MORE THAN JUST EQUIPMENT

Internet access and participation for people with a disability in Victorian public libraries

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The State Library of Victoria, through Vicnet, has identified the "digital divide" as an important issue to be addressed in the provision of library services to people with disabilities. Various libraries have introduced a range of adaptive technologies aimed at enhancing access to library services for people with disabilities. However, due to the ad hoc nature of the provision and implementation of these services, it has been difficult to identify the extent to which these services have been successful. The purpose of this project was to gain a greater understanding of the library and information needs of people with disabilities, particularly in relation to the internet.

We explored what the information and library needs of people with disabilities are, with a focus on the internet, and how those needs can be better served by the public library system in Victoria.

Through a program based on three surveys of stakeholders as well as a review of literature, we explored the culture of the existing library system in Victoria and the extent to which it supports access to information technology by people with disabilities.

Two hundred and forty-six people with disabilities, forty carers of people with disabilities and one hundred and fifty library staff throughout Victoria were surveyed in partnership with a range of disability organisations, to identify the key themes and issues relating to access to the internet and other information communication technology in libraries.

In general, the findings across all surveys yielded similar themes, specifically:

- **The internet:** the role and importance of the internet in accessing the library and information in general were not as prominent in the questionnaire responses as expected. There is still fear around the use of the internet, particularly in relation to it being too complex and intimidating.
- **Adaptive equipment:** there are significant problems with providing adaptive and assistive equipment for people with disabilities. The cost and complexity of the equipment are significant barriers, as well as not knowing what to purchase, from where and for whom it will benefit.
- **Training and education for people with disabilities:** training in how to use the library resources, the internet, computers and adaptive equipment is vital for people with disabilities. This training needs to be done by someone disability-aware, and in small groups or one-on-one.
- **Advertising of services for people with disabilities:** while the majority of respondents to all questionnaires seemed to be aware of their public library, it was repeatedly stressed that more information about what services the library offers for people with disabilities is important. The most effective way to do this, according to these responses, is to have links with disability services and other groups in the community.
- **The importance of library customer service:** friendly, helpful, informed, disability-aware, trained and welcoming staff are seen as vital to enhancing access to public libraries for people with disabilities.
- **Allocation of resources:** an unexpected but important theme to emerge was the idea that the cost and time involved in providing services and equipment to people with disabilities could not be justified given the perceived low numbers of people with disabilities in the community.

- **Physical environment:** includes the need for physical access (ramps, toilets etc.) as well as an appropriate environment (e.g. noise levels, lighting).
- **Getting to the library: t**his included, most prominently, parking problems as well as distance from the library and lack of adequate public transport. The benefits of home services were stressed by respondents in all three categories.
- **Country Victoria vs. City:** while library staff in country Victoria reported that their libraries had fewer users with disabilities, they were generally worse off than their Melbourne counterparts in relation to facilities, adaptive equipment training and awareness of what is available to them.

Clearly, access to Information Communication Technology (ICT) services was found to be important. However, there were some surprises, particularly the emphasis on what may be loosely termed "traditional" disability access issues including physical access to the library building, the library environment and disability-aware staff. At the outset of this project we expected that these concerns may still be relevant, but given that the Federal *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* has been in place for well over a decade, we did not expect them to be so prominent.

A dominant theme was that while work needs to be done to improve access to libraries for people with disabilities, there is a willingness in the sector to make such improvements. The impediments to doing so involve a lack of financial resources and lack of information rather than a lack of will.

Finally, there appeared to be support from library staff for a directory for use in making decisions about purchasing options for equipment and services, but it was acknowledged that this would be of limited use to a person with a disability. Alternatives to a directory are discussed.

Recommendations

ICT Issues

Recommendation 1: That library staff are supported to deal with specialist adaptive/assistive equipment, and provide improved ICT services for people with a disability. This can be achieved through further needs analysis, identification of best practice, and the sourcing of funding for projects such as:

- Initiatives that can increase library use of expert organisations (such as ComTEC, Vision Australia, Scope) for advice on adaptive/assistive equipment and specialised services. This could be achieved through a resource guide with key contacts as well as workshops, introductory sessions and forums
- Establishment of specialist networking forums for libraries to share information, including details of equipment in other libraries
- Training programs for library staff
- Community engagement and targeted promotion of ICT services with local disability support services and networks
- Development of a *good service delivery guide* drawing attention to accessible customer service options related to ICT such as:

- Provision of private space, if needed, for use of screen reader/voice-activated equipment
- Availability of longer bookings for internet computers for people with a disability
- Provision of training for people with a disability on how to use the internet and adaptive equipment.

Recommendation 2: That funding is made available so that libraries can increase the availability of internet computers and adaptive equipment and software.

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Recommendation 3: That library websites and online resources are accessible to people with vision impairment.

This can be achieved through a benchmarking process, site by site measurement and promotion of best practice. The following are priority areas:

- Website compliance with W3C and the Victorian Government Website Management Framework Standards
- Online catalogues and data bases to be made accessible where possible. This could be achieved through joint procurement that prioritises accessible products.

Non ICT Issues

Recommendation 4: Improve physical accessibility to libraries and within libraries.

This can be achieved through a benchmarking process, site by site measurement and promotion of best practice to ensure adequate means for people with disabilities to physically access the library. This would include:

- **Getting there –** parking, public transport stops and availability of community buses
- **Getting into and working in the library –** universal design.

Recommendation 5: Acting on the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*

That libraries are required to respond to the *Disability Discrimination Act* through a formal process. For example, a disability responsiveness plan could be one response to the Act. Service delivery responses in the spirit of the act could include:

- Availability of staff or volunteers to assist people one-on-one
- Process to ensure specific requirements are met at enrolment
- Making orientation sessions in libraries accessible – including group-specific sessions
- Continued creation and support of new Home Library services
- Training and ongoing support for library staff about overall awareness of disability, different requirements for those with disabilities and potential service considerations This will also be relevant content within training courses for people entering the library workforce.

INTRODUCTION

The State Library of Victoria, through Vicnet, has identified the "digital divide" as an important issue to be addressed in the provision of library services to people with disabilities. The Victorian Government has recently stated its commitment to access to universal services in addressing disadvantage in the community.[1]Many libraries have introduced a range of adaptive technologies aimed at enhancing access to electronic library services for people with disabilities. To date it has been difficult to identify the extent to which these services have been successful due to the ad hoc nature of implementation of such services. This project aimed to gain a greater understanding of the library and information needs of people with disabilities, particularly in relation to the internet.

There are three primary areas where better information is required:

1. the needs of people with disabilities when accessing the internet in public libraries
2. what digital services libraries are currently offering people with disabilities
3. what libraries need to do to better cater to the information needs of people with disabilities.

Despite a range of strategies being implemented to better serve the needs of people with disabilities in accessing public library services in Victoria, this has not been done in a coordinated way. As a result there is little understanding of the overall picture of accessibility to these services and facilities for people with disabilities.

This lack of clarity has been compounded by the rapid rise in the use of the internet in accessing Victoria's public library system over the previous decade. There is a concern that this has led to an increase in the "digital divide" which may be affecting people with disabilities disproportionately.

The focus of this project was to find out what the information and library needs of people with disabilities are, particularly in relation to the internet, and how these needs can be better served by the public library system in Victoria.

Through a program based on three surveys of stakeholders and a review of literature, we explored the culture of the existing library system in Victoria and the extent to which it supports access to information technology by people with disabilities.

[1] Victorian Government, 'A fairer Victoria: Building on our commitment, May 2007.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Victorian Libraries Policy 1998[2] had as its aim to define and reinvent the library of the twenty-first century with six strategies: developing an integrated library infrastructure, providing coordinated cooperative programs, building partnerships, promoting effective library management, creating a skilled workforce and maintaining traditional strengths in old and new ways. The policy seeks to "incorporate changing technology to deliver traditional library services in new and more effective ways". What is relevant to this study is that the policy recognises the rapid technological challenges libraries face and states that Victorian libraries "ensure the viability of fundamental library principles such as equality of access to information". The policy has a strategy for disability services to use grant funding to encourage new developments in adaptive technologies and to foster the development of information about disability, including marketing initiatives. It also aims to raise awareness of disability services within Victorian public libraries by integrating several projects into a statewide framework based on a coordinated mainstreaming approach to disability services within public libraries.

Following the Victorian Libraries Policy, a series of projects under the Libraries Online banner was developed to enable the Victorian population to participate in the information culture by having information and communication technology (ICT) available to all in a user-friendly and efficient manner. The main thrust of these projects was to increase public internet access through all public libraries.[3] The evaluation of Libraries Online by I & J Management Services in 2001 indicated that there were improvements in infrastructure, access, content and technical know-how of library staff, enabling greater access to the internet for people in the community. Since 2001 there have been many changes in ICT. In particular, there has been a greater uptake of internet access in the home, brought about by the greater affordability of computer hardware and competition in the Internet Service Provider (ISP) market. There are now 61% of Victorian households with internet access, according to the latest census[4]. This has led to reduced prices and the introduction of broadband, giving fast, reliable and superior-quality delivery. A large proportion of the Victorian population also has access to the internet at their workplace.

Even though many more people now have ready access to the internet than in 2001, there is a significant role for public libraries to provide for those who do not have such ready access, and this group may include people with disabilities.

This literature review examines research on access to public libraries, with a focus on ICT services, for people with disabilities. There are three main components of the literature: the digital divide (that is, issues related to ICT); physical access to libraries (public, private and university); and general access to public services. While a lot of research has been done in all of these areas separately, very little specifically relates to access to public libraries, and their ICT services, for people with disabilities. However, the research from these three areas can be looked at in conjunction with each other to generate an understanding of the key issues.

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[2] Library Board of Victoria, *Victorian Libraries Policy 1998: Library 21, Defining and reinventing the library of the 21st century*, 1998.

[3] I & J Management Services, 'Vicnet – Libraries Online Evaluation', March 2001. (unpublished).

