Access and inclusion to public libraries for children with special needs and their families.

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Every child deserves to find themselves lost in a book

Hannah’s story

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In 2012 approximately 13% of children under 14 in Australia had a disability.  
(ABS, 2013)

1 in 5 students in Australia have a disability or learning difficulty.  
(The Australian Newspaper, 12/3/16)
The most common disability for children in Australia is largely invisible.

What is it?
Why should libraries be accessible for a minority group?

It is the LAW and accessibility for all is a core principle of the public library.
'The DDA makes it against the law to discriminate against someone if they have a disability in the following areas of life: … *Access to premises* used by the public. For example, using libraries…'

People with disabilities have the same right as others to participate in and enjoy the arts, sports, games, films and other fun activities. So, theatres, museums, playgrounds and libraries should be accessible by everyone, including children with disabilities.

Australian Library and Information Association

Each member of the Australian community has an equal right to public library and information services regardless of age, race, gender, religion, nationality, language, disability, geographic location, social status, economic status and educational attainment.

Statement on public library services (2009)
2014 Research Trip to United States and Canada

• Visited 22 public libraries (including two cultural institutions) that deliver programs for children with special needs in:
  – San Francisco
  – Vancouver
  – Toronto
  – New York
  – the greater Chicago area

• 18 participants took part in a one-to-one interview and an online survey.

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Benefits

83% Greatest benefit for the family: Being connected to their community and the social interaction

77% Greatest benefit for the library – it becomes more inclusive for all.

83% Greatest benefit for the community – acceptance of diversity in their community.

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What do you see as the main barriers to public library access for children with special needs and their families?

- 55% Library staff attitudes and sensitivities
- 50% Programs do not cater for children with special needs
- 44% Library’s physical environment (noise, universal design)

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What do you think prevents libraries from addressing barriers to access?

77% Lack of knowledge on how to address the barriers.

66% Staffing resources.

61% Financial resources.
What has your library done to improve access for children with special needs and their families?

- 94% Implemented programs for children with special needs.
- 94% Developed partnerships with external organisations.
- 88% Staff training.

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What one thing do you think would have the greatest impact on increasing access if it could be implemented?

- 38% Disability awareness training for all staff
- 27% Outreach programs
- 11% Priority for management

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Six key elements

Research found there were six common elements that libraries focussed on when addressing issues of accessibility. The elements were used to develop:

an inclusive library model.

The foundation of this model is a supportive management.
Management

• A strongly supportive management is the foundation of the model.

• Develop a Disability Access and Inclusion Plan

Inclusion for All
Access and Inclusion Plan 2014–2017

Disability Access & Inclusion Plan

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Training

• Disability awareness training for all staff.

• Universal design for learning.

• Multiple intelligences.

• Universal design.
Partnerships

• Develop relationships with external individuals or organisations that work with children with special needs and their families.
Programs

• It is not what you deliver but **how** you deliver it. (universal design for learning and multiple intelligences)
Programs

• Make as many programs as possible inclusive.

• Consider targeted library programs as a bridge to inclusive programs.
Collections

• Develop a children’s collection that is inclusive of children with disabilities.
• Develop audio and book kit collections of popular titles for all ages.
• Develop HiLo (high interest, low difficulty) collections without the label easy reads.

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Collections

• Provide books with tactile pictures and books with sign language.
• Develop parenting collections on the topic of children with disabilities and their families.
Physical Environment
(space and equipment)

• Undertake a library access audit, benchmarking against:
  • the principles of universal design for access in libraries
  • legislated building access codes.

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Marketing

- Marketing is how public libraries put out the ‘welcome mat’ for children with special needs and their families.

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• Find out who your audience are and reach out.

• Promote that you are an inclusive library.
Preliminary findings from research with public libraries Australia and New Zealand

- <50% Aware of laws
- 20% Barrier of library staff attitudes and sensitivities
- 46% Developed partnerships to promote and develop access [compared to 94%]
- Lack of marketing and understanding of need for it.

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Take away question

What can your library do for Hannah and her family?
Find out more

• ALIA 2016 conference paper.

• Scholarship Report see Catherine Helen Spence Scholarship website

• Blog: Library Lions Roar
  http://librarylionsroar.weebly.com

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