INTRODUCTION

Libraries are essential cornerstones of any developed society. They serve as gateways to learning and lifelong development of one’s skills and knowledge. One needs them and can use them at any stage of life, from formal education in schools and higher learning endeavours to lifelong learning beyond school, right up to one’s twilight years. Libraries are neutral places where people from all walks of life can gain access to knowledge and use the knowledge gained to progress oneself through life. Being a public good in most societies, it plays the pivotal role in society of ensuring no one is left behind in the pursuit of knowledge and information for personal advancement. And therefore, libraries are for life.

To illustrate this, we will share with you the Singapore National Library Board’s (NLB) experience. As the physical and social landscapes have changed over time in Singapore, libraries have helped to connect individuals to their communities and built stronger bonds between communities and forged a stronger nation as a whole. Our 24 public libraries serve as social touchpoints that provide programmes for community participation and for self-
enrichment and development. Over time, our libraries have become sanctuaries for all Singaporeans, regardless of age, race, language, occupation, education level and religion.

3 Despite IT advancement and digital media, Singaporeans still embrace our physical network of libraries. Our customer satisfaction surveys show that our customers rate an overall of 4.33 out of 5 for their satisfaction level of our libraries. Each year, our libraries see a total of about 37 million visitors and book loan steadily increased to 33 million in FY10 from just 27 million in FY05. Participation in library programmes is also at an all-time high as library users today seek more experiential learning, coupled with learning and reading from books to engage them.

4 Surveys we have done also show that many Singaporeans are spending more time in libraries with their young families, teenagers study in the library while retirees and senior citizens pass their time reading and attending library programmes, relevant to their needs. With this, Singapore’s public libraries offer a safe and comfortable space for Singaporeans across generations to spend their time meaningfully, either for leisure and recreation or for self-development and learning.

Our Reading Initiatives

5 In the past year alone, we have delivered several reading initiatives to Singaporeans to further engage them in reading and learning. This is part of our overall engagement with our users and supports our strategic intent of Libraries for Life. We will share here some of these reading initiatives that have delivered our key outcomes of engagement, reading and learning.

- **World Book and Copyright Day : Book Exchange 2011 and Spot -The –Reader 2011**
In conjunction with World Book and Copyright Day, NLB organised the Book Exchange 2011, which was a one-day event where book lovers can do their part for the environment while indulging in their love of reading. Held for the third successive year, this event organised by Public Libraries Singapore allowed book lovers to exchange their used books with each other.

More than 7,000 participants took part in this year’s edition with an exchange of about 77,000 books. This has allowed both users and non-users of libraries to give their own books a second lease of life and share them with others and for them to get a new collection of books for their own reading, leisure and learning.

Another signature event organised under the World Book and Copyright Day was the **Spot-The-Reader 2011**. 62 groups of more than 600 volunteers visited 12 shopping malls, markets, hospitals, parks, commercial business districts, town centres, etc on 21 April 2011 from 11am to 3pm to seek out members of the public who are reading and to delight them with a reward of a token. These volunteers were members of various reading clubs, community leaders, student volunteers from schools, and NLB staff. Over a period of 4 hours, the volunteers spotted 6,000 readers (almost a 10% increase over previous year’s figure) and had given out 6,000 goodie bags.

Through this movement, we hope to encourage the reader to continue the habit of reading and emphasized the importance of developing lifelong reading habits

- **Opening of Two Public Libraries in shopping malls – Serangoon and Clementi**
In the months of April and May 2011, NLB has opened two new public libraries located in the shopping malls of Serangoon and Clementi, in supporting our new vision of Libraries for Life.

Serangoon Public Library (SRPL) was the first public library in Singapore to have a dedicated area for gaming, SRPL aims to promote learning and a reading culture by tapping on the educational effects of games. The games featured in this area will demonstrate significant educational content or learning value. Apart from housing interactive game stations, SRPL also offers an extensive collection of game-related titles to enhance the learning and discovery process for novice and seasoned gamers alike. SRPL has also partnered with gaming entities such as the Singapore Cybersports and Online Gaming Association and DigiPen Institute of Technology, to organise programmes and workshops related to gaming.

