

# Workshop: libraries and the handicapped

**F**ROM Monday, 19 May to Friday, 23 May 1980, Melbourne State College provided the setting for the First National Workshop on Librarianship for Handicapped Users.

Jointly sponsored by the Library Association of Australia and Melbourne State College, the workshop had been in preparation since 1978 following the consultative seminar held in Canberra and the meeting of representatives of library consumers and providers held at the Prahran College of Advanced Education.

The 32 workshop participants came from all states and territories and represented a wide range of library services – state libraries, municipal services, tertiary institute libraries, and libraries associated with particular groups of disabled persons. The workshop was designed as an intensive participatory experience, with input from a variety of persons with expertise in the range of topics under consideration.



After being welcomed by Dr Graham Corr, Head of the Department of Librarianship at Melbourne State College, and Mrs Doreen Parker, President of the Victorian Branch of the LAA, participants heard the objectives of the workshop outlined by Mr Lloyd Junor, the workshop organiser and Lecturer in Media Studies in the Department of Librarianship at Melbourne State College.

The program then began with Mr John Brudenall, of the Parliamentary Library in Canberra, discussing the present situation of library services for handicapped users in Australia, and Mr Bill Thorn, of the National Library of Australia, describing the nature and extent of existing collections for handicapped users.

Further workshop sessions covered issues such as the legal rights of handicapped persons, community attitudes and consumer needs, problems of access, signage and displays, various types of non-print media,

library organisation, financial and administrative responsibilities, acquisition and organisation of materials, aspects of co-operation, user services and outreach.

Guest speakers included Miss Cath McKenzie, Parliamentary Counsel, State of Victoria, Mrs Margaret Lester and Mr Brian Kidd, ACROD, representatives from St Paul's School for the Blind and Visually Handicapped and the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, Dr Alan Johnston, Department of Optometry at the University of Melbourne, Lloyd Junor, Don Schauder, Cliff Law of the Queensland State Library, Duncan Marshall of the Riverina Public Library Service, Miss Jill Keefe of the Victorian Education Department's Visiting Teacher Service, Miss Bea Donkin of the Swinburne College of Technology's Library, Mrs Taisoo Watson of the Brighton City Library, Mrs Jane Worrall of the Moorabbin City Library, Miss Jill Hiscock of the Heidelberg City Library, and Mrs Jan Smark of the Braille and Talking Book Library.

Tuesday morning was spent at the National Guide Dog Training and Mobility Centre, Kew, where participants were introduced to issues relating to mobility skills, person-to-person skills, daily living skills, facility design and equipment.

On Wednesday afternoon, visits were made to the Noah's Ark Toy Library, the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, the Braille and Talking Book Library, Angus Mitchell House and the Independent Living Centre – both residential centres conducted by the Yooralla Society of Victoria. Wednesday was also the focus for an excellent display of books, materials and equipment relating to the needs of handicapped persons and of particular relevance to library services.



Among the most valuable sessions of the workshop, according to the participants' written evaluations were those conducted on Monday and Tuesday afternoons by John Deverall and John Hillel of the Drama Department, Melbourne State College. During these segments, the participants were introduced to a variety of 'aids' which enabled them to simulate the role of persons with a diverse range of handicaps. While simulating these handicaps, they were required to perform a number of common library tasks in the College's Education Resource Centre. Participants found this to be a most rewarding exercise which sensitised them to the needs of handicapped persons and helped them realise that the problems faced by such persons are not always as obvious as they might appear at first to the 'normal' person, even one who is sensitive to the needs of the disabled.

These impressions were reinforced and extended by the Monday and Tuesday evening sessions, organised by Mr Jim Finn, of the National Federation of Blind Citizens, and involving persons with a range of disabilities including total and partial blindness, total and partial deafness, and paraplegia. It was extremely beneficial to be able to discuss their library needs with people who actually experience those needs in their day-to-day living.

The keynote address on Wednesday evening was to have been given by Mr Justice Meares, Chairman of the National Advisory Council for the Handicapped. Unfortunately,

Justice Meares was taken ill and admitted to hospital late in the preceding week.

The workshop was fortunate to obtain the co-operation of Senator Gordon Davidson, Chairman of the National Advisory Committee to the National Library of Australia on Library Services for the Handicapped. Despite short notice, Senator Davidson delivered an excellent and stimulating address on the topic 'A dream for the 1980s: will it come true?' to an audience including many representatives of handicapped groups and the general public. The meeting was ably chaired by Mr Denis Richardson, President of the LAA.



On the final afternoon of the workshop, a plenary feedback session was chaired by the Hon A.A. Staley, Minister for Posts and Telecommunications. This was followed by the opportunity to frame recommendations in a session chaired by Dr Simon Haskell, Dean of the Institute of Special Education at Burwood State College. A number of resolutions were adopted. They will be collated by the workshop planning committee and forwarded to the LAA shortly. In general, these resolutions reflect the issues highlighted by the activities of the workshop. In particular, it was noted that the library needs of handicapped persons are being inadequately met at present; that librarians and trainee librarians need to be informed of the particular needs of handicapped persons; that workshops similar to the present one can assist in this educative process.

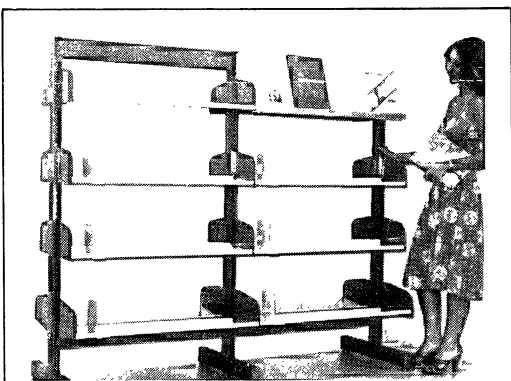
The workshop proved to be an extremely important event and a valuable learning experience – for the participants and for the planning committee. The participants valued the opportunity to exchange ideas and information with one another as well as gaining much from the workshop sessions themselves.

The committee discovered that they had perhaps made the program too intensive, leaving insufficient time for necessary social and informal interaction. In the later segments there was perhaps too great an emphasis on the visually handicapped and too little on other forms of disability. While this may reflect the fact that, for libraries, the problems of the visually impaired are more immediately obvious, and that there have been greater conceptual and technological advances in this area, the workshop did tend to lose some of its earlier balance.

Notable omissions from the program were the needs of librarians working with the intellectually and mentally handicapped, and the diverse special problems faced by librarians who operate housebound vehicles. It is hoped that these and other deficiencies will be recognised and accommodated in future workshops.

It is intended to publish the proceedings of the workshop in greater detail as soon as possible. In addition, most sessions of the workshop were recorded on videotape. When suitably edited, these will be made available to interested persons. In the meantime, enquiries regarding any aspects of the workshop may be addressed to Mr Lloyd Junor, Department of Librarianship, Melbourne State College, 757 Swanston Street, Carlton, Victoria, 3053.

*Paul G. Power*



**Need library furniture?**

**Duff Steel . . . naturally!**

Duff Steel Industries (NSW) Pty Ltd  
 PO Box 363 Sutherland NSW 2232  
 Phone: Sydney 521 8333, Melbourne 68 4339,  
 Hobart 72 7933, Perth 328 8140, Adelaide 42 4516,  
 Brisbane 356 7622, Darwin 84 3650.