

# Opening Access to Public Libraries for Children with Special Needs & their Families

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Every child deserves to find  
themselves lost in a book



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**San Francisco Public Library**  
**Vancouver Public Library**  
**Toronto Public Library**  
**North York Central Library**  
**Brooklyn Public Library**  
**Brooklyn Children’s Museum**  
**Fanwood Public Library**  
**Scotch Plains Public Library**  
**Farmingdale Public Library**  
**Middle County Public Library**  
**Children’s Museum of the Arts, New York**  
**Barbara Klipper - author**  
**SNAILS Group**  
**Skokie Public Library**  
**Glenview Public Library**  
**Glen Ellyn Public Library**  
**Deerfield Public Library**  
**Arlington Heights Memorial Library**  
**Evanston Public Library**  
**Gail Borden Public Library**  
**Glencoe Public Library**  
**Batavia Public Library**

# Executive Summary

## Background

Within the library profession there is widespread support for access to libraries for people with disabilities. However, literature on the topic of access to public libraries for people with disabilities has largely overlooked children with special needs and their families.

## Purpose

**This report investigates the factors influencing access to public libraries for children with special needs and their families.**

**The objectives were to:**

- Identify what public libraries are currently doing to improve access for children with special needs and their families.
- Identify the barriers to access for children with special needs from the perspective of the public librarian.
- Identify the barriers public libraries face in addressing the issue of access for this group of the community.
- Make recommendations of strategies that public libraries can employ to improve access for children with special and their families.

## Research Design

A mixed method of qualitative and quantitative approaches was conducted. Participants took part in a semi-structured, one-to-one interview and an online questionnaire. The data was analysed and used to develop a model of an inclusive public library.

## Findings

Results of data showed:

- Library staff attitudes and sensitivities were considered by library staff be the greatest barrier to access for children with special needs and their families.
- Lack of knowledge on how to address access issues for children with special needs was listed as the greatest barrier for libraries.
- Libraries had attempted to address the issue of inclusive programs above all other barriers to access for this group.
- Staff training in disability was listed as having the greatest impact on increasing access.
- The majority of libraries focusing on inclusion had very supportive management.

# Executive Summary

Research found there were six common elements that libraries focused on when addressing issues of accessibility for children with special needs and their families.

**These elements were:**

- Collections
- Programs
- Partnerships
- Physical barriers (space and equipment)
- Training
- Marketing

The elements were used to create an inclusive library model. The foundation of this model is supportive management.



# Executive Summary

## Recommendations

Key Recommendation:

**The Inclusive Libraries Model is used to guide public libraries to improve access for children with special needs and their families.**

Recommendations specific to each element of the model.

### Management

- A strongly supportive management is the foundation of the model.
- Develop a Disability Access and Inclusion Plan

### Training

Training in the following:

- Disability awareness for all staff
- Access to Children's Services
- Developing a Disability Access and Inclusion Plan
- Universal Access.
- Access to Functions, Festivals and Fun Activities
- Multiple Intelligences

### Partnerships

- Develop relationships with external individuals and/or support organisations that work with children with special needs and their families.

## Programs

- Use theories of universal design for learning and multiple intelligences when developing programs.
- Integrate these theories into all programs.
- Consider targeted library programs as a bridge to inclusive programs.

## Collections

- Develop a children's collection that is inclusive of children with disabilities.
- Develop audio and book kit collections of popular titles for all ages.
- Develop HiLo (high interest, low difficulty) collections, without the label 'easy reads'.
- Provide books with tactile pictures and books with sign language.
- Develop parenting collections on the topic of children with disabilities and their families.

## Physical Barriers

### (space and equipment)

- Undertake a library access audit, benchmarking against:
  - The principles of universal design for access in libraries.
  - Legislated building access codes.

## Marketing

- Find out who your target audience are.
- Reach out to your audience.
- Promote that you are an inclusive library.
- Use images of people with disabilities in your promotional materials.
- Work with families of children with special needs to promote the library through their social media networks.

**Finally, 'Have a go' and reach out to families of children with special needs. Librarians need to ask: 'How can children with special needs be involved?' with every decision made in the library.**

# Strategic Alignments

## Strategic Alignment with the South Australian Public Library Network

The recommendations of this report are aligned with the following goals of the document, *Tomorrow's Libraries: Future directions of the South Australian public library network*. (South Australian Public Libraries Network, 2015)

### 1.1 Provide vibrant flexible spaces that are fit for purpose.

**Aligned with recommended actions: 1.1.1, 1.1.2, 1.1.3**

Actions:

- Develop a disability access and inclusion plan for the Library.
- Engage the theory of universal design in all library spaces and undertake an audit of the library against the principles of a universal design for libraries.
- Undertake a benchmark audit of the library against current building guideline for disability access such as, *Disability (Access to Premises - Buildings) Standards 2010 Australian Government (2011)*.

### 1.2 Continue to extend the reach of library services into the community.

**Aligned with recommended actions: 1.2.1, 1.2.2**

Actions:

- Investigate and implement a preferred model of delivery of services to children with special needs and their families.
- Share best practice for innovative ways to engage with the disability communities where they are (for example a hospital story time and mobile library service).
- Partner with intent to develop connections within the disability community.

### 1.3 Create greater impact through targeted programmes and event.

**Aligned with recommended actions: 1.3.1, 1.3.2**

Actions:

- Develop state-wide and nation-wide programmes to draw attention to and improve library access for children with special needs and their families. Where possible link these in with existing national events and programmes (i.e. autism awareness week).

- Seek opportunities to work with community, educational and business partners to deliver programs in the library for children with disabilities, with intent to achieve greater impact.

### 4.2 Achieve scale and greater impact through partnerships

**Aligned with recommended actions: 4.2.1, 4.2.2, 4.2.3**

Actions:

- To achieve greater impact demonstrate to local and state funding and authority bodies how improved library access for children with special needs aligns with their goals.
- Develop a state-wide and nation-wide online inclusive library services support network to learn, share and collaborate with.
- Develop relationships with local, state and federal health and disability organisations to design and implement a collaborative library service model for children with special needs and their families.

# Strategic Alignments

## **5.3 Empower staff to provide outstanding service.**

**Aligned with recommended actions: 5.3.2, 5.3.3, 5.3.4**

Actions:

- Work with providers of professional library qualifications to include inclusive libraries and library services as part of their curriculum.
- Include staff training in the area of disability as part of a Library Disability Action & Inclusion Plan.
- Develop a workforce professional development plan that includes training in the following areas:
  - Disability awareness training for all staff.
  - Improving Access to Children's Services.
  - Developing a Disability Access & Inclusion Plan.
  - Understanding Universal Access
  - Improving Access to Functions, Festivals and Fun Activities.

# Background

In 2011 I led the Children's and Youth Team at the Adelaide Hills Library Service in the introduction of a story time session for children with special needs and their families. Impetus for the introduction of the new program came from staff observation and patron comments. Patrons commented that the regular early childhood group sessions were too large and too loud for their children. Children with autism and hearing difficulties were overwhelmed by these sessions. The sessions were also intimidating for some parents/carers of children with disabilities. Staff noticed that these families were dropping out of the sessions.

As a mother of a child with special needs, a teacher with ten years experience in schools that included special education, and a SPELD tutor, I could understand why families might be asking for such a program. Perhaps more importantly, I knew that if I (as a teacher-librarian confident within a library environment) struggled to access the library with a child with special needs, how would others less familiar in the environment manage?

Children with special needs, like all children, benefit greatly from literacy activities. As with all children, the earlier the interaction with books and other literacy activities, the greater the long term results. Library staff were keen to ensure that these families had the same opportunities to access library based literacy activities. Due to the dearth of existing library programs in Australia for children with special needs I developed, in partnership with local health services, our own library program for children with special needs. The program continues to run and in 2012 won a national Friends of the Libraries Australia, Peter McInnes Award for library services for children and young people.

Out of this experience I developed the desire to explore what was happening in public libraries for children with special needs and their families. In 2014 I undertook a research study tour of eighteen public libraries and two cultural institutions in the United States and Canada that focus on programs for children with special needs. The Catherine Helen Spence

Scholarship, the Public Libraries of South Australia Rod East Award and the Australian Library and Information Association Twila Ann Janssen Herr Award funded the study tour. This report is the result of that study tour.

I would like to share the learnings and recommendations of my research with public libraries, library boards and government authorities at both a state and national level. Possible avenues for this are:

- Dissemination of this report
- Workshops and seminars
- Training packages
- Journal articles
- Conference presentations
- Online and in person group discussions

# Study Tour Highlights

My research trip to public libraries in North America and Canada was an absolutely amazing experience. It was inspiring to meet so many public librarians passionate about and committed to improving access for children with special needs and their families. Every librarian had stories of heartache and joy they had experienced as part of the journey to develop a more inclusive public library. One quote, which perhaps encapsulates this, is the following: “What programs for children with special needs lack in numbers, they make up for in heart.”

Although difficult to choose, some of the highlights I experienced are listed below.