Located at retail mall nex and the heart of a major transportation node, the library offers a wide selection of quick and easy reads such as comics, graphic novels and magazines which will be prominently displayed to make it easy for users to pick up a book on the go.

To celebrate the opening of SRPL, an exhibition titled “Serangoon: A place like no other” will be on display at the library. This exhibition showcases the heritage of the Serangoon area, as well as winning entries of the recently held “People, Places & Recollections” photo contest, where the community was invited to share photographs on the Serangoon area. SRPL has also partnered the National Heritage Board (NHB) to feature two exhibitions on “Food” and “Spice” targeted at children and young people, to create awareness and educate on the heritage of Singapore’s street food and spice trade.
The library has also teamed up with community and grassroots organisations to organise thematic programmes that engage both the young and old through interactive learning. Library users can look forward to programmes on heritage and green living as well as perennial favourites such as storytelling sessions for children.

Two new services with the opening of the Clementi Public Library (CMPL) were introduced. In line with the “Quick Stop” pick and go concept, the Mystery Brown Bag Service which targets the lunchtime crowd, offers convenient access to pre-selected reading materials packed according to popular themes. Apart from the Mystery Brown Bag Service, children can also enjoy experiential learning via the Interactive Digital Storytelling Kiosks, also a first to be introduced.

The Clementi Public Library is the 24th public library in Singapore. With a floor area of 1,900 square metres, the CMPL has a start-up collection of approximately 150,000 items, including books, magazines and audio-visual materials in the four official languages. The collection includes some 83,000 volumes of fiction and non-fiction books for adults and young people, as well as 67,000 books for children. The library also offers more than 400 local and international magazines, and a selection of local newspapers in the four official languages.

- **Books Come Alive**

Books Come Alive (BCA) is a nationwide reading programme for children aged 7 to 12 years. It aims to promote reading, encourage interaction and peer to peer sharing on reading interests, expand the reading experience and provide learning opportunities for children.

BCA started on 4 June 11 with a variety of mystery-themed children’s programmes to be held till November 11. To promote its launch, a road show was held from 27-29...
May at United Square Shopping Mall. The event saw 412 children participating in book review submissions and mystery-related activities, and 56 new library member signups.

Since its launch, 56 programmes including BCA signature programmes and children’s specials have been conducted (as of 30 June 11), with more than 1,364 participants.

The Code RE(a)D Challenge is another BCA signature programme which entices children to read through clue solving games and reading/drawing activities. The Challenge entails deciphering of 14 clues and piecing together answers to reveal a mystery book title. To get started, children redeem a sleuth’s handbook (with 6 loans) and collect weekly clues at the public libraries. The Challenge ends in September, when the last clue is released. Kids with the correct answers will stand a chance to win a mystery prize. In the first 2 weeks of the Challenge (4-19 June 11), 2,362 handbooks had been redeemed, contributing to 15,277 loans.

In the first month of its launch, more than 1,776 children have participated in the various BCA programmes.

- kidsREAD

This nation-wide reading programme was officially launched on 23 April 2004 by the then Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong. It is a collaborative effort by NLB, People’s Association (PA) and 5 community self-help groups to promote the love of reading and cultivate good reading habits among children aged 4 – 8 years old from low-income families in Singapore.
Through this collaborative reading programme, 120 kidsREAD clubs have been set up throughout Singapore so far, involving more than 5000 volunteers and over 13,500 children have been reached. While the initial plan was to set up reading clubs at community clubs, public libraries and service centres affiliated with the community self-help groups, other agencies have come on board during the implementation phase. These include Primary Schools, Family Service Centres, Student Care Centres, Kindergartens, special needs organizations and children’s homes.

