) notes that the

> shortcomings of traditional library classification systems and the need for better representations of Indigenous subjects and knowledge have been widely noted in library studies, information management, and Indigenous studies literature. (p. 571)

Duarte and Belarde-Lewis (2015), in discussing the terms used for cataloguing items by or about First Nations people, state that

> before we can create spaces for Indigenous ontologies—that is, alternative information structures guided by Indigenous concepts of realities—we have to understand when and how cataloging and classification practices become techniques of colonization. (p. 682)

This highlights the importance of working with communities to discuss how items are described, and potentially working with systems of Indigenous Knowledge. The approach of working with communities about the terminology used when cataloguing is relevant for other groups of people as well – for example, people who speak English as an additional language or dialect – so that the most accurate terms are used. Improved understanding can enable better search terms and added description. Duarte and Belarde-Lewis (2015) highlight this

> blind spot of text-based literacy-based colonial societies. Although it is possible to colonize facets of the landscape through re-mapping territories, re-writing histories, re-inscribing institutions, re-classifying sovereign peoples as citizen subjects, and re-naming individuals and phenomena to cohere within dominating epistemologies, it is not possible to completely subdue peoples whose ways of knowing are not primarily text-based, but oral, communal, aesthetic, kinesthetic, and emergent from living landscapes. (p. 685)

These statements are relevant for local studies collections in public libraries, which can work towards decolonisation of the collection the potential for Indigenous or First Nations ontologies (Duarte & Belarde-Lewis, 2015, p. 686). While Indigenous or First Nations ontologies are not the focus of this research, they are relevant as they show the importance of thinking about other ways of describing and cataloguing local studies items for discovery through the library system. Some items in a local studies collection are likely to be by or about First Nations people, so there is direct relevance to how these items are catalogued. This is also relevant for items by and about people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, including those for whom English is an additional language or dialect, people who are LGBTQIA+ and others, including women, who may not have been described accurately in cataloguing, or who may have been left out of the catalogue record. Note this is not to conflate Indigenous and other areas of knowledge but, rather, to demonstrate the importance of accuracy for detailed cataloguing of local studies items.

First Nations ontologies are diverse and particular to different parts of the world, and these have been translated for different cataloguing systems. In Aotearoa New Zealand there is the use of *Ngā Ūpoko Tukutuku* | Māori Subject Headings. In one instance these have been added to the bibliographic records of older Māori language readers, giving these records a 'voice' (Bardenheier et al. (Te Rarawa, Te Aupōuri), 2015, p. 497). These readers are books with reading skill levels applied to them. In this context, it shows that there can be value in returning to previously catalogued items and adding additional information.

A study of applying *Ngā Ūpoko Tukutuku* | Māori subject headings, and *tikanga* (cultural protocols) in the archive of Dr Pei Te Hurinui Jones highlights the importance of working with local First Nations people in developing classifications (Whaanga et al., 2015). As well as working with people in the First Nations community, information and advice can be sought from other people from whom information is collected. This can be compiled as part of the formal process of documenting donations of items, or when content is created. The Brian Deer Classification System, developed by the First Nations librarian of the same name, continues to have relevance in the discussion of cataloguing and classifying items by First Nations people (Swanson, 2015) as does the Mashantucket Pequot Thesaurus of American Indian Terminology Project (Littletree & Metoyer, 2015, p. 641).

There is a small amount of general writing about local studies cataloguing making the point that

> [l]ocal studies cataloguing is not quick cataloguing. It is researched cataloguing supporting research. It takes more time to do it, but it enhances productivity in the long run, because you do not have to keep as much information in your head and convey it to the user whenever they ask…The local studies collection can be seen as a mine. The catalogue opens galleries into it. Value adding cataloguing lights up the gems that make the collection so valuable to the community. Without the precision and accurate description of the catalogue, those gems would remain hidden, forgotten forever. (de Taille, 2000, p. 130)

This describes the importance of detailed and accurate cataloguing. The amount of time it takes to add the details needs to be considered against the volume of items waiting to be catalogued. How the items are described impacts how easily they can be searched for, and which terms are privileged by being included in the catalogue records, and which are excluded. The importance of cataloguing local studies items is described by Johnston (2013) as 'improving public access to these collections and ensuring that knowledge about them passes on to future … staff and patrons' (p. 222). The importance of consistent cataloguing has also been discussed in relation to oral history recordings (Wynne, 2009).

Community recipe books may form part of a local studies collection. Wintermute (2017), in discussing a university cataloguing project for community cookbooks, states that 'the specialized interest and the historical and research value of these cookbooks were a justification for going beyond the minimal-level cataloguing that would have expedited the processing' (p. 200). This is a relevant consideration for other local studies items. Sometimes the catalogue may need more detailed information so that people understand the local connections, and so that the information can be connected to other local studies information.

Research by Fenlon and Varvel (2013) has explored how to evaluate local history coverage in distributed, digitised aggregations. They examine how the cataloguing can help people find local studies items other than in local library systems. Fenlon and Varvel conducted a survey of academic and public libraries in the USA about the Institute of Museum and Library Services' Digital Collections and Content aggregation. With survey responses from 252 public libraries and 168 academic libraries, they found that a minority of catalogue records included geographic data, and that searching or browsing for local information via an aggregation was a challenge. This research, while looking at catalogue records, connects to research by Groce and Lyons (2013) and Pietrobruno (2013), who both look at metadata. Fenlon and Varvel (2013, p. 194) state that local studies items 'remain … problematic in digital cultural heritage aggregations'. This highlights the importance of adequate cataloguing to include sufficient metadata so that items can be found by searching or browsing.

2.2.3 Access and preservation

There is limited empirical research about access and preservation for in a public library local studies context. With digital or digitised items there is the potential for local studies collections to be always available, unlike items sitting in buildings that depend on access to those buildings. Barry and Tedd (2008) undertook research to determine how local studies collections in Ireland were being represented online, and the attitude towards this by local studies staff. Their research followed work by An Comhairle Leabharlanna (An Chomhairle Leabharlanna & Cultural Heritage Project, 2003) to encourage digitisation of local studies items as a way to support social inclusion and participation. Social inclusion can be linked to social justice. Barry and Tedd were looking at other outcomes resulting from this report and evaluated the websites of the 32 local councils in Ireland by using a fifty-part checklist to explore seven themes. They investigated areas such as branding, navigation, download speeds, consistency through the site, authority, use of multimedia, disability access, interactivity or comment, search, help, and costs.

Four of the top-scoring websites were selected for further evaluation, and seven relevant library staff, including local studies staff, were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. The staff were very positive about presenting local studies collections online, with a focus on older items, especially those out of copyright. This demonstrates the importance of investigating staff perceptions, as this provides insight into approaches and attitudes to the work they do. It also reinforces the need for a detailed, systematic investigation of publicly available local studies information and for investigation of the digital preservation strategies of libraries.

Basing their methodology on that used by Barry and Tedd (2008), Smith and Rowley (2012) investigated digitisation in public libraries in the Greater Manchester area in the United Kingdom. Smith and Rowley analysed nine websites and conducted semi-structured interviews with fifteen people, most of whom were local studies librarians. Purposive selection was used for the library staff interviewed. They found that there is a need for a long-term, structured approach to digitisation, as much digitisation is project-based without ongoing funding. Some library staff interviewed were concerned over the value of digitisation, citing the importance of doing research from the original item, while other staff realised the value of remote access to these unique local resources.

The need for digital preservation was a concern and it was difficult to obtain usable data to analyse online use of the collections. For local studies collections and services, Smith and Rowley (2012) write that

> it is therefore important that this aspect of the public library service takes every opportunity to enhance the use of its services, its reputation for relevance and accessibility of its resources, its engagement and communication with users and communities, and the expertise and competence of its staff. In this, it is important that local studies collections respond to changes in the way people access and consume information. (p. 273)

This statement about local studies collections responding to change is significant, as it demonstrates an ongoing need for an agile approach to this area of public library work. These ideas connect to the research by Featherstone et al. (2008), Groce and Lyons (2013) and Pymm (2013) in showing the need for local studies collections to be responsive to their communities and to changing ways that people use and access information. While this research is over ten years old, the findings are still relevant to digital collecting as well as online access to local studies items.

Smith and Rowley's research highlighted the need for sustainable funding for digitisation and digital preservation, better understanding for library staff of digital preservation and digitisation, an improved web presence of local studies collections and better community engagement with these collections. These are all elements of access to local studies items. Smith and Rowley (2012) state there is a need for more research into local studies collections and services including longitudinal studies of websites and detailed research about local studies clients so that decisions about the collections can be evidence-based. This research was focused on digitised rather than digital original content but is still relevant to digital original content.

Research by Ravenwood et al. (2013) explores the selection of digital items for preservation, albeit not specifically for public libraries. This study is based on a review and analysis of literature describing the selection of digital items for preservation in libraries. It highlights the need for more detailed processes and processes that are not simply migrated from analogue content issues. This has relevance for public libraries, as there is still little original digital content being included in local studies collections (State Library of New South Wales, 2021).

Dallwitz et al. (2019) explore the importance of digital access to Anangu historical items, for remote access on mobile devices. This kind of access is relevant for local studies collections

as well as for Indigenous knowledge, although there are likely to be different outcomes. For the Anangu people this

> direct access acted as a catalyst for senior Anangu leaders and knowledge holders to further their political goals and inspire their children for the benefit of future generations. Today Ara Irititja continues to generate a strong sense of identity and pride in Anangu and further empowers them to continue to use and maintain their culture and language. (Dallwitz et al., 2019, p. 1)

This research demonstrates the importance of appropriate online access and interactions so that local studies items can be an important part of life rather than having limits on where and when it is available. Not all material can be made available online, but as the examples here show, some can be.

2.2.4 Summary

This section has explored empirical research relevant to local studies collections in public libraries. Online access can be an important way for people to be able to use these collections. The articles demonstrate the need to explore how recent items are added to collections, what format they are in, how preservation and digital preservation are addressed, how the items are catalogued, what details are recorded, are they on Trove, how long does it take to be catalogued, and what access is available (in library, online, any specific conditions). It shows the need to investigate online to see what can be found on library websites, and catalogues, as well as to talk with relevant library staff about their practices. This research highlights the need to explore how library staff interpret local studies collections and services as this influences the kind of items included in their collections and investigate how this interpretation aligns with local documents such as collection plans.

2.3 Insight from associated fields

This section explores insights from associated fields that can be relevant to local studies collections in public libraries in thinking about collecting recent content. In particular, it focuses on research on archives and museums and investigates recent collecting. Some museums and archives have a history of exploring the importance of a social justice approach to collecting, and in thinking about collections (Punzalan & Caswell, 2016). A few recent publications about libraries have included an analysis of their archival collections with a social justice framing (Kandiuk, 2020), or looked at archives housed in libraries (Schull, 2015).

2.3.1 Archives

This subsection explores empirical research about archives, which can be part of some local studies collections as well as being separate collections. While not specifically about local studies collections, these studies are relevant for considering how contemporary information is collected to preserve it for the future. Archives may be part of other organisations, or standalone organisations, and their collections comprise many formats, including digital.

Some of the descriptions of archives are similar to descriptions of local studies collections. Shortall (2016) provides a case study of a council archive in Ireland and the role these kinds of archives can have in collecting, preserving and making available local studies collections. This research looks at the importance of archives to community memory and the relationship between community-run archives and council archives. This connects to the case study by Conrad (2013) as they both look at examples from individual libraries.

In recent years, archivists have been active in advocating a social justice approach to collecting; some archivists

> strive to resituate and reinterpret existing hegemonic collections and are committed to democratising the historical record through the development of collections from a social justice perspective. (Kandiuk, 2020, p. 1)

Research about social justice and archives is relevant to local studies collections in public libraries because of ideas used or suggested being relevant in other collecting or memory intuitions (Allard & Ferris, 2015; Buchanan & Bastian, 2015; Kelly, 2010; Punzalan & Caswell, 2016; Wakimoto et al., 2013). In recent research and writing about archives, there is frequent discussion about the importance of managing archives using a social justice approach (Duff et al., 2013; Punzalan & Caswell, 2016). This is not the only viewpoint, but there is significant discussion of this approach. Punzalan and Caswell (2016) argue that social justice is most apparent in discussions of the following areas of archival scholarship:

- Inclusion of underrepresented and marginalised sectors of society
- Reinterpretation and expansion of archival concepts
- Development of community archives
- Rethinking archival education and training
- Efforts to document human rights violations (p. 27).

The first three of these points are the most relevant for public library local studies collections, although they could also have an influence on library education and training. Australian public

libraries are less likely to be documenting human rights violations as part of their local studies collections, although that could be possible. There is some discussion of the importance of social justice for library staff; for example, Morales et al. (2014) state:

> We believe that libraries can and should play a key role in promoting social justice; and that a commitment to diversifying our profession, our collections, and our services is critical to social justice work in and for librarianship. (p. 440)

Of note here is the call to diversify the library profession and collections, as one may help to influence the other. Writings about social justice and public libraries have made little mention of local studies collections (Vincent, 2012), however, as there are many areas of library services, programs and collections that could be a focus for a social justice approach.

Local studies collections can help to preserve information about an area so that it is available for research and other purposes. As Istvandity (2021) writes:

> Many archives are faced with the fragility of the past insofar as those histories may lean on a narrow set of resources, and that these resources are themselves fragile and at high risk of damage or accidental destruction. The fear of losing heritage is usually well founded: even aspects of the recent past, which are now finding their way into digital formats, are seen as irreplaceable or irreplicable, while also signifying key components of knowledge. (p. 331)

This fear of loss is a consideration for preservation; however, it needs to be considered in a way so that enables many views of a community to be preserved, not only those that are more visible or otherwise privileged. Shilton and Srinivason (2007) remind us that for everything preserved, there is likely to be something lost. They explain that:

> When archivists choose to preserve one memory, they forfeit the resources – human, physical, and financial – to preserve another … Precisely because archivists cannot afford to collect everything, those with a mandate to preserve cultural history (and we would argue that most archives, by virtue of being institutions of cultural memory, have some mandate to collect multicultural history) must be aware of the need to collect diversely should they hope to come anywhere near representing diverse societies. (p. 91)

While they are writing about archives, the idea could be applied to other collections, such as local studies collections in public libraries. It is a reminder that for every item collected another item may not be. Its relevance for the research is that it strengthens the importance to prioritise deliberate, diverse collecting. It is a reminder that what is added to a local studies collection is a choice with consequences rather than an accidental occurrence. Shilton and Srinivasan (2007), commenting on archives, state:

> Re-envisioning archival principles of appraisal, arrangement, and description to actively incorporate participation from traditionally marginalized communities will not only allow these communities to preserve empowered narratives, it will allow archivists to move towards the long-debated, and still unrealized, goal of representative collections. (pp. 4-5)

This approach would promote equity and assist with diversity of collecting so that more of the community is visible in the local studies collection. This connects to the ideas raised in relation to organising, describing and cataloguing items by First Nations people (Littletree & Metoyer, 2015; Swanson, 2015; Whaanga et al., 2015). This is of relevance for the research because it describes the importance of strong community connections and an inclusive approach to collecting. It connects to ideas about the challenges of collecting different kinds of items, such as music (Istvandity, 2021, p. 332).

Further critical writing investigates whose stories are kept in archives, and who makes the decision about their inclusion or exclusion. Krim, Gwynn and Lawrimore (2020) note the involvement of archivists in these decisions, stating:

> When archivists fail to recognize the historical value of a particular community, archival silences occur. Archival silence refers to a lack of historic documentation of a particular community or organization. The lack of collecting and preserving documentation may be the result of unconscious decisions made on the part of the archivist, or it may be an intentionally used tool of oppression. (p. 86)

These comments highlight that constructing an archive is a process of deliberate decision-making, as is constructing a local studies collection in a public library. The implications for the research are exploring documentation of a community, the decisions made by the library staff about what is included and what is not, and the methods used to source or create collection items.

Evans et al. (2015) research archives and how they may be able to support social justice. Using case studies, they investigate four Australian examples to demonstrate the importance of collecting and keeping records, and the concept of archival autonomy. They focus on the importance of records for ‘identity, memory and accountabity needs of communities’ (Evans et al., 2015, p. 343). The implications for this research are that collecting information that is confronting may be part of the role of local studies staff, and that staff have a responsibility for how the items are catalogued, stored and made available. Further implications are that the discussion of social justice research is more advanced in archives than it is for local studies

collections, as is the discussion of participatory record keeping (Evans et al., 2015; Evans & Wilson, 2018, p. 858). Evans and Wilson (2018) want to ask

> provoking and uncomfortable questions about the marginalisation and exclusion that traditional thinking and practices sustain and propagate, and to interrogate the role that archives and recordkeeping plays in the exercise and abuse of power in society. (p. 858)

As well as bringing forth ideas similar to Krim et al. (2020) and Shilton and Srinivasan (2007), this research connects to the definitions of local studies collections from Wyatt (1991), Dewe (2002) and Reid (2003) requiring an inclusive approach. It has relevance in exploring questions of inclusion. Other writers address exclusion and bias by stating that 'we cannot deny or ignore that white supremacy is at the root of archival studies, practices, and policies' (Gabiola et al., 2022, p. 82).

Connecting to the research of Evans et al., as well as Krim et al., is the work of Carter (2006) on silences, about people whose voices are not part of archives. Carter (2006) writes that passive or unconscious decisions about what to include in archives are as effective as deliberate exclusion of information about people or organisations and raises the important concept of choice, noting that when

> archivists are aware of the silences in their archives, they can take measures to try to allow for multiple narratives to fill some of these gaps, to make users aware of the silences, and to attempt to understand and respect the choice of certain groups to keep their silence. (p. 217)

This describes the importance of archivists or library staff who manage local studies collections in public libraries to be aware of silences within them. For choice to be included in the archives, or library, there needs to be an awareness of the potential to contribute narratives to what is already being documented. This hints at the importance of wider and more inclusive networks for library staff to be able to source information about and with their community. This is not suggesting alternative views of history but, rather, that different information can provide a fuller view of a community, and not a partial view. For example, until *Hidden figures* (Shetterly, 2016) was published, not many people realised that African American women had been working as computers at NASA.

Carnegie Mellon University Libraries explored the concept of silences in their online exhibition named *What we don't have* (Carnegie Mellon University, n.d.), which listed key archives they had not collected, or if collected had not yet processed so that they are available for research. While Carnegie Mellon explored its archives, not all universities are doing this. Bowers et al. (2017) note that

> [a]s universities confront the racist practices and policies of their pasts, it is primarily their built environments, the named buildings and monuments erected to individuals who were responsible for or participated in acts of violence against or suppression of others, that are visible, not the gaps in the university archive. Buildings serve as tangible rallying points for change, but archives are not immediately obvious sites of racial confrontation and reconciliation (p. 176).

This is an area yet to be explored in detail for local studies collections in public libraries.

Flinn (2010) investigated the growth of independent community archives, often by and for people whose stories are not being collected by other organisations. This connects to Carter's (2006) work exploring silences. Flinn (2011) states that

> there are local history initiatives that are not really inspired by an overtly articulated political agenda other than an understanding that 'every story counts' and that capturing previously untold histories can result in a more popular, democratized local history. (p. 10)

This idea that every story counts is relevant to how people think about local studies. The implication for this research is that it may be hard to demonstrate equitable collecting. Flinn (2011) sees an activism in this collecting, such that when

> informed by a clear political agenda and perspective, the capturing of oral histories and community memories can be used to empower the community in challenging the narratives that are falsely representing them and may be used against them. (p. 11)

This helps demonstrate the importance of creating content when information about people or an area of interest does not already exist. Oral history can be a relevant way to collect information that would otherwise not be recorded and more widely remembered. Note that oral histories may be collected by libraries, museums, or archives, as well as other collecting or memory institutions. Oral histories can encourage public participation in the documenting of a community, and

> in the viewing of non-official histories from ordinary people by a wider public. When heritage and the public connect, cultural heritage can be defined as being less about what people have access to and more about the heritage people hold within themselves and the new history they can make through telling their own (hi)stories. (Purkis, 2017, p. 436)

The discussion about whose stories and information are visible in archives is an ongoing one, and is relevant for local studies collections in public libraries. Gabiola et al. (2022) note that for

> historically marginalized and minoritized people, erasure – in mainstream media and in archives – is a complicated experience. Just as some may be used to the ways in which they cannot see themselves represented, so too might they also desire to subvert documentation for reasons that are specific to their communities, histories, and traditions. Representation, to put it bluntly, is complicated. (p. 60)

This discussion continues ideas raised earlier that focus on the importance of community-run and -managed archives, because

> community archives can serve as powerful forces against symbolic annihilation by collecting a more inclusive historical record; using language emic to communities to describe those records; and creating preservation and access policies that reflect community values. (Caswell et al., 2016, p. 59)

For community archives to be effective their sustainability needs to be addressed. Carter (2017) writes about the importance of archival activism with communities documenting their own information, particularly during times of community change such as regeneration or campaigns against gentrification. The implications for the research are that community archives can be an effective documentation of change and community connection but may be vulnerable to not being permanently preserved for the future.

Records can also be destroyed in wars, and this is the situation Halilovich (2016) explores. Through the use of ethnography she researches the effects of the 'destruction of documents, photographs, books and official records' (p. 83) as a result of the war in Bosnia in the 1990s. Her research into the destruction of records, and people's response to this, shows the importance of local studies' record keeping. Halilovich is describing a collection gap, in this example, one caused by war. This collection gap caused by war is relevant in relation to other more recent wars – for example, in Ukraine and Syria – as well as for natural disasters such as flooding in Australia.

There can be other reasons for documents not being preserved. Harris (2002) provides examples from South Africa where people did not put some information in writing during the apartheid era because it may have provided incriminating information about them. He goes on to say that

> [m]ore chilling processes of memory erasure were also utilised widely by the apartheid state, with many thousands of oppositional voices being eliminated through means such as informal harassment, media censorship, various forms of banning, detention without trial, imprisonment, and assassination. (p. 70)

While this was a different approach to what happened in Bosnia, the impact is the same: the records have not been kept because they were often not created. Oral history would be an appropriate way to collect information from those still alive. Examples of using oral history to document crises are described (Cave & Sloan, 2014) as recording information that may not have any formal documentation. Oral history has also been used to obtain accounts of migration to new countries (Tureby & Wagrell, 2022).

Other collecting institutions can highlight missing information from their collections, showing this approach could be relevant to local studies collections in public libraries. From a school perspective, there are examples of missing marginalised voices. As Ahlfeld (2021) states, one

> reason to preserve records digitally is to create space for memory of groups that have been underrepresented, and who have been traditionally left out of curation sites like museums and academic archives previously. (p. 494)

This collecting of a broader range of views is of relevance to other archives, with Belmont and Opotow (2017) writing about how critical incidents have shifted the focus of the New York Public Library's Manuscripts and Archives Division, which adjusted collecting during the Second World War for the then-contemporary collecting of information about refugees, possibly because of the employment of refugees by the archive. The archive

> refocused its collections from archiving the histories of 'Great Men' and elite families to collecting historical material on organizations, groups, and individuals who lived in precarious times and circumstances. (Belmonte & Opotow, 2017, p. 63)

There was another shift in collecting during the 1980s when archives relating to HIV/AIDS were added to the collection. Both can be seen as a social justice approach to collecting as well as a local studies approach, because they involve collecting a wider range of stories. Belmonte and Opotow (2017) write that

> [a]s a result of archivists' concerns about social justice and their activism, their archives have preserved historically important material. Thus, a procedurally just archive ensures that the collection represents a society's social issues as they affect diverse populations. (p. 68)

They go on to state that procedural justice in archives work means that archivists

> are alert to the fairness of rules, policies, and procedures that guide their ongoing archival work. Procedural justice, therefore, concerns various aspects of archiving. (2017, p. 67)

The relevance for the research is that a large institution like the New York Public Library's Manuscripts and Archives Division can adjust its collecting to reflect current and urgent information like refugees arriving from Europe and HIV/AIDS. If an organisation like this can alter collecting priorities using an approach of procedural justice to shift to a social justice focus, even if only for those topics, it demonstrates that an adjustment in focus is possible for other libraries. With both topics they may have been influenced by staff interests, but it still provided a catalyst for a change in approach. Belmonte and Opotow (2017) were impressed by the archivists that they interviewed for their research and

> their informed perspectives that are simultaneously historical and contemporary, and their understanding of how archival material speaks to social issues in the larger world … Archival materials are instead a peopled and vibrant resource. They con- tribute perspective and specificity to our understanding of historical events and societal change, offering qualitative psychologists an extraordinarily rich resource for researching social justice. (p. 70)

This helps to demonstrate the potential for local studies collections in public libraries to collect items with a focus on local social justice concerns, at scales appropriate for their communities.

Continuing this social justice perspective, Bhebhe and Ngoepe (2021) describe the importance of the South African History Archive. This archive has a focus on the

> documentation of neglected history, including the 'successful' community oral history project in the Tembisa township … its role in acting as a 'refuge' archive for the endangered archives of some of the minority groups in Southern Africa … Counter-archives are pushing the agenda of social justice through archiving and effectively providing access to the neglected history. (pp. 1–2).

This describes the significance of records being kept so that information about minority groups is not neglected. It demonstrates the importance of prioritising the collecting of information from people from minorities so that their information helps to reflect the complexity of a society and does not present a single story. It connects to ideas raised by Ahlfeld (2021) and Belmonte and Opotow (2017). The relevance of these articles for the present research is the deliberate inclusion of information by and with people with different life experiences in local studies collections.

Strauss, discussing collections in Chile, makes a strong case for the preservation of information showing a range of perspectives, using the example of a violent dictatorship in Chile last century being gradually described in more muted terms, changing from a military 'dictatorship' to a military 'regime'. This thesis is being written as Russia fights in Ukraine

because of a different interpretation of history. If people do not know the history of an area, they may assume that an inaccurate description is an accurate view of the past. Strauss (2015) calls for the

> preservation of memory in its broadest spectrum, including, for example, the voices of those who supported Pinochet [a former dictator in Chile] and those who decried his cruelty, is a social imperative. If the multiple voices of memory are not preserved, it is weakened and bends more easily to the political whims of the present. The cost for a society without memory is far higher than the possibility that the wrongs of the past might be repeated. (p. 370)

While local communities in Australia may not have similar experiences of violent dictators, there can be differing views of community events and history that are important to document. Recent research about locations of massacres of First Nations people in Australia reveals a violent history that has not been as visible in some local documentation (Hooper et al., 2020). There is writing about the invisibility of First Nations people in some archival records, and of the importance of working with First Nations people to change this (Kelly, 2010; Krebs, 2012).

Baxter and colleagues researched how photographs of an area – in this case, the main street of Kirkwall in Scotland – can be used to obtain further information about an area and to explore 'sustaining cultural identity, community and a sense of place' (Baxter et al., 2015, p. 1). They use the existence of items in one format (photographs from the Orkney Library & Archive) to collect related information in different formats. While not ostensibly about local studies collections, this research demonstrates the value of collecting photographs for both research content and for their potential to act as prompts to elicit additional information which has the potential to be included in a local studies collection.

Many areas have community-managed archives, many of them well managed. There is a dependence on volunteers to collect and preserve the history of an area, which is vulnerable to the availability of volunteers as well as to their skills and bias. There can also be differing opinions between the collecting group and the diaspora for the area as well as other people who are interested. Research undertaken to investigate some 'rural community heritage initiatives' in the United Kingdom (Tait et al., 2013 p. 565) revealed tensions, as

> some Comainn Eachdraidh [local historical associations] maintained museums that are open to the public (for example in Uig) while others continue to be informally run and do not have premises for exhibiting collections. The voluntary and fluid nature of Comainn Eachdraidh activities mean that their collections are developed rather sporadically and are heavily dependent upon volunteer effort. Some Comainn Eachdraidh apply for external funding to

> support topic-specific historical research. Between times, the collection is usually shaped by what people choose to bring to a Comainn Eachdraidh, whether it be artefacts, stories or genealogical information. (Tait et al., 2013, p. 570)

Collections shaped by what people choose to bring can influence what public libraries include in local studies. This provides what people want to donate or dispose of, which may not be an effective fit for what a public library wishes to collect. It also may not reflect the diversity of the community. Flinn, while using different terms, writes about community archives, where communities are collecting local stories and information because other organisations are not. However, such community archives may not have longevity because there is not the infrastructure to support their care. This can be true whether they are collecting online or analogue items (Flinn, 2010, 2011).

When effective, archival description can describe community identity in an appropriate way using

> a number of tools to aid in the preservation of empowered, contextualized narrative and thick description to avoid marginalizing cultural identities. Archival theory has a long history of understanding and achieving the preservation of the contextual value of records. (Shilton & Srinivasan, 2007, p. 90)

The contextual information of records is important, as without context meaning may not be clear. Archives can be dense collections of information, with many documents providing layers of information, helping to tell a complex story. This research by Shilton and Srinivasan is relevant because of its contextualised narrative and the use of thick description.

2.3.2 Museums

Some museums and museum staff have been involved in the discussion of the challenges of contemporary collecting, writing about it in a positive way (Axelsson, 2014; Malone, 2020; Williams, 2017). The National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh is active in this collecting space, and in public discussions about the challenges, stating that

> they must document the present for the future; and they must also seek to anticipate future trends. This can only be by a process of trial and error to which the historical museum and its practices, and the Plan of Work, are usually averse… [and] because we have been collecting contemporary pieces since our inception, it is also a lesson in humility when we look back at what has (and has not) been collected over a century and a half. (Alberti et al., 2017, p. 334)

This last statement highlights that, even with a deliberate approach to contemporary collecting, items and topics may be missed. It highlights the importance 'to reflect the now' (Alberti et al., 2017, p. 338) and to 'explore the very practice that should keep a museum up-to-date: collecting the contemporary' (Alberti et al., 2018, p. 403). These are relevant ideas for this research and for public library local studies collections, as reflecting the now will provide a more robust documentary record of this time for the future.

Thinking about what to collect now, rather than waiting to see what remains after decades, is a challenge, and an opportunity. Neilson (2015) states that

> [d]efining what may or may not be interesting in the future encourages a new form of interest in the present, including a focus on how we communicate contemporary objects, material and cultures (p. 369)

This interest in the present is crucial for how contemporary collecting is managed. Neilson (2015) describes this difficulty:

> Contemporary collecting has always been difficult for many museums because it involves direct (and subjective) choices of what may or may not be worth saving for the future. (p. 370)

This provides an opportunity to collect before there is a scarcity of items, while there is choice about what is saved. It can enable the collecting of information directly from people involved in events, while they are happening.

Contemporary collecting in museums can be a way to enhance the dynamism of the collection bringing in new items relating to earlier collecting so that both groups of information inform thinking about the other. Gabriel, writing about the ethnographic collections at the National Museum of Denmark, discusses recent collecting from Powwow in the USA with a focus on 'cultural phenomena, which stress cultural dynamics and bridges the past and the present' (Gabriel, 2016, p. 278). This connects older collection items – for example, a deer hide dress with bead and shell decoration – with a new outfit for women's traditional dance from the Northern Cheyenne Reservation in 2011. There was

> consultation with Northern Cheyenne individuals and families, it was decided to collect both everyday clothing, such as caps, T-shirts … and dance outfits associated with the most common Powwow disciplines … Regarding the Powwow outfits, it was decided to aim for used items with personal biographies and purchased directly from families known to the collector and whose members in several instances contributed with video interviews and other types of documentation, which were included in the exhibition. (Gabriel, 2016, p. 278)

This broader approach to collecting the clothing of everyday as well as dance outfits from Powwow demonstrates the importance of community consultation, so that there are other views of the community available. Gabriel (2016) asks:

> Can contemporary collecting help create associations between old collections and present day society? How do we prioritize, when collecting the past? And how do we ensure that co-curation and community involvement not only challenges the authority of museums, but also informs museological practices in new and constructive ways? (p. 276)

The collecting undertaken for the National Museum of Denmark exposed issues of poverty and some shame from the people these items were purchased from, making these recent acquisitions important and complicated (Gabriel, 2016, p. 280).

This connection between existing collection items and themes is a consideration for the Field Museum of Natural History in the USA. Its contemporary collecting is funded because it deaccessioned and sold a valuable collection of paintings. This was a controversial decision. Using this funding, an anthropological approach was taken towards selecting the new items whereby 'the anthropologist inserts a distinct perspective that can provide new insights for community members as much as they provide new insights for the anthropologist' (Wali, 2014, p. 69). An approach of providing new perspectives could be used for public library local studies collections; however, they will need to work out their funding priorities.

Vagnone et al. (2016) remind us that addressing diversity must be a strong and consistent message in how collections are considered. They are writing specifically about historic house museums; however, their message is relevant to local studies collections in public libraries as well. They state:

> Communicating diversity is not simply a matter of crafting a message of inclusion; it is about illustrating a sincere commitment across an organization. Adopting a more enlightened perspective will have a direct impact on visitation, funding and community involvement because doing so addresses market forces. If your HHM [historic house museum] is not providing the cultural diversity, services, or products that are valued by the country's changing demographics, then consumers will go somewhere else. (pp. 76–77)

This has relevance to how public libraries think about their collections and services. Museums are not perfect in this space, as Kinsley (2016) notes in her exploration of museums and inclusion, but the discussion that is occurring is helping with inclusion and social justice, and there is the potential for public libraries to consider using some of these ideas.

2.3.3 Summary

This section has investigated information from archives and museums of relevance to local studies collections in public libraries. Of note are the references to a social justice perspective in collecting, being aware of archival silences, and the approach some museums have taken towards contemporary collecting. Archive and museum researchers acknowledge that their collections are not neutral. There is work undertaken to include people who may frequently be silent in the collection.

2.4 Collecting contemporary and recent content

The discussion of the importance of contemporary collecting by libraries and other collecting organisations has increased in the last few years. The contemporary collecting by libraries is sometimes included with archives and galleries, so these will be discussed together if more than one kind of collecting institution is involved. Some of this collecting is yet to be described because it is still being collected – for example, *Capturing climate change* by the Australian Museum (2020). Other discussions highlight possible rather than actual collecting (Hughes-Watkins, 2018).

Subjects that have led to increased discussion by collecting or memory institutions include #BlackLivesMatter and the global COVID-19 pandemic. Information about these may take the form of blogposts (Drake, 2016) or websites (Irish Linen Centre & Lisburn Museum, 2020); however, there is some empirical research as well (Anderson & DeRiemer, 2021; Barrowcliffe, 2021; Liebermann, 2021; Neatrour et al., 2020). There is other rapid response collecting occurring, or being suggested, and this will be discussed later in this section.

Some of the discussion of contemporary collecting is about creating content. Yaco et al. (2015) write about a documentation project that created new items. It involved collecting accounts from experiences in Birmingham, Alabama, from 1963 in order to assemble the stories of people who were children (of all races and perspectives) then and may have participated in the civil rights movement. Wall (2018) investigates content creation and, rather than webpages, explores other creations such as podcasts and walks by the City of Edmonton historian laureate. There were a range of subjects exploring ‘multiple perspectives and interests of local people, including both nature and culture’ (Wall, 2018, p. 7). Content creation could be created as a result of new research from older collection items.

This section will discuss collecting social media, rapid response collecting and collecting with the community, all areas that have seen an increase in refereed articles in recent years.

These provide some areas of collecting or potential collecting for local studies collections in public libraries.

2.4.1 Social media and collecting

Social media can be a way of sharing current concerns and interests in a community across a range of social media platforms. Posts may be private that is shared only with people known to the poster, or they can be public for wider sharing. These public posts can be collected, subject to the use conditions of individual social media platforms. A student paper from almost a decade ago still has relevance in the call for the importance of social media collecting. As Rhodes (2014) stated:

> The modern social movement is quick forming, fluid, and vast. It incorporates strong visuals and social media as well as virtual archival imperatives. Libraries have an opportunity to do the same to support, engage, and document what is happening around them, to take part in the changes within the lives of their users. The future library has a finger on the pulse of the community. (p. 10)

These calls to action need to be placed in a context of library, museum or archive practice so that the practicalities of social media collecting are considered. Rhodes provides the inspiration for this kind of collecting but leaves it to others to deliver practical outcomes. The implication for the research is to investigate how libraries may collect local online information.

Hood and Reid (2018) discuss the role that social media can play in obtaining more information about collection items. Their research involved posting photographs from a local heritage centre in northern Scotland on Facebook and measuring the interactions. While this is not actually collecting social media, it is using it to obtain information of relevance to collections. The information shared by the community may be a way of exploring the concerns and interests of a community. This is a method used at times by public libraries, but not written up in formal ways. This connects to the work of Kumar (2022), who researched how the destruction of heritage sites in Nepal after the 2015 earthquake was depicted on Twitter. While this was again not a collecting project, the research uses some analysis processes that could be useful for public libraries to analyse social media about their area in planning for collecting it.

Henninger and Scifleet (2016) provide examples of some social media collecting and call for more widespread collecting of social media. As well as general statements about the importance of collecting social media, they analysed Facebook, Google Plus (which no longer exists) and Twitter, exploring the flooding of the Murrumbidgee River in NSW in March 2012 (Henninger & Scifleet, 2016). Their analysis of social media showed that as well as deriving

new information about the current floods, there was an opportunity for people to share information about earlier floods. Similarly, Shen et al. (2017) conducted test collecting of social media during natural disasters. They selected hurricanes and cyclones, using a range of hashtags focusing on the names of locations impacted by a hurricane or cyclone. They filtered out hashtags they describe as 'noisy' because they are not the focus of the event but provide background noise (Shen et al., 2017). While Shen et al. are geographers, their research is of relevance to libraries because it demonstrates an analytical approach to decisions about what hashtags to collect.

Harrower and Heravi (2015, p. 105), in thinking about 'how to identify archive-worthy events' on social media, discuss kinds of documents that can provide current records, issues of preservation that may impact the understanding of the documents, and what constitutes true primary documents for digital items. They explore the use of social media in Ireland, including the styles of different social media platforms. They undertook test collecting of current topics on Twitter and trialled methods of collecting that could filter for geographic location, so that they were collecting information about Ireland and not other countries. Like Henniger and Scifleet and Shen et al., they saw value in collecting social media. This is of relevance to the present research because of the potential for public libraries to collect local social media information.

Using an approach of API (Application Programming Interface)-based collecting, Littmann et al. (2018) used social media for research on specific topics. This involved mainly testing collecting for specific researchers who use the GW Libraries at George Washington University (USA), but as different researchers ask questions in different ways this helps to refine their thinking and their practices. These varied approaches to social media collecting, including testing research collecting of Twitter, help to demonstrate how this could be a practice for public libraries to consider for their local studies collections, as it may help to identify recent and current concerns and the interests of a community at specific points in time.

2.4.2 Rapid response collecting including #BlackLivesMatter

In recent years there has been an increase in empirical research about rapid response collecting, which is associated with cause-based collecting. The terminology for this area is not yet set, and both terms are used. Rapid response collecting is a targeted form of contemporary collecting. The Victoria and Albert Museum was one of the first institutions to describe rapid response collecting (Cohen-Stratyner, 2017, p. 88). Cause-based collecting is a term used to describe targeted collecting practices for specific causes (Cohen-Stratyner, 2017, p. 85,

describing the work of Kylie Message). In recent years this has included #BlackLivesMatter and the COVID-19 pandemic, but there are many other topics, such as collecting information about the referendum on abortion in Ireland, that could be included.

There is discussion of the importance of rapid response collecting for museums, as some items have very time-specific purpose, or are available for a short time. Malone writes about work undertaken by the National Museum of Ireland to document the Irish Abortion Referendum in 2018, and prior protests on this topic. The purpose of this was 'the need to be pro-active in collecting the material culture of today's issues and social movements in order to preserve them in our national narrative' (Malone, 2020, p. 2).

This collecting had to happen quickly or the items, mostly of an ephemeral nature, would be destroyed. The collecting of artefacts from the Women's March in various locations around the world has been discussed, with many pink hats and signs now in museums (Cohen-Stratyner, 2017). Collecting these at or near the time of these protests was important, as key items – for example, signs and hats – may not survive over time without care. The collecting described by Malone and Cohen-Stratner is relevant to the research because of the need to explore how agile public libraries can be in their collecting. The National Museum of Australia used public Facebook groups to collect accounts of how people were experiencing the bushfires during the 2019–2020 summer, with another Facebook group started to document the COVID-19 pandemic (Davies, 2022).

Some rapid response collecting can have significant conservation and preservation issues that may prevent libraries from collecting the items. Posters with glitter fit this description. Some organisations collect them, while for others they are regarded as being out of scope because of the way they can shed their glitter. Lapp (2021) highlights the important information that items with glitter may contain, with glitter itself being part of the information conveyed. Lapp provides examples of specific items containing glitter that are used to document the Women's March in Washington DC in 2017 and other protests, and includes photographs of notes attached to some of the signs stating 'glitter issues' (Lapp, 2021, p. 292). Lapp (2021) states:

> The liveliness of these glittery records demonstrate how glitter persists in meaning-making and fabulatory world-building even after it is no longer required for its original purpose. In the archive glitter – and the records it constitutes and enacts – becomes reinvigorated by a new secondary use-value determined by how it accumulates, where it is stored, how it is accessed, and who puts it into circulation. (p. 294)

From this research, collecting some items with preservation issues provided they are not going to create preservation issues for other items could be appropriate for telling a wider story of a community, or they could be photographed, or documented in some other way so that the information is retained rather than being invisible.

Rapid response collecting is not a new approach for libraries, but it is not common. The Linen Hall Library in Belfast was active in rapid response collecting during 'The Troubles', beginning to collect relevant ephemera and other publications in 1968 (Topping & Evans, 2005, p. 382, quoting Gracey & Howard, 1971). The items became the Northern Ireland Political Collection. The items collected for the

> Northern Ireland Political Collection are, if the material is first and foremost political in nature and has been published in Ireland, North or South, or if it has been published outside of Ireland but is specifically about or regularly addresses Irish politics. (Topping & Evans, 2005, p. 382)

Library staff went to a range of locations to collect items, 'including the headquarters of every paramilitary organisation in Belfast' (Topping & Evans, 2005, p. 382). It is not suggested that library workers should put themselves in danger, but this shows the importance of collecting items when they are new to make sure they are available into the future. The Linen Hall Library was not immune to the Troubles, suffering bomb damage in 1974, 1987 with broken windows from nearby bombs, and in 1994 incendiary devices were placed in the library, causing about 1,000 books to be destroyed (Topping & Evans, 2005).

The Northern Ireland Political Collection is an important local collection because of what it documents, but it can be seen as having a wider relevance as well. This is true for other rapid response collecting. Purkis (2017) raises the important idea that

> heritage can be situated within people's life stories, and that these stories create a heritage identity of a local place. The idea that heritage can be found within people, and digital heritage can be about creating new historical content centred on peoples experiences is worth emphasising. (p. 436)

This connects to the importance of content creation. There are other organisations collecting stories about the same time in the same country. A recent project to record oral histories of the Troubles that documented people looking back at that time but was informed by their more recent experiences.

> It explored the idea of what connects us all as 'local people' and the rich diversity of what now constitutes a 'local person' in the modern day Derry/Donegal cross-border area. It explored the concepts of both heritage and culture. (Purkis, 2017, p. 436)

The oral histories were part of an exhibition that as Purkis (2017) states 'embraced the heritage value of ordinary people's lives and stories as being important' (p. 438).

These different methods of rapid response and cause based collecting in Northern Ireland, show a shift both in what is possible and in attitudes towards discussing recent history. The National Museum of Northern Ireland has analysed its own approach to collections and exhibitions about the Troubles after poor responses to an earlier exhibition. It is focusing on

> the principles of ethical remembering and are intended to address the challenges of interpreting sensitive and contested history by emphasising context, reflection and critical reflection. (Logan, 2021, p. 26)

The principles of ethical remembering are appropriate to social justice and local studies collecting as well.

