



Painting the BIG picture: RA and membership

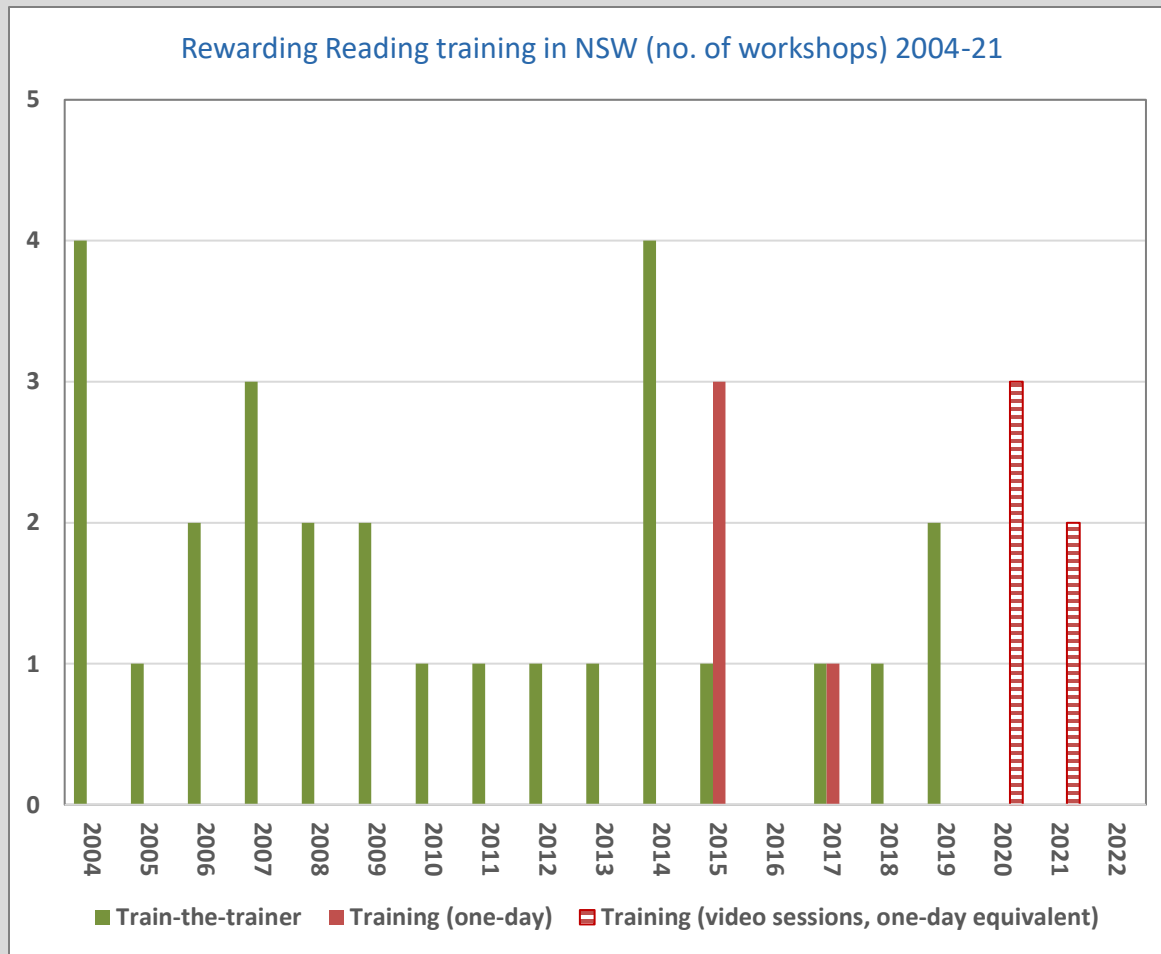
Ian McCallum & Sherrey Quinn

Libraries Alive! Pty Ltd

Presented by Ian McCallum

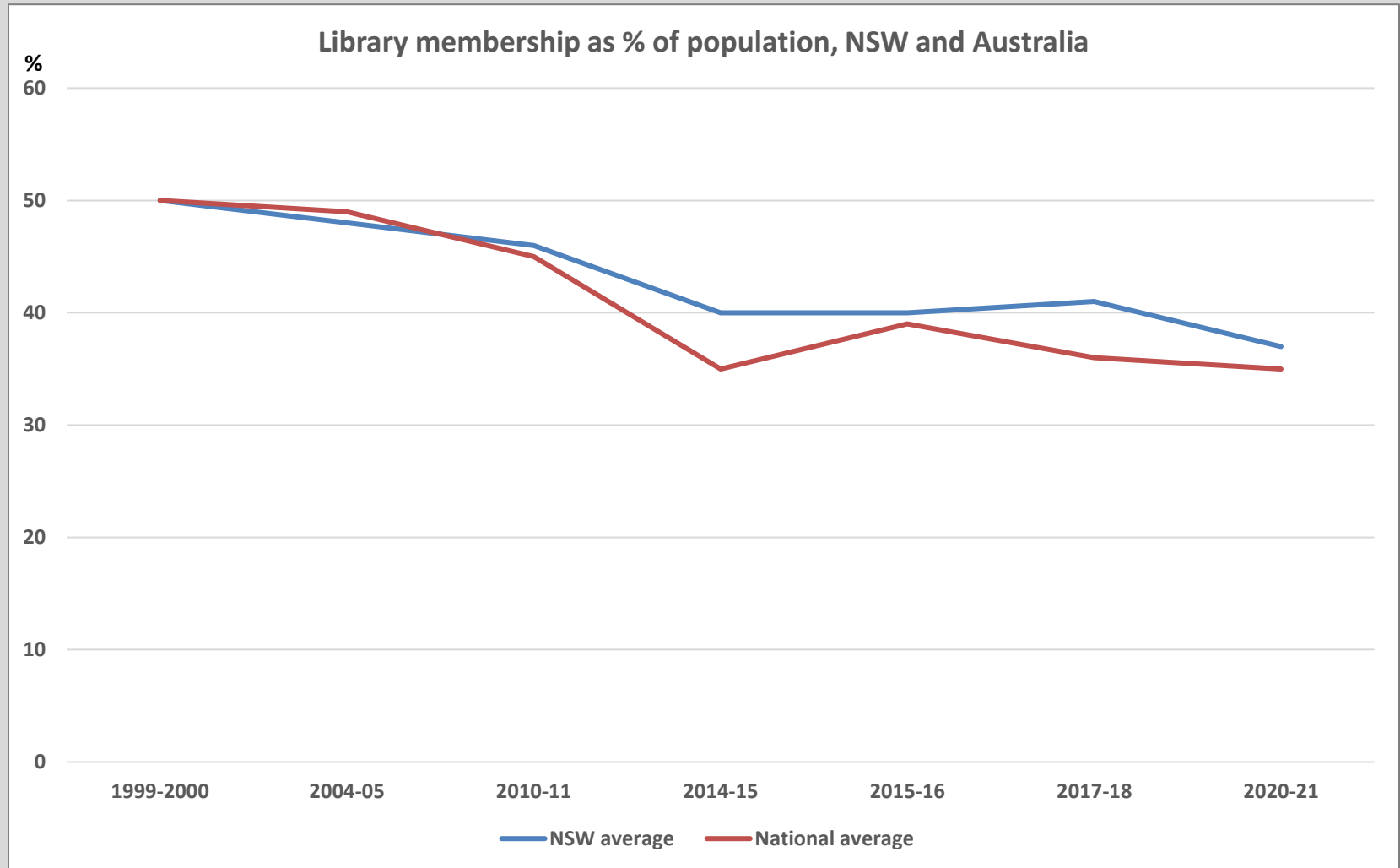
Readers' Advisory Seminar, SLNSW, 21 March 2023

Readers' advisory initiatives: *Rewarding Reading* workshops in NSW, 2004–21



- Training sponsored by SLNSW
- Sustained commitment by SLNSW to RA skills development
- 27 train-the-trainer courses 2004–19; 390 trainers trained; multiplier effect for on-training, perhaps 8 to 10 times (2-3 for small libraries, dozens for large libraries)
- Raised awareness of RA and sparked dozens of RA initiatives in NSW