With the future Library 2020 Strategic Plan, upon approval of funding from 2012 to 2016, kidsREAD will retain children on its programme until they complete Primary 2 instead of graduating them after one year on the programme. We will enhance the quality of the programme, the curriculum will be fine-tuned to cater to advancing the development of reading skills for the child as he or she ages. In addition the programme will be expanded to reach out to more children.

**Launch of 10,000 and More Fathers Reading! 5th Anniversary Celebration**

The Launch of “10,000 & More Fathers Reading!” 5th year anniversary celebration, themed “Reading – Your Very First Gift To Your Child”, attracted approximately 2,000 participants on Saturday, 4 June 2011 at The Plaza of National Library Building.

Father figures and their family members from all walks of life spent a Saturday afternoon and immersed in a slew of enriching programmes like storytelling, performances, games, workshops, reading tips, recommendation on children’s books and cool crafts.
Since its inception in June 2007, more than 60,000 participants have benefited from this programme which aims to encourage father figures to read to or with their young charges on a regular basis.

- **READ! Singapore**

  Working with more than 120 partners, book agencies, community and business organizations as well as 100 schools over the past 6 years, the campaign has organised more than 1,600 book discussions and other reading-related activities and attracted over 160,000 participants from all over Singapore. We have reached out to a wide and diverse target audience, such as the National servicemen, taxi drivers, hairstylists, healthcare/hospitality/service Industry workers and civil servants.

  Under READ! Singapore 2011, Book lovers can now read on the go with the launch of MobileRead, a free application developed by the National Library Board (NLB) to encourage people to read for this year's READ! Singapore campaign. Launched by Dr Yaacob Ibrahim, Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts at the opening ceremony of READ! Singapore 2011, MobileRead gives iPhone users free access to short stories which have been selected for READ! Singapore this year as well as those from the past six years of the annual campaign.

  To further encourage people to read while on the move, NLB partnered the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA) to promote MobileRead as part of today's modern lifestyle. Since the soft launch of this application in January 2011, there have been 40,000 downloads including 29,000 e-books.
On 1 July, NLB and IDA hosted the “Enjoying A Digital Reading Lifestyle” carnival which also featured a READ! Singapore book display and other reading-related activities.

With twenty Singaporean authors behind the selected literary works for READ! Singapore 2011, this year's campaign showcased the highest number of Singapore authors since the campaign started in 2005, across the four official languages. All the four selected poems, and half of the sixteen selected novels and short stories, were written by Singaporeans. One of the books, Gone Case by Dave Chua is also the first Singaporean work to be published in a graphic novel version. Of the selected works by overseas authors, three have been made into award-winning films and movies.

The selected short stories and poems were also compiled and published into a special READ! Singapore 2011 anthology, which can be borrowed from NLB's libraries. READ! Singapore 2011 runs from 23 June to 28 September 2011. During this 14-week period there is a wide range of reading-related programmes and activities held at various locations across Singapore.

6 Reading Carnivals were organised by NLB and the grassroots leaders to reach out to more than 2,000 residents to encourage reading and forming of reading interest group among their residents in 2011.

With a bigger and broader scope of programmes to meet the needs and expectations of more readers both old and new, READ! Singapore has come a long way since its origin sixth years ago. The growing support of the public, commercial and educational institutions as well as the media is a testament to the status of READ! Singapore as an annual nationwide event to look out for.

Under the READ! Singapore annual campaign as well as its reading clubs, especially the Taxi Sifu Reading Club, we have encouraged many Singaporeans to
cultivate the love for reading and become lifelong learners in the 21st century and beyond!

Moving forward, we hope to extend the reach of our campaign to children, as well as include the “writing” component and encourage people to pen their reflections after reading. To select more short stories for reading as well as to translate them into the other 3 languages.

- **Collaboration with the People’s Association**

The partnership with People’s Association (PA) enables NLB to leverage on the grassroots’ network of PA to reach out to more people in Singapore.