Not all causes are as violent as the Troubles. Ashmore (2013) writes about the impact of the internet on the interpretation and practice of history in Shetland, using examples of sharing historical photographs and the live streaming of local events. This is discussed here because it explores how history is perceived and discussed. The live streaming enabled people from far away to connect to the practice of history in Shetland. There has also been discussion about location-based heritage Facebook groups as a place to discuss local information, or for sharing information (Ashmore, 2013, p. 280).

One area in which there has been an increase in empirical research has been in collecting about specific rapid response topics, including #BlackLivesMatter.[4] Rollason-Cass and Reed (2015), specialists in internet archiving, started collecting information about the death of Michael Brown, who was shot in 2014, using a process developed in 2007 for what they describe as 'Spontanous Events' (Rollason-Cass & Reed, 2015, p. 242). As more African American people were killed by police officers they broadened the collecting. The #BlackLivesMatter hashag was not used until 2015 (Ince et al., 2017). Rollason-Cass and Reed use a collaborative approach, and the name of the archive has changed over time, showing the shifts in this discussion. As they state, the

[4] Hashtags will be shown with mixed case (for example, #BlackLivesMatter) for easier reading and disability access. Hashtags shown in quotes use the case present in the original article.

> #blacklivesmatter Web Archive illuminates the potential of archiving a movement on a national scale with multiple invested institutional partners and the assistance of a varied crowdsourced approach to curation. It also presents multiple challenges that are not unique to any one web archiving project. (2015, p. 245)

Their discussion focuses on the importance of collaboration for archiving social media. From a local studies perspective, this could be multiple public libraries working together with input from community groups, as some topics cross local borders. Rollason-Cass and Reed (2015) highlight the importance of flexibility, breadth of collecting and accuracy and that by 'employing various technologies to capture content on the web, the archive can achieve a more robust and diverse capture of fast moving data' (p. 246).

Other potential collecting around online information from #BlackLivesMatter is discussed by Lieberman (2021), who states that online archives may bring more marginalised voices into the discussion. A risk not explored in detail is platform changes and the deletion of information. Liebermann (2012) is writing from the perspective of memory studies and not library or archival studies, but there are elements of her ideas that could be applied to local studies collecting, including that of making

> it possible for marginalized groups to enter the public discourse, decentralize dominant narratives and validate their stories as worth remembering. (p. 726)

During the course of the COVID-19 pandemic there has been writing about items collected to document the pandemic, although little of this focuses on public libraries (Burns et al., 2021; Neatrour et al., 2020; Noehrer et al., 2021; 'Play and Curation during the COVID-19 Pandemic', 2020). There has been a focus on collecting information about the pandemic from many galleries, libraries, archives and museums. There are examples of such collecting, but few empirical works have been written about this collecting as the pandemic continues. For example, the Brooklyn Public Library COVID-19 Project is described as part of an article for school library collecting (Ahlfeld, 2021, p. 497), while more detail is provided about digital collecting at the University of Utah to document how people of that state responded to this pandemic. The University of Utah is collecting photographs, stories and oral histories of the pandemic (Neatrour et al., 2020, p. 403).

The Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA) also decided to collect information that documented the pandemic, including racist information. As Chu (2020) writes, with

> racially motivated rhetoric circulating, it is important for MOCA and other cultural institutions to document the voices of minority communities disproportionately affected by

> the pandemic, so that they will have a voice in the larger social and medical narratives; this is part of our responsibility as a cultural and social-minded institution… museums have often been accused of perpetuating narratives of privilege that exclude or stigmatize minorities. The omissions of minority voices have become even more apparent as a result of the recent Black Lives Matter movement. (p. 341)

These ideas are relevant for the research as they highlight the importance of public libraries making sure they are not 'perpetuating narratives of privilege' and ignoring or sidelining minority voices in the community. This idea is reflected in the work of *Sites of Conscience*, a global coalition of museums and other memory-based collections active in the practice of social justice. Together,

> they speak to the integral role of allyship in advocacy movements and can assist museum leaders in utilizing and articulating their own institution's collection, history, and voice in supporting movements for social justice. (Norris et al., 2020, p. 321)

This is part of a discussion about museums not being neutral. Fleming (2016) states that

> museum messages are the creation of the people who work at the museum … every comment they make is an opinion that could be opposed; every object they choose to display is loaded with meaning; every decision to omit something from display could be disputed. Museum people who claim they present neutral views about the world are either being disingenuous or stupid. (p. 74)

This interpretation has relevance for public library local studies collections in helping them keep perspective and encourage a seeking of wider views to document a fuller history of their area. This concept of neutrality is raised in relation to libraries (Bourg, 2018; Gibson et al., 2017); however, the museum context there is a direct relationship to local studies collections. They speak to the need for a selection of items to be kept, rather than museums being seen as 'the graveyard for unsettling floatsam of long-past oppressive regimes' (Fraser et al., 2020, p. 297).

Conducting oral history interviews during a pandemic presented an opportunity to test some recording techniques that had been little used, because of the understandable preference for conducting in-person interviews. The National Nordic Museum (NNM) in Seattle used the platform Zoom to conduct oral history interviews. The interviews were conducted early in the COVID-19 pandemic to collect the experience of the pandemic while it was happening, not realising that it would still be occurring over two years later. These interviews show perspectives from 2020, which are likely to differ from later recordings and provide an

important snapshot in time (Anderson & DeRiemer, 2021). This recording project demonstrates an agile response to the documenting of information and events. The relevance to public libraries is precisely this agility, some of which was shown by collecting projects for pandemic-related information, mostly in 2020.

Recent books about oral history explore the importance of oral history recordings. These include looking at the practice of oral history and memory (Hamilton & Shopes, 2008) and using oral histories to document crises (Cave & Sloan, 2014). Some books are about oral histories about a single event – for example, Hurricane Maria (Chansky & Denesiuk, 2021). These help demonstrate the crucial documentation that oral histories can provide, information and perspectives that are not available in other ways.

Another focus for possible collecting is the 'Loud Fence' campaign, which started in Ballarat, Victoria, but spread around Australia and overseas, involving coloured ribbons tied to fences. At first it was ribbons tied to fences of churches named in the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2013–2017), but later the ribbons were tied to the fences of other churches as well (Wilson & Golding, 2018, pp. 861–862). Wilson and Golding (2018) state that it

> is in the realm of performative transformation that the ribbons of the Loud Fences have their potency, and in which is revealed their own role and status as heritage entities in their own right. Their sudden appearance effects a (partial) transformation of the establishment heritage entity – previously a relatively static repository of familiar and 'comfortable' narrative – into an entity whose narrative is in flux, an entity of uncertain history and thus of less tangible heritage. Thus as an unwilling participant in a performance which itself has an undefined but real heritage role, the establishment entity finds itself caught up in heritage as a process. (p. 865)

Loud Fences is a community protest that could have been documented by a local public library, and potentially with many public libraries documenting it, this research information could be gathered in a distributed way, showing the potential to connect the very local with wider occurrences while acknowledging a local impact, like that of ribbons tied to the fence of St Patrick's Roman Catholic Cathedral in Ballarat where the movement started. Wilson and Golding (2018) state that

> Loud Fence is a reminder to the institution and the community of a plethora of narratives that have been silenced, hidden, precisely because they are 'upsetting'. (p 869)

A search of the Central Highlands Libraries catalogue, of which Ballarat is part, showed no mention of loud fences or Loud Fence. This does not necessarily mean that those libraries have not collected information on this topic; it may not yet be catalogued, or it may have quite different metadata to describe it.

There is also empirical writing about audio projects, which are not obviously a fit with cause based collecting or rapid response collecting but share similarities as they document specific themes. Giaccardi and Palen (2008) write about a project from 2007 in which acoustic sounds were recorded and then shared. They state that the

> goal is to encourage an engaged and collective way of 'listening to the land'. The ultimate objective is to sustain a form of social production of the natural heritage that fosters environmental awareness and eventually supports new forms of land interpretation and management. This work is based on the belief that sounds are a personal and critical element of the natural heritage to be preserved. (p. 296)

This idea is relevant to research because there is the potential for public libraries to undertake location-specific sound recordings as sounds for a location may change over time.

2.4.3 Collecting from and with the community

Collecting information about the whole community should not require a separate heading, but it is a separate heading here because otherwise it risks being ignored or invisible. The risk of bias in library collections is well known (Gibson et al., 2017). Collecting practices that contribute to bias in local studies collections risk misrepresenting community diversity and developing a collection that cannot reliably reflect the character of an area. Birdi et al. (2011) state that

> there may be a benefit to all members of the community of being exposed to materials about other ethnic cultures, as part of the reflection of a culturally diverse society. (p. 126)

This acknowledgement of community diversity is significant. It highlights the importance of documenting and making available local studies items to improve our understanding of recent and current concerns and interests of the community. As Mutibwa (2016) writes,

> there may not be a singular and obvious past out there, but rather perhaps multiple versions of it, the successive reconstruction, reinterpretation and representation of which are key to facilitating (diverse modes) of remembrance which, in turn, shape cultural identity in innumerable ways over time. (p. 9)

This is reflective of the fact that First Nations people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people with a disability, people who are LGBTQIA+ and others are among those under-included in local studies collections (Allard & Ferris, 2015; Kelly, 2010). Reid and Macafee (2007) note the

> intersection with working-class history, women's history and multi-cultural history shows that interest in local studies is shared by diverse sections of the population. (p. 130)

without commenting on the visibility of these groups of people in the collections.

We have a choice about how we research. We can choose to ask new questions of existing collections to explore what the silences and absences can tell us about people who may not be as visible in local studies collections. Lloyd and Moore (2015) highlight the importance of working with communities and not for them, while Ramirez (2022) reminds us that

> all history is by its very nature subjective, no matter how objective we try to be … [however] we can effectively scrutinise historical evidence in more inclusive ways and engage with the past through fresh eyes. (p. XIV)

This question of visibility is also raised by Pocock (2003), who states that

> [t]here is an increasing acceptance in many spheres of heritage practice and research that heritage needs to move beyond the traditional realm of the grand and elite, to consider the everyday and to recognise cultural and social groups traditionally underrepresented by heritage regimes. (p. 260)

Dellios (2022) similarly reminds us how different stories – such as migration and industry – intersect with one another to form a stronger understanding of an area. There are potentially many such intersections that are important to capture in local studies collections. Dellios states that, as researchers, 'it is our task to interrogate the spaces and structures that exist for migrant community groups to voice their own histories of immigration and settlement' and goes on to ask how 'communities remember migrant labour in post-industrial places' (2022, p. 9). This is relevant for local studies collections in public libraries, as communities change over time and people may not have been photographed, had oral histories recorded, or other aspects of their lives included in a collection. It highlights the importance of working with the community in collaboration rather than for the community in consultation (Dellios, 2022, p. 15). Dellios reminds us of the importance of 'privileging 'ordinary' storytelling' (p. 11) and while her focus is how migrants are depicted in local heritage the importance of ordinary storytelling can be key for thinking about local studies collections. We are also told by Dellios (2022) that

> the memorials and memorial gardens, heritage walks, council-funded local histories, historical societies, and their small museums – do not consider the migrant or even the non-Anglo-Australian perspective, or the relationship between migration and industrial labour … The point here is that heritage is intimately connected to political debates and social justice issues and can have material implications. (pp. 30, 33)

This is a long list of where people have been excluded from the story of an area so that their contribution, and their lives, are made invisible. More inclusive local studies collections have the capacity to welcoming people into research spaces, which Vagts (2022) suggests can highlight that people really are welcome to use the spaces for research.

As part of welcoming people into research spaces some local studies items may need to be created, as the information will not otherwise be documented. As Purkis (2017) states:

> Creating new digital heritage about people's 'intangible' life stories can be seen as an important part of the public's engagement with heritage … [this] heritage can be situated within people's life stories, and that these stories create a heritage identity of a local place. The idea that heritage can be found within people, and digital heritage can be about creating new historical content centred on peoples experiences is worth emphasising. (pp. 435–436)

This is relevant to the present research because it reflects the need to investigate how public libraries create content for information not otherwise documented.

2.4.4 Summary

This section has explored recent research about collecting contemporary and recent content. It includes examples of social media collecting, although most of the writing is about the potential for collecting social media. It explored rapid response and cause-based collecting, including examples from the Troubles in Northern Ireland as well as #BlackLivesMatter and items relating to the referendum for abortion in Ireland. It also examined the importance of collecting from and with the community.

2.5 Conclusion

This literature review has provided an overview of research related to local studies collections with an emphasis on understanding collecting practices of current or recent content. It brings together recent empirical research in areas relevant to local studies collections to highlight the importance of diverse and inclusive collecting, and the strength of using a social justice approach. The research gaps suggest opportunities for further research on collecting recent content for local studies collections. Despite some research on local studies

collections, there is little that focuses on cataloguing, access, preservation and rights management. Similarly, research on recent collecting tends to consider particular formats viewed in isolation, rather than exploring how recent content is added to local studies collections in public libraries through diverse formats and content, and how this can ensure greater representation of diverse communities.

The next chapter describes the research methodology used for the current study. More specifically, it outlines the ethnographic approach, involving interviews, observation and document analysis, that enabled an exploration of the current practices of public libraries in regard acquisition, creation and curation of recent content for local studies collections.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Introduction

This chapter details the method for this qualitative study. It begins by exploring the research paradigm, before introducing the research approach including key components and justification for its selection for this study. The chapter then outlines the site selection, data collection and analysis approach. The chapter concludes with discussion of ethical considerations and strategies used for maintaining the quality of this research.

3.2 Critical theory

This study is positioned within a critical theory paradigm, a research tradition that focuses on power, inequity and social change. As a paradigm for research inquiry, critical theory developed in response to arguments that social science can never be truly objective or value-free, and that there is a need for distinctive and appropriate methods to undertake research with the express goal of social change in mind (Neuman, 2013). To this end critical theory empowers people to look beyond constraints placed upon us (Creswell, 2014). The aim of critical theory is 'to produce a particular form of knowledge that seeks to realize an emancipatory interest, specifically through a critique of consciousness and ideology' (Carr, 2000, p. 209). Critical theory encourages rethinking assumptions and investigating other ways of seeing a topic, rather than considering the usual way that things are done. Critical theory thus has the potential to widen our thinking and can expand how we think about library-related research (Buschman & Leckie, 2010). This is a relevant point for this research: because critical theory 'confronts and interrogates the power structure inherent in institutions' (Highby, 2016, p. 148), adopting this paradigm for this research is helpful in examining the practices of public libraries in regard to acquisition, creation and curation of recent content for local studies collections.

Critical theory can also bring the idea of social justice into the discussion so that public libraries are challenged to deliberately consider their thinking around what they collect and how their community is included and represented by the contents of those collections. It helps question whether there is an accidental or deliberate exclusion of items being collected about people and groups including those who have been historically, intentionally and traditionally marginalised. Critical theory is a way to 'investigate social justice concepts while engaging embedded ideologies, power dynamics and institutionalised social practices that underpin

information services' (Dadlani, 2016, p. 309). It can assist library staff to consider how they can seek a more equitable approach to the collecting of information (Cope, 2016, p. 82). A public library has the potential to be a site where information access is extended to the whole community (Loeb, 2016, p. 30). This is relevant to local studies collections in public libraries as it encourages a questioning of current practices and assumptions, including about what recent content is acquired, created and curated, and how recent and current concerns of the community are collected.

As Pyati (2007) states, critical theory 'creates a wider space for a progressive re–envisioning of the roles of libraries in promoting enhanced and more democratic forms of information access' (paragraph 46). These potentially more democratic forms of access can be aided or hindered by how local studies collections are managed and developed. Critical theory can work well with ethnography, for, as Stooke (2010) argues,

> institutional ethnography offers LIS [library and information science] practitioners and researchers strategies with which to interrupt their involvement in processes that privilege the interests of powerful groups and reinforce hegemonic discourses of competition and the principles of the market. (p. 291)

The disruption that critical theory can bring may be used to interrogate the concept of 'vocational awe' that can cause bias in thinking about libraries, their staff, collections and services (Ettarh, 2018; García Mazari, 2021; Meyers et al., 2021). Vocational awe is a term recently described by Ettarh (2018) and refers to

> the set of ideas, values, and assumptions librarians have about themselves and the profession that result in notions that libraries as institutions are inherently good, sacred notions, and therefore beyond critique. (paragraph 1)

Vocational awe is a widespread, but not a universal, view (Chiu et al., 2021) that has the potential to impact on local studies collecting for public libraries. The concept of vocation awe is of relevance to critical theory, as challenging such awe is one of the roles critical theory potentially plays.

The Sustainable Development Goals supported by the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) (Australian Library and Information Association, McDonald, Australian Public Library Alliance, & National and State Libraries Australasia, 2018), in addition to being relevant to local studies collections in public libraries, could be considered to encourage critical theory – particularly target 8 in the stretch goals (Flack, 2021), which requires that library collections, services and staff are diverse, reflecting the whole community.

This point about collections reflecting Australia's population as well as local communities is another reminder of the importance of local studies collections demonstrating that a community is diverse, rather than providing a narrower view, and helps show the need for a critical investigation of these collections.

Critical theory has the potential to help see beyond the current situation, to interrupt processes that privilege the powerful and to re-envision information access in public libraries. It is highly relevant for research related to local studies collections, as these collections should record and show the whole community (Dewe, 2002, pp. 1–2). The use of critical theory encourages uncovering assumptions about local studies collections in public libraries and questioning them with the aim of improving these crucial local collections.

3.3 Ethnography

Ethnography was selected for this research for its ability to provide an intimate understanding of cultural practices, in this case the practices associated with acquiring, cataloguing and curating local studies collections. Ethnography is a qualitative research approach that studies a particular group or culture with the aim of better understanding it (Fetterman, 2010). It is a multifaceted approach that seeks to tell a 'credible, rigorous and authentic story' (Fetterman, 2010, p. 1) using a range of techniques to 'document what people know, feel, and do in a way that situates those phenomena at specific times in the history of individual lives, including pertinent global events and processes' (Handwerker, 2001 location 139). It provides the opportunity for longer-term investigation of a research area and 'enables a holistic approach to research' (Miller et al., 2016, p. xi) including detailed descriptions of what happens as well as why it happens (Koning, 2010). It enables a 'deeper *immersion* in others' worlds' (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 2; original emphasis). As such, ethnography is a very useful tool addressing the research questions, as outlined below.

3.3.1 Key components of ethnography

There are some common features or components of ethnography that distinguish it as a particular and unique research method, particularly useful to understanding practices. These include its recognition of emic and etic perspectives, including the role of the researcher as a tool; an understanding of culture as a system; and its capacity to provide holistic contextualisation.

As Fetterman (2010) states, the 'emic perspective … [or the] insider's perception of reality is instrumental to understanding and accurately describing situations and behaviors'

(p. 20). The emic perspective provides multiple realities, as each person presents their perspective on the situation (Fetterman, 2010), and is vital for learning how each person views their role and demonstrates their understanding of this. This study attempts to understand the community and culture being studied from the emic or insider perspective.

The researcher is a librarian who has worked in public libraries, and currently works for a state government-managed library. The researcher has a social justice perspective, seeing equity and fairness as important elements in how the world functions, and how publicly accessible libraries can function. When well managed, libraries – especially public libraries – can provide social justice for their community; however this requires deliberate work, and is not accidental (Cooke, 2018; Pateman & Vincent, 2016). The researcher regularly visits public libraries for work, as well as being an active member of the local public library and enjoying the collections, programs and services that public libraries provide. Each public library is different, but there are similarities with types of practices and approaches to create the community focus that makes public libraries both like and different from each other. There can be similar concerns, issues and practices between different types of libraries as well. There are people who fill comparable roles, regardless of the library type. While the research site was a specific library service, and the people involved are all individual and unique, they share traits and attributes because of the work they do to acquire collection items and make them available for their community, as well as providing programs and services.

The etic perspective is 'the external, social scientific perspective of reality' (Fetterman, 2010, p. 22). It involves stepping back from the insider's view in an attempt to explain the community's culture and practices. When using the etic approach, the researcher emphasises what they consider is important. For the current study, the etic perspective was particularly adopted at the point of analysis; the researcher tried to develop the findings from an outsider perspective in order to respond to the research questions. While the researcher works in a library, the research location was a different library, and while it is a workplace, it is not the workplace of this researcher, but a research location. This caused shifting in perspectives, moving from thinking about what happens from the perspective of the library staff to the perspective of an outsider. It was challenging and interesting to keep refocusing on the etic perspective, as doing so meant stepping back from the local rationale of the staff at Kookaburra Libraries to see a broader view. It meant seeing their perspective at times, and the research perspective flipped to and fro.

However, Fetterman (2010) observes that 'most ethnographers simply see emic and etic orientations as markers along a continuum of styles or different levels of analysis' (p. 22). This

highlights the importance of both perspectives and of using one to illuminate the other, and when analysing data to use both emic and etic approaches for coding data (Crang & Cook, 2007). Fetterman notes that the 'ethnographer's task is not only to collect information from the emic, or insider's, perspective but to make sense of all the data from an etic or external social scientific, perspective' (Fetterman, 2010, p. 11). It is likely that the researcher 'will experience being both insider and outsider simultaneously' (Spradley, 2016, p. 57). This was true of the research undertaken. The use of both emic and etic perspectives to collect information, and to interpret the information gathered, is one of the strengths of an ethnographic approach.

The use of the researcher as tool is described by Fetterman (2010), who states that 'the ethnographer is a human instrument' (p. 33), and each researcher, as the primary tool for data collection, will have an impact on the research (Lipson, 1991). As this instrument or tool, the researcher gathers information about the research site and people. Like any tool, it needs to be used wisely and well to support the quality of the data collected and how it is interpreted. The researcher as human instrument 'must discriminate among different types of data and analyze the relative worth of one path over another in every turn in fieldwork' (Fetterman 2010, p. 2). It was therefore important in this research for the researcher to 'bring the person of the researcher into consciousness' (Lipson, 1991, p. 12). This was achieved by actively engaging in intentional self-awareness and consciousness of what was brought to the site of study, who the researcher is, and how their own experiences can influence the community dynamics. The researcher kept field notes to record personal experiences as a means to recognise the influence of their personal biases and feelings on the study (Lipson, 1991). These notes were a way of recordings ideas to explore later.

A researcher should focus on 'discerning cultural patterning in the behavior they observe' (Wolcott, 1987, p. 45) within the community they are seeking to understand. Culture is important; as Wolcott (1990) states, 'there is no ethnography until culture makes an entry, no matter how tenuously' (p. 50). Importantly, Wolcott (1990) contends that 'culture is not waiting to be discovered' (p. 50). By this he means, culture can only be '*inferred* from the words and actions of members of the group under study' (Wolcott, 1987, p. 41; original emphasis). For this reason, culture 'is best revealed within what people *do*, what they *say* (and *say they do*), or within an uneasy tension between what they *really do* and what they *say they ought to do*' (Wolcott, 1987, p. 45; original emphasis). For this study, the researcher focused on culture by adopting multiple data collection techniques that would allow an exploration of the real lived experiences, voices and actions of the community members (i.e., observation, interviews).

Adopting multiple data collection techniques allowed the study to utilise 'holistic contextualisation' whereby 'everything people do is the context for everything else they do' (Miller et al., 2016, pp. 28–29) and to 'understand any single aspect of a person's life, one wants to have at least some sense of all the rest' (Miller, 2016, p. 30). Holistic contextualisation was embraced in the current study by incorporating observation, listening, analysis of documents, and interviews to 'describe as much as possible about a culture or a social group … [as] each scene exists within a multilayered and interrelated context' (Fetterman, 2010, p. 18). It has been noted that the writing of '[e]thnography reflects the reality that no one lives in just one context. Everything we do and encounter is related as part of our lives, so our approach to people's experience needs to be holistic' (Miller et al., 2016, p. xi).

3.3.2 Rationale for using ethnography

Ethnography was the most appropriate method for this study for three main reasons. First, the ethnographic approach allows the gathering of 'thick description'. Thick description involves more than simply recording and describing something. It involves providing the background information necessary for understanding the relevance, meanings and intentions that underpin social interactions. The practice of 'thick description', described by Geertz (c1973, pp. 6–10) and based on the work of philosopher Gilbert Ryle, is a key element for ethnography and was a principal consideration for the decision to use ethnography as the research method for this project, as was the opportunity for longer-term investigation of the research area. Thick description allows for the context of the information to be understood by the reader. It enables research to be presented as

> a complex, emic analysis providing sufficient relevant and contextualized details to enable a nonparticipant to quickly learn the essential facts and determine the validity of conclusions. (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2020, [unpaginated, paragraph 34)

Thick description enables to reader to connect to the people and location studied as if they were there, with the perspectives of both being an insider and an outsider to the situation.

Second, data collection strategies in ethnography can include a variety of approaches such as participant observation, conversations and interviews, as well as documents, photographs and videos (Atkinson et al., 2007). The range of strategies associated with ethnography facilitates obtaining 'more detailed, real-time, in-depth qualitative data that can be much more representative of what happens in libraries' (Priestner & Borg, 2016, p. 9). The collection and analysis of detailed, real-time data was crucial for this research, which explored the actual practices used by the library. It revealed change over time and patterns in behaviour,

as well as providing insights into the thinking behind work practices. The range of data also permits a triangulation of information, so that what is said can be tested against what is seen, as well as against formal policies.

Third, ethnography, in its exploration of 'the everyday world of common-sense objects and practical acts' (Geertz, c1973, p. 118), aligns with the practical nature of public libraries. It has been used to explore the lives of people and their communities all around the world, from those in relatively remote areas (Geertz, c1973), to those in highly urban areas (Deegan, 2007; Miller et al., 2016). Bridges, in his study of a public library in Wales, describes ethnography as 'research for the everyday' (Bridges, 2010, p. 54). Public library local studies collections aim to acquire, create and curate stories, and to record the everyday life of their communities (Allen & Johnson, 2008; Reid & Macafee, 2007). They seek to show what places look like, and provide information about their communities, their inhabitants and their environments. However, local studies documents and other materials as well as including can exclude communities, individuals and events, so it is useful to investigate how the everyday life of communities is collected by public libraries. Ethnography not only seeks to understand the everyday but can also be a strong advocate for the less powerful and underrepresented, bringing into focus the question of who the local studies collections document for the future. Together with critical theory, ethnography enables the research questions of this study to be comprehensively investigated. This provides an alignment of the research method, research paradigm, and the world view of the researcher, bringing a social justice lens to local studies collections so ensure a wide range of people, not only the powerful and articulate, are represented.

3.3.3 Ethnographic studies of libraries

While ethnographic research is not common in library studies, neither is it unusual. In 2012 there were already more than eighty examples of ethnographic research in library settings (Khoo et al., 2012). These include Katherine Robinson (2014), who used ethnography to explore diverse communities in public libraries; Marianne Bamkin, who combined ethnography and grounded theory to investigate children's use of mobile libraries (Bamkin, 2012; Bamkin et al., 2016); and Ed Bridges (2010), who explored social interaction at a public library in Wales. Bamkin (2012), Bridges (2010) and Robinson (2014) demonstrate the value of ethnography in their doctoral studies exploring public library practices.. Ethnographic methods of qualitative observation, interviews, and analysis of documents as well as audio and visual materials (Creswell, 2014) are all very relevant for public library research. These tools

and documents demonstrate the depth of data, analysis and analytic insights that ethnography as a research method can provide.

While local studies collections in public libraries have yet to be explored through ethnography, there are ethnographic studies involving libraries that are relevant. Ethnography has been used to explore the experience of evidence-based practice in an Australian public library (Gillespie et al., 2016), public library storytellers in a low-income area (Young et al., 2019), customer and user experience (Mucz & Gareau-Brennan, 2019; Priestner & Borg, 2016), the changing aspects of public and university library services (Cavanagh, 2013; Huvila, 2013; Priestner & Borg, 2016), the theory of public library use (Eriksson et al., 2013), baby boomers' use of public libraries (Williamson et al., 2010), resilience in times of budget cuts (Grace & Sen, 2013) and reading in public libraries (Sequeiros, 2011, 2014).

These examples demonstrate the effectiveness of ethnography for researching libraries. The studies of public libraries, which have all directly contributed to important conversations about public libraries, demonstrate the effectiveness of ethnography, and suggest it can be a valuable tool for exploring local studies collection practices in public libraries.

3.4 The research site

This section outlines the site for the ethnographic study, including the rationale for selecting the site and how permission was obtained to access the site for the study. For this research the perspectives of library staff and community members have been investigated, as these different viewpoints provide a fuller picture of local studies collecting. The two groups of people who participated in the study are described, as well as the timing and nature of visits to the site. This research looked at staff and community members, and the relationship between the two. The subject of the research is the local collections and it is investigated through the people who interact with them, including library culture. These groups are a section of the Kookaburra community who collect, create or write about local studies of relevance to public libraries, their relationships, and their local studies collecting practices. Over the decades how ethnography is undertaken has changed, and often subsets of communities are explored rather than an entire community or culture.

3.4.1 Site selection

This study is an ethnographic investigation of a single public library service in Australia. Hammersley and Atkinson (2019) note that often ethnographers research one location, even at times one individual. Wolcott (1987) states that 'anthropologists ordinarily work with one of

whatever they study: one informant … one family … one tribe or clan … one village … one society' (p. 49), while Gielis (2011) argues for the 'merits of single-site ethnography in researching the everyday lives of people' (p. 257). This is approach demonstrated by the work of Glasser (2010) and Miller (2016). A single-site approach was a very successful strategy for the Chicago School of Ethnography (Deegan, 2007) as well as early British researchers (Wolcott, 2003, p. 120). Hall (2012) demonstrates the effectiveness of a single site in her study of a street in London. It is a method used by library staff to study their own libraries (Bryant, 2009; Delcore et al., 2009; Foster & Gibbons, 2007) as well as by researchers investigating specific libraries (Gillespie et al., 2016).

The selection of a single site for this research aimed to provide rich data to explore the research question. As outlined by Pelto (2016), the selection of one site is a widely used approach capable of generating a density of data. Studying a single site in depth focuses the interactions and connections in one place and builds understanding over time as relationships and understanding develop; as Harper (2018) states, 'there is a justification for the original formulation, an ethnography situated in place, focused on humans making culture' (p. 98). Amit (1999) notes that ethnography can involve extended site visits, or short repeat visits, as well as other methods of obtaining information, stating that it 'is the circumstances that defined the method, rather than the method defining the circumstances' (p. 11). Exploring one site in detail enables this research to determine the how the acquisition, creation and curation of recent content occurs through the practices of staff in public libraries.

Several considerations informed the selection of the public library site. First, the case study needed to hold, or be actively engaged in the acquisition of, sufficient recent local studies material for detailed investigation to be possible. To show recent activity, rather than past practice, the site needed to have evidence that local studies content had been created within the last five years. This could be in any format, including recently produced or published works on paper, ebooks or materials in other digital formats, photographs, video, audio (including music) and ephemera (these may be paper-based objects like fliers and posters, or they could be digital). This was discovered by searching over 85 Australian public library online catalogues for material with a creation or publication date within the last five years. This also involved searching other library databases or websites in case such material was not described in the catalogue but was available another way. It could include new material being added regularly or as part of a one-off project, or as a test of a method of collecting. The volume of collecting was also considered, as it would have been challenging to effectively study a library that has added only a very small number of recently collected items. No Australian public library was

collecting large numbers of recent items, but some were collecting in very small quantities. This limited site selection to those that had catalogued or otherwise made recent material available. A public library may be collecting social media, every new game or book created in their area and undertaking oral history recordings, but if these were not findable online, because they not being catalogued, this site was not considered.

Second, a prospective site needed to have local studies staff, as their presence contributes to the capacity of the library service to collect and manage recently collected content. This was also central to ethnographic observation and interviews. The presence of a dedicated local studies staff is usually dependent on the size of the library service, as well as its history. It is preferable that staff for local studies services be qualified librarians, but there are other relevant skill sets, such as those of archivists or public historians (State Library of New South Wales, 2021). In smaller libraries, they may be a library technician or a library assistant. The inclusion of local studies staff is important as their presence contributes to the capacity of the library service to collect and manage recently collected content.

Third, the project sought a case study where the local studies collections and services were described on the library website (Barry & Tedd, 2008) to show how the library helps the community discover the collection and services. This could be a separate webpage, or it could be several webpages, or part of an overall description of the library service. Having the local studies collection described online makes this information available to the community. The description may include strengths of the collection, any partnerships, and may mention areas the library would like to collect in, or is starting to collect in. It could also include a link to the collection policy, plan or strategy.

Fourth, the local studies library selected needed to have a social media presence. Local studies content on social media can be a way of showing the community what is in the library collection and of encouraging community interaction with this content. It may be used to seek information for the collection, raise awareness of the range of material in the local studies collection or to inform people of a service or program (Haro-de-Rosario et al., 2016).

The websites, library catalogues and social media presences of over 85 Australian public library services were reviewed to assess which library services met the criteria listed above. A shortlist of eight libraries that met the criteria was compiled, although not every library met the criteria equally. The use of social media was unexpectedly difficult to match. The site chosen represented a combination of what is ‘interesting, relevant and doable’ (Crang & Cook, 2007, loc. 2840), including the proximity of the research site, established connections and accessibility.

3.4.2 Naming conventions

For the purposes of confidentiality, this institution will be referred to as Kookaburra Libraries. A full description of the library service is provided in Chapter 5. Pseudonyms are used to ensure anonymity for Kookaburra Council and Kookaburra Libraries as well as for the people who were interviewed. It was decided to use this approach because, as well as protecting individuals, it can assist people to understand this research more generally. As Fetterman (2010) states, the

> use of pseudonyms is a simple way to disguise the identity of individuals and protect them from potential harm … [and to] protect these individuals from the researcher's larger audience. (p. 147)

Further to this, the thesis is careful in how it describes the locations and other information to make the Kookaburra area harder to identify.

The pseudonym for the area, council and library is from the name of a NSW state emblem, because the researcher lives in NSW. The kookaburra is the bird emblem of NSW (NSW Government, 2021). The pseudonyms for the names of the people interviewed are chosen from the *NSW Registry of Births Deaths & Marriages list of most popular baby names for 2016 for NSW* (NSW Government, 2019), the year in which the research commenced. The names were selected counting down from 100 and allocating the next name on the list. This was done for anonymity as well as simplicity. The name selected matches the gender of the person interviewed. A complete list of pseudonyms is provided in Appendix A. To further protect participants' identity, library position titles have been modified to describe the intent of a role, rather than using actual position titles that may be identifiable. A similar method has been used with document titles, so their function is made clear while the organisation remains anonymous.

3.4.3 Accessing and visiting the site

Research at Kookaburra Libraries was conducted predominantly during 2019, with two site visits taking place in the first half of 2018. The approach to the library was via the library manager, with an email used to provide background information on the research as well as contact details for the researcher's supervisors in case the library staff wished to discuss the research with them. There was a very slight professional connection, with the researcher knowing the library through previous work. This provided an approach like that described by Fetterman (2010) of having an 'introduction by a member' (p. 36). Formal written permission

was obtained after a telephone discussion with the library manager, Amelie, and one other senior staff member, John. Permission from the library was confirmed in a letter from the library manager, which was included in the ethics application. There was also an email confirmation. As well as obtaining permission from the library manager, permission from individual participants was obtained for interviews and observation. Individual permissions were documented by the signing of consent forms for interviews and observation where appropriate.

One visit in 2018 was to spend time in the library spaces anonymously, looking at how Kookaburra Libraries was used and starting a familiarisation with the space. This was a time of anonymous observation, as if visiting the library like anyone else in the community. The second visit in 2018 was for a pilot test of the data collection techniques to be used, especially interviews, and included interviews with two staff, Amelie and Freya. The pilot interviews provided the opportunity to begin researching the practices of public libraries in regard to acquisition, creation and curation of recent content. These two interviews were helpful in demonstrating the overlapping concerns of the library manager, Amelie, and the local studies librarian, Freya. They revealed some differences as well, with Amelie placing local studies within the broader library strategy. There were different perspectives provided through the experiences of a more recent arrival to the library service, Amelie, and one who had worked in the library for longer, Freya. This library visit also included a meeting with both of them together, and this demonstrated a strong and positive relationship, even though Freya had little notice of the planned research and had not been consulted about it. The interviews were conducted separately. There was a detailed library tour, with different sections of it provided by Amelie and Freya, and this helped to demonstrate their slightly varied but compatible perspectives.

In 2019 there were eleven visits of between one and five days to Kookaburra Libraries, with other information provided by emails and telephone calls. There were emails, prior to the site visits, in which questions from the library about the timing of research visits was discussed. At least seven hours was spent at the library each research day, except for a half-day meeting to brief the local studies staff on the research prior to the regular research visits starting. This briefing of local studies staff was crucial to the success of the research, as these staff needed to be comfortable with what was planned and the regular presence in their space of a researcher. The timing of the research visits were to suit the library and the researcher. The consecutive days included some visits for night shifts and weekend library opening, allowing an accumulation of detail about the library to build up. It also normalised the presence of a

researcher in the library, although the researcher never became invisible. Additional interviews were undertaken during this time as well as many days of observation and listening. Much of the time was spent observing in a public area of the library, with other observation taking place in the library workroom as well as other library sites. The public area of the library was a key location for many staff interactions, and an important area to be present in. As Fetterman (2010) states,

> [t]he most important element of fieldwork is being there – to observe, to ask seemingly stupid but insightful questions, and to write down what is seen and heard. (p. 9)

The observation at other library locations was of shorter duration and connected to observation at meetings or interviews with library staff.

Fetterman (2010) notes that one leaves the research site once there is sufficient data, describing this as when 'the same specific pattern of behavior emerges over and over again … [and] when the general picture reaffirms itself over and over again' (pp. 9–10). Jeffrey and Troman (2004) include discussion of a 'compressed time mode' (pp. 538, 540) for ethnography including short periods of intense research, with the focus being on data saturation without an exact specification of time. The results needed to be credible, transferable, dependable and confirmable (Fetterman, 2010). For the visits to Kookaburra Libraries there was a change in the pattern of visits part way through 2019, increasing the frequency and duration of each research visit to ensure a saturation of data. Soon after this change in frequency and duration it became possible to undertake observation of staff prior to the library opening.

Spending at least seven hours on site each day, decisions were required as to what needed to be observed. Most of the observation was of local studies staff in the local studies area as they undertake much of their work in this space, interact when they change over desk shifts, or are in the area for other work. Some of the observation was in the work room area, usually at a time following or preceding an interview. The local studies librarian requested that specific and additional permission be obtained from the library manager Amelie and another senior staff member, John, about observing at meetings. This permission was obtained via email but took a while to procure. There was observation of meetings, in the second half of 2019, once this had been separately approved by the library manager, and for one specific kind of meeting, by John. This delay in approval did not cause significant problems as there were few meetings and information was provided by library staff who had been present. The meetings, even when they could be observed directly, did not provide key information but were helpful for building

connections. At other times the observation was mobile, following staff around the library as they moved through different spaces for their work.

In the initial discussion with the library manager, the prospect of having free labour for library work was raised to attempt to embed participation in the observation. The library manager seemed keen on the possibilities of this, but the local studies librarian was not. As discussed elsewhere, the staff were very busy so working out a regular project would have taken time from other work, although often work projects were discussed so some of the participation was in the form of discussion of ideas for local studies. There were very occasional work projects that the researcher could undertake, such as shelving or sorting items. These were helpful for the different focus they provided for the researcher.

There was opportunity to participate in a small number of morning and afternoon teas at the library for birthdays and other key events. This meant more visibility with staff in other sections of the library, and sometimes even council staff were present. The small number of interactions over food provided a useful perspective on the information gathered at other times. That the researcher brought food to share, chocolates and homemade biscuits, was viewed favourably. There was little opportunity to have lunch with the library staff.

The eleven visits in 2019 were both different and similar, as any research plans had to be ready to change from day to day as what was possible in the library changed. Some interviews were rescheduled several times because staff were sick, tired or working at another branch at short notice. Others were hard to plan because staff were on extended leave. Most interviews went ahead as scheduled. All the local studies staff were interviewed at least twice to check for changing perspectives over time. These were formal interviews that were recorded and transcribed. There were also many informal discussions as different library staff updated the researcher on changes, things that had been happening or chatted about a wide range of topics.

Planning was undertaken but often there had to be agile changes due to the ebbs and flows in the daily life of a busy public library. Most of the observations occurred over at least two consecutive days, with several sets of dates being full weeks of observation. This was very similar in time to a week of work, but with the work focus being observation and interviews. The research was undertaken during time that the researcher was on leave from their usual work. During the observation time part of the local studies collection was investigated in detail, as it provided an opportunity to blend in with people using the collection. This gave the researcher space and time to examine the collection, in particular the recent printed titles, with some online investigation done during observation as well. The twelve months at Kookaburra Libraries provided a detailed view of this library and the connections flowing through it.

The building of trust happened in a range of ways, including bringing food, listening to staff, and asking broader questions about the context of their work. The briefing sessions, and then listening to various discussion topics, proved a helpful connection. Being willing to stay out of the way at times was important, while at other times deciding to follow a particular staff member around proved valuable.

The decision to conclude the visits to Kookaburra Libraries was based on the data that had been obtained. This decision was discussed with Freya, as she was the key contact for this research with Kookaburra Libraries. There was no formal leave-taking from Kookaburra Libraries as a visit was planned once they had implemented some new technology and other changes scheduled for the following year, 2020. These changes were not directly relating to this research and were delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher has stayed in touch by email with Freya, the local studies librarian, as she was the primary contact for the site. Freya provided updates on changes and responded to emails from the researcher checking in on how the staff were going during various stages of the pandemic. The researcher has provided brief emailed updates to the library manager, Amelie, and John, the manager with local studies responsibilities. When the research was planned with Kookaburra Libraries a feedback session after it was written up was discussed. When this occurs, it will provide a delayed formal leave-taking.

3.4.4 Participants

For Kookaburra Libraries there were two groups of participants involved in this study. One of these groups is the public library staff for Kookaburra Libraries, and the other group is community organisations in the Kookaburra Council area. Detailed description of the participants is provided in *Chapter 5 People and place*.

Public library staff include those who are involved in creating, acquiring, cataloguing, preserving, or making accessible recent content for the Kookaburra Libraries local studies collection. The aim was detailed coverage of relevant library staff, including the library manager, at the selected library to explore what they do, how they think about it, and why they do it. Consideration was given to including library volunteers if their work at the library was of direct relevance. The library does not have many volunteers and one of these, Hayden, was interviewed. The public library staff provided detailed information about local studies collecting practices, and about the local government area where the library is located.

Members of two community groups that collect or record local information were included in the study, as was one local author who documents the area through photography. The author

is included with the community groups because of his role in documenting the Kookaburra area and making his photographs available to the community through publications and presentations. The researcher worked with Kookaburra Library staff to select the most relevant community groups; the local studies librarian, Freya, suggested both groups, and Eve, the local studies specialist outreach suggested the author. The people in the community groups are included to provide information about content creation and collecting, showing opportunities for public libraries. Of the two groups included, one collects environmental information about the area and documents their work of environmental rehabilitation by taking photograph and videos. The other group, a sporting organisation, takes photographs at games, has collated statistical data about players and matches, and collects some ephemera in the form of clothing. The groups were of interest because of the local information they document and collect, and because of how the groups use and interact with their public library. Library patrons were not included in the study for reasons of logistics and ethics.

Judgemental sampling was used to determine which library staff to observe and interview at Kookaburra Libraries. In judgemental sampling, participants are chosen based on the researcher's (or other experts') knowledge and professional judgement (Duignan, 2016). This approach to sampling participants enables the selection of the people who would be likely to provide the most relevant information (Fetterman, 2010, p. 35). As Ladner writes, the role of an ethnographer 'is to find participants who offer the greatest potential for understanding the phenomenon at hand. Sampling, for the ethnographer, is not an enterprise in accurate prediction, but an attempt to offer explanation' (Ladner, 2014, p. 102). In the present research this was done based on information provided by library staff, as well as suggestions from the researcher based on specific roles and responsibilities. As information became known over time, additional decisions about who to approach to interview were made by the researcher.

