



A Guide to Starting and Running a Community-Based Toy Library

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Quick Start – A *Fast-Track* method to starting a Toy Library

The following guidelines are perfect for anyone who wants to get their new Toy Library up and running with the minimum of fuss. More elaborate systems and procedures can be incorporated into this simple model at any time.

- **Gather together a few interested friends**
Anyone can start a Toy Library, so once you have realised the need for one in your area, the first logical step is to meet with a group of like-minded parents to develop your idea. Don't worry if your group is small – some libraries operate with as few as half a dozen members.
- **Pool a few toys from each family**
This will give you the basis for your library of toys.
- **All pay a membership subscription**
This will give you a small fund to begin purchasing toys.
- **Buy some toys**
Ensure the toys are washable, well-made and ones the children in your library will enjoy playing with.
- **All members to borrow a toy**
Record who has borrowed what and establish a date for return.
- **Each member to approach other friends**
One of the easiest ways to expand your membership is to utilise the existing networks of your members.
- **Start advertising**
This doesn't need to be expensive. Try making some posters (either on your home computer or by hand), and displaying them in pre-schools, local community centres, your church, etc. In the majority of cases, these venues will let you display your poster at no charge.
- **Apply for funding**
At any time, there are numerous Government and non-Government agencies offering monies to community groups in the form of grants. The Government of Western Australia has an online Grants Directory which can be a useful starting point:
<http://www.grantsdirectory.dlg.wa.gov.au/>
Lotterywest also has grants which are aimed toward unincorporated newly commenced entities: <http://www.lotterywest.wa.gov.au/grants>

1. WHAT IS A TOY LIBRARY?

1.1 The importance of toys to children

A toy library is a venue where parents, grandparents and/or carers can go to borrow a large variety of good quality toys, puzzles and games, designed to support children's development and promote learning through play. These toys, puzzles and games may be borrowed and enjoyed at home or in a group situation– just like books from a lending library.



1.2 The cost of toys

A toy library is able to provide a large selection of quality toys and equipment for loan. By belonging to a local toy library, individual children or groups have access to a wide range of good toys, games, puzzles and equipment. They also offer parents the opportunity to ‘try before they buy,’ which ensures they do not waste money on toys their child may not enjoy, or receive any value from.

1.3 Benefits of a toy library

Membership of a toy library may increase a parent’s understanding of the importance of play, of the different types of play and the stages of development at which these types of play are of particular importance. In addition, Toy Libraries offer a network of support for families. Parents and carers can meet informally, forge friendships and discuss their problems and concerns. They can also be a great way to meet new like-minded people if the family has just moved into a new area.

2. GETTING THE BALL ROLLING

2.1 Getting a group of interested parents

Any individual or group interested in the value of play for children can start a toy library. Some assessment of the need for a toy library in your area will be required. Will the toy library be serving pre-schoolers, physically, intellectually and/or socially handicapped children or other groups? Getting together with a group of interested parents and others will probably be the first step to getting your toy library up and running.

2.2 Publicising a meeting

Once it has been decided to establish a toy library, a good way of ensuring potential members have an opportunity to contribute energy, resources and ideas in the early stages is through a public meeting. This may be publicised through infant welfare centres, libraries, local media, etc. This meeting will help to establish a likely profile for your toy library.

2.3 Appointing a committee

A committee is a group of people who take on the responsibility of managing a community group, voluntary organisation, charity, trust or social enterprise. The committee is responsible for making sure that the organisation sticks to its aims and objectives. In terms of a new toy library, you will need to find a core group of Individuals who are willing to make a commitment for an initial period. These individuals will be a good basis from which to form a committee. For possible committee roles see 4.1.

2.4 Getting started

From here, suitable premises will need to be found, initial funding sought and some toys purchased. This will be an appropriate time to seek support from your local shire or council, service clubs and local business houses.



3. FINDING A PLACE

3.1 Location in the neighbourhood

Ideally, a toy library should be a bright, cheerful, welcoming place. Suitable premises which are easily accessible to users and which will adequately house the toy collection will be required. Approach your local infant welfare centre, church, community centre, or local government community services department to find a possible location. Some of these groups may have unused space which you will be able to use, in some cases rent free, and in others for a nominal amount.