As the owner of the Passion Card Programme, PA engaged its members through a host of exciting and wholesome activities at the Community Centres and other PA outlets. There is a great synergy that both NLB and PA can achieve through collaboration.

The collaboration includes:

a) **NLB- PAssion Card Partnership**

Under this partnership, PAssion ez-link Card Members who are Singaporeans and Singapore Permanent Residents (PRs) can enjoy a free exclusive 5-year NLB Premium Membership upon registration. The NLB Premium Membership allows members to borrow up to eight (8) library items, including a maximum of four audio-visual materials from the public libraries.

Singaporeans and Singapore PRs who sign up for or renew their PAssion Card membership from 1 Aug 2011 onwards will be automatically registered for the NLB Premium Membership, as per Terms and Conditions upon the registration for
PAssion Ez-Link Card programme. Existing PAssion ez-link Card Members prior to this period will need to approach any of the NLB libraries to register for their complimentary NLB Premium Membership until the expiry of their PAssion Card Membership.

b) PAssion Reading Club

PA and NLB shall jointly develop programmes to engage the PAssion Card Members in activities that promote reading and reading-related activities. One such programme is the development and expansion of the Reading Club Interest Groups between NLB and PA, which will involve more members in the Reading Club Interest Groups and at the same time, offer the members the platform to engage in community service aimed at encouraging reading.

c) Dinner and Durian Party for Reading Club Members

A “Dinner & Durian Party” gathering was organised by PA on 15 July for more than 200 people to showcase reading clubs and encourage new grassroots leaders to form reading clubs. With this, NLB organised 8 enriching book discussion sessions (4 in English and 4 in Chinese) to encourage the setting up of reading clubs among new grassroots leaders at the gathering. The long term plan for PA is to set up reading clubs at all the constituencies in Singapore.

- Outreach to Users and Communities

As part of our community engagement efforts, Public Libraries conduct various outreach events to schools, community clubs, organisations, external large-scale events.
For YP services, a total of 59 outreach events were conducted, reaching a total of 19,498 participants. For seniors’ services, a total of 4 outreach events were conducted, reaching a total of 2,033 participants. For general audiences, a total of 17 outreach events were conducted, reaching a total of 17,731 participants.

Highlights of the external large-scale events are:

✔ Active Ageing Carnival (1 - 3 Apr): Apart from showcasing our collection and services, librarians also conducted book sharing and erhu sharing session on stage during the carnival. About 1,770 library books and AV items were available for the public to borrow. A total of 1,497 books were borrowed.

✔ Canberra Day (17 Apr): a grassroots event organised by Jelutung Community Centre/ Canberra Consultative Citizens’ Committee. 3,000 participants turned up for the event, majority of the participants visited NLB booth to browse and collect an activity stamp, so as to redeem a goodie bag. 724 loans were made during this event.

✔ National Institute of Education (10 May & 6 Jun): A series of outreach activities to NIE was coordinated to promote library services and products to graduating teachers. The response was encouraging, and we received some positive feedback for our efforts.

• Learning Communities
There are currently 23 Learning Communities (LCs) managed by the Adult and Young People’s team at the public libraries. The LCs include groups centred on reading, and those that are “activity-focused”, i.e. where members have a shared interest and reading/learning resources are introduced along with the discussions.

For teens and adults/seniors, a total of 29 sessions were held, reaching a total of 642 participants.

The latest addition to our LCs was the Singapore Novelist Club at CTPL. Its first session in May saw 12 participants, mainly individuals who are keen to know more about creative/fiction writing. Seniors’ Reading Club (Chinese), Taxi Sifu Club, Book Lovers Club and Gaming LC continue to draw good turnouts.

