

Building accessibility and adaptive technologies for library users with disabilities

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Logan, population approximately 160 000, is located on the eastern corridor between Brisbane and the Gold Coast. Logan City Council Libraries have a membership of almost 90 000 active borrowers who last year borrowed 2 080 142 items. According to ABS figures, almost seventeen per cent of Logan residents identify as having a disability.

The **Charles Hamilton Special Needs Centre**, situated at the Logan North Library, was opened in January 1996. It provides equipment and resources to assist people with vision, hearing, intellectual and mobility disabilities.

Although the impetus to the centre was conceived by library staff, the planning committee consisted of representatives from local disability groups, whose advice was invaluable and whose ideas were included in the centre's design.

Since the Centre opened, the ideas of how to meet people's needs have changed and further equipment and services provided by Logan City Council will be more inclusive, acknowledging the rights of people with disabilities.

Enhancing our existing environment and services to ensure accessibility

Public libraries are excellent at acquiring, organising and lending material. This is what we do best so we should not be re-inventing who we are in the face of the new formats provided by technology. By placing too much value on identifying and acquiring the latest equipment or software, we detract from focussing on the provision of a holistic service. Librarians should strive to keep informed about technological innovations but must keep in mind that all aspects of service should be reviewed.

Integrated planning

Accessibility should not be an afterthought or an 'add-on' but an integrated effort to make services and materials available to all members of the community. An action plan is essential to ensuring that the planning is relevant.

Your action plan should include a review of existing resources and programs and the development of policies aimed at inclusion. It should set realistic goals and allocate the responsibility for achieving these goals. It should pro-

vide for adequate staff training, and have a mechanism for evaluating outcomes.

Marketing services

In almost all of the services offered by public libraries, community support is vital to success. In many cases, people with disabilities will not be aware of specialist services and will not consider the public library a resource. To overcome this perception, a continuing schedule of outreach activities should be undertaken.

The disability sector is not homogeneous

Libraries need to provide different responses to different needs. It is vital to remember that the needs of more than one third of people with a disability will not be met with conventional software and mobility aids. Accessibility is more than just being able to get in the door.

Staff training

Staff training is vital to the success of any library service. *The Disability Awareness Kit* produced by the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, the State Library of Victoria and Libraries Victoria is an excellent resource, which can be easily accessed.

Funding

Funding for services must be part of the basic budget planning each financial year. In addition, identifying and applying for funding opportunities via grants should be part of the library's strategic plan.

Conclusion

- Services for people with disabilities must be part of planning for all libraries.
- Library staff must listen to customers and heed suggestions and feedback.
- Librarians must be creative and proactive in the design and promotion of library services.
- Librarians must regularly review the services provided.
- Library staff must respect those people to whom the service is provided.

This is an abridged version of a paper prepared for the Forum on Library Services for People with Disabilities held at the National Library of Australia in March. Papers from the forum will be available from the National Library website [<http://www.nla.gov.au>] shortly.

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