- I was invited to attend a **Music for Autism** program, held at the Brooklyn Public Library. It was an emotional experience to see up to 100 people with autism and their families enjoying a music concert. A wonderful group of volunteers acted as buddies for each child with special needs; leading them into the concert room, showing them the food and drink, dancing with them and providing support in anyway necessary. The buddies reassured family members that it was O.K. for their child to dance and vocalise as they interacted with the music. For some families this was the only opportunity they have to see a concert together. The delight on the faces of the children with autism as they were able to openly respond to the music was fantastic.
- I visited the **IBBY Collection of Books for Young People with Disabilities** at the Toronto Public Library, North York Central Branch. IBBY is the International Board on Books for Young People. I did not realise this collection existed. It was wonderful to discover books for children with disabilities from all over the world. This large collection of books for young people with disabilities is an excellent guide to collection development for public libraries. The IBBY collection tours the world and public libraries can request to host it.
- During my visit to Brooklyn Public Library there was a sitting of the **Brooklyn Developmental Disabilities Council**. The Brooklyn Public Library has a partnership with the Brooklyn Developmental Disabilities Council and I was invited to attend with the Librarian. This is an excellent example of how powerful partnerships can be, and it was inspiring to see that the library was a key player in the Council; helping to facilitate community programs, acting as a conduit for information etc.
- The Special Needs and Inclusive Library Services network (**SNAILS**) is an online network made up of 42 public libraries in the Illinois area. I was fortunate to be able to attend a quarterly meeting of this group. It was inspiring to learn that so many public libraries (42) in one state (Illinois) were interested in improving access to their library for children with special needs, and were actively part of a supportive network. I believe this type of support network could be successfully developed both locally and nationally in Australia.

# Study Tour Highlights

- Finally, it was a moment of clarity for me when the **Director of the Children's Museum of the Arts, New York** explained that she considered programs targeted to children with special needs to be the bridge to inclusive programs for all children. Many librarians I spoke to struggled with the decision to provide targeted or inclusive programs. After speaking with the Art Director it seemed clear to me that there is a place for both types of programs in a library.

# Introduction

Fundamental to the concept of the public library is that it is accessible to everyone in the community. It is widely agreed that disability access to public libraries is an important part of this principle.

***One of the key principles of a library is that access is provided equally to all citizens of the community it serves.***

(State Library of Victoria, 2009, p. 1).

Public libraries in Australia are required to provide disability access under the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act of 1992 (Australian Human Rights Commission, n.d-a., para. 1).

According to UNICEF (2013, p. 4) the largest minority group in the world is people with a disability. Amongst this group children are some of the most excluded; traditionally they do not have a voice, making them more vulnerable than adults. In 2003 approximately 1 in 12 children under 14 in Australia had a disability, and in 2006 intellectual/learning disabilities, for example autism, was identified as being the greatest cause of disability for children under 14 (Australian Institute of Health

and Welfare, 2006b, pp. 4-6). Other countries such as the United States report similar statistics. (United States Census Bureau, 2012, p. 5) Clearly, children with special needs and their families are a large minority group in our communities.

Accessibility for people with disabilities is not a new concept to libraries. Hearing and digital format books are available for borrowing in virtually all large public libraries. Ramps, elevators, wheelchair accessible desks, etc. are also good examples of public libraries addressing physical disabilities. In many places access to public buildings for people with physical disabilities is legislated. The focus for public libraries has primarily been on physical and sensory disabilities (such as vision and hearing) for adults. A search for accessibility on the web page of many public libraries clearly illustrates this focus, as do the accessibility policies of public libraries. The accessibility documents of the State Libraries of South Australia and Victoria are good examples of this (State Library of South Australia, 2009; State Library of Victoria, 2009). It is however, the more hidden

disabilities of developmental, intellectual, psychiatric and sensory processing that remain unaddressed by public libraries. The lack of focus on a broader range of disabilities is even more pronounced when considering access for children and is also reflected in the research literature on the topic of disability access to public libraries (R. Hill, 2012).

According to the Australian Library and Information Association public libraries should be ***...safe and trusted public spaces where everyone is welcome...*** (Australian Library and Information Association Public Libraries Advisory Committee, 2012, p. 5). Unfortunately, this is not always the experience of children with special needs and their families. The following quote gives a clear illustration of this.

***People with autism are often loud. They may feel the need to touch, pull out or even mouth books. They may have a hard time if a book or video they want to borrow is out on loan. ...librarians in general have no training in helping patrons with developmental challenges. As a result, they often respond***

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## ***negatively to disruptive behaviour...*** (Rudy, 2013, para. 1-2).

Public libraries can be intimidating or uncomfortable places for children with special needs. For example, a child with cochlear implants can be overwhelmed by noise in open spaces. They may have difficulties communicating and may not be able to participate in traditional children's programs. Similarly, a child with autism may be sensitive to noise, bright lights and smells. This discomfort may reach a point at which the child begins to scream and engage in repetitive behaviours. The parent may then feel self-conscious and concerned that they are being judged by other library users and staff. The child and family may choose to leave the library.

## **When considering that public libraries have traditionally not focused on access for children with special needs and their families, some of the issues include:**

- Community integration of children with special needs is fairly recent. In Australia it was not until the 1980s that the policy of living in the

community was introduced (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2008).

- Physical and sensory disabilities are often easily recognised through the use of a wheelchair or a seeing-eye dog. However, disabilities such as autism, developmental delays, auditory processing or attention deficit disorder are not always obvious; particularly in children where inappropriate behaviour is often labelled as bad behaviour.

## **Current trends in public libraries**

Increasingly the public library is being recognised as having an important role in developing early literacy skills. The implementation of literacy programs for babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers in libraries is evidence of this; as is government programs such as the Little Big Book Club in South Australia, which uses public libraries as a distribution point for free books and public education pamphlets on children's literacy development for parents. Similar experiences in public libraries can be found in other countries, for example the United States and

Canada through the public library program, Every Child Ready to Read. For a child with special needs access to these opportunities can be even more important. The development of early literacy skills is widely accepted as a key indicator to the later literacy success of a child. (Spedding, Harkins, Makin & Whiteman, 2007).

Public libraries are also able to provide opportunities for children with special needs and their families to be part of their community, which can be crucial to overcoming the isolation that having a disability or being a carer can bring. Public libraries provide opportunities for children with special needs to engage in activities that are not therapy related and which can be positive and fun for the whole family. This can be important in families that are stressed and financially disadvantaged.

Although there are many other reasons that access to public libraries for this group is important, one final one is that many children with special needs will grow up to be adults with special needs. Thus, developing and nurturing

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a relationship with the public library for children with special needs will have both immediate and lifelong benefits.

## Problem Statement

Children with special needs and their families experience difficulties when accessing public libraries. As a consequence they are a disenfranchised library user group. This problem exists despite the widespread support for increased access to libraries for people with disabilities. This support is reflected in the literature in the field of library and information science, as well as in document guidelines produced by library professional bodies, for example the Australian Library and Information Association and their document, **Guidelines on Library Standards for People with Disabilities (1998)**.

A literature search into this topic reveals a significant gap in knowledge and understanding. The literature on the topic of access to public libraries for people with disabilities is dominated by the study of adults with a disability, and in particular adults with physical and sensory disabilities. There is

also a preponderance of studies that focus on technology and its place or importance in disability access (H. Hill 2013, pp. 137-138). There are very few studies that research the broader range of disabilities, including psychiatric and intellectual when considering the topic of library access (H. Hill 2013, p. 140). Further investigation of the literature on the topic reveals that research into children with special needs and public libraries is even more limited.

Without an understanding of the topic how can public libraries be:

***...inclusive, offering services to all members of the community, including customers with special needs...***

(Australian Library and Information Association, 2012, p. 10)

## Implication of this problem for public libraries

The implication for public libraries not meeting the access needs of this segment of the community is that they may be failing to meet the following legal and/or professional obligations:

- Disability Discrimination Acts
- Rehabilitation Acts
- United Nations Declaration

of the Rights of Disabled Persons

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Disability Discrimination Policies of Professional Library Bodies
- Disability Discrimination Policies of their government funding body (local, state or federal).

The Australian Human Rights Commission on their website, **A Brief Guide to the Disability Discrimination Act (n.d.)**, clearly state that public libraries are included under this act. The act states:

***The DDA makes it against the law to discriminate against someone if they have a disability in the following areas of life: ...***

***Access to premises used by the public. For example, using libraries,...***

(Australian Human Rights Commission, n.d., para. 1).

The UNICEF (2008) publication, **It's about Ability: An Explanation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability**, also clearly describes how the United Nations Declaration relates to public libraries.

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*People with disabilities have the same right as others to participate in and enjoy the arts, sports, games, films and other fun activities. So, theatres, museums, playgrounds and libraries should be accessible by everyone, including children with disabilities* (UNICEF 2008, p. 15).

Many library professional bodies have disability discrimination policies that are based on the legal parliamentary acts of their country.

The Australian Library and Information Association in their guidelines on library standards for people with disabilities state: ***The following principles should be incorporated into every library policy in relation to library services for people with disabilities:***

- a) A person with a disability has the right to be treated with the same dignity, consistency, and consideration as any member of the general public who receives library service.***
- b) The onus shall be on library administrators and personnel to show why any limitation to service exists, rather than on the patron to prove his/her right to a certain service. Every***

***library policy should be written to include the fundamental principles outlined in the Disability Services Act 1986, the Equal Opportunity Act 1995 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1992.***

(ALIA 1998, para. 12-13).

Public libraries have a unique role in being able to provide all citizens with access to free opportunities for social, educational, economic and emotional development. By not fulfilling this role the impacts for children with special needs and their families can be life long. The following quote from the Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies: a division of the American Library Association, Library Services for People with Disabilities Policy (2001), highlights this role and the obligations of public libraries.

