

Library for the blind under threat

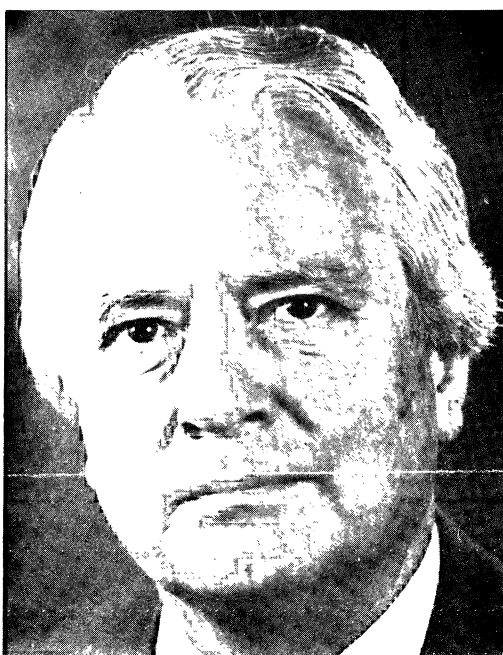
LIBRARY SERVICES for the blind and visually impaired in NSW are seriously threatened by a severe lack of funds. The services, involving the free delivery of Braille and Talking Book (audio) equipment and tapes to more than 4500 people by the Royal Blind Society of New South Wales are 'stretched to the limit' according to the General Manager, Mr Graham Laurence.

And the situation is worsening in the face of rapidly rising demand in such areas as:

- Talking Book (audio) titles – borrowings are up by 62 per cent on the year;
- Large print titles – borrowings are up by 57 per cent;
- Braille production – up by 15 per cent;
- Talking Book production – up by 27 per cent;
- Other cassettes copied – up by 40 per cent;
- Student service requests – up by 29 per cent;

'At least another 2000 people need access to our services,' said Mr Laurence, 'and that is a conservative estimate.' He added that through its own fund-raising efforts the RBS has tried to provide library services with very little Government subsidy.

However, unless substantial aid becomes available in the foreseeable future, the ability of the RBS to maintain existing services, meet demands from potential new readers and offer a reasonable range of



Graham Laurence . . . 'stretched to the limit'

Braille and Talking Book titles was very much in jeopardy.

Putting the case for State Government funding, Mr Laurence points out that almost every sighted person enjoys ready access to a public library. The RBS seeks the same status as that of Government funded free libraries, so much taken for granted by sighted people.

Inadequate

In a reference to inadequacy of current levels of Federal and State Government support, Mr Laurence said that in 1980, for example, it represented only about 20 per cent of total expenditure requirements of more than \$4.6 million. 'Of the total, \$130,000 came from NSW Government, \$80,000 of which was earmarked for library services. No Federal funding for the RBS library was received. This very limited Government support just does not compare with that received by agencies for the blind in our sister state of Victoria.'

In 1979, the Victorian Association for the Blind received from the Hamer Government, a non-specific grant of \$1.9 million, while the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind was granted \$790,000. These funds were additional to Federal Government allocations.

Victorian aid

In 1980 the Victorian Government funded the State's three main agencies for the blind to the tune of \$3,189,000, while NSW state aid to the RBS totalled only \$130,000. The single lowest Victorian grant of \$187,000 was to the Braille and Talking Book Library, and this, of course, is still higher than the NSW Government grant of \$130,000 which was allocated for all RBS activities and not just library services.

Interestingly, for the period 1981/2 the Victorian Government has promised to double its allocation to the Braille and Talking Book Library which now totals \$375,000.

In the same period, the RBS has budgeted for an expenditure of \$874,000 for its library services but is still awaiting the outcome of a funding application to the NSW Government made in November last year.

The RBS has already launched a modernisation program involving its new Talking Book System based on standard cassettes. 'We have also undertaken to meet the financial burden of buying 5000 new Talking Book (play-back) machines at a cost of more than \$1 million including essential taped titles'.

Mr Laurence said that the RBS had shown its willingness to share these resources with all the disabled people by supplying its cassettes to 15 libraries throughout NSW in addition to agencies such as the Spastic Centre of NSW. 'What we need urgently from the NSW Government is an unequivocal commitment to meet our ongoing library costs'.

'Bookworms become sissies'

AKALAMUNDA SHIRE councillor has attacked his council, saying it is 'helping to turn young Australian boys into poofers and sissies.'

Cr Hugh Sanderson said yesterday that the council should be encouraging children to play outdoor games instead of spending its time and money building libraries and organising community arts programs.

'Council shouldn't be allocating so much money for the things that may make our children bookworms or culture vultures or turn Australian boys into poofers or sissies,' Cr Sanderson said.

'Bookworms tend to become sissies instead of developing into good, strong Australians.'

Cr Sanderson (63), a World War bomber pilot, made similar comments during a debate at a recent council meeting on budget

allocations for the 1981-82 financial year.

'Some people may have taken my comments too literally but I made them and I stand by them, Cr Sanderson said.

'What I was upset about was that the council was charging for the hire of local sporting grounds to junior groups when I felt they should have been provided free.

'The money from this was helping to finance a library to be jointly run by the council and the Lesmurdie High School as well as a community arts program.

'I feel we should be encouraging our children to get outside and participate in good, healthy activities and not expect them to have to pay for the privilege.

'After all, the Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields.'

From The West Australian, 3 Sept. 1981.