3.2 Accessibility

Ideally, the toy library should be in a central location, close to public transport and/or with convenient car parking. Many members are likely to have prams, pushers or wheel chairs, so a street level location or ramp access will be required. Also, consider having a place to ‘park’ prams, pushers, etc.

3.3 Security and safety

Some toy libraries are able to find an area for their exclusive use, which can be locked when not in use. Others need to share premises with other users. In this case, it will be necessary to have lockable cupboards and possibly a lockable storage area for larger items. The area itself should be safe for young children.

Volunteers on duty may have young children with them, so they will need to know that their children are safe while they are busy. Vigilance is required, as even doors and gates with childproof mechanisms can be inadvertently left open. Access to a play area, either indoor or safely enclosed outdoor, would be an added bonus.

3.4 Rental

Rental of a venue can place a considerable strain on toy library finances, so it is advisable to seek a space that is either rent-free or requires only a nominal amount. If such a venue cannot be found, then rent may need to be covered via fundraising or perhaps a grant from the local government body.

3.5 Sample venues

Examples of possible venues for your toy library include:

- scout/guide hall
- shop front
- community centre
- infant welfare centre
- playgroup
- kindergarten
- church hall
- mobile unit (caravan, trailer, etc)



4. GETTING ORGANISED

4.1 Defining committee tasks

The most common roles within any committee are:

- a chair (or a president)
- a secretary, and
- a treasurer.

The committee for your toy library should comprise these at a minimum.

Other committee roles you may like to consider are:

- vice president
- secretary
- treasurer
- fundraiser
- toy buyer
- toy maintenance person
- cataloguer
- publicist
- roster coordinator

4.2 Incorporation

Incorporation of an association means that it becomes a legal entity in its own right, separate from the individual members. Put another way, the association is considered at law to have a distinct identity that continues regardless of changes to the membership.

Community groups—including toy libraries—can incorporate under the Associations Incorporation Act. The Act provides a cheap, simple way of establishing a legal entity that has the capacity to function in its own right.

There are many advantages in setting up a toy library as an incorporated body. These include:

- the association acquires the powers of a body corporate with perpetual succession and a common seal;
- the association may sue or be sued;
- the association may enter into contracts and acquire, hold and dispose of property;
- members or officers of the association (the committee) are generally not liable to contribute towards the payment of debts or liabilities of the association;
- the name of the association concludes with the word "Incorporated" or the abbreviation "Inc." as part of its name; and
- if members or office bearers of the association incurred liabilities or obligations on behalf of the association prior to incorporation, those liabilities and obligations can be exercised against the incorporated association.



Source: Department of Commerce web site:

<http://www.commerce.wa.gov.au/ConsumerProtection/Content/Business/Associations/index.htm>, 25 February 2010

4.3 Insurance

It is important to have your toys insured. It is more important to have public liability insurance so that if in the event harm comes to a member family or any person your toy library deals with you have coverage to assist in short or long term care.

WAATL is able to offer a bulk insurance rate for member toy libraries. This rate will often be substantially more affordable than dealing with insurers on an individual basis. Contact WAATL for information and prices.

5. MONEY MATTERS

5.1 Deciding on subscription charges

How much members are required to pay in subscriptions depends on a number of factors. Consider the following when setting your fee structure:

- insurance costs
- running costs
- toy purchases
- rental costs
- number of members
- funding received through grants
- accessibility to low income families i.e. will you offer concession rates and installment payments?
- rates for groups

5.2 Fundraising

To ensure your toy library has a successful future, you will need to organise some specific money producing – or fundraising -- activities. Asking members to help with fundraising provides an opportunity for social contact and publicity for the toy library. Some possibilities are:

- cake stalls
- toy sales
- party plan activities
- chocolate drives
- shopping tours
- raffles
- quiz nights
- sausage sizzles.



Some toy libraries offer a fundraising levy as an alternative to participation in fundraising. Borrowers may choose to pay this amount once a year and then be free of the obligation to help with stalls, drives, etc.