***...Disabilities cause many personal challenges. In addition, many people with disabilities face economic inequity, illiteracy, cultural isolation, and discrimination in education, employment and the broad range of societal activities.***

***Libraries play a catalytic role***

***in the lives of people with disabilities by facilitating their full participation in society...***

(Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies: a division of the American Library Association 2001, para. 1-2).

## Significance of this Research

This research is an area of knowledge and discovery that has not previously been explored, the topic of access to public libraries for children with special needs and their families. Previous research in this area has primarily focused on public library access issues for adults with disabilities. This research will advance knowledge in a completely new area, access for children with special needs and their families. The results of the research will be influential in shaping how public libraries provide access for children with special needs and their families.

The influence of the research will also be at a policy level. For example, by highlighting an otherwise overlooked disability access issue, the research will encourage public libraries to examine their disability access policies in the light of the new knowledge.

For families of children with

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special needs the significance of the research is the possible benefits of the new knowledge leads to improvements in their access to public libraries. These benefits include:

- The whole family feels comfortable and welcome in a library environment.
- Sign language and other forms of communication are seen as an activity that occurs in the general community, not just at home.
- Families able to receive information in regards to community services available.
- A sense of belonging to the community that they live in.
- Involvement in 'normal' everyday activities (not therapy).
- Opportunities to interact with children in their community.
- Access to the many benefits and services that the mainstream community experience by visiting the library; for example information and resources, cultural and leisure activities, literacy, life long learning etc.

For the wider community possible benefits include:

- Partnerships between public libraries and the many special needs service providers in

their community.

- Increased awareness of families of children with special needs in their community.
- Greater acceptance of families of children with special needs.

## Aims

The aims for this research project are:

- Identify the barriers to public libraries addressing the issue of access for this group of the community.
- Identify a range of strategies and approaches for public libraries to improve their access and service for children with special needs and their families.
- Make recommendations of strategies for public libraries to improve access for children with special needs and their families.

## Outcomes

The key outcomes for this research project are:

- Increased understanding of the barriers to access to public libraries for children with special needs and their families.
- Improvements in access to public libraries and their

programs for children with special needs and their families.

- Increased awareness of this topic amongst public librarians, library management boards, local councils, government authorities, library professional bodies and in library education.

## Definition of terms used

For the purpose of this study the following definition of special needs will be used:

***The term 'special needs' refers to a diverse range of needs often caused by a medical, physical, mental or developmental condition or disability. Special needs can include cognitive difficulties, physical or sensory difficulties, emotional and behavioural difficulties, and difficulties with speech and language.***

(Scoilnet: portal for Irish education, n.d.).

## Access

The term access as relates to public libraries and children with special needs and their families is used in this study in a broad sense. It includes physical, intellectual, sensory, emotional and psychological accessibility. For a public library to be accessible participants need

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to be able to both physically attend and also to participate at a meaningful level. Examples include:

- Physical access into the building and its facilities
- Access to technology
- Participation in programs
- Access to services provided by the library
- Participation/interaction with the resources available.

## **Families of children with special needs**

In this study the term families of children with special needs will be used to include the following:

- Immediate and extended family members (parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts and uncles).
- Carers/guardians or nurses/allied health care workers.
- Persons responsible for the child with special needs on the day of the child visiting the public library.

# Literature Review Summary (Full review attached as Appendix A)

## Introduction

In 2013 Heather Hill undertook a major literature review in the area of libraries and accessibility. Hill analysed published research literature in the field of library and information science over the period 2000 to 2010, identifying the major issues and trends related to accessibility and disability.

The major findings of her review were that 25% of the research deals with electronic accessibility (for example web access). Although it was the next most common focus, the issue of services provided to people with a disability made up only 12% of the research. As noted above she also found that the most common disability researched was visual disability. Learning disabilities were the next most common, making up just 9% of the literature. Hill notes that her review confirms previous studies into this field of literature undertaken by authors such as Davies (2007), Saumure and Given (2004) and Williamson, Schauder and Bow (2000). These studies also showed that very little of the research undertaken involved investigation and most of the

articles described difficulties and possible solutions.

Hill points to a significant gap in researching what people with disabilities actually want from libraries and how that service can be best provided. Hill also highlights that this is reflected in the research methodology of the literature with only 36% of the research undertaken actually involving people with a disability, even to the point of having able-bodied people undertaking tests for accessibility (H. Hill, 2013).

## Information needs of people with a disability

Heather Hill (2013) found that of the research into disability and accessibility in the library, ***“Little research explored the more fundamental questions of what people with disabilities might want from an information provider and how best to provide that service”*** (p. 141).

# Literature Review Summary (Full review attached as Appendix A)

## Role of technology

Williamson, Schauder and Bow (2000) in a study into the information seeking needs of adults with blindness in Australia had very similar findings. The study noted the lack of major research into the information needs and information seeking behaviours of people with disabilities. The study also raised the issue that information technology is often considered to be the answer to many of the access issues for people with disabilities. However, Williamson et al. highlight that the issue of access and disability is in fact more complex than this, often involving societal and economic issues as well.

## Universal design

Ekwelem in 2013 researched access to academic libraries by university students with vision or mobility difficulties. He also found that despite changes in technology, adult university students with vision impairment or mobility difficulties continued to experience problems when accessing academic libraries. He states that, ***“...people with disability cannot use a library that has been designed for non-disabled users”*** (p. 4). Ekwelem considers universal design as a possible theory for addressing the access issues faced by this group. One recommendation from his research is that, ***“Universal accessibility should be made an integral component of the overall service development plan”*** (p. 27).

The theory of universal design also applies to learning and has a potentially very important role in library access for children with special needs. The theory applies the concept that a learning style or approach that works for one child with a particular need may also work for a range of children (CAST, n.d.) Universal design in learning could be used in public

libraries in the areas of signage, written material and children’s programs. Practical examples of the use of this theory in a public library context are detailed in Banks et al. (2014).

# Research Design

## Introduction

In order to investigate the issue of access to public libraries for children with special needs and their families I studied 20 public libraries (including two cultural institutions) that focus on this issue.

## Methodology

A mixed method of both qualitative and quantitative approaches was used. The qualitative approach allowed participants to detail the experience of providing public library access for children with special needs and their families. This approach provided the opportunity to learn about an access issue that may not have been identified in the questionnaire. The quantitative research method allowed for statistical analysis of answers, where such data is informative to the factors influencing access to public libraries for children with special needs. Charmaz's (2014) grounded theory approach was used to develop an inclusive libraries model, which can be used to improve access to public libraries for children with special needs and their families.

## Research questions

The purpose of this research project was to investigate the factors influencing access to public libraries for children with special needs and their families. The research focused on the following questions:

- What are public libraries currently doing to improve access for children with special needs and their families?
- What are the barriers to access from the perspective of the public librarian?

## The online questionnaire used in the research has been attached as Appendix C.

Questions and response options were formulated through the my experience in delivering programs to children with special needs and through documents and how-to manuals that give guidance to public librarians on this topic. Questions were trialled with library staff working with children with special needs.

## Participant selection criteria and process

A total of eighteen participants took part in both the interview and the online survey. Participants were from a total of five states in the countries of the United States and Canada. The interviews were conducted in person at a location of the choosing of the participant. The number of participants represents the number of key authors, trainers, practitioners, conference presenters and public librarians in North America and Canada with experience in delivering access to public libraries for children with special needs and their families.

The participants all had practical experience in developing or delivering public library programs, policies or strategies in relation to the issue of access to public libraries for children with special needs and their families. The age of the participants involved was over 18 years.

Public librarians from the United States and Canada were selected as the participants due to their collective experience at delivering services to children

# Research Design

with special needs and their families. Public librarians from the United States have written the only 'how-to' books on the topic. One of the oldest programs for children with special needs in the United States has been in existence for over twenty years. The International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) Collection of Books for Young People with Disabilities is housed in Toronto. A large and possibly only online network of public librarians interested children with special needs and library services is made up of 42 librarians from Illinois.

The following criteria was used to select the participants interviewed:

- Authored a journal article, a 'how-to' book, an online blog or other publication on the topic of access to public libraries for children with special needs.
- Developed and produced a training package on the topic.
- Presented a paper on the topic at a national conference.
- Curator of a major collection of resources for children with special needs and their

families (e.g. IBBY).

- Member of an online network for public libraries interested in programs for children with special needs.
- Recommendations from other professional librarians.

Participants were contacted directly by me via email. Some of the initial contacts were made with the referral of a common third party; however, in most cases this was not the situation. Informed consent from both the participant and the organisation that they worked for was given, and ethical obligations were adhered to.

## Data collection and recording

One-on-one interviews were hand scribed, and backed up in electronic version. The online questionnaire used the electronic program, Survey Monkey. Participants were sent the online link via Survey Monkey.

## Description of research activities and survey instrument

An electronic questionnaire was used for both the online questionnaire and also to structure the one-on-one interview. The questionnaire for public librarians consisted of 41 items that allowed respondents to reflect upon their experiences related to providing library services to children with special needs and their families. The electronic questionnaire contains 33 multiple-choice items, five open-ended items, and three Likert-type scale items. The survey was not timed, however, it is estimated that participants finished in 40 minutes when undertaking the online questionnaire and an hour when participating in the one-on-one interview.

