



Cairnmillar Institute

Big-library capabilities delivered on a smaller scale



Cairnmillar
INSTITUTE

Serving a small and highly specialized learning institute, the Cairnmillar library overcame their initial hesitation and found out that regardless of size, any library can reap the huge benefits delivered by Ex Libris Alma and Primo.

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Mary Turnbull, Cairnmillar Institute



About Cairnmillar Institute:

The Cairnmillar Institute is one of Australia’s leading centres for psychology and counselling services and an industry leader in psychology education and training. Founded by Professor Emeritus Dr Francis Macnab in 1961, the Cairnmillar Institute pioneered counselling and psychotherapy in Australia.

As a registered higher education and an accredited Vocational Educational and Training (VET) provider, Cairnmillar is focused on providing mental health training through a range of courses spanning from micro-credentials and short courses to university-equivalent degrees - Bachelor of Psychology & Counselling through to Doctor of Psychology (Clinical Psychology).

Cairnmillar has been at the forefront of clinical psychology and psychotherapy services with a strong reputation for clinical excellence and community engagement. As a not-for-profit organisation and a registered health promotion charity Cairnmillar seeks to leverage its expertise and deliver real benefits to the communities it serves, including those in regional and rural areas.

A growing problem for a small library

Smaller libraries should be able to benefit from big-library functionality. After all, they’re tackling the same tasks, but with a tiny staff. That’s the challenge that Cairnmillar Institute faced. The Institute had grown from its initial offering of postgraduate courses in counselling, psychology and psychotherapy by adding undergraduate courses as well. “We had a broader range of student levels, with different needs coming in,” states librarian Mary Turnbull. As a result, the existing library system, which was built to support specialist and small educational libraries, was no longer adequate. “It had served us well for four or five years,” she recalls. “But it could not support the larger circulation volume and there was no discovery linked into it. It was really, really difficult to continue using that sort of system. We’d reached the limit of what it could offer. It was time to change because we were growing. Students were expecting more.”

Extensive due diligence leading to Ex Libris solution

Kathryn von Treuer is CEO and Provost of the Institute, and she was part of the information gathering and selection process that led the library to select the Ex Libris Alma/Primo solution. “We needed some very comprehensive due diligence to present to the council and the academic board,” she asserts. “We looked at five different programs and the advantages and disadvantages of each, and looked at several metrics. We also spoke with several different librarians at other institutions to get their opinions. I cold-called them and asked what they were using, and they were very generous with their time. It was their references that really swayed me.” They shared insight on a number of issues. “I asked about system support, because ongoing support is critical to us in a smaller library. They told me the training wasn’t intimidating, which was reassuring, and that the system is easy for students to access and use. We put together a 12-page document that presented the due diligence and put forward our preference, which was Alma and Primo, and our selection went through the academic board quite smoothly.”

“It really is wonderful and I recommend it to smaller libraries. It’s not scary as long as you have the right support in place and we have that from Ex Libris.”

Maryka Brown, Cairnmillar Institute

Cairnmillar management, however, wanted the new system to go live by the beginning of the next school year, which meant the window for implementation was less than six months. “While we were implementing Alma and Primo, we were concurrently running a full library service and planning for the next year,” explains Turnbull. So they relied heavily on their implementation specialist from Ex Libris. “She deserves more credit than I could ever give to anybody,” Turnbull declares. “There was not a question she didn’t answer and when we were tearing our hair out, particularly during the configuration process, she was there every step of the way.”



Solution that scales for smaller libraries

Maryka Brown and Mary Turnbull are the only two librarians on staff and both work part time. “We don’t have library technicians or library assistants,” Brown reveals. That lack of staffing made Mary Turnbull, the sole librarian at the time of decision making, initially hesitant to go with the Alma/Primo solution as Turnbull relates: “I looked at all the functionality and I thought it was fantastic. But I discounted it because I thought it was too big. I didn’t think it was suited for a smaller institution, even one that was rapidly growing.” Part of her hesitation was that from her contacts with other libraries, she knew the size of the teams that had implemented Alma and Primo elsewhere. But Ex Libris support assured the Cairnmillar team that they could scale down appropriately. Moreover, Ex Libris was more than willing to lend a hand, as Brown recounts. “They were very accommodating, responsive and helpful, aware that we were both part time and needed the help, and they were happy to provide it for us.”