[4] Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007, *2006 Census of population and housing*, cat. No. 2068.0, ABS, Canberra.

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One of the few research projects that specifically relates to access to *public* libraries for people with disabilities was found locally. The work of Dr Kirsty Williamson and her colleagues at Infotech, a joint venture by Monash and Charles Sturt Universities in 2000, focused on this subject. A number of conclusions were drawn about how access to public libraries could be increased for people with disabilities. Several papers were published as a result of the research, and according to the authors, "partly as a result of the project, adaptive equipment and software is being installed in all the public libraries of Victoria".[5]

Some seven years on, significant societal, political, economic and technological changes have occurred. Advances in technology have occurred particularly quickly. There are new adaptive technologies available and new general technologies have enormous potential to increase access to information for people with a range of disabilities. One important example is Podcasting, a technology gaining widespread use which allows radio programs to be downloaded to iPods and other hand-held devices to be listened to at the user's leisure. This technology potentially has enormous benefits for the blind and sight-impaired community in particular who have traditionally relied heavily on the radio as a source of information. With Podcasting, access can be obtained according to individual schedules and not those of the broadcaster – an important advancement both practically and philosophically in relation to autonomy.

On a federal policy level, the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA), which enshrines the equal provision of services to people with a disability in law, has been in place for some 15 years. There are also various policy pushes at both State and Federal levels to address Australia's aging population which, due to the higher number of people with sight, hearing and mobility-related disabilities among older people, is especially relevant here.

Moreover, the internet and ICT in general are now firmly entrenched as a primary source of information and as an access point to a range of essential public and private services for everyone. This potentially has significant access benefits for some people with disabilities but it is clear in the literature that it is not the silver bullet some technology enthusiasts in the 1990s perhaps promised it would be.

A 2005 research report for the State Library of Victoria recommended that "there should be greater consultation with the community…"[6] about factors that influence library use. Through this project, we hope to gain a better understanding of what ICT services are available in public libraries in Victoria to people with disabilities, and how these services can be made more accessible.

There were several key themes identified in the local and international literature that are part of the overall issue of public library access for people with disabilities, especially with an ICT focus. This literature review will be structured around these themes:

- The Digital Divide
- Library services
- Resource and customer service issues

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[5] K Williamson, S Wright, D Schauder, L Jenkins, 'Flexible Work Stations in Community Settings for People with Disabilities', *Paper presented to Communication Research Forum*, 2000, www.dcita.gov.au/crf/papers2000/williamson.doc

[6] 'Bridging the gaps"', Report Three of *Libraries/Building/Communities: The Vital Contribution of Victoria's Public Libraries – A Research Report for the Library Board of Victoria and the Victorian Public Library Network*, State Library of Victoria, 2005, p. 44.

- Design for people with disabilities
- Access issues: physical and non-physical

The Digital Divide

First used in the mid 1990s in the United States, "the term "digital divide" distinguishes between those who have access to and can effectively use new information technologies and those who do not".[7] Barriers to accessing technology can be physical (that is, not having access to a computer or the internet) or non-physical (that is, not having the knowledge, training or confidence to use technology). The literature suggests that the gap between those who use technology and those who do not is growing and that this both denotes *and* compounds disadvantage as ICT becomes an increasingly entrenched aspect of daily life. As numerous commentators suggest, "the more essential services and information move online, the greater are the chances of an increase in information poverty".[8]

One of the primary barriers identified to the use of technology in general and the internet specifically, is cost. Many people simply cannot afford computers, anti-virus and other software and internet fees and charges. This is particularly the case for people with disabilities, many of whom are on low incomes or on a pension. Public libraries have played an important role in providing access to ICT for the whole community. In fact, according to a 2005 State Library Board of Victoria report, "public library staff place special importance on providing access to library services to people in the community who are least able to afford private alternatives".[9] Access to public libraries for people with disabilities is especially important when the vital role of libraries in mitigating the effects of the digital divide is understood. Although 61% of Victorian households had internet access at the 2006 Census[10], conversely 39% of Victorian households did not have internet access, a sizeable proportion of the population who may wish to access the internet by other means.

Library Services

There is a lot of research both locally and internationally about what services should be provided in public settings for people with disabilities. In relation to libraries in Victoria, local research projects suggest that while services for people with disabilities have been improved, there is still significant variation among municipalities.[11]

One of the most persistent themes in relation to the provision of services for people with disabilities in library settings is the complexity of adaptive technologies. Screen-reading software, for example, can be very difficult to use for both the user and librarian. Moreover, there are numerous types of adaptive technologies available on the market but there is little information about how to discern between them.

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[7] C McClure, J Ryan, JC Bertot, 'Public library internet services and the digital divide: the role and impacts from selected external funding sources'. *Information Use Management and Policy Institute*, School of Information Studies, Florida State University, January 2002, p.10.

[8] K Williamson, D Schauder, L Stockfield, S Wright, A Bow, 'The role of the internet for people with disabilities: issues of access and equity for public libraries'. *Australian Library Journal*, vol. 50, issue 2, 2000, p. 4.

[9] 'Bridging the gaps', op. cit., p. 5.

[10] Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007, *2006 Census of population and housing*, cat. No. 2068.0, ABS, Canberra.

11 ibid., p. 6.

In addition to these issues, some software is suitable for people with some disabilities and not for others. The same goes for physical adaptations such as touch screens, Braille keyboards, headphones and so on. This makes choosing what to buy difficult for libraries, especially in the context of tight resources. A commonly cited problem in the literature was the issue of all library users using workstations and other equipment designated for use by people with disabilities. In the context of "disability design" (as opposed to the universal design detailed below in Design for People with Disabilities), this is a significant problem, as the designated "disability" computer workstation either has to remain vacant until a person with a disability wants to use it, or is open for use by anyone. This means that it is highly possible that it will be in use when someone with a disability needs it.

Another important component of library services is digital services – both on-site and remote. In relation to on-site access the literature repeatedly stresses the need for fast and reliable ICT support to be available in the library, and for the same support to be available specifically in the use of adaptive equipment. It is often suggested in the literature that *all* staff should be trained in the use of adaptive equipment and not just a "disability support" person because such a person may not be available all the time and because catering to the needs of people with disabilities should be the responsibility of everyone.

Remote access, primarily through accessing the library catalogue off-site, was also cited as being crucial to widening access to public libraries for people with disabilities. In fact, remote access to public services, particularly via the internet, was heralded in the 1990s as the great leveller for people with disabilities as it potentially allowed those with physical disabilities to access services without having to actually get to them. For example, in relation to blind and visually impaired people:

> *"… not only does access to the internet increase access to information … it also allows them to participate in a new information and communication format which has the potential to become a primary source for all people. In this way, people who are blind or vision impaired will not see themselves differently from the rest of the population."*[12]

The same could also be said of access for people with a range of physical disabilities and rarer conditions[13], especially where independent travel is difficult or impossible.

However, it is important to note that several commentators have expressed caution about this potentially utopian view of technology. First, this view ignores the cost of technology, computers, software and adaptive equipment, which is especially problematic for people with disabilities, many of whom are on low incomes. Second, it ignores the widespread "lack of fit between technology and the needs of people with disabilities…"[14] There are two components to this: the physical component – that is, the suitability of the keyboard, desk, screen and so on. The other is the non-physical component including software and websites. A common complaint is that adaptive software is often incompatible with a number of computer operating systems thereby rendering many sites inaccessible.

Similarly, poor web design is frequently cited as a major barrier to remote access for people with disabilities. Guidelines for universal web design have been available for a number of years

12 Williamson et al., 'The role of the internet for people with disabilities: issues of access and equity for public libraries', op. cit., p. 10.
13 J Morley, 'Mainstreaming Disability Service in Victorian Public Libraries – Report, Recommendations and Key Performance Indicators', RVIB Central Consultancy Services, August 2000, p. 29.
14 Williamson et al., 'The role of the internet for people with disabilities', op. cit.

(indeed, Vicnet itself offers such guidelines[15]) but the modus operandi of web design still seems to be that they are designed with a "general user" in mind and then, at best, are slightly modified for people with disabilities. This puts the financial onus of access on the person with the disability in that it relies on them having appropriate software and equipment to adapt the site which, as has been stated above, does not always work in any case. Numerous commentators also point out that this design fault is compounded by the fact that in many public and private settings websites are updated and maintained in an ad hoc way by a number of different staff members, thus potentially compromising the overall design and reducing the likelihood of "universal design".

An interesting and related point about remote access is that the literature suggests that even where remote access is easy and cheap or free for the user, it can be nonetheless problematic. Concern is repeatedly expressed in the literature about the possible isolation that could result from an increasing reliance on remote access to public services. While not talking specifically about remote access, research by Quantum Market Research found that there is "a growing distinction in the public's mind between those services which are seen to have retained their old-fashioned human touch (good) and those that have discarded these values…"[16]. When considered in light of the fact that public libraries are an important social space that can "foster a sense of community belonging"[17] the "remote solution" to access is not necessarily the best for everyone. The important role that the library plays as a social space for some people with disabilities should not be forgotten.

However, this does not mean that remote access to libraries is not important or potentially beneficial to a range of people with disabilities. For some people, physically visiting a library to use its services is very difficult, time-consuming and involves relying on carers and others, thereby diminishing autonomy and choice. Irvall and Nielson from IFLA suggest that special attention must be paid to making library websites and catalogues fully accessible for people with disabilities.[18] As Jenny Craven points out in a study about disability access in university libraries, if the quality of remote access is poor this will also affect physical access. If, for example, you can reliably tell whether a book or other resource is available, you are more likely to physically go and get it. However, if the information is unreliable and you waste your time and effort, you will be less likely to return.[19] Similarly, if the library website is difficult or impossible to use and/or its disability services are not clearly advertised, people who have difficulty physically accessing the library site are unlikely to make the effort to visit.

In summary, the literature suggests that high-quality remote and on-site ICT access is very important for all library users and potentially has special benefits for people with disabilities. However, it also clear that this must be seen as *one part* of the provision of services to people with disabilities and not as the solution to access problems. It is also important that where ICT services are provided to increase access, they be high quality and, wherever possible, designed with all users in mind.