Snowball sampling was used with the two community groups. Snowball sampling uses suggestions, or recommendations about who else to interview provided by people who have already been interviewed (Braun et al., 2017). In the sporting organisation this happened because the first two interviews led to strong recommendations about other people to talk with. For the environment group, the snowball sampling happened after information was provided by a relevant government department and the first environmental volunteer approached suggested a second person to be interviewed. There were other suggestions from the environment group about who to interview, but injury or an unwillingness to participate in research stopped this aspect of snowball sampling developing. Approaches to the two community groups were via email, and this led directly to interviews with several group

members, which through snowballing led to more interviews. A small number of the interviews of public library staff occurred through snowball sampling as well, when some library staff were suggested by other staff who had already been interviewed because they may have relevant information. Most of the library staff were located through judgemental sampling.

3.5 Data collection

This section describes ethnographic data collection techniques used in this study. It provides information about why they may be used as well as how they were used as part of this research. This research included observation, interviews, and document review. Table 1 described how these were used within the site and across the two participant groups.

Table 1. Ethnographic data collection techniques used in this study

Technique	Library staff	Community groups/individuals
Observations	Observe staff collect, add, or create collection items, observe staff interactions with the community. Observe staff interact with each other, in meetings, and as part of their daily work. This included the use of photographs to document actions and collection items but not people.	
Interviews	Use of semi-structured interviews. Staff described what they do and why. This included the use of photographs, recordings, and written notes to document.	Use of semi-structured interviews. Community members described what they do and why. This included the use of photographs, recordings, and written notes to document.
Documents	Policies, strategies and guidelines, the library system, collection items such as digital photographs, books, archives, and maps.	
Field notes	This was a combination of written, photographed, and recorded note taking that as well as documenting observation,	

	documents and interviews was documenting the experience of this research. It included questions yet to be answered, as well as comments, thoughts and ideas	

Source: Adapted from Creswell (2014, pp. 192–193).

While these are distinct data collection strategies there was some overlap, with documents being apparent in observation or used as part of interviews and information from observation being further explored in interviews. Photography as a method of data collection focused on places and collection objects, not people. It was a note-taking method to complement the use of written field notes.

3.5.1 Observation

This study draws heavily on observation performed during periods of embedded participation in the site. Observation including engaged listening (Forsey, 2010) is a key means for obtaining information for ethnographic research, because:

> Observation shows practices as they occur rather than as they are described, the participant observer … is participating in order to observe, notice, record, and try to make sense of actions and events. This involves an element of standing back intellectually and reflecting on things, writing them down and thus objectifying them, asking directed questions in order to address research questions, and seeking access to groups and situations that another participant might not access. (O'Reilly, 2009, p. 152)

The researcher's role as a temporary insider can provide a 'nuanced insider perspective of a particular community's information experience' (Bruce et al., 2014, p. 47). In 2018 there were two site visits for the pilot study; one of these was for observation, with the second comprising interviews with two library staff as well as a detailed walking tour of the library with information provided by Amelie and Freya. In 2019 there were eleven visits of between one and five days. Most of the observation occurred over least two consecutive days, with several sets of dates being full weeks of observation. Each day was at least seven hours on site. An indicative observation criteria was established to provide guidance and focus to the observation (see Appendix J). The criteria were based upon the work of Spradley (2016); during the observation the following key aspects were being considered where possible and appropriate:

- Space – layout of the physical setting; rooms, outdoor spaces etc.
- Actors – the names and relevant details of the people involved

- Activities – the various activities of the actors
- Objects – physical elements: furniture etc.
- Acts – specific individual actions
- Events – particular occasions, e.g. meetings
- Time – the sequence of events
- Goals – what actors are attempting to accomplish
- Feelings – emotions in particular contexts (p. 78).

These were very useful ways to focus observation, and even recording information about rattling air conditioning provided a perspective of the site over time. The photographs taken over multiple visits helped to show both similarities and differences that were useful in thinking about other information about this site.

The observation of library staff was undertaken in such a way that:

- the collecting practices and the rationale for these are understood
- routine and unusual actions are observed
- how the local studies collection is planned, catalogued and made available is understood
- who the key people are as well as connections between people is clear
- it may help demonstrate connections between people from the community and from the library
- it could show where practice is different to the theory described in interviews
- things that people may not think to describe in interviews are seen.

In addition, the observation provided:

- detailed descriptions of local studies collection items
- information about the work of the library staff who manage the collection
- information about any volunteers and their roles
- information about events associated with the collection and creating content as well as how local studies fits into the library.

The observation was a combination of planned and incidental observation. Planned observation was when the researcher was observing and not interacting at all. This sounds unnatural, but resembled being quiet but engaged with what was going on; it took place in a range of contexts, including meetings, and sometimes in the local studies area. Incidental observation involved

the researcher participating in activities of the organisation, such as answering questions in a meeting, or having library staff discuss the research in a less formal context.

Gaining trust was a continuing action for both types of observation. These were busy library staff, and the researcher was asking questions and observing what they were doing. It was a delicate balance, with the researcher in some instances being viewed as a 'temporary insider' but at other times being viewed as 'an outsider'. When being seen and experienced as a temporary insider, people were willing to talk about numerous aspects of their work with the researcher, including many library issues and sometimes their lives. For example, the work of spouses, children and other family interests and connections were all raised. For the research, the context of people's lives was not included nor documented, but it can still be remembered. Some staff would frequently chat about their work as part of observation. They were appreciative of the fancy chocolates and homemade biscuits brought for them by the researcher.

When being seen and experienced as an outsider, the researcher found it was difficult to access the work room. This was a security issue that required borrowing keys every time to gain entry to the workroom, and without their keys the staff member could not move around the building. This meant that for the researcher to have access someone was unable to do their work or had to borrow another persons' keys in turn. This occurred a few times and demonstrated that it was not a path to pursue often. Observation included observations of acquisition, cataloguing and access processes. Areas investigated included what subjects and formats of material are included in the local studies collection and how they are made available.

The observation was overt with the library staff. It was important to be open about this research with the participants, while protecting their privacy and confidentiality. Permission was obtained by signed consent forms from each library staff member for observation. Much of the observation was at a service point, as that was where some of the local studies staff were working, rather than in the work room, and was a location that could be independently accessed. Some of the value of the research was 'a natural consequence of the researcher's being *there* rather than somewhere else' (Palmer et al., 2018, p. 419). This 'being there' provided opportunities for people to talk with the researcher outside interviews. There was limited but very useful observation in work areas. It was only possible to observe a small number of meetings due to the additional permissions required by Kookaburra Libraries for these, and there were some meetings that were postponed or cancelled. Some of the meetings observed were stand-up meetings between staff; others were more detailed team meetings, including several branches of library staff, or even as many library staff as were not required to staff service points. There were a couple of meetings with people from other organisations. Further

information about permission has been provided earlier in this chapter. Being able to observe meetings provided very little information of direct relevance to this research but provided useful background information.

There was one instance of observation of content creation, for photographs taken of an event taking place near Kookaburra Libraries, and this helped to highlight the rarity of this kind of action. Observing the photography enabled a different view of the library and showed planning by the library staff for this kind of documentation. It also demonstrated cooperation between different teams in the library. The researcher was able to attend a small number of library events of relevance to local studies – for example, the launch of a display and a local author's book launch at another location.

3.5.2 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews with two groups were conducted. There were nineteen formal interviews with library staff, most around an hour in length. These were all undertaken as individual interviews. All the local studies staff were interviewed at least twice to check for changing perspectives over time. These were formal interviews, but there were also many informal discussions as different local studies staff updated the researcher on changes, things which had been happening or chatted about a wide range of topics. These were documented in field notes. Seven interviews were undertaken with community members from two community organisations and with one local author. One of these interviews was of two people together, as that is how they were most comfortable participating, and one was immediately after another. The interviews are listed in Appendices F and G.

Although there is no prescriptive sample size for an ethnographic study, it is acknowledged that this generally comprises between 15 and 36 participants (Bernard, 2011; Bertaux, 1981). Bruce (1997) considers that the number of participants needs to be sufficient to gather suitably rich descriptions of people's varying ways of experiencing a phenomenon.

The stories or accounts from the library staff and community group members are important for providing evidence of what they do, why they do it, and how they think about it. Seidman (2013) contends that 'an interest in other individuals' stories because they are of worth' (p. 309) sits at the heart of the interview technique. This interest, and the questions shaping it, helped to draw forth information in interviews. Interviews were identified as an appropriate data collection method for the study because of their suitability in obtaining information about people's views, opinions, ideas and experiences. As Brinkman and Kvale

(2015) state, for interviews that are part of research 'we talk to people because we want to know how they describe their experiences or articulate their reasons for action' (p. 3).

The interviews were semi-structured to provide a framework and some consistency, and to enable flexibility so that as circumstances changed new areas of discussion could be introduced (Wilson, 2012). The interviews included introductory questions, follow-up questions, probing questions, specifying questions, interpreting questions and silence (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). The interview protocols are available for viewing in Appendices K and L. There were indicative questions for each person being interviewed; these were tailored to each participant and varied according to the role that a participant fulfils in a local studies service. In addition to these indicative questions, relevant follow-up questions were asked.

The interview protocol for the library staff was designed to discover each person's practices and experiences in relation to the collection, creation and curation of recent content for local studies within the library. The interviews of the library staff commenced with simple questions about their library experience and work. This was to help them feel comfortable with the process of being interviewed, and to understand that they were the people with the specialist knowledge. This also provided information about their roles in the library and helped to depict how they viewed their work, even if they were comfortable from the start of the interviews. The questions moved on to what they thought was interesting and or important about local studies, to help obtain an overview of what was happening, before more detailed questions about local policies and practices. Some interviews needed few questions to be asked as the people interviewed provided many details with little prompting. For other interviews many questions were required to ensure the researcher understood the information and the perspective being provided. Specific questions about recent content were included, as it appeared easier for some staff to talk about older items that were being collected than about recent content. There were significantly more older items being added to the collection than recent content. Follow-up questions were tailored for each interview.

The interview protocol for the community group members was designed to discover each person's experiences and their practices of engaging with the library in regard the collection, creation and curation of recent content for local studies. The interviews of community members started in a similar way, with questions about their background and their roles in community organisations or creating content. This was designed to help relax the people interviewed. The community members were all willing to talk about their volunteer roles, and the questions for this group focused on the kind of content their organisations created and how they organised and cared for these, as well as how other relevant items were collected and cared for. There

were also questions to help describe connections between community groups and Kookaburra Libraries.

Interviews provided additional information to the observations and documents collected in the form of descriptions, rationales, stories and ideas, thus providing information not available in other ways. Interviews allow people to determine how they are represented as each person chooses what information they share, and how they describe it (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). How much or how little information is conveyed is a choice each person makes. Some of the library staff interviewed had very strong boundaries for the information they wanted to share; if the question was outside their range of comfort, they would deflect through their answer. This did not happen often, and sometimes the information would be mentioned at another time when the discussion was not being recorded.

The formal interviews were all recorded, usually with two devices, a dedicated digital audio recorder and a mobile phone set to flight mode. Most interviews were around an hour in length. This length was determined by the information being provided as well as the concentration span of the person being interviewed. It was important to prepare carefully for the interviews (Crang & Cook, 2007; Seidman, 2013) and to be prepared to improvise as circumstances required, as not all variables could be planned for. Where the interviews were undertaken was important, as people needed to feel safe and comfortable, and be as free from interruption as possible. This describes the ideal; however, in conducting interviews the ideal rarely happened. Often the interviews took place in the public area of the library, as the chosen location of the person interviewed, and general background library sounds were audible but usually not disruptive. This was a quieter part of the library, but occasional voices could be heard. During the interviews it was possible to block out these background sounds, but it was helpful to be reminded of them when listening to the recordings while transcribing them. There were some interviews in library workrooms, as well as the tearoom, and while the interviews were conducted in quiet voices, occasionally another staff member would provide an answer to the questions as well. This proved very helpful and was covered in the permissions provided.

The interviews of community group members were usually undertaken in their organisation's building. One of these buildings, that of the environmental group, was quiet with little background noise. The interviews of people undertaking volunteer work for the sporting group were conducted in a much noisier location. While the high levels of background sound were not ideal, they increased the comfort of the people being interviewed, demonstrating the importance of being flexible as to location. The interview of the author took place in a library.

For the interviews, who was present and the time, date and location of each interview was noted. Where possible the interview location was photographed, as that provided useful information. Photographs were used to record information on computer screens if a person was demonstrating work, and to document other procedures that may be taking place during the interview. To protect confidentiality people were not photographed, other than hands holding books or newsletters or other collection items. Silence was important (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015) as it could provide thinking time for the person being interviewed and avoid rushing them from question to question.

Basic instructions were provided to each person interviewed so they understood how the information would be used, and that they could choose to not answer questions. This was done by providing the participant information sheet, and as well as allocating time to read it, and verbally highlighting key points. The instructions helped to enable consistency over time at the different sites, and to set the scene for the interviews, providing an opportunity to describe the recording devices as well. Written consent was obtained for all participants taking part in an interview prior to an interview being undertaken.

Some people were interviewed more than once, as over time their ideas and the information they are able to provide may change (Crang & Cook, 2007). This depended on a participant's willingness to be interviewed more than once, and upon their availability as they could be very busy, on leave, tired, sick, recovering from being sick or otherwise unavailable.

3.5.3 Documents

This section will explore the use of documents that can provide insight into the formal structures, policies and plans of an organisation. These can support information provided by interviews and from observation or provide a contrast. Documents can be public or have restricted access outside the organisation, or even a specific part of an organisation.

Documents created within the organisation studied are likely to contain useful data: 'documents make great data … they are literally everywhere in developed societies and can therefore tell us a lot about a broad range of phenomena' (Grant, 2019, p. 2). Grant (2019) defines documents as 'content or objects which include written, graphical or pictorial matter, or a combination of these types of content, in order to transmit or store information or meaning' (p. 11). In ethnographic research there is the 'need to value a wide range of things *other* than fieldwork … Library research and the analysis of archives, government documents, popular culture, mass media, web logs, statistical report, and so on are central [to this]' (Coleman, 2011, p. 204; original emphasis). These could include policy and strategy documents as well as

procedure manuals, position descriptions, social media, publicity information, the library system and other relevant collection databases. As '[w]riting establishes the stable relation between words and things necessary for bureaucracies effectively to implement regimes of control' (Hull, 2012, p. 256), analysis of documents can enable tracking of this control.

Documents can provide a contrast to, or support, what is observed. It is possible that 'written documents are one of the most valuable and time-saving forms of data collection' (Fetterman, 2010, p. 63), but this may not always be the situation. The documents 'are not simply instruments of bureaucratic organizations, but rather are constitutive of bureaucratic rules, ideologies, knowledge, practices, subjectivities, objects, outcomes, and even the organizations themselves' (Hull, 2012, p. 253). Collection items were part of this data gathering. Not all documents were able to be viewed; for example, there was an elusive staff structure that Kookaburra Libraries was never able to provide.

Kookaburra Council has many approved documents, plans and strategies. Most of the documents investigated had been through formal council approval processes. Some documents were for internal library use only. Key documents used as part of this research were:

- Kookaburra Council Community Strategic Plan, which provided top level information about the organisation [Kookaburra Council Community Strategic Plan KCCSP 20182028]
- Kookaburra Council Cultural Strategy and Kookaburra Council Multicultural Plan, which provided helpful background information [Kookaburra Council Cultural Strategy KCCP 20162019 Kookaburra Council Multicultural Plan KCML 20162019]
- Kookaburra Libraries Strategy, which connected with Kookaburra Council strategic documents and provided planning priorities for the library [Kookaburra Libraries Strategy KLS 20192023]
- Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan [Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan KLCP 20182021], which, while a short document, contains the crucial public information about the collecting priorities of Kookaburra Libraries
- Kookaburra Libraries Local Studies Collection Development Plan provided a more detailed plan for local studies collecting, but as a document sat under Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan [Kookaburra Libraries Local Studies Collection Development Plan KLLSCDP 20182022]
- Kookaburra Libraries Digitisation/Digital Preservation Strategy sits under Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan, with a focus on the topics shown in its title

[Kookaburra Libraries Digitisation/Digital Preservation Strategy KLDDPS 20192022]

- Kookaburra Libraries library system, as it was important to be able to search the library system to see how items were described in their catalogue records, and the subjects and dates of material that had been catalogued.
- Collection items, as it was important to be able to look at the recent content onsite and online (if digital or digitised) to learn more about it.

It was important to identify how the documents aligned with the information that was obtained in other ways. Was what they contained consistent with what was being seen and heard as part of the research? Or were they theoretical with little practical application? They were examined to see what they said about collecting recent and current concerns of the community, or, if these were not explicitly stated, whether it was possible to see an implicit account. They were examined in detail, and for high-level ideas of relevance as well.

3.5.4 Field notes

Writing regular and systematic field notes is vital in ethnographic research (Creswell, 2014; Emerson et al., 2011). An A5-sized field journal (comprising four separate notebooks) with approximately 250 pages in total of detailed notes was produced as well as fourteen small format notebooks (89mm by 140mm) that provided an additional 600 pages of notes during the study. The method of note-taking varied depending on what was the most effective and the least disruptive for each circumstance. Written and photographic field notes were used to record the experiences of the observation and interviews. Most notes were hand-written, supported by photography when that was not intrusive. A few notes were made by audio recording, mainly when practising using the audio recorder, and to try a different method of note-taking that did not involve looking at a blank page. A small camera rather than a mobile phone was used for the photography so that it was clear when photographs were being taken.

It was important to record these notes daily as recall of details and impressions may change over time (Crang & Cook, 2007). The short notes written during each day in the small format notebooks were typed up in more detail as soon as possible (Emerson et al., 2011) so that detail was preserved, and nuances of observations effectively recorded. Writing even brief notes at the time, or as soon after as possible – which then became much more detailed typed notes – helped to connect information over time, and to record some ongoing practices and questions. Written field notes included reflections on observation, interviews and other data which had additional details included when these were typed.

Photographs can provide important documentation for research, and are a crucial part of field notes, as 'pictures taken early in fieldwork can be revisited later … [and] may remind]the researcher] of what was initially strange' (Crang & Cook, 2007, location 1575). Photographs can also record information that was not noticed at the time, providing useful data (Fetterman, 2010). Photographs taken as part of this research focused on collections and locations, as that was a requirement of the ethics approval. The photographs show the library, collection items, computer screens and the occasional hand or part of an arm of a staff member. This proved to be very helpful documentation. The exterior of the library was photographed each day, as it helped as a reminder of seasonal changes, and as daily reminder of the focus of the research.

As well being used to record information during observations and interviews, written and photographic field notes were used to record processes, interactions and reactions. These recorded the experiences of the observation, interviews, other aspects of data collection and general reflections on being embedded in the site studied. Photographs were a useful way to record information from screens, particularly staff views of library systems. These were always done with permission. This 'immersion in others' world in order to grasp what they experience as meaningful and important' (Emerson et al., 2011 loc. 414) needs to be recorded as it will provide information for analysis, and needs to be recorded consistently and in sufficient detail to be meaningful (Crang & Cook, 2007). The regular photographs taken of Kookaburra Libraries assisted with this.

Spradley (2016) comments that '[n]o matter how unobtrusive, ethnographic research always pries into the lives of informants' (p. 22). The aim of this research was not to pry into personal lives. Personal information provided by library staff was not documented as part of observation unless it directly related to the research (for example, if it was about someone being sick or on holidays and not available to be interviewed). This information was noted so that there would be a reminder to follow up with that person when they were available.

3.6 Data analysis

This section will describe the data analysis approach used in the study. In ethnography, data analysis 'involves exploring deeply to see what is there that might not be obvious; standing back to see what patterns emerge; thinking and theorising to draw conclusions' (O'Reilly, 2009, pp. 13–14). The data needs to be analysed with a systematic method, 'testing one source of information against another' (Fetterman, 2010, location 1999) and involves 'summarising, sorting, translating and organising' (O'Reilly, 2009, p. 13). The analysis demonstrates the

viewpoints of the participants and explores their interconnections (Crang & Cook, 2007). It ‘is iterative, building on ideas throughout the study’ (Fetterman, 2010, location1988).

The information needs to be investigated using a systematic method, ‘testing one source of information against another’ (Fetterman, 2010 loc 1999), and involves ‘summarising, sorting, translating and organising’ (O’Reilly, 2009, p. 13). It was important to continue exploring the analysis, as ‘[t]he process of analysis is not a matter of developing a definitive account, but of trying to find a means to understand the inter-relations of multiple versions of reality’ (Crang & Cook, 2007, location 2140). Sorting through the data and structuring it in a consistent and methodical way helps to enable this.

Miles et al. state that ‘[e]thnographic methods tend towards the descriptive. The analysis task is to reach across multiple data sources and to condense them’ (2014, location 744–755). This descriptiveness provides a challenge for consistency and accountability so that the analysis is trustworthy. The collected evidence in the form of text, interviews and photographs must be processed. The method of processing the data forms part of the analysis, and any description of that analysis. The analysis is to ‘reconfigure this data, to look at it much more carefully and critically, and to perhaps de- and recontextualise different parts’ (Crang & Cook, 2007, location 1899) while Miles et al. suggest a sequence that includes coding, ‘sorting and sifting’ (2014, location 804). Braun and Clarke (2006) highlight the importance of using a structured approach working through thematic analysis. Part of the data analysis is ‘(1) data condensation, (2) data display, and (3) conclusion drawing/verification’ (Miles et al., 2014, location 804). Keeping the focus on the participants’ meanings through this analysis is vital (Creswell, 2014). This describes inductive and deductive data analysis as the themes are derived from the data, and the data is then rechecked to see if there is adequate evidence or if more research is required.

When analysis is undertaken with consistency and rigour, the results have the capacity to provide an effective analysis of a service. Any data analysis techniques used need to be able to manage detail, as there are transcripts from many hours of interviews, and field notes that have been written up from many days of observation, as well as many photographs and other documents. The quality of the data analysis for ethnography has a basis in the quality of the data recorded. Any alteration of the data, as well as being unethical, would reduce the effectiveness and rigour of the data analysis. It is important to allow adequate time for data analysis, as estimates suggest that three to five times as much time will be required to analyse the data as it took to collect it (Miles et al., 2014, location 2327), although this would appear a conservative estimate based on the time that was required for this research.

It was important to work 'systematically through the entire data set, giving full and equal attention to each data item, and identify interesting aspects in the data items that may form the basis of repeated patterns (themes) across the data set' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 89). The data from interviews, observation, and documents was analysed separately as the themes may vary by format of data; however, data was treated consistently across the different data types.

3.6.1 Analysing data from interviews and field notes

The interview data and the field journal data (which included notes on the observations alongside other reflections and insights) were analysed using the thematic analysis approach of Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis was adopted as the suitable analysis method given its strength in identifying patterns or themes of meaning within the data that are important to the description of the phenomenon. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe a five-step analysis approach:

1. Familiarising yourself with your data,
2. Generating initial codes,
3. Searching for themes,
4. Reviewing themes,
5. Defining and naming themes (p. 87).

Interview recordings were fully transcribed, and the transcriptions were analysed. All recorded interviews were transcribed using automated transcription which was then text-corrected by the researcher. Listening to the recorded interviews this way – in short sections while transcribing – helped provide some of the information for analysis and highlighted the importance of trying to capture the emotion of the people being interviewed as that would not always be clear from the transcribed words alone. This aided the process of familiarisation with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is important to use complete transcriptions so that all the data can be analysed and the temptation of 'quote-hopping' (Crang & Cook, 2007, location 1272), or selecting quotes that support a desired outcome, is reduced.

Field notes were written while observing and listening at Kookaburra Libraries. Field notes, when written up in detail, were subjected to 'close reading, open coding, and writing memos that formulate and clarify the ideas' (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 173). They were explored in detail as understanding should have developed over the time they were being written, and they contained useful detail.

The interviews and field notes were coded to NVivo. There was a preliminary round of coding of interviews and field notes that was mainly used as a method of learning how NVivo worked, and to help think about how to structure the data. This used a small number of codes. This led to a second coding of interviews and field notes on NVivo with dozens of codes used. NVivo is used extensively in library- and information-related analysis, including in the fields of heritage and agriculture (Creswell, 2014); librarians and advocacy (Bowen & De Master, 2014); makerspaces in libraries (Hicks, 2016; Liang et al., 2019); and public libraries (Moorefield-Lang, 2015; Siklander, 2017).

Separate data sets were used on NVivo for library staff and community group volunteers, including the author, as, even prior to coding, fundamental differences in approach were clear and the researcher did not want to risk conflating these different perspectives. The second set of coding after the preliminary coding involved exploring what themes were present and included codes for library processes and descriptions. This second coding helped the themes become apparent as the codes highlighted broader sets or patterns of information. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that a 'theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set' (p. 82; original emphasis). The themes were noted as part of the exploration of the codes, seeing what codes connected to demonstrate a particular theme.

A third round of coding of interviews was undertaken with a greater focus on analysis and on the themes present in the data, with the relevant codes helping the identify the themes. This meant that the data was better able to tell the story, which was not hidden by being bundled with too many other concepts. This time around 40 codes were used to focus on the relevant data rather than all the data collected. This third coding had all data as top-level subjects or codes rather than as layered or potentially hierarchical codes. The hierarchies in the previous (second) coding may have implied some connections were stronger than they were. It may also have implied there were hierarchies when this was not the intent.

In the third coding, to ensure a hierarchy was not accidentally used, colours were added to the codes. This is possible in NVivo so that the codes can be sorted by colour to visually bring codes connected to the same themes together. This aided in clustering codes as themes, without adding a hierarchy.

This third coding improved the visibility of key themes that had been slightly buried by earlier coding. It involved the same data but was better analysed and exposed. Themes were rechecked against the total dataset of interviews, observation and documents to make sure that information was not missed, obscured, otherwise forgotten or incorrectly interpreted. This was

recorded in a preliminary document looking at the themes that explored the themes then checked them back against the data. The themes were checked back against the interviews and the field notes to make sure that the data was being interpreted and used in a consistent manner. Repeat coding was labour-intensive but assisted in familiarisation with the data, generating codes, searching for themes and reviewing themes, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). Table2 below illustrates the three rounds of coding undertaken by the researcher.

Table 2. Coding process showing or describing some extracts from NVivo

Coding round	Example of coding	Analytical approaches
1	Open coding This used broad topics	This was preliminary coding to explore the data and the method of coding, and of learning to use NVivo. This has a small number of codes that were too general.
2	Local studies • Collection gaps identified by staff • Digital content which could be collected • Local studies – collection strategy • Local studies – partnerships • Local studies activation • Local studies content – old • Local studies content – old – condition • Local studies content – old – with new access • Local studies content – recent • Local studies content – recent – potential collecting • Local studies content – recent – proactive collecting	This started with exploring themes for library practices, then the themes of the data were explored. This may have implied hierarchical connections where they did not exist. It produced layered information that was complex and heavily interlinked. It produced large numbers of codes (dozens), not all were relevant to the topic of the research.
3	• Recent content • Saying no • Significance • Staff connections • Staff creating content • Staff personal interest • Staff seeking new content • Storage	The approach of this was non-hierarchical to improve visibility of key themes and to not imply hierarchical connections where they did not exist. There were less codes, around forty, and these were more targeted.

3.6.2 Analysing data from photographs

Photographs were taken as part of observation, or during interviews, to document work practices being undertaken, collection items or library spaces. Visual content analysis (Budge, 2017; Rose, 2014) part of visual research methods (VRM) (Rose, 2014) was used to analyse the photographs. This enabled inclusion of data from photographs in the thematic analysis. The photographs were of collection items, shelving, computer screens, spaces in the libraries etc. They were not photographs of people, other than an occasional hand holding a book while it was being catalogued, or similarly non-intrusive photographs. Many of the photographs documented general information or background information about the research location and not information of specific relevance to the research. They were taken to document the experience of observation but did not always contain information relevant to the research. This left a subset of photographs to be explored in detail.

For visual content analysis, the photographs were printed in colour on A3 sheets of paper with massed photographs on each page. As with the other data, it was examined to see what they showed about the practices of public libraries regarding acquisition, creation, and curation of recent content for local studies collections. The photographs were individually coded to explore the themes they recorded. Having them printed out together assisted in identifying photographs of relevance as well as connecting themes. Some of the photographs were taken because they recorded an observation location, and over time this may show little or significant changes. At the time of taking the photographs it was not possible to always know their value; this was true of written observations as well. Being able to see many photographs at the same time helped identify both similarities and differences. Photographs could be looked at individually if greater detail was required. The themes were checked back against the coding for interviews and field notes to make sure that the data was being interpreted in a consistent manner. The photographs are not reproduced in this research as it is possible they would allow identification of the research site.

3.6.3 Analysing documents

The documents from Kookaburra Libraries provided very helpful information about the organisation and its stated priorities. Document analysis was done in stages with some material analysed prior to site visits, as some of the documents were used to aid the selection of the site. Document analysis can assist in asking questions in a logical order for participants when conducting interviews. The documents analysed included websites, social media, and library and council documents of relevance. The timing for some analysis depended on the policy of

Kookaburra Libraries on accessing documents that were not online. The online documents could be accessed at any time. The effectiveness of analysing data from documents depends on what documents are available – for example, how detailed written policies are and when they were updated.

Online documents were printed, or print copies were used for analysis. The documents were coded using Post-it notes to note the themes, as this was the most effective method to mark different themes within one section. The themes were checked back against the interviews, the field notes and the photographs to make sure that the data was being interpreted in a consistent manner.

The library system was addressed differently. The item records on the library system were searched for supporting data to information in interviews, from field notes and photographs. They were searched for other views of the information provided too. It was not possible to undertake a mass data analysis of the library system, nor was that the intent of this research. There were limits on what was possible with the library system; for example, searching by date or refining a search by date was not always possible because of system constraints. Photographs of the library system taken during interviews or observation were considered here as well. Collection items were explored in a similar way, either using the original (if analogue) or online (if digital).

3.6.4 Thinking critically about data analysis

Fetterman (2010) describes the skills of critical thinking and common sense as being vital for analysis of ethnographic material. There are 'unlikely to be singular accounts of singular cultures but multiple competing versions' (Crang & Cook, 2007, location 2133) that need to be addressed, and as such the 'process of analysis is not a matter of developing a definitive account, but of trying to find a means to understand the inter-relation of multiple versions of reality' (Crang & Cook, 2007, location 2140).

It was important, therefore, to bring the analysis of each set of data together to develop the overall findings and to test the data, 'trying to fit pieces of data into the bigger puzzle' (Fetterman, 2010, p. 94). Each section of data contributed useful information to the findings. Some of this was in the form of triangulation (Baxter & Eyles, 1997; Fetterman, 2010; Fusch & Ness, 2015) so that information could be verified. At other times, different information was available through the distinct kinds of data collected – for example, policy documents may describe some actions not yet implemented. Through all the exploration of the data the focus was on what information it provided to investigate the research questions in a credible,

dependable, confirmable and transferable way (Houghton et al., 2013). How did this information help discover the practices of public libraries regarding acquisition, creation and curation of recent content for local studies collections? This required thinking and analysis about how these practices might need to shift so that as well as recording the historical past, that recent and current concerns of the community are appropriately collected.

The analysis began during data collection (Creswell, 2014) as this helped to determine data saturation. Creswell (2014) highlights the necessity of all data analysis requiring continual checking in with the data as it is organised, read, coded, used for description and themes, then interpreted for results. Each step must be verified by the data, supported by 'a rich thick description to convey to the findings' (Creswell, 2014, p. 225).

While sorting the data, through coding, it was important to check for anomalies through the different data sets and over time. These could be as a result of coding or other errors, and would need to be checked (Crang & Cook, 2007). It was important to keep returning to the primary materials, the observations, field notes, transcriptions, recordings of interviews, photographs and the documents. This served as a vital reminder of what the data is, and 'the contexts in which these were constructed as your research progressed and what your thoughts were on this at various times' (Crang & Cook, 2007, location 1913).

During the data analysis it was also important to check with participants, to make sure that their intended meaning had been understood (Crang & Cook, 2007). Short reports were written bringing together the different formats of the research (Fetterman, 2010, location 2503). These were in a series of separate notebooks that assisted with thinking about the codes and the themes. They allowed the researcher to check back each time the research was undertaken at Kookaburra Libraries. This use of notes from previous visits and data analysis between visits to determine new questions to ask ensured that the researcher really understood what the staff were saying. Some of this – for example, the collection processes by format – was documented in a spreadsheet for consistency. This spreadsheet was checked and rechecked with Kookaburra Libraries staff for accuracy.

3.7 Maintaining the quality of the research

Trustworthiness in research is an important consideration when providing evidence of a study's rigour. Research 'should be designed, reviewed and undertaken to ensure integrity and quality' (Crang & Cook, 2007, location 471). Lincoln and Guba (1985) have a framework for trustworthiness of research that requires:

- Credibility

- Transferability
- Dependability
- Confirmability (p. 328).

Credibility, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) is about confidence in the truth of the findings and can be demonstrated by 'prolonged engagement … persistent observation … triangulation' and several other measures (p. 328). This can be demonstrated for the present research by the regular visits to the site over time, enabling an accumulation of information and research information. This time at Kookaburra Libraries included persistent observation, and when combined with other information this enabled triangulation of the data. The information from the community groups also contributed to this prolonged engagement and triangulation of information.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe transferability as being about showing that the findings have applicability in other contexts. Low transferability is a criticism often levelled against single-site studies (Simons, 2009). While this research focused on one public library in Australia, the findings of the work present detailed and contextualised illustrations of local studies practice that are potentially applicable to other public libraries in Australia. It is up to those engaging with the findings of this study to determine 'whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). The thickness of the description provided via the use of ethnography contributes to the transferability of the overall research.

Dependability is another way of stating that the research is consistent and that could be repeated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). From the detailed information on the research design and process of data collection an analysis provided in this chapter, it would be possible to replicate the research either in the same location, or in another library exploring the same questions.

Confirmability is an important part of the framework for trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe confirmability as the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not by researcher bias, motivation or interest. The importance of researcher as instrument in ethnography was discussed earlier in this chapter. To ensure the findings of this study were founded upon the understandings and experiences of the participants, the researcher actively sought to engage in intentional self-awareness and kept field notes to record personal experiences as a means of recognising the influence of their personal biases and feelings on the study (Lipson, 1991).

3.8 Ethics approval

Ethical clearance for this study was applied for and obtained from the University of Southern Queensland (approval no: H18REA053, 2018). This ethics approval was contingent on gaining informed consent from participants and maintaining confidentiality of records. Approval for site entry and study commencement was received from the Library manager. The *Information* and *Informed Consent* forms for participants taking part in the interviews and observations, (see Appendices B–F, I) were approved by University of Southern Queensland. Copyright and other legal practices have been complied with as have protocols for interviews, observation, photographs and recording.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the methods most suited to investigating the question of how collecting practices may create bias in local studies collections. It began by exploring the research paradigm and outlining why ethnography was a suitable approach to understanding these issues. It further outlined how data collection, collation and analysis was conducted to emphasise quality and ethical considerations.

CHAPTER 4: KOOKABURRA COUNCIL AND KOOKABURRA LIBRARIES

4.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the site for the ethnographic study: Kookaburra Libraries. It provides an overview of the Kookaburra area, including the people who call Kookaburra home, and of the community they live in. It then provides information about Kookaburra Council and Kookaburra Libraries, the staff, the local studies collection, and the services that Kookaburra Libraries deliver to their community. It further describes community volunteers who are creating their own records of information about their part of the Kookaburra area.

4.2 Kookaburra community

This section introduces the Kookaburra community, including demographic information and a brief community profile. This will help position the library services described in later sections of this chapter.

Over 120,000[5] people call Kookaburra home, including the local Aboriginal people who are the Traditional Custodians of this area having a continued connection to the land and water of Kookaburra. Kookaburra has a slightly higher percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people than the national average. The median age of the whole Kookaburra community is slightly younger than for Australia as a whole, with a much higher percentage of people in their twenties; however, there is a significant aged population, which is much higher than the national average. There are a higher percentage of people born in Australia and with English as their first language than for the rest of Australia, but there still is a culturally and linguistically diverse community and has been for decades. The largest percentages of people who are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are older, having moved to the Kookaburra area decades ago. There are smaller numbers of recent migrants and refugees.

Average education levels are similar to the rest of Australia; however, there is a higher percentage of people in professional occupations than for the rest of Australia and this connects to the health and education sectors being significant local employers. Personal and family incomes are above the national average. The unemployment figures are slightly higher than for

[5] Some of the information in this section is obtained from public data, including statistics. The statistics about the council and libraries must be imprecise to enable anonymity for these sites. Other information is from council and library documents and cannot be cited for reasons of organisational anonymity.

the rest of Australia, and there is a higher percentage of people working part time. For families, there are higher percentages of single parent families and couples without children, as well as other family types. Couples with children form a noticeably lower percentage of the population than for Australia as a whole. There are higher percentages of people with mental health conditions, arthritis and asthma than for the rest of Australia.

Many of the homes are separate houses with a comparable ratio to national data with a higher rate of occupied dwellings. There are higher percentages of townhouses and row or terrace houses than nationally, with similar percentages of apartments to national figures. It is a time of change in this community, as in some areas apartment blocks are replacing industrial sites or single-family homes. Three-bedroom dwellings are the most numerous, followed by two bedrooms, then four bedrooms. For the national data three bedrooms dwellings are also the most numerous, followed by four bedrooms, then two bedrooms. Kookaburra has more single or lone person households than the national average.

Kookaburra is a place that people are proud to call home, with shared experiences of the good times as well as the tough times. There is not complete agreement around the changes that are happening in the area, as some people want Kookaburra to stay as it was during the last few decades of the twentieth century. This was prior to some key industries moving out of the area. These changes, both recent and older, have brought new people to the Kookaburra area to be part of this vibrant, bustling community and to contribute their stories to the stories that are already in place. There can be a strong sense of community for people whose families have lived in the area for centuries (Aboriginal people), decades (descendants of colonists plus more recent arrivals to the area) or more recently (people who have chosen to move to Kookaburra recently and call it home). The population of Kookaburra continues to grow. In the community the greenspaces include bushland as well as local parks, and sports facilities. Water-based recreation is very important in this area.

The Kookaburra area attracted the attention of colonists because of its local resources, including the potential for exploiting the environment, with later interest in the possibility of agriculture. Agriculture continues in the Kookaburra area, with livestock-related production being particularly significant. There is some plant-based agriculture and associated industries, but these contribute less to the local economy than livestock-related production.

When the colonists were consolidating their position, developing civic life and the associated buildings became important, with churches and schools among the structures built. The quality of the buildings has varied over time, with some early ones built quickly and

cheaply and not lasting for many years, while others were built to last for decades, and possibly centuries.

Manufacturing has been and continues to be of consequence to this area. While it is less important than it used to be, it still contributes significantly to the local economy. The Kookaburra area continues to host some of the same industries that have served and employed people in the area for decades. There have been cycles of change in the local industries with factories opening, expanding and later closing, sometimes after being bought out by a competitor, or because of changes in the global economy. The ebbs and flows of the economy of Kookaburra reflect those of Australia as a whole. There are new and smaller scale businesses and industries moving into the area. Kookaburra is a key transportation hub as the location aids the movement of goods and the provision of services. This transportation makes a significant contribution to the local economy.

Healthcare and education are key local employers, Both have increased in significance over the last decade as the area has grown. These sectors employ significantly more people (both residents of Kookaburra and of surrounding areas) than manufacturing and agriculture. The retail trade also is a key employment sector.

Cultural life is important, with local festivals and other kinds of cultural and making events being valued in this area. There are a range of cultural facilities, with museums and galleries as well as public libraries. The museums and galleries collect and display recent as well as older material about the Kookaburra area.

The Kookaburra community has been impacted by natural disasters, sometimes with repercussions lasting many years. Like many other parts of Australia, it was impacted by drought in 2018, 2019 and early 2020, bushfires in late 2019 and early 2020 (by both local fires and by smoke from fires outside the area), the global COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 and floods in 2022.

4.3 Kookaburra Council

This section will provide information about Kookaburra Council, including its finances and priorities for the community. Kookaburra Council is one of 537 councils in Australia (Australian Local Government Association, 2022). Like many councils, it is the result of the amalgamation of smaller councils into a larger one.

Social justice principles form part of the strategic planning for the council. In 2022/2023 Kookaburra Council had a budget of over $300 million. This included funding to continue building their services. Kookaburra Council provides a wide range of infrastructure and

services including parks, waste management, tourism, environmental management, transport, libraries and other civic infrastructure.

A high-level document for the council is the *Kookaburra Council Community Strategic Plan* [Kookaburra Council Community Strategic Plan KCCSP 20182028]. Social justice principles, including equity and access, are among the priorities of this plan. The plan discusses council priorities, many dependent on partnerships with government agencies as well as local groups and businesses. This helps to demonstrate connections between the community and the council. The importance of culture and heritage is documented in this plan, as well as in the separate *Kookaburra Council Heritage Plan* [Kookaburra Council Heritage Plan KCHP20202030]. The priorities for the council were determined after extensive community consultation. Kookaburra Libraries are included in the *Kookaburra Council Cultural Strategy* and in other formal council documents. Some of these are mentions rather than detailed inclusions, but they still position the library as a valued part of council services for and with the community.

The *Kookaburra Council Heritage Plan* [Kookaburra Council Heritage Plan KCHP20202030] describes the importance of improving community knowledge of the history of the area, including of locations and objects. This aligns with other council plans and policies and is of relevance to the library. The *Kookaburra Council Multicultural Plan* [Kookaburra Council Multicultural Plan KCML 20162019] describes the diversity of the Kookaburra area, including across different age groups. The council is seen as having a role working with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, the larger as well as the smaller communities. This can align well with the library priorities of providing collections, services and programs.

This section has provided some data about Kookaburra Council. This helps place the council services in context, including the library as one of the services available to the community.

4.4 Kookaburra Libraries

This section provides information about Kookaburra Libraries, including their statistics and the range of services they provide. Kookaburra Libraries, established in the late 1940s, is a network of several branch libraries with an operating expenditure of over $11 million and over seventy staff. Together, Kookaburra Libraries receive over 600,000 visits per year and

have a total circulation of over one million loans per year.[6] The branch libraries vary in size from very small to moderate. Some of the library buildings have been recently renovated but none of the libraries are large or very large buildings.

The library staff receive over 80,000 inquiries annually and provide programs for more than 45,000 people. Services and programs for children include story times, making events and other activities. For adults there are reading groups, craft groups and other making activities, and technology training, as well as local studies programs and displays. There is extensive online access to library collections, services and programs. The library services continue to develop and change to support the strategic priorities of the council, and through this to serve their community. The key strategies and plans shaping and guiding local studies at Kookaburra Libraries are outlined in the following section.

4.4.1 Strategies and plans for local studies at Kookaburra Libraries

There are four strategies and plans that are relevant to local studies collections and services at Kookaburra Libraries. Many of these documents are part of the formal planning of Kookaburra Council. Kookaburra Libraries have the *Kookaburra Libraries Strategy* [Kookaburra Libraries Strategy KLS 20192023] and three collection related documents, the *Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan* [Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan KLCP 20182021], the *Kookaburra Libraries Digitisation/Digital Preservation Strategy* [Kookaburra Libraries Digitisation/Digital Preservation Strategy KLDDPS 20192022] and *Kookaburra Libraries History and Heritage Collection Development Plan* [Kookaburra Libraries History and Heritage Collection Development Plan KLHHCDP 20182022]. Each provides different levels of detail about the strategy and plans for the local studies collection. A brief overview is provided in Table 3.

[6] These statistics are from 2019, the year of researching Kookaburra Libraries. With library closures during 2020 and 2021 for the COVID-19 pandemic, more recent annual figures for library use are lower.