Broad functionality and efficiencies, made easy

Brown further notes, “We cover everything, so it’s important to have a system that makes it easy for us to do that.” The connectedness of Alma and Primo, on both the front and back ends, delivers efficiencies and functionality that pays off for a library with such limited staff resources. For example, “Physical item requests are clearly there in Alma waiting for you, and it’s all seamless - as it should be. The students and staff don’t need to know what’s going on behind the scenes. You put a request in, here’s your book. No problem.”

“The way that Alma communicates with us is really useful as well,” Brown continues. “There was a hard copy book that was a prescribed text, we only had a couple of copies that were being heavily used and Alma flagged it. That’s great because we have the actual evidence to raise it at the executive level to get approval to purchase additional resources. That takes the pressure off us a little bit because it’s not just our word, it’s Alma that’s noticing these things.” In fact, as a whole, “The analytics are very valuable to us,” according to Turnbull. “Kathryn, as our CEO, asks for statistics so we are able to make decisions based on evidence. We can identify the highest used items, the lowest used, that sort of thing. It helps us with future planning and purchasing too. So that’s been really important.”

Certainly, there has been a learning curve, but that has more to do with the new capabilities themselves than knowing the steps to perform them. “It’s taken me awhile to learn some features,” explains Brown. “Things like integrating new Journal subscriptions, because we didn’t have individual publisher subscriptions before. But now that I have a handle on it, that kind of functionality is quite easy for me. Once you’ve done something a couple of times, it’s like, I can do this in my sleep.”

Meeting high student and staff expectations

“We have two cohorts of students,” states Turnbull. “Some have already been to a university before coming to Cairnmillar and they bring high expectations, so our previous system was a sudden, enormous downgrade for them. We have other

students who haven't studied for a long time, and the old system was clunky for them to use so they couldn't find things. So we had two cohorts of disappointed people." But now, she shares, "Alma and Primo have not only made our lives easier from the librarian back end, but the clients — our students — are also very happy. They pay the same big fees as the big universities to come to Cairnmillar. They expect us, and rightfully so, to have a really good and comprehensive library service that is easy for them to access. We now have that, and they're using it with confidence." Adds Brown, "We're also getting feedback from academic staff and they are telling us 'I haven't had an issue finding anything.' Which is wonderful, it's music to my ears."

Institutionally aligned, future-ready

According to Brown, moving to Alma and Primo helped the library better-align with the objective of the Institution. While the library was running the old system, there was a lot of discussion about the library's role, and what it needed to achieve. She reports that with the move to the Ex Libris solution, everyone seems happy with the library's service levels so those conversations have essentially stopped. After all, she points out, "The new systems are used by basically every large university," and moreover, she foresees even more advantages as Cairnmillar continues its growth trajectory. "The discovery function that is able to search across everything that we have in our Library in one place is astounding and easy," she notes. "It means that whatever we put into Alma is searchable in Primo. So, in future adding new resources won't be a problem for us."

A recommendation based on experience

Even though Cairnmillar has tripled in size in recent years, the population of approximately 600 students is still dwarfed by the large institutions one normally thinks of as users of the Ex Libris solution. However, Brown states, "It really is wonderful and I recommend it to smaller libraries. It's not scary as long as you have the right support in place and we certainly have that from Ex Libris. It's something that's seriously worth investigating." Adds Turnbull, "We're proof that you can do it."



About Ex Libris, Part of Clarivate

Ex Libris, part of Clarivate, is a leading global provider of cloud-based solutions that enable institutions and their users to create, manage, and share knowledge. In close collaboration with its customers and the broader community, Ex Libris develops solutions that increase library productivity, maximize the impact of research activities, enhance teaching and learning, and drive student mobile engagement. Ex Libris serves over 7,500 customers in 90 countries. For more information, see our [website](#) and join us on [LinkedIn](#), [YouTube](#), [Facebook](#), and [Twitter](#).