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15 For advice on making the internet more accessible, see http://www.vicnet.net.au/disability.access.htm.

16 'Bridging the gaps', op. cit., p. 5.

17 'Showcasing the Best', Report Four of *Libraries/Building/Communities, The Vital Contribution of Victoria's Public Libraries – A Research Report for the Library Board of Victoria and the Victorian Public Library Network*, State Library of Victoria, 2005, p. 50.

18 B Irvall & G S Nielson, 'Access to libraries for persons with disabilities – Checklist', International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions IFLA Professional Reports, no. 89, 2005, p. 15.

19 J Craven, 'Electronic access for all: awareness in creating accessible web sites for the university library', *Disability and Information Systems in Higher Education*, January 2002.

Resource and Customer Service Issues

Like most services, public libraries operate within significant resource constraints. Some of these are financial constraints and some are not. The primary non-financial resource cited in the literature as being important to access for people with disabilities is the quality of library customer service.

The State Library's recent research stresses the importance of caring and well-trained staff to all marginalised library users, including people with disabilities.[20] While it found generally high levels of satisfaction with public library staff in Victoria, it also found that "several people said they had observed a reluctance of library staff to engage with 'high maintenance' groups…"[21] If by "high maintenance" one means people with a range of needs then some people with disabilities would potentially fall into this category. This may apply particularly to those library users with some forms of mental illness who may be more likely to present with challenging behaviours.

One staff solution employed by a number of libraries all over the world seems to be to have a designated "disability librarian" who handles anything disability related. As has been stated elsewhere, this model is not a popular one in the literature. In practical terms, the designated disability person may not be available when needed and in philosophical terms, it is thought that it removes the responsibility of all staff to be disability-aware and available for all library users. Therefore, a model whereby *all* staff are trained in disability-awareness and adaptive technologies was seen as the best model.

The literature suggests that there are various components to training staff to respond effectively and respectfully to people with disabilities. The first is the need for staff to know about the full range of disabilities and associated needs. The term "disabled" is an umbrella term which covers disabilities ranging from, for example, sight impairment to intellectual disability to mental illness. Moreover, the levels of disability within each "category" vary enormously as do the needs of people with disabilities. Knowing and understanding this and seeing the individual person and their needs (as opposed to preconceived ideas about the disability) is an important part of disability awareness required of staff. Irvall and Nielson and others also suggest that it is important that all library staff be competent in the use of ICT and adaptive equipment and that they know how to borrow materials from other libraries as, for example in the Australian context, the Vision Australia library.[22]

The literature is also very clear that training staff to cater to the needs of people with a range of disabilities costs money. This is arguably less problematic in an Australian context as disability-awareness training is available free or cheaply through a range of organisations including local councils. However, this training does not cover the use of specific equipment and also takes staff and management time.

As a State Library report recently suggested, Victorian public libraries are increasingly being asked to do more, for more people, for less money.[23] Meeting the needs of disadvantaged communities, including people with disabilities, takes time and money. In this context, all public services, including libraries, are faced with tough decisions about where to allocate their resources. Catering to the needs of people with disabilities is one of many aims of public libraries. In addition, knowledge of *how* to cater to those needs is patchy and the literature suggests that while

20 'Bridging the gaps', op. cit., p. 21.
21 ibid., p. 32.
22 Irvall & Nielson, op. cit., p. 9.
23 'Bridging the gaps', op. cit. p. 7.

many libraries may be willing to, for example, purchase adaptive and other equipment, they do not always know what to buy and/or how to use it. Investing thousands of dollars in equipment and software that may become redundant or require constant updating (as most ICT equipment does) is frightening at the best of times, let alone when budgets are so tight.

A number of possible solutions are suggested in the literature to these resource problems. The first solution is more money. This may come from increased lobbying of government or, as McClure and colleagues suggest, from diversifying funding sources – that is, supplementing government funding with grants and private money.[24] Of course, time also needs to be available to obtain such money.

Second, it is often pointed out that some big changes that will have significant benefits to people with disabilities are relatively easy and cheap to implement. As Irvall and Nielson advise,

> *"To make a library accessible you need economic resources. Many improvements, however, can be implemented with very small amounts of money – or possibly without any costs. The solution can often be found through a change of staff attitude and thinking in new ways."*[25]

An example of this may be the concept of universal design cited previously. It is thought that designing libraries and their equipment with universal design principles in mind may reduce the need to purchase different equipment for every user of the library and therefore save money. If, as one simple example, all desks purchased were adjustable (for people in wheelchairs and those using prams) this would obviate the need to buy standard desks *and* adjustable desks for people with disabilities as they can just as easily be used by people with and without mobility needs. The same could be said for website design and ICT equipment. Of course, these issues need to be teased out more thoroughly with input from design specialists, but the model certainly merits further investigation.

Another commonly cited strategy centres around communication and cooperation between services. According to the literature, many adjustments to staff training, library layout, web sites and other designs can be made in all libraries relatively easily. However, in some cases and for some disabilities, highly specialised equipment is needed that is expensive and will only cater to the needs of a few people. In this case, the suggestion repeatedly made in the literature is that all library staff across the system be aware of where this equipment is available and be able to direct library users to it. In other words, where specialised equipment cannot be obtained, it should be shared.

In summary, while the literature suggests that resources for public libraries are tight and the task of catering to a range of needs can be daunting, it is also thought that many things can be achieved with some will and some lateral thinking. It is also suggested that the task of reminding governments and other funders of the importance of (and legal requirement in Australia to) provide equal access to public services cannot be underestimated. In an age marked by the digital divide and the vital role that public libraries play in mitigating the effects of it, as well as the social and information role that libraries play, increasing access to public libraries for people with disabilities is crucial.

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24 McClure, op. cit., p. i.
25 Irvall & Nielson, op. cit. p. 3.

Design for People with Disabilities

One of the most important and interesting themes to emerge in the literature is the concept of design for people with disabilities. At first glance, it seems fairly straightforward – that is, identifying the needs of people with disabilities and then adapting buildings and technology to cater to those needs. However, the issue is actually much more complex than that and there is a divide in the literature between the concept of "disability design" and "universal design".

Disability design is a design model that assumes "general" users without a disability on the one hand, and users with disabilities on the other. This model assumes that there is a "normal" body from which all others deviate. Based on this understanding, certain parts of the service or equipment are then adapted specifically for use by people with disabilities from the "normal equipment".

Conversely, universal design or "design for all" is exactly as it sounds – a design principle underpinned by the idea that everyone should be able to use the thing being designed. In this understanding, there is not a "normal" or "standard" body that design is based on. It does not start with a "standard" design to be adapted to a "disability model". Rather, the object is designed for everyone, including people with a range of disabilities and other needs. In a library context this would mean, for example, that you do not have a designated work-station and computer with adaptive equipment and technologies for people with disabilities, but that all computers and work-stations are designed with access for everyone in mind.

The universal design model is underpinned by what Williamson and colleagues call "social theory" or a "social political" model of ability. They cite Johnson and Moxon who suggest that "according to this [social model] … what matters is not so much a person's inability to walk as the fact that most buildings and transport systems are inaccessible to people with mobility impairments."[26] In other words, in this model, the very concept of disability is considered to be a normative one and ideas of what is normal and what is not actually *create* the notion of disability and of "special needs" in the first place. Therefore, "disability" is understood as a social construction that occurs when a person interacts with a man-made environment. If that environment were made differently and for everyone, the "disability" would cease to exist or would at least change.[27]

The concept of universal design, especially for public services such as libraries, is becoming increasingly popular. There are several web-based initiatives dedicated to it including, most notably, the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)[28] and its Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) and the universal design website www.design.nscu.edu/cud. The push is both philosophical, in that it involves a fundamental re-think of ability and disability as being socially constructed, and practical in that it is thought that advances in technology should enable universal design more easily. As Williamson and colleagues point out "with the rapid development in technology, it is hoped that equipment in the future will cater for a broader proportion of the population and that fewer special adjustments will be necessary..."[29]. In a related report, they also point out that high

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26 K Williamson, D Schauder, A Bow, 'Information seeking by blind and sight-impaired citizens: an ecological study'. *Information Research*, vol. 5, no. 4, July 2000, p. 243.

27 C Newell, 'Beyond the Market', *A submission to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Inquiry into* 'Access to Electronic Commerce and New Technology Services by Older Australians and People with a Disability', October 1999. http://www.hreoc.gov.au/disability_rights/inquiries/ecom_subs/Newell.htm

28 See http:www.w3c.org

29 K Williamson et al., 'Assisting people with disabilities to use the internet: the role of the public library', *Australasian Public Libraries and Information Services*, vol. 14, no.1, March 2001.

costs of adaptive equipment should be reduced as mainstream equipment is made more universal.[30]

In practical terms, universal design means designing every aspect of your service with a range of users in mind. Proponents of this model are quick to point out that this does not mean focusing on people with disabilities and that universal design benefits everyone and may be cheaper. Moreover, in some cases, design elements intended for one group of users might have unintended but nonetheless beneficial consequences for a range of users. As Morely suggests in her 2000 report, "… many strategies implemented to improve services for people with disabilities can enhance services for other library users. For example improved access for users with physical disabilities can also benefit people with mobility difficulties such as the elderly or parents with prams."[31]

Access Issues: Physical and Non-physical

Much of the literature we reviewed focused on access to public services in general for people with a range of disabilities. These issues included standard considerations about physical access such as:

- appropriate car-parking and access to public transport
- building design (including wheelchair ramps, layout, disabled toilets etc.)
- clear signage.