In each of these research activities participants were required to consider their assessment of the current and future inclusive practices of the library at which they work and public libraries in general. The interview and the online questionnaire were undertaken in the participants' preferred location. All of these activities were non-invasive in a physical

# Research Design

sense. However, for some participants the activities might be considered invasive in a personal sense. Guidelines for what to do should a participant experience distress were given in the research information sheet that all participants received.

## **Ethical considerations**

Ethics approval was received and strictly adhered to for this study.

## **Data analysis**

The data was analysed using the grounded theory approach. An iterative approach was employed to assist in finding meaning in the data.

## **Data quality and validity**

The sample size and participant selection criteria for each study has been, as far as possible, determined to ensure data validity and quality. To further improve data quality the participant information sheet for the research outlined the importance of the research as well as the potential personal and community benefits.

## **Limitations**

One limitation of this study is that it did not involve families of children with special needs, nor did it involve public libraries that currently do not focus on access for children with special needs and their families.

# Inclusive Libraries Model

From the research a number of common elements emerged that have been used to create a model for public libraries wanting to provide better access for children with special needs and their families. These elements were evident in different degrees in the public libraries and cultural institutions visited during the study tour; however, not all of the libraries had addressed every element in the model. This model is a guide to developing a more inclusive library. It is based on studies of twenty public libraries (including two cultural institutions).



The diagram of the model here shows that the key elements that inclusive libraries focus on are: programs, physical barriers, training, partnerships, marketing and collections. A strongly supportive management is the foundation of the model. These elements are not interdependent, nor do they all have to exist for a library to undertake inclusive practices, however, the more elements a library focusses on the more inclusive it will be.

## Management

The one common element found in all of the libraries was a supportive management. This element is the foundation upon which an inclusive public library is built. The development of a Library Disability Action & Inclusion Plan is an important part of this.

## Collections

Collection development in the context of inclusive library services is quite a large area and includes materials in different formats e.g. braille, audio books; non-fiction materials for adults and children on disabilities, fiction materials that have their protagonists people with disabilities, high interest and low

# Inclusive Libraries Model

skill level fiction and non-fiction, picture books with different sensory formats, toy libraries and pairing of audio and written books. Collection development for children with special needs and their families is as varied as the community that the library serves.

## **Physical Barriers (space and equipment)**

In many ways this element is the area that libraries have traditionally focused on when attempting to improve access for people with disabilities. It is possibly the most visible and therefore perhaps the most tangible; particularly when sourcing or allocating funds. Physical barriers include wheelchair accessibility, adaptive equipment, adjustable furniture, however, there are other aspects of physical barriers that are not always obvious. Some of these examples include, lighting, flooring, noise levels and accessible toys. This element involves creating a library that is accessible, welcoming and comfortable through the physical aspects of the library.

## **Partnerships**

This theme is not new to public libraries. Partnerships are an integral part of public libraries engaging in community.

Partnerships are vital to ensuring success in developing in an inclusive library. They are needed to reach out to families of children with special needs, to assist with the development of inclusive programs, to provide guidance on inclusivity, and to give the opportunity for libraries to be an integral part of an inclusive community, not an added extra that is nice to have. Partnerships can enable libraries to be the conduit through which families can find out about services and programs in their community.

## **Programs**

This element is in some ways the most challenging for public libraries. Some of the challenges include:

- How do we program for children with special needs and what does that look like? What do we include in our program?
- Do we develop programs that are inclusive for children of all abilities or do we develop programs targeted to children with special needs?

- What sorts of programs are suitable?
- Who will develop and run the programs?

Programs are however critical to developing an inclusive public library. Programs provide opportunities for children with special needs to engage in literacy based activities, to be part of their community, to develop social and other real life skills. Programs provide opportunities for families of children with special needs to be part of their community, to develop friendships and support networks in their community and to visit the library and thereby access the resources and services available. Isolation can be a problem for families of children with special needs; library programs can help with this. Programs also provide families of children with special needs the opportunity to engage with their child in a non-therapeutic activity. Programs can provide the opportunity for families to have fun!

# Inclusive Libraries Model

## Training

This is perhaps one of the easiest elements for public libraries to make changes in. It can also be one of the biggest barriers to visiting a public library for children with special needs and their families. Disability awareness training is central to creating a welcoming and inclusive library. If families believe that they are or will be judged by library staff they are unlikely to visit a library. Unfortunately, for some families it only takes one negative experience for this to happen. Similarly, if members of the community are unsupportive in their behaviours towards children with special needs and their families, the families will not feel welcome.

When children with special needs and their families visit a public library they will interact with staff from all areas, from circulation to programs to shelvers and security staff. This means that all staff that work in a library need to receive training in disability awareness. Training in this area helps to increase confidence for staff in their interactions with children with special needs and their

families. A general disability awareness program is the best place to start. It may then be beneficial to undertake more specialised training in particular disabilities, depending on the make-up of your community. For example, if your community has a school for children with hearing impairment, this would be a logical disability to gain additional training in. Community awareness programs and training are also an excellent way of developing a more inclusive community.

## Marketing

This is perhaps one of the most overlooked elements. There is a general belief amongst librarians that members of the community, including those with disabilities, will know that they are welcome in a library. Unfortunately, this is not the reality. Families of children with special needs face discrimination on a daily basis. It can take a lot of self-confidence and strength for families of children with special needs to ask for accommodations to be made if they are needed. Marketing is an essential way public libraries can put out the 'welcome mat' for children with special needs and their families.

# U.S. and Canada Study Tour

The study tour involved visiting five major North American and Canadian cities and surrounding greater areas. A total of twenty public libraries (including two cultural institutions) that deliver programs for children with special needs were visited. Public libraries visited were in the cities of San Francisco, Vancouver, Toronto, New York and the greater Chicago area. The cultural institutions were in New York.

## **Inclusive Public Libraries and Cultural Institutions Visited**

The public libraries and cultural institutions visited as part of this research were selected because of their focus on providing access for children with special needs and their families. Each of these libraries focused on at least one of the elements in the inclusive libraries model:

- Programs
- Physical barriers
- Training
- Partnerships
- Collections
- Marketing

The elements provide an entry to explore how each of the public libraries visited focused on providing access for children with special needs and their families.

Due to the number of public libraries visited the following case studies will generally discuss only one element of providing access for children with special needs in each library. This does not mean that the case study library does not focus on the other elements of the inclusive model. The element discussed in each library will be chosen based on one of the following:

- It is an outstanding example.
- The library has focused on the element in an unusual or unique way.

# Study Tour | Brooklyn Public Library

## Brooklyn Public Library

Brooklyn Public Library (BPL) is in the Brooklyn borough of New York. It has 60 branches and serves a population of over 2.5 million.

Brooklyn Public Library is an outstanding example of inclusive programming, partnerships and embedding the library and its programs in the community. For the BPL providing library access for all children is a priority. To achieve this the BPL has established an environment that they call 'The Child's Place for Children (and Teens) with Special Needs'. The Child's Place was set up as an environment for children and teenagers with disabilities to feel included, safe and to have fun in. The Brooklyn Public Library aims to provide inclusive programs for children and teenagers with and without disability. The core of the Child's Place program is in five of the BPL branches, however, staff work with the programs throughout the entire Brooklyn Library System.

Twenty eight years ago the librarian in charge of children's services at BPL saw a need

to improve library access for children with disabilities. She was able to earmark some grant money and establish the program. The other services that the same grant funded no longer exist. However, the Child's Place has gone from serving 136 people a year to 23 000. In 1997 the program expanded from one site to five and in 2012 teen services were added. The Child's Place continues to be funded through a mix of government and private monies.

The Child's Place is staffed by six library staff and is headed by Carrie Banks, director of Brooklyn Library Services for Youth with Disabilities. Banks has co-authored the book on the topic, Including families of children with special needs: A how-to-do-it manual for librarians (2014).

### Training

The Child's Place library staff receive training in universal design for learning, universal design, multiple intelligences theory and disability awareness. They are passionate and the majority have had experience in working with children with disabilities. All children's and

teen library staff through out the Brooklyn Public Library are trained in disability awareness.

### Programs

The Brooklyn Public Library offers an inspiring range of programs and services through The Child's Place. Programs are not only targeted to children with disabilities, but are inclusive for children and teens of all abilities. If there is a need and a demand they will run a program. Examples of programs include:

- Story times
- Gardening
- Crafts
- Theatre workshops and productions
- Music concerts
- Lego
- Class and school visits
- Gaming for teens
- Maker-spaces

BPL also host and run a wide range of workshops for youth with disabilities and their families, including:

- Finding community recourse
- Government benefits
- Transition planning to adulthood
- Sexuality and young adults with all types of disabilities
- College/university fair

# Study Tour | Brooklyn Public Library

- Community resource fair
- Navigating the special education system
- Writing a resume when you have a learning disability
- Communication, social skills, relaxation for parents

The library are able to provide such an extensive array of programs due to their large number of active partnerships and their integration with the disability community.

## Outreach

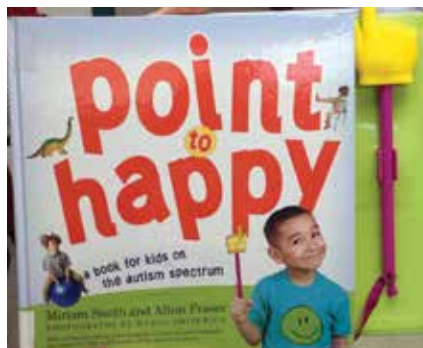
BPL also have an amazing outreach program for children with special needs, which includes:

- Children's hospital programs – where children are read to and are given a book to keep
- Mobile children's library
- Juvenile detention centre visits
- Homeless shelter visits, where children are given books to keep.

