

Bibliotherapy for wellbeing: Creating space for reflection

HLA / HLi Conference – October 2026

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Austin HEALTH

Acknowledgement of Country

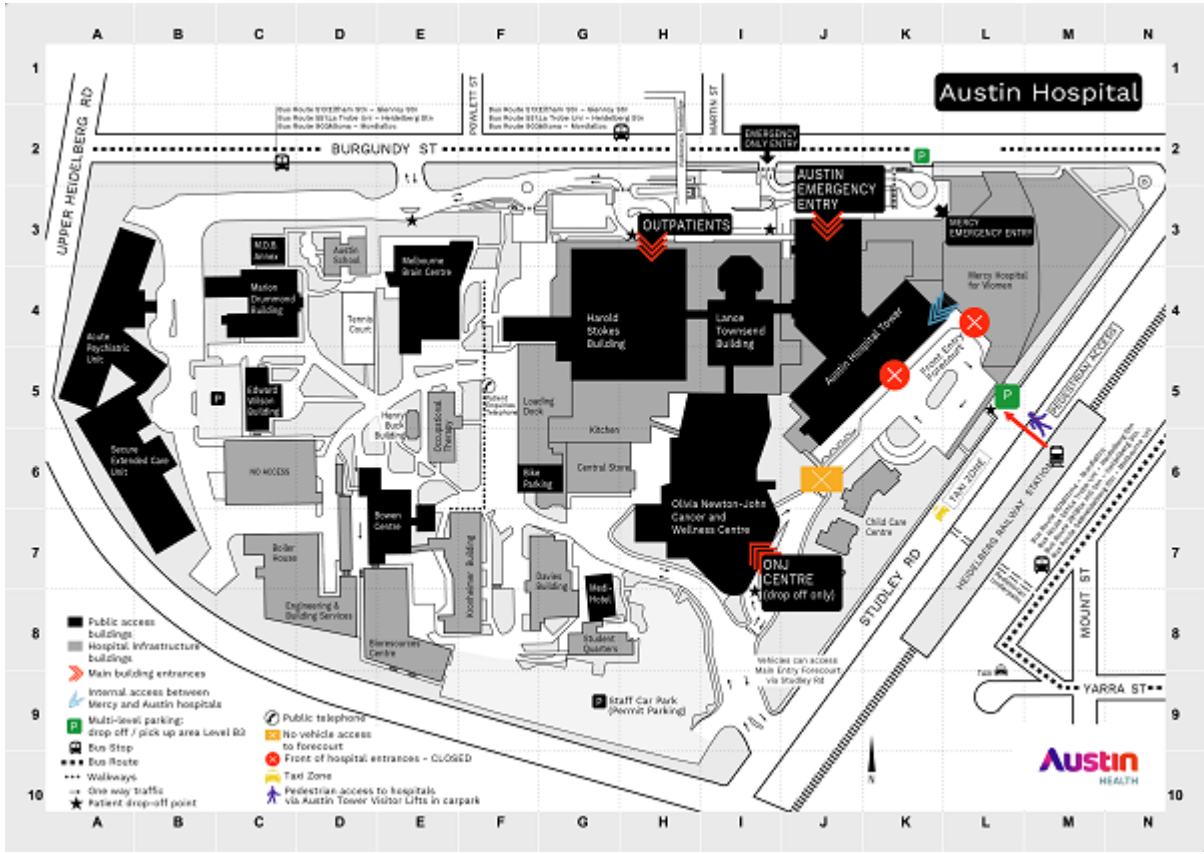
We are presenting today from the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present and extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here today.



Austin Health

- Public Teaching hospital
- Melbourne's North-East
- North Metro & Mitchell Local Health Service Network
- Research intensive
- 3 campus locations



Library services

- 1 Library at main campus
- 4.4 FTE staff

What is bibliotherapy?

Bibliotherapy Australia definition:

"the practice of using literature and storytelling to positively affect the wellbeing of individuals, families, communities and society".

Synonyms: reading therapy, book therapy, therapeutic storytelling



Timeline of activity: 2025 – current



Photo by Sincerely Media on Unsplash

April – June 2025: Bibliotherapy for Beginners online course offered through Bibliotherapy Australia/ALIA

Late June 2025: ran a peer learning bibliotherapy session for library colleagues (as a learning activity)

July 2025: Made a proposal to run "express" bibliotherapy sessions during the Wellbeing Festival. The response was YES!