In short, in relation to physical access, and as stated by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, "people with disabilities should be able to arrive at the site, approach the library building and enter the building easily and safely."[32] For a comprehensive list of physical requirements, see Jill Morley's RVIB report.[33]

In addition to physical impediments to access for people with disabilities which are relatively well-known, the literature also revealed a number of non-physical access issues which are perhaps less obvious. In particular, the literature repeatedly mentioned psychological barriers to access. These might include barriers which apply to a lot of people such as finding computers and technology intimidating or, indeed, finding the library itself intimating. This intimidation is compounded for people with disabilities who may require extra help due to their disability. As a result, as Jill Morley and others suggest, "library orientation and user education programs are especially important for people with disabilities"[34] as are a welcoming environment and friendly staff.[35]

A related non-physical access issue that recurred in the literature was the issue of advertising library services for people with disabilities. At its most basic level, if people with disabilities don't know if their needs will be met at the library, they are less likely to go there. The 2005 State Library project *Libraries/Building/Communities* found that awareness in the community about Victorian public libraries and their services is generally high.[36] However, it also found that the

30 Williamson et al., 'Information seeking by blind and sight impaired citizens: an ecological study', op. cit., p. 25.
31 Morley, op. cit., p. 3.
32 Irvall & Nielson, op.cit., p. 4.
33 Morley, op. cit.
34 ibid., p. 28.
35 Irvall & Nielson, op. cit.
36 'Bridging the gaps', op. cit. p.19.

"lack of awareness of the full range of library services is a key barrier to access for some sections of the population."[37]

The general consensus in the literature seems to be that marketing via disability groups is the key to improving access to libraries for people with disabilities. In this sense, knowing what disability services are available in the local community and developing relationships with those services are vital to improving access. Brigitta Irvall and Guda Nielson from IFLA suggest that this can be achieved by formal invitations to disability groups, brainstorming sessions, planned library activities, regular meetings and/or discussion groups.[38] The common theme is the idea that simply installing adaptive equipment and technology will not be enough – the people who will most benefit from such improvements need to know about them.

34. 'Bridging the gaps, op.cit. p. 33.

38 Irvall & Nielson, op. cit., p. 16.

SURVEYS

To gain a greater understanding of the library and information needs of people with disabilities, particularly in relation to the internet, three primary stakeholders were targeted to gather information on the provision of library services to people with disabilities. The three primary areas where better information is needed are:

- the needs of people with disabilities when accessing the internet in public libraries
- what digital services libraries are currently offering people with disabilities
- what libraries need to do to better cater to the information needs of people with disabilities.

Introduction

Three groups of people were surveyed for this research project: people with disabilities, carers of people with disabilities, and the staff of public libraries. All three questionnaires involved a combination of yes/no and multiple choice (that is, quantitative) questions as well as open-ended (that is, qualitative) questions where respondents were invited to provide comments. The responses to these questions revealed similar themes but often with different emphases. Therefore it is worth looking at them separately before the findings are brought together in the next section, *Research Findings and Recommendations*.

Method

For the first stage of the Winthrop Trust Research Project (see Figure 1 on page 19) to ascertain the barriers that exist for people with disabilities to access the internet in public libraries in Victoria, three surveys were conducted. The surveys were designed to gather information on services that are available for people with disabilities in public libraries in Victoria and what services should be available. The three questionnaires are reproduced in full in Attachment 2.

Survey of people with disabilities:

The first survey of 246 people with disabilities included questions on their knowledge and use of their local public library, the specialised services and equipment that they require and that are available, their knowledge and use of the internet and the opportunity for them to provide anecdotes of difficulties they have had when using a public library because of their disability and how it could be made easier for them to use both public libraries and the internet. The questionnaire also asked for their interest in being part of future discussions about the library and internet access.

Different versions of the questionnaire:

Easy English version:

This version was for people with an intellectual, learning or reading disability so that they could more easily understand the questions, and in some cases independently complete the survey. It was created by the Communications Resource Centre of Scope, and used pictographic communication symbols. Two hundred hard copies were printed in colour, primarily distributed to the Victorian Advocacy League for Individuals with Disability (VALID) client network groups

at ComTEC and at the VALID conference. They were also sent to community and local government workers by request.

Screen-reader version – This is a special electronic version developed for people with a vision impairment that could be read using screen-reader technology such as Job Access With Speech (JAWS). This version was primarily distributed through Vision Australia's digital club, as well as by request, and could be downloaded from the Infoxchange website.

Braille Version – In response to a request from a disability service provider, a Braille version of the questionnaire was created by Vision Australia. A support worker documented the survey responses on a standard version of the questionnaire for the one respondent who used the Braille version.

Survey of carers:

A survey of 40 people who care for someone or work directly with a person with a disability was conducted. Questions included a brief profile of the person they care for and their relationship, a profile of the carer themselves, their own experience with public libraries and the internet, their knowledge of the local public library in the area where the person they care for lives, what services would be easier for the person they care for to use in the public library, whether the carer encourages the person they care for to use the public library and the internet, and some questions asking for suggestions for making using the public library easier for the person they care for.

Survey of library staff:

The third survey of 160 people who work in public libraries in Victoria was designed to gather their views and to ascertain their perceptions of services that are available to people with disabilities in public libraries in Victoria, with a particular focus on the internet. Questions included their knowledge of members or regular users of the library who have a disability, the purposes for which they use the library, what services their library has to assist them, how the library advertises or reaches out to people with disabilities, what policies and procedures relating specifically to access to the library for people with disabilities are in place, and what training related specifically to people with disabilities is available for staff in their library. The section on information communication technology asked for details of computer and internet access available in the library and the adaptive or assistive equipment provided and any barriers associated with providing this equipment. The questionnaire also asked for other barriers or problems which prevent their library from providing more or better services to people with disabilities. Questions were asked about a directory for public libraries that outlined purchasing options for equipment and services to assist people with disabilities. Finally, the questionnaire allowed for the opportunity to highlight the best things their library does to assist people with a disability to access their library and any difficulties or challenges this presents. The questionnaire also asked for their interest in being part of future discussions about the library and internet access and whether they would like to share any interesting and/or innovative initiatives that their library is undertaking.

Distribution of questionnaires

To ensure a wide distribution of the questionnaires, and as many people with disabilities as possible were given every chance to complete the questionnaire, the ICT Disability Working Group was heavily involved in the distribution. Many other people working in local government and disability service providers also coordinated the distribution and return of the questionnaires.

Library Survey:

The survey was promoted at the February 2007 meeting of the Victorian Public Library and Information Network (VICLINK), the peak body for Victorian public libraries, comprising representatives of every public library in the State. Following the promotion at the VICLINK network meeting, the surveys were distributed by email to all Victoria library services.

People with a Disability and Carers' Surveys:

The questionnaires were distributed through the networks available to the working group that oversaw the project. In most cases the questionnaires were distributed via email, with hard copies printed out and returned via reply paid post. The key distribution channels were:

Disabled Motorists Association (DMA) – The questionnaire was sent out in hard copy with the organisation's February newsletter. DMA also facilitated distribution to Northern Region Post Polio Support Group Inc.

MS Victoria – The questionnaire was emailed to online support groups, and hard copies were also made available to other members of the organisation's groups.

Vision Australia – Vision Australia distributed the questionnaire to approximately 350 library clients in their Digital Club via email.

ComTEC at Yooralla – The questionnaire was offered to people who came into ComTEC for assessments during the February-March period, and sent to all clients of the Aids and Equipment Program from the previous 12 months.

Infoxchange – The survey was promoted on the Disability News website, where the questionnaire could be downloaded.

Local Government and Disability Sector – The questionnaire was distributed through RuralAccess, MetroAccess and DeafAccess Victoria personnel based primarily within local councils and community health services across Victoria. They were requested to distribute the information to their disability networks, advocacy groups, disability services and other contacts within their local government area.

The questionnaires were also distributed to Department of Human Services regional offices, neighbourhood houses, specialist employment service providers, carers support organisations and some ethno-specific disability service providers and networks.

The survey was also promoted in a radio interview with ABC Gippsland on 1 March2007.

Victorian Advocacy League for Individuals with Disability Inc (VALID) "Have a Say" Conference, February 2007 – Members of the working group set up a table in the conference expo and directly invited people to complete the survey.

VALID and Activate Communities – The survey was promoted and distributed through networks which coordinate client self-advocacy networks in the southern, eastern and western regions.

Collection of questionnaires.

Distribution and return of questionnaires were coordinated by Vicnet, in both hard copy and electronic formats. Data entry was undertaken by Vicnet under advice from Equity Research Centre.

Advisory panel - ICT Disability Working Group

The ICT Disability Working Group provided consultation and advice on the survey questionnaires and was actively involved in their distribution. There was consultation several times with the working group, including the development of recommendations. Members of the working group are:

Ty Newton	Activate Communities (Scope)
Andrew Murray	Baw Baw Shire
Bich Thai	City of Darebin
Kathryn Finemore	ComTEC (Yooralla)
Dianne Eggins	DHS Disability Services
Katrina Knox	Darebin Libraries
Rosslyn Pickhaver	Disabled Motorists Association
Nada Stojkovic	Hobsons Bay City Council
Megan Salisbury	Hobsons Bay City Council (Formerly Scope)
Hayden Nichols	Infoxchange
Andrew Lowcock	Infoxchange
Louise Pearson	MS Society of NSW/VIC
Tony Iezzi	Vision Australia
Rebecca Herrington	Vision Australia
Colleen McCombe	State Library of Victoria (Vicnet)
Gabrielle Foulis	State Library of Victoria (Vicnet)