5.3 Grants

At any time, there are numerous Government and non-Government agencies offering monies to community groups in the form of grants. The Government of Western Australia has an online Grants Directory that can be a useful starting point:

<http://www.grantsdirectory.dlg.wa.gov.au/>

The Our Communities web site has a monthly newsletter (subscription-based) which will help keep you up-to-date with what grants are available, and where:

http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/funding/grant_main.jsp

Current funding agencies for grants include LotteryWest (<http://www.lotterywest.wa.gov.au/grants>) and ongoing agencies such as FAHCSIA Volunteers Grants Program, Community Banks, Local Council Community Grant Schemes, Variety Club and Employee Trusts.

To increase your likelihood of success in procuring funds through grants you can:

- Educate yourself on the art of writing and submitting a grant application. As a starting point, the Western Australian Council of Social Service (WACOSS) offers training in this area. <http://www.wacosstraining.org.au/>
- Appoint someone on your committee to be in charge of grant applications.
- Keep a calendar of closing dates for all possible sources.
- Request guidelines and application forms in advance of the closing date.
- Prepare your application and quotes well in advance.
- Seek help from the funding organisation if you have questions.
- Submit your grant on time. Late applications are often not considered.
- Consider when the money will need to be spent and submit requests with plenty of time in advance of this date. There is often 2-6 months before receipt of the funds.
- On receipt of the funds, it is important to retain receipts for all expenditure.
- A wise grant recipient sends a thank-you note to the granting organisation and makes a public acknowledgement.

Should you fail in a grant application, contact the organisation and ask what you could improve the next time to increase your chances of success.

5.3.1 Reduced price information technology

DonorTec provides donated and discounted technology products and services from companies such as Microsoft, Symantec, Sophos and Cisco to eligible income tax exempt (ITE) Australian non-profit groups. Via this program, non-profits can access the latest technology via donations or generous discounts.

Visit <http://www.donortec.org/>



5.4 Bank accounts

Bank accounts should require the signature of two committee members. It is preferable to register more than two signatories, as the absence of once e.g. during a holiday, could make the account inoperable.

5.5 Money collection

All monies received must be receipted with a copy to the member. Monies must be stored safely and an easy method of contact for the member responsible for banking developed. If it is possible to have at least one committee member present at each session, that member could be appointed to receipt and deliver such monies to the treasurer.

Keep any money retained on site to an absolute minimum.

6. CHOOSING TOYS

6.1 Starting a collection

A toy library needs to choose toys wisely so that members will obtain enjoyable, safe, and stimulating play value. While toys selected will depend significantly on the needs of members, a number of other criteria may help in choosing toys wisely:

- Good quality toys may be more expensive but will last longer. Choose brands with a good reputation.
- Choose larger toys that families would not necessarily buy due to cost and storage problems.
- Choose safe strong toys that are easy to clean and keep in good repair.
- Avoid soft toys or toys with fabrics. They are harder to keep clean and looking good. If donated, pass on to another worthwhile institution e.g. a women's refuge or op shop
- Select toys that will develop a wide range of skills such as hand-eye co-ordination, gross and fine motor skills, hearing, language and imagination.
- Look for versatile toys that can be used in different ways or by a wide age group.
- Select brands that can provide replacement parts that may extend the life of a toy.
- Survey members to see what they want.
- Find out what other toy libraries find popular.
- Try to avoid 'fad' toys that may be unpopular in six months time i.e. film or television merchandise. They tend to cost more and are – unfortunately – often poorly constructed.

When toy buying remember to consider,

- DURABILITY – tough is best!
- CHILD APPEAL – several items can always be grouped together to make an interesting toy.
- SAFETY – avoid long pull cords (no more than 30cm), sharp edges, brittle plastics, small pieces for children under 3 years and any toxic materials.



- ENCOURAGE POSITIVE BELIEFS - toys should preferably be non-violent, non-sexist, secular, and embrace a multicultural demographic.

To get your toy library off the ground you may ask all founding members to donate a toy or puzzle. Local businesses may be willing to give a toy or other item in exchange for free publicity.

6.2 Toy categories

Select toys across a wide range of categories to ensure that the changing needs of all borrowers are met. To assist in this, divide toys into groups, according to their main play purpose and developmental goals.

For examples of useful categories chosen by other toy libraries, see Section 9.1.

6.3 Durability

A cheap toy, which breaks on its first or second use, is unsuitable for a toy library. Strongly constructed toys may cost more initially but will prove to be better investments in the end. Toys should be washable, sturdy and well made. Some toy manufacturers are able to provide replacement parts.