Table 3. Library plans and strategy

Name of document	Availability	Date	Purpose
Kookaburra Libraries Strategy	Public	2019–2029	Describes the strategy for the entire library service
Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan	Public	2018–2022	Describes the collection principles and priorities for the library collection as a whole
Kookaburra Libraries Digitisation/Digital Preservation Strategy	Staff only	2019–2022	Provides digitisation priorities and challenges for the local studies collection
Kookaburra Libraries History and Heritage Collection Development Plan	Staff only	2018–2022	Details collection plan for local studies collection, with some strategy elements included. This sits under the *Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan*

4.4.2 Local studies at Kookaburra Libraries

This section provides information about the local studies collections and services at Kookaburra Libraries. The local studies collection and services are for all Kookaburra Libraries, covering the entire local government area. The library also collects some items from the surrounding biogeographic area if the information is relevant to the Kookaburra area. At one of the branch libraries there is an area for the local studies collection, and this is the branch library where all local studies staff are based, although the five local studies staff work at other branch libraries in this system as well. The local studies area has a service desk, collection items for public access, tables for researchers to work at, lounge seats, computers, microfilm readers and a multifunction device for scanning, copying and printing. Additional copies of some local studies titles are part of the lending collection. In addition to the local studies area where services and a collection are provided for the community, there is a stack area where more fragile items as well as items with lower use are stored.

The current focus for the local studies staff is on cataloguing items (digital and analogue) so that people can undertake their own research, and digitisation for access as well as preservation of the original photographs and other items. Mediated access to the collection is often required because it is a complex collection and not all items are catalogued or available for browsing. There is no designated local studies budget. Funds for buying collection items, equipment or preservation material come from the general library budget as needed.

The local studies area has a small selection of new local studies books on display for easy browsing and to create an awareness of the range of recently published content being added to the collection. This display changes depending on the number of new items added to the

collection. Not all new local studies items are displayed this way. The local studies collection is also visible through displays in the libraries to help inform the community about the collection as well as the information contained in it. The changing displays on the plasma screens in the library include information about the local studies collections and services as part of the general library information they convey. Information about local studies is included in email newsletter updates for the community as well as being provided on the library website.

The local studies staff provide programs to inform people about the collection and the information contained in it. As part of this there are semi-regular local studies programs to help people learn how to research using the collection. There are also irregular local studies talks often linked to broader events such as history and heritage weeks, as outreach to community groups, or connected to displays in the library to help people find out more about the stories behind them. Local studies staff work with colleagues in other teams to present library wide events and programs to include local studies more broadly in the lives of the community.

Other branch libraries may have copies of relevant local studies print publications (books) available as reference titles, or for loan. Some branch libraries may have a small number of items in other formats on display. These items on display will be about the area around each of the branch libraries. Digitised and digital items are available for viewing online; however, there is still much of the collection that is neither digital nor has been digitised.

4.4.3.1 The local studies collection

Items for the local studies collection in Kookaburra Libraries includes books, archives, maps and plans, newspapers, newsletters and magazines, microfilm, council records, audio-visual items including oral history recordings, photographs, finding aids and transcripts and objects. These can be in analogue or digital formats. Some items may be in more than one format; for example, a photograph may be in the collection and a digitised copy of the same photograph may also be in the collection.

The recent content can include new council publications or reports that Kookaburra Council has commissioned, both in print and digital format, recently published books, new volumes of newsletters or recent archives from community organisations, and items that have been created for the collection, such as photographs taken by staff.

4.4.3.2 Acquiring new items for the local studies collection at Kookaburra Libraries

The local studies items that are being added to the collection are often older items. There is a steady, although relatively small, stream of recent items coming to the library, mostly

through donations, although there are some purchases and content created by staff as well. The recent items, while smaller in number compared to the older items being added to the collection, still forms a noticeable part of the collection.

Local studies collecting involves using many strategies simultaneously to discover new items that can be potentially added to the collection. Word of mouth is one way in which potential new local studies items can be discovered by library staff to add to the collection. This may be by listening to library clients talk about a book they are writing or have heard about, or by someone telephoning, emailing or visiting the library to discuss a possible donation. It also might be something the library staff hear or see as part of networks they participate in or manage.

There are different methods for local studies items to be added to the collection. New items for the local studies collection are purchased, donated or created. The methods may vary by format – for example, a book donated by the author may have additional copies purchased so that there are copies that can be borrowed. The items may be purchased from a book supplier who specialises in providing titles to libraries, from a local bookshop, a publisher or direct from an author.

Kookaburra Libraries receives a large number of unsolicited donations from individuals, and organisations. Larger donations tend to be from organisations, and may include their archives, as well as reports or publications such as newsletters. Organisations may be regular donors to the library of their newsletters, some of which come in digital forms instead of on paper.

Kookaburra Council is a key contributor to the local studies collection as a donor with business papers, minutes and other council documents from specific departments being included in the collection. Kookaburra Libraries and their council create their own content. This creation of content is usually in the form of digital photographs – for example, of local events or changing buildings or streetscapes.

4.4.3.3 Cataloguing local studies items at Kookaburra Libraries

At Kookaburra Libraries, books that are purchased or donated as new books are catalogued and processed in a similar timeframe to other new books. The catalogue record will be taken from Libraries Australia if it is available; otherwise, the item will be catalogued by the library staff. Books that are donated and are not new are stored in an area with other local studies books waiting to be catalogued, and their cataloguing is worked at in a systematic way.

Other paper-based local studies items are more likely to be treated as archival material for cataloguing. This means they are likely to be catalogued and described as a collection of associated items, rather than individually like a book. As well as having a catalogue record, archives may have a finding aid; this provides a listing of some of the contents and the archives box they will be in. For some archives this finding aid may be viewable as an attachment to the catalogue record. Maps and photographs, including digital or digitised ones, are sometimes catalogued individually and sometimes as a set or group.

4.4.3.4 Processing new items for the local studies collection at Kookaburra Libraries

Local studies items are processed to maximise their preservation and minimise permanent marks on the books and other items. For books, acid-free labels are used underneath other labels (such as barcodes) that may have acid in their adhesive. Books are not covered so that they are not damaged by adhesives. Books may be stored in acid-free boxes with title, call number and other details on the outside of the box.

Archives and other non-book items may be placed in acid-free archive boxes, or for maps and photographs encapsulated in clear, acid-free sleeves or other enclosures. Maps may be stored in map cabinets with no encapsulation or stored rolled as sets of maps while waiting for cataloguing. Some items within an archive may have additional preservation undertaken, including but not limited to encapsulation in an archival clear sleeve as well as being stored in an archive box with other components of the archive. If some of the items in the archive have been digitised or are digital there will also be a link to these if they have been added to the library system.

Books and archives that have a digital component, such as an accompanying DVD or USB, will have the digital content shifted onto a hard drive so that it will be accessible into the future when digital preservation can be applied. New digital content is stored on hard drives until it can be catalogued and added to the library system. This has a similar cataloguing approach to analogue archives. There are back up copies that continue to be stored on hard drives as at the time of research there was yet to be systematic digital preservation applied to digital content. Digital content – for example, photographs – usually has both preservation (TIFF) and access (JPG) copies, stored separately. At present there is little or no digital preservation being undertaken on digital or digitised content.

4.4.4 Staff

This section provides the overall library staffing profile with a focus on those who are associated with the local studies collections and services and who are participants in this research. More detail on individual participants will be provided in later sections; this section is focused in understanding how the staff as a whole function.

Public library staff make decisions about what is included in local studies collections, they provide access to these collection for the community through the local studies items being catalogued, and through displays, talks or exhibitions. The staff help researchers find what they are looking for, as well as researching information for displays and queries that come in through email, telephone calls and face to face enquiries. The local studies staff are crucial for connecting the collection to the community as it is a complex collection to discover, and not all of it is catalogued.

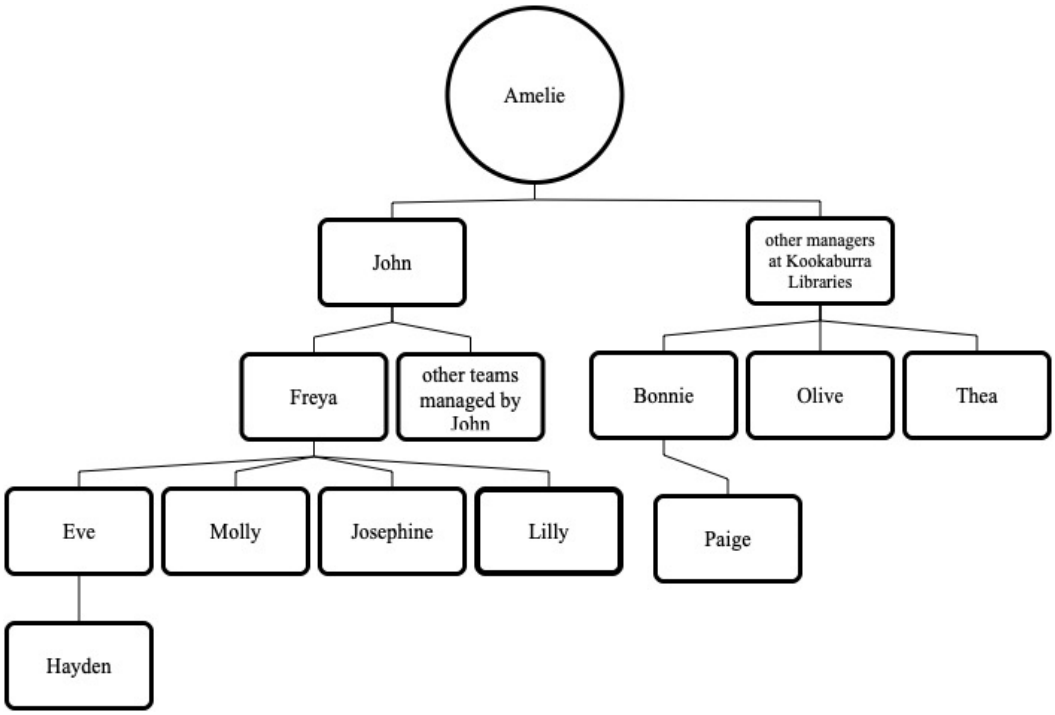

Figure 1. Organisational chart for staff interviewed at Kookaburra Libraries.

Figure 1 provides an indicative staff structure. It includes one volunteer, Hayden, whose work is directed by Eve. While it shows that all local studies staff report to Freya, there are times, such as some projects, that there will be discussions directly with John. At other times they will be working with staff in other teams managed by John, or across the library. Those relationships and connections were not part of this research.

Some staff in other sections of the library are shown on the staff structure as information about their work formed part of this research. Staff in other sections of the library with

responsibilities in local studies, while not being in the local studies branch, can be important to how it operates. They can have influential roles for the strategy of how local studies fits within the library services, as well as for changes across Kookaburra Libraries that have an impact on service delivery for local studies. There are other staff throughout the library whose work is key to local studies, while having different reporting hierarchies. Two other staff, Bonnie and Paige, provide additional cataloguing or accessioning work, routinely adding new items to the local studies collection. Staff in the branches of Kookaburra Libraries, as well as providing preliminary assistance for local studies, can hear about potential new local studies items from talking with patrons or by seeing new resources in the local area.

In the last few years there has been an increase in the number of local studies staff, and this has helped with the very large workload. While it may seem the staffing numbers are generous, with five dedicated local studies staff, this library could have even more local studies staff to serve the needs of the community. It is crucial that there is high-level organisation and strategic support for local studies from Amelie and John. The changes that the library has experienced over the last few years have been key in the positive perception of local studies both within the library and across council.

The local studies staff is a small team within a larger team, within a yet-larger team of all the staff at the library, which provides an image of circles within circles. The local studies team work closely together. Like other Kookaburra Libraries staff, they are busy serving on public service points assisting clients, assessing donations, cataloguing, digitising, providing programs, working on displays, and planning strategy. Also like the other library staff, the local studies staff work on projects across the library. They work throughout the library as they are regularly rostered to other branches and can be redeployed to the other branches of Kookaburra Libraries when staff are sick or on leave.

Each day there are daily site-specific standing staff meetings where all the staff in the building at the time come together. There is a list of points for these daily meetings and these are the same each day so that people know, for example, what events are on, who their contacts are, and any technological or other issues they need to be aware of. Staff can ask questions as well. This is a simple and effective method of connecting all the staff who are on site each day. The local studies staff are involved in these meetings, with Freya often being the team leader running them. There may be a brief local studies specific meeting following this as well.

4.5 Participants

All participants in the study were library staff working in the local studies collection or volunteers working in community organisations with connections to the Kookaburra Libraries local studies collection. It is important to provide some background about the participants as their experiences, and the information and insights they provided, were crucial to this research. Their information shaped the pathways investigated. The library staff were the primary group researched. Interactions with them were important because they are the people who manage the local studies collection and who choose the direction that the collection takes. These are the people who decide what information about the Kookaburra community will be available for future research. The volunteers were an important secondary group because of their interactions with the Kookaburra Libraries staff, but also because of the local collections they manage.

4.5.1 Library staff

Three groups of library staff participated in this study: (i) management staff; (ii) local studies staff; and (iii) staff in other parts of the library. Details of these participants are summarised in Appendix A.

4.5.1.1 Management staff

The management staff at Kookaburra Libraries have particular responsibilities, priorities and focus in relation to local studies collections and services. Their involvement is crucial as they are influential in the organisation and play a key role in setting the agenda for library services.

Amelie, the library manager, is responsible for the library services in addition to some other council services. She plays an important role as a strategic advocate for local studies within Kookaburra Council. Through the *Kookaburra Libraries Strategy* [Kookaburra Libraries Strategy KLS 20192029], for which that Amelie was responsible, there is a key, public and continuing role for the local studies collection. There is also a different approach, that of encouraging new research, which has the potential to deliver a wider view of the community through the items that have been collected. Partnerships to create new local studies content are also part of *Kookaburra Libraries Strategy.* These two aspects help demonstrate the important strategic role Amelie plays in the library, as they have the potential to deliver more diverse contemporary local studies items.

In her first interview, Amelie said she was ‘absolutely blown away with the collection that existed’ when she came to work at Kookaburra Libraries. Amelie’s recognition of the scope and value of the local studies collection influenced her strategy for positioning local studies within the library service, developing and caring for the collection, and nurturing partnerships to help increase the reach of the collection and other services. Amelie’s strategic approach to building on the potential of the local studies library is demonstrated by a restructure she undertook in which vacant positions from other parts of the library service were redeployed to local studies. This change in the staffing profile enabled local studies to transition from a small and struggling branch to one that is active in its outreach and fosters a connection between the community and the stories of the Kookaburra area.

John reports to Amelie and is the manager for several teams, including the local studies team. He is also a relatively recent arrival at Kookaburra Libraries. John is a catalyst; he works to connect the local studies staff to others in the group he manages so that local studies can broaden its impact and more easily connect to other services the libraries provide. John is strategic in his approach to connecting the local studies team with the other teams he works with, taking time to develop relationships with the staff, seeking to dissolve silos, and helping staff think in new ways about the impact local studies (and other library services) can have for the community. The aim of this is to help increase the reach of local studies through other areas of the library, such as children’s services and other public programmes.

With the other senior staff in the library, including Amelie, John is documenting and creating the strategy for the library. John worked with the local studies staff on the *Kookaburra Libraries Local Studies Collection Development Plan* [Kookaburra Libraries Local Studies Collection Development Plan KLLSCDP 20182022]. In talking about this plan, John highlighted the practical purpose of ‘looking at what we want to continue collecting, what we don’t want to continue collecting, and the collections that we’ve got’. This builds on John’s tactics of ‘looking at each of the teams trying to understand what their strengths are, what their weaknesses were, the opportunities for collaboration’. John is very busy with all the sections that he works with within the library, but also in building connections to other parts of Kookaburra Council and the community.

4.5.1.2 Local studies staff

This section will provide information about the local studies staff at Kookaburra Libraries, their work and experience. It will describe skills, perspectives and strengths they bring to their roles.

Freya, whose position title is 'local studies librarian', leads the local studies branch and reports to John. She is a long-time staff member at Kookaburra Libraries and has held a variety of roles across the library system. Her varied experience across the system informs her approach to local studies. Freya has both a broad and deep approach to collecting. Freya is a keen photographer; some of her photographs have been added to the local studies collection, and there are many more waiting to be added. Freya's collection knowledge is excellent. She has a strong focus on increasing collection access:

> [M]y main aim my whole career has been about making things accessible … it doesn't matter what sort of material it is … nothing's a secret, everything should be available.

Freya sees local studies as central for the community, as part of the core rather than on the periphery of people's lives:

> I always like to talk about local history as how we affected the world not how the world affected us, so when I'm talking to the students about for example our soldiers went away and did these things, it wasn't that the war came and took them away and so, I usually try and talk about history from that local perspective.

Freya values being able to connect people to the stories of the area through talking about the collection, as well as through ensuring that items are catalogued and searchable.

Eve, the outreach specialist in the local studies branch, functions as the unofficial second in command for this area, working well with Freya and the other local studies staff. Eve's position has a strong focus on access to local studies collections. Eve develops practical and creative solutions for access and can be both proactive and reactive. Eve is responsible for displays of local studies items. These displays are undertaken in association with Freya, but this work is led by Eve and it is a key part of her role in local studies. As a local studies practitioner, Eve sees her role as collecting stories and helping people connect with them, stating that 'making those personal connections is what makes the collection valuable to the people'.

Eve is interested in planning future local studies developments, saying of the local studies staff that

> we're starting to get the headspace to identify gaps and see where we should be collecting in the future, what's missing, and that's for me, quite exciting because it's like we've been waiting and now we're kind of seeing what's there and what's not.

This describes an interest in what happens next and being able to focus more on planning for local studies than reacting to situations as they emerge.

Josephine is a customer service specialist in the local studies team. She is a problem-solver who enjoys helping researchers with in-depth queries, sometimes even working on them outside work hours because she is driven to find the answers. Her front-line service role allows her to be on the watch for new local studies collection materials. Josephine said that 'I seem to play a bit of a role in acquisitions because everybody who's writing books, I speak to them, I usually help them with their research'. This can lead to the library accepting copies of the published research. Working in libraries is Josephine's second career and started with temporary work in various sections of the library after completing library qualifications. Josephine is systematic and structured in her thinking. Josephine occasionally takes photographs for the collection at the request of Freya.

Molly is a digital specialist in the local studies team whose role is focused on digitising photographs and other materials. While she enjoys this work, Molly described it as 'laborious, very laborious and I sometimes just have to go away and do something else because it's just repetitive'. Molly's work involves working systematically through the process of digitising and cataloguing one set of photographs at a time. Molly enjoys local studies, stating that 'I just like historical stuff but I also I like being able to do things with it'. For her the digitisation is a means for the community to be able to use the materials in other ways. Some of Molly's work is investigating other ways to make these digitised items available, outside the library system. Molly occasionally takes photographs for the collection at events she is participating in or viewing.

Lilly is a cataloguer technician and is responsible for cataloguing some of the local studies books and reports as well as being rostered on the public service point. Lilly has worked at Kookaburra Libraries for some time, first in cataloguing, then at a branch library, and now cataloguing in local studies. The priories can shift. For example, she stated that when she started in her current role 'I was doing lots and lots of heritage reports because we had quite a backlog of those'. Lilly's work includes adding holdings to Libraries Australia, then downloading these records. These are added to the library system by Bonnie. Lilly's work can also involve creating an original catalogue record for a title that does not have a catalogue record on Libraries Australia. In speaking of the detail needed in cataloguing, Lilly stated:

> I think that is the cataloguer's job is to make sure that the detail and the facts are there, to make it easy for people to find. So, you know, a lot of people think you're being a bit nit-picky, but that's one of the things that you have to do.

4.5.1.3 Staff in other parts of the library

The library staff at Kookaburra Libraries whose work relates to local studies include those who have responsibility for cataloguing or accessioning some of the items, or who alert local studies staff to new potential collection items in the area.

Bonnie is the cataloguer librarian and has extensive experience in cataloguing local studies items, commenting that 'there's no simple cataloguing for local studies'. Because of her extensive experience, Bonnie provides advice to Lilly about cataloguing local studies items. There are also other work priorities for Bonnie, who stated that 'there are so many other things to do that I really don't get a lot of time to do local studies cataloguing'. The local studies items Bonnie deals with have usually been purchased and are generally books or microform. Bonnie provides catalogue records for new newsletters.

Bonnie may decide on the number of copies of a title to purchase, but there could be discussion with Freya about this as well. Bonnie, in talking about how the library staff find out about new local studies titles, stated that

> a lot of our staff are … on the lookout for local studies type content, and they will send it in, so it's just sort of coming in in dribs and drabs all the time.

Some of these new local studies items are sent straight to Bonnie who verifies that it is really for local studies:

> [W]e do try to make sure they [the authors/content creators] actually live somewhere in the area and that they're local, local authors but, well yeah, anyone who offers that sort of stuff, we will take it, so and that's getting more common now, there's a lot more self-publishing.

Paige works with Bonnie, accessioning new books and adding holdings for issues of newsletters. Paige places orders for items (books and microfilm) selected by other staff. Paige mentioned the importance of looking for local studies titles because sometimes when books are ordered it is not apparent, they are local, so

> if we buy a book that we then realise later is a local author, we get copies for local studies or, it can work the other way, they're having an author talk and it's a local so we buy copies.

Paige adds individual issues of newsletters to the library system in batches when a few issues have arrived at the library, so that the items are available quickly. As with local studies books, the processing undertaken by Paige aims to minimise damage to each newsletter.

The staff who work in branch libraries can provide information about new publications they see or information that they're hearing about because they are working in different

locations. One of these branch library staff, **Olive**, is particularly diligent about sending copies of items through to the local studies staff or passing on information about new local publications or other relevant information. Olive is not the only person who does this, but it is a particular area of interest for her. In talking about this Olive stated that

> sometimes I might see something in the paper and say to people did you see this? …things that seem like ordinary everyday things today, in 50 years time are special, and so as ordinary as something is today when I see it and send it in, there's just that idea that it might be, something like that. But I've always just been someone who … is just aware of what's happening around me.

Olive is proactive about providing other staff with information; for example,

> whenever you see a local author has something out, I get onto [Bonnie] and say to, you know, or [Paige] did you know that this is now available or whatever and or get a copy and send it into them and things like that so that we can get copies of those too.

This suggesting of items by Olive and other branch library staff was seen as being very positive by colleagues such as Freya and Bonnie.

Thea, a library officer, works in building partnerships, and previously worked at an organisation that donated recent content to the library. Thea was very new to Kookaburra Libraries, having only started work there one month before being interviewed. Thea was interviewed not because of her current role, but because of her work before joining the library. In this role she was instrumental in coordinating a donation of recent local studies items to the library. There was a collection that was being stored rather than cared for. As Thea stated,

> with no one to manage it, it was thought it was better to donate it to the library cause at least then somebody could have a look at it at some point.

Hayden is one of a very small number of library volunteers. He is a mature age library student who is listing items from a donated collection to help with their findability. This is the collection Thea was previously responsible for. Hayden is populating an Excel spreadsheet that will function as a finding aid for part of this collection. The spreadsheet was developed by Eve in consultation with Bonnie and is based on similar descriptive work from other libraries. Hayden enjoys this volunteer work. In talking about this he said that he is

> trying to establish their authors, or … if they have an identifiable author, which material is copyright, the title of the [items], the issue … and any potential kind of publication dates, we're also adding a small amount descriptive metadata so, a small description of the [item] if there's anything in particular that's unique or distinguishable about it such as if it's

> constructed in a particularly unique or unusual kind of way out of uncommon materials … [or] there's the additional things that that that come with them such as an image or cassette tape or something like that.

This work with recent content connects to some of his university studies, but also with his interests as a resident of the Kookaburra area. He is finding these items really interesting to look at, saying that

> sometimes I just want to sit and read, and I don't…I am trying to plough through them, but at the same time some of them are just so well written and so engaging.

This comment shows that is it possible to become distracted while working with local studies as there may be connections to explore or interesting content to read.

4.5.2 Volunteers

The volunteers who are participants in this research are people who contribute a significant amount of time to a local organisation, or for their own research, and who either donate, or have the potential to donate, materials to the local studies collections. In the Kookaburra community there are volunteers working with organisations who are documenting part of the area. The documentation is not the primary purpose of these community groups but is a result of recording the activities of the groups. This creates a range of potential local studies items, or at least items that need to be preserved by these local groups. The groups talked with are only a very small sample of the groups creating content as they document their organisations within the Kookaburra community. Three types of volunteers participated in this study: (i) local environment group volunteers; (ii) local sports organisation volunteers; and (iii) a local author.

4.5.2.1 Local environment group volunteers and their collections

Two volunteers from a local environmental group participated in the project. The local environment group is rehabilitating land degraded by inappropriate land management methods. Volunteer work includes replanting local species, as well as weeding and monitoring the biodiversity of the area. The volunteers work with skilled environmental specialists and other scientists who lead the planning for this work. They also work with specialist nursery staff who grow the required local plants. The local Aboriginal people are a key part of the network as well.

The environmental group has a small collection of environment-related publications and reports about the specific area where the rehabilitation is being undertaken. The environmental rehabilitation work is photographed and videoed. There are spreadsheets of information about the plants, including information about what plants were planted, how many were planted, when they were planted and where. The location information includes GPS coordinates. The collection includes some historic items, mostly photographs. A few of the volunteers participate in both the rehabilitation of the land and the digitisation of the publications and photographs, others in one or the other. There is also a database developed by volunteers of family history information as they seek to track previous colonist residents of the area.

Heidi and **Hayley** both volunteer with the local environmental group. Heidi is retired and had moved to Kookaburra from another state. This volunteer work was suggested to her by a local agency that connects potential volunteers to opportunities for them. Heidi volunteers three days a week for this group as well as being very active in the once-a-month group work to rehabilitate the local environment. While Heidi did not grow up in the Kookaburra area, she is very proud of her adopted home, including the volunteer work she is doing. In talking about the importance of documenting the work of the volunteer group Heidi commented:

> And it's so good when you hear people and you see them talking [on video]. It's not just a static thing, you are seeing the person and how they talk and what they're doing as well, you now. So instead of just seeing a picture of someone holding a plant, or working a stake around a plant protector, you might see them, we've got a really good one of someone sitting there, just putting one together, how the stake goes in.

This demonstrates the importance of documenting the volunteer work that is part of the connection to the location for Heidi. Heidi has developed an affinity to this area and towards the other people who care for it as well.

In talking about how the photographs recording the volunteer work are organised Heidi stated that

> we have the photo database … divided up into years, and it'll be like a planting day or there will be a celebration day … they're not with any particular aim, they were just recording who was there, or what was happening on that day, because we do have the metadata in those pictures that were taken on a digital camera, which is handy so, but yes, there's thousands of individual slides, of individual pictures.

This helps demonstrate that while the items are being collected, and there is an awareness of metadata and organisation, the photographs and videos could still be vulnerable to loss or other

destruction. One of the backup methods is having a second copy of data, in the form of a portable hard drive. This is taken home by a different volunteer each night. This is not an optimal method but provides two copies of data stored in different locations.

Hayley is younger than Heidi and works full time participating in regular volunteer work about once a month as part of the rehabilitation work. Hayley works on the family history database from her home in her own time as well. It is an Access database that is not available online. Hayley stated that they

> back it up with a second copy in case something happens to that. But [another volunteer is] in the process of doing multiple [backups] so you have multiple backups and they're stored at different volunteers houses so that in the case we lose the master. We haven't lost the copy.

Hayley's focus is more on the family history as she is a descendant of colonists in the area and she

> didn't really participate in revegetating as part of that project until my son was about seven years old, and as a junior cub, he had to start doing a bit of community service, so where else should he come than over to the … [place] where his three times great grandfather used to live, so we started volunteering for the project in, it would have been early 2008, and I've always had a love of history.

It is very important to Hayley that there is this connection from previous generations of her family, as it led to her interest in the location and to visiting it while it was still farmland prior to the environmental rehabilitation starting.

The environment group has relationships with local First Nations Elders, and part of this relationship includes learning about local plants from these Elders. This information directly influences the rehabilitation work of the environment group. The discussion with First Nations Elders ensures the environmental work is more effective and that volunteers stay away from areas of cultural significance. It does not include secret or sacred information being provided to people who should not have access to it.

4.5.2.2 Local sports organisation volunteers and their collections

Four volunteers who have been working for a local sporting organisation, often with near-lifetime links to the organisation, were included in the study. The local sporting organisation has been operating for decades. It started for one sport and now is the organisation behind several different sports, but all the volunteers interviewed are involved in the same sport and have strong loyalties to the team.

Darcy, **Hamish** and **Isobel** are current volunteers with this local sporting organisation. **Spencer** had recently stopped being a volunteer for the same organisation. Darcy and Hamish are plain-spoken ex-police officers who each volunteer about 35 hours a week with the sporting organisation and have done for several years. They have senior roles within the organisation. Darcy proudly described his almost lifelong connection to the sporting organisation, saying:

> I'm a former junior player with the club, I've started off as Schoolboys, junior, right through the grade. I'm a life member, I think I've said, a life member of the club, having served what we call a statutory ten years of signal service, signal exceptional service.

Darcy was concerned about the decline in volunteers saying that it's 'very hard to get volunteers now. They all want to get paid, and we're keeping the tradition going, a lot couldn't care less probably.' This is a relevant point given how time-consuming the volunteer involvement is for Darcy and Hamish. The time-consuming nature of the volunteer work was part of their description of the work of Spencer, who made the sporting organisation playing records accessible online and in print. Hamish stated that Spencer 'brought our records into the 21st century'.

Some of the photographs of the sport are on display at the sporting organisation, in an area of (accidental) low light, while others are in nearby storage [Photographs KP19062019]. There is no listing of what photographs and memorabilia are owned by the sporting organisation, nor of what photographs and memorabilia are stored where, nor is any deliberate preservation work done on the items. Darcy and Hamish know what is stored where at the sporting organisation and both have personal items relating to the sporting organisation stored in their homes. Hamish stated that 'at one stage we used to keep jumpers. I did, I used to keep one set … a jumper from each year', as did Darcy. The items stored in their homes are their own property and not the property of the sporting organisation.

Hamish talked about the strong relationships within the sport, saying:

> You develop friendships in your earlier years which you maintain and retain all your life. All your life, never changes, because of that camaraderie. Right? And I went to, which we do these times of our lives, go to more funerals than anything else. I went to a funeral last Sunday, and I saw blokes there I played football with, and it's been 35 years, it was like only yesterday. But looking at them they told a different story.

It is these strong connections that may be crucial to preserving the sporting memorabilia stored in various locations, even if it is a distributed collection in the homes of various organisation members.

Isobel is the volunteer official photographer for the sporting organisation and has been in this role for ten years. Isobel is focused on showing the games in the local environment, and on the importance of the quality of the light and what it can bring to her documentation of the games:

> I want that light … I want the feel of what it is at the time, not just this harsh sharp image. If it's the middle of winter, glorious day, I want that golden light coming through the back. I want to see … the guys in background … I want to see that and see the crowd in the background cheering and the build of the guys. You look at the photos now, the build and the uniforms, you look at the old photos, big difference in all these, so we need to keep that now. It's changing too quick. I think over time, the changes are progressing more and more, and we need to keep it. Yes, it's just yet trying to capture everything, you're trying to capture so much. You want the whole feel of the day, not just that person, I want, I can't put it into words. the whole atmosphere of the day in my picture, okay. Sometimes that works.

This description indicates some of the information that is available in the photographs Isobel takes, and her enthusiasm for her photography. Isobel wanted her photographs to document the specific locations of the sport and not simply be close-ups of players who could be in any location; the specific location was important. It also shows her awareness of the changes in the last ten years. A comparison of her photographs to earlier ones is likely to show an even starker contrast. Isobel spoke highly of Spencer who was key to her involvement with the sporting organisation.

Spencer was a previous volunteer with the sporting organisation but had stopped volunteering about two years prior to being interviewed. In his most recent volunteer work, Spencer had a focus on making the player statistics public so that anyone could look up player and match statistics. He aimed to bring older data as much as possible into the same format as more recent data. Spencer improved the findability of recent data so that it could be much more quickly accessed and searched. It is available on the sporting organisation website, and in a very small number of books that have been printed. Darcy, Hamish and Isobel all praised his work. Spencer had been a follower of the sporting organisation since his father took him to a game when he was very young. After his retirement from teaching Spencer was a volunteer in various key roles within the sporting organisation, culminating in his work to bring the player and match statistics into a format appropriate for the current century. This was a huge job and led to Spencer walking away from the sporting organisation and not going to any games. About the data he compiled, Spencer stated,

> these are the books I've written and if I turn to any page, that page there and that name there [pointing to the books], I've typed, none of this is cut and pasted. Any page, that 'y' there, I've typed it. Every word, all these records here, I've typed them, and they came off a set of cards initially. They were, a filing set of cards and it took me two years to put all those onto an Excel spreadsheet of all the players from 1951.

The statistics work that Spencer undertook is contained in printed copies in Kookaburra Libraries [collection items KLSS 14022022]. He is proud of that as it helps to validate the importance of these statistics. This statistics work updated some of the information available for key players including the number of matches that they played, as in one case a much-quoted number was shown to be wrong. This work has the potential to be of wider interest for local studies and family history. His research will continue to be available in Kookaburra Libraries for research as he has donated copies of the collated player and match statistics to the library for the local studies collection. In talking about this work, he stated:

> I went into the [Kookaburra Libraries] and got the results and put them in this book, and I can find that exact page on the website. … I don't think too many people give a shit, that's what my wife said. I don't think it's got a wide audience, but I think it's really important, and someone's going to come along [in] 50 years time and grab that book out of [Kookaburra Libraries], and they're going to say wow. I just hope the next 50 years is there as well.

These comments from Spencer demonstrate some of the challenges of connections, with his love of the sport being tempered by the difficulty of bringing many years of sporting data together. The view his wife took of this work can also be seen to have an impact on him. Isobel commented on the importance of Spencer's books being in Kookaburra Libraries, highlighting that 'it's not just the club, the whole area. It's [Kookaburra] history'. Having these books of player and match statistics in the local studies collection at Kookaburra Libraries was seen as confirming the value of the work done, and the value of sport to the Kookaburra community.

4.5.2.3 Local author and photographer

This section introduces a local author and photographer who has been documenting the Kookaburra area for several decades. His career contributed to his photography; like Isobel, he is not a professional photographer. The local author is a slightly different kind of volunteer as he receives payment for the books that he writes. He fits with this group of people because he is not a paid library staff member, nor does he volunteer for Kookaburra Libraries.

Jonathan, a local photographer and author, is a retired teacher. He is a keen photographer of the area and has been for decades, photographing topics of particular interest as well as taking more general photographs of the area. Jonathan has mostly used slides and because he purchased high-quality slides and stores them in a stable environment, they have generally lasted very well. More recently Jonathan has moved to digital photography, but the slide format is still his favourite. In discussing the need to be opportunistic for photographs and potentially other documentation of a community, he stated that

> when an opportunity comes along to grab it, and I think as a recorder or researcher, I think that's what you got to do. You've got to be aware that here's an opportunity, and if you don't take it, you might never get another chance, and that's what I said to a lot of people. If you have the urge to take an image, take it now, because you may not get the other opportunity.

These are important points as they describe both taking and making opportunities to record a community, and highlight that each person can have a role in documenting what is happening.

Jonathan is deliberate in his use of the term local studies:

> I use the term local studies because if I describe myself, I describe myself as a cultural geographer instead of an historian, because I've found from what I've seen of past historians, they're just basically concerned with that something happened, whereas it's more a systems approach. Why did it happen then? Why did it happen? What was it like? What were the consequences? And what's the evidence?

This approach is visible in how Jonathan does his research for the area and has an impact on the kinds of photographs he takes as well. Jonathan went on to say:

> I do think it's important to look at your own backyard, and that's generally why I've liked local studies so much, and I call it local studies … when it's highlighted to them it does tend to make things a little bit more meaningful and a little bit more relevant, and that's probably if you like one of my mission statements in terms of my interest in local studies, making it work for people. You know, so it's not just what's the value of history in inverted commas, what's the value of this, and that's why I like the continuities and the connectiveness between things.

This shows the importance of how information is interpreted to help people connect to it. This links to how Freya and Eve describe it, using the local events and the story of place to connect people to locations and past events. Jonathan stated that in

> local studies that you've got people from the local area that had been players on the broad stage and the broad stage impacting on the local area.

Jonathan, whose books have been purchased for the local studies collection at Kookaburra Library, stated:

> I've got a good working relationship with [Freya] and [Eve]. Even though I haven't been in there much actually, again a question of accessibility but I ring them up, I ring [Eve] quite a few times about the photos and she sends [them] along.

Jonathan views this as a positive connection, and from his perspective this is partly about obtaining copies of photographs for his writing, but it is still described as a 'good working relationship'.

This section has introduced some of the volunteers who chose to give their time to local community groups, or to other activities that involve their documentation of parts of the Kookaburra Council area. This provides a small number of examples for what is likely to be a much more widespread documentation by the community taking place.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter introduced Kookaburra Council, Kookaburra Libraries, the staff and the community volunteers who were interviewed for this study. It provides a sense of the town and the community it serves, which will help to contextualise the findings presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

> My main aim my whole career has been about making things accessible … it doesn't matter what sort of material it is. So it's probably fairly handy that that's how I like it, … nothing's a secret, everything should be available.
>
> — Interview with Freya 14 May 2018

The previous chapter introduced Kookaburra Libraries, the site of investigation, and provided information on the staff and volunteers who participated in this study. This chapter responds to the research question: *what are the practices of public libraries in regard to acquisition, creation and curation of recent content for local studies collections*? The chapter presents the research outcomes of the documentary analysis, observation and interviews implemented as part of the ethnographic method at Kookaburra Libraries. These results are organised according to four aspects of the collection process.

5.2 The local studies collection practices of Kookaburra Libraries

The practices of collecting recent local studies content at Kookaburra Libraries can be organised into four elements, shown in Table 4. These are derived from analysis of the data collected through an ethnographic study of this library, described in Chapter 3. These explore the intentions that inform the collecting practices, the planning that is undertaken to support collection development, the actions performed by library staff to add recent local studies content to the collection and, finally, the impacts of these on the form of the local studies collection. Each element is connected to each other, with the plans and strategy providing the starting places for the purpose and scope of local studies collections, and what can be considered for inclusion in the local studies collection. These, in turn, are interpreted through the day-to-day practices of how the library acquires local studies items, including through the force of donations, which strongly influence both acquired content and collecting priorities. While described separately, each element of the system affects the others and is interconnected.

Table 4. Findings – themes and descriptions, elements of the local studies collection acquisition process

Theme	Description
Plans and strategies	Outlines the current library plans and strategy that guide local studies collections, and the opportunities and limitations that they configure.
Library acquisition practices	Examines how the library acquires items for its local studies collection including purchases, content creation and donations.
Reliance on unsolicited donations	Identifies the effects of donations, including the pressures to acquire unsolicited materials, the influence of relationships with donors, and the resulting backlog of items to be catalogued into local studies collection.
Collection development	Highlights how plans, strategies, acquisition practices and donations impact on the representativeness of the collection.

These sections each describe the processes, scope and choices made by staff at Kookaburra Libraries in collecting, providing access to and caring for the local studies collection. They explore how these decisions are made in the wider context of Kookaburra Libraries and the collection, services and programs they provide, as well as how Kookaburra Council serves its community.

5.3 Plans and strategies

There is a series of documents that shape the intent and capability of the library to collect recent local studies content, from Commonwealth and State legislation through to individual library plans. Plans and strategies provide the cornerstone for collection management for a local studies collection in a public library because they establish the policy framework for the actions required to be undertaken. Strategies provide the ideas and vision for action, while plans provide a practical description of what must be undertaken for this vision to be translated into practice. They are official documents that deliver structure to guide the collecting protocols for an organisation. These plans and strategies outline the intention of a library and provide insight into the rationale for different sections of the library collection. Strategies and plans can influence the agility and effectiveness of processes to acquire, create and curate recent content, including procedures for cataloguing, preservation and access, and decisions about deaccessioning and disposal of items. Plans and strategies can be critical for developing a diverse, equitable and inclusive local studies collection, and may provide the basis for decisions on funding, staffing and other priorities. They can limit what might be collected or disposed of.

The plans and strategy analysed for this research project are formal documents, endorsed either by Kookaburra Council or by Kookaburra Libraries, that structure the way the library collects, preserves, and provides access to recent and current local studies content. An analysis of these documents helps to understand the enabling and limiting factors that influence Kookaburra Libraries ability to develop a diverse, inclusive and equitable local studies collection.

5.3.1 Collecting structure provided by library plans and strategy

The legislative and regulatory environment for local councils and their library services is layered and complex, and this influences the local structures that are the focus of this research. Kookaburra Council is governed by State and Commonwealth legislation and regulations that structure how it operates. These include State Government legislation and regulations that require local councils to provide a free public library service and to co-fund the cost of this with the State Government. While some funding for Kookaburra Libraries is provided by the State Government, most of their funding is provided directly by Kookaburra Council. There is no direct Commonwealth Government funding for public libraries other than occasional grants or project-based funding. Within this overarching governance structure, each library service has its own plans and strategies, which include the following documents at Kookaburra Libraries:

- *Kookaburra Libraries Strategy*[7] [Kookaburra Libraries Strategy KLS 20192029]
- *Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan* [Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan KLCP 20182021]
- *Kookaburra Libraries Local Studies Collection Development Plan* [Kookaburra Libraries Local Studies Collection Development Plan KLLSCDP 20182022].

These provide the structure for acquisition, creation and curation of recent and older items for the local studies collection. Both the *Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan* and the *Kookaburra Libraries Strategy* are written for the community as well as library staff and are publicly accessible online on the Kookaburra Council website. The *Kookaburra Libraries Local Studies Collection Development Plan* is not publicly viewable and is used by local studies staff.

[7] Pseudonyms are used for anonymity for Kookaburra Council and Kookaburra Libraries as well as for the people who were interviewed. The documents have pseudonyms too. See *Chapter 3 Research Method* and *Chapter 4 Kookaburra Council and Kookaburra Libraries* for more information about this.

5.3.1.1 Kookaburra Libraries Strategy

The *Kookaburra Libraries Strategy* is a high-level document that describes a vision for the library. It provides aims for how the services will be delivered, describes the priorities for the library and connects to the strategies of other business areas of Kookaburra Council. The local studies collection is part of this Strategy, with a major goal of increasing access to this collection. Some of this improved access to the local studies collection will be achieved by digitising older items and making the digital copies available online via the Kookaburra library system.

The Strategy outlines the importance of partnerships for research and for content creation so that new local studies items can be developed. It specifically identifies partnerships with First Nations people, local cultural or heritage agencies and educational institutions. Many of the listed partnerships build on already established relationships rather than creating new ones, although there is potential for new relationships in how this action is described in the *Kookaburra Libraries Strategy*. The intention of this Strategy is to build new content through research as well as by creating of new content – for example, the production of oral history recordings or photographs – although specific formats and topics are not specified. The content creation may be able to record stories of people and places not yet visible or not very visible in the local studies collection.

John talked about the stories yet to be researched in the collection, saying that

> just with understanding what's in our collection, we have a huge amount of collections down there, particularly the archives, I think, where there are sort of stories that are locked away that we've not made accessible yet … we want to understand, what are the stories that are in there? Is there anything new that we can add to [Kookaburra's] narrative of understanding of its own identity?

Through this statement John raises the idea that research as described in the *Kookaburra Libraries Strategy* has the potential to draw forth different perspectives and information about the Kookaburra area and community. This research may help to show recent and current concerns of the community, and any resulting publication or other information could become part of Kookaburra Libraries' local studies collection. Depending on the subject matter researched and what research questions are asked, this research may be able to provide more diverse accounts of the area than are usually documented, as different perspectives could be explored.