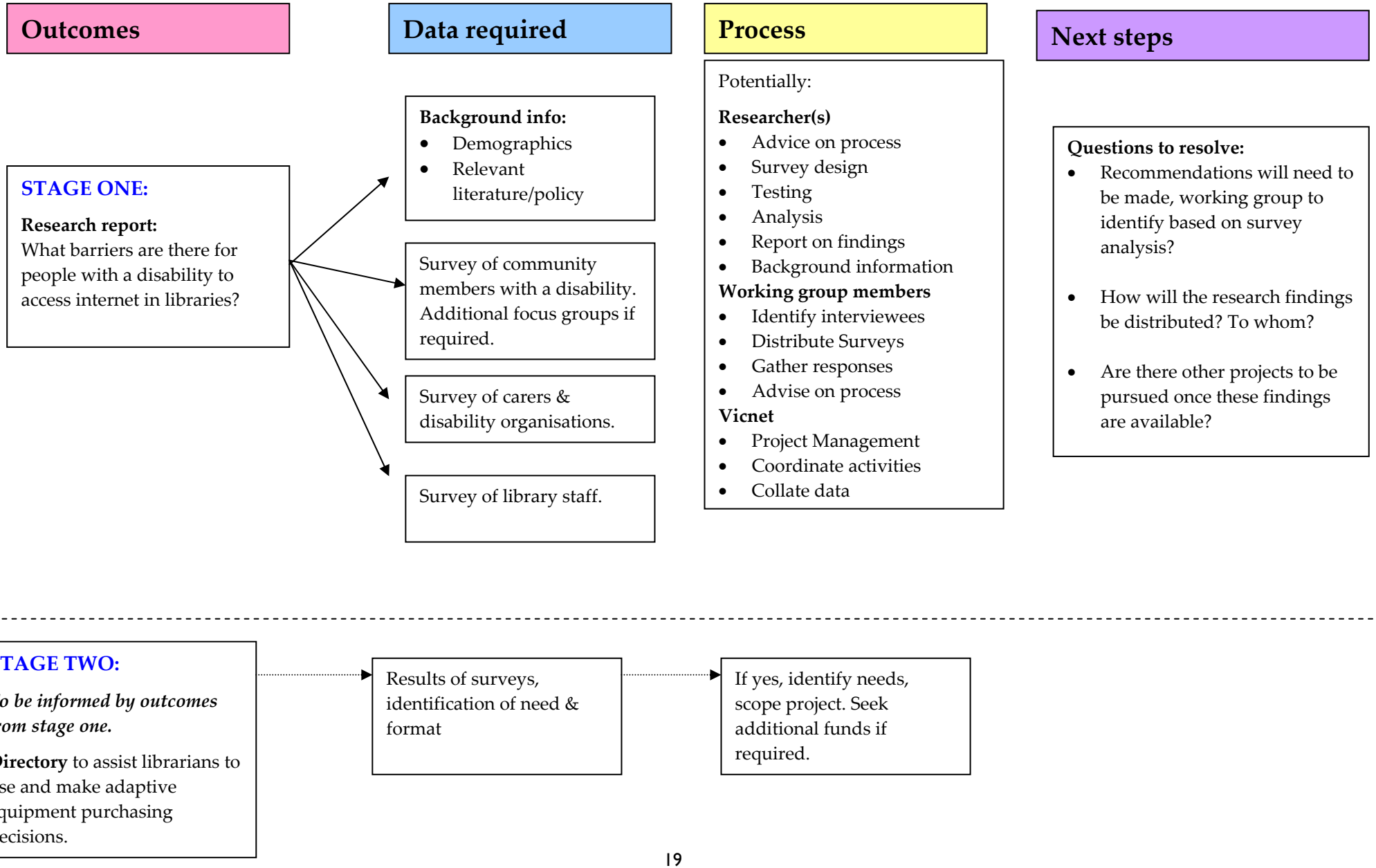
Researchers

Equity Research Centre

The Equity Research Centre was contracted to fulfil the role of "researcher" as identified in the Project Flowchart, shown over the page. The role involved:

- Advice on process – Equity Research Centre provided advice to Vicnet on survey questions, targeting groups and size of sample, distributing the questionnaires, timing of distribution and returning of questionnaires, training in data entry and other matters related to the data collection exercise.
- Survey design, development including consultation with Vicnet and the ICT Disability Working Group, and testing of three questionnaires for:
  - People with disabilities
  - Library staff
  - Carers of people with disabilities.
- Analysis of quantitative and qualitative data – quantitative data was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to identify trends and themes. Qualitative data was analysed and grouped into common themes by Equity Research Centre research officers.
- Report on findings.
- Provision of background information.

Figure 1: Research Project: October 2006 – June 2007



Summary of key themes: Quantitative questions

The majority of the questions in the three questionnaires were yes/no or multiple choice questions. Below is a summary of the key themes in these quantitative responses. See the Supplementary Report for the raw data and questionnaires.

- **Information Communications Technology (ICT):** The majority of respondents with a disability (two-thirds) said they use the internet. Most of them use it at home or work (many with a carer), one quarter said they use it at a public library (the same percentage of carers also said they access the internet at the library) and half said they would like to use the internet more. The main reason cited for not using the internet was not owning a computer (78.3 per cent). Library staff identified use of the internet as one of the main reasons people with disabilities use the library.

  It is important to reiterate that almost a quarter of respondents with disabilities said they went to the library to use the internet. This is a very large number when we consider that in 2000, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, only 6 per cent of the general public used the public library to access the internet. While this research did not examine usage of library facilities by the general public and therefore we do not know how this percentage has changed as private ISP subscriptions have expanded, it is safe to assume that people with disabilities are far more likely to use a public library to access the internet than the general population.

  Library workers' responses suggest that the majority of libraries (96.3 per cent) offer computer and internet access but 43.8 per cent do not offer any adaptive or assistive equipment or software. The most common adaptive options provided were screen-reader technology, mouse options, enlarged keyboards and track balls. There is also a perception among library workers that the adaptive and assistive equipment that is provided for use by people with disabilities is under-utilised. Only 10 per cent said the equipment was used frequently.

  Generally, workers from libraries in the country reported lower percentages of facilities and equipment for people with disabilities than those in the city.

  Most library staff (93.8 per cent) said their library had a website. One fifth said that they thought their website met World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) standards (mainly librarians and coordinators) and two-thirds did not know.

  Over half the respondents with disabilities had carers and of that half, 51.8 per cent said their carer encouraged them to use the library. Less (40.1 per cent) said their carer encouraged them to use the internet and almost 10 per cent of carers themselves said they were scared to use the internet. The most common thing carers and people with disabilities used the internet for was email.

- **Services and Equipment:** it is clear from the responses to the questionnaires that people with disabilities use public libraries for a variety of things. Interestingly, library workers thought that most people with disabilities use their library to borrow books (88 per cent), whereas respondents with disabilities and their carers indicated that, in fact, they use the library most often for other purposes (using the computers, borrowing DVDs, CDs and so on). This discrepancy may be because many people with disabilities are not easily identifiable as having disabilities. On the other hand, the most common user disabilities identified by library workers were physical and intellectual disabilities and it may be that those patrons borrow

books more often than using other services whereas the full spectrum of people with disabilities do not.

In relation to adaptive equipment and assistive technologies, almost one third (31.3 per cent) of respondents with disabilities said they needed such equipment and the same percentage of carers said the person they cared for needed it. Of that third, only 12 per cent said that their local library had such equipment. The most commonly cited equipment needed was screen-reader technology such as JAWS and voice recognition software such as Dragon Speak.

Melbourne metropolitan library staff reported that their libraries had a higher percentage of adaptive equipment than their counterparts in country Victoria, and said they were more frequently used.

A large number (two-thirds) of respondents with a disability said they would use the public library more if it had better and more services for people with disabilities. The most commonly requested improvements were "someone to help if needed" (44.7 per cent), improved physical access (44.3 per cent), toilets (41.9 per cent) and a range of formats for books (40.2 per cent).

- **Promotion of services:** it is clear from the responses that information about what services are available to people with disabilities could be improved. Less than one third (27 per cent) of library workers said that their library advertised its services to people with disabilities and a quarter said their library reached out to people with disabilities.

  Just over one quarter (26.9 per cent) of library workers said their library had partnerships with disability organisations. This increased in country areas where 33 per cent of libraries had partnerships with local disability services.

  Of the carers who reported that they take their charges to the public library, two-thirds were aware of the services on offer. However, they stressed the need for extra carers and/or people at the library to assist.

- **Customer Service issues:** respondents to all three questionnaires emphasised the importance of well-trained, friendly, welcoming, disability-aware staff for people with disabilities. However, there is some discrepancy in perceptions of their availability. For example, almost half the people with disabilities said that they would like personalised assistance from helpful, disability-aware staff or access to a volunteer reader. However, two-thirds of library staff felt that their library was already doing this.

  Slightly less than one-third of respondents with a disability said they were given the chance to talk about their needs at the library, but of that third, almost 80 per cent said that when given this opportunity, their needs were met. Respondents who indicated that they did not speak English well were less likely to be given the chance to discuss their needs.

  People with disabilities and their carers repeatedly said that to use the library and the internet they needed more help from library staff. The responses from library staff indicated that they would like to do this but were hampered by lack of training, time and money. Slightly less than half said they had received disability training of some sort (usually disability-awareness training), and that the training they received was very or moderately useful. There were differences between the responses from Melbourne metro workers and their country counterparts: fewer received training in country libraries than in the city (40 per cent country

Victoria vs 56 per cent city), and the country Victorian respondents regarded the training as far less useful (55 per cent Melbourne metropolitan library workers rated training as very useful compared with 33 per cent of country Victorian library workers). Many said they would like more training, especially about how to communicate with people with disabilities (60 per cent), how to use assistive/adaptive technologies (52.5 per cent) and how to assist people with a mental illness (52.5 per cent). Less than half (42.5 per cent) of the staff knew that local councils offer disability awareness training.

Only one quarter of library staff was aware that their library had disability-specific policies and procedures and almost a quarter (22.5 per cent) of those who were aware, thought that they did not make much difference. Approximately two-thirds agreed that their library takes seriously the needs of people with a disability and the remaining 35 per cent disagreed or were unsure.

The most commonly cited need on a staffing level was the need for volunteer readers and other forms of one-on-one support.

- **Physical environment:** the issue of the physical environment of the library was repeatedly mentioned by respondents in all three surveys. Less than half (44.3 per cent) of the respondents with disabilities knew whether their local library had physical things like ramps, railings, adjustable desks and so on and well over half identified the removal of physical barriers as something that would make it easier for them to access the library (physical 26.8 per cent, toilets 28.5 per cent and access to a private room 27 per cent). Only 68per cent of library workers said that people with disabilities could physically access the library they worked at.