Library membership as % of population



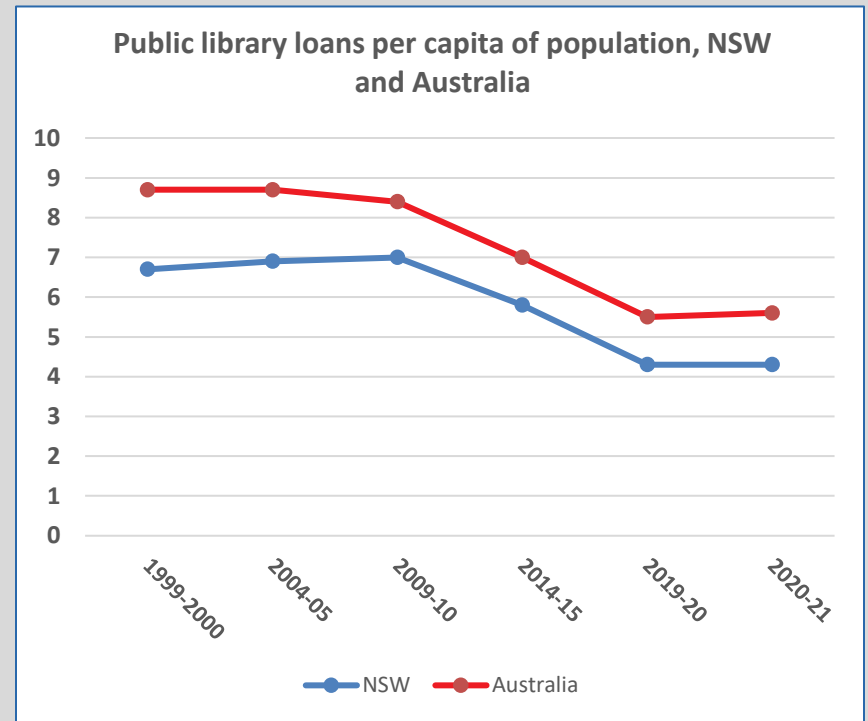
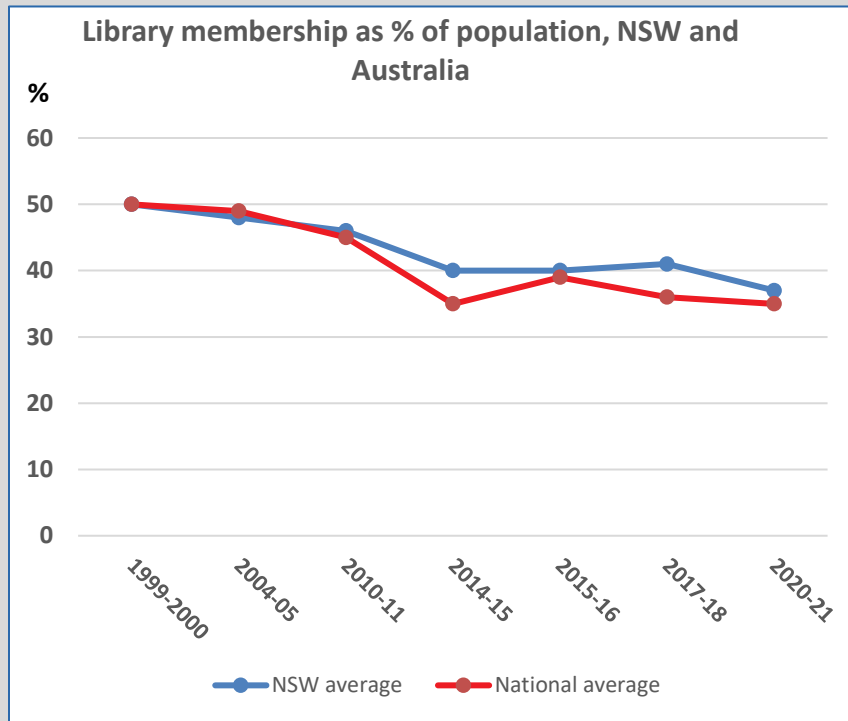
How *do* we measure effectiveness?

- Loans
- Visits
- Customer satisfaction
- Outcomes
- Membership

What did the behavioural insights project find?

- **What would encourage people to visit their library more? Top items:**
 - availability of books and events
 - flexibility of opening times
 - awareness of services
 - increasing access to library spaces.
- **Main reason for visits (80%):**
 - to browse and borrow collection items.
 - Public libraries are also used as spaces for individual activities.
- **>70% of library members visited their library** – either in person or online – **in the last 6 months**. Most members visit their library at least once or twice per month