5.3.1.2 Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan

The collection aspirations of the Strategy are implemented through a more specific *Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan*, a succinct, high-level document that outlines how the whole library collection is managed. As an overarching document, its principles and intent apply to, and influence, local studies collecting as part of the entire Kookaburra Libraries collection distributed through all the branch libraries in the Kookaburra Libraries service.

The *Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan* states that the library 'manages and preserves materials of local historical and heritage value'. It notes that for the whole collection the library will acquire items to 'meet the diverse ages, interests, cultures, languages, and literacy levels' of the people in the Kookaburra community, albeit without providing demographic information to place this in context. According to the *Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan* the library collection, of which the local studies collection forms part, should have 'relevance to the community' and reflect a 'diversity of viewpoint'. These requirements of relevance and diversity are for local studies as well as every other part of the collection.

There is a statement that the 'importance of the subject matter to the collection' may influence decisions about collecting, yet there are no guidelines in the *Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan* as to how importance might be decided. This is significant because without guidance, 'importance' may be subjective, individualistic or arbitrary. If importance is decided by individuals without guidance about inclusiveness, equity and diversity, there is a risk that the collection will develop in ad hoc ways, with bias and poor representation.

While the *Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan* does not specifically mention obtaining recent or current content for the local studies collection, neither does it exclude it. The *Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan* states that the library will care for items of 'historical and heritage value plus those of relevance to the community'. This implies that items of relevance to the community may not be seen as having historical value or possibly that heritage and historical collections are not relevant to the community. It states that the library will provide resources to enable local studies research. This part of the *Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan* may be implicitly supporting collecting recent and current content; however, it is not an explicit statement of this kind of collecting. The *Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan* was discussed in the interviews undertaken with local studies staff, who noted that it was not regularly referred to by them for collection decisions. It is assumed that this is because the local studies staff were already familiar with it. These staff gave similar descriptions of what

is included in the local studies collection, but generally related them to the overall strategy rather than the more detailed plans.

5.3.1.3 Kookaburra Libraries Local Studies Collection Development Plan

The *Kookaburra Libraries Local Studies Collection Development Plan* sits under the *Kookaburra Library Collection Plan* and includes a list of strategic actions that focus on the priorities from the *Kookaburra Libraries Strategy.* As well as these actions it contains broad statements about the subject matter that the library seeks to collect about the Kookaburra area for the local studies collection. The *Kookaburra Libraries Local Studies Collection Development Plan* states that the items collected are to tell the complete story of the Kookaburra area and may be able to position the local information in a national or international context. This aim to document the full story of the area connects to the idea of the collection reflecting the community that is mentioned in the *Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan.*

As well as telling the story of the Kookaburra area, the library seeks to collect information relating to the surrounding biogeographic area because there are strong regional connections. The biogeographic area comprises at least five local government areas. The local studies information sought for this biogeographic area includes items, records and archives as well as published works, which is the same kind of information that is collected for the Kookaburra area. There are public libraries in the biogeographic area; however, the *Kookaburra Libraries Local Studies Collection Development Plan* does not describe how or if Kookaburra Libraries will work with them on this collecting, nor was this mentioned in interviews when this issue was raised.

The *Kookaburra Libraries Local Studies Collection Development Plan* states that Kookaburra Libraries aims to collect contemporary items with future research value. The idea of what constitutes ‘future research value’ may be subjective and there is a risk this might impact adversely on the diversity of the collection, just as the idea of ‘importance’ in the *Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan* may. This may be vulnerable to bias based on the personal interests of staff. John described the importance of the local studies collection in thinking about the ‘current story and past story and understanding how we can contribute to future story’ for the Kookaburra area. This could be another way to describe thinking about ‘future research value’ bringing together stories and information about the Kookaburra area, but still lacks detail about how ‘future research value’ is defined. Older items collected do not have this same requirement placed upon them.

The *Kookaburra Libraries Local Studies Collection Development Plan* sets out some of the challenges of collecting local studies items and an overview of the collection, outlining issues that relate to heritage collections without necessarily providing solutions. John described the *Kookaburra Libraries Local Studies Collection Development Plan* as 'looking at what we want to continue collecting, what we don't want to continue collecting, and the collections that we've got'. The practice of stopping collecting certain areas of information was not apparent from observations or interviews undertaken.

The deaccessioning policy for local studies items is included in the *Kookaburra Libraries Local Studies Collection Development Plan*. Items can be deaccessioned for reasons of authenticity, ownership, duplication or damage. This needs to be approved by the library manager on an item by item basis. There are other libraries like Kookaburra Libraries that do not deaccession or weed out local studies items, or only very rarely remove items from their local studies collection. A recent NSW survey found that around half the public libraries in that state do not have a weeding or deaccessioning policy for local studies, nor do they weed out or deaccession items from their local studies collection (State Library of New South Wales, 2021).[8] For many public libraries the local studies collection is a permanent collection, and items within them are to be available for research forever. This mention of a deaccessioning policy is not to imply that existing local studies material from the Kookaburra Libraries should be disposed of; rather, it highlights the need to be sure of what is selected for the collection and the consequences of those decisions (Shilton & Srinivasan, 2007).

It is rarely possible to collect everything of relevance or significance. No library, archive, gallery or museum can manage this, unless they have a very narrow collecting focus and a very large budget. Items can be included in the local studies collection at Kookaburra Libraries provided they match the criteria for relevance in the *Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan*, including that the items should have 'relevance to the community' and represent 'diversity of viewpoint'. The *Kookaburra Libraries Local Studies Collection Development Plan* asks, Does this item, or do these items, help to tell the story of Kookaburra including its relationship to the surrounding biogeographic area and wider events, or is it from the surrounding biogeographic area? This creates the potential for a very large number of items to be relevant and considered for collecting because they match some of these requirements. The idea of relevance is of greater focus for local studies collecting than that of significance.

[8] NSW data is used as comparable data is not available from other states, or nationwide.

Determining the significance of items that may be added to the local studies collection is not addressed in detail in the policy and strategy documents at Kookaburra Libraries, other than for recently created items that need to be seen to have future research value. Shilton and Srinivasan (2007) note:

> Archivists choose which records to preserve and discard, using the power of appraisal to consciously or unconsciously assert chosen narratives as truth while ignoring or reframing others. (p. 88)

While this is written about archivists, the ideas are relevant to local studies collecting in public libraries as what is collected influences the information available for research.

Copies of the *Kookaburra Libraries Local Studies Collection Development Plan* and the *Kookaburra Libraries Digitisation/Digital Preservation Strategy* were provided to the researcher following a discussion with Freya. These were discussed with Freya as specific actions for the local studies staff are incorporated in the documents, and in a spreadsheet library staff have access to. Staff in other sections of the library were responsible for some of the actions planned for the local studies collection, and it was not clear how or if local studies staff would coordinate this, especially in relation to some content creation that was the responsibility of another group of library staff. These were questions that had yet to be resolved by the library staff and there had been little discussion between them about this. The *Kookaburra Libraries Digitisation/Digital Preservation Strategy* relates to older local studies items rather than collecting recent and current concerns and will not be discussed.

5.3.1.4 Collection format priorities and exclusions

The discussion about what formats may be collected includes information from the *Kookaburra Library Collection Plan* and the *Kookaburra Libraries Local Studies Collection Development Plan*, so it is useful to bring the discussion of these two documents together to aggregate their information. The *Kookaburra Library Collection Plan* names some formats of items that are already collected for local studies, such as books, photographs and maps. It is not specified if these are digital or analogue, so it may be that they could be either or both. Additional information about formats is in the *Kookaburra Libraries Local Studies Collection Development Plan*, which includes preferred collection formats and a short list of excluded formats. The preferred formats for collecting are archival quality for both analogue and digital items. Specifications for different archival formats are not provided, as it may be assumed that the local studies staff are aware of what the standards are for archival formats for analogue and digital items.

The *Kookaburra Libraries Local Studies Collection Development Plan* does not acknowledge the importance of collecting digital content so that digital preservation can take place before items are deleted, their digital storage devices are unreadable, or the items become otherwise inaccessible. Digital items can be of archival quality; however, even fairly recent digital content may be inaccessible because of the object or device it is stored on (Nagy & Kiszl, 2021). For example, compact discs deteriorate or can no longer be read by standard devices. Floppy discs, USB drives and other digital storage devices are subject to similar deterioration and access issues (Evens & Hauttekeete, 2011). Even with a well-managed digital preservation work flow, files can be corrupted and lose information (Kim et al., 2021). While someone can easily bring in a box of fifty-year-old letters printed on paper to donate to the library, it could be much more difficult to bring in thirty-year-old emails. The emails may be saved to the hard drive of a computer that can no longer be used; they could be saved to floppy discs that have become unreadable; or, even if they have been appropriately migrated, they could be in a file format that can no longer be read without specialised emulation software.

There can be issues with the format of potential donations; for example, Bonnie noted that they have not been able to accept ebooks as donations as they do not have a way to easily make them available for people to read. This means that when people are producing ebooks rather than printed publications, they cannot be included in the local studies collection despite potentially being in an archival format. This could mean that certain kinds of information are not being collected and preserved by the library, and this may impact the diversity of viewpoints available for research.

The *Kookaburra Libraries Local Studies Collection Development Plan* lists some formats that are specifically excluded from being collected. These include items that are transient or on fabric or formats that will put other items at risk of damage. Transient items may be too ephemeral to preserve, not be durable enough to conserve or require skills that are difficult to source, although what is meant by transient is not specified. Fabric items may be seen as more appropriate for other kinds of collecting organisations, such as museums. From observation, some formats described as excluded – for example, fabric or textiles – can be included in the local studies collection if they are part of an archive or are otherwise seen to have collection value. For formats that may put other items at risk of damage, that risk could be because the item is shedding, contains pests or mildew or is chemically hazardous, as some cellulose film can be. While these exclusions may appear reasonable, as Lapp (2021) notes using the example of items with glitter, this may exclude information about specific groups in the community – for example, women and people who are LGBTQIA+. This demonstrates the

need to think carefully about how inclusions or exclusions are described to ensure that this is not privileging or disadvantaging specific perspectives.

The *Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan* provides the information that local authors, including those who self-publish, can donate items for the collection. The term used for what may be donated could refer to published titles, or copies of the research materials used to produce a publication. Some local authors have donated both their books and the research archive for them, although as noted earlier there are issues with being able to donate ebooks. Recently published items can be donated. This may be of more relevance to the rest of the library collection; however, it means that donations of recent publications of relevance to the area but written by authors who live elsewhere may be accepted. Donating an item or a set of items like an archive does not guarantee that it will be included in the collection.

The *Kookaburra Libraries Local Studies Collection Development Plan* mentions that donations will only be considered when they are gifts and can be cared for by the library. This highlights that they are donations and not permanent or semi-permanent loans. There are exceptions made to this donation as gift approach. There was at least one example of a donation of recent content to which the donor had attached a condition, including if that condition was not met that the item/s would be returned to the donor. Kookaburra Libraries were complying with the condition; however, it was not clear what would happen in the future – for example, if they ceased complying in several decades time [Information from field notes KFN 29042019]. The donor may no longer be alive to have the item/s returned to them, they may not have descendants, or the descendants could be difficult to trace.

This donation as outright gift does not consider other methods, such as Creative Commons licensing, which can be used to provide permissions for use while the content creator retains ownership of the copyright, or social media collecting, with continuing changes to terms of use that already differ on each social media platform. At the time of research, Kookaburra Libraries did not collect social media.

The *Kookaburra Libraries Local Studies Collection Development Plan* requires that the library staff have the skills to care for the local studies items. This capacity could shift as staff leave and others are recruited to replace them. This may cause changes over time in what kinds of items staff have the capacity and skills to look after. For long-term preservation of items consistent staff skills would be important, or a clearer explanation of what is meant by the skills to care for items could be provided.

Even though the local studies collection at Kookaburra has a long history, in the recent past it was a collection under pressure, and this is partly responsible for the backlog in making

items available for research. Amelie described the situation she found when she started at the library only a few years ago, saying:

> The staff here at the library service were understaffed, under resourced and I think they were busy doing what they needed to do to keep managing the collection … we should be investing dollars into the infrastructure, we should be investing significant dollars to promote it, to make people aware of it.

This was a collection that local studies staff were struggling to manage and promote because of a low staff-to-collection ratio and large workloads. It was a collection that was said to be important, but the infrastructure provided did not support the stated significance. Amelie was key to advocating for an increase in staffing for the local studies area. This relocated positions from other parts of Kookaburra Libraries to local studies positions, but without providing an overall increase in library staffing.

There are formal procedures for documenting donations, including the requirement to complete donor forms so that detailed and accurate information is obtained about each item or set of items [Information from photograph[9] KP 10072019 showing donation form]. This is necessary for accountability for the item as well as documenting the provenance, relevance and significance of items. Local studies librarian Freya described the current practice for documenting donations as 'very pedantic' to ensure they are not creating or leaving problems for future library staff and researchers to address. This is necessary because some older donations have no forms, or insufficient detail on their donor forms, and consequently it is not clear if some uses of a donated item are acceptable. Use of the term 'researcher' is inclusive of all researchers regardless of age, research skills or interests. The donation information in the *Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan* and the *Kookaburra Libraries Local Studies Collection Development Plan* is general and can be seen only indirectly to be encouraging the inclusion of a wider range of voices and experiences in the local studies collection.

5.3.2 Summary

This section has described the plans and strategy that play an important role in local studies collection management at Kookaburra Libraries. These formal documents inform the way the library collects, preserves and provides access to recent and current local studies

[9] Photographs are not included as they may provide clues to the location researched. Information from photographs is used as these were part of the note-taking method to record information about the research site.

content. The plans and strategy make provision for the collection of local studies items to tell the current story of Kookaburra.

To recap how the plans and strategy include collecting recent and current concerns including diverse, inclusive, and equitable perspectives:

- The *Kookaburra Libraries Strategy*, through the development of partnerships, will lead to the creation of content in the form of new local studies items. The proposed research mentioned in the Strategy has the potential to ask new questions of the collection to help provide a more diverse, equitable and inclusive account of the area as well as to create new items for the collection. The content creation planned in the *Kookaburra Libraries Strategy* has the potential to bring new information to the collection from people and industries not traditionally included. This could be an important way to document a fuller story of the Kookaburra area and bring in the voices and stories of the people who may have been marginalised by other collecting methods.
- The *Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan* does not provide explicit guidance about the age of the new collection items for local studies; however, it mentions that a principle for the whole collection is that of reflecting the demographic diversity of the Kookaburra area. It notes the collection should be relevant to the community, represent diverse viewpoints and the 'importance of the subject matter to the collection' is a consideration in collecting. This signifies that the local studies collection should be documenting the demographic diversity of the Kookaburra area. There is little detail about how the local studies staff are to determine relevance or significance for adding items to the collection.
- The *Kookaburra Libraries Local Studies Collection Development Plan* states that the library will collect contemporary items that have future research value. Considering the varied nature of a local studies collection, this proof of future research value is unlikely to present a significant barrier; however, there may need to be deliberate prioritisation to be able to collect with a social justice focus of diversity, inclusion and equity.

This demonstrates that the plans and strategy make provision for the collection of local studies items to tell the current story of Kookaburra, including a diversity of viewpoints, so that this information is available in the future. This is clearest in the *Kookaburra Libraries Strategy* and is reflected in conditions in the *Kookaburra Libraries Local Studies Collection Development*

Plan that require that items have future research value. This puts a responsibility on the local studies staff to ensure that their collecting reflects the varied demography of the Kookaburra community, as mentioned in the *Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan*. The *Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan* does not provide explicit guidance about the age of the new collection items for local studies. John, in talking about the importance of collecting for local studies. stated that

> we really need to be more proactive in collecting stories now, so that in fifty years, there's not just this big gap … and we'll have no evidence to show what was actually happening in our city … it's about current story and past story and understanding how we can contribute to future story.

This call by John for increased action in collecting stories now would be a way of demonstrating whose stories the library is seeking. His statement confirms ideas that are raised in the plans and strategy for Kookaburra Libraries.

5.4 How the library acquires local studies items

> [I]f we don't take that and then sort through it and then determine its value, who will?
>
> — Interview with Amelie, 12 November 2019

While plans and strategy establish the intent and possible scope of local studies collecting, the actual collection is determined by actions of the library staff. This section explores how staff implement the Kookaburra Libraries plans and strategy, as well as other collecting practices that determine what is added to the local studies collection. As noted by Amelie in the quote shown above, adding items to the local studies collection is a way of demonstrating the value of these items for the community.

This theme describes how Kookaburra Libraries staff collect items for their local studies collection, including how they implement the plans and strategy relating to this collection. The discussion begins by exploring collecting practices including connections between people that facilitate this, before looking at requested donations, unsolicited donations and collecting according to staff personal interest.

5.4.1 How Kookaburra Libraries acquires local studies items

There are three main approaches to acquisitions for local studies collections: items can be purchased, created or donated. The decisions about what is included in the local studies collection, and about interpreting the relevance and significance, are predominantly made by

Freya and Eve, both very experienced local studies staff with in-depth collection knowledge. From observation, the focus for selection is on telling the story of Kookaburra as well as relevant information from the surrounding biogeographic area, without necessarily representing diverse viewpoints about the area, although some work is taking place to address this (as will be discussed later). The decisions about what to include in the collection predominantly focus on the small number of items that can be purchased, and the items that are offered as donations. Mentions of diverse, inclusive or equitable collecting during interviews were made in response of specific questions asked rather than the information being volunteered.

At Kookaburra Libraries the main items purchased are published books, although other items such as calendars, zines, art works, recorded music, microfilm or microfiche may be bought for the local studies collection. Annually there are a small number of relevant items available for purchase, and the number and kind of these varies from year to year. The purchases are generally managed by the acquisitions staff at Kookaburra Libraries if they are for new books, microfilm or microfiche, and by local studies staff if they are other kinds of items, although there is discussion between the library staff about this. These items are purchased from the overall library collection budget as there is not a separate local studies budget.

The second method of acquisition for local studies is that of content creation. Content may be created for a local studies collection when it is not available through other channels. At Kookaburra Libraries, content is created mainly in the form of photographs taken by local studies staff, although there are a small number of oral history recordings. Staff time is limited for content creation, and some of the photography is undertaken outside work time. While there is the potential to commission the creation of content, that is not a method being used by Kookaburra Libraries.

The third method of acquiring items for the local studies collection at Kookaburra Libraries is that of donation, whereby individuals and organisations give items to be included in the local studies collection. This is largest category of items added to the Kookaburra Libraries local studies collection each year and will be addressed in detail.

Donated items are predominantly paper-based or in another analogue format and can include publications donated by their authors, maps, council documents in various formats as well as art works, posters, or film in different formats. Older, superseded formats of audiovisual materials may come into the Kookaburra local studies collection, often as part of a larger donation. Some donations of photographs are digitised at the point of donation and the original

is returned to the donor along with a digital copy. Among the donations are some digital items, which are mainly of photographs but can include other content on portable hard drives, USB drives, CD-ROM or DVDs. These digital items are sometimes part of an archive or printed publication and may provide duplicate information to the printed publication or additional information – for example, photographs and videos.

There are donations of archives ranging in size from a handful of associated items to multiple boxes overflowing with items for the local studies collection. These can include published items such as promotional fliers as well as unpublished items such as minute books, research notes and other documents. The archives may contain art works including prints or some digital items [Information from observation KFN 10072019] or items like t-shirts in the archives of sporting organisations [Information from observation KFN 15112019]. Archives can be added to over time as an organisation donates additional components to the library [From observation KFN 14112019].

Mayoral gifts are part of the local studies collection and form their own subset of content; these will not be discussed as they do not directly tell the story of the Kookaburra area. These gifts can be from sister cities as a way of showcasing their local culture.

Collecting published information about the Kookaburra area includes both purchases and donations. This can include histories and other publications written by or about local organisations for anniversaries, fiction by local authors or other works written about the area and is included here as there are more donations given than purchases made. These are all areas relevant to the *Kookaburra Libraries Local Studies Collection Development Plan*. Local studies publications may be produced by big publishers, organisations, small presses, be self-published or print on demand. Some will have very small print runs as they may be printed specifically for a family or an organisation. Eve noted the importance of

> making sure anything published is coming in, because when you get really busy you can miss those things, and particularly anything new and local and Indigenous … just making sure if we see anything and keeping an eye on [name of local First Nations organisation] and local publishers to make sure that that's coming, that we're really on top of those sorts of things, which is pretty basic. But you can, particularly cause so many people are self-publishing now, you can miss that stuff if you don't keep your eyes out.

These comments from Eve describe the challenges of discovering items that are published about the Kookaburra area, as not everyone may realise that Kookaburra Libraries are interested in their local publication. While this is depicted as 'pretty basic', it describes

community connections to a local First Nations organisation and local publishers to assist in providing new collection items. Freya talked about obtaining recent publications, stating that

> we've got one guy who used to be a school principal, and when he was at his school, he used to send us his yearbook every year, which he did himself, so he's written a number of school histories, and he always just delivers them to us which is very nice, but he's also done some other organisations as well, but he quite likes doing school histories.

This local author contributes information about schools and some other organisations. There are a growing number of authors who self-publish, live in the Kookaburra area and offer the books they have written to the library, or that library staff need to track down so they can be added to the collection. Networks can be crucial to discovering this information as the items may have very targeted distribution, but what one can find out about may depend on who is in one's network.

5.4.2 Library staff connections for acquiring local studies items

The *Kookaburra Libraries Strategy* includes discussion of the central place of community connections for the library. This describes the importance of connections including partnerships with organisations and individuals for improved access to the local studies collection and to create new items for it.

Library staff connect with colleagues in their library and within their council. The library staff are connected to the community as they provide a collection, services and programs for and with the people of the Kookaburra area. The connections reach out beyond this to include library suppliers, people who deliver items to the libraries, and those who provide services and programs for their libraries. Staff who live locally connect with the community as part of their daily lives. These connections are like a mycorrhizal fungal network that can aid in providing nutrients to trees to help them grow and assist trees to share resources with each other, just as libraries provide resources for the community and, in turn, benefit from people in the community using libraries. These mycorrhizal fungal networks can be beneficial to participants including the trees and other plants, as well as the fungus (Sheldrake, 2021). It is worth noting that not all relationships involving mycorrhizal fungi are beneficial, just as other relationships and connections are not always beneficial (Sheldrake, 2021).

Sourcing new local studies items potentially involves staff across the whole library service, and some of the Kookaburra Council staff as well. Each staff member will have distinct connections with people and organisations and so may discover different new publications or sources of information that could be documented for the local studies collection. Assisting a

person with their research enquiry may be the start of establishing a relationship that could lead to the offer of items for the local studies collection, or it could lead to building the connection between the researcher and the collection or the information contained within it.

John and Eve both described the importance of deliberately building connections between library staff to increase the understanding of local studies, and of the potential for new outcomes for the Kookaburra community because of new or strengthened connections between staff in different parts of the library structure. As part of this, John mentioned a focus on building relationships between local studies staff and library staff who provide services to children so that, together, they can create programs and resources for young children to learn about their community. Eve commented on this as well, saying that

> we try and tie in with other areas of the library so [names of different teams] and I have been trying to also include the branches, if we can, in different bits and pieces because I think that everybody likes local history, they just don't know it.

Eve's description of people not knowing they are interested in local studies highlights the importance of programs and other kinds of outreach to connect people in the Kookaburra community to information in the local studies collection that is relevant to them. Other connections are being built between local studies and outreach staff because of the work undertaken by this team in connecting the library with the community. These connections have the potential to lead to new local studies items as more people in the community find out about the local studies collection at Kookaburra Libraries.

There are some staff in branch libraries, like Olive, who are active in sending suggestions or items to local studies staff. This could be because they hear about a local publication or because they have removed flyers from the community information noticeboard and think that a specific flyer could be added to the collection. Freya described this connection by stating that 'we've got a network of branches. We have a lot of people who talk to a lot of other people, so we quite often get referrals from our branches.' This increases the number of staff listening to the community discuss new items of potential local studies interest or who see information on local websites or on social media. While it increases the number of people listening and watching, providing more locations for Kookaburra Libraries staff to interact with the community this method still predominantly depends on people coming to or contacting the library rather than library staff making contact.

Another perspective on this connection between local studies staff and branch libraries was provided by Olive, one of the library staff who works in the branch libraries. In talking about the kinds of items she sends to the local studies staff, Olive stated that it is

> the things that I take off the notice boards that were some sort of community event, I send those all into them. If it's something that's, you know, you decide is not going to be of any value, you don't send those in, but the rest I send all in so that they've got copies of those up there … just anything that's community based I send into them.

This describes Olive making decisions about what is sent through, providing a filtering of the information. This may be positive, but it may also limit what the local studies staff find out about. Olive mentioned that for local studies the relationships are not only with local studies staff, but can also include the acquisitions and cataloguing staff:

> [W]henever you see a local author has something out, I get onto [Bonnie] and say to, you know, or [Paige] did you know that this is now available or whatever and or get a copy and send it into them.

The filaments of connection spread out from the library to the rest of Kookaburra Council. Some council staff donate Kookaburra Council information to the local studies collection, some directly and others via the branch libraries. Freya, in describing the connection to council staff, stated that

> they're quite happy for us to keep all those display plans, say, management plans and the annual report and those sorts of things go on display, so we got this sort of standing order with the branches they just send us every, anything that anyone sends ... So, if they're doing something about a development plan of some sort, they really, these days tend to only send it to the suburb that it happens in, so the branch people just when they come off their exhibition period just send them to us now.

This describes the pathways that some of the Kookaburra Council information takes before it is part of the local studies collection. In further commenting on these connections with the staff at Kookaburra Council who send the information to the library, Freya stated that

> they're not managers, they're people who actually handle the material, and publish it and put it together and do all that of stuff, they're the ones that I'm on their list, so, then they just ring up, if they're curious or they tell everybody else as well what, if somebody else comes to them and says should we print this thing, they give them the word … and it works both ways, they come and borrow things, one of the sections over there at the moment has

> borrowed a few things and they digitised and bring it back with the electronic version so that's pretty good as well.

This describes connections built up over time between library and council staff that continue to provide relevant new items for the library. It demonstrates the importance of library and council staff talking with other people in their organisation about the connections between the council and the library. as that may in turn help create a new connection, providing a snowball effect.

Local studies staff at Kookaburra Libraries described connections with the community of Kookaburra as important to their work. Freya, in talking about the importance of long-term relationships with some community groups, stated:

> We have some other connections in the community where … historical societies etc., we collect things that they publish. We collect their newsletters, so some of the different societies around town … we have like sixty years of collecting from those societies. [We] keep in contact with them so that we know what they're doing...[they] also quite often do … little exhibitions … so gives us another opportunity to collect some of their material … and then as some of those people have been retiring, they've been bringing their work in to us … because we've already made those connections ... We just keep a lookout a lot.

This describes connections that can be continued by different library staff from those who established them, in the example of the long-term donations of newsletters. It helps to demonstrate that these relationships can be a shared responsibility of library staff rather than necessarily being individual relationships, although there can be that aspect to them as well. New relationships can be established as people use images from the local studies collection in other publishing and provide copies of this to the local studies collection. John noted that

> one of the elements that we're putting into our outreach plan is to build those relationships to not only collect current stories, so to add to the collection, but also to find partners to collaborate with to present and reinterpret some of those collections.

This statement by John reiterates the information in the *Kookaburra Libraries Strategy* about the value of connections for building the local studies collection.

Research, and the potential for research, can also provide connections between people and the local studies collection. Freya noted that these connections have changed over time, stating that

> even twenty years ago where people would have arrived in the reading room and asked for materials, and they're hunched over what they were doing, and they come back again next

> week, and you might have known what they were doing … but history was much more insular… it was their history, and they were writing it. But now people are quite happy, in lots of cases, to share their work with other people so, that's a big change from what I've experienced. It's much more open, people are happy to sit in there and discuss their work.

This helps to show how onsite use of the local studies collection can contribute to researchers' connections with each other, as well as with the Kookaburra Libraries collection and library staff. There is not yet potential for researchers connecting directly online with each other through Kookaburra Libraries. This is likely to require deliberate action – for example, either providing an online space, or encouraging the use of specific hashtag (Houghton et al., 2020).

Amelie commented on some inconsistent collecting from the past, based on 'who knew who', before the current strategy and plans were implemented. This provides a different perspective on connections with the council and community. Amelie stated of past collecting practice that it was 'more who knew who, and you know I think if there's one thing that confirms the need for any sort of a plan then it's that inconsistent collecting'. Amelie's comments about the collecting being based on 'who knew who' show the importance of the strategy and plans discussed earlier, with their focus on partnerships for research and collecting, and diverse collecting. To help prevent corruption and exploitation, there is a code of conduct for Kookaburra Council staff [Kookaburra Council Code of Conduct for Staff KCCCS2022] that contains information about ethical behaviour required of council staff. This is because, when misapplied, connections may enable or encourage corruption. This is not an issue in the connections discussed as part of the research.

Amelie discussed partners each having their own priorities in relationships and that the library must watch out for the interests of the Kookaburra community as part of their priorities. This is in the context of a specific formal partnership with a written agreement. Some of these new partnerships are about encouraging research from the collection. Amelie described this as

> providing really quality authoritative information that is not subject to interpretation, obviously there's interpretation how people viewed it but here's the facts … taken from this document, written at this time.

This new research can, in turn, become part of the local studies collection. These newer, formal partnerships form part of the connection between the library and the community, with more filaments, this time in the form of written agreements, connecting the local studies collection and its services with the community. Freya spoke about one of these newer relationships with an organisation in the community, stating that

> that's a really good one because we're both getting something out of that and its sort of ongoing now … we've established that partnership … there's a lot of stuff there we can do with them so that's a pretty good one that's fairly recent.

This comment by Freya highlights that there are benefits to connections and partnerships that may be different for each relationship.

The local studies staff are connected to many organisations as a result of requests for them, particularly Freya, to give talks, or because the organisation has come to the library for a local studies talk or a tour. These talks can build connections as the local studies staff find out more about the local organisations and provide them with advice, or the library may be the recipient of donations from them. For example, a talk to a local environment group led to one library staff finding out about their local environment collection, which is stored in a flood-prone location with few environmental controls. This connection started because an ex-library staff member was a volunteer with that organisation; thus, an existing relationship led to a new one. At present the library is providing advice about how to best care for the collection and how to make the information available more widely, including on Trove. These discussions are shaping the practices at the environment organisation so that their collection is better cared for including them starting a spreadsheet to list the items in their collection. This is a connection between the library and a community organisation that is improving the listing of collection items. This collection has the potential to become a donation in later years, but if well managed may be able to remain an independent collection. This is the same local environment group whose members participated in this research.

Other ways connections are demonstrated are by local studies staff, in particular Freya and Eve, being invited to events such as launches of local publications [from observation KFN 20082019]; these connections can also lead to donations. Some of these events are a way of finding out about and acquiring recent content, and can enable Freya and Eva to catch up with some of their regular researchers. It demonstrates that they are interested enough in this to participate in their own time [from observation KFN 20082019]. Local studies staff are connected to several local organisations [from observation KFN 20062019, KFN 12112019, KFN 03122019].

Some of the recent donations of archives to Kookaburra Libraries include contemporary content as well as older items. Decisions about accepting these archive donations are made by Freya or Eve in response to offers from their council, members of the community, community organisations or local businesses. These offers are mostly due to existing relationships, because

these provide a way for an organisation, or an individual, to find out about the possibility of the library being interested in their information [Interview with Eve KLSSO 29042019].

5.4.3 Requesting donations for local studies at Kookaburra Libraries

The Kookaburra Libraries local studies staff encourage donations from people who have used the local studies collection for research and then produce something as the culmination of this research, especially if it is a printed book [Interviews with Freya KLSL 14052018, Josephine KLSSS 21032019 and Eve KLSSO 29042019, photograph recording observation KP02122019]. This kind of donation, based on using the local studies collection for research, is a cyclical part of people using the information in the local studies collection. Items created from research using the local studies collection can be important to add to the local studies collection as they demonstrate some of the information available in the collection, as well as providing a way to learn more about local people, organisations or places. The books of sporting results created by Spencer and donated to Kookaburra Libraries, which include some information from the local studies collection, are an example of this kind of donation. The donations that are invited by Kookaburra Libraries staff constitute a small percentage of overall donations for the local studies collection. Another kind of collection-inspired donation as described by Freya is when people or organisations 'use our images for their own publishing so we always make a copy of that as part of the deal when we do some work for them so that adds quite a lot material to it as well'.

There are a small number of books accepted as donations on the agreement that they can be passed along to another organisation if they are duplicates for titles already held in Kookaburra Libraries' local studies collection. This is permitted under the *Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan*. This impacts a minority of donations. It requires staff time to sort through, but it enables a reallocation of donations to distribute a small number of duplicate publications to other local collecting organisations [photograph recording observation KP23052019].

5.4.4 The provision of unsolicited local studies donations at Kookaburra Libraries

Unsolicited donations are donations – in this instance of items for the local studies collection – that are offered by the donor without being asked for. It includes donations that started as unsolicited donations but expanded to include other material the library staff suggest could be appropriate for the local studies collection after discussions with a potential donor. There is a long history of the donation of unsolicited items for the Kookaburra Libraries local

studies collection, including the foundation items for this collection [Interview with Freya KLSL 14052018]. Kookaburra Libraries started with a relatively large local studies collection because of generous donations of items several decades ago, around the time that Kookaburra Libraries were established. These early donations were predominantly books and artworks provided by a couple of donors, with photographs and documents given by a small number of other donors soon after. These unsolicited donations, comprising significant and relevant items, were initially from a small number of collectors who had large personal collections and wished to provide public access for these items as part of the library collection. These were large and generous donations of collection items to inspire the community of Kookaburra.

Current donations predominantly depend upon a donor offering items for the collection; the donor may telephone to discuss a possible donation or bring items to the library. As well as Kookaburra Council donating items to the library [photographs recording observation KP 23052019, KP20082918, KP23082019], some other organisations or venues that work with the council are aware of the potential to donate items to the local studies collection. Eve commented on a youth venue that closed, saying

> we just got hard drives full of images, the different bits and pieces they'd done, so definitely people know [they can donate], and particularly within council.

The donations are accepted when they are relevant and align with the collection plan, and this results in most unsolicited donations being accepted. These items are stored while awaiting cataloguing or description and any conservation or preservation[10] work required. The unsolicited donations continued during 2019 when this research was undertaken.

The large volume of unsolicited donations observed being accepted during the research makes it hard to try new ways of collecting or different methods of outreach to seek a diversity of viewpoints as described in the *Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan* [from observation KFN 21062019]. The current practice means that people in the Kookaburra community can offer what they want the library to have, or what they do not want to keep, which may not be quite the same as what is sought for the collection. This does not mean that the items are not relevant; they tell part of the story of the Kookaburra area, which is why they are accepted for the collection.

[10] *Conservation and preservation are concerned with the careful management of change to cultural material.* National Museum of Australia https://www.nma.gov.au/about/corporate/plans-policies/policies/collection-care-and-preservation [accessed 23 May 2022].

The high volume of unsolicited donations coming into the local studies collection has the potential to create a delay before items are catalogued, preserved and made available for the Kookaburra community [observations KFN 08032019, KFN 21062019, KFN 15112019]. With a backlog of items to work through, it is harder to make sure that recent and current concerns and interests of the community are appropriately collected and that the items collected document a diversity of viewpoints.

During observation at Kookaburra Libraries there were a high volume of donations from council staff, as some of them were required to clear out paper items from their offices. While some of these items were sent to the records section at Kookaburra Council, not all of them met the criteria. Many of these items made their way to the library as the council staff did not want to simply recycle them, and the items contained useful information about the communities in Kookaburra and were thus relevant to the library collection. They contained older information about the council [from observation KFN 13112019, KFN 02122019]. These unsolicited donations were a direct result of the connection between local studies and council staff.

The approach of accepting most items offered by the community makes it appear that Kookaburra Libraries is more reactive and reliant on donor suggestions, rather than on deliberate planning by the library staff as described in the plans and strategy. It risks collecting only from, or predominantly from, existing networks rather than in a deliberate and planned way that includes more people in the community. This has the potential to create or continue a lack of diversity in the collecting. The current process has provided many new collection items that document the community [photographs recording observation KP 15112019], yet there are still gaps in information about the area.

The Kookaburra Libraries plans and strategy arise from a need to clearly describe the rationale behind actions taken, so that they can be understood in the future. Amelie, the library manager, highlighted the importance of a structured approach to local studies collecting supported by plans and strategies so that in the future people understand the collecting decisions made. Amelie mentioned that in the past some of the collecting had an unplanned nature rather than being shaped by plans and strategies, and stated that

> it's the ad hoc nature of that [which] worries me … I think there was a gap in …the methodology of why we collected what we collected and if I could ask … the staff ... 'Why did we collect that and why didn't we have that well you know that sitting over with the museum, why isn't that with us now?', and they actually can't tell me because there was sort of no sense, it was just whatever opportunity came up rather than us being a bit more

> proactive and seeking … We should have a plan for that … I feel that that's council's job. Who else will do it if it's not the local council?

These comments highlight the importance that Amelie as the library manager places on the council collecting, preserving and making available information about the local area in a way that is defined and supported by plans and strategies. This is further reinforced by the discussion with Amelie about the *Kookaburra Libraries Strategy*. Amelie noted that the *Kookaburra Libraries Strategy* includes the importance of the local studies collection for the community and is about stories being drawn forth from the collection, helping people to learn more about their area.

Eve in talking about the approach that Kookaburra Libraries takes to acquiring items, stated that 'we're reaching a point where we can be a lot more proactive about what we want to do, which is really exciting because there's been so long of just dealing with the past'. This statement by Eve shows a willingness by the library staff change their approach, and their collecting practices, but this was not yet visible in changed practices – for example, in how unsolicited donations were being accepted.

5.4.5 Collecting according to staff personal interest

As discussed in the previous section, connections can be crucial for local studies collecting, as many new items are discovered through word of mouth. This may mean that the interests of Kookaburra Libraries staff influence collecting because of where they go, who and what they see and who they know. This can be wide-ranging – for example, collecting fliers and newsletters when they are seen by library staff while they are out and about – or it can be narrow, such as taking photographs at an event that is important for a family but that also may tell a wider story [library system search KLLS 22012022]. Collecting according to staff personal interest is not a criterion for relevance or significance in the library strategy or plans.

For some topics there may be one staff member who is very interested in an area, and they will be active in what is collected about it, while another has different interests. This is described by Eve, who stated that

> [Freya] loves sport, and I would never look at sport … she'll be aware of what's going on and that would just not cross my mind, and you do look at the clippings folders like historically too, and you'll go, oh god, it's an awful lot of stuff on gardens or something and then you'll be like, oh, so and so [was] … here at that time and that interested them [laughs]. So as well as everything else that they cut, they would make sure they probably cut more gardening than I would do [laughs].

This demonstrates the influence of staff personal interests, in that even after a staff member has left the influences of their interests can be seen. Music is an area that has a relatively small collection and is generally collected by word of mouth from other staff or friends [Interview with Eve KLSSO 02122019 and observation KFN 06122019]. This variety can be positive, but it is important to make sure that areas such as local music, for example, are not excluded simply because of a lack of interest or a lack of personal connections, or, conversely, overrepresented because of the strength of staff connections.

Photography is a personal interest for Freya [Interview with Freya KLSL 14052018 and observation KFN 21062019], as well as a one of the collecting priorities [Interview with John KMLS 11112019]. Freya's systematic photography over time has assisted in adding relevant items to the collection or placing them in the queue to be added to the collection. Some other photographs added to the collection represent events in the lives of other local studies staff [Interview with Molly KLSSD 07032019], while others are taken to document a specific event to make sure this information is included in the local studies collection [observation of photography for the collection KFN 20092019].

The staff personal interests can be seen to provide strengths, for the areas covered in depth, but areas the staff are not as interested in still need to be included so that the entire story of Kookaburra is collected. In talking about an area of recent collecting, Mollie stated that

> it's not my kettle of fish but I can see that they're really cool and that they're really unique and special … I can see their worth and I can see the potential to use them to engage with an audience which normally would never ever step foot in local studies.

This describes being able to see a broader perspective about part of the collection, but one not of personal interest for Mollie. It hints that there is a risk of bias in collecting if priority is given to collection areas that staff are interested in, potentially at the expense of other subjects and groups that may help to tell a more diverse, equitable and inclusive story. To address this, Freya delivers talks that include showing items of interest to a small number of specific groups so that they are aware of the potential to donate material to the library [Interview with Freya KLSL 14052018]. This raises awareness so that community groups are informed of items relevant to their interests in the local studies collection, and are aware of the potential to donate further material.

Eve noted that local studies can be a way for people to connect to the community they live in, stating that

> local history can do that for people and help them make those ties and sometimes, and collecting stories, the stories of trying to be broad and not influenced by what your passions are, or what you find interesting.

This shows the importance of following a planned collecting strategy and not necessarily following personal interests. This has the potential to be a way to connect newer residents to the Kookaburra community as well.

Even with the importance Amelie places on plans and strategies, she referred to a recent photographic project suggested by a Kookaburra councillor to document specific aspects of the Kookaburra area, stating that

> serendipitously we're collecting, even though that was never … part of that physical collection strategy that we were in the business, in the process of finalising at the moment.

This demonstrates that, for Amelie, the plans and strategy may need to be set aside for ad hoc collecting priorities. This makes the collection vulnerable to councillor personal interest as well as staff personal interest. Another perspective is that potentially the plans and strategies need to be written in a way to include collecting not yet imagined so that there is a diverse, inclusive and planned approach.

For the social justice approach to collecting that is suggested by this research, a deliberate approach is helpful, as it can assist in providing increased visibility for more people in the community, contributing to creating a diverse, equitable and inclusive local studies collection. Staff personal interests and connections can be a starting point for collecting, but their influence must be handled carefully and with consideration so that the many difference facets of the Kookaburra community are deliberately included rather than being accidentally excluded.

5.4.6 Summary

This section has explored how the library acquires items for the local studies collection. This included exploring the connections local studies staff have within their organisation and with their community and how this can assist or influence local studies collecting. The connections with the community are uneven. The connections between the local collections section of the library and the community are sometimes ad hoc or improvised, meaning that some parts of the community are less visible or not visible in the collection. The ad hoc nature of some connections is not necessarily a problem, provided the strategy and plans are followed to assist in delivering a social justice approach of equity, diversity and inclusion to local studies.

Without new connections the local studies staff are unlikely to be able to fulfill the diverse collecting requirements from the *Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan*. For the local

studies staff, there is the challenge of how to create new connections so that new groups and individuals are included and become visible in the local studies collection.

5.5 Reliance on unsolicited donations

> [W]e have people turn out with huge amounts of material, which is awesome.
>
> — Interview with Eve 2 December 2019

While donations as a method of acquiring items for the local studies collection were discussed as part of Section 5.3, this section focuses on the issue of relying on donations, particularly unsolicited donations. The section will explore the pressure to accept donations, the snowball effect with donations, the disconnect between plans and outcomes and the pressure to be up to date with cataloguing.

5.5.1 Pressure to accept donations

The pressure to accept unsolicited donations for the local studies collection may be due to concern that these items could be destroyed, deleted or perhaps be damaged by damp, fire, pests or other threats if they are not accepted. Local studies staff may not see the pressure to accept donations as possibly coercive action undertaken by a potential donor. These (at times large) unsolicited donations can be seen in a positive light, as Eve stated:

> [W]e have people turn up with huge amounts of material, which is awesome … So that's where we probably need to more concentrate on filling the gaps because we do get people arrive with these amazing things that we need to go, okay, well this community is not arriving, do they know they can arrive? And how do we make connections with them?

At present the method of accepting unsolicited donations privileges those who know how to navigate the process of donating to the library or, in some instances, know library staff.

Eve commented that work is yet to be undertaken to identify gaps in the local studies collecting, stating that

> we're starting to get the headspace to identify gaps and see where we should be collecting in the future, what's missing, and that's for me, quite exciting because it's like we've been waiting and now we're kind of seeing what's there and what's not. So we are looking at that, which is great.