6.4 Appeal

Children must enjoy playing with the toys, so consider this when buying. A toy that is “educational” and has the greatest value in a child’s development is useless if it is never borrowed.

6.5 Safety

Special attention needs to be given to safety features. Toy buyers should be aware of, and avoid, where possible:

- brittle plastic, which, if broken, exposes sharp corners
- small pieces which may be swallowed, or inserted in ears, nose, eyes
- toxic paint or materials
- sharp corners or edges
- long cords on pull toys which may tangle around a child’s neck
- easily detached pieces which may pose safety hazards (wheels may be pulled off to expose to expose sharp axles, eyes on soft toys may come off and be ingested, nails in wooden toys may work loose)

Check your toy collection regularly for safety hazards.

Government regulations require that balls, and toys containing small parts that could be swallowed, must be labelled as unsuitable for children less than three years. WAATL members can download warning labels suitable for this purpose.

Please consider checking the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission web site to see if any purchase, either past or present, has been recalled. Recalled items will need to be removed from your collection.

<http://www.recalls.gov.au>



6.6 Finding good suppliers

Keep an eye out for toy sales in various shops including stores like K-Mart, Target, Toyworld, Big-W, and Toys R Us.

Choose local suppliers where possible. The advantages of using local suppliers is that you have; direct customer service for warranty where there is a fault and no further freight costs to return purchases; a source for parts supply; and in some cases, free assembly of larger items.

You may also be able to purchase direct from educational suppliers, wholesale outlets and manufacturers. Most educational toy stores will give toy libraries a discount on purchases and many publish their own catalogues in hard copy and on the internet. It pays to view the toys, as pictures can be deceiving as to size and quality.

6.7 Buying used toys

Used toys offer an excellent opportunity for toy libraries to purchase quality items at low cost. Toys may be purchased from members and friends, school fetes, markets and fairs and through “for sale” advertisements. It may even be worth running a “wanted to buy” advertisement on some occasions. Ask for and retain receipts for proof of purchase.

Important Note: Please read your toy library insurance carefully before purchasing any second hand or used toys to ensure that you are fully covered. Some toy library insurance does not cover the use of second hand and used toys.

6.8 Loaning of Videos, DVDs and Computer CD-ROMs

Before you decide to purchase videos, DVDs or CD-ROMs, please refer to www.copyright.com.au website for information. There is a fact sheet (G54) ‘Lending Items Protected by Copyright’ available and information for libraries and non-profit organisations on the website.

Keep in mind that these type of items are available to borrow free of charge from public libraries so you may wish to concentrate solely on toys. It is also worth remembering that these items generally do not wear well, especially in hands of small children. DVDs and CD-ROMs scratch easily and video tape degrades over time with use.

Be aware that according to [Classification \(Publication, Films and Computer Games\) Act 1995](#) it is a requirement that a person who sells or publicly exhibits a classified film, or sells, hires or publicly demonstrates a computer game, **must keep a notice in the approved form** about classification for films and computer games **on public display in a prominent place**. In order to be prominently displayed, it is recommended that the approved notice be displayed at the point of sale, such as on the counter or at the cashier.

To download approved notices please go to:

<http://www.classification.gov.au/www/cob/classification.nsf/Page/ClassificationinAustralia>
[Legislation ApprovedNotices ApprovedNotices](#)



7. STORAGE AND MAINTENANCE

7.1 Shelves, racks, floor

Much of this will depend on the venue. If the toy library has sole use of a lockable room, the most versatile storage will be adjustable shelving. This can have the advantage of being easily removed should change of venue occur. Ideally, for occupational health and safety reasons, all shelving should be securely anchored to a fixed wall.

How toys are displayed depends on whether they are permanently on display or stored in locked up cupboards.

Each toy library will need a storage system that will evolve from its particular needs. Some will store or display toys in numerical sequence, others in groupings of use e.g. sight, hearing, manipulation, or category.

Racks for hanging items can also be employed, whilst large items will require floor space or to be hung from the ceiling. Lockable cupboards are necessary if space is shared: maybe use cupboards on wheels so that toys can more easily be moved to a larger borrowing area.