The Library's extensive partnering also allow them to embed themselves in the different disability communities in the area and through this to reach out directly to those they are targeting.

## Inclusive Programming

The children's and teens' programs at BPL Childs Place are inclusive and open to children of all abilities. To ensure that the programs are inclusive, the library staff begin all program planning with the principles of universal design for learning, multiple intelligences and universal design of space and equipment. By planning programs in this way the staff reduce the risk of having to modify a program on the spot if a child with a particular disability unexpectedly turns up. When planning a program staff keep in mind that no one knows what a child's developmental capabilities actually are. To accommodate this they provide opportunities for children and teens to participate at the level that best suits them.



## Common elements

The inclusive programs include a number of common elements. Some of these are:

- Multisensory delivery of the activity – for example the use of puppets to tell a story as well as reading aloud
  - A large range of resources
  - Books
  - Music
  - Adaptive toys and craft equipment
  - Puppets and other toys
  - Picture schedules and Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)
  - Social stories, which are available online to help familiarise children with the library and what might happen in a program
  - Interpreters are also available
  - Program group size for teen programs is 15 and for children's programs it is 12
  - The pace of the session is monitored – a more interactive but slower pace is used
  - Programs are held in the programs room, which allows for control over external sensory input (e.g. noise, visual)
  - Routines are consistent and constantly referred to through picture schedules to provide a sense of security.
- Library staff, paid and unpaid

## Study Tour | Brooklyn Public Library



external providers and external allied health care professionals deliver the programs and services. Volunteers are used to support the programs, many of who have disabilities themselves.

A great example of a program is **Music for Autism**. This program runs in partnership with the BPL, it is presented by paid and unpaid external providers and is supported by volunteers and library staff. Music for Autism is an international organisation that has an affiliate in Great Britain. The organisation holds free

events across the United States. The professional musicians are paid and numerous volunteers are enlisted. Volunteers help on the day by making attendees feel welcome and by dancing with those children who wish to. Attendees are encouraged to participate through whatever means they would like, for example movement, dance, song or vocalisation. Food and drink is available throughout the concert. In the second half of the concert attendees are given instruments to play. The concert is not as loud as traditional concerts, 'soft' clapping is used, lights are kept on and attendees

are able to come and go as they please. A picture schedule board is used throughout the concert to make sure attendees know what to expect next. The rules and expected behaviours are clearly explained at the beginning and reinforced throughout the concert. Social stories are also made available to attendees prior to the concert. These concerts are a wonderful experience for all.

### Partnerships

Outstanding programs are only part of the success story of access for children with special needs and their families at the Brooklyn Public Library. Partnerships are another key element. The partnerships that the library has formed have led to the BPL being embedded



## Study Tour | Brooklyn Public Library

in the disability community of their borough. By being part of the disability community the library are able to promote their programs, they are able respond to the needs of the community and thereby run programs that are real and relevant. They are able to access up-to-date and well informed program presenters, they can target their programs and they can support the disability community.

A fantastic example of partnering is the Brooklyn Public Library's membership of the Brooklyn Developmental Disabilities Council. To be part of the Council you need to be working in the area of developmental disabilities, have a developmental disability or be a caregiver of a child with a developmental disability. A recent program that the Library and the Council have partnered on is an anti-bullying conference for people with disabilities. The Library will host this conference for the Council. Another example of successful partnering is with the New York transport system. An access officer from the New York transport system is on the Brooklyn Developmental

Disabilities Council. The Library has been able to work with the access officer in improving public transport disability access to the Library's branches. Over the years the Library has grown in its role with the Council, to now being considered to be an integral part of the Council. The Library has demonstrated their function as a key part of the community.

### Key Learning Outcomes

The Brooklyn Public Library has been focusing on public library access for children with special needs and their families for over twenty years; the library has had time learn from their own experiences, and like any other library they continue to learn. There is so much that can be learned from the Brooklyn Public Library, some of the key learning outcomes are:

- Embed yourself in the disability community of your library population.
- Develop partnerships.
- Provide inclusive programs.
- Develop your programs using the theories of universal design for learning and multiple intelligences.
- Reach out to where your community are (homeless shelters, hospitals).

- It is not the topic of a program that makes is inclusive it is how you deliver it.
- No one really knows the developmental potential of a child with special needs, so provide activities and opportunities that support children to reach that potential.

## Study Tour | Barbara Klipper – author and librarian

Barbara Klipper is the Connecticut author of a book and a number of articles on the topic of children with disabilities and public libraries. She is also an experienced youth services' librarian who has developed a public library special needs centre and designed a grant-funded sensory storytime program. She has trained a number of library systems in how to work with children with autism, and has presented on the topic at conferences around the United States.

When I met Barbara Klipper she had just published an article on the topic of children with disabilities and maker-spaces in libraries, **Making Makerspaces Work for Everyone** (2014). Barbara's key advice to me on this topic was to consider the needs of children with disabilities as you design a maker-space and to assume that some of the users will be children with disabilities that are not immediately apparent, such as learning disabilities. I would recommend reading this article if your library has or is considering a maker-

space. Barbara also has excellent practical advice on how to program for children with autism in her book, **Programming for Children and Teens with Autism Spectrum Disorder** (2014). Although the book is targeted to children with autism, the advice is relevant to library programming for all children with special needs.



### Programing

Klipper advises that decisions in the following areas need to be made when starting to program for children with autism. (2014, pp7-12).

- **Goals**

How will you define success for the program? Unlike other library programs, the number of attendees is not a good reflection of the success of the program. This issue was raised by a number of

librarians that I visited. One librarian explained to me that, "What these programs lack in numbers, they make up for in heart."

- **Inclusive program or a program targeted**

only to children with autism?

- **Age and development stage of participants**

This can be tricky to determine, as the developmental range of children with disabilities can be very large. This information will influence the activities of the program.

- **Outreach and marketing**

If the families are currently not attending the library, traditional library marketing methods might not be successful. Consider connecting with disability organisations, schools and online groups.

- **Budgeting and funding**

Consider applying for special grants to purchase more expensive equipment.

- **Scheduling**

Therapy and medical appointments can mean families are very busy, so consider weekends. Routine is important.

- **Collaboration**

Support and advice

## Study Tour | Barbara Klipper – author and librarian

from autism groups and organisations can be instrumental in the success of the program.

- **Training requirements**

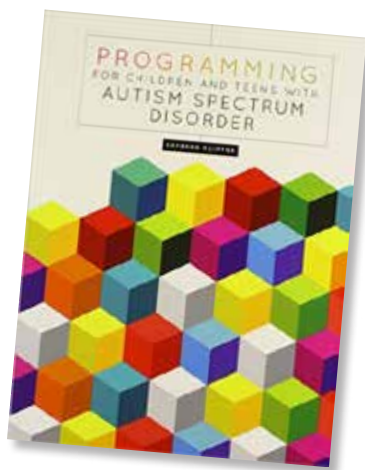
What training will staff involved need?

**Some of the best practices for programs that Klipper advises are:**

- Smaller groups.
- Volunteers to assist.
- Use social stories to prepare children.
- Use visual supports.
- Help children transition between activities. Consider the use of visual schedules, timers or music.
- Provide a physical environment that is:
  - safe
  - has few distractions
  - does not have fluorescent lighting or draughts
  - is clutter free
  - has a quiet corner
  - if possible has a sink
  - has delineated seating
  - considers sensory needs, has fidgets
  - considers dietary needs if food is involved.
- Include repetition, routine and redundancy in the program.

(Klipper, 2014, pp13-21)

It was a pleasure to meet with Barbara Klipper. She is both passionate and committed to improving access to libraries for people with autism, as evidenced by her recent establishment of the **Autism Welcome Here: Library Programs, Services and More** grant. The grant supports library projects and services for people with autism.



## Study Tour | Vancouver Public Library



Towards the back of the children's area two separate play and reading areas can be seen. These areas provide a more enclosed and quieter space for children, particularly for those that find the larger more open space overwhelming.

## Study Tour | Vancouver Public Library

Vancouver Public Library (VPL) has 22 branches, serving a population of over 500,000. It is the third-largest public library system in Canada.

### Programs

The VPL provide a unique program called 'Language Fun Storytime'. It was initially developed as a targeted program for children with speech and language delays. While Language Fun Storytime continues to run as a targeted program, some of the literacy approaches developed in the program have been adapted and used in other story time sessions. Language Fun Storytime is a good example of how a targeted program can successfully build staff capacity and be a bridge to the development of more inclusive library programs for families of children with special needs.

This story time approach is underpinned by the theory of universal design for learning. The primary difference with this story time program is that advocates the use of a multi-modal approach to the telling and retelling of one book. For example, during a

story time session only one book is focused on. The book is initially read aloud, it might then be retold using a felt story board, and will then be retold for a third time using another mode such as props. Traditional rhymes and songs are also used in the program.

The benefit of the multi-modal approach is that it supports children with language delays by giving them extra time to understand the story and the language and literacy conventions used. This approach also caters for a range of different learning styles. Yet at the same time the approach is engaging and developmentally appropriate for children who have typical development.