Under the READ! Singapore banner, we are able to attract the participation of 100 schools and rally in the support of more than 120 partners from Government/Ministries, Community/Grassroots organisations as well as partners from the Service and Hospitality Industry to organise book discussion sessions and set up reading clubs. READ! Singapore had also successfully influenced taxi drivers, hairstylists, teachers, healthcare/hospitality/service officers, civil servants, youth and senior citizens to set up their own reading clubs. To date, more than 90 Reading Clubs have been formed.

All of these LCs continue to engage Singaporeans in reading and discussion and play an active in keeping reading and learning alive.
Moving forward, NLB’s Strategic Plan will focus on programmes aimed at strengthening NLB’s core business of promoting reading and ensuring that the positive social capital generated by libraries is enhanced.

This will see the shift from Just Libraries to making libraries preferred social spaces for community interaction for all Singaporeans. Our reading programmes will move from a ‘one size fits all’ approach to a National Reading and Info-literacy framework tailored to specific needs in collaboration with community partners. From our current work in the collection and preservation of Singapore content, we will work next on the curation of the Singapore story with active community engagement. We already have content available in many different forms on our shelves and we will use this to further reach the underserved and build special collections which will allow Singaporeans to level up their reading and learning. Currently, our digital library service acts as an auxiliary to our main services and network of public libraries. In the next lap of development, we want to bring digital resources and services anytime, anywhere.

In our Library 2000 plans, it was infrastructure-driven and we laid the foundation for our network of public libraries. With the Library 2010 plan, we envisioned the development of the digital infrastructure, keeping up with current trends and technologies. With our new Library 2020 strategic plan, we have set a new vision of ‘Readers for Life, Learning Communities, Knowledgeable Nation.’

New vision ‘Readers for Life, Learning Communities, Knowledgeable Nation

Let us explain here why these have been chosen as part of our strategic plan. Reading is essential to the foundation of knowledge acquisition and learning and libraries are in a position to foster reading for life on a national level. Learning communities can be built through interactions at libraries, where individuals can connect to their communities and
at the same time, fostering a sense of belonging and shared values in our multicultural society. In the next decade, Singapore aspires to be a Knowledgeable Nation and libraries play a key role in fostering lifelong learning among individuals and communities. Partnerships among libraries and other institutions can lead to greater access to our nation’s collective knowledge resources and content.

To realise this vision, we are focusing on four key strategic objectives as follows:

- **Reading, Learning and Info-Literacy**

  This objective will focus on entrenching the reading habit and will grow reading interests among existing and avid readers. We want to lay strong foundations for reading among pre-schoolers and young families; sustain youth interest in reading and learning through school engagement; facilitate active learning and community engagement with seniors; continual educating and updating Singaporeans on information literacy to strengthen information literacy among Singaporeans and ensure that they develop a habit of enquiry which they can use in all aspects of their lives.

- **Next Generation Libraries**

  Building on the popularity and well-loved role of libraries as community spaces, the role of libraries will be further strengthened in the years to come. The next generation libraries will continue to provide equal access to knowledge for everyone and will promote knowledge sharing. Under this umbrella, all 24 public libraries will further fortify their role in serving as social touchpoints for learning, culture and community engagement.

- **Excellence in Singapore and Regional Content**
In this, we want to ensure an authoritative collection of Singapore content and engage Singaporeans in discovering and using NLB's Singapore content. Through all of this, we hope to foster a sense of national identity and pride through appreciating Singapore's content.

- **Digital Library, Anytime, Anywhere**

Access to digital library resources and services will be improved and users will be provided with easy and intuitive access and interfaces. This objective also means that NLB will be quick to adapt to new and emerging technologies in its delivery of digital services to Singaporeans.

**Conclusion**

NLB's future Library 2020 Strategic Plan will ensure that Singaporeans have continued access to knowledge and will champion reading and information literacy for the effective use of knowledge. NLB will provide Singaporeans with a safe and reliable haven for learning, whether in the physical or digital realm.

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**References:**

*Libraries for Life: NLB’s Strategic Plan into 2020. Published 2011.*