7.2 Bags or Boxes

Keeping the original box with the toy enables the borrower to see from the pictures. To make them stronger you can reinforce with contact etc. Most construction sets and toys now come in strong containers. Attach a picture of the contents and the number of pieces to the side or inside the container.

If funds are insufficient to provide containers, then use bags (plastic, laundry etc.). Plastic bags with hangers are useful for racks. If using bags of any sort, ventilation holes must be punched at regular intervals – one hole to every 10 square centimetres – to avoid possible suffocation. The bags should also have appropriate warning labels.

7.2 Puzzles and games

Puzzles can be displayed flat on shelves, overlapping each other to conserve space, or stacked. Shelves can be fairly close together. Puzzles may also be hung from racks in bags. The disadvantage with this is that borrowers are unable to see the completed puzzle unless the bag is very close fitting. To overcome this, affix a picture of the completed puzzle to the bag.

Boxed puzzles and games can be stacked on shelves as the name of the puzzle or game is usually on the side of the box. If not, label it with a permanent marker so that the contents are obvious. This should lessen the problem of boxes being pulled from the shelves just to find out what is in them.

7.3 Ride-ons etc.

Larger items sometimes present problem for most toy libraries. Occupational health and Safety (OHS) rules apply here, so large items are to stay on the floor to prevent borrowers (adults and children) and volunteers from sustaining injury trying to access or retrieve the larger items.



7.4 Cleaning

Toys presented in an attractive and clean manner give much satisfaction to the borrower. With limited time, space and volunteers it is difficult to thoroughly clean toys each time they are returned, especially when you want to place the toys back into circulation for the next borrowers. Of course, dirty toys would not be available to borrow until they have been properly cleaned.

All members should be requested not to return toys unless they have been cleaned. Keeping some wipes or washcloths handy can ease the cleaning situation, where the member can wipe down the toys at the place of returns. Regular reminders, and the provision of cleaning tips, in the Toy Library newsletter can reinforce this. On joining, new members should be educated on the expectation of returning toys in a timely and clean state.

7.5 Repairs

Toys under warranty should not be tampered with as this can affect the warranty. Toys that cannot be returned to the place of purchase or to the manufacturer may be fixed by a tradesman or a repairer. Please use common sense when repairing toys, especially older, outdated toys. Sometimes it's worth replacing as opposed to repairing.

With any repairs, safety is paramount and all items need to be reassessed after repair to make sure that they meet safety requirements. The fact that the item has been repaired, (and the nature of the repair) needs to be noted on the label of the item, as well as being recorded in either the accession register or the categories list.

7.7 Annual clean out

As the toy library stock grows, older or unpopular items can be removed from stock. Some may be suitable for fundraising purposes (at a used toy sale or market stall). Note that toys which have been purchased through a grant may not be able to be sold this way but instead donated to a charity, doctors surgery etc. Check with your WAATL representative or call WAATL direct.

Recruit volunteers to help wash toys and containers, effect minor repairs and mark toys as necessary. This may be done at the library or by individual members taking items home e.g. the laundering and minor repairs of bags.

8. SETTING POLICIES

8.1 Rules for joining members

Rules will vary according to circumstances, but will probably include the following:

8.1.1 Age eligibility

You will need to decide what is appropriate in your situation.



- **Birth to pre-school:** This is the time when highest usage usually occurs. Once children begin school their free play opportunities are less, and many parents do not feel the need to belong to a toy library.
- **Birth to 6, 8, 10, 12 years:** Some toy libraries use these cut-off points, and there are many families who will continue to borrow through these years, especially if there are also younger children in the family. This can also overcome problems which may occur when older siblings are denied the opportunity to borrow.
- **All age membership:** This allows the whole family to grow and play together, and also provides a service to older people, those recuperating from an illness or operation or those with a particular interest such as jigsaw puzzle enthusiasts (who will often donate some of their own puzzles) or temporary needs (looms, embroidery frames). Good second-hand games, puzzles and other equipment for the older age group can often be purchased quite cheaply, so that funding for the younger age group is not too thinly spread.

8.1.2 Group membership

It will be necessary to decide whether groups such as pre-schools, schools, playgroups, family day carers and childcare centres are eligible for membership. As groups will probably require a greater number of toys when borrowing, a higher membership fee will be appropriate.