Further information about the program can be found in the chapter, 'Language Fun Storytime: Serving children with speech and language delays'. (Prendergast & Lazar, 2010)

### Partnerships

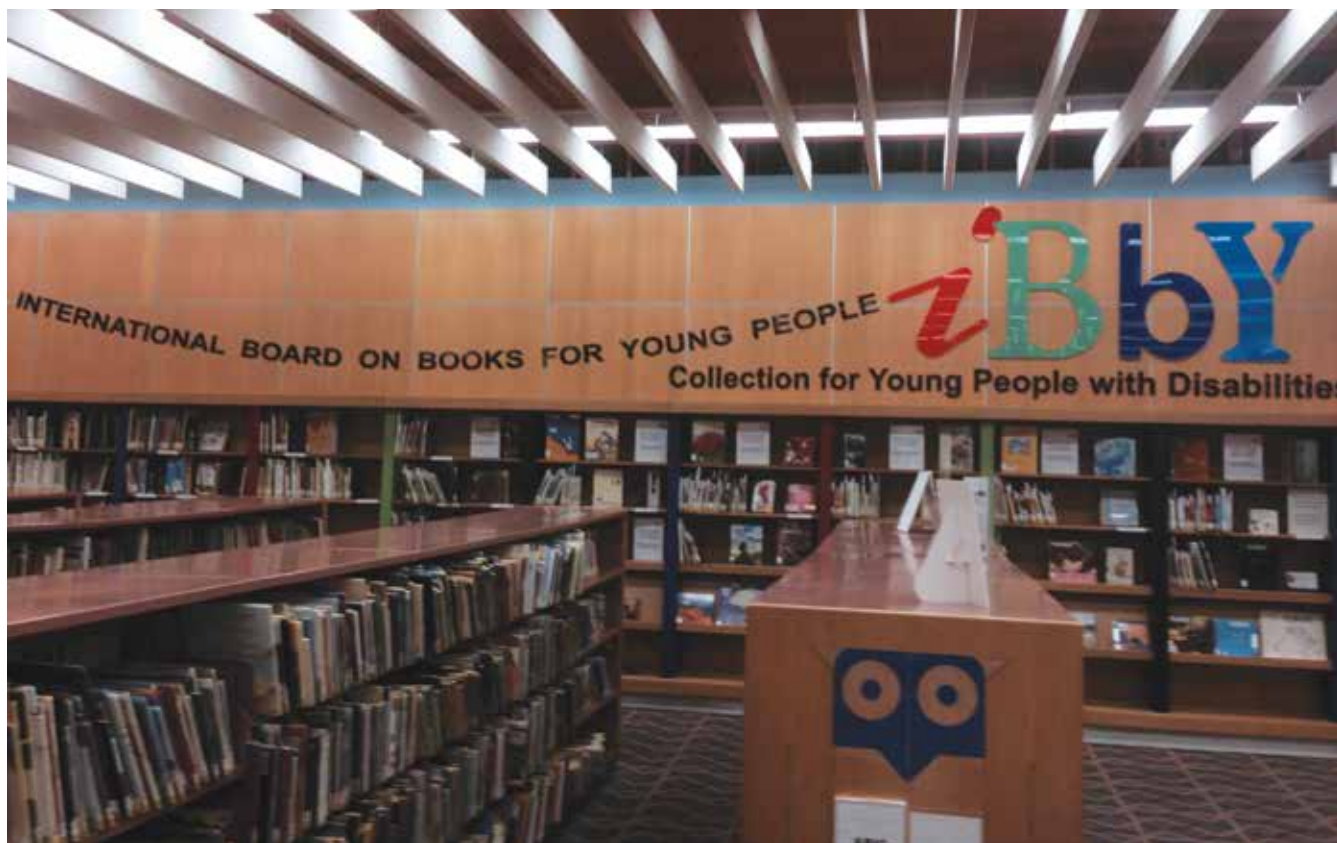
Language Fun Storytime was developed in partnership with VPL Children's Librarians and Vancouver Coastal Health's Speech Language Pathologists.

It is delivered in a number of different library and community sites across Vancouver to small groups of children who have been referred by a speech therapist and who are receiving or waiting for speech-language therapy. The partnership with an external health service has been critical to the success of the Language Fun program and has generated new opportunities for the library to engage with the wider community of children with special needs and their families.

### Key Learning Outcomes

- Partner with local health organisations.
- Reach out to where your community are.
- Use a multi-modal approach to deliver your story times.

## Study Tour | Toronto Public Library Service



Toronto Public Library (TPL) has 100 branches, serving a population of over 2.6 million. The Library is known throughout the world as the home of the 'IBBY Collection for Young People with Disabilities'. As well as this specialised collection, another TPL focus is on developing children's areas that promote play and interaction for children of all abilities. These areas are called 'KidsStop: early learning centers'.

### Collection development

The collection is owned by IBBY and managed by Toronto Public Library, at their North York Central Branch. IBBY (The International Board on Books for Young People) is a not for profit international organisation. As part of its mission IBBY aims, *"to promote international understanding through children's books and to give children everywhere the opportunity to have access to*

# Study Tour | Toronto Public Library Service

## ***books with high literary and artistic standards.”***

(IBBY, n.d., para 1-2).

Toronto Public library receives submissions for the collection from IBBY national sections and publishers from all over the world. Every two years Toronto Public Library select the most outstanding to be compiled and catalogued in the collection. The main criteria used for selection are:

- Books that are produced specifically for children and teens with special needs. For example, books that are in a different format (ie braille), have tactile pictures, have sign language pictures as well, or are high interest and low difficulty books specifically for children with special needs.
- General children and teen books that portray children, teens and adults with a disability; for example where a main character in the book has a disability, however the disability is not necessarily the focus of the book.
- High quality picture books from general production that are accessible to all levels of language and intellectual abilities.

The collection tours internationally several times a year. Although it is a reference collection the public are encouraged to use it. It is prominently positioned in the middle of the children’s library in one of Toronto Public Library’s busy branches. The collection is promoted to schools, teachers, parents and researchers. Schools are also able to borrow small packs of titles to use the classroom. The library has purchased circulating copies of many of the titles held. This collection illustrates that books for children and teens with disabilities do not have to be condescending or ‘helping hand’ type collections. An exceptional book for children and teens is one in which the story is the central focus not the disability.



This collection is exceptional and serves a specific purpose of being the international repository for books for children and teens with disabilities.

However, the collection serves as an outstanding example for other public libraries of titles appropriate for their own collection and also the criteria used to choose appropriate books.



## **Key Learning Outcomes**

- Develop a children’s collection that is inclusive of children with special needs.
- Select titles that have protagonists with special needs, but where the disability is not the central focus.
- Hold the same title in different formats.
- Hold books that are visually and texturally sensory.



# Study Tour | San Francisco Public Library

San Francisco Public Library (SFPL) has 27 branches, serving a population of over 800,000. The community that the SFPL serves is a very diverse city, culturally, linguistically, socio-economically. San Francisco has a significant homeless population. Disability is known to have a strong correlation with homelessness.

## Collection development

The SFPL are a unique example of very strong collections for adults and children with disabilities. The SFPL has an Access Services Center. This Center encompasses a number of collections targeted to patrons with a range of disabilities. Some of these are traditional public library collections such as Large Print and Outreach Collections (mobile services). What is perhaps more unique is that the following collections are all housed at the main branch.

- The Resource Collection for Learning Differences
- Library for the Blind and Print Disabled
- The Deaf Services Center

## Resource Collection for Learning Differences

This collection is targeted to patrons of all ages with learning differences; as well to their families, friends and professionals associated with the field. The collection includes resources related to learning differences, dyslexia and attention deficit disorder. This collection was the first of its kind in the United States, it was established in 1993.

The collection is made up of books, audio, video, magazines and newsletters. Assistive technology is also available to assist with access for patrons. The Centre run educational programs on learning differences for people with learning differences, their families and the general community.

## Library for the Blind and Print Disabled

This collection is a sub-regional library of the Library of Congress National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. Patrons need to qualify under the guidelines of the National Library Service to be eligible for this collection. The collection is targeted at all ages.

The collection includes serials in audio format, talking books and descriptive videos (which are movies or television programs that have extra narration to describe the movie, characters, scenery, actions etc.). The library also provides information about services for people with visual impairment available in the community.

Assistive devices are available in the library and a small selection can be borrowed. The range of assistive devices available is large and includes: braille printer, reading machines, talking library catalogues, a range of different computer software, modified computer hardware, talking sign receivers.

The library runs a range of programs for people who are visually impaired. An excellent one is 'Audio-described Movie Monday'

## The Deaf Services Center

This collection is targeted to children and adults with a hearing impairment, their families, friends and professionals in the field. Staff in the Center are able to communicate using sign language.

## Study Tour | San Francisco Public Library

Collections in the Center include: books, serials, videos and DVDs and well as a resource file of articles, newspaper clippings etc. The collections focus on all topics of relevance to people with hearing impairment. Assistive devices such as closed-captioned viewing devices are available for use in the library. A videophone is also available.

Like the centres for learning differences and the vision impaired, this centre provides information about local services for its patrons. The Center runs a range of programs, for which it provides sign language.

The SFPL also has a collection of assistive devices that have been made into kits and are available at all information desks. The kits have a range of tools including: magnifiers, signature guides, braille rulers, pencil grips, large mouse, modified keyboards etc. The kits are available for use by any patron.

