

## ENERGISE, ENTHUSE, INSPIRE

EEL gives a voice to the new generation of library and information professionals. If you have any suggestions or topics for this column, please contact the column co-ordinator Lesa Maclean at [maclean.lesa@gmail.com](mailto:maclean.lesa@gmail.com)

# FIRST, YOU NEED TO BE ABLE TO GET INTO THE BUILDING

Accessibility can mean many different things for different people. As someone who often uses a wheelchair, the first thing Suzie Day asks before she can do anything in life is "can I get in the building?" Sadly, the answer is 'no' more often than you might think.

But when we're talking about accessibility in libraries, for Suzie, the greatest hurdle is getting employment.

Over the last two years I have been applying for just about every suitable job (and a few that were not!), and have gained just two interviews. Both of these positions were for short term contracts with NGOs that provide disability services. I am halfway through my current contract, so I am back in the job market. As my fiancée is also disabled, but cannot work at all, it is essential that I have secure and stable employment. Being disabled is expensive, and at the end of each fortnight, any money that isn't spent on appointments, medications, and therapy is usually gone the following week. One person living on the disability pension is surviving. Two people living on the pension isn't even that. In Australia, just 39.8% of people with disabilities are employed, compared to 79.4% employment rates within the general population. This is one of the lowest workforce participation rates of developed nations.

As it stands, before I even think about what to put in my cover letter, I always have to ring the organisation, to find out just how suitable it is. In my experience, older library buildings tend to be wheelchair-accessible in the main area, but the staff-only areas such as the break room are not. Newer buildings tend to be better, but this is not always the case.

Even large, open workrooms have their issues with boxes and other things on the floor, which can make it difficult for me to navigate the room. Simple things such as making sure workrooms have sufficient floor space around the furniture can make a big difference.

Often larger organisations will have a standardised form to fill out to apply for a job. You can't prove it, but you know when you tick the box that says "Do you have a disability or illness that may affect your performance?" your CV goes to the bottom of the pile. Legally speaking, I am under no obligation to declare any disability until after I am offered a job, and even then I do not have to disclose anything unless it is relevant to the position. The loophole that is often exploited can be found in the disclaimer that states "Should it be found this declaration is false at a later date, it may result in grounds for termination". Since

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January, I have completed no less than six job applications such as this. If any managers have control over this aspect of recruitment, then it is something they should be aware of.

Another hurdle I have found in finding employment is the increasing need for a drivers licence. More than a few



local governments have a requirement that staff be able to move between branches. My disability restricts my ability to drive, so that immediately disqualifies me from a number of positions. I once asked a manager if there might be some considerations or adjustments made, and that I was eligible for 50% off taxi vouchers. He responded that they might consider me if I had 75% off vouchers (which don't exist). When you move staff between branches "because we like to rotate staff", accommodations can be made. Besides, one of their older buildings had no ramp entry.

I know that as a new grad, my CV looks fantastic. I am just two arts electives from graduating, I have supervised volunteers and staff, I am currently starting a library from scratch, I have presented a paper at an international conference, I have written for INCITE and other publications on a number of occasions, I network at every opportunity I get and I attend conferences as often as possible. I am so passionate about libraries, and their role within the community.

I just want the chance to show what I can do. So to all employers out there, please consider making more effort to employ people with disabilities. When taking into consideration a suitable building, workload, time commitments, flexibility, and public transport, my job options are limited. I need that one perfect job more than you realise.

Suzie Day  
@MissSuzieDay

Suzie Day is in her final semester of university and currently works part-time at the Mental Health Law Centre Library doing a whole lot of cataloguing. She is passionate about providing information services to marginalised communities, and about libraries being community spaces. She can be found on Twitter as @MissSuzieDay and blogs at [CatalogueThis.com](http://CatalogueThis.com). She also looks fantastic in bow ties.