- **Importance of public libraries:** there was a general consensus that the public library is an important public space and an important place for people with disabilities. Many carers and people with disabilities who responded are regular users and members of their public library. Over 70 per cent of respondents with a disability belonged to their local library and 61.8 per cent said they would like to use their public library more.

  While 40 per cent of people with disabilities agreed that the public library was an important part of their life, the internet was an even more important part of life for 55 per cent of respondents with disabilities.

  People who identified themselves as not speaking English well, used the library less and their carer was less likely to encourage them to do so. However, 37 per cent of LOTE respondents with a disability said they used the library *often*, compared to 25 per cent of general respondents with a disability.

  Approximately 80 per cent of library staff said the public library was a "valuable resource" for people with disabilities (the remaining 20 per cent were either unsure or disagreed) but fewer were sure of how to improve services and access for them.

- **Financial constraints:** A common theme relating to internet and computer access was financial constraints. This applies to the cost of private use (that is use at home on a personal computer) and was also repeatedly stressed by library workers as a major barrier to providing services to people with disabilities. In fact, 80 per cent of library workers identified lack of funding as a barrier.

- **Directory:** The vast majority of library workers said they would find a directory of services useful (45.6 per cent) or moderately useful (47.5 per cent). However, over half were not sure or disagreed that such a directory would make a difference to access for people with disabilities. The preferred format was a combination of online and paper-based information.

Summary of key themes: Qualitative questions

A number of questions in the three questionnaires provided space for comments or were open-ended questions. Below is a list of the key themes in these qualitative responses in summary and then in more detail.

Summary of key themes in all three questionnaires

A number of themes were repeated in the qualitative responses in the three questionnaires. These included:

- **The internet:** there is still fear around the use of the internet, particularly in relation to it being too complex and intimidating. Fast, reliable and cheap access to computers and the internet is seen as important to people with disabilities. The role and importance of the internet in accessing the library and information in general was not as prominent in the questionnaire responses as expected. Particular concerns related to the more "traditional" barriers such as the physical environment (see below).

- **Adaptive equipment:** the provision of adaptive and assistive equipment is seen as important to providing access for people with disabilities to libraries, computers and the internet but there are significant problems with providing it. A number of library staff indicated that the cost and complexity of the equipment are significant barriers, as is not knowing what to purchase, from where and whom it will benefit.

- **Training and education for people with disabilities:** training in how to use the library resources, the internet, computers and adaptive equipment is vital for people with disabilities. This training needs to be done by someone disability-aware, and in small groups or one-on-one.

- **The importance of library staff:** friendly, helpful, informed, disability-aware, trained and welcoming staff are seen as vital to enhancing access to public libraries for people with disabilities. People with disabilities and carers identified this as being crucial to encouraging access, and cited many examples of where they felt they did not get the help they needed or deserved. Library staff cited this as one of the best things their library does for people with disabilities. Many library staff indicated a willingness to provide better services but felt that they did not have the time or training to do so.

- **Advertising of services for people with disabilities:** while the majority of respondents to all questionnaires seemed to be aware of their public library, it was repeatedly stressed that more information about what services the library offers for people with disabilities is important. The most effective way to do this, according to these responses, is by having links with disability services and other groups in the community.

- **Physical environment:** the physical environment of libraries is seen as a major barrier to access to people with disabilities. This includes physical access (ramps, toilets etc.) as well as an appropriate environment (e.g. noise levels, lighting). Many carers and people with disabilities identified this as the most important barrier and many library staff suggested it was one of the hardest things to change given that their buildings were small and old.

- **Getting to the library:** difficulty in getting to and from libraries is seen as a major barrier to access for people with disabilities. This included, most prominently, parking problems as well as distance from the library and lack of adequate public transport. The benefits of home services were stressed by all three types of respondents.

- **Allocation of resources:** an unexpected but important theme to emerge from the library staff was the idea that the cost and time involved to provide services and equipment to people with disabilities could not be justified given the perceived low numbers of people with disabilities in the community.

Questionnaire 1: People with Disabilities

Question 24: Do you need adaptive equipment to use computers? If yes, what equipment do you need?

- Synthetic speech program or scanner – something that converts text to speech (for example JAWS)

- Magnifying software (for example Zoom Text)

- Printers

- Enlarged equipment: keyboard, screens, trackball and mouse

Question 32: Please tell us what would make using the internet easier for you

- *More training and education* – many respondents said that computers and the internet were too complex and they did not know how to use them. There were repeated requests for small-group or one-on-one training where people were given time to learn and practise.

- *Provision of adaptive equipment and technologies* – might include physical adaptive equipment (track balls, large screens etc.) and/or software. There was a repeated suggestion that the equipment and technology should be simple to use.

- *More accessible websites* – websites that are compatible with adaptive technologies and easier to use. There were repeated suggestions about the need for large print.

- *Someone to help* – a common theme was the need for someone patient and understanding to help and to show people how to do specific tasks. While there were fewer responses here than the other key themes, they were passionate and strongly worded.

- *Cheap, immediate and fast access* – whether it was at home or at the library, respondents stressed the need for immediate, fast and reliable internet access that was free or at least affordable. There were many requests for more computers at the library to prevent long waiting times and the need to book. Many people also requested longer sessions so they had the chance to practise and learn.

Question 33: Tell us about a time when using a public library was hard because of your disability

- *Lack of services needed by people with disabilities* – quite a few respondents said that using their library was hard because of the limited resources available to them. Examples given included a lack of talking books and a lack of adaptive equipment.

- *Staff issues* – there were numerous examples given where library staff were either unhelpful, poorly trained, rude or too busy to help. Several respondents indicated that there was an assumption by the staff that people with disabilities would bring someone (such as a carer) to help them and that this made it hard to ask for help when alone. Several examples were given where staff served other patrons first and asked people with disabilities to wait.

- *Physical impediments at the library* – the vast majority of respondents gave examples of physical access barriers. There were a lot of examples given of inadequate wheelchair access (lack of railings, ramps too steep, no ramps, not enough room), poor signage, doors that were difficult to open, lack of disability toilets or toilets out of order, shelves too high, lack of places to sit while waiting (thereby exacerbating fatigue) and other things.

- *Hard to get to the library* – the focus was on inadequate parking as well as poor public transport options. A few respondents indicated that their closest library was too far away.

- *Poor environmental atmosphere* – a number of people passionately criticised their local library's environment. This included basic things like lighting being too low and the environment being too noisy for them to concentrate, especially when school groups were present.

Question 34: Please tell us what would make using public libraries easier for you

- *Easier access to computers* – a lot of people said that booking computers was difficult because they had to rely on others to get to the library, that they had to wait too long to use a computer and that the computers did not have the adaptive equipment and software they needed.

- *More services* – a lot of people said it would be easier for them to use the library if there was more on offer for them. This included large print books, talking books, a better range of publications, more CDs and so on.

- *Better staff* – a lot of people talked about the need for the "human touch". They want helpful, friendly, disability-aware staff who know what they're doing.

- *Improvements in physical access* – by far the most common responses centred on making it easier to get to the library and the physical access issues of the library building and layout. There were repeated requests for more room for wheelchairs, better signage, automatic doors, low shelves, ramps, disability toilets, better lighting and private rooms.

General unsolicited comments

- I use the library to access the internet and to do research.
- I need more help from staff at the library.
- A home library service would be useful.
- I do not know when the library is open, what I'll find when I get there and whether I'll be able to access it physically (that is, ramps and other things).

Questionnaire 2: Carers of people with disabilities

Question 26: Does the person you care for need adaptive equipment to use computers? If yes, what equipment do they need?

- Enlarged keyboard
- Voice recognition software
- Touch screens
- Large text on screen

Question 29c: Have you ever suggested to the person you care for that they join their public library? If they said no, why didn't they join?

- They do not have a carer with enough time to take them.
- They are not confident to ask library staff for help.
- They are not interested.

Question 31: What would make it easier for the person you care for to use public libraries?

- *Library services* – many carers said if libraries were open more often, offered more services for people with disabilities and advertised their services then more people with disabilities would use them.
- *Staff Issues* – many carers indicated that trained, friendly, approachable and *encouraging* staff were vital to making is easier for the person they care for to use the library.
- *Better physical infrastructure* – by far the most common responses focused on physical impediments such as lack of disability toilets, lack of ramps, difficult doors, need for a private room, better signage, more suitable shelf height and more room for wheelchairs.
- *Easier to get to* – a commonly cited problem was the difficulty for the person with a disability in getting to the library by private or public transport means. This included a lack of disabled parking, a lack of buses or the bus-stop, being too far from the library.

Question 32: What would make you more likely to encourage the person you care for to use public libraries?

- *Helpful staff* – the most common response from carers was that if they knew there were helpful and friendly staff at the library, they would encourage the people under their care to use the library.
- *More time* – many carers indicated that they thought the library was a valuable resource but that they did not have enough time to take the person under their care.
- *Group activity* – a common suggestion was that if there were group activities for like-minded people or people with similar disabilities they would be likely to encourage the person in their care to attend. They were less likely to encourage them to attend on their own.

Questionnaire 3: Library Staff

Question 8: How does your library advertise its services for people with a disability?

- *Print and other advertising* – most of the strategies involved information that is accessed by individuals independently. This included printed materials, websites and newspaper and radio announcements.

- *Staff networking* – the next most common strategy was promotion with direct staff involvement. This included library staff visiting local disability services and promoting disability services at council events.

Question 9: Does your library attempt to reach out to people with disabilities who are not existing members or regular users of the library? How does your library do this?

- *Outreach* – by far the most common strategy to reach new groups of people with disabilities was library staff getting out and about in the community. Examples included liaising with community groups, going to community meetings, giving promotional talks at disability events and networking with local council disability departments.

