

Services for people with disabilities

Services for people with a print disability at Burnside Library

The City of Burnside Library in Adelaide endeavours to provide leading edge technology for clients with a print disability. Commensurate with this vision, in 2003 library management accepted an opportunity to participate in the first 'Book in the Sky' (BiTS) project in partnership with the Royal Society for the Blind (RSB) and the developer Audio-Read from Sydney. The value of this cooperative venture was acknowledged in 2004 when The City of Burnside received 'The National Award for Innovation' in Local Government.

The BiTS digital technology enables people with vision impairment or a print disability to access written material such as books, newspapers, magazines and council and community newsletters. The Navigator is a battery operated audio handset about the size of a remote control. Currently 20 Burnside Library patrons utilize a Navigator, on loan either from Burnside library or from the RSB. The current waiting list for a Navigator from the library highlights the demand for this digital technology, which clearly surpasses other talking book formats.

In a concerted effort to address potential social isolation amongst patrons with a print disability, Burnside Library actively encourages clients to visit the library and engage with staff and other community members. However for those who can't, due to age or illness, Home Library staff will visit them. In addition, the BiTS program co-ordinator visits housebound Navigator users to provide ongoing support and exchange of book titles. All Navigator users have access to an Audio-Read catalogue



*The Navigator
(photo kindly provided by
Audio-Read Ltd)*

(containing well over 2000 titles) from which to choose their reading material. Library staff download requested material from a central computer; up to 40 hours of audio content can be stored on the Navigator. The user can then easily navigate between pages and chapters of a book or various pages and sections of a newspaper.

During informal dialogue with the clients during 2007 it became evident that there was a need to create a social group specifically for Navigator users, and, as with sighted borrowers, offer participation in a Book Discussion Group. This was seen as the next step - a progressive move in terms of encouraging Navigator users to visit the library more often and access the myriad of events and activities on offer. Following discussions with and enthusiastic feedback from these clients, an audio-book discussion group was formed. The first meeting was held in October 2007 with ten members who determined that they will meet once a month in the adjacent community centre. Not all have vision impairment



*A client of Burnside Library
using the Navigator*

though; three provide transportation and research support for their partners. Whilst the group is jointly facilitated by the RSB and library staff, its leadership firmly rests with the group. In terms of future planning there is an opportunity for a volunteer to provide facilitation support, particularly important if there is sufficient interest to form a second audio-book group.

The remarkable co-operation from all sectors, demonstrates that public libraries, not-for-profit organisations and the commercial sector can create partnerships that benefit all.

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What our clients say:

"To me the Navigator is the most wonderful invention. From being an avid reader to now being blind, the Navigator has given me untold pleasure."

"Novels in Braille are very large and heavy books, which I find difficult to use as the arthritis in my hands is extremely bad", says a chronic rheumatoid arthritis sufferer.

"I have found that the Navigator has broadened my word and author knowledge."

The Navigator has also made me become involved with the very nice people at the Library. I love being with people so it's a social contact for me."

From a client who developed vision impairment at 50 years of age and became withdrawn, "The Navigator has given me back my life".

"Love the book marking ability of the Navigator and the fact that it turns itself off when I fall asleep."

From an Audio Book Discussion Group participant, "How amazing that many users can 'read' the same book at the same time just like the paper book"