### **Learning Outcomes**

The collections that are held by the SPFL are clearly specialised and the SPFL would be one of the few public libraries in the

world to house all three. The SPFL does however provide an excellent example of the kinds of materials and collection development that other public libraries might consider when focusing on making their library more inclusive for children with special needs and their families. The needs of a library's community of children with special needs will influence the development of the collection.

### **Key Learning Outcomes**

- Consider the needs of children with vision, hearing and learning difficulties when developing your collection.

## Study Tour | Farmingdale Public Library



This 'Program Room' is in the main children's area of the library. It is enclosed providing a quieter, lower sensory environment, at the same time as being in the centre of the library.

Farmingdale Public Library has one library and serves a population of over 43,000.

The Farmingdale Public Library is an excellent example of developing close connections with children with special needs and their families in the library's community. The library actively reaches out to families of children with special needs,

and is engaged in constant conversations with their families so that they are able to respond to the communities needs. There is a focus that all staff within the library, not just children's and youth staff, are committed to welcoming children and youth with special needs and their families.

### **Programs**

Farmingdale Library provides a diverse range of programs for children with special needs and for their families. Due to the openness of the relationship between the library and the children with special needs and their families, the library programs are responsive to the needs of the children and their families. Farmingdale Library runs two weekly programs for

## Study Tour | Farmingdale Public Library

children with special needs. The first is a teen video game night and the second is a programed series. The series run for a set period of time, with the focus of each series changing. One example is the Kitchen Skills program, which runs over a seven week period.

In addition to the weekly programs a range of other programs run throughout the year. Examples of these include:

- Sensory movies
- My fun place Jr.
- Art with Karyn
- Special Needs Carnival
- Information nights on a range of topics related to parenting and raising children with special needs

Library staff, as well as external presenters deliver the programs. Volunteers are used to assist with the delivery of the programs.

### Marketing

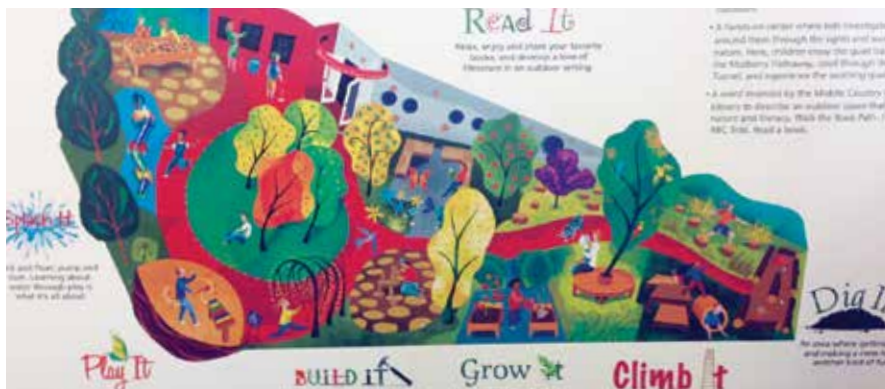
The library use their website, flyers and partnerships with organisations involved in the disability sector to promote their programs and services. Farmingdale Public Library has produced a flyer giving families tips on how to prepare their child with special needs for a visit to the library. In all of their promotional material the library reinforce that the children with special needs and their families are welcome in the library and that they are encouraged to make a connection with library staff to ensure that the needs of the child and family are accommodated as best as possible.

### Key Learning Outcomes

Farmingdale Library is an example of a small library being a big part of the community of children with disabilities in their area.

- Embed the library in its community of children with disabilities.
- Develop a relationship with the families of children with special needs that visit the library.
- Listen to the families of children with special needs
- Provide programs targeted to children and teens with special needs.
- Contract external providers to run programs where needed.
- Encourage families to have input into the types of programs run at the library.
- Promote the inclusive services and programs of the library.

# Study Tour | Middle County Public Library



Middle County Public Library is in Long Island, New York. The library has two branches and serves a population of 63,000.

This library is a great example of focusing on the physical elements of library space and universal design to create an environment that is inclusive for all families. The library is a national model for the Family Place Libraries concepts; the library also provides the national training and technical assistance for this program.

Family Place is a model of service to families and children that reaches out to new and non-traditional audiences, builds partnerships with community agencies, and develops new programs and services that focus on emergent literacy and

family support. The overall goal of Family Place is to develop and institutionalise a family-centred environment in public libraries by expanding the traditional role of libraries and transforming them into community centres for literacy, early childhood development, parent education, family support and community information.

Core Components include:

- The parent child workshop.
- Specially designed interactive public space within the library for young children and parents.
- Coalition building & outreach.
- A parent's collection.
- Additional developmentally appropriate programs for children, birth-five and their parents/caregivers.
- Trained staff.

To receive the accreditation libraries need to implement

these components. Family Place libraries redesign the library environment to ensure it is welcoming and appropriate for children of all abilities from birth and up. Librarians also facilitate connections and reach out to non-traditional library users.

The resources, programs and services offered at the library are welcoming and inclusive of all families and children. More information on the Family Place Library concept can be found at: <http://familyplacelibraries.org/index.html>.

## Physical barriers

The children's area at the Middle County Public Library, Centreach Branch is a wonderful example of providing a space that meets the needs of all families. Two of the zones within the children's area particularly stand out. The first of these is the 'The Nature

## Study Tour | Middle County Public Library

Explorium'. This is a fantastic outdoor learning space. The Nature Explorium opens directly from the children's area. It is well fenced to ensure children are unable to run off. The natural space is designed to help families develop connections with nature and also to encourage discovery and exploration. The space is physically accessible for all children and is divided into the learning areas of creating, growing, climbing, digging and water play. Children are able to interact with the space in an open-ended way, at their own ability and in the way that suits them. It also provides opportunities for children to interact with each other in many different ways; for example one child may be making a butterfly environment, while another is drawing the butterflies in the garden. Nature provides opportunities for children to play and interact in non-judgemental and unstructured ways.

The second zone is 'The Museum Corner'. This space is purposely designed to be an interactive exhibit space. The exhibits are curated by children's librarians, are hands-on and change throughout the

year. Again this is a welcoming and safe environment that encourages children to interact with the display in the way that they are most comfortable.

The remaining space in the children's area is large, however, it is also cleverly separated into smaller zones. These include play spaces, cosy and quiet spaces, program spaces etc. The children's area play space is a set up to accommodate a range of open-ended play activities, with opportunities for children to engage in social or individual play. For example, a large play shop with a range of accompanying toys allow children to play together, side by side or individually; at their own developmental level and pace.

The different zones and range of spaces within the children's area create an environment where a child can find a place that suits his/her needs.

### Programs

The library runs a number of inclusive literacy programs, such as sensory story time and 'sing, sign and read' baby sessions. It is, however, their children's sign language club that is unique. The club has been running

weekly at the library for 25 years. The club is made up of 100 children. The children learn to sing and sign songs, which they perform throughout the year to the community.

### Key Learning Outcomes

The Middle County Library is an excellent example of creating library spaces that are inclusive.

- Develop family friendly children's spaces.
- Develop a children's/family area with different zones for quiet activities, play, educational activities etc.
- Provide spaces that are low sensory and cosy.
- Provide a range of open-ended play activities and equipment.
- Provide play equipment that allow for sensory experiences.
- Develop a children's garden that is inclusive and enables children of all abilities to engage, (include sensory activities, physical activities etc.)

# Study Tour | Brooklyn Children's Museum

Brooklyn Children's Museum was founded in 1899, and was the first children's museum in the world. BCM's mission statement is "to actively engage children in educational and entertaining experiences through innovation and excellence in exhibitions, programs, and use of its collection."

The Museum encourages children to develop an understanding of and respect for themselves, others and the world around them by exploring cultures, the arts, science, and the environment.

BCM supports its mission by offering public programs, school programs, programs for summer camps, after-school programs and accessible programs for children with disabilities. The museum is passionate and committed to being accessible to children with special needs and their families. Children of all abilities are a focus of the museum.

## Programs

The Brooklyn Children's Museum creates initiatives and programs that strengthen inclusion and accessibility for all visitors. The Museum provides inclusive family time in the Sensory Room. In addition, there are exclusive monthly programs for children with disabilities. There is also a partnership with Friendship Circle, an organisation that provides activities for children with both physical and cognitive disabilities.

The Sensory Room utilises universal design and offers inclusive family hours, monthly family access programs, adaptive school programs, and partnerships with the disability community.

In addition the museum celebrates children of all abilities during its annual, I Can! Kid-Abilities Day. This year 1200 visitors were welcomed and 100 free passes were offered to organisations that work with the disability community.



## Physical barrier

The development of a space targeted to children with special needs at the BCM provides a unique example of what is possible in a public cultural institution. The museum has created a space called the Sensory Room. It is a welcoming and interactive space that provides children the opportunity to engage in multisensory play with the equipment set up in the room. This flexible space includes interactive equipment that can be set up in various combinations and manipulated to create environments that can either be stimulating or

## Study Tour | Brooklyn Children's Museum



Inside the Sensory Room

calming, which can be adjusted through the use of equipment and lighting. This room provides a welcoming environment for children with autism spectrum disorders. The room is available for special needs school groups as well as the scheduled drop-in programs. The room is utilised as part of the programs targeted to children with special needs and their families.

