

Free and equal access to all users

Alex Cutts, State Library of Queensland

As Queensland's major reference and research library, the State Library of Queensland has a very broad brief in providing a free library and information service to the Queensland public. In this context the library provides assistance to people with disabilities to access the library's print collection and a broad range of electronic information resources through the use of adaptive technology.

Some of the facilities available at the library specifically to assist users with visual, hearing and or physical impairments, deaf and physically handicapped users include:

- *Zoomtext Plus*, a screen magnification program used on internet workstations.
- *Jaws*, a software program for the visually disabled which provides a screen reader with speech capability.
- *Smartview*, an enlarger of printed text and images which uses a large Colour TV monitor to display the enlargements.
- *Maggy lamps*, table-top magnifiers with a light built in.
- *Kurzweil Personal Reader*, an optical scanner.
- *PC-Trac*, a large track ball which substitutes for a computer mouse.
- Ultra compact keyboard, designed for people with limited hand or arm movement.
- *Intellikeys*, a large sized keyboard for people with low vision or limited control of hand movements.
- Lap wedges, designed to support keyboards or books on a persons lap.
- TTY, a telephone typewriter service for people with hearing or speech impairment.

Basic staff assistance is provided in setting up the equipment and, where necessary, demonstrating its use. Because of the specialist nature of the equipment, the library only has limited quantities of some of these fa-

cilities and advance bookings are necessary for some of the equipment.

The library attempts to anticipate and cater for the broad needs of users with physical disabilities by providing a wide range of adaptive technology. There is a strong element of 'just-in-case' in making decisions about acquiring appropriate adaptive technology. The needs assessment, upon which our services to the disabled program is based, is a pragmatic and somewhat ad hoc process. Decisions concerning the acquisition of appropriate adaptive technology are based upon: local demand revealed through client feedback; the conventional wisdom relating to the area; advice from other state libraries, relevant interest groups, and associations, as well as state and commonwealth government departments and agencies involved in assisting people with disabilities. We have recently published a brochure to promote our services for distribution through various organisations including the Independent Living Centre; Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service; Community Resource Unit; Queensland Spastic Welfare league — Technology Unit; Spinal Outreach Team — Princess Alexandra Hospital; Adaptive Technology Services — Vision Impairment Service; Occupational Therapy Department — University of Queensland; and the QUT Vision Rehab Centre.

While the library makes every attempt to meet the needs of all users, there are challenges involved. The non-routine and intermittent demand for the service and the wide range of facilities available makes the maintenance of staff competencies in the use of the full range of equipment and software difficult. There are also budgetary implications when purchasing specialist software and equipment which is not used to its full potential.

The State Library of Queensland will continue to monitor and adjust its range of services, ensuring that the library maintains access for those clients with special needs. ■



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