Eve went on to mention a discussion with a researcher looking at local Greek Orthodox churches who had been looking at relevant newsletters the library held, and who

> was saying, 'It's a really awesome collection' and he goes, 'Oh, are you actively collecting in that community?' and I was like, 'No but we should be', and so I was talking to another staff member who I knew was involved and she was the same she was like, 'Oh you know, okay, yeah, for sure' … so I think we need to do more of that with the gaps … but we need to do it well.

John questioned some of the current methods used for acquiring new items for the local studies collection. He talked of the approach of collecting items and only then thinking about what to do with them, stating:

> I think it is the last sort of three or so years is the first time the libraries actually sat back and thought, what is the future of these collections? For a lot of years, it was very much that sort of paddling madly just to keep up to try and sort of collect and store … the mental space that we were in as an organisation was sort of capture/store, and sort of just grab it, put it somewhere on a shelf, we know it's safe and we know it's safe, so therefore, we can worry about it later, but not actually actively thinking about how do we build capacity.

John described the results of pressure to accept donations that are collected and stored but are not findable by the community as they are not yet catalogued onto the library system. The pressure to accept donations could be a factor in deciding the relevance of adding items to the local studies collection, but the way John described it, it is an important factor, leading to his description of this as an unsustainable practice.

The current method, with pressure to accept donations, makes some stories known. It demonstrates that people and organisations who know the processes to follow can be placed in positions of privilege as they encourage Kookaburra Libraries to accept their donations, so that their stories and their interests are collected and preserved as part of the Kookaburra Libraries local studies collection.

Accepting donations that are offered for the local studies collection is understandable. It shows a strong interest in wanting to collect items of relevance that are offered to Kookaburra Libraries. The high volume of unsolicited donations offered to and accepted by Kookaburra Libraries makes it difficult for the library staff to seek donations for areas of information not visible in the local studies collection because there is not the staff time to manage a different strategy. It may mean that considerations of diverse viewpoints are not being prioritised.

5.5.2 The snowball effect of repeat donors with donations

According to the *Kookaburra Libraries Local Studies Collection Development Plan*, donations offered for the local studies collection do not have to be accepted. This provides an

option to say no to donations; however, this is not often done by Kookaburra Libraries. Rarely saying no to donations can be like a snowball; it starts off small and grows as people hear from their family or friends about the potential to donate items. This can lead to more people approaching Kookaburra Libraries with potential donations. The offer of donations can be positive but accepting most of them has the potential to lead to biased collecting.

Sometimes a person or an organisation offers a specific item to the library, then, through discussion with a staff member, this becomes a larger donation containing more information, or it helps contribute to long-term donations of items that may be regularly produced, such as newsletters, annual reports, and archives, creating a snowball effect [Interviews with Freya KLSL 14052018 and Eve KLSSO 29042019, photographs recording observation KP22052019, KP18092019]. This snowball effect can be seen with two recent organisations, one of which had closed. Prior to its closure it was donating media files to the local studies collection. After its closure it donated a large archive of items, mostly in analogue formats, to Kookaburra Libraries, while a second organisation (still running) donated a specific format of their items, and later expanded its donation to digital photographs and additional analogue items [Interview with Eve KLSSO 29042019].

Another example involved information about an individual. This was a local man who was interested in local history and had compiled various sets of information about the area, which he donated to the library. A family member wrote a book based on his diaries and letters, and this book was published and a copy donated to the library. The diaries, letters and other source material for the book were digitised and donated along with their digital files and some funding for ongoing care of this part of the local studies collection [Interview with Freya KLSL 16052019]. This is a generous way to provide local information as an unsolicited donation for the library. As a donation it built on items that were given by the local man prior to his death. This illustrates what is possible when people know the processes to follow and have the money and other resources to be able to undertake this work.

Issues of relying on donations are demonstrated in a variety of ways; for example, when relationships are established with a donor organisation or an individual, these often continue over time. The impacts of this can be positive, neutral or negative. For example, many newsletters from local organisations are regularly received through the mail for the library to add to their collection. These printed newsletters have research value. Their ongoing donation is often the result of relationships between previous library staff and community organisations that have continued through changes in personnel both at Kookaburra Libraries and the organisations. This provides many years' worth of local newsletters on a wide variety of topics

that over time, like a snowball, grow larger and larger. These newsletters are already catalogued, so it is a relatively fast process to accession new issues for the collection [Interview with Paige KA 18092019 and photographs of observation KP 18092019]. There are potential impacts when these newsletters change to being emailed documents or are delivered digitally in other ways, as is starting to happen. This can cause a break in continuity, as the organisation may not inform Kookaburra Libraries of changes to the format [Interview with Paige KA 18092019] and as of the time of the research there was no system in place to check for the availability of emailed or other digital newsletters that might replace or continue some of the newsletters previously posted. Kookaburra Libraries can collect digital newsletters, and have done so for some titles that changed from print to digital; the challenge, as with many local studies items, is finding out that these items have been published at all [Interview with Paige KA 18092019]. Thus, one of the issues of relying on donations may be collection gaps when formats of items such as newsletters change, and this is not communicated to the library staff or discovered by them.

The snowball effect can be a positive strategy, building depth in particular collecting areas, but it is unlikely to demonstrate the diversity of the community. Eve talked about the unstructured method of accepting some donations, and described the strengths she sees in this process, stating:

> I think we should have the structured way of looking at what we don't have but I also think that the fact that we have some flexibility with what we can accept, once you get too structured you can't do that, and I know for sure that some things have come to us because other more structured organisations have not been able to take them, and they've been wonderful things. So, it's quite good in some [ways], I think you need both, otherwise you can miss out, or you just become really boring.

The current, less structured approach can mean that if there has been a successful donation of an item from an organisation this has the potential to lead to other items from the same organisation, rather than new items from different sources. This leads to in-depth collecting in some areas, but to an absence of diversity or missing information in others. The unstructured approach may be more sustainable if there were a structured method being used to take a social justice approach to systematically address collection gaps looking at diversity, equity and inclusion in local studies.

5.5.3 The disconnect between plans and outcomes

The library staff are understandably proud of the local studies collection; however, as with other local studies collections, there are ongoing issues. There is a backlog of items that require cataloguing, description, digitisation, digital preservation and conservation or preservation. The cataloguing is necessary so that items can be searched or browsed for on the library system; the digitisation for preservation and access so that people can see a digital copy and not increase the deterioration of items by repeatedly handling them; the digital preservation assists digitised items and digital original content to be maintained; and conservation or preservation may be needed for analogue items that have experienced deterioration over time or to prevent deterioration taking place. This backlog of work is a concern because it makes it difficult for researchers to understand the scope of the existing collection and to find items independently without requiring assistance from the local studies staff. It is a challenge for staff, not only because of the work they need to do for this collection, but of the increased difficulty of finding uncatalogued items to assist clients with their research. Kookaburra Libraries are not alone in experiencing these challenges; the situation is similar for local studies collections in other public libraries (State Library of New South Wales, 2021)[11].

To quantify the size of the local studies collection, Freya organised the local studies staff to count the collection items, including those yet to be catalogued. This was so that informed and planned decisions could be made about how to improve access to the local studies collection items over time. The project counted the number of items, one by one, by format, as well as documenting the need for cataloguing, digitisation, and the condition of the items, so it was known if preservation or conservation was required. Freya mentioned that

> we're also counting the backlog of published type material or … anything that's waiting to be catalogued …[or] other things that people have donated, and we're trying not to get into trouble with cataloguing as you know they get a bit upset with us… I think they think we're having a go at them.

The reference to the cataloguers is because they are the staff who catalogue the published items. Counting the backlog of published items requiring cataloguing could be interpreted as being critical of the speed of Bonnie and Lilly in cataloguing print items for the local studies collection. This hints at some tension between staff, but this was shown to be not a major concern by other information provided. The backlog of digital items waiting to be catalogued

[11] NSW data is used as comparable data is not available from other states, or nationwide.

by Freya and others is not as visible, as these items sit on hard drives rather than on shelves other library staff walk past.

John, in talking about this counting project, noted that

> the idea is that we could actually do an audit … to understand, what are all of the collections … if they are at risk, or if they are actively decomposing, or if they're neutral [laughs]. To understand, so that we could then prioritise with some of those, the digitisation works, but also with some of the outsourcing of what we can do for preservation work.

John described the need to know the status of items so that they can be made discoverable and looked after for the community.

Eve, Mollie and Josephine were involved in this local studies counting project as well. Eve described part of her role in this work, saying:

> I think that's why my head is so much in wanting just to sort out what's already here. So, you know for me the fact that I just wanted to make sure the stuff that's waiting, that needs to be catalogued that does not need doubles, that all the council stuff is together, all the other stuff is together … I'm putting them altogether so that when [Bonnie] does hit them or [Lilly] … they can do the whole lot at once. There's nothing worse than doing three of something and then finding two more that need to be done a week later … I need that to be clear before moving on, and then when new things come in, we know what we have and what we don't have, and we'll just be in a better position, but it is getting better.

This description shows some issues of relying on donations, with items needing to be brought together to streamline cataloguing workflows, as Eve was doing. Eve preferred one set of work to be completed before starting the next so that the local studies staff have to capacity to think about other actions for the collection. Eve's description of bringing items together to streamline work for Bonnie and Lilly demonstrates a positive working relationship.

The workload of dealing with issues of relying on unsolicited donations has impinged on library staff being able to be active with collecting. Eve spoke about the situation, saying that

> I think that our heads have been very much in dealing with the past. And we're getting to the point now where we're able to go, what's missing in what we collect in the future? But we've had such a backlog, once that's, now we're going, ah, you know what? … for the last few years it's just been a lot of catching up on, cause there was only one or two staff for so long, and such a huge backlog. So, I think when we get a better grip on that, which I can slowly see slowly the light at the end of the tunnel. Then we can be really proactive about how we move forward.

This describes the impact of the backlog of items to be catalogued and processed, and how it has been difficult for the library staff to think about other ways of working because of the time needed to undertake this immediate work.

The capacity of the local studies staff at Kookaburra Libraries to be active in seeking items or content for the library collection is impacted by the relevance of the current unsolicited donations, the large volume of these donations[12] and the approach of accepting most of them. The offered donations for local studies comply with the collecting criteria, but as a result of saying yes to these donations library staff do not have the space or time to seek other stories of the Kookaburra area that show the diversity of viewpoints that is described as a priority in the *Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan*. The staff could choose to not accept some unsolicited donations based on their 'relevance to the community' or if they do not represent 'diversity of viewpoint' [Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan KLCP 20182021]; however, the donations are generally accepted if they are about the Kookaburra area.

The approach of accepting most unsolicited donations may have a long-term effect of narrowing the collecting focus as well as not accurately reflecting changes in the community. This method is unlikely to contribute to creating a more diverse and inclusive local studies collection and has the potential to document a biased history of the area. This may not be the intended effect of this approach, but it could be an unintended outcome.

5.5.4 The pressure to be up to date with local studies cataloguing

The research value of the local studies collection is appreciated by the library staff and the researchers who use the collection. The access is provided by items being catalogued, and the collection knowledge of local studies staff about items not yet catalogued [information from observation KFN 20062019, KFN 21082019, KFN 20092019]. Having items catalogued means that they can be searched for online, and people anywhere can find out what items are held by a library or other collecting institution. Cataloguing and metadata on a library system enables people to search or browse for research or pleasure (metadata is information about information and can be another term used to describe cataloguing). Creating these records about an item or set of items takes time. The more items requiring cataloguing or description, the more the time needed. Local studies cataloguing can be slow because of the detail and description that must be provided for each item or set of items. As Bonnie stated, 'there's no simple cataloguing for local studies'. Local studies items may be catalogued individually – for

[12] Exact numbers are not able to be given as they could impact the anonymity of Kookaburra Libraries.

example, books – or as sets of information, such as archives, which may have a basic catalogue record and be accompanied by a finding tool that has a more detailed listing or an overview of the contents of the archive.

When library items are not catalogued the only people who may know they exist are the library staff (or the donor if the items were donated); when a researcher searches the library system, they will not find the uncatalogued items – they are invisible. Not having everything catalogued or described thus inhibits research discovery. Of the items collected by Kookaburra Libraries, many are catalogued, but not all. These uncatalogued items cannot be found in the library system or through using finding aids for archives. Findings aids are generally a detailed listing of the contents of an archive, so that researchers have information about the kinds of items or information they are likely to find in an archive. If a researcher does not contact Kookaburra Libraries, they will miss finding these items. If they do contact the library, local studies staff must spend time searching for items without catalogue records. This relies on staff knowledge of the local studies collection; while their knowledge is extensive (especially Freya's), the collection is too big to know all of it. Ideally, as well as being searchable locally on the library system, these same titles should be searchable on Trove, the national database.

John described the situation in local studies as involving a backlog of donations waiting to be catalogued. The decisions causing this were sometimes made prior to current local studies staff being in their roles. John, in describing the situation, stated:

> I think it was from memory … that there was more than a ten-year backlog in donations, and they were basically those unsolicited, we have not solicited for a very, very long time for collecting in the local history area, and so having more than a ten-year backlog meant that the reality was that we were never going to get past even just understanding what was in the donations list, let alone ever actively cataloguing, or digitising, or making it accessible, which is just the game that they'd been playing for many, many years … we've gone from an over ten-year backlog, in the last two years, to having an under ten-year backlog, but particularly with the rate of these unsolicited donations, it seems to not ever get much below.

John highlighted that staff are responding to issues of relying on donations. These actions influence access to the collection as well as the capacity to seek new content. The estimate of the cataloguing backlog being a ten-year project is simply that, an estimate. There are some items that have been waiting over twenty years to be catalogued. This impacts the capacity of staff to be active and, from a social justice perspective, to collect material related to recent and current concerns and interests of the community.

Ten years is a long time to wait for items to be catalogued, and during that time new items are added to the cataloguing queue. Past collection decisions have provided a collection of significance, but one that is not fully catalogued, and that has preservation issues. (Note, however, that not all local studies items at Kookaburra Libraries take ten years to be catalogued; high demand items are catalogued quickly so they are available soon after their arrival in the library.)

A recent audit of NSW public libraries shows that only 16% of libraries have 91% or more of their local studies collection catalogued, while 42% of libraries have 60% or less of their local studies collection catalogued (State Library of New South Wales, 2021, p. 45).[13] This means that Kookaburra Libraries are not alone in having a backlog of local studies items requiring cataloguing. It does not mean, however, that this is a positive situation to be in. The work of cataloguing, conserving and digitising older items, while important, has an impact on current collecting at Kookaburra Libraries because of the staff time required to do this work.

Information technology staff in Kookaburra Council have in the past placed restrictions on how much information could be provided for cataloguing because of the online storage that would be required for this information. Bonnie stated that

> we put a lot of information into the local studies catalogue records, and, with this interface, I had to, I shouldn't say it here, the IT persons gone now, I had to fight to get that much information actually to be appearing in the record.

These discussions would have taken time away from working on cataloguing but were necessary so that the local studies item records could have sufficient detail to be useful.

This did not help the overall situation with local studies cataloguing, as Bonnie went on to say that

> quite often they'll be a publication like, there's a local guy who puts out books of photographs so that will arrive on my desk, and I'll know that people will be waiting to get that so I'll have to catalogue that straight away so it is prioritised, and other things you know you just know that you're not going to have time to do it for a while, but just gets put in that pile over there [pointing to shelves of local studies items awaiting cataloguing].

Bonnie and Lilly aim to reduce the time it takes for some items to have a catalogue record [Interview with Lilly KCT 21032019, information from photographs KP 07032019, KP 10072019]. Templates are used for some local studies cataloguing where original cataloguing

[13] NSW data is used as comparable data is not available from other states, or nationwide.

can be made slightly faster through using a repeatable approach [Interview with Lilly KCT 21032019] – for example, with some reports from Kookaburra Council. Detailed name and geographic subject headings are included in local studies catalogue records, as this specific local information is important for the discoverability of items. [Information from photographs KP 10072019].

As well as Bonnie and Lilly, other local studies staff, particularly Freya, catalogue items for the collection. This is mostly for digital or digitised content and for archives. The digital items are sitting on hard drives waiting to be catalogued [Interviews with Freya KLSL 14052018 and KLSL 20082019]. Some of these items are photographs taken by Freya and others are digital items shifted from other digital storage devices. Freya stated, 'I've been transferring all the stuff from CDs and the DVDs and everything onto some storage that we got from IT. There is quite a lot of it.' The cataloguing backlog for digital items is not as visible as for printed items as they are stored on hard drives or on shared drives and are only visible when the hard drives or the shared drives are explored, while printed items sit on shelves or in boxes on the floor and are thus much more visible to other library staff.

Over time there have been different systems for documenting information about the items in the collection, including multiple locations for finding aids for archives. The amount of detail in finding aids varies. Eve, discussing this, noted that

> we knew that there was a lot of knowledge in people's heads … I was like right, well we need to get this down on paper, where the locations are, and go from there … I wrote a big, long list and went through all the books, cause has [Freya] showed you, there's like all these archive books that date right back. I went through all of those, and a lot of them, have location, some of them have numbers up to a certain point and then obviously there's changes of staff, changes of things that were priorities within the library. And then they've changed to a different system … there were way more lists than I realised. So, there is folders of lists so then I, went through I scanned all those, so then we, when we had the new system, we put all the archives in and then we attached all the lists, and then went from that point so I've kind of been more involved in that side.

This description shows that what is known about these items can be complicated, and that further exploration can reveal additional issues that need to be resolved. This statement from Eve describes work that has been undertaken to streamline finding aids for archives by scanning them and attaching them to the library system records for the relevant archive. This helps demonstrate the importance of items being catalogued or having other metadata so that there are fewer places local studies staff need to search for items. Items that have been

catalogued can be searched for by a researcher without needing staff mediation. Even if every item was catalogued, staff mediation may still be needed for some research because of specialist knowledge required to connect different information sources.

There is a project in progress, using a volunteer, to provide a detailed listing of items within one archive. Eve and Bonnie worked on the parameters for this project, and the volunteer is a library science student who fills predetermined fields in a spreadsheet with information about each item in a specific archive. This listing of items is a way of collating detailed information for finding aids for an archive. Organising volunteer work takes time, so offers of volunteer work are rarely accepted by the library [from observations KFN 20082019, KFN15112019]. Volunteers could not be used for cataloguing as that requires professional skills, but using them in this way, for listing items in an archive, is an option.

Information about permissions for access can be included as part of a catalogue record and may be recorded on a donation form or as part of an oral history interview form. This is mostly in relation to audio or video recordings and photographs but can involve other archival information as well. Eve noted that 'if stuff comes from somewhere, like, just say an archive turns up from an organisation that's closed down and … you don't know, whether they have permissions for anything'. The permissions Eve mentions matter for copyright and providing access to these items for research and other uses. This is an issue, as items created within the last sixty-five years are likely to still be in copyright and may remain in copyright for many decades. For oral history recordings there are some recent risk assessment guidelines (National and State Libraries Australasia, 2021) that can help with decision-making.

5.5.5 Summary

This section has described issues of relying on donations, especially unsolicited donation, for the Kookaburra Libraries local studies collection. The discussion began by exploring the pressure to accept donations, which privileges those who know the processes to follow to have their donations accepted, or in some instances know the library staff. It continued by describing the snowball effect of repeat donors, whereby a donor who is successful in having something accepted by the library is likely to have more items accepted, leading to in-depth collecting in some areas but few if any items collected in others. The disconnect between plans and outcomes was noted, in that while the plans and strategies make certain statements, other behaviours are frequently used for deciding what is added to the local studies collection. Through all of this there is pressure to be up to date with cataloguing so that the items are findable by researchers, and more easily findable by library staff.

5.6 Collection development

> We aspirationally want to have everything catalogued and on the way to digitisation in ten years. And if we're ever going to get to that point, doing what we're currently doing is not going to work.
>
> — Interview with John 11 November 2019

The current practice of accepting most donations that are offered for the local studies collection puts pressure on the library staff who catalogue, digitise and conserve this collection. It limits the ability of staff to adopt an agile approach to collecting, creating or developing new content for the local studies collection, and to including more diverse voices of the community, which that is a priority in the *Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan*. This subsection is in part a continuation of Section 5.4 (*How the library acquires local studies items*) and 5.5 (*Issues of relying on donations*) and explores what happens once items have been accepted or purchased for the collection, and the lifecycle of access, care and preservation required for them.

This theme describes the outcomes of donations on diversity and on the scale of the collection at Kookaburra Libraries. The discussion begins by exploring the importance of planned collecting by Kookaburra Libraries, then investigates in/visibility in the local studies collection, before looking into collecting by community groups and discussing the ongoing impact of these previous decisions.

5.6.1 The importance of planned collecting

Relying on unsolicited donations makes planning for collecting difficult. John, in talking about potential collection gaps, raised the importance of collecting stories and information so that this information will be available in the future, and there will not simply be a gap in the information available for research. This aligns with statements by Amelie about the importance of planning collecting.

There will always be bias in a library collection, as Carnegie Mellon University Libraries noted with a recent exhibition called *What we don't have: confronting the absence of diversity*; this exhibition listed significant items they had not collected or, if they had collected them, that were not yet findable. They stated that 'we acknowledge that the gaps represent members of our community who have been silenced' (Carnegie Mellon University, 2020). This issue of gaps in their collection and people in the community who have been silenced is relevant in local studies collections.

Highlighting the importance of diverse and equitable collecting by organisations like libraries, Sheffield (2016) writes that there is a

> renewed professional imperative to position information centers as central locations for social justice work [which] has also turned our attention to the need to preserve materials that support a diverse and pluralistic society … [and] as a duty to steward unexplored histories. (p. 573)

To 'steward unexplored histories' (Sheffield, 2016, p. 573) there needs to be a deliberate diversity of connections between the library staff and community groups or individuals, so that diverse information and items about the experiences of living and working in the Kookaburra area are acquired by the library and preserved for the future.

John, in seeking a change in direction for local studies collecting, note that

> the rate of donation, it never seems to actually decrease, but again, they're all historical documents, they're all items from more than 30 or 40 years ago, they're not active story of [Kookaburra] now. So there has to be something that we undertake to capture that story now and so the cataloguer won't be focusing on that new stuff, I still want the cataloguer focusing on getting that backlog under control. I'm thinking that we're going to have to, one of our projects for the new budget is to actually allocate some outsource contract, sort of cataloguing and sort of materials, cause we, even with understanding, having somebody just slightly plodding through and dealing with all that manual work.

John is looking for information to change the processes so that collecting recent information is possible and not delayed because of the impact of past collection decisions. Managing access to items already acquired is important, but at present it may come at the cost of being able to take action on collecting information about recent or current concerns. Looking for different solutions connects to the idea of who is not visible in the Kookaburra Libraries local studies collection. Fraser et al. (2020), in a recent article about museums and neutrality but relevant to libraries, including their local studies collections, states:

> Museum work is not neutral. Museums have never been neutral. The act of collecting preferences some cultural stories over others. The effort to interpret the collections will always be political. What we do with our power and privilege will continue to be the subject of scrutiny, as well it should. We are the gatekeepers of culture and history. We have a duty to recognize that history has never been neutral and that to think otherwise is obstruct the path of social justice. (p. 298)

Local partnerships and connections have the potential to raise awareness of the local studies collection for new audiences, through the use of information from the collection for different purposes – for example, in a theatre production or by other artists. John mentioned this, saying that part of the purpose is

> to understand, but also to get a different perspective, and I think the other side of that is about teaching. Just getting the younger audiences who are going to be writing the narratives over the next 30 years of [Kookaburra] to understand that those resources are available, and when they can actually go back and find more information, cause that's something that I've noticed [and] also the fact that our service has not invested any time or energy making those collections more available, which is where we're going now [laughs].

John highlighted the importance of diverse community connections and viewpoints to help explore the collection with different perspectives. He stressed the importance of making the collection available to the community for research and other uses. His comments demonstrate the need for deliberate connections with people of different ages and backgrounds as that is likely provide more interpretations of the information as different questions are asked of it. These different viewpoints may be able to contribute new items to the Kookaburra local studies collection.

5.6.2 In/visibility in the local studies collection

Interviews with John, Freya and Eve suggest there is an awareness of some of the absences from the local studies collection. John commented that Kookaburra 'has not ever been, a one flag ship' going on to describe the importance of agriculture, making and art, and how they 'don't ever get held up to being one of the sort of the flagship identities' for the area. He noted that people with a disability are not visible in the collection. Freya mentioned ongoing discussions with people who are LGBTQIA+ to include more of their stories in the collection and commented on other absences that needed to be prioritised, stating that

> we haven't got some of the more modern industries that are going around. We've got some things happening with some of the creative people but as far as industries go … we haven't ever done really anything with it so that's sort of on the top of the list at the moment … we have hardly any Indigenous material at all. We have paintings and some photographs and a few other bits and pieces but not very much else.

There are plans to increase collecting with and about First Nations people of the area [Interview with Freya KLSL 14052018, Kookaburra Libraries Strategy KLS 20192029].

Even with this knowledge there may be further absences that may need investigation – for example, perspectives from people of different ages, genders and life experiences about their experiences of living in Kookaburra. The Australian Generations Oral History Project ('Australian Generations Oral History Project', 2008) provides a large scale example of this, but a smaller local project may be possible as people of varied backgrounds, ages and genders have different experiences of living in the same area at the same time.

The library staff have begun to take steps to address some of these absences or reduced visibility by starting to build new relationships. Freya stated:

> There's a number of groups around town, so we've been sort of turning up things for them to see that show them [information of relevance to them]. We're not asking them for anything but we're just making sure that they realise that if there's somewhere that … [they can] deposit things for people to look after them, that we're there to do it

This is a way to help build connections with some organisations without pressure, but there is a limit on the number of groups the library staff can reach this way because of the time the library staff must invest. This highlights the importance of being strategic and deliberate in building these new connections. There may not be relevant information to show every community group because of past collecting practices, but there may be general information that could be considered. Krim et al. (2020) note that the

> lack of collecting and preserving documentation may be the result of unconscious decisions made on the part of the archivist, or it may be an intentionally used tool of oppression … Without documentation demonstrating these populations' existence and achievements, they are not only being marginalized in the present by the dominant social structure but are also marginalized in the past and future. ([unpaginated], p 86–87)

This highlights the importance of deliberate and diverse collecting (Shilton & Srinivasan, 2007), which is supported by the policy documents at Kookaburra Libraries.

Amelie spoke of the value of persistence and the role this had in Kookaburra Libraries being able to collect items for local studies even with earlier inadequate staffing levels. Amelie stated:

> You know you've got to persist, and I think over the years the fact that the previous iterations of all of the library services over the years have managed to maintain it, improve it, still collect. You know it's amazing, you know that they've been able to do that for the last fifty, sixty years which is fantastic.

Persistence for the sake of persistence may not lead to a change in approach to local studies collecting; indeed, it may increase bias in the collecting. It is important to assess the strategy so that the local studies collection can reflect a wider range of people in the community and thus present a more comprehensive record of the history of the area, echoing John's comment about Kookaburra not being 'a one flag ship'.

5.6.3 How to know what is collected by community groups

The interviewees from community groups had differing perspectives about past collection decisions made by their organisations. These organisations may not always have structured planning for which items are kept. Their collections may be vulnerable to changes within their organisations, as well as to natural disasters. Darcy, a sport organiser, in talking about another sporting organisation mentioned that their photographs were destroyed because they were not stored above flood level, saying: 'They lost them because they didn't have them in a secure place. We got water in our room down there, but we then got shelves put in so all our stuff is above where the water would come.' Darcy's organisation has undertaken work to protect its collection and to keep it out of flood water. This decision in the past ensured that the collection is still available. Installing the higher shelving Darcy talks about could help in future floods, provided there are no increases in the height of flooding.

The sporting organisation that Darcy, Hamish and Isobel volunteer for, and for which Spencer was a volunteer in the past, has a room with many items of significance for the organisation including photographs, trophies and clothing, as well as a small photographic and trophy display in a public area of the sporting organisation building [information from photographs KP 19092019]. These items may become vulnerable once people like Darcy and Hamish are no longer volunteers. There is a risk that these items could be cleared out to make space for other uses of an area, or even because an area is redecorated. There is no listing, description, or documentation of these items that help tell the story of the sporting organisation. People like Darcy, Hamish and Spencer know and can describe the significance of these items because their connections to this organisation have extended over many decades, but it may not be apparent to other people. This lack of information about the items is one of the impacts of the scale of collecting and of not cataloguing, or even listing, the important items that help to tell the organisation's story.

The environment group has a different approach to order and how they manage their collection. Some of these are recent changes. Environmental reports were written and kept by a previous organisation before the current volunteer environment group inherited them. These

reports and other items provide detailed environmental information about the area the environment group is rehabilitating. The reports have practical and historical value and are being digitised. The paper items (books and reports), slides and printed photographs of the environmental group are stored in archival boxes on shelves [information from photographs KP 16092019]. Many of them are stored in an area at risk of flooding, while others stored in the same rooms are above the height of previous floods, although the shelving they are on may move in flood water. The preservation strategy is that at the time of threat of flooding the archive boxes full of items are removed from their shelves, placed in a vehicle and driven to higher ground in a nearby area. This requires that people be available and able to shift archive boxes containing collection items, and that roads remain open. Given the height and speed of some of the floods in Australia from 2020 to 2023, this appears a dangerous strategy that could risk lives as well as collection items.

For these community groups there is a history of poor documentation of what they collect or accumulate. This may be because these are not primarily collecting organisations, although they have collected or accumulated information about their organisations and areas that helps to tell the stories of the Kookaburra area. The environment group has started a spreadsheet with a list of items it holds, which is being compiled as volunteer time permits. The sporting group has no such list, although Isobel and Jonathon have detailed documentation about their photographs. Kookaburra Libraries is providing some advice to the local environment group about how to manage its collection. Providing advice to organisations about how to manage their collections could be a key role for public libraries if they have the staff to be able to undertake this advisory role. However, there are likely to be limits as to how many community groups could be assisted in this way.

The environment group's past and recent collecting includes photographs of events. It uses photography to document the work of the group – for example, planting days, information sessions and the growth of plants. There is GPS (global positioning system) data available for the different areas where planting has occurred, and photographs can be matched to these exact locations. This is important as it helps to document the growth of plants in specific areas. Heidi stated:

> [W]e have the photo database … divided up into years, and it'll be like a planting day or there will be a celebration day, so … there were pictures taken. So, there are stills that were taken on those days. And again, they're just, they're not with any particular aim, they were just recording who was there, or what was happening on that day. Because we do have the metadata in those pictures that were taken on a digital camera, which is handy … there's

> thousands of individual slides, of individual pictures, and some of them were in the early days, they were put into 35mm slides.

This long-term data of environmental rehabilitation is potentially valuable for researchers. It could be helpful for someone who understands different formats of photography to examine this collection and provide specialist advice about its management, but at present all they are doing is keeping the items safe. Until there is a complete listing of the items managed by the environment group, they, like Kookaburra Libraries, rely on knowledge held by individuals, rather than on documented information.

For community groups there is a tension around their skills and their responsibilities for the items they manage in their collections. In talking about some of the challenges for the impact of past collection decisions that the environmental group faces, Heidi asked

> if we had more of what we're already trying to do, how would we handle it? Because we're not an institution, we're only a group of volunteers. And so, we have to do the best we can, but there's no point having a collection … the people can't get to, can't relate [to].

Through this statement Heidi raises useful ideas of access, significance and relevance. It is important to know what is in the collection, how to access it, and the significance of those items that may not be immediately apparent. The significance can be shared through metadata or other cataloguing information, and through exhibitions or displays. Heidi's comments demonstrate the importance of organisations being able to manage their collections so that people can access them for research. Their digital storage has an onsite copy and a backup taken home by one of the volunteers. While not a perfect solution, this means that they do have a backup if something happens to their site.

While the sporting organisation has some storage for analogue items and objects in its building, the digital content is less secure and depends on the good practices of an individual. The photographs Isobel takes for the sporting organisation are available on her website, with some published on social media, and a small number printed for display at the sporting organisation. Isobel looks after the digital photographs she takes, and stated that her focus is

> just mainly trying to keep it all tidy. This year I'll go through a lot using a different program and try to start attaching names [of players] to photos, so that if someone says, oh, have you got a photo of so-and-so from this year then it's a just matter of type, type, type that name and that year, instead of having rely on my memory, which I'm very good at [laughs] the older the photo is someone say, oh, have you got a photo of such and such, do you remember this? I'm like, yeah, that was eight years ago, not a problem.

Isobel is adding information to increase the metadata attached to each photograph. This is useful for being able to find relevant photographs, just as cataloguing is critical for library items. Isobel is the only person who can access all these photographs and their metadata, and access to them relies on her good will rather than a formal agreement. For Isobel, the scale of the collection means that she has ten years of photographs taken for a sporting organisation; however, very few of these are owned by the sporting organisation.

The local author, Jonathan, has a detailed approach with his photographs, the older ones being slides and the more recent ones digital photographs. In talking about his slides, and the impact of keeping them, he described the structure of their organisation, saying:

> Most of the 250,000 [slides] are written on, and I like the slide medium because it's compact, but having said that, when you've got so many, it's bloody weighty in boxes and things, but it is compact … with a slide, you can project it on the wall, and you can look at it, you can analyse it, you can have other people look at it and analyse it at the same time, and it is amazing just how much different input you can get from others … also if you wanted to get a colour print off a slide, you could. If you wanted to get a black and white off a slide, you could, and I think now, with the passage of some time since the mid-1970s, my choice of medium has well and truly been vindicated.

For most of his slides Jonathan selected high-quality film so that the colours have stayed very close to the original, even decades later. Only a small number were on less durable slide film, which loses colour quality over time. Jonathan uses a structured approach to documenting the information about his slides, and the scale of his collection means that he has many thousands of slides to store and care for, but they are in a stable format, safely cared for and are lasting well. He is yet to determine their future when he is not around to care for them. Some but not all the slides are digitised, so there is the potential for destruction of much of his collection if anything were to happen to the slides. This collection contains a great deal of information about the Kookaburra area.

These three examples of community collecting – the sporting organisation, the environment group and the local author – show a wealth of relevant or significant local information being managed by people in the community. These are only three collections in the Kookaburra area, and there are likely to be many more community groups and individuals with relevant local information that they create, collect and care for. Kookaburra Libraries does not have the capacity to care for these collections, although given their current practice, they may accept them if they were offered. This shows the potential for a library to play an advisory role – as already demonstrated with the environment group – for other local collections.

Staffing this could be difficult, and a challenge would be how to make all these separate collections more discoverable and visible for researchers. This helps demonstrate the importance of Kookaburra Libraries thinking carefully about what is added to their collection if they are to take a social justice approach to collecting and reflect the diversity of their community.

5.6.4 Summary

This section has explored the outcomes of donations on diversity and scale of collection. For Kookaburra Libraries, moving more to planned collected rather than relying on unsolicited donations could assist with documenting a more diverse view of the area. For a social justice approach to local studies collections, it demonstrates the importance of thinking about issues around relying on donations and using that thinking to inform current and future collecting practices so that there is a better understanding that collecting 'preferences some cultural stories over others' (Fraser et al., 2020, p. 298). It is a reminder that actions that may seem accidental, such as collecting relevant unsolicited donations, can be very deliberate, potentially demonstrating collecting that 'preferences some cultural stories over others' and continues the invisibility of part of the community in the collection.

This includes the need for local studies staff to continue to work at improving access to older items through cataloguing, listing and digitisation. The time taken to manage this older collection impacts the ability to collect new and more diverse material. Looking at the approach of Kookaburra Libraries from a social justice perspective reveals the need to balance the impact of past collecting with how the recent and current concerns and interests of the community are collected.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the practices of Kookaburra Libraries regarding the acquisition, creation and curation of recent content for their local studies collection. In doing so, the chapter responded to the first research question of the study. Four themes document and depict the practices for collecting recent content for the local studies collection at Kookaburra Libraries. The libraries' policies and plans informed and shaped how they acquired local studies items, which led to relying on donations, impacting the scope for collections to reflect and include different stories and voices within community. This has implications for how visible the spectrum of individuals and groups within community are to researchers looking back at the history of the Kookaburra area, and for how the diversity of the community is

recorded for the future. The next chapter will consider how current practices could be shifted in order to ensure that in addition to recording the historical past, recent and current concerns and interests of the community are appropriately collected.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

> We really need to be more proactive in collecting stories now, so that in fifty years, there's not just this big gap … and we'll have no evidence to show what was actually happening in our city … it's about current story and past story and understanding how we can contribute to future story.
>
> — Interview with John 11 November 2019

6.1 Introduction

This study sought to explore the practices of public libraries in regard acquisition, creation, and curation of recent content for local studies collections. Embracing a critical theorist paradigm, the study focused on questions about power, inequity and social change, with the aim of deliberately considering how public libraries collect local studies and how their community is included and represented by these collections. The previous chapter documented four themes that depict current local studies collection practices at Kookaburra Libraries. This chapter presents the findings of this study in response to the research question: *How might these practices need to shift in order to ensure that as well as recording the historical past, that recent and current concerns and interests of the community are appropriately collected?* This chapter will explore the need for a social justice approach to local studies collections in public libraries.

6.2 The need for a social justice approach to local studies collections

Practices identified in the previous chapter undermine policy intentions and impact the ability of the library to develop diverse, equitable and inclusive local collections. As John warned: if staff at Kookaburra Libraries do not adjust their local studies collecting practices, there is a real risk that important information and content will be omitted, and that the local collection will poorly reflect the community it aims to represent. Shilton and Srinivasan (2007) describe this lack of representation in archives, and this very real concern for the inclusion of diverse voices and current experiences is relevant in local studies collections too. These ideas align with the social justice focus of this research, so that recent and current concerns and interests in the community with multiple viewpoints are appropriately collected, rather than predominantly those of privileged sections of the community. Vincent (2012) states about social justice that it

> must involve embracing equality and diversity; focusing on a needs-based service and targeting resources towards those who need them most; knowing and understanding the components of the local community; having an active, collaborative role in empathising and working in partnership with the local community; and fully engaging the community. (p. 350)

The idea of working in partnership with the local community and fully engaging with the local community builds on existing work at Kookaburra Libraries, but with a potential change in focus.

To ensure the social justice outcomes for local studies collections proposed by this research, it is necessary for libraries to adopt a deliberate representative approach to collecting contemporary and recent local studies items. The creation of a diverse, equitable and inclusive local studies collection cannot occur without reckoning with existing power structures. Shilton and Srinivasan (2007) argue that the 'power to represent' (p. 88) has been wielded by information institutions throughout history, and the manifestations of this power have helped to build societal definitions of culture'. In Kookaburra Libraries the power to represent is largely being wielded by donors with existing community power and profile, and with connections to the library. Their unsolicited donations tell some of the story of the Kookaburra area, but they often repeat the same parts of the story, and they do not tell the whole story. Deliberate inclusive representative collecting which includes contemporary and recent items or information therefore requires developing new relationships with different local groups or agencies. However, such strategies are largely absent, and Ham's (1975) criticism of archival collecting is equally applicable to local studies collections in public libraries when he says that the

> most important and intellectually demanding task as archivists is to make an informed selection of information that will provide the future with a representative record of human experience in our time. But why must we do it so badly? Is there any other field of information gathering that has such a broad mandate with a selection process so random, so fragmented, so uncoordinated, and even so often accidental? (p. 5)

For the community, accidental and deliberate exclusion (gaps in the collection) look much the same: both manifest as invisibility or absence of representation. Leaving stories of contemporary and recent collecting out can continue past injustices or create new injustices, unless people choose not to share their stories for specific reasons (Carter, 2006). It is therefore important that local studies collections develop an awareness of the practices that contribute to these invisibilities so that they can develop strategies to address the issue of representation.

This research has identified several practices in the local studies collection process that directly undermine the aim of Kookaburra Libraries to build an inclusive and representative local studies collection. The practice having the most impact is Kookaburra's library staff *never* (or rarely) *saying no* to items being donated to the collection. Relying on individual staff to make decisions, and the absence of clear collection guidelines or policies, has led to a collection with gaps and biases, with some sectors of the community privileged in the collection and others largely invisible. This study posits *windows*, *mirrors* and *sliding doors* as a way to both understand and shift local studies collection practices to embrace diversity, equity and inclusion of the communities being served. These ideas are explored further below.

6.3 Never saying no

6.3.1 Weak guidance from plans and strategy

While the plans and strategy at Kookaburra Libraries have the potential to support a social justice approach to local studies collecting, implementation and decision-making about collections are poorly aligned with these policies. As outlined in the previous chapter, staff are aware of the policies, and broadly follow them. However, unlike museum collections – which have clear guidelines and curatorial and conservation expertise to guide decisions about collections based on significance – local studies acquisition in public libraries is based on very broad criteria, the key one being 'relevance'. While relevance is the most important criterion for inclusion in local studies collections, decisions about how to assess *relative* or comparative relevance are absent.

This is the case for Kookaburra Libraries, where the strategy and plans provide only broad guidance as to what is relevant or how to assess relevance. Consequently, it is up to individual staff members to make decisions about what constitutes relevance. The problem is that, at the broadest level, everything originating in the geographic footprint of the libraries can be deemed relevant or potentially relevant. In the absence of clear guidelines and comparative significance to help guide acquisition decisions, almost everything is regarded as relevant. It becomes impossible, or near impossible, to decline donations on the basis of relevance.

6.3.2 Emotional and relational decision making

Kookaburra Libraries – and local collections more broadly – are offered items that other institutions cannot or will not take. As noted above, other collecting institutions such as museums tend to have clearer guidelines and processes to decide what to collect. Local studies collections can, therefore, be a point of last resort for donors. This places emotional pressure

on staff, who feel they must accept items to prevent their loss or destruction. In these circumstances, local studies collection staff never, or rarely, say no. As Amelie asked,

> well, if we don't take that and then sort through it and then determine its value, who will? … we'll go back to some of that stuff, and I just think it's important … it's of value historically to the community.

Significantly, the current practice of accepting most unsolicited donations is a choice of individual staff, rather than a requirement of policy. However, decisions to accept donations are more often based on concern for the offered items (and the donors) than for the collection as a whole. This individual and relational decision-making about donations therefore fails to factor in social justice issues of diversity, equity and inclusion.

A different approach is possible, that of saying no to more donations and then creating content by and with people who are not as visible in the local studies collection, but it is not the pathway that has been chosen. When items are in front of staff, or when organisations close and a whole collection of information is at risk of being discarded or destroyed, the local studies staff find it hard to say no to donations. The inclusion of diverse views seems to be regarded as less important.

6.3.3 Relational donations and the risk of collecting from cliques

The pressure to accept unsolicited donations directly contributes to bias in the collection. Certain sectors of the community have an enhanced presence in local studies collections because they already hold social and cultural capital that enables them to use the system. Existing donors, and others with personal connections to the library, know the processes to follow and how to make an argument for relevance. However, while these donations may be relevant, repeat donations or donations from similar sectors of the community results in bias developing in the collection. Those in the community with less access, and less social and cultural capital, are unable to influence the collection in the same way. They may not have material to donate, know that they can donate, know how to donate or be able to argue for relevance. As Eve commented, 'I think there's some people who are aware that we collect, there's some people that aren't'.

These imbalances of power create the risk of the local studies collection only sourcing material from particular cliques or from people already known to library staff. It creates a divide between those who know they can donate and know how to argue for donations to be accepted and those who do not. Kookaburra Libraries accepts what people want to give them provided it is relevant to the area, and this can mean that the donors are potentially leading the library.

In the absence of structures and guidelines for rejecting donations, and without an up-to-date catalogue, there is a disconnect between planned collecting and actual collections that is exacerbated by pressures to accept donations and by the snowball effect of donations created through existing social networks. Consequently, people who do not already engage with libraries or local studies collections remain under- or unrepresented. This itself creates a snowball effect, in that people who cannot see themselves, their concerns, interests, background or history included in local studies collections are further disengaged.