- *Print and other advertising* – less common was promotion via print material, noticeboards, letter-boxing, websites and radio and newspaper advertising.

Question 14: Are you aware of any local resources that your library could use to assist people with disabilities? What resources are you aware of in your local area?

- *Wide variety* – from the number of different responses it is clear that there is a wide variety of resources in the community.

- *Local Council* – the most common response was local council run services such as Meals on Wheels, Day Links etc. A number of respondents were also aware of Metro and Rural Access Workers.

- *Schools, Health and Community Services* – many respondents listed their local health service and community and support groups as well as local disability schools.

- *Other* – all other responses were from specific organisations such as Vision Australia, Scope, Yooralla and so on or general services such as neighbourhood houses and Centrelink.

Question 16: Does your library have partnerships and/or strong relationships with any disability organisations? Which organisations?

- *Schools* – the most common response was links with local disability or "special development" schools.

- *Vision Australia* – was the most commonly cited organisation with links to libraries.

- *Council and other services* – all the other organisations listed were either council services (Murray Hume Services, for example), health services (such as the local speech therapist) or disability services or groups (such as ASPIRE).

Question 19c: What are the barriers or problems associated with providing adaptive/assistive computer equipment at your library?

- *Cost* – by far the most common barrier cited was the cost of the equipment and lack of funding for it.

- *Staff training* – many respondents indicated that their staff did not know how to use the equipment and that they did not have the means to offer the training.

- *Physical limitations* – an equal number of respondents said they did not have adequate space for the equipment and that they did not have a private room for its use where necessary.

- *Exclusivity* – a number of respondents said it was hard to justify having equipment exclusively for people with a disability.

Question 21E: Would you agree or disagree with the following statements:

a) *"public libraries are a valuable resource for people with disabilities"* – 81 per cent agreed with this statement, 15 per cent were unsure, one library staff member (0.6%) disagreed, one (0.6%) added the qualification "potentially" and the remaining 3% did not answer the question.

b) *"the internet is a valuable resource for people with disabilities"* – 71 per cent agreed with this statement, 22 per cent were unsure, two library staff members (1%) disagreed and six per cent did not answer.

c) *"more people with disabilities would access public libraries if the services for them were better"* – 62 per cent agreed with this statement, 33 per cent were unsure, four library staff members (2.5%) disagreed and four (2.5%) did not answer.

d) *"the library I work in takes the needs of people with disabilities seriously"* – 65 per cent agreed with this statement, 30 per cent were unsure, six (4%) disagreed and two (1%) did not answer.

- *Advertising services* – a number of respondents indicated that people with disabilities may not know what services their library offers for them. One strategy that was suggested was that disability groups need to be made aware of what is on offer at the library.

- *Services under-utilised* – a few respondents said that the services and equipment that are available for people with disabilities are not used enough and that therefore the cost of them cannot be justified.

- *Other* – the other comments centred on not having enough time, money and resources to offer adequate services to people with disabilities.

Question 22b: Please tell us about the barriers preventing your library from providing more or better services to people with disabilities.

- *Poor physical environment* – the most commonly cited barrier was the inadequacy of the library building. Many respondents said that they were in old, cramped buildings that could not be adapted to cater to people with disabilities.

- *Funding and resources* – the other primary barriers that were repeatedly stressed were lack of staff time, affordable training and funding and the high cost of adaptive and other equipment.

- *Other* – the other key themes were a perceived lack of demand from people with disabilities and a lack of knowledge on the library's part about people with disabilities and their needs. There was an undercurrent in the responses to this question that suggested that due to the small numbers of people with disabilities in the community, the time and money spent to cater to their needs could not be justified.

Stand-out responses:

- "There could be possibly a 'required' level of provision of services across all libraries that could be advertised state-wide so disabled people would know what services to expect in every library or at least from the main branch…"

- "Disability clients are easily overlooked in a busy environment…"

- "Happy to trial, access and maintain equipment if we knew it made access easier for patrons…"

Question 23c: If there was a directory for public libraries that outlined purchasing options for equipment and services to assist people with disabilities, what information would you want in such a directory?

- *Information about equipment and software* – by far the most common response (more than twice as common as the next closest response) was a request for information about software and hardware options. Respondents want to know what equipment is needed for what disabilities, what options there are, where to get the equipment, features of it, how to use it, case studies demonstrating its usefulness and reviews of products. They want to know what the best thing is to spend their money on and how to get it.

- *Suppliers* – the next most common request was for a list of suppliers of equipment and services.

- *Where to get advice* – a number of respondents indicated that they would like to be able to call upon someone for advice on how to make their library more disability-friendly and what equipment to purchase.

- *Training* – another repeated request was for training about disability in general, how to use adaptive equipment and how to make libraries more accessible.

- *Other* – in general, the other requests were for contact information for support groups, information about types of disabilities, information about what other libraries offer and where to get funding.

Question 24: What is the best thing your library does to assist people with disabilities to access your library?

- *Staffing* – the most common response was that the best thing about their library was the helpful, friendly and disability-aware staff.

- *Assistive/adaptive technologies* – several respondents said that their library had recently installed adaptive technologies and equipment.

- *Improving physical environment* – many respondents indicated that their library had made recent attempts to improve the physical access. This included things like installing or improving ramps and rails and putting in disabled toilets.

- *Provision of house-bound services* – a number of respondents said that the best thing their library did for people with disabilities was to offer house-bound services. This is clearly a very highly regarded service.

- *Community outreach* – one of the things respondents cited as the best thing their library does for people with disabilities was networking with local disability groups, schools and services.

Question 25: Have there been difficulties for your library in providing services for people with a disability? What could make it easier?

- *More money* – the vast majority of respondents said they needed more money to offer better services to people with disabilities.

- *Better trained staff* – a number of respondents said their library staff needed more and better training about disabilities and how to use adaptive equipment and technologies. Several specifically mentioned the need for training on how to handle difficult behaviours, especially among people with mental illnesses.

- *Physical setting inadequate* – a large number of respondents said that the physical environment of the library needed to be improved. They suggested that old and small buildings were a huge problem as they did not lend themselves to being adapted and were cramped.

- *More time* – a lot of respondents said that they needed more time to spend with library users with disabilities.

Stand-out responses:

- "The biggest difficulty is knowing what people need and then having people know that we have what they need."

- "Being small also means not many disabled people use the library (only a small population base). Difficult to justify purchase."

Question 26: If you wanted more information about assisting people with disabilities, where would you go? Who would you ask and/or contact?

- *Local Council* – a significant number of respondents said they would seek information from their local council. In some cases they specifically mentioned Rural and Metro Access Workers.

- *Community groups/services/peak bodies for people with a disability (PWD)* – a number of people said they would find a local service provider or group and ask their advice.

- *Internet* – many respondents said they would seek information on the internet. This was usually one of the number of options listed by such respondents and may be the starting point rather than an end in itself.

- *Internal* – the same number of people who indicated the internet as a source of information, said that they would ask someone on their staff. This was usually a manager or disability worker.

- *Other libraries and library bodies* – several people said they would ask other libraries and library organisations (for example ALIA) for advice and information. Eight respondents specifically listed Vicnet.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this research was to gain a greater understanding of the library and information needs of people with disabilities, particularly in relation to the internet, in public libraries in Victoria.

There were two components to the research: first, questionnaires to people with disabilities, their carers and library staff; second, a literature review. In general, the findings were consistent. The same themes recurred. Access by people with disabilities to ICT services was found to be important. However, there were some surprises, particularly the emphasis on what may be loosely termed "traditional" disability access issues including physical access to the library building, the library environment and disability-aware staff. At the outset of this project we expected that these concerns may still be relevant, but given that the Federal *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* has been in place for well over a decade, we did not expect them to be so prominent. A clearly dominant theme was that while work needs to be done to improve access to libraries for people with disabilities, there *is* a willingness in the sector to make such improvements. The impediments to doing so involve a lack of financial resources and lack of information rather than a lack of will.

Many issues requiring attention have been identified. In response to these issues, five key recommendations have been developed which offer realistic and achievable responses:

ICT Issues

Internet Access at the Library

The provision of fast, reliable, cheap (or preferably free) internet access at public libraries was found to be very important. The vast majority of respondents with disabilities use the internet and they use it at public libraries at a significantly higher rate than do people in the general population. Importantly, over half the respondents with disabilities also said they would like to use the internet more. Given the fact that so many services are now provided online and the internet is such an entrenched part of modern life, equal access to it for everyone is vital. Public libraries in Victoria play an important role in mitigating the effects of the "digital divide" on people with a disability.

The most common complaints about internet access at the library included:

- not enough computers available
- long waiting times to get access to a computer
- session times on the computer too short
- lack of adaptive and assistive equipment and software.

- *Key Issue 1: There is a need for more funding for computers and adaptive equipment for use in public libraries.*

- *Key Issue 2: The standard one hour booking for public internet access is not always sufficient, and there is a need for internet bookings of more than an hour for people with a disability.*

- *Key Issue 3: Effective use of adaptive equipment that involves screen readers or voice-activated software would be improved through use of the equipment in a private room.*

- *Key Issue 4: There is a need for training opportunities for people with a disability to gain skills to use the internet (as well as relevant adaptive equipment) in libraries.*

Access to the Library via the internet

In addition to access to the internet at the public library, there is the related issue of access to the library via the internet. Most importantly, remote access to the library catalogue via the internet was an issue that was repeatedly returned to in the questionnaire and literature responses. While remote access is not a solution to overall access to the library for people with disabilities, it is still extremely important. In particular, being able to accurately see from home or elsewhere what is available at the library is very important for people with disabilities who find it difficult to get to and from the library. Where the catalogue is not available remotely and where library websites do not meet W3C standards, access for people with disabilities is compromised.

