

The National Library and disabled readers

THE PRESENTATION of the Talking Book of the Year Award to Mr Eric Rolls for his book *A Million Wild Acres* was made by Mr Harrison Bryan, Director-General of the National Library of Australia. Mr Bryan spoke of the National Library's interest in the library problems of disabled readers:

We are latecomers to this field, having operated in it for only just over two years.

Our approach has been to attempt to co-ordinate the efforts of others rather than, as in the case of the Library of Congress, to develop massive collections and services of our own.

There have been two reasons for this. First, that the likelihood of securing the considerable resources needed to mount an independent operation was slight two years ago and is now utterly remote. Second, that there were and are existing operations of high quality in the field already, not least those of the Royal Blind Society of New South Wales.

The Library's aim then has been to provide the mechanisms for maintaining and where possible improving, co-operation among the various agencies to secure the maximum total effort with the minimum of duplication and to extend the range and number of books available in special formats for handicapped readers.

First, there is the National Advisory Council on Library Services for People with Disabilities, set up to advise the Council of the National Library in this area.

Second, there is the *National Union Catalogue of Library Materials for the Handicapped (NUC:H)* which, by listing all the special format titles located anywhere in Australia, aims to extend the range of availability for any one library or any one reader beyond what is held locally.

NUC:H rests firmly on the premise that all libraries serving disabled users see themselves as part of this national resource, which transcends state and organizational boundaries. This entails both making available book information concerning their holdings and those holdings themselves through inter-library loan to the users of other libraries.

At present the catalogue lists some 10,000 titles, including most of the holdings of the Royal Blind Society. It might be noted that it was only the second, quality, computer based catalogue of such materials in the world, the other being in the Library of Congress.



Mr Harrison Bryan

National Library of Australia photograph by David Reid

The National Library is able to call also on that catalogue since it has been mounted on a computer in the United States to which we have direct access. Australian readers can thus become aware of an even wider range of titles and Australian libraries can seek to acquire them by purchase or on loan.

I should say that the Library of Congress is very anxious to operate this arrangement in reverse, as it were, such is the high regard in which they hold Australian produced materials for handicapped readers.

But locating material already in existence is only half the story of resource sharing. Already, institutions can be guided by NUC:H in deciding whether or not to go ahead and incur the expense of a particular production, but this decision will be considerably assisted by the third of our tools for co-operation now being forged, the Works in Progress (WIP) file which will list titles being produced. The Library has been testing this system with a number of organizations, including the Royal Blind Society.

The fourth mechanism for co-ordination is the publication *Link-up* which the Library produces regularly (in both graphic and audio formats) to provide a forum for the exchange of news and experiences.

Our last, but by no means least important resource is a human one. The Library's own small section on Library Services for the Handicapped not only produces and organizes the four mechanisms I have described but acts as a resource for the whole system and a catalyst for further development. I think it proper to say that I believe that not

only the National Library but the whole community of libraries and organizations serving handicapped readers is very fortunate to have the services of Cliff Law at their disposal in this area.

One of the things that he is particularly keen on is the quality of the materials produced and he has been working with audio producers on the development of guidelines for the production of talking books in Australia.

No comment on quality would be complete without proper mention of the pioneering work done by the Royal Blind Society in this area and especially its far-sighted adoption of the Library of Congress 4-track cassette system. Thanks to the Society this format has become widely established in Australia. This has made certain that Australia remains compatible with the major world centres of production of talking books and that therefore it can gain maximum benefit from association with them.



Mrs Joan Rolls

Winner misses out

An accident prevented Mr Eric Rolls, winning author of The Royal Blind Society's 1982 Talking Book of the Year for his book *A Million Wild Acres*, from attending the presentation dinner at The Society's headquarters at Enfield.

However, Mr Rolls, hospitalised with a broken leg, recorded his speech, which guests heard over dinner. The author spoke of how *A Million Wild Acres* had come into being, initially a collection of stories of the land and the people who settled it, stories which demanded a telling.

Mrs Joan Rolls, the author's wife, accepted the award from Mr Harrison Bryan, Director General of the National Library of Australia.