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Title of project/innovation/initiative	Lively Knitting & Crochet Book Clubs
Date initiated	April 2013
Date completed	Ongoing

The issue/challenge

The Lively Knitting & Crochet Book Clubs aim to raise the profile of both the Homeless Connect initiative and Council's libraries as a meeting place and learning hub for the community.

Project details

The culmination of weeks of intensive knitting and crochet at Rockhampton Regional Libraries from April to June resulted in an impressive collection of warm woollen items created for the Rockhampton Homeless Connect event at the Robert Schwaren Pavilion on 20 June 2013.

Rockhampton Homeless Connect is an initiative of the Rockhampton Regional Council in partnership with community, government and business organisations, and aims to provide support and services to those who are homeless, through a one-stop approach to range of services and agencies in the community. Rockhampton Regional Libraries are just one of the many organisations represented at the annual one day event.

A call to arms saw the creation of Lively Knitting and Crochet Book Club groups set up at the five branch libraries busily learning how to knit or crochet (and sharing their skills with others), and stitching squares into blankets; and creating scarves, jumpers, socks and jackets from wool donated to the libraries by members of the community in a bid to support the annual initiative. The library-led programme has been an overwhelming success with effective community engagement including collaborative and intergenerational learning; social inclusion; and a prodigious amount of warm products created in a relaxed and welcoming environment.

Rockhampton Regional Councillor and Communities Chair Cr Rose Swadling visited knitting groups at the Emu Park Library, Rockhampton Regional Library and Mount Morgan Library in the lead up to the Homeless Connect event to formally receive items made by the groups and to acknowledge the exceptional efforts of the members. Children at a nearby childcare centre donated balls of yarn to the knitting groups which was received by Cr Swadling at the North Rockhampton Library. A morning tea was held at each library which provided an

opportunity for the members to learn more about the aims and objectives of the Homeless Connect initiative ensuring an effective lead in to the event with media opportunities and coverage.

A group of knitters from the Emu Park and Rockhampton groups were delighted to be invited to visit the Homeless Connect event on June 20 to create an active 'learning space' in a knitting circle, and to quietly witness the immense joy which their products gave to participants.

The knitting groups established at the Mount Morgan Library, Emu Park Library, Rockhampton Regional Library and Yeppoon Library have elected to meet on a regular basis at each of the libraries after the 2013 Homeless Connect and have continued to create beautifully crafted woollen products in preparation for 2014 Rockhampton Homeless Connect.

Wool donations continue to be dropped into the libraries well after the event with a recent donation of four large bags of Samoyed dog fur/wool sent to the Mount Morgan Library for a keen textile artist to spin into balls of wool for the craft efforts of the group. Over 500 balls of wool from the family of a deceased estate were donated to the knitting groups at the libraries, representing a significant collection of wool used for craft projects over many decades delighting our keen crafters at the libraries.

A core group of knitters at the Rockhampton Regional Library have been sharing their skills with high school students during the school holidays, as well as a group of ladies from a local disability service. Teenage students from a special school and their carers will be attending the library to take part in learning a new skill with the knitting group during the forthcoming September school holidays. The passionate knitters embrace anyone keen to learn and patiently share their skills honed over a lifetime of stitching.

The challenge for the groups now is to ensure that the donation of wool continues at a steady pace over the spring and summer to meet demand from the knitters. The social interaction of the groups combined with a collaborative approach to learning has been an integral component of the initiative, with the knitters caring deeply about the issues surrounding homelessness in their own community, with a strong desire and commitment to providing support. The inaugural knitters still working in the libraries' groups have unrelenting ownership of the knitting circles and their place in the heart of the library community.

The activity has been a successful community engagement initiative embedding the local public library as the ideal space to learn, work and create.

Figure 1: Lively Knitting Group – Mount Morgan Library



Figure 2: Discussing knitting techniques - Emu Park Library