8.1.3 Number of items to be borrowed

This will depend on the number of toys available. You may decide on a set number of toys per family (if a flat family fee applies) or a set number of toys per child (especially if you charge extra for each additional child).

Limiting each family to one of your expensive toys plus a set number of smaller toys, puzzles, etc. may be necessary. This ensures that each family will have access to the more expensive toys, and will also limit your losses should the toys not be returned.

8.1.4 Fees and fines

Most toy libraries depend on membership fees to provide a large portion of their operating budget.

In order to provide a service that is available to as many families as possible, fees should be kept at a reasonable level. Some families may need to pay in instalments. Concessions should be available to those receiving government pensions and it may be possible to obtain sponsorship for those in need.

Some libraries charge an additional fee as each item is borrowed. In this case, the initial membership fee may be considerably lower, or it may be considered as a deposit to be refunded on leaving the library after the deduction of any outstanding monies. The disadvantage of a fee per item borrowed system is the extra money handling involved.



Fines may be charged for overdue toys. This will help to ensure a regular rotation of toys.

8.1.5 Members' obligations

Even if there is a paid coordinator, volunteers are essential to staff the borrowing sessions. In some libraries, all members are obliged to take a turn on the roster. Alternatives should be considered for those members who are unable to do roster duty. For example, they may be able to help in other ways such as toy cleaning, sewing bags, repairs, etc.

Members may also be required to assist in any fundraising efforts, working bees, etc. Again, alternatives should be considered for those unable to participate in these types of activities. Maybe an extra levy could be charged in lieu of participation.

8.1.6 Lost or damaged toys

Members should undertake to return toys in a good, clean condition.

Toys which are damaged will fall into two categories:

- Result of prolonged usage and reasonable wear and tear (no fine applicable)
- Damage by trauma e.g. excessively rough play or inappropriate use; damage from sources other than the expected user, including pets; force used by older age group or parent; heat damage, etc.

It is appropriate to impose fines for repair or replacement of damaged or lost toys, however, donations of similar or other acceptable items should be considered.

8.2 Hours of operation

These will vary with the clientele. For example, if school-age children are involved, it will be necessary to include after-school or Saturday sessions. If the service is to be used by families with working parents or groups such as pre-schools, then the opening hours should not exclude these families, teachers or staff from attending.

The commitments of volunteers must be considered when setting your toy library's opening times, e.g. drop-off and collection of children from pre-school or school, meal preparation times, etc.

As many volunteers will need to bring small children with them, the length of the sessions must not be too daunting. For many children, one hour is as much as can be expected. Longer sessions may require a split roster, reciprocal child minding arrangements, or the use of volunteers who are willing to undertake roster duty while their children are at school or kindergarten.

8.3 Closing dates

Decisions will need to be made as to whether the toy library will operate during school holiday times or public holidays. Some members will not wish to limit their holiday options by being rostered for duty. Others will be away.

If the library decides to operate during the term holidays, it is still worth considering closing over the Christmas and new Year holidays. This time can be used profitably for stocktaking and maintenance tasks. Many families will not borrow over this time because they will be



away, the children have new toys from Christmas, and much time is spent out of doors in settings not requiring toy library toys.

It is possible to allow extended loans for families who would like items over the holiday period, especially if the return of all toys would present storage problems. Borrowing time can be extended to cover the shorter school holidays.

9. DAY TO DAY OPERATIONS

9.1 Cataloguing system

In order to keep track of who has borrowed which toys you will need to keep a record of all your toys and all your members. You will also need a borrowers' catalogue to inform users about your toy stock. Remember to allow sufficient time for this important task. Involving staff and volunteers will help to familiarise everyone with the procedures and the toy stock.

Catalogues are complete lists of toys/equipment/books. The cataloguing system should allow toy librarians and toy library users to locate toys/equipment/books in the library.

Most Toy Libraries in Australia base their cataloguing systems on the British ABC System. This is as follows:

A = Activity	E = Expression
B = Baby/Beginners	F = Fun
C = Co-ordination	G = Games
D = Discrimination	J = Jigsaws

9.1.1 Manual card catalogue

The manual card catalogue is one of the most common in use. Many toy libraries begin with a card system, similar to the familiar card system used by book libraries. It is relatively easy to keep up-to-date as cards can be added or withdrawn. It is important that it be kept in order so that details about toys can be quickly accessed.