Sept 2025: Ran 2 "express" bibliotherapy sessions: 1 in-person in the library and the other at the repat site as part of the Wellbeing Festival

April 2026: Ran 2 express sessions: 1 online and 1 in-person in the library

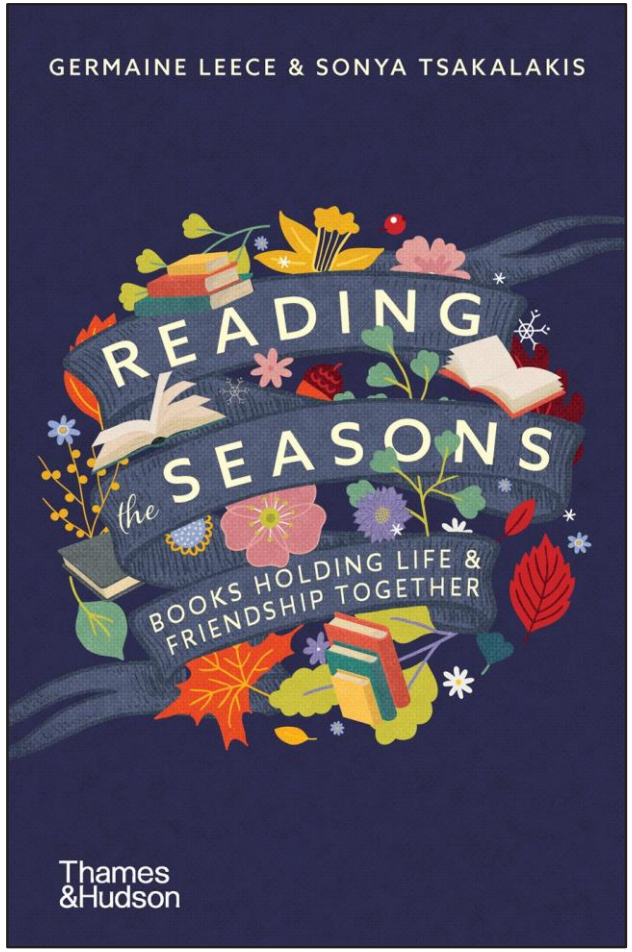
Oct/Nov 2026: Have 2 sessions scheduled later this month!

Hybrid session

- 30 minutes
- Capped at 12 participants
- Register to attend

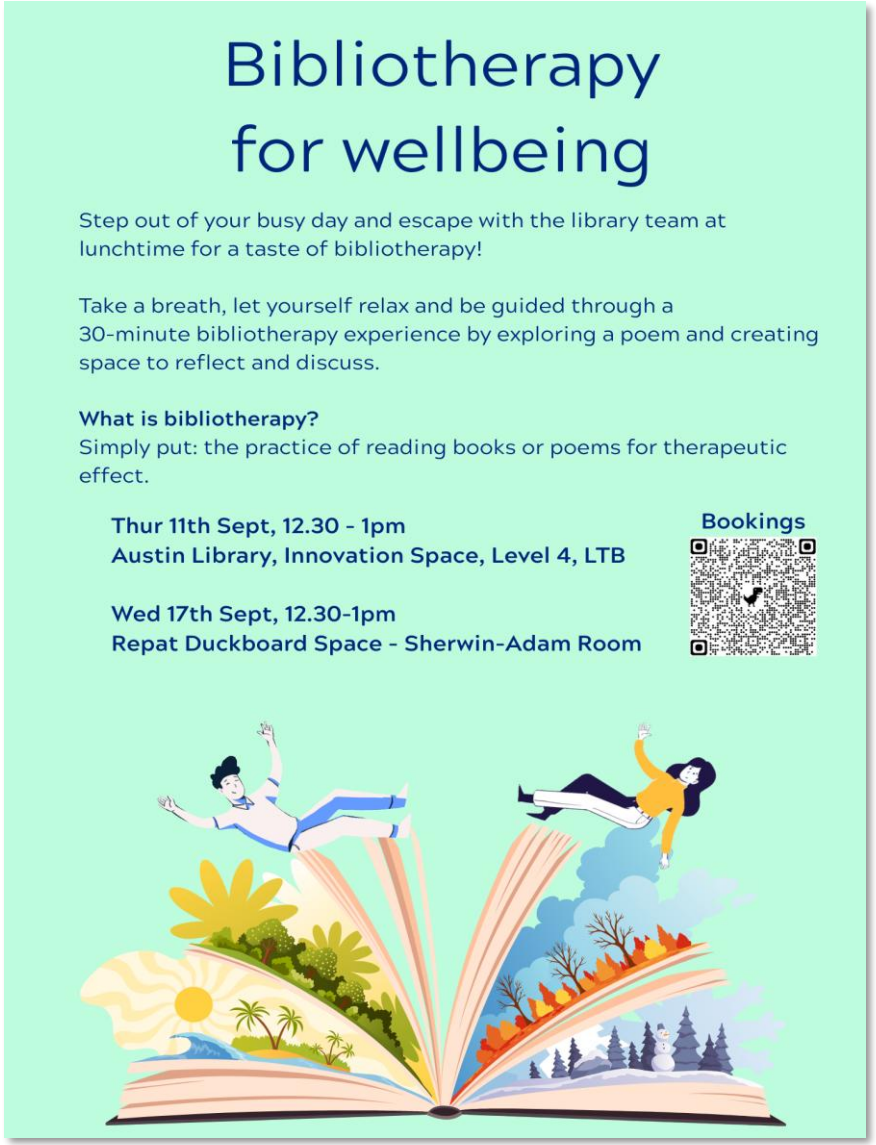
Session outline:

