

Community Series - Book Club Podcast

Interviewer [00:00:00] Welcome to the Inner West Library Community series, we would like to start by acknowledging the Gadigal and Wangal people of the Eora Nation on which this podcast is produced

Today we'll be talking about book clubs Inner West library, hosts a number of book clubs across eight branch locations which focus on a variety of content and community language. Our Book clubs usually meet once a month to discuss a nominated book. Currently with the COVID situation, most of the book clubs are not running. Some clubs have embraced the digital platforms. Today we'll be speaking with Gerry O'Brien from Beyond Fiction Book Club.

Welcome, Gerry.

Gerry O'Brien [00:00:31] Hi. Nice to speak with you, Sophie.

Interviewer [00:00:32] Nice to speak with you too. So, Gerry, book clubs have always been popular and have taken on an extra significance since the COVID lock down. "Quarantine book clubs", as they've become known, have appeared everywhere. The Internet and social media have provided multiple platforms to enable readers to join online. What are your thoughts on the role of book clubs in the post COVID environment?

Gerry O'Brien [00:00:52] Ok, in the post COVID environment, which I hope we'll get to in the reasonably near future, I think book clubs will function as they've done in the past. But I think the new significance they found of keeping people in touch with each other when social distancing and people not going out so much has meant that many book clubs have not met on the face to face basis. Yes, I think the importance will increase. I think people will have made new friends over the book club circuit and those friendships will continue and the book clubs will have possibly found other ways that they will work as well.

Interviewer [00:01:31] How have the members of the Beyond Fiction Book Club managed to stay connected?

Gerry O'Brien [00:01:35] First thing to say is we've not actually missed the meeting because we are quite a small number. It made it easier in a way because we started using Zoom from the very start. We've had Zoom meetings and we've had the same books which we would have had under normal circumstances. Once or twice, we actually have met where we can find an area which has got good social distancing and because we are quite a small number, that's enabled us to meet there. But in the main, it's been via Zoom

Interviewer [00:02:06] Inner West Libraries host, a number of community book groups that have different reading lists, community languages and areas of interest the Beyond Fiction book group has a specific focus. Can you tell us a little bit about this and how you select your reading titles?

Gerry O'Brien [00:02:18] Our book club is about, I think, four years old, and I've been a member since it started, and I seem somehow to have ended up running it without being totally aware of how that happened. So, when it started, we were very much a science based book club, but we decided to evolve it beyond science but keep it strictly non-fiction books are chosen essentially by asking members to nominate books. And if we all agree that's a suitable book that we'd like to read, then we go for it. There can be an overlap with what we do with what the Open Book Group does also, at Balmain Library. I mean, a typical book would have been one by Henry Marsh, who's a surgeon who wrote a book called Do No Harm, and that's featured in both book clubs because it is non-fiction. So that really has evolved. We've got a list going up until February. We take December off and have a picnic, but we've got a book list going up until February. But I would like to see is a list that we can extend up until November of next year so that when the post-COVID world emerges, we cannot quite relaunch, but we can have a good reading list prepared. We are working with Balmain Library, publicise what we are doing and try and get more members in.

Interviewer [00:03:44] Do you ever read anything that's not non-fiction?

Gerry O'Brien [00:03:47] No, that's not quite true. We do. I mean, well, the book I've just mentioned, Henry Marsh, is not non-fiction because it's his story of how he worked. But it is more about what he does rather than about him. So that I think that

would be the difference. We wouldn't read it as a straight biography. Obviously, that is biographical in some ways, but it is much more what he achieved

Interviewer [00:04:15] When this whole situation is finished do you think you'll maintain a digital presence when the restrictions are lifted and when we can safely return to meeting in person?

Gerry O'Brien [00:04:22] I think most of us would like to go back to meeting in person. That adds an extra layer to the meeting. And I have to say that usually because we meet at eleven o'clock in the morning, we then go out and have lunch somewhere. So that that's a sort of social aspect added to the pure book club focus. I think we'll go back basically to meeting in person because we've done it. We know how to do it and we know it works.

Interviewer [00:04:45] I understand you want to meet in person, which is fantastic. But if somebody cannot make your meeting, do you think you will allow them to Zoom in? So, say three of you are at location and one person can't make it you can Zoom that person in.

Gerry O'Brien [00:04:58] Well, I can say sometimes we've had occasions where somebody can't make it, but it's because they're actually going to be away doing something different, so they're not in a position to, to Zoom in. We haven't really thought through how we could have a Zoom presence for one member as all the others in the room. I'm sure it can be done. We haven't given that much thought, I must admit. Thank you for sending us in that direction.

Interviewer [00:05:20] Now, how can people get involved in the book club?

Gerry O'Brien [00:05:23] Well, what happens at the moment is it tends to be word of mouth. We meet somebody who says, you know, they're interested in what we're doing, and we get them to come along. But that's really where all our initial readers came from, other than people who are also members of the Balmain Library Open Book Club, because it was also publicised there. so, we got some crossover from there. I'm, I'm a member of both. I have to read two books a month, which I can find difficult to fit in sometimes, I have to say I think what we would like to do is to have

some sort of publicity drive with the library. But of course, we don't know whether we're going to get a long warning that COVID-19 situation is going to end or someday we'll suddenly say that, OK, it's safe to open meeting rooms in libraries and we can start using it again.

Interviewer [00:06:14] Yeah, I think that's a little bit up in the air. So, we'll see how it all works out. But yes, I'm hoping after this podcast, we'll get lots of members joining all our different clubs across libraries. I really do appreciate you talking with us today, Gerry, and I hope you guys have a great day.

Gerry O'Brien [00:06:29] It's been a pleasure. Thank you.

Interviewer [00:06:30] Thanks, Jerry.

If you would like to learn more about our book clubs, including the Beyond Fiction Book Club, contact the Library. We also have an extensive book club collection of books sets available for loan to anyone interested in creating their own book group. Each set can be borrowed for extended period of six weeks to give you time to read the item and discuss it at the meeting.

Contact the library for details. We also have an extensive e-book collection available to all members via our online catalogue. If you need help choosing your next read, visit the library website as we have several resources that could help you choose.

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