9.1.2 Book catalogue

The book catalogue has a range of entries on each page allowing the user to see a group of toys at a glance.

9.1.3 Computerised catalogue

Increasingly, toy libraries are using databases for their catalogues. The preferred method of tracking will vary from toy library to toy library. Some libraries may be happy to use a basic spreadsheet program – such as MS Excel -- while others may prefer a professional database software package.

Within Australia, two database systems have been developed specifically for toy libraries, primarily those with 100 members or more.

The *Mibase* system was developed in Victoria, while the *Bookmark* system was developed in South Australia as a project for the Department of Education.



Mibase is a comprehensive system that allows for the recording of loans, returns, member's details, the amount of money paid per member, duties performed by members, renewal dates and toy cataloguing information.

For more information on either of these systems, contact WAATL.

9.1.4 Photographic catalogue

A permanent photographic catalogue illustrating the complete toy library collection allows members to see the full range of toys offered. Photos of most toys can be clipped from toy manufacturers' catalogues whilst others may be hand drawn or photographed. Group the illustrations in a photo album to match the cataloguing system.

9.2 Toy register

Keep a list or “Toy Register” of all your toys for stocktaking and insurance purposes. An Excel spread sheet is suitable, but a manual list – use a sturdy book or loose leaf folder – will suffice to start.

Regardless of the system used, it may be useful to also list the toys in alphabetical order. It is also recommended that a copy be kept off-site.

9.3 Marking toys

Each toy will need an identifying number and you may decide to mark it on every piece. An instant, non-toxic, drying pen – which is difficult to remove – is best for this job. Some toy libraries use an engraving tool, especially for very small pieces. Puzzles and games should be similarly treated.

9.4 Borrowing procedures

A variety of borrowing systems are used by toy libraries, and one simple, efficient system is as follows:

- A borrowing card, detailing its individual pieces, is prepared for each toy.
- An envelope is prepared for each member.
- When a toy is borrowed, the appropriate toy card is taken from the file and inserted in the member's envelope.
- On the toy card the borrower's name and date due is recorded.

Alternatively;

- a card is prepared for each member and details of toys borrowed and the date due are marked on this card.
- A card is also prepared for each toy and the borrower's name is written on this.

This system has the advantage of allowing the easy location of any toy.

Electronically:

- A system for recording borrowings and returns is built into the database (see section 9.1.3)



9.5 Staffing

For compliance with Occupational Health and Safety, a minimum of two people is needed in the toy library during opening hours. These may be paid or volunteer. Volunteers are most likely to be members, but consider involving others such as senior citizens, grandparents or high school students.

A roster system is used by many toy libraries, and those responsible for checking toys in and out need to be fully acquainted with borrowing procedures. A message book is an effective means of communication between staff at different sessions.

10. KEEPING THE BALL ROLLING

10.1 Maintaining a good supply of quality toys

Good quality toys are expensive. It is well worth taking advantage of yearly stocktaking sales and pre and post Christmas sales. If your local toy shop does not have the toys you would like, it may have access to educational suppliers and can order the toys for you. If you establish a contact locally, you are more likely to receive a sizeable discount.

Because of the nature of well-made toys, it is possible to obtain them second-hand in very good condition. This applies particularly to wooden jigsaw puzzles as they have more limited use than some other toys.

Much of your stock can be used almost indefinitely if you keep a good supply of spare pieces. Frequently, these can be obtained at little cost through donations of incomplete toys or second-hand purchases. They may also be acquired from the manufacturer or through retail spare parts packs, as well as online auction web sites.

10.2 Newsletters

Newsletters are a great way to keep your members informed of fundraising activities, new toys, and general items of interest. They can also remind members of their obligations, detail any problems and make requests for information or fundraising assistance.

Access to a home computer will be invaluable, but a typewriter will be adequate. It is possible that someone in the membership will have access to free or reduced cost photocopying. You can seek assistance from your Local council as well as your State and Federal Member of Parliament as they may provide free printing and photocopying to not-for-profit organisations.