- *Key Issue 5: Awareness among people with disabilities of the availability of online catalogues is limited.*

- *Key Issue 6: Library websites, online catalogues and databases need to be accessible for library users with a vision impairment.*

The Equipment Maze

One of the most important but difficult issues we came across in the research was the provision of adaptive equipment and software in libraries. The provision of such equipment is crucial to access to libraries for people with disabilities but its availability in Victorian public libraries is sometimes limited. In general, there appears to be a willingness on behalf of libraries to purchase such equipment but serious impediments include a lack of money and information on what equipment is needed, what equipment is available and where it can be obtained. Potentially spending thousands of dollars on what might be the "wrong" equipment is a daunting prospect, as is the prospect of training staff and patrons in how to use it.

There are two primary components of making equipment more accessible:

1. software: screen reader technology, voice activation software and so on
2. physical adaptations: adjustable desks, track balls, mouse options and so on.

It is impossible to make recommendations here about what equipment libraries should purchase just as it is almost impossible for libraries to make such decisions on their own. Rather, we believe expert advice needs to be given to individual libraries about what choices to make. This advice could come in the form of a Directory of Services and Equipment or from a Disability Specialist.

- *Key Issue 7: Library staff need training on how to support people with a disability to use adaptive equipment. There is a need for library staff to increase use of expert organisations to assist in this area.*

Knowing What's Out There

A repeated theme in the research was the issue of knowledge of library digital services. In short, having the best services in the world is irrelevant if the people who need them do not know about them. While our research found that knowledge of the existence of the library itself is high among people with disabilities and their carers, knowledge about what services they offered is much less

consistent. Similarly, there is patchy knowledge among library staff about what services other libraries offered to people with disabilities. In a context of tight resources where it is impossible for any one library to offer services to meet the needs of every person with a disability, this is cause for concern.

We came across a range of suggestions relating to how to advertise library services to people with disabilities. By far the most common solution in both the questionnaire and literature responses was to advertise those services via disability groups. Networking, especially with local disability groups and services, was seen by all three groups of respondents to the questionnaires and in the literature as the most effective way of advertising the library's services for people with disabilities.

Of course, not all people with disabilities are attached to or aligned with disability services or groups so general forms of advertising via, for example, the local newspaper are also important. Another common suggestion was to have disability-specific open days or orientation sessions. It was suggested that sessions tailored to groups of people with the same disability would provide more relevant information to participants and would potentially make participants feel more comfortable than attending general orientation sessions.

- *Key Issue 8: More information is needed about relevant equipment in other libraries to support referrals.*

- *Key Issue 9: There is a need for library staff to have greater awareness of and networking with local disability groups, Disability Services Community Building Initiatives, Access for all Abilities and other existing community resources and be encouraged to set up links with them.*

- *Key Issue 10: There is a need for libraries to ensure that people with a disability are supported to attend library orientation sessions.*

Non ICT Issues

Physical Access: going to, getting in and being comfortable at the library

The most dominant finding in the three questionnaires and the literature was that significant impediments still exist for people with disabilities in relation to physically accessing public libraries in Victoria. People with disabilities still find it difficult to get to the library – in terms of inadequate provision of disabled parking, poor public transport options and onerous walking distances from the library. Those who need carers to get to and from the library find getting there very difficult as they are reliant on the availability and willingness of another person.

For some people with certain disabilities getting to and from the library will be almost impossible no matter how much support is provided. For these library users, home services and remote access to the library catalogue are very important. However, one thing that is clear from the questionnaire responses and the literature is that the local library functions as a vitally important social space and that, therefore, physical access to the library is still very important. Providing remote or off-site access is not the solution to access to public libraries for people with disabilities.

- *Key Issue 11: The suitability and number of disabled car parking spaces are not adequate in many libraries*.

- *Key Issue 12: There is a need for other transport options, such as community buses, to enable access to the library for people who do not have access to a car or are unable to use public transport.*

- *Key Issue 13: The proximity of public transport stops and shelters (tram, bus or train) needs to be improved for some libraries.*

- *Key Issue 14: Access to home library services is highly valued and remains important for those people whose disabilities prevent them from going to the library.*

Our research found that many people with a disability, once arriving at the library, find it difficult to use the actual building. Standard physical impediments such as a lack of wheelchair ramps, ramps that are too steep, doors that are too heavy to open, a lack of working disabled-access toilets, aisles that are too narrow, poor signage and other things were commonly reported. Library staff also cited these problems in their responses and many bemoaned the fact that their library building was old and/or small and therefore unable to be easily adapted to enable greater access.

Many library environments were also found to be in need of improvement. Poor lighting and sound were commonly mentioned, most obviously for those people with hearing and sight impairments. In relation to hearing, the noise made by school children was mentioned several times as being a problem as was the lack of a private room to use noisy adaptive equipment such as screen-reader technology. Another recurring issue was books and other resources being placed out of reach on shelves.

- *Key Issue 15: The accessibility and physical design of some libraries limit access for people with a disability. Some buildings cannot be adapted, and accessibility can only be achieved by relocation.*

Library Staff: getting help and feeling welcome

Second to physical access issues, the issue that received the most attention in the questionnaire responses and literature was the importance of sufficient numbers of welcoming, friendly, well-trained, disability-aware staff. The staff in public libraries in Victoria are one of its greatest assets and our research generally found a willingness on their part to try to improve services to people with disabilities. However, we also found that where library staff were not well trained or welcoming, this had a major impact on library users with a disability. We also found that willingness alone was not enough; the staff need the time, resources and training to provide the best possible service to people with disabilities.

Specific areas that library staff appear to find a challenge include:

- knowledge about mental illness, especially handling difficult behaviours
- knowledge about disability in general, especially the different types of disability
- knowledge about how to use adaptive equipment
- having the time to spend with people with disabilities, many of whom need one-on-one support
- knowledge about the legal obligations of the library under the Federal *Disability Discrimination Act 1992.*

It was almost universally agreed in the questionnaire responses from people with disabilities and their carers, and the literature, that all library staff should be disability-aware and be able to provide services to library users with disabilities. Having a "disability librarian" was an

unpopular model because they are likely to be unavailable regularly and because meeting the needs of people with disabilities is seen to be the responsibility of everyone.

A related and concerning undercurrent in some of the questionnaire responses by library staff and sometimes in the literature was the idea that providing services to people with disabilities could not be "justified" due to their low numbers in the population. Such a view perhaps involves an incorrect perception about the number of people with disabilities in the population, a lack of information about the legal responsibilities of public and private services in Australia to provide access to people with disabilities, and a philosophy or view which assumes that people with needs that differ from the general population are not worth the effort. While such a view was not widespread, it was present enough to warrant concern.

- *Key Issue 16: There is a need for training to increase knowledge and skills of library staff, as well as people undertaking training pathways, in disability awareness, and the legal obligations of the Federal Disability Discrimination Act.*

- *Key Issue 17: There is a need for greater flexibility in the availability of staff to provide required assistance for people with a disability.*

- *Key Issue 18: There is a need for training and ongoing support for library staff about customer service for people with a mental illness.*

- *Key Issue 19: There is a need for improved service delivery design for individuals who have additional support requirements.*

Doing More for Less: Funding

Predictable but nonetheless important issues to arise constantly in the questionnaire responses and the literature were cost and a lack of money. Many changes can be made to libraries which are *relatively* inexpensive or even free. These improvements include things like a change in attitude arising from disability-awareness training, changes to the layout of the library, lighting improvements and so on. Given that there is willingness among most library staff we surveyed to provide the best possible services to people with disabilities, we can only assume that these changes are not being made because libraries do not always know how to make them.

However, there are many changes that need making which cost money. Public services such as libraries operate under significant resource constraints and serve a number of groups in the community. Their funds are tight and spending what little money they do have is daunting without information to make an informed decision.

- *Key Issue 20: There is a need for more funding, as well as prioritisation of existing funding, to make improvements to libraries services to meet the requirements of people with disabilities.*

Recommendations

ICT Issues

Recommendation 1: That library staff are supported to deal with specialist adaptive/assistive equipment, and provide improved ICT services for people with a disability. This can be achieved through further needs analysis, identification of best practice, and the sourcing of funding for projects such as:

- Initiatives that can increase library use of expert organisations (such as ComTEC, Vision Australia, Scope) for advice on adaptive/assistive equipment and specialised services. This could be achieved through a resource guide with key contacts as well as workshops, introductory sessions and forums
- Establishment of specialist networking forums for libraries to share information, including details of equipment in other libraries for referral
- Training programs for library staff
- Community engagement and targeted promotion of ICT services with local disability support services and networks
- Development of a *good service delivery guide* drawing attention to accessible customer service options related to ICT such as:
    - Provision of private space, if needed, for use of screen reader/voice-activated equipment
    - Availability of longer bookings for internet computers for people with a disability
    - Provision of training for people with a disability on how to use the internet and adaptive equipment.

Recommendation 2: That funding is made available so that libraries can increase the availability of internet computers and adaptive equipment and software.

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Recommendation 3: That library websites and online resources are accessible to people with vision impairment.

This can be achieved through a benchmarking process, site by site measurement and promotion of best practice. Following are priority areas:

- Website compliance with W3C and the Victorian Government Website Management Framework Standards
- Online catalogues and data bases to be made accessible where possible. This could be achieved through joint procurement that prioritises accessible products.

Non ICT Issues

Recommendation 4: Improve physical accessibility to libraries and within libraries.

This can be achieved through a benchmarking process, site by site measurement and promotion of best practice to ensure adequate means for people with disabilities to physically access the library. This would include:

- **Getting there –** parking, public transport stops and availability of community buses
- **Getting into and working in the library –** universal design.

Recommendation 5: Acting on the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*

That libraries are required to respond to the *Disability Discrimination Act* through a formal process. For example, a disability responsiveness plan could be one response to the Act. Service delivery responses in the spirit of the act could include:

- Availability of staff or volunteers to assist people one-on-one
- Process to ensure specific requirements are met at enrolment
- Making orientation sessions libraries accessible – including group-specific sessions
- Continued creation and support of new Home Library services
- Training and ongoing support for library staff about overall awareness of disability, different requirements for those with disabilities and potential service considerations This will also be relevant content within training courses for people entering the library workforce.

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