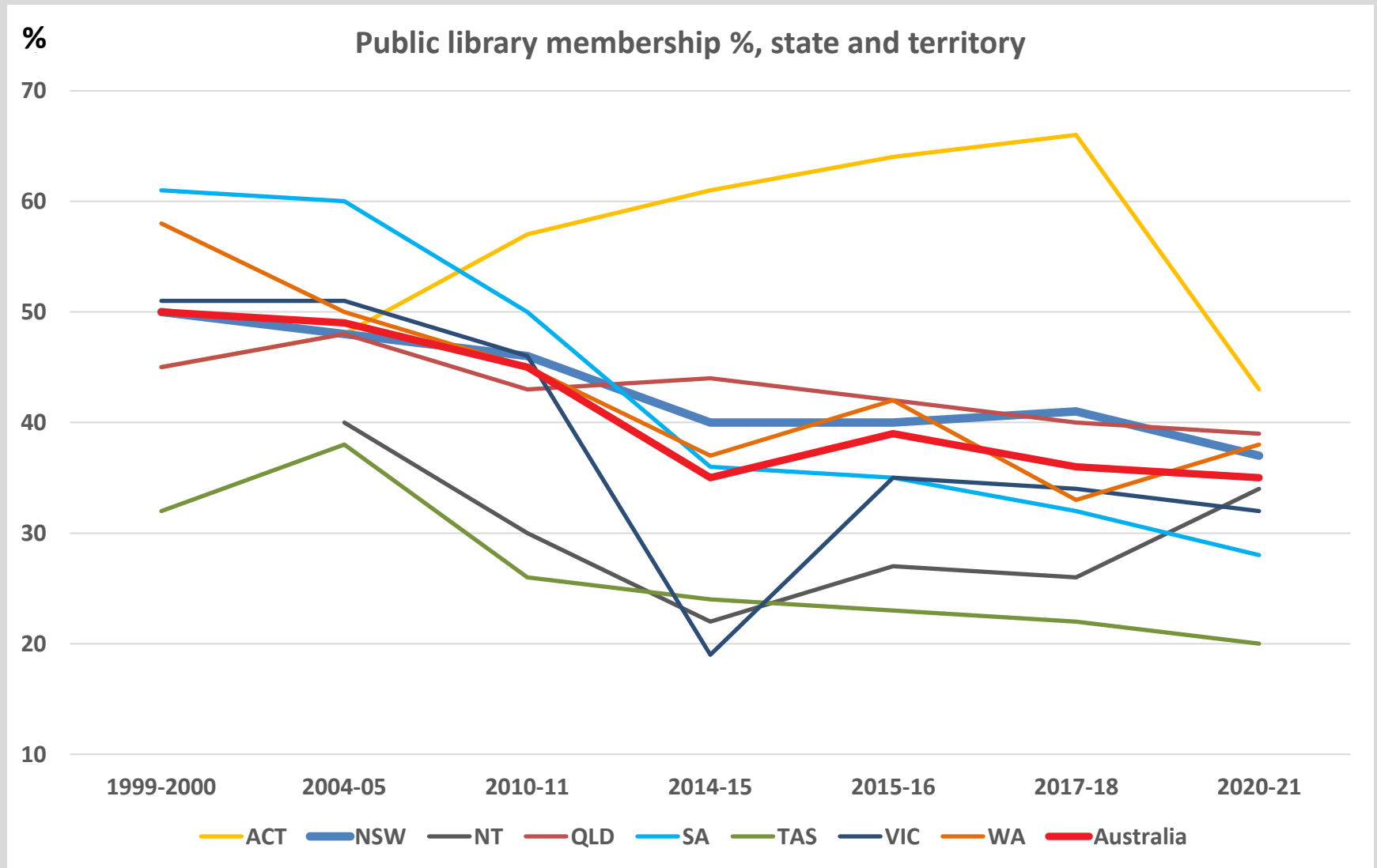
What's happening with membership?



Comments:

- NSW membership down 26% over 20 years
- National membership down 30% over 20 years
- NSW loans per cap down 35% over 30 years

The national picture



What are the conventional responses to declining membership?

- ❖ **Increase expenditure on library materials**
- ❖ **Build or refurbish physical facilities**
- ❖ **Promote collection and services/programs**
- ❖ **Fine tune: extend opening hours, offer more programs, abolish fines, increase the number of items that can be borrowed, train staff**

