

TAMARA & BRIDGET

BRIDGET SARRIS

Acting Principal - Evans High School

One of my most pleasurable activities as I walk around our school is to drop into our library, and marvel at the transformation that the space has undertaken in the last couple of years under the expert vision of our teacher librarian. It has grown from an uninspiring, featureless room full of dusty books, to a vibrant learning centre where staff and students feel supported in an environment conducive to teaching and learning, discovery and creativity. The library is now bright, quirky and inviting, with differently themed “rooms” allowing students to find their own space.

Our teacher librarian is an amazing asset to the school. She is our main information specialist with a cross-curricular knowledge and skilled ability to guide teachers and students in their navigation of new technologies. She has also become an expert in the world of young adult literature and has stocked our library appropriately for our students, whether they are voracious or reluctant readers, or newly-arrived students needing specialised texts.

While our library is an amazing centre of teaching and learning in the school, it is also a space where students can forge their social skills and develop their leadership skills. As “Library Warriors”, student volunteers have assisted in the planning, renovation and promotion of the library, as well as the choice of resources and displays. At lunchtimes, the library is full to capacity, with students not only undertaking research but socialising in extra-curricular activities. It is a place where students feel safe and supported, and where students of all ages enjoy each other's company. ■



OASIS IN THE LIBRARY – A WORK IN PROGRESS!

TAMARA RODGERS

Teacher Librarian

I've been a part of the Evans High School community for over ten years now, firstly as an English Teacher, and for the past two and a half years as Teacher Librarian. I have always enjoyed teaching here, but the opportunity to be involved in the revitalisation of our library space has been my most challenging and rewarding professional experience to date. To take a fairly standard split level multi-storey home to books, built in the early 1970's, and to transform it into a space that will meet the multi-faceted needs of our diverse school community? It's been a massive task, and one that we are still working on!

I have always liked the metaphor of the library as an oasis, a haven in an often unforgiving environment, and my primary goal when making decisions about what to do next has been to ensure that this space is one that will feed the souls of our main stakeholders – our students. The library is a place where they come to find information and ideas that will stimulate their mind. It's a place where they come to build connections. It's a place where they come to find solace. It is, above all, a place where they can find what they need, whatever that may be.

With that in mind, we have consulted heavily with our student body, to discover what their ideal library looks, feels, and smells like. What kinds of books do they want on the shelves? What kind of furnishings do they want to be able to use, for whatever purposes they may decide to come in? What colours do they want on the walls? What kinds of activities and programs do they want to be able to take part in? Our library caters for a mainstream high school, as well as an Intensive English Centre and an Autism unit, so the range of needs and ideas is pretty massive, and has required some innovative, and at times flat out crazy, solutions!



We've created quiet reading spaces, established around our fiction and graphic novels collections. We've invested in flexible furniture which can be easily reconfigured, or removed completely, allowing for a wide range of uses for the existing spaces. We've sourced old chairs with character, and new bean bags with pizzazz. And, above all, we've found a way to accommodate almost every suggestion made by a student (we are trying to figure out how to make the slide into the ball pit work, but it's still on the vision board!)

It has been so gratifying to see such a transformation in the library in such a relatively short period of time. It is also enormously rewarding to work on this ongoing project, with the undying support of our school staff, in particular the executive, and our wonderful principal Bridget Sarris. Her bias towards “yes” when we approach her with yet another “amazing idea” is so encouraging, and it demonstrates the power of a passionate teacher librarian and a supportive principal, working in concert to honour the important role that libraries can, and indeed should, have as the central focus of a school.

I know that I'm not the only teacher librarian who gets asked “aren't libraries defunct now? I mean, you have the internet right?” I am so grateful to be working in a school that recognises just how critical libraries are. We are about more than just giving kids information that anyone can google! The Library@Evans is an oasis in which our students can find comfort, take risks, build connections, and explore their world, in a comfortable, engaging, and welcoming space. I'm so lucky to be able to spend my days here! ■