Email is a quick and easy way to distribute your newsletter to members. If you wish to use this method, then ensure you obtain an email address from members when they join. Don't forget that not everyone has email, so provision needs to be made for hard copies to be available for anyone without email access.

10.3 Raising the profile through publicity

Every time you manage to get the name of the toy library before the public, you will be adding to community awareness of your existence. Following are a few ways you can get your toy library better known in the community:

- Other community groups and organisations are usually happy to display a poster, hand out leaflets to their members or include information in newsletters. Members



who use other facilities can assist in distribution. Shop windows and community notice boards are other possibilities.

- Some Council (book) Libraries have a display case and display boards that can be booked by community groups for one to two weeks to increase community awareness of available services.
- Children’s Services in various localities usually have display opportunities at shopping centres (perhaps during Children’s Week or some other time chosen by the local Community Services Department). If you do have such an opportunity, then a few large, easy to mind toys such as a “Twist and Turn” carousel, a tunnel, a cubby house or a couple of bright ride-on toys act as a magnet to children. In conjunction with shared use of display boards and leaflets to distribute this is a worthwhile publicity exercise.
- Be prepared to join in any community activity days where a display is possible. You will be surprised at how many people there are who have never heard of a toy library. Fundraising is made easy at such a display if you can have a toy hamper prepared.
- Groups needing a guest speaker or something to brighten up their Annual General Meeting may be interested in a toy display with (or without) a short talk. Ask your local pre-schools. Regional preschool teachers’ meetings may be another possibility.
- Newspapers:
 - The weekly newspaper in your area will advertise special happenings in the “What’s On?” (or similar) column.
 - If you have received any financial grants (e.g. from your Local Government body), submit a small news article to the newspaper.
 - When your fundraising efforts involve a prizewinner, ask if the newspaper will take a photo of the presentation.
 - Ask if the newspaper will print an article about the toy library, and maybe even take a photo to accompany the article.
- Radio:
 - Some radio stations will make community service announcements. If you have a special event organised, ask if they can include it.
 - It may be possible to have a toy library representative interviewed on community radio.

10.4 Involving new members

It can be helpful if new members are rostered on duty shortly after joining. The experience will not only give a feeling of being involved, but create an awareness of obligations such as the importance of returning toys cleaned and intact. If they enjoy the experience they are likely to volunteer for duty on a regular basis.

10.5 Communicating with other Toy Libraries

With so many toy libraries in existence across the state, the nation and the world, there is a wealth of knowledge and experience to draw from. If you are encountering a problem, it is more than likely that someone, somewhere, will have encountered it also – and maybe



come up with a great solution. Conversely, if you have a great idea for any aspect of starting, operating or promoting a toy library, then there are sure to be many others interested in sharing this knowledge.

10.5.1 Online forums:

Yahoo® Groups has a group for anyone involved with running a toy library. It provides an easy way to connect with members of toy library committees, and field solutions to whatever situations you are dealing with.

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/toylibrary/>

There is also a group for toy libraries using or considering the *Mibase* program as their borrowing system.

<http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/mibase/>

10.5.2 WAATL:

One of WAATL's primary aims is to foster communication and cooperation between Toy Libraries across Western Australia. Refer to section 10.6 for details of WAATL and its activities.

10.6 Western Australian Association of Toy Libraries

Founded in 1981, WAATL aims to:

- Promote an awareness of the importance of toys and games for both fun and for learning.
- Gain recognition for Toy Libraries as an important resource to families and communities.
- Offer information and support on all aspects of starting or operating a Toy Library in Western Australia.
- Foster increased cooperation and communication between Toy Libraries in Western Australia.

Membership to WAATL is open to anyone interested in toy libraries, and offers:

- Access to a wealth of information and resources that can assist you in the successful start-up and continued operation of a Toy Library.
- The opportunity to share your knowledge with other Toy Libraries across the State. Similarly, you will have access to the combined knowledge and experience of other WAATL members.
- A chance to have your say in the future direction of Toy Libraries in Western Australia, with full members having voting rights at WAATL general meetings.
- A voice for your organisation and other WAATL members at a State and National level.
- The opportunity to keep up-to-date with news and developments via the monthly WAATL newsletter.

To contact WAATL:

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