

JUST BECAUSE



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'Local rag' plays vital role in binding communities

NEWSPAPERS have an enormous ability to unite and build communities and also divide society and play a part in its weakening.

No matter where we live, bagging the "local rag" is a common topic of conversation — and yet we just can't help ourselves — we need to read it.

The paper plays a vital role in letting people know what is going on in our town.

For 150 years The Chronicle has told us who has been born, who has died, who has got married and who tasted success on the sporting field on the weekend.

It has covered major events, scandals and tragedies.

There is something very powerful in the local.

The printed word can be a great tool in binding a community together.

In the mid 1990s I was an avid reader of the *Boab Babbler*, a paper covering the town of Derby in the Kimberley region of Western Australia.

A weekly edition printed on two sheets of A3 paper usually sold out by 3pm.

It had a print run of about a 1000 copies and was produced by the local state high school.

The paper covered all of the big local events and was a must read for locals.

A friend of mine is currently engaged in the challenging and rewarding task of community development in the New South Wales town of Wilcannia.



A 2006 postcard project brought all walks of life together, showing the rich cultural diversity of Toowoomba. PICTURE: SUPPLIED

One of his key activities there is to edit and produce 300 newspapers a week.

Local stories, local content providing a sense of community in a needy location.

A newspaper can reflect a community back to itself.

This is not just giving the readers "what they want", but also

"showing them who they are".

And because they are human this can be both positive and negative.

Local stories can highlight our capacity for kindness and decency as well as cruelty and inhumanity.

They can inspire and challenge us.

They can provide a voice for those with little or no voice.

In 2006 I was able to collaborate with The Chronicle on a postcard project.

Working with journalist Kathleen Donaghey and photographers Bev Lacy and Kevin Farmer, a series of seven stories and postcards were created promoting "Toowoomba — A Garden City of Diversity".

The postcards told a range of stories of people who now call Toowoomba home.

People whose ancestors had lived here for tens of thousands of years through to others who were the first generation to leave Asia, Africa or Europe.

They had different backgrounds, different journeys but were united by a strong love for Toowoomba and the country they now call home.

They were not labels like "Aborigines, Muslims, Asians, refugees, migrants" — but ordinary local people working hard to look after their families and make a contribution to our community.

It was a great project demonstrating the power of the paper to provide leadership and promote diversity.

The feature article was recognised winning a 2006 Queensland Media Award.

Over the past 150 years there have been many other moments when The Chronicle has sought to build community and inspire us with local stories of courage and hope.

For these I say thank you and good luck blowing out the candles!