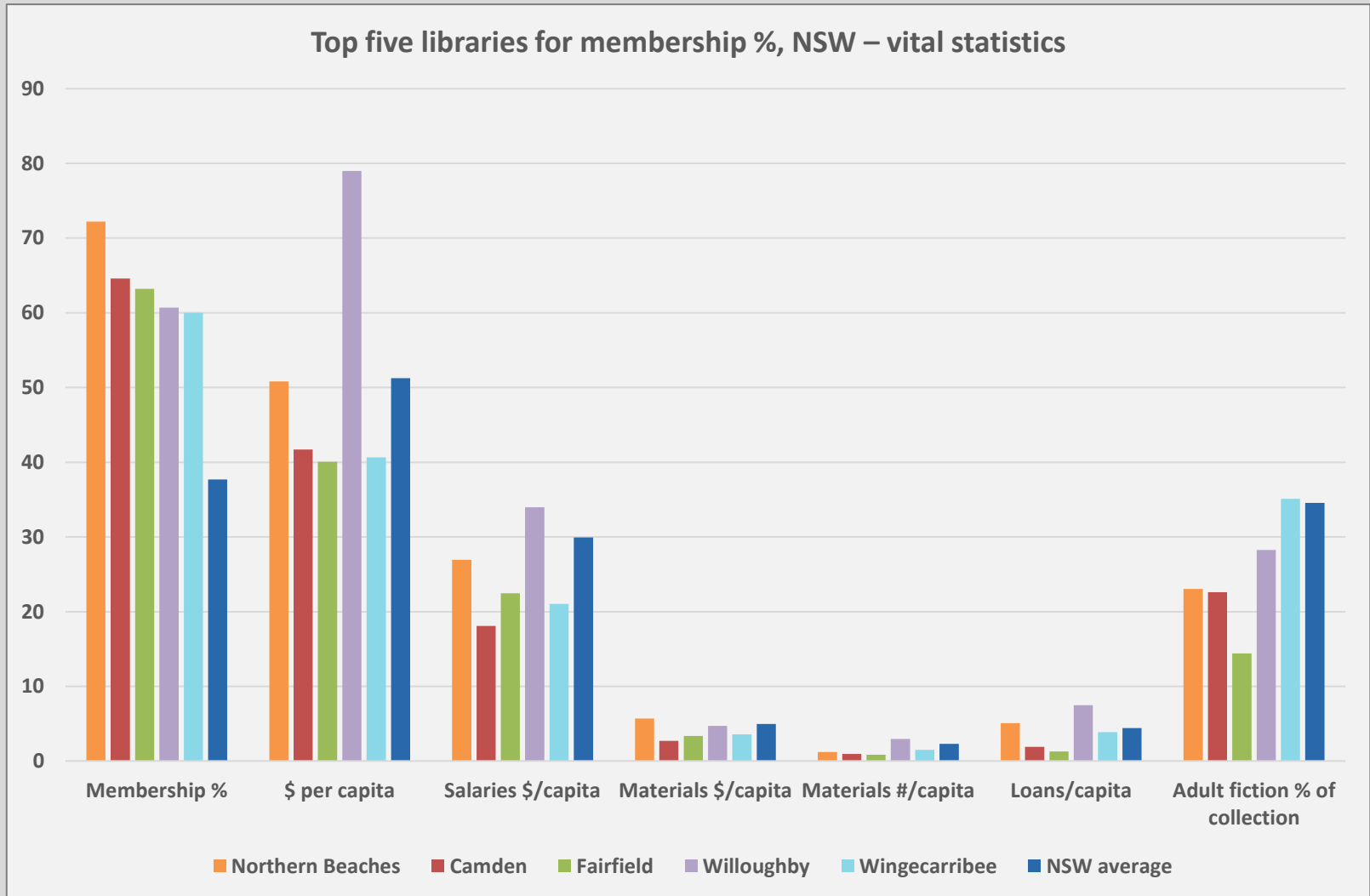
Wait a minute!

Some libraries are doing quite well . . .

Library	Mship %	\$/cap	Sal\$/cap	Mat\$/cap	Mat/cap	Loans/cap	Adult fiction % of colln
Northern Beaches	72.2	50.81	26.94	5.68	1.22	5.08	23.06
Camden	64.6	41.69	18.10	2.71	0.95	1.89	22.61
Fairfield	63.2	40.05	22.46	3.36	0.86	1.30	14.39
Willoughby	60.7	78.97	33.96	4.72	2.96	7.5	28.27
Wingecarribee	60	40.63	21.04	3.60	1.49	3.88	35.09
NSW average	37.7	51.24	29.93	4.95	2.32	4.41	34.57

Wait a minute!

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What are the top 5 doing that makes them stand out?

- **Spending more overall?** Not really (except for Willoughby)
- **Spending more on staff?** Not really
- **Spending more on materials?** Not really
- **More materials per capita?** Not really
- **Higher loans per capita?** Mmm. Varies, but except for Willoughby, not really
- **Higher proportion of adult fiction ('core business')?** Not really

Conversations with library managers

Why are your membership statistics so high?

What are you doing right?

There's no one thing, but community educational background is an important factor

Focus on customers/customer experience and pro-active customer service

Supportive Council/Council officers

(Passionate) Staff understand community characteristics and are involved with the community on multiple fronts

Community values books and reading (LOTE and literacy)

Invest in staff training/team meetings/performance improvement

Convenient locations/transport links

Begin with programs for the new-born

Be relevant for new residents – join them up as they move in

What can we do about it right now?

What is our single most important membership message for retaining existing members and creating new members?

[Suggestions from seminar attendees will be incorporated in the written version of the presentation]

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