- Introductions
- Acknowledgement of Country
- Disclaimer
- Overview of bibliotherapy and various approaches
- Relaxation exercise
- Introduce poem and poet – read aloud x 2
- Invitation to discuss
- Closing remarks – promote library and leisure reading collection



Working smarter, not harder

- Express session follows the same format; a new poem is selected each festival
- In-house poster created by Monica Simpson adapted each iteration
- Feedback organised at a program level



Outcomes and reflections

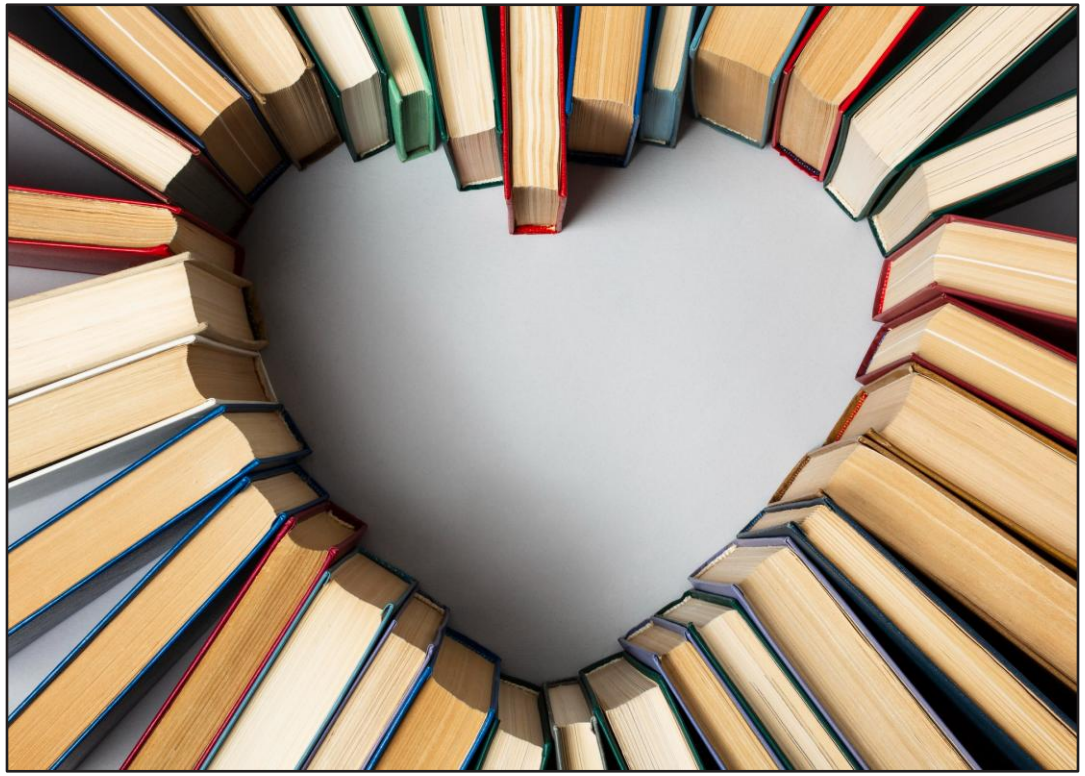


Image designed by Magnific

- Good ROI in terms of PD spend!
- Library is more actively supporting wellbeing
- Invited back to participate in Wellbeing events
- Part of the Wellbeing Influencers group
- Encouraging new users to the library
- Asked by Mental Health unit to co-facilitate a session
- Personally – it's been an exciting journey and ignited a new passion in bibliotherapy!

What's next?

- Continue to run during Wellbeing events
- Amy McKenzie doing the course in 2027
- Further training for me

Acknowledgements

Dr Susan McLaine, Bibliotherapy Australia

Liz Harris, Chief Librarian

Amy McKenzie, Collections Librarian

Monica Simpson, Community Engagement Librarian

Mozhdeh Dehghani, Digital Resources Librarian

Questions?

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