Not everyone uses a public library. The most recent national data shows that 35% of people in Australia are registered members of their public library (State Library of Queensland, 2022). This means that 65% of the community may not be aware of libraries at all, and an even smaller number are likely to know how local studies collections work. Even among library members or visitors there may be poor awareness of local studies collections or donation processes including that representative contemporary or recent information and items may be of interest for the collection. People with lower levels of social, economic and cultural capital are likely to have less knowledge about the system, and in some instances may even have less material to donate. So, while a social justice inclusive approach to collecting aims to include materials and perspectives from all groups, there are some structural barriers.

These leave gaps and results in biased collections whereby some sectors of the community are privileged in the collection and others are largely invisible. These problems require a much more strategic and less reactive approach to develop an inclusive and diverse collection. Despite this need, NSW local studies research[14] shows that 27.8% of public libraries are not using demographic data to influence their collecting, and 15.2% are using only some of their demographic data, while 56.9% provided examples of how demographic data was influencing their local studies collecting, providing examples of how they document changes in their area, how they are working with local Aboriginal people, which culturally and linguistically diverse communities they need to approach to include in oral histories, and how the library staff photograph the area to document information about change (State Library of New South Wales, 2021, p. 17).

The interviews undertaken with Kookaburra Libraries staff show that they are aware of significant gaps in the collection, including types of material and content. In particular, they have identified both content forms and sectors of the community are underrepresented. They noted that content from First Nations peoples, people with disability and LGBTQI+

[14] NSW data is used because it is not available nationally or from other states or territories.

communities is under-represented. They recognise that local industries and economic sectors were unequally represented and have prioritised some areas for collection, but struggle to address these:

> [W]e haven't got some of the more modern industries that are going around. We've got some things happening with some of the creative people but as far as industries go … we haven't ever done really anything with it so that's sort of on the top of the list at the moment.

While libraries are looking at ways to better document a wider range of community stories, there remain many challenges, one of the main ones is the volume of donations which compounds existing bias.

6.3.4 Increasing the backlog

The acceptance of donations tends to lead to further offers of donation from the same donors and, as identified, continues a cycle of creating more of the same type of collection, and even duplication. Repeat donations also implicitly limit the collection of other stories (Shilton & Srinivasan, 2007) because there is no space or time to collect other items.

The prioritisation of personal and relational decision-making over the priorities and purpose of the collection creates a backlog of items to be catalogued. This further undermines the capacity of staff to make acquisition decisions informed by the collection priorities and gaps. As John recalled about collecting at Kookaburra Libraries:

> For a lot of years, it was very much that sort of paddling madly just to keep up to try and sort of collect and store … the mental space that we were in as an organisation was sort of capture/store, and sort of just grab it, put it somewhere on a shelf, we know it's safe and we know it's safe, so therefore, we can worry about it later.

Accepting donations with no immediate plans for cataloguing, preservation or access highlights the importance of stepping back to think about collecting rather than paddling madly to stay afloat.

Decisions about relevance for acquisition should at least partly be made based on understanding what is and is not in the collection. In the absence of an up-to-date searchable catalogue, it is difficult to assess whether similar items already exist in the collection, let alone whether they are over- or under-represented. While some staff have in-depth collection knowledge, this is not comprehensive, and the library cannot rely on such arbitrary or fortuitous knowledge. If an aim of the local studies collection is to be diverse, equitable and inclusive then it must be possible to assess the diversity of the collection prior to making decisions about

donations. Without this overview, it becomes impossible to address the social justice agenda of local studies collections.

The issue of the backlog has further implications for strategic collecting. Staff are inundated with cataloguing a large volume of donations, leaving little time to source new items or collections. They also have little time to create content. This has particular implications for inclusion, which relies on developing new relationships with sectors of the community, and on developing new content such as photographs and oral histories of people whose stories and experiences are not otherwise visible in the collection.

6.4 Windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors

6.4.1 Whose voices and whose stories

Libraries are subject to the bias and prejudices of their staff and, potentially, their communities. All library collections have bias; they are not neutral institutions (Gibson et al., 2017). It can be difficult to critique libraries because staff and communities can experience vocational awe, even if that is not the terms they use to describe it. Vocational awe, a term developed by Ettarh (2018),

> describes the set of ideas, values, and assumptions librarians have about themselves and the profession that result in notions that libraries as institutions are inherently good, sacred notions, and therefore beyond critique. ([unpaginated], paragraph 1)

To change practices deliberate action needs to be taken so that libraries can endeavour to 'steward unexplored histories' and to preserve materials documenting a 'diverse and pluralistic society' (Sheffield, 2016, p. 573) – because that is world we live in. As Shilton and Srinivasan (2007) state, 'memory institutions have ignored experiences outside of the history of the powerful, creating collecting gaps within archives' (p. 88). This may mean adopting a priority of documenting the stories of the community and not always accepting unsolicited donations.

6.4.2 How to think about community reflections

Mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors are metaphors developed by now Professor Emerita Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) in the context of children and reading. They come from research in the USA into how likely children who are not white were to see themselves, or people with similar backgrounds, in the books they read. Bishop (1990) highlights the value to all children in seeing their diverse world shown:

> When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part. (p. 1)

In 1990 it was not very likely if one was not white that one would see oneself, or someone similar, in a children's picture book. Recent research in this area shows there continues to be an under-inclusion of children who are not white in children's books (Caple & Tian, 2020; Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2021; Corrie, 2018). Cooke (2019), talking about fiction, states that diverse books are important for all of us and that the

> value of diverse books, for all readers, is well documented; this includes teaching respect for all cultures, seeing through the diverse mirrors and doors, learning how to interact in the world, and enriching the reality of readers. (p. 29)

As well as being used to describe books for young children, the concept of mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors has been used for young adult publications (Day, 2020), including young adult publications with mathematics (Rezvi et al., 2020) and has been used to investigate professional training for library staff (Cooke, 2018).

The idea of mirrors refers to having stories and experiences like our own reflected back to us. Through windows we see into other people's lives and learn from them. The idea of sliding glass doors is that we not only see into someone else's life, like looking in a window, but are able to be transformed by the experience or to step into their experience by opening a sliding glass door. It involves exploring who, through a library collection, can see themselves or people like them mirrored back to them; who is different to the information in the collection, and is thus looking through windows into different experiences; and what information immerses us in another experience, or the experience of opening a sliding glass door, through the local studies content in the existing collection. While this is discussed in terms of people, it also applies to other aspects of community such as biodiversity, the built environment and organisations. Reese (2018) adds the term *curtain* for some First Nations stories. As Reese states:

> This is a way to acknowledge and honor the stories behind the curtain – those that are purposefully kept within Native communities. Native communities resisted historical oppression and continue to preserve our culture by cultivating our ways in private spaces-behind the curtain. While Native people share some of our ways publicly in the present day, there is a great deal that we continue to protect from outsiders. (2018, p. 390)

While the importance of curtains for some information is acknowledged, it will not be discussed in the context of this study.

A social justice approach to how recent and current concerns of a community are included in a local studies collection can be examined using perspectives of mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors. This approach can challenge collection bias, and accidental or deliberate omission of information.

The research suggests that this concept of mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors has relevance for local studies collections. The idea of 'enriching the reality of readers' (Cooke, 2019, p. 29) is important in local studies because, depending on how these collections are managed, only some people in the community can see their lives, locations or communities mirrored in a local studies collection. This can potentially limit what kinds of windows into the community are available, as well as restricting the possibilities of sliding glass doors. This risks the danger of creating a single story, where only one aspect of the community is recorded or noted despite there being many ways that a community can be viewed (Adichie, 2009). Schwartz and Cook (2002) write that

> the choice of what to record and the decision over what to preserve, and thereby privilege, occur within socially constructed, but now naturalized frameworks that determine the significance of what becomes archives. (p. 3)

This connects to ideas from Shilton and Srinivasan (2007), who report that for everything saved for an archive, something else cannot be. These ideas from Schwartz, Cook, Shilton and Srinivasan are relevant for local studies collections in public libraries, as what is added to their collections and saved may then determine what is regarded as significant and be seen as demonstrating whose stories matter.

6.4.3 Why use mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors in local studies

The idea of mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors is a clear way to describe diversity, equity and inclusion in local studies collections. They provide a clear vision of inclusion or exclusion, of reflection or of only seeing stories of others. It is an easy-to-understand concept because we are familiar with what these items look like and how to use them. There is also the possibility of distortion of information or reflections – for example, if the mirrors or windows are constructed to show stereotypes, misinformation, mal-information or bias.

Using examples from popular culture, the book *Hidden figures* (Shetterly, 2016) shows the importance of telling more diverse histories, including those of people or groups who have been historically, intentionally and traditionally marginalised. In this example, while some

people always knew that African American mathematicians were crucial to the early work of NASA and that many of them were women, it had largely been a hidden history until Shetterly wrote her book. Similarly, research by Hamilton-Brown (2017) using art and oral history has revealed a more diverse history of knitting than had been widely acknowledged. Her thesis was titled *Myth − black people don't knit: the importance of art and oral histories for documenting the experiences of black knitters*. This information was known by the participants, but not recognised further afield. Similarly *Dark emu* (Pascoe, 2018) is an Australian example of research that provides a different perspective on information that was being generally discussed. While the stories in other communities may not receive the widespread coverage these three do, they show the potential for new perspectives to be provided from older information using documentation methods such as oral history.

These ideas are important for all of us, as we have many aspects to our lives and mirrors can reflect different ones. For example, the researcher grew up in a rural area living on a farm, had parents who experienced the Second World War, works as a librarian, and likes walking, gardening, frogs, birds and dogs. Each of these have different potential for mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors, as do the facts that the researcher is white and monolingual but with culturally and linguistically diverse ancestors.

6.4.4 What Kookaburra Libraries does for equity diversity and inclusion

Showing the street people live on, visit, or work in, even from the past, can provide a mirror, a window, or a sliding glass door. Eve described how people can connect to the current local studies collection, noting that

> if you say to them [the people in the community] 'Come and look at the local history', they'll just go [rolls her eyes], but if you show them a picture of the street they lived on or their local town they're like 'Oh my god have you seen this'.

This demonstrates that there can be simple starting points for this approach and that existing collections can be leveraged to assist contemporary collecting. Having older photographs of a street someone lives in, or another place they go to, should not be the only mirror available for people. It is likely a mirror for part of their lives and not a larger, more reflective and shinier mirror for more of their experiences.

Freya talked about the difficulties of increasing the diversity of the collection, including the need to build trust with new people and organisations over time and being ready for setbacks. As Freya commented:

> We're still having some conversations about the LGBTI community who were really keen, and then got cold feet, because some of it's fairly recent but that diversity of all sorts of people and that sort of non-white stuff has been a gap for a long term … It's hard to put it together … however our outreach services are sort of moving in different ways as well so I think there might be some ways that we can find through all that.

This describes work being undertaken by Kookaburra Libraries for diversity and inclusion, that is not yet delivering results for the library. It demonstrates the importance of building relationships over time. At Kookaburra Libraries there is some diversity in who is documented via the new books coming into the collection, as shown by an exploration of items added to the collection over the last five years [photographs for observation KP 14052018, KP 07032019, KP 08032019, KP 22032019, KP 16052019, KP 23052019, KP 10072019].

At present, not everyone in Kookaburra may be able to see themselves or aspects of their lives reflected in the local studies collection. The existing collection at Kookaburra Libraries is mostly in English with little bilingual collecting, collecting in languages other than English, or collecting about people who speak English as an additional language or dialect. There is limited information about First Nations people, and little about people who are LGBTQIA+ or people with disability; instead, it privileges those who write about the area or who know they can donate information to the library. The current focus is on mirrors, reflecting the well-known and the well-documented, including the self-published. This provides mirrors for a narrow section of the community. This is not unusual in local studies collections, as these are often the items that are available to collect. John commented that the local studies team is working with the idea that the diversity of Kookaburra is a key part of the story of the area. There is progress to be made on this so that the diversity of the community is more visible in the local studies collection for the community.

The *Kookaburra Libraries Strategy* states that there will be new research from the existing collection, and this will provide an opportunity to create new content from researching the collection [Kookaburra Libraries Strategy KLS 20192029]. This has potential to create windows to show greater diversity in the collection, or through having more diverse researchers to provide other mirrors or windows as well as new collection items through their research. This could be achieved by asking different questions of the collection as well as by having more diverse researchers provide their perspectives on what questions matter. The information is the same, but knowledge, lives and experiences can help us see their mirror, window or sliding glass door. For example, Dr Breda Carty (2019), 2017 CH Currey Fellow at the State Library of NSW, whose first language is Auslan, was able to research the lives of people with

disability from a collection that had not previously been explored this way. The Kookaburra Libraries' plans for partnerships with other organisations, including ones run by First Nations people, with potential to create new content, could contribute to a perspective of mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors [Kookaburra Libraries Strategy KLS 20192029].

6.4.5 What might mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors look like in local studies

What might mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors look like in a local studies collection? It could involve placing a higher priority on creating content where none exists, so communities and their stories of Kookaburra are not excluded. This may assist in providing representative recent and contemporary information about the community. It could borrow the idea, from Dellios' (2022) research into migrants, of 'privileging "ordinary" storytelling' (p. 11) and conveying this approach to the community. Krim et al. (2020) remind us that

> [i]n the case of marginalized communities – many of which may not have robust physical records due to economic disparity, may have suffered physical displacement, or may have required the need for confidentiality – oral history represents the most efficient form of documentation from which a narrative can be formed. ([unpaginated}, pp. 93–94)

The opportunities that oral history provides are also described by Mayotte et al. (2018), who state that

> [o]ral history seeks to grab the mic from the constantly amplified voices of the powerful and privileged and direct it toward ordinary people with stories that deserve hearing. This impulse is an oral historian's response to the inequity that results from ignoring or silencing the mosaic of stories that make up any historical event, time period, or social issue. (p. 21)

As well as trained local studies staff, trained community interviewers could undertake oral history interviews. For example, the State Library of NSW has commissioned oral history recordings in Cantonese (Cheng & Ko, 2019). This does not mean that only insiders in the community can undertake interviews, but it is an option to consider.

Continuing the photographic work of Kookaburra Libraries is important, as is ensuring that existing photographs and videos are catalogued. As well as the library staff taking photographs, this could involve seeking photographers with different experiences of living in Kookaburra and of seeing the area. It could involve other content creation as well – for example, board games or role-playing games could be ways to record experiences of living in Kookaburra, as could some collaborative publications.

Shilton and Srinivasan (2007) remind us that not everyone has mirrors, windows or sliding glass doors for them to access the local studies collection. They state:

> Archivists choose which records to preserve and discard, using the power of appraisal to consciously or unconsciously assert chosen narratives as truth while ignoring or reframing others … archivists impart or relay narratives and knowledge structures to explain the relationships among records in a collection. This assertion, ignoring, or reframing of narrative that accompanies archival processes is inevitable. (p. 88)

Some people may have more mirrors than others, potentially artificially amplifying the importance of their information with all the dazzle of a large mirror ball. Krim et al. (2020), writing about archives, suggest ideas relevant to local studies collections stating that '[m]arginalization in archives often occurs as a reflection of traditional archival practice, which is often rooted in white privilege' ([unpaginated], p. 87). This speaks to the idea of people not having archives, or items in a local studies collection in a public library to mirror their lives, only ones that provide windows into the privileged lives of others. In a local studies collection this requires seeing collection management as a deliberate process of acquiring or creating items, not an accidental one. Accidental is accepting most unsolicited donations, while deliberate is seeking out new viewpoints and experiences of the Kookaburra area including providing representative recent and contemporary about the community.

Another step is to seek to address the failure of past collecting, of deliberately or accidentally omitted narratives, and to provide mirrors for these. Evans et al. (2015) call for the 'transformation of evidence and memory management frameworks and infrastructure into a new dynamic, distributed, participatory paradigm, capable of supporting multiple archival perspectives, more able to heal rather than harm' (p. 340). Gabiola et al. (2022, p. 82) – talking about archives but with relevance to local studies collections – argue that 'we cannot deny or ignore that white supremacy is at the root of archival studies, practices, and policies'. This may mean only white people (and it may only be some white people) have mirrors, while other people have whitewashed windows to look through. New local studies content can assist with a democratisation of information; Purkis (2017) reminds us that

> heritage can be situated within people's life stories, and that these stories create a heritage identity of a local place. The idea that heritage can be found within people, and digital heritage can be about creating new historical content centred on peoples experiences is worth emphasising. (p. 436)

This speaks to both mirrors and windows and possibly may even work towards sliding glass doors.

Keeping the focus on social justice, as proposed in this research, Belmonte and Opotow (2017), in describing the work of archivists at the New York Public Library, comment that

> [a]s a result of archivists' concerns about social justice and their activism, their archives have preserved historically important material. Thus, a procedurally just archive ensures that the collection represents a society's social issues as they affect diverse populations. (p. 86)

This can be possible for other libraries as well. It needs to be safe, not dangerous, for these stories to be told and kept. Gabiola et al. (2022) remind us that

> [e]specially for communities of color, this tension points to societal and/or cultural forces that may contribute to whether it is acceptable for them to affirm the importance of their own histories and make themselves visible. This tension illustrates the multifaceted ways in which communities may not want visibility: considering exploitation and harm, as well as public knowledge to protect and educate future generations, participants described the various reasons for not wanting to be seen or their stories to be known versus desiring to document atrocities in history and their accomplishments. (p 77)

Diversity, inclusion and equity are complex, but can be worked towards with informed discussions, in safe places, so that the mirrors and windows into communities are safe and strong, and not likely to break and create shards that do harm. Multiple narratives are to be encouraged, and people provided with a choice of silence rather than the enforcement of silence (Carter, 2006). Having a choice of silence is being invited to choose to provide, or not provide, mirrors of information for local studies collections, rather than accidental or deliberate exclusion (noting that these may appear similar in the collection). This research does not suggest rushing into change but, rather, planning and taking action for change in discussion with the community. It is likely to take time to build new relationships.

6.4.6 Required changes to collect with a focus on mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors

There is a target in the Sustainable Development Goals stretch targets for Australian libraries which calls for 'Library workforce, collections and services [to] reflect the diversity of Australia's population and local communities' (Flack, 2021, p. 5). This is a target for all Australian libraries, not only Kookaburra Libraries. This point about collections reflecting, or potentially mirroring, Australia's population as well as local communities is another reminder of the importance of local studies collections demonstrating that a community is diverse.

The ideas of mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors needs to be central to collecting. They appear important in the *Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan*, and this is supported by the *Kookaburra Libraries Strategy*. These perspectives need to be embedded in the daily approach to work, and in seeing an inclusive approach as the core business of collecting items by and about the Kookaburra community. This should be considered for each possible donation, purchase or content creation project so that the focus is on diversity, equity and inclusion rather than on rarely saying no to unsolicited donations. There may a place for consultation with communities who are not very visible in the collection – for example, First Nations people, newer industries, local agricultural producers, people with a disability, newer residents, culturally and linguistically diverse residents and LGBTQIA+ people.

The format of collection items may present an opportunity. Collecting social media may be a way to include a wider range of voices. John mentioned that social media is not being collected, saying that the

> large majority of [the] community [is/are] recording their own social history right now in digital social medias, which we do not have capacity to collect, and so that's the next challenge … We need to spend some time unpicking the threads of social media to try and work out what should we be collecting there.

There are other formats of items not included. One staff member, Josephine, commented that no one had discussed ebook donations; however, Bonnie mentioned that 'I had had a couple of conversations with people who wanted to donate stuff, who've had it in ebook form, and I've said, look we have, we don't have a platform that we can do this at the moment'. The reference to a platform is about being able to read an ebook as a book rather than in a format like a PDF (portable document format). It hints that the technology available to the library is a barrier to some formats of relevant donations. Collecting videos, ebooks and social media may be other ways for Kookaburra Libraries to provide different mirrors for their communities, as these other formats may help with amplifying voices and stories that are currently not well documented. Undertaking oral history interviews is another option to consider.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has brought together analysis of the findings to understand how the practices of public libraries could shift to ensure that as well as recording the historical past, recent and current concerns and interests of the community are appropriately collected. Findings identified that Kookaburra's library staff rarely or never saying no to items donated

to the local studies collection was the most significant practice directly undermining the aim of building an inclusive and representative local studies collection. Relying on individual staff members to make decisions, and the absence of clear collection guidelines or policies, has led to collections with gaps and biases, where some sectors of the community are privileged in the collection and others are largely invisible. To respond to this current practice, this study posits windows, mirrors and sliding doors as a way to both understand and shift local studies collecting practices to embrace diversity, equity and inclusion of the communities being served. This study underscores the value that a social justice approach to local studies collecting can provide in ensuring a more accurate and authentic record of the community as a wider range of voices and stories are documented, collected and preserved. The following and concluding chapter discusses the contributions this study makes to both disciplinary knowledge and practice, with a particular focus on future research to continue to inform and shape this emerging approach.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

This research set out to understand how collection practices might create bias and inequity in local studies collections. Through ethnographic research, including documentary analysis, participant observation and interviews, the research has highlighted a number of elements that undermine the inclusive intent of local studies policies and agendas. This chapter explores how these practices might need to change to better document the recent and current concerns of the local community in local studies collections in public libraries. It first outlines how this research contributes to knowledge and practice, before moving on to the significance of the research. Finally, the chapter circumscribes limitations and makes recommendations for future research.

7.2 Review of the findings

This research explored two related questions about local studies collection in public libraries in order to understand the practices of public libraries in regard to acquisition, creation and curation of recent content for these collections, and to identify how these practices might need to change in order to ensure a more representative and inclusive collection. These questions focus on the importance of a social justice approach to local studies collections in public libraries to ensure the representation of the diversity of a community for future understanding and potential research. Four themes document and depict the practices for collecting recent content for the local studies collection at Kookaburra Libraries. The library strategy and plans informed and shaped how they acquired local studies items. There were policy intentions to focus on diverse collecting, but other priorities disrupted this so that there was a disconnect between plans and outcomes. The interpretation of the strategy and plans has led to a reliance on unsolicited donations, impacting the collection's ability to reflect and include diverse stories and voices within community (RQ1 was discussed in detail in Chapter 5).

The library policy and plans have the potential for diverse, equitable and inclusive collecting, bringing ideas of mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors to the collection. The relational approach to accepting donations provides a risk of collecting from cliques, and this could result in collection bias. The research explored whose voices and whose stories were being valued by being collected, preserved, and made available for the future as well as

thinking about how the community is reflected in the local studies collection. The practice of rarely saying no to unsolicited donations has meant that the ideas in the libraries policies and plans in relation to representing the diversity of the Kookaburra area have not been fully implemented (RQ2 was discussed in detail in Chapter 6).

7.3 Contribution

This research makes a contribution to knowledge and to practice through addressing a gap in knowledge. This gap is twofold. Firstly, there is little written for public libraries or by public librarians about contemporary collecting of local studies items. Secondly, there is a lack of empirical research about local studies collection practices that can provide an evidence base to inform practice. This second point is particularly important as it means there is little evidence available about the need for public library staff to shift their collecting practices so that local studies collecting has a deliberate and planned social justice focus that is inclusive of the community and of recent content.

It is important to consider changes in how recent and current content is collected by public libraries for their local studies collections so that a more diverse, equitable and inclusive collection is constructed. This would help to avoid producing a 'biased and distorted archival record' (Ham, 1975, p. 5) and would acknowledge the power library staff have to produce biased collecting (Shilton & Srinivasan, 2007). This would enable local studied staff to 'support a diverse and pluralistic society … [and] to steward unexplored histories' (Sheffield, 2016, p. 573). It also shows the relevance of ideas that Cooke (2019) has raised in the context of fiction writing, that the

> value of diverse books, for all readers, is well documented; this includes teaching respect for all cultures, seeing through the diverse mirrors and doors, learning how to interact in the world, and enriching the reality of readers. (p. 29)

This approach would be of benefit to all local studies collections in public libraries, as well as the communities whose lives and interests are documented and to future researchers.

7.3.1 Contribution to knowledge

The findings of this study contribute to local studies research by providing an evidence base that enables public library workers, as collectors of local studies information on behalf of their communities, to extend their understanding of current collecting practices and paradigms. It considers the impact on who and what is included in these collections and, just as importantly, who and what have not been included or, who have been deliberately excluded. Combining

critical theory with a social justice approach to local studies collections in public libraries, this research contributes new knowledge about how local studies collections might be more inclusive and representative. The research further identifies opportunities for and, difficulties of, collecting recent content for local studies collections.

The in-depth exploration of collection policies and procedures at Kookaburra Libraries provides a snapshot of contemporary collecting practices. It demonstrates how these practices need to shift to document recent and current concerns and interests of the community and, most significantly, how the challenge of rarely saying no to unsolicited donations undermines these efforts.

This research provides knowledge about the effectiveness of current practices in addressing current contextual issues and the importance of developing collections that document and reflect local communities, including how existing policies, budgets and skill sets for councils and other relevant organisations help or hinder this work. This could be considered as reflecting the importance of ethical remembering that is 'intended to address the challenges of interpreting sensitive and contested history by emphasising context, reflection and critical reflection' (Logan, 2021, p. 26).

7.3.1.1 Formal collection plans can be sidelined

The findings show that, even though collecting diverse material is a priority in collection plans, at Kookaburra Libraries the library staff felt compelled to accept a high volume of unsolicited donations without consideration of diversity for the local studies collection. This is likely to contribute to collection bias. From a community perspective, accidental exclusion looks very similar to the deliberate exclusion of collection items, as the 'lack of collecting and preserving documentation may be the result of unconscious decisions made on the part of the archivist, or it may be an intentionally used tool of oppression' (Krim et al., 2020, p. 86). From the research at Kookaburra Libraries, it certainly did not appear that the aim was intentionally to oppress those not represented in the local studies collection. However, a social justice approach to local studies collecting may have resulted in significantly different items being added to the collection to document the people and environment of Kookaburra.

The literature from archives and museums demonstrated the importance of a social justice approach to collecting (Caswell, 2014; Duff et al., 2013; Kandiuk, 2020; Punzalan & Caswell, 2016), of the perspectives this can provide for social issues (Belmonte & Opotow, 2017) and of its ability to create refuges for critical information (Bhebhe & Ngoepe, 2020). There were gaps in the literature in public library research about collecting, including of recent and

contemporary content, despite some definitions of local studies clearly stating the importance of collecting a diverse view of the community through collecting recent and older items on a broad range of topics (Hobbs, 1948; Reid, 2003; Wyatt, 1991). As Mutibwa (2016) writes, 'there may not be a singular and obvious past out there, but rather perhaps multiple versions of it' (p. 9). This helps to highlight the importance to each of us of diverse local studies collections.

7.3.1.2 Diverse and inclusive collecting requires prioritisation

As a consequence of these factors, there is limited diversity represented in the viewpoints and stories collected in the Kookaburra Libraries local studies collections. This restricted the mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors available to the community. There was a research gap in the literature about diverse and inclusive local studies collections in public libraries. Building on the literature that suggests library collections are not neutral (Kandiuk, 2020) and that staff profiles do not fully reflect the community (Morales et al., 2014), this research suggests that there is a need for local studies collections to be more diverse and inclusive. There has been discussion about libraries not being actively anti-racist, and being passive in their approach to diversity (Gibson et al., 2017), although there has been some specific work exploring aspects of diversity in heritage collections in one library (Opotow, 2015). There is more detail in the archives and museum literature about the importance of diverse collecting (Chu, 2020; Cohen-Stratyner, 2017; Fleming, 2016; Lapp, 2021; Rollason-Cass & Reed, 2015), including with a deliberate social justice approach (Punzalan & Caswell, 2016). In the literature, the importance of diverse viewpoints being collected was noted mainly in relation to archives and museums (Allard & Ferris, 2015; Birdi et al., 2011; Mutibwa, 2016; Reid & Macafee, 2007), highlighting the importance of collecting with an eye to diverse gender, race, disability, people who are LGBTQIA+, and people of different economic histories and work (Dellios, 2022). It is important to recognise those who are traditionally not included in collections documenting a community (Pocock, 2003).

7.3.1.3 Balancing discoverability and collecting

The research described pressure to be up to date with cataloguing being in tension with a significant backlog of items yet to be catalogued. This impacted both digital and analogue items. Cataloguing and other metadata remain crucial as otherwise items can be very hard to find. The literature showed the importance of appropriate terms being used within the catalogue records (Noble, 2018) and of 'adequate bibliographic description' (Martin & Heath, 1994, p. 29). The timeliness of cataloguing was little discussed in the literature and so can be seen as a

research gap. There has been significant writing about the terms used to catalogue material by and about First Nations people (Bardenheier et al., 2015; Duarte & Belarde-Lewis, 2015; Swanson, 2015) as some terms in the past have been racist and/or inaccurate. The current terms used in the catalogue records and descriptions at Kookaburra Libraries are not problematic from this perspective.

7.3.1.4 Creating content for community visibility

Content creation was explored as part of the research at Kookaburra Libraries. There was some content creation taking place, mainly photographs; however, there was a delay in the community being able to access these items because of the backlog of items to be catalogued. Kookaburra Libraries did not have a current oral history recording project. Ephemera items were being collected, some were arriving in the library as parts of other donations. At Kookaburra Libraries the library staff were aware of some of the gaps in the local studies collection; however, from the research it appeared that this was difficult to address because of the challenges of relying on unsolicited donations. The literature about rapid response collecting focuses on archives (Burns et al., 2021; Rollason-Cass & Reed, 2015) and museums (Cohen-Stratyner, 2017; Davies, 2022; Logan, 2021; Malone, 2020), with a small number of libraries (Topping & Evans, 2005) included. The literature on collecting information about #BlackLivesMatter (Rollason-Cass & Reed, 2015) and the COVID-19 pandemic (Burns et al., 2021; Chu, 2020; Neatrour et al., 2020; Noehrer et al., 2021) helps to highlight the importance of rapid response collecting. Some of this rapid response collecting involved content creation as the items to document events did not exist and needed to be constructed to ensure this information, and these perspectives, could be preserved for the future. Agile oral history collecting was discussed (Anderson & DeRiemer, 2021), as was using oral history recordings to document crises such as natural disasters (Cave & Sloan, 2014; Chansky & Denesiuk, 2021). The literature about rapid response collecting demonstrated collecting potential for local studies collections in public libraries, including content creation.

7.3.1.5 Reflections of the community

Another contribution to knowledge is applying the idea of mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors (Bishop, 1990) to local studies collections in public libraries to encourage a social justice approach to these collections. It is important to ask who is visible and who is not, whose stories and information are collected, catalogued, preserved and made available for research, and whose are not. This was explored in the research as this perspective of reflection and

visibility assisted in thinking about the equity and inclusion that can be seen, or not seen, in how local studies collections in public library collections document and tell the stories of their communities.

This visibility matters when a social justice approach is applied to local studies collections. It may require long-term work to seek out these stories and information for local studies collections, as not everyone considers it their right to be included in the story of the area and people may not have published information about themselves, their family, their community organisation, their industry, their art or other aspects of their lives and community. Information and stories may have been published in a format that the library is not as familiar with collecting, such as ebooks or social media. It could also be that library staff are not as aware of some stories because of the limits of their existing networks. A social justice approach could borrow from Dellios' (2022) research into migrants, the idea of 'privileging 'ordinary' storytelling' (p. 11) and conveying this approach to the community.

The findings of this study contribute to ongoing debate and discussion concerning the discourse and practice of local studies and how public libraries connect to their communities for obtaining this information. In terms of future research value from a local studies collection, accidental exclusion of information looks much the same as deliberate exclusion of information, particularly if it is about people or groups who have been historically, intentionally and traditionally marginalised. This may mean that library staff need to work with a greater range of contacts in the community and to be very deliberate about this. It is hard to argue that accidental exclusion of information really is an accident and not a deliberate decision to exclude specific viewpoints and experiences.

7.3.2 Contribution to practice

The findings of this research have the potential to inform changes to local studies collecting policies and practices. This could lead to greater diversity and inclusiveness in collecting that would better document the recent history of an area. Changed local studies collecting practices could deliver a more accurate and representative view of a community. This would be of benefit for researchers of public and community history through the greater depth and range of content available for research, as well as providing a wider selection of local studies material for recreation.

Thinking about mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors may help change the thinking about local studies as it could lead to an active seeking of stories and measures to ensure that people and information areas of the community are not left out. This potentially can lead to a

broader and deeper understanding of the community, and of making sure there is deliberate collecting for the future, rather than mostly relying on an accidental mix of unsolicited donations.

Making changes to encompass a social justice approach to collecting is likely to require a deliberate alteration of practices. Some libraries may need to update their plans and strategies to reflect these changes, or to highlight that this is a deliberate practice being followed. Each public library will need to decide its own approach to this. If libraries are not aware of the importance of a social justice approach to local studies collecting it will be much harder for them to consider this change, and they may not be aware of biases in their collecting. As well as potentially impacting local studies, such a change in approach may impact other collections as well. It is acknowledged that it is important to consider staffing levels and workloads.

The research highlights that local studies and other library staff have a responsibility to be better at telling the whole story of our communities rather than the privileged stories of part of our communities. Otherwise, we continue to marginalise people or groups in our communities, and we miss out on information and stories we could all learn from.

There is the potential for local studies staff to adopt a more targeted approach to providing advice to local organisations as they manage their own collections – not only heritage-related organisations but also community groups that have documented their organisations. These could be social, cultural, environmental, sporting or other groups. This will depend on the skills of the library staff, and their capacity to provide such advisory support.

Depending on the community profile of an area, more items may need to be collected that are in languages other than English, both for First Nations people's information and stories and for and with people who from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds or for whom English is an additional language or dialect. It may be that there will be more bilingual oral histories recorded, or documenting of local rap artists and other musicians for local studies collecting. Some of this is likely to require that more culturally and linguistically diverse staff are involved in local studies, as well as more library staff who are First Nations people.

7.4 Significance of the research

The significance of this research is twofold. There is significance for methodology and for the profession. The methodological significance of this study lies in the use of an ethnographic approach to study public library practice. While ethnography as a research method has been used in public libraries, it has not been used to investigate and advance practice specific to local studies collections. This study demonstrates the value of ethnography

for this specialised domain, both in revealing new understandings and in providing findings that can be applied to the improvement of the design and delivery of local studies collecting in public libraries.

With regard to professional significance of the current study, the findings provide a new way to think about diversity in local studies collections in public libraries. Significance for the library profession lies in the application of the mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors metaphor to document and understand local studies collections in public libraries. The framing of mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors for local studies collections provides an image of exclusion and discrimination that public library staff can then work to change. This helps to highlight the relevance of a social justice approach to local studies collecting in public libraries as a way of reflecting the diversity of the community, and of amplifying voices that may have been silenced. A social justice approach to local studies has the potential to provide a more accurate record of the community as well as documenting and preserving a wider range of voices and stories.

This study could have positive impacts for library staff, particularly managers and other senior staff who wish to recognise the importance of a diverse and inclusive local studies collection. It identifies how they might evaluate and measure the effectiveness of diverse collecting initiatives. It identifies how local studies staff might act to better document the diversity of their community, and not only recognise those who are active in providing donations to the library. This would ensure that libraries are deliberately including their community in their local studies collections rather than accidentally, or deliberately, excluding them. The research may help library staff to consider the diversity of other collections, as well as services and programs and to think about these with a social justice focus as well. This may help to provide mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors in other aspects of library collections, services and programs.

The research will also benefit library educators and library education, providing Library and Information Services (LIS) curriculums with empirical evidence of the need to include more content on social justice approaches to collection development and management, for local studies specifically but also for public library collections generally.

7.5 Assumptions, delimitations, and limitations

Research is subject to assumptions, delimitations and limitations. The assumptions are the things that a researcher takes for granted in a study. Neuman (2013) suggests that researchers make assumptions about the nature of human beings, social reality, or a particular

phenomenon or issue. Wolcott (2005) reminds us that assumptions need to be made explicit and clear.

This study began with the assumption that a local studies collection in a public library should reflect the community it is in, but that this was not happening in a planned and consistent manner. This assumption was based on what the researcher was seeing and hearing about local studies collections through their professional work, and through reading the literature. It seemed there were relatively few examples of diverse and representative collecting in local studies, and that, when there were examples, they were written or talked about as being unusual, rather than part of business as usual collecting to tell the story of a community.

There was an assumption that local studies collections are predominantly accepting older items, or information about older people because they have a long history and their stories need to be collected before they die,[15] rather than collecting or documenting what is happening now across all the community so that this information will be available in the future. This assumption about older material was backed up by research undertaken as part of the researcher's work, looking at digital collecting as well as other aspects of local studies collections, services and programs (State Library of New South Wales, 2014, 2021).

Seeing and hearing relatively few examples of recent and current information being collected for local studies, including relatively small volumes of digital collecting, suggested the need to investigate a social justice approach. The importance of collecting digital content soon after the content has been created has been little discussed in the context of local studies collections. If this truly was not happening, collections would be documenting an inaccurate and incomplete view of an area, setting up problems for future researchers as well as missing many stories about a community. Books like *Hidden figures* (Shetterly, 2016) demonstrate that even with all the information available about NASA and its work, it was not widely known that African American women working as calculators in a segregated environment were key to its success. The researcher wondered what local stories and information were not being collected for future research.

Finally, the researcher assumed that local studies staff in public libraries would be interested in changing what they do so that they are documenting and preserving a more accurate, representative and equitable account of their community by collecting diverse viewpoints as well as by collecting recent and current concerns of the community. This

[15] It is important to collect older items for local studies collections as well as information about older people, but in the interests of social justice and a representative collection, these should not be the only or dominant information collected about an area.

assumption recognises that it can be difficult to change work practices, and that the pressure of current work may make continuity feel less complicated than change. Current plans and strategies may make changing practices difficult. Public library staff may not have looked at their local studies collection from the perspective of who is not included and what stories are missing. There are likely to be issues about the time it will take for staff to change their work practices, and potentially the skills and time they require to build connections with new groups, organisations and individuals. Public library staff work where they do because of their interest in serving the whole community, and this research assumes they will be willing to make sure they are representing the whole community in their local studies collection.

Delimitations refer to the boundaries of the study based on the researcher's decision of what to include and what to exclude. They make the study manageable and relevant to what the researcher is trying to achieve. Due to the nature of the research problem being investigated, the current study had to be conducted in a public library with a local studies collection supported by dedicated staff. Additionally, the location of the public library had to be easily accessible for the researcher. As a result of selecting ethnography as the research approach, the researcher was required to visit the library regularly over the life of the study, and as such a library that was logistically accessible was needed. The nature of the ethnographic method used in the study, involving observation, interviews, and document analysis, required willingness and support from a library manager, and a local studies team.

Limitations are aspects of the study, frequently outside of the researcher's control, that can influence the outcomes and conclusions of the study. This study used an ethnographic method involving one Australian public library conducted over a twelve month period. The COVID-19 pandemic was one limitation on this research, as it restricted follow-up visits to the research site. Other communication means were used; however, with limits on travel within a state, travel between states, distancing requirements and other lockdown or lockdown-related restrictions, follow-up site visits were not possible. The findings of this study are therefore shaped by the geographic, social and economic context of the library and the broader community in which it is located. The period when the study was undertaken also represented a specific point of time in the life of the library with regard to organisational context, priorities and staffing arrangements. The findings from this study therefore may not be applicable outside the specific public library that provided the context for the study, or the participants – library staff and volunteers – who contributed to the study. However, the use of rich description and verbatim quotes, as well as a detailed commentary on the public library and the community,

will provide information and insights that will be of relevance for other public libraries in how they think about local studies collections and collecting.

Another limitation is that the researcher did not explore local studies from the perspective of marginalised or invisible community groups. The researcher endeavoured to include discussion with a group that has been historically marginalised, but it chose to not participate and the researcher respected this decision. This research encourages the use of a social justice approach to public library collections, in this instance local studies. If a social justice approach to local studies collections can be documented and articulated, then all voices and stories need to be given the space to inform what that social justice approach looks like. Hence, one of the limitations of this study is not involving less visible groups as part of the study; however, it is better to have an imperfect study that helps to inform and move both understanding and practice forwards than no study at all. In seeking to amplify the voices of people or groups who are historically, intentionally and traditionally marginalised, one needs to start somewhere.

All researchers bring their own limitations to their research. In the present study, the researcher grew up in a rural area living on a farm, had parents who experienced the Second World War, works as a librarian, and likes walking, gardening, frogs, birds and dogs. The researcher is white and monolingual but with culturally and linguistically diverse ancestors. These descriptions highlight that the researcher is not likely to belong to a group, other than women, that has been historically, intentionally and traditionally marginalised. This means that the researcher relies on the voices of people who have been thus marginalised to help describe the importance of changes in local studies practices. It may also mean there is a risk that this is seen as the research of a ‘well-meaning white woman’ (Trepagnier, 2001, p. 141) with no further relevance.

The researcher regularly visits public libraries for work as well as working with them in other ways. This includes discussions about, and training for, managing local studies collections. Along with staff in other states and territories, the researcher endeavours to bring a critical view to the national provision of local studies collections, programs and services. With the staff at Kookaburra Libraries there was a slight professional connection through some prior contact. The researcher’s work involves working with public libraries on other aspects of their collections, services and programs.

7.6 Future research directions

As always, there is future research potential from the ideas explored in any research. This study suggests three main areas for future research: social justice and collaborative

research, social justice and local studies, and mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors in further public library contexts.

7.6.1 Social justice and collaborative research

Social justice and collaborative research are relevant to both of the other future directions and are placed first because it matters who does the research. This future research direction is not about questions that need to be asked but, rather, who should be asking the questions and undertaking the research. To seek to address the limitations of the researcher outlined above (i.e., not belonging to a group or people that has been historically, intentionally and traditionally marginalised, other than being a woman), it is important for future research to involve people who have been thus marginalised. Such research could be collaborative to build skills in new researchers and to bring new perspectives to this area. Local studies research by people from less visible groups within a collection is important. This approach is needed to really develop social justice as a genuine approach to local studies, as it already is in some archives and museum work.

7.6.2 Social justice and local studies

Following on from who does the research, the future research directions for social justice and local studies include a series of questions that could be asked, including how applying the concept of mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors changes the practice of local studies collecting. This leads to questions of what policy and collection decisions are made to undertake these changes, and what new staff training is required. There is also potential to explore how the collection is altered as a result. For example, are there more oral history, music or ambient sound recordings, videos to document practices and places, or zines, comics or games? Once collecting changes occur, how do they impact the range of local studies research and programs undertaken as people are able to find out more about the recent and current concerns and interests of the community? Are new people using the collections because there are more relevant mirrors and information for them? Are they using the collection and asking different questions of it? Future research could include asking how community consultation about local studies improves the diversity, equity and inclusiveness of the collecting. The Linen Hall Library in Belfast has a long history of rapid response collecting (Topping & Evans, 2005), showing that there has been a history of libraries being involved in this practice but also highlighting the need for more research in this area given documentation of the COVID-19 pandemic and #BlackLivesMatter and similar protests.

As well, future research could explore roles and responsibilities, formal and informal, in documenting communities comparing community run and managed archives with an 'official' local studies collection provided by the local council. This has the potential to include research collaborators from representative community organisations.

7.6.3 Mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors in further public library contexts

Future research could also explore applying the idea of mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors to how other collections, programs and services are shaped in public libraries, including adult fiction, adult non-fiction and multilingual collections and community outreach. This could assist public libraries in exploring issues of equity and representation in their collections and services, and in researching which sections of the community are not yet library members, and investigating why some people may not be using the collections and services provided. This would align with some of the discussions happening around public library collections, especially in the Canada and the USA.

An inclusive and diverse local studies collection for each community could promote feeling of belonging and inclusion, help in tackling social issues, and provide recognition that diverse communities are not new. The mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors provided by an inclusive and diverse local studies collection could more accurately reflect the present and past of a community, connecting stories and experiences, but also showing different perspectives on the same events or places.

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the contribution of this research to knowledge and practice, before it moved on to the significance of the research, as well as the assumptions, delimitations and limitations. It suggested future research directions before providing a conclusion.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Document identification protocol, participants, and their pseudonyms.

Kookaburra Libraries

Position title or role[16]	Interview date	Pseudonym	Document ID
Library manager	14 May 2018 12 November 2019	Amelie[17]*	KLM 14052018 KLM 12112019
Manager with local studies responsibilities	11 November 2019	John*	KMLS 11112019
Local studies librarian	14 May 2018 16 May 2019 20 August 2019	Freya*	KLSL 14052018 KLSL 16052019 KLSL 20082019
Local studies specialist - outreach	29 April 2019 2 December 2019	Eve+	KLSSO 29042019 KLSSO 02122019
Local studies specialist - service	21 March 2019 5 December 2019	Josephine*	KLSSS 21032019 KLSSS 05122019
Local studies specialist - digital	7 March 2019 2 December 2019	Molly+	KLSSD 07032019 KLSSD 02120219
Cataloguer technician	21 March 2019 2 December 2019	Lilly+	KCT 21032019 KCT 02122019
Cataloguer librarian	29 April 2019	Bonnie*	KCL 29042019
Accessions officer	18 September 2019	Paige+	KA 18092019
Branch library officer	19 September 2019	Olive^	KBLO 19092019
Library officer	2 December 2019	Thea^	KLO 02122019
Library volunteer	21 March 2019	Hayden#	KLV 21032019
Field notes	2018 - 2019		KFN [date]
Photographs	2018 - 2019		KP [date]

Kookaburra Council Documents

Name	Date	Document ID
Kookaburra Council Community Strategic Plan	2018-2028	KCCSP 20182028
Kookaburra Council Code of Conduct for Staff	2022	KCCCS2022
Kookaburra Council Cultural Strategy	2016-2019	KCCP 20162019
Kookaburra Council Heritage Plan	2020-2030	KCHP20202030
Kookaburra Council Multicultural Plan	2016-2019	KCML 20162019
Kookaburra Libraries Collection Plan	2018-2021	KLCP 20182021
Kookaburra Libraries Digitisation/Digital Preservation Strategy	2019-2022	KLDDPS 20192022
Kookaburra Libraries Strategy	2019-2023	KLS 20192029

[16] Position titles are not always used as they may have an impact on the confidentiality of the site.

[17] * Designates staff who have qualifications to be librarians, + are staff with qualifications to be library technicians, # undertaking qualifications to be a librarian, ^non- library qualifications or no formal qualifications

Kookaburra Libraries Local Studies Collection Development Plan	2018-2022	KLLSCDP 20182022
Kookaburra Libraries library system		KLLS date checked

Kookaburra community

Position title or role	Interview date	Pseudonym	Document ID
Environment volunteers	16 September 2019	Heidi Hayley	KCEV 16092019
Sport organisers	16 September 2019	Darcy Hamish	KCSO 16092019
Sport researcher[18]	19 September 2019	Spencer	KCSR 19092019
Sport photographer	19 September 2019	Isabel	KCSP 19092019
Local author	3 December 2019	Jonathan	KCLA 03122019

[18] Spencer was also a former sports organiser

Appendix B. Consent form for interviews of library staff

University of Southern Queensland

Consent Form for USQ Doctoral Research Project Interviews of library staff

Project details

Title of Project:	Understanding the everyday practice of local studies collections in two NSW public libraries: an ethnographic study.
Human Research Ethics Approval Number:	H18REA053

Research team contact details

Research student
Ellen Forsyth
Doctoral research student
[redacted]

Principal supervisor
Prof Helen Partridge
Pro-Vice Chancellor, Scholarly Information and Learning Services
[redacted]

Associate supervisor
Dr Kate Davis
Senior Research Fellow
[redacted]

Associate supervisor
A/Prof Celmara Pocock
Associate Professor (Anthropology) and Director (Centre for Heritage and Culture)
[redacted]

Statement of Consent

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- ☐ Have read and understood the information document regarding this project.
- ☐ Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction.
- ☐ Understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the research team.

- Understand that the interview/s will be audio recorded, and photographs will be taken.

- Understand that you can contact the University of Southern Queensland Ethics Coordinator on (07) 4631 2690 or email ethics@usq.edu.au if you do have any concern or complaint about the ethical conduct of this project.

- Are over 18 years of age.

- Agree to participate in the project.

- Provide my permission for one or more interviews
-

Participant Name	
Participant Signature	
Date	

I give permission to be interviewed with one or more people. Yes. No. Not applicable.

Please return this sheet to research student prior to undertaking the first interview.

Appendix C. Consent form for interviews of community

University of Southern Queensland

Consent Form for USQ Doctoral Research Project Interviews of community members

Project details

Title of Project:	Understanding the everyday practice of local studies collections in two NSW public libraries: an ethnographic study.
Human Research Ethics Approval Number:	H18REA053

Research team contact details

Research student
Ellen Forsyth
Doctoral research student
[redacted]

Principal supervisor
Prof Helen Partridge
Pro-Vice Chancellor, Scholarly Information and Learning Services
[redacted]

Associate supervisor
Dr Kate Davis
Senior Research Fellow
[redacted]

Associate supervisor
Dr Celmara Pocock
Senior Lecturer
[redacted]

Statement of consent

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- ☐ Have read and understood the information document regarding this project.
- ☐ Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction.
- ☐ Understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the research team.
- ☐ Understand that the interview/s will be audio recorded, and photographs will be taken.

- Understand that you can contact the University of Southern Queensland Ethics Coordinator on (07) 4631 2690 or email ethics@usq.edu.au if you do have any concern or complaint about the ethical conduct of this project.

- Are over 18 years of age.

- Agree to participate in the project.

- Provide my permission for one or more interviews

Participant Name	
Participant Signature	
Date	

I give permission for the collection of my organisation to be photographed - please strike out whichever is not applicable. Yes. No. Not applicable.

I give permission to be interviewed with one or more people. Yes. No. Not applicable.

Please return this sheet to research student prior to undertaking the first interview.

Appendix D. Consent form for observation library staff

University of Southern Queensland

Consent Form for USQ Doctoral Research Project Observation of library staff

Project details

Title of Project:	Understanding the everyday practice of local studies collections in two NSW public libraries: an ethnographic study.
Human Research Ethics Approval Number:	H18REA053

Research team contact details

Research student
Ellen Forsyth
Doctoral research student
[redacted]

Principal supervisor
Prof Helen Partridge
Pro-Vice Chancellor, Scholarly Information and Learning Services
[redacted]

Associate supervisor
Dr Kate Davis
Senior Research Fellow
[redacted]

Associate supervisor
Dr Celmara Pocock
Senior Lecturer
[redacted]

Statement of consent

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- ☐ Have read and understood the information document regarding this project.
- ☐ Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction.
- ☐ Understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the research student.

- Understand that the observation/s will be documented, and may be photographed.
- Understand that you can contact the University of Southern Queensland Ethics Coordinator on (07) 4631 2690 or email ethics@usq.edu.au if you do have any concern or complaint about the ethical conduct of this project.
- Are over 18 years of age.
- Agree to participate in the project.

Participant Name	
Participant Signature	
Date	

Please return this sheet to research student prior to the observation being undertaken.

Appendix E. Consent form observation community members

University of Southern Queensland

Consent Form for USQ Doctoral Research Project Observation of community members

Project details

Title of Project:	Understanding the everyday practice of local studies collections in two NSW public libraries: an ethnographic study.
Human Research Ethics Approval Number:	H18REA053

Research team contact details

Research student
Ellen Forsyth
Doctoral research student
[redacted]

Principal supervisor
Prof Helen Partridge
Pro-Vice Chancellor, Scholarly Information and Learning Services
[redacted]

Associate supervisor
Dr Kate Davis
Senior Research Fellow
[redacted]

Associate supervisor
Dr Celmara Pocock
Senior Lecturer
[redacted]

Statement of consent

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- ☐ Have read and understood the information document regarding this project.
- ☐ Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction.
- ☐ Understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the research student.

- Understand that the observation/s will be documented, and may be audio recorded, and photographed.

- Understand that you can contact the University of Southern Queensland Ethics Coordinator on (07) 4631 2690 or email ethics@usq.edu.au if you do have any concern or complaint about the ethical conduct of this project.

- Are over 18 years of age.

- Agree to participate in the project.

Participant Name	
Participant Signature	
Date	

Please return this sheet to research student prior to the observation being undertaken.

Appendix F. Information sheet interviews library staff

University of Southern Queensland

Participant Information for USQ Doctoral Research Project: Interviews of library staff

Project details

Title of Project:	Understanding the everyday practice of local studies collections in two NSW public libraries: an ethnographic study.
Human Research Ethics Approval Number:	H18REA053

Research team contact details

Research student
Ellen Forsyth
Doctoral research student
[redacted]

Principal supervisor
Prof Helen Partridge
Pro-Vice Chancellor, Scholarly Information and Learning Services
[redacted]

Associate supervisor
Dr Kate Davis
Senior Research Fellow
[redacted]

Associate supervisor
Dr Celmara Pocock
Senior Lecturer
[redacted]

Description

This research is being undertaken as part of doctoral research at the University of Southern Queensland. The purpose of this research is to explore the everyday practice of local studies collections in two NSW public libraries and it looks at how recent material is added to local studies collections. This is to discover what kind of material is collected and to determine how inclusive of the whole community the local studies collection is for future research and interest.

It aims to answer the research question: what are the experiences of public libraries in the collection, creation and curation of recent content for local studies collections in public libraries?

The research student requests your assistance because you work in a public library which is involved in collecting contemporary material for the local studies collection, and you are involved with local studies collecting or the local studies collection.

You will be asked to share your experience of the local studies collection, as well as any issues or challenges faced. I am interested to hear your insights into collecting or creating local studies material, cataloguing, preserving or making this content available for the community.

Participation

Your participation will involve at least one interview that will take approximately 30 to 60 minutes of your time. The interview/s will take place at a time/s and venue/s that is/are convenient for you. If appropriate and agreed to, interviews may include more than one person.

Questions will include but not be limited to:

- Please describe your role with the local studies collection.
- What kind of materials are being included? What kinds of formats and content have proven difficult to collect? How old does something have to be to be included? How is significance to the area determined?
- What recent content has been added to the collection?

The interview will be audio recorded. Data collection may occur during two or three visits over three to six months.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. If you do not wish to take part you are not obliged to. It will not be possible to withdraw after the research has started as it will not be possible to separate the data.

Your decision whether you take part or do not take part will in no way impact your current or future relationship with the University of Southern Queensland.

Expected Benefits

It is expected that this project will not directly benefit you. However, it may benefit your library.

While your institution's participation in the research will be anonymous, participation will give your library access to information and analysis about local practices. This may provide ideas about other aspects of contemporary collecting to explore and apply locally.

Further, the research will benefit local studies practitioners and collecting institutions more broadly by providing insight into the collecting practices and experiences of case study organisations. There is limited research in the field and this study will initiate dialogue on key contemporary collecting issues.

Risks

There are no anticipated risks beyond normal day-to-day living associated with your participation in this project.

Privacy and Confidentiality

All comments and responses will be treated confidentially unless required by law.

- Interviews will be audio recorded. It is not possible to participate in this project without being recorded.
- Interviews recordings will be transcribed by the research student or a transcription agency. Transcription agency staff will sign a transcriber confidentiality form before being provided with audio files.
- All identifying information about you will be removed from your interview transcript.
- The recording of your interview will only be accessible to the research team and the transcriber.

Research data will be retained securely in the CloudStor database for 5 years in accordance with the Queensland State Archives University Sector Retention and Disposal Schedule (reference number 601.3/C150). Additionally, consent form documents will be retained securely in the CloudStor database for 15 years after the conclusion of this research project (reference number 601.2/C111). After this time these records will be permanently deleted from the database. Any paper records will be stored in a locked location.

Consent to Participate

I would like to ask you to sign a written consent form (enclosed) to confirm your agreement to participate in this project. Please return your signed consent form to the research student prior to participating in your interview. This consent to participate will cover all interviews with you.

Questions or Further Information about the Project

Please refer to the Research contact details at the top of the form to have any questions answered or to request further information about this project.

Concerns or Complaints Regarding the Conduct of the Project

If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project you may contact the University of Southern Queensland Ethics Coordinator on (07) 4631 2690 or email ethics@usq.edu.au. The Ethics Coordinator is not connected with the research project and can facilitate a resolution to your concern in an unbiased manner.

Thank you for taking the time to help with this research project. Please keep this sheet for your information.

Appendix G. Information sheet interviews community

University of Southern Queensland

Participant Information for USQ Doctoral Research Project Interviews of community members

Project Details

Title of Project:	Understanding the everyday practice of local studies collections in two NSW public libraries: an ethnographic study.
Human Research Ethics Approval Number:	H18REA053

Research Team Contact Details

Research student
Ellen Forsyth
Doctoral Research student
[redacted]

Principal supervisor
Prof Helen Partridge
Pro-Vice Chancellor, Scholarly Information and Learning Services
[redacted]

Associate supervisor
Dr Kate Davis
Senior Research Fellow
[redacted]

Associate supervisor
Dr Celmara Pocock
Senior Lecturer
[redacted]

Description

This research is being undertaken as part of doctoral research at the University of Southern Queensland. The purpose of this research is to explore the everyday practice of local studies collections in two NSW public libraries and it looks at how recent material is added to local studies collections. This is to discover what kind of material is collected and to determine how inclusive of the whole community the local studies collection is for future research and interest.

The research student requests your assistance because of your participation in a local community group which collects or records local information. This collecting or recording of local information may not be the primary purpose of the community group, and may be done as a by-product of the main purpose of the group. This may involve your group collecting material about the area, or taking photographs at local events. Your group is of interest both because of the local history which you collect or document and collect, but also because of how the group uses and interacts with the local public library.

You will be asked to share your experience with local collecting, as well as any issues or challenges faced. I am interested to hear your insights into collecting or creating local studies material.

Participation

Your participation will involve in at least one interview that will take approximately 30 to 60 minutes of your time. The interview/s will take place at a time/s and venue/s that is/are convenient for you.

Questions will include but not be limited to:

- How does your organisation collect local information? How does it provide access to this?
- What kind of local information does your organisation create – for example photographs, videos, social media, minutes of meetings.

The interview will be audio recorded. Data collection may occur during two or three visits over three to six months. Photographs may be taken of the collection items if permission is provided.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. If you do not wish to take part you are not obliged to.
It will not be possible to withdraw after the research has started as it will not be possible to separate the data.

Your decision whether you take part or do not take part will in no way impact your current or future relationship with the University of Southern Queensland.

Expected Benefits

It is expected that this project will not directly benefit you. However, it may benefit your community group or public library.

The research will benefit local studies practitioners and collecting institutions more broadly by providing insight into the collecting practices and experiences of case study organisations. There is limited research in the field and this study will initiate dialogue on key contemporary collecting issues.

Risks

There are no anticipated risks beyond normal day to day living associated with your participation in this project.

Privacy and Confidentiality

All comments and responses will be treated confidentially unless required by law.

- Interviews will be audio recorded. It is not possible to participate in this project without being recorded.
- If appropriate and agreed to, interviews may include more than one person.
- Interviews recordings will be transcribed by the research student or a transcription agency. Transcription agency staff will sign a transcriber confidentiality form before being provided with audio files.
- All identifying information about you will be removed from your interview transcript.
- The recording of your interview will only be accessible to the research team and the transcriber.

Research data will be retained securely in the CloudStor database for 5 years in accordance with the Queensland State Archives University Sector Retention and Disposal Schedule (reference number 601.3/C150). Additionally, consent form documents will be retained securely in the CloudStor database for 15 years after the conclusion of this research project (reference number 601.2/C111). After this time these records will be permanently deleted from the database. Any paper records will be stored in a locked location.

Consent to Participate

I would like to ask you to sign a written consent form (enclosed) to confirm your agreement to participate in this project. Please return your signed consent form to the research student prior to participating in your interview. This consent to participate will cover all interviews with you.

Questions or Further Information about the Project

Please refer to the Research contact details at the top of the form to have any questions answered or to request further information about this project.

Concerns or Complaints Regarding the Conduct of the Project

If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project you may contact the University of Southern Queensland Ethics Coordinator on (07) 4631 2690 or email ethics@usq.edu.au. The Ethics Coordinator is not connected with the research project and can facilitate a resolution to your concern in an unbiased manner.

Thank you for taking the time to help with this research project. Please keep this sheet for your information.

Appendix H. Information sheet observation of library staff

University of Southern Queensland

Participant Information for USQ Doctoral Research Project: Observation of library staff

Project details

Title of Project:	Understanding the everyday practice of local studies collections in two NSW public libraries: an ethnographic study.
Human Research Ethics Approval Number:	H18REA053

Research team contact details

Research student
Ellen Forsyth
Doctoral research student
[redacted]

Principal supervisor
Prof Helen Partridge
Pro-Vice Chancellor, Scholarly Information and Learning Services
[redacted]

Associate supervisor
Dr Kate Davis
Senior Research Fellow
[redacted]

Associate supervisor
Dr Celmara Pocock
Senior Lecturer
[redacted]

Description

This research is being undertaken as part of doctoral research at the University of Southern Queensland. The purpose of this research is to explore the everyday practice of local studies collections in two NSW public libraries and it looks at how recent material is added to local studies collections. This is to discover what kind of material is collected and to determine how inclusive of the whole community the local studies collection is. It aims to answer the research

question: what are the experiences of public libraries in the collection, creation and curation of recent content for local studies collections in public libraries?

The research student requests your assistance because you work in a public library which collects contemporary material for the local studies collection, and you have some involvement with local studies collecting or the local studies collection.

The research student will observe local studies related activities. Local studies related activities involve actions to preserve the past for this area and record the present. It may include, but not be limited to:

- the collecting of local materials such as books, leaflets, photographs, recordings or social media about the area
- recording events, such as writing minutes, taking photographs, recording videos or making an oral history recording, or making a game about the area.
- collecting music by local musicians or music about the area
- cataloguing or indexing this information, digitising (for material in other formats), preserving (including digital preservation) and providing access to information about the local area.
- assisting people access this information
- discussions or meetings about the local studies collection
- local studies events

Participation

Your participation will involve being observed in local studies related activities. If you do not wish to take part you are not obliged to.

The observation/s will take place at a time/s and venue/s that is/are convenient to you. Data collection may occur during two or three visits over three to six months. Data collection will involve note taking and photography.

Observation will involve being watched while working. The aim is for this observation to be as unobtrusive as possible. In ethnography participant observation is used, so that at least some of the observation will be done while working alongside the library staff. The researcher will observe meetings and other work. This includes planning meetings, staff meetings and functions and unplanned social events such as morning teas and lunches. The observations could also take place at public events such as talks, workshops and open days.

Contextual observations: The researcher will observe the general day to day activities of the library. These could include how the staff go about their work activities, their responses and actions between each other and the public, the appearance and structure of the organisation and any activities which will add to the researcher understanding the context of the organisation.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. If you do not wish to take part you are not obliged to. It will not be possible to withdraw after the research has started as it will not be possible to remove the data.

Your decision whether you take part or do not take part will in no way impact your current or future relationship with the University of Southern Queensland.

Expected benefits

It is expected that this project will not directly benefit you. However, it may benefit your library.

Further, the research will benefit local studies practitioners and collecting institutions more broadly by providing insight into the collecting practices and experiences of case study organisations. There is limited research in the field and this study will initiate dialogue on key contemporary collecting issues.

Risks

There are no anticipated risks beyond normal day to day living associated with your participation in this project.

Privacy and Confidentiality

All comments and responses will be treated confidentially unless required by law.

At times photographs may be taken to remind the researcher of the events as they occurred. Any participants who are observed, artefacts collected or photographs taken in these field notes will be de-identified at the time of the writing or digital download from the camera, although images may be able to be used with permission. Photography will focus on locations and collection objects, not people.

Research data will be retained securely in the CloudStor database for 5 years in accordance with the Queensland State Archives University Sector Retention and Disposal Schedule (reference number 601.3/C150). Additionally, consent form documents will be retained securely in the CloudStor database for 15 years after the conclusion of this research project (reference number 601.2/C111). After this time these records will be permanently deleted from the database. Any paper records will be stored in a locked location.

Consent to Participate

I would like to ask you to sign a written consent form (enclosed) to confirm your agreement to participate in this project. One form will cover the period of the research. Please return your signed consent form to the research student prior to the observation taking place. This consent to participate will cover all observation with you.

Questions or Further Information about the Project

Please refer to the Research team contact details at the top of the form to have any questions answered or to request further information about this project.

Concerns or Complaints Regarding the Conduct of the Project

If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project you may contact the University of Southern Queensland Ethics Coordinator on (07) 4631 2690 or email ethics@usq.edu.au. The Ethics Coordinator is not connected with the research project and can facilitate a resolution to your concern in an unbiased manner.

Thank you for taking the time to help with this research project. Please keep this sheet for your information.

Appendix I. Information sheet observation of community

University of Southern Queensland

Participant Information for USQ Doctoral Research Project: Observation of community members

Project details

Title of Project:	Understanding the everyday practice of local studies collections in two NSW public libraries: an ethnographic study.
Human Research Ethics Approval Number:	H18REA053

Research team contact details

Research student
Ellen Forsyth
Doctoral research student
[redacted]

Principal supervisor
Prof Helen Partridge
Pro-Vice Chancellor, Scholarly Information and Learning Services
[redacted]

Associate supervisor
Dr Kate Davis
Senior Research Fellow
[redacted]

Associate supervisor
Dr Celmara Pocock
Senior Lecturer
[redacted]

Description

This research is being undertaken as part of doctoral research at the University of Southern Queensland. The purpose of this research is to explore the everyday practice of local studies collections in two NSW public libraries and looks at how recent material is added to local studies collections. This is to discover what kind of material is collected and to determine how inclusive of the whole community the local studies collection is. It aims to answer the research question:

: what are the experiences of public libraries in the collection, creation and curation of recent content for local studies collections in public libraries?

The research student requests your assistance because of your participation in a local community group which collects or records local information. This collecting or recording of local information may not be the primary purpose of the community group, and may be done as a by product of the main purpose of the group. This may involve your group collecting material about the area, or taking photographs at local events. Your group is of interest both because of the local history which you collect or document and collect, but also because of how the group uses and interacts with the local public library.

The research student will observe local studies related activities which you are participating in. Local studies related activities involve actions to preserve the past for this area and record the present. The focus is on the community groups interactions with the public library staff, and use of the public library for their local history activities whilst in the public library.

Written and photographic field notes will also be used to record the experiences of the observation. They will also record aspects of data collection, as well as general reflections of being embedded in the sites studied.

Participation

Your participation will involve being observed in local studies related activities. If you do not wish to take part you are not obliged to.

The observation/s will take place at the public library at time/s which is/are convenient to you. Data collection may occur during two or three visits over three to six months. Data collection will involve note taking and photography.

The focus is on the community groups interactions with the public library staff, and use of the public library for their local history activities whilst in the public library.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. If you do not wish to take part you are not obliged to. It will not be possible to withdraw after the research has started as it will not be possible to remove the data.

Your decision whether you take part or do not take part will in no way impact your current or future relationship with the University of Southern Queensland.

Expected Benefits

It is expected that this project will not directly benefit you. However, it may benefit your community group or public library.

The research will benefit local studies practitioners and collecting institutions more broadly by providing insight into the collecting practices and experiences of case study organisations.

There is limited research in the field and this study will initiate dialogue on key contemporary collecting issues.

Risks

There are no anticipated risks beyond normal day to day living associated with your participation in this project.

Privacy and Confidentiality

All comments and responses will be treated confidentially unless required by law.

At times photographs may be taken to remind the researcher of the events as they occurred. Any participants who are observed, artefacts collected or photographs taken in these field notes will be de-identified at the time of the writing or digital download from the camera.

Research data will be retained securely in the CloudStor database for 5 years in accordance with the Queensland State Archives University Sector Retention and Disposal Schedule (reference number 601.3/C150). Additionally, consent form documents will be retained securely in the CloudStor database for 15 years after the conclusion of this research project (reference number 601.2/C111). After this time these records will be permanently deleted from the database. Any paper records will be stored in a locked location.

Consent to Participate

I would like to ask you to sign a written consent form (enclosed) to confirm your agreement to participate in this project. The consent form will cover the entire period of the research. Please return your signed consent form to the research student prior to the observation taking place.

Questions or Further Information about the Project

Please refer to the Research Contact Details at the top of the form to have any questions answered or to request further information about this project.

Concerns or Complaints Regarding the Conduct of the Project

If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project you may contact the University of Southern Queensland Ethics Coordinator on (07) 4631 2690 or email ethics@usq.edu.au. The Ethics Coordinator is not connected with the research project and can facilitate a resolution to your concern in an unbiased manner.

Thank you for taking the time to help with this research project. Please keep this sheet for your information.

Appendix J. Indicative observation criteria

University of Southern Queensland

Observation criteria for USQ Doctoral Research Project

Project Details	
Title of Project:	Understanding the everyday practice of local studies collections in two NSW public libraries: an ethnographic study.
Human Research Ethics Approval Number:	H18REA053

Research Team Contact Details

Research student
Ellen Forsyth
Doctoral research student
[redacted]

Principal supervisor
Prof Helen Partridge
Pro-Vice Chancellor, Scholarly Information and Learning Services
[redacted]

Associate supervisor
Dr Kate Davis
Senior Research Fellow
Email: kate.davis@usq.edu.au
[redacted]

Associate supervisor
Dr Celmara Pocock
Senior Lecturer
[redacted]

Observation criteria

Observing in ethnographic research is about listening and watching. The purpose of the observations is for the researcher to gain insights about the context of the phenomena that is under investigation. It involves studying groups of people, individuals and objects that are part of everyday life. The researcher becomes involved, immersed and participates in the daily routines and develops on-going relationships with the people in it. He/she gets close to the people in the

investigation and participates as much as possible to learn what it is like to become a member of that world and share its experiences. The researcher records or writes down systematically what he/she observes, learns and understands while participating in the daily life of others. In this way, the researcher accumulates a written record of observations and experiences (Emerson, 1995).

Observations for this study will involve planned observations and incidental observations.

For observation the following aspects will be recorded where possible:

- Space - layout of the physical setting; rooms, outdoor spaces, etc.
- Actors - the names and relevant details of the people involved
- Activities - the various activities of the actors
- Objects - physical elements: furniture etc.
- Acts - specific individual actions
- Events - particular occasions, e.g. meetings
- Time - the sequence of events
- Goals - what actors are attempting to accomplish
- Feelings - emotions in particular contexts

(Spradley, 2016)

Library observation

Observation of library staff will be done so that:

- the collecting practices and the rationale for these are understood
- routine and unusual actions are observed
- how the local studies collection is planned, catalogued and made available is understood
- who the key people are as well as connections between people is clear
- it may help demonstrate connections between people from the community and from the library
- it could show where practice is different to the theory described in interviews
- things which people may not think to describe in interviews are seen

It will provide:

- detailed descriptions of objects (local studies collection items)
- information about the work of the library staff who manage the collection
- information about any volunteers and their roles
- information about events associated with the collection and creating content as well as how local studies fits into the library over all.

Observation shows practices as they occur rather than as they are described, 'the participant observer … is participating in order to observe, notice, record, and try to make sense of actions and events (O'Reilly 2009) and as a temporary insider, can provide a 'nuanced insider perspective of a particular community's information experience' (Bruce, Davis et al. 2014). The observation for libraries will include observations on acquisition, cataloguing and access processes. It may include observation of content creation, for example photographs being taken of a library event, sitting in while an oral history interview is conducted or observing a staff meeting where collections are discussed. It could include participation in library or

community events of relevance to local studies, as this may be a way that new content is created or obtained for the library.

Planned observation for library staff
In planned observations the researcher will have an attitude of detachment. The 'fly on the wall' observation strategy will be used in a structured way within the organisation. The purpose of these observations is to gain an understanding of the workings of the organisation at the planning stages; understand the aims and objectives of the organisation; know who the key players are and the dynamics between them. Pollner and Emerson (1988) explain that no researcher can be a completely neutral observer, yet these observations are necessary as they may expose the researcher to subtleties, underlying agendum and assumptions may not be disclosed in reading meeting minutes alone.

At these observations the researcher will not participate nor comment unless invited to do so. Some notes may be taken but these will be done as unobtrusively as possible. Notes taken here will be as reminders of the events and may comprise one or two words or a short sentence. It may comprise a quote that the researcher wishes to record accurately. At a later time, the researcher will write a fuller account of what was seen, heard and experienced during the events of the meetings.

Incidental observations for library staff
Incidental observations may involve the researcher actively participating in the activities of the organisation and interacting with the participants. In doing so, the researcher attempts to reveal 'multiple truths' (Emerson et al, 1995) as the researcher comes to experience first-hand the subtle relationships and interactions of the participants in a way that may not be accessible through detached observation and interview alone. Such activities could include the general day to day activities of the library where staff interact with each other and the public. Some of these interactions could be between staff and the researcher.
In recording observations of this type, the researcher will take time at the conclusion of interactions or incidents to write field notes which attempt to capture and preserve the concerns and doings of the participants involved. The researcher takes an empathetic stance to attempt to reflect and understand the events, interactions and concerns which may have been expressed.

Gaining trust from the participants will be crucial to the recording of such events. The researcher will not ignore emotions, but will use her own sensibilities to understand how others understand and evaluate what has happened (Emerson et al., 1995). The researcher will respect the feelings of the participants at all times. Should any participant feel discomfort at the researcher's involvement in activities, the researcher will remove herself from the situation and no field notes will be recorded. Additionally, the researcher will seek confirmation when making observations of participants as to whether they are willing to have the activity and interactions compiled into the field notes of the researcher. They will be informed that confidentiality will be assured, but they will not have access to the finalised field notes.

Follow up:
Active involvement of the researcher in experiencing the daily life of the organisation as previously described provides the researcher with inside knowledge about the organisation. Follow up interviews which draw on these insights allows the researcher to explore issues which may not be apparent with interviews taken from an outsider or passive observer.

Field notes of observations:
The purpose is to describe situations and events, as well as people's understandings and reactions to the events around them (Emerson, 2001). The field notes are as much about relating the lived experiences of the participants as they are about capturing the researcher's own 'lived emotional experience of unfolding events and interactions' (Ellis, 1991, p. 25). In this way, the researcher seeks to provide a window into the experience of others to capture feelings and thoughts of the participants.

Writing regular and systematic field notes is vital for recording observations (Emerson, Fretz et al. 2011, Creswell 2014) The methods of note taking will depend on a combination of what are the most effective and the least disruptive for each circumstance. It is likely that a combination of typed and hand written notes as well as photographs will be used. It is important to record these observations for each field trip as the details and impressions may change over time, (Crang and Cook 2007). The short notes taken in the field will be written up in more detail as soon as possible (Emerson, Fretz et al. 2011 Chapter 3) so that detail is preserved, and nuances of observations effectively recorded. For notes taken on an ipad or laptop the devices will be password protected. Handwritten notes will be kept in a secure location. After transferring these notes to fuller field notes, they will be destroyed. The field notes will be written in a private place away from view or interaction with any of the participants. The field notes will contain the date and approximate time of the event or incident. Locations will be referred to by alias, as will the people involved in the interactions being described. No one, but the researcher and the research team will have access to the field notes.

This research will require overt participation in each library and be subject to ethics approval. These are groups, particularly within the libraries, which coincide with my existing work and networks, and it is important to be open about this research with the participants, while protecting their privacy and confidentiality.

As well as writing ethnographic field notes, photographs will be taken to record the environment. They will be part of the ethnographic field notes. Photographs can provide important documentation for research, and are a crucial part of field notes, as 'pictures taken early in fieldwork can be revisited later, by the researcher … [and] may remind them of what as initially strange' (Crang and Cook 2007 loc 1575). Photographs can also record information which was not noticed at the time, providing useful data (Fetterman 2010 loc 1762).
Permission will not be obtained for these areas of photographs if the observation takes place in a large public space, for example a public library or a public meeting. Consent will be obtained for smaller locations and smaller numbers of people. Photographs will focus on recording location and collection items, not people.

Written and photographic field notes will also be used to record the experiences of the observation, interviews and the '*immersion* in others' worlds (Emerson, Fretz et al. 2011 loc 414). They will also record aspects of data collection, as well as general reflections of being embedded in the sites studied.

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Appendix K. Interview protocol library staff

University of Southern Queensland

Indicative interview questions and protocol for library staff for USQ Doctoral Research Project

Project Details

Title of Project:	Understanding the everyday practice of local studies collections in two NSW public libraries: an ethnographic study.
Human Research Ethics Approval Number:	H18REA053

Research Team Contact Details

Research student
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Associate supervisor
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Associate supervisor
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Senior Lecturer
[redacted]

Interview sample questions and protocol

Setting up for the interview

- Check the participant is comfortable to start and clarify expected maximum time for each interview is 60 minutes.

At the start of the interview

- Turn recorder/s on
- Greeting
- Restate purpose of the project, and the interviewee and interview's names, date, location and other relevant information.
- Restate consent parameters and clarify agreement to participate.
- Remind participant that the questions are meant to stimulate their thinking. They can answer or not as they wish.
- Remind interviewee that they can add to or address aspects not directly in answer to the question but which come to mind.
- Check the recorder/s is/are working properly.

The Interview Questions

The following are the indicative interview questions. Most staff would only be asked some of these questions. The local studies staff would be asked most of them over the course of multiple interviews. This is not an exhaustive list, additional questions can and will be asked as needed during each individual interview:

Question	Information being sought	Who to ask
Please tell me a little about your library and your work.	This is to help the interview start and to see how people perceive the library service they provide. May include number and type of clients, opening hours, number and type of staff, main services and resources provided. Prompts include - briefly describe what you do, each day or regularly within your work which related to local studies, and about how much time in their work is spent on local studies? This may include work history, how long they have worked in libraries/in this library and some background about how they came to be in this role.	everyone
What excites you about local studies? What do you think is important about local studies?	These questions may be moved around in the sequence, depending on how things are answered. It will help find out the fun, the joyful or the grim aspects of why local studies matters to this person. This may help draw out any bias in collecting/recording. This may not need to be asked, if this information is provided in an earlier question. The main purpose of this is to find out if local studies means older material only, or how much contemporary collecting/recording is on the horizon.	everyone
What do you think of as local studies?	This may not need to be asked, if this information is provided in an earlier question. The main purpose of this is to find out if local studies means older material only, or how much contemporary collecting/recording is on the horizon.	everyone
What recent content has been added to the collection?	This is to explore what subjects and formats are included, and how the local studies collection reflects local interest and relevance.	everyone

Provide examples of the kinds of things which are included in your local studies collection?	Prompt - please describe how your collection demonstrates collecting historical and current material. Recent content being under five and under ten years since the event happened. This may not need to be asked, if this information is provided in an earlier question. The main purpose of this is to find out if local studies means older material only, or how much contemporary collecting/recording is on the horizon.	
How does the collecting strategy facilitate your collecting practices?	Probe questions to explore when the collecting strategy was last updated. Are there aspects of it you would like to change? This is to find out how the collection strategy helps contemporary collecting.	Local studies staff Library manager
How do you source and add new local studies content to the collection?	This question is to find out how new local studies material is found or created, catalogued, preserved and made available for the public to use. Probe question about adding recent content and do you create it/cocreate it/commission/buy/accept donations? This is to explore how this library came to do contemporary collecting, so need to know how the thinking works. Probe question on fiction by a local or set in the area is included – also ask about zines/comics/games	Local studies staff but possibly some other staff as well such as cataloguers and IT
How are the items added to the catalogue or other database? Please describe the kinds of records including subjects, transcriptions, notes	To be asked of cataloguers and people who source the material – for different perspectives on this work. Probe question – is the material on Trove? This may not need to be asked, if this information is provided in an earlier question.	Local studies staff Cataloguers IT
With your local studies collection, what do you see as the gaps in the collection?	Probe questions about what subject areas or formats they would like to collect/catalogue/preserve/make accessible, which may be hard to include in the collection. Why would like to collect these? Why are they hard to include?	Everyone – in varying detail
What partnerships do you have which assist in local studies collection development?	This is to look at what connections there are within the community, including the types and range of community groups worked with. This may not need to be asked, if this information is provided in an earlier question. The main purpose of this is to find out if local studies means older material only, or how much contemporary collecting/recording is on the horizon.	Local studies staff Library manager
How is new digital media added to your collection?	Prompt for photographs/videos/games and social media This question to be asked of people with collecting responsibilities, cataloguers and relevant IT staff to see if this has similar work flows to other content.	Local studies staff Cataloguers IT
How are permission documents recorded?	To be asked of people with collecting responsibilities, cataloguing responsibilities and policy responsibilities to see how permissions such as donations and access are collected and recorded. This will help understand access to recent content all of which would be in copyright.	Local studies staff

Do you make material available using creative commons?		Possibly cataloguers and IT
What services and resources does your library provide (if any) to support the creation of new local studies content by individuals or groups within the community? Please describe?	For staff with collecting responsibilities to explore partnerships and content creation.	Local studies staff Programs staff
How have you evaluated how the local studies collection is used and or valued by the community?	This is to explore how the collection and collection use is evaluated. What kinds of statistics are collected about the use of the local studies collection and are there surveys done of relevance to the local studies collection?	Local studies staff Library manager
What challenges has your library faced in supporting the maintenance and development of the local studies collection?	To be asked of most staff, including library manager to see how well constraints are understood and communicated. Probe questions will be used to explore things such as time, sharing of resources, skills, knowledge and capacity (staff and space).	Everyone – but more detailed responses from local studies staff and library manager
What kind of opportunities do you see for your public library and other organisations to collaborate and work together to provide local studies collections and services?	Only to be asked if this has not come up already. Building the understanding of community connections.	Local studies staff Staff with a strategy focus
Is there anything else about local studies that you would like to mention that we haven't yet discussed?	Opportunity to say more.	Everyone
Who else in your library service that I should speak with, who might provide extra details or a different perspective?	Who else needs to be talked with.	Everyone

The following generic probe questions are indicative of further questioning which may be useful, at any point of the interview, to clarify, extend or deepen the nature of responses:

- Please explain what you mean by that?
- Please tell me more about that?
- Please describe an example of that?

Conclusion

a) Ask the participant if there is anything they wish to add**.**

b) Thank the participant for their time and contribution to the project.

c) Remind the participant of the contact details on the information sheet should they have any queries or concerns in the future.

d) Wish the participant a nice day

Finish the interview

Ensure the sound file is saved as soon as practicable to the agreed online repository for safekeeping.

Appendix L. Interview protocol community

University of Southern Queensland

Indicative interview questions and protocol for community members for USQ Doctoral Research Project

Project Details

Title of Project:	Understanding the everyday practice of local studies collections in two NSW public libraries: an ethnographic study.
Human Research Ethics Approval Number:	H18REA053

Research Team Contact Details

Research student
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Doctoral research student
[redacted]

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Pro-Vice Chancellor, Scholarly Information and Learning Services
[redacted]

Associate supervisor
Dr Kate Davis
Senior Research Fellow
[redacted]

Associate supervisor
Dr Celmara Pocock
Senior Lecturer
[redacted]

Interview sample questions and protocol

Setting up for the interview

- ☐ Check the participant is comfortable to start and clarify expected maximum time for each interview is 60 minutes.

At the start of the interview

- Turn recorder/s on
- Greeting
- Restate purpose of the project, and the interviewee and interview's names, date, location and other relevant information.
- Restate consent parameters and clarify agreement to participate.
- Remind participant that the questions are meant to stimulate their thinking. They can answer or not as they wish.
- Remind interviewee that they can add to or address aspects not directly in answer to the question but which come to mind.
- Check the recorder/s is/are working properly.

The Interview Questions

The following are the indicative interview questions. While the term local studies is used for the questions the term local history will also be used in the questions. This is not an exhaustive list, additional questions can and will be asked as needed during each individual interview, although sufficient information may be obtained by only asking the first few and last few questions:

Question	**Information being sought**
Please tell me about this community group and how you came to be involved	This is to provide background on the person and the group. It will be a way of starting the discussion. It also provides for information about formal roles as well as other participation. This is a brief starter question.
How does the group record or document what it does? Probe questions may be about photography, minutes, research, social media and publishing, as well as access and what structured order is used for past records. Probe questions also about community group information in the local paper - paid or free information, paid or free newspaper, in print and/or online.	This will show what material this group creates, and how they document their own local information including information about the group such as minutes. Can include information about how the material is made available – is it in a shed, a club house, or is it online?
What kind of local information does your organisation collect? Probe questions about the nature of the group – for example local netball club may collect photographs of netball events their teams participate in regardless of location, local show may only photograph the local show.	This is to find out about any collecting of material other than content created by the group. It could be photographs and other records of group activities or it could be more general collecting about the community. It may not need to be asked if the information has been provided earlier in the interview.

Does the organisation have a strategy or policy about collecting/recording local areas/activities?	This is to find out about any strategy or policy about this – for example every netball match will be photographed.
Have you used the local studies collection at the library? What do you like about it?	This question may be moved around in the sequence, depending on how things are answered. It will help find out the fun, the joyful or the grim aspects of why local studies matters to this person. This may help draw out any bias in collecting/recording. It may not need to be asked if the information has been provided earlier in the interview.
What do you think of as local studies? Please describe what this term means to you? Please give examples from your experience. Probe questions may be about local history as an alternative term.	The main purpose of this is to find out if local studies means older material only, and how much contemporary collecting/recording is on the horizon. It may not need to be asked if the information has been provided earlier in the interview.
Is there some material you would really like to add to the collection managed by your organisation but have not been able to? What is this?	This is to find out how they are thinking about the collection, and its future, also to show how they perceive gaps in the collection. This may not need to be asked, if this information is provided in an earlier question or it is not relevant to the role the interviewee has in the organisation.
What partnerships do you have which assist in recording the history of the area?	This is to find out who they work with and may be a source of additional information. This may not need to be asked, if this information is provided in an earlier question or it is not relevant to the role the interviewee has in the organisation.
About how much time in your volunteer/work is spent on local studies?	This is to find out time wise where this all fits. This may not need to be asked, if this information is provided in an earlier question or it is not relevant to the role the interviewee has in the organisation.
Please describe how you locate new material for the collection? Probe questions may be around how the group records local events.	This is to find out if they create it/cocreate it/commission/buy/accept donations. This may not need to be asked if this information is provided earlier. This may not need to be asked, if this information is provided in an earlier question or it is not relevant to the role the interviewee has in the organisation.
How are the items added to the catalogue or other database? Please describe the kinds of records including subjects, transcriptions, notes	This question will depend on what access is available to any material This may not need to be asked, if this information is provided in an earlier question or it is not relevant to the role the interviewee has in the organisation.
How is new digital media added to your collection? Photographs/videos/games?	This question will depend on what access is available to any material. Probe question about permissions/copyright. This may not need to be asked, if this information is provided in an earlier question or it is not relevant to the role the interviewee has in the organisation.
Is there anything else about local studies that you would like to mention that we haven't yet discussed?	Provides the opportunity for other comments, if they have not been otherwise made.

Is there anyone else in your community group that I should speak with, who might provide extra details or a different perspective?	Sourcing other people to interview.

The following generic probe questions are indicative of further questioning which may be useful, at any point of the interview, to clarify, extend or deepen the nature of responses:

- Please explain what you mean by that?
- Please tell me more about that?
- Please describe an example of that?

Conclusion

e) Ask the participant if there is anything they wish to add**.**

f) Thank the participant for their time and contribution to the project.

g) Remind the participant of the contact details on the information sheet should they have any queries or concerns in the future.

h) Wish the participant a nice day

Finish the interview

Ensure the sound file is saved as soon as practicable to the agreed online repository for safekeeping.