### Key Learning Outcomes

- Encourage inquiry-based learning.
- Develop environments that are designed for either active or passive interaction, and matched to fit the perceived motivation, interests, leisure, relaxation and/or educational needs of the child.
- Develop spaces that support social development as well as visual, auditory, tactile, vestibular, and gross motor.
- It is not the topic of an activity or program that is inclusive it is how you present it.
- The development of programs need to be based on universal design for learning and multiple intelligences theories.
- All public cultural institutions can be inclusive.

## Study Tour | Fanwood and Scotch Plains Public Libraries

Fanwood and Scotch Plains Public Libraries are in New Jersey, New York. Fanwood has a population of 7,500 and Scotch Plains has a population of over 23,000. The libraries are separate entities, however, due to their close proximity and smaller populations they work together on different projects. One such project is Libraries and Autism: We're Connected. In 2008 the two libraries received a grant to jointly develop a training package for public libraries on the topic of patrons with autism.

### Training

This combined library service is an outstanding example of training in the area of disability for public librarians. The program is recognised nationally in the United States and is available free to all public libraries online and in a DVD format. The program focuses on how to provide customer service to patrons with autism and their families. The aim of the training is to empower library staff with the knowledge and confidence to offer a more inclusive service, which will

in turn help libraries become welcoming places for people with autism and their families.

The training package looks at the importance of communication, customer service, employing library staff and volunteers with special needs, programming strategies that work, partnerships and empowering staff to be involved. As part of the project a range of resources was developed, many of which can be accessed from the website of the project:

<http://www.librariesandautism.org>

The next stage of the project is to develop a training package focusing on public libraries and teens and young adults with autism.

### Key Learning Outcomes

- A public library is never too small to provide inclusive programs and services for children with special needs and their families
- Partner with other libraries to run inclusive programs and to provide staff training on disability awareness



# Study Tour | Children's Museum of the Arts

The Children's Museum of the Arts is in New York and is a not for profit art gallery/studio that provides hands-on art programs and drop-in workshops for children.

The museum is focused on providing inclusive access for children of all abilities. The Children's Museum of the Arts also provide programs targeted to children with special needs, with the intention that these will act as a bridging program to more mainstream inclusive activities.

## Partnerships

The Children's Museum of the Arts is a good example of the kind of organisation that public libraries could partner with. The Museum currently partners with local public libraries to run art and literacy sessions for children with special needs at the library.

## Programs

The Children's Museum of the Arts offers weekend inclusive programs for children of all abilities. The weekend activities provide the opportunity for children with special needs, their families and friends to explore, create and have fun with art in a non-judgmental,

welcoming environment. Programs like these enable families of children with special needs to relax and enjoy each other. Families with children with special needs can be under a lot of stress and the opportunity to engage in non-therapy, fun activities for the whole family can be critical. The Art Museum believe that art therapy for children with special needs can bring a range of benefits at an emotional, physical, cognitive and social level.

An example of one of the weekend inclusive activities is the 'Clay Bar'. This activity provides a wonderful sensory and tactile experience, which can also be very relaxing. For those children who do not like the sensation of clay, pipe cleaners are offered. This is the kind of activity that public libraries can run themselves or partner with an art organisation. Imagine an activity that involves story telling and clay making.

Universal design for learning is integral to the development of art programs run at the Museum, however, they also focus on using the resources that they have had at hand to improve delivery of the program.

For example, if a child needs a longer paintbrush and one is not available, they will strap a stick to the handle of the paintbrush to make it longer. Thus it is not always necessary to purchase adaptive equipment.

## Key Learning Outcomes

- The Children's Museum of the Arts is an excellent example of the kind of partner that public libraries could make to develop and provide inclusive programs.
- Use programs targeted to children with special needs as a bridging program. Sometimes these programs are the door to the library for children with special needs.
- Be flexible when delivering programs and think about how you can use the resources you have at hand to make any accommodations required.
- Use universal design for learning theory in the development of programs.



## Study Tour | Special Needs and Inclusive Library Services (SNAILS)

SNAILS is a public libraries networking and professional development group in the greater Chicago area, Illinois. The network is for children's and youth librarians, library staff and students of library studies. The focus of the group is library services for youth with disabilities. The group meet quarterly, and have a blog that is an excellent resource and support for librarians on the issue of access for children with special needs.

(<http://snailsgroup.blogspot.com.au>)

### Partnerships

SNAILS is a fantastic example of libraries coming together to partner, share, learn and support each other. It is a vibrant and active group and this is reflected in the high level of interest in meeting the needs of children with disabilities in the Chicago-area public library sector; there are over forty member libraries. The quarterly meetings are an opportunity for libraries to share what they have been doing in their library, to receive guidance and support and to learn from and inspire each other. Each meeting

also has a guest professional development speaker.

This group is passionate about the issue of public library access for children and youth with special needs. It provides leadership by focusing on developing knowledge and furthering awareness of the issues amongst public librarians.

### Key Learning Outcomes

Networking groups such as these are an excellent first step for public libraries wanting to improve access for children with special needs. The interest in and success of this group is a clear indication of the need for similar groups in other parts of the world.



## Study Tour | Skokie Public Library

Skokie Public Library has one library and serves a population of 65,000.

The library has been focusing on accessibility for children with special needs and their families since receiving a grant in 2004. Skokie Public Library used the grant for staff training, increased programming, purchasing adapted toys and technology, and collection development. The grant enabled them to focus on all of the elements of the inclusive library model.

### Programs

Over ten years later the library continues to focus on this group of the community. The library employs a special needs coordinator librarian and runs four very successful regular programs that support children and youth with special needs. The programs for younger children, Club Wonder and Rainbow Therapy, are targeted to children with special needs. The program for youth, Friend Squad, is an inclusive program for all youth. The Baby Signing session is inclusive of all babies and families. Numbers are restricted for each program and families need to register with

library staff. Registering gives staff the opportunity to connect with the families, to understand the needs of the children attending and where possible support those needs. The library also make regular email contact with the families; reminding them of programs coming up, providing information about resources that may be useful and informing families of community based workshops, lectures and meetings that may be of interest to them. This type of interaction is supportive to families of children with special needs, who are often isolated and under extreme levels of pressure.

Rainbow Therapy is a monthly program for children between the ages of seven to twelve. The program involves therapy dogs and their handlers. Volunteers also assist during the sessions. The opportunity to interact with a dog in a relaxed, non-therapy and non-judgmental environment provides a range of benefits to the children that attend. Some of the benefits include the opportunity to practice social skills, increased confidence and increased language use. The level and pace of interaction is non-pressured and is led by the child.



Club Wonder is a monthly program for families of children with special needs who are between three and seven years of age. The program is a rotation of a range of different activities. The sessions offered

## Study Tour | Skokie Public Library

range from art, music, yoga and sensory story time. The library is able to offer a wide variety of experiences through partnering with local organisations. Partnering also provides opportunities to connect families with potential service providers and to other families of children with special needs. This is very important for both children and parents/caregivers.

Friend Squad is a program with the aim of helping youth who experience difficulty in making friends. Peer volunteers are trained as friendship ambassadors to help with the program. The program provides a supportive environment for youth to interact with their peers. The friendship ambassadors host the activities that are run by the library. This type of program can be vital for youth with disabilities. Friendships can become more complex as children develop into teenagers, this can be even harder and more isolating for youth with special needs.

Baby Signs is a weekly inclusive program for all families. Signing, singing, playing and saying are all utilised to create an interactive program that

promotes the use of sign language in the community.

### Physical barriers

Skokie has also invested in technology for children with special needs. They have purchased a computer with an adapted keyboard, switches and a trackball. They have purchased software and games targeted to children with special needs.

### Collection development

Collections for children with special needs and their families is another area that is popular at Skokie Public Library. The library has developed a kit of toys for children with special needs that are available for use in the library. They have also created a special needs collection with the following resources that are available for borrowing:

- Adapted picture books, using picture communication symbols.
- High interest, low skills level books.
- Books and tape sets of abridged popular titles.
- Speech and language development software.
- Braille and large type books.
- Signed stories on DVD.
- Disability awareness books

and DVDs.

- Leap into literacy, adaptive books for children with special needs.

### Key Learning Outcomes

Skokie Public Library is a great example of offering programs that are targeted to children with special needs as well as inclusive programs. Programs that have been very successful include:

- Therapy dog literacy programs.
- Programs for primary school aged children with special needs, with a rotating theme to suit the interests of the children.
- Friendship programs for teens with special needs.
- Baby signing program.
- The breadth of the special needs collection is a fantastic example of what is possible.

## Study Tour | Glencoe Public Library

Glencoe Public Library has one library, serving a population of almost 9000. This library is an excellent example of how despite being small, the library is focusing on increasing access for children with special needs and their families.

### Programs

This library provides a monthly, Saturday morning, sensory story time. The sensory story time is contracted to a non-profit service provider for children with special needs. The sessions are provided for free by the library and are targeted to library families with children with special needs. The sensory story time involves a range of activities including interactive stories, felt boards, singing, dance, craft and a parachute. A library staff person is present and involved in the story time, ensuring that connections are made between the families and library staff. It also provides the opportunity for library staff to assist families to access library resources.

The library also run family film events targeted to children with special needs and their families.

### Sensory Storytime with Lekotek



### Inclusive Sensory Play

To make the film nights more inclusive the following elements are included:

- Availability of noise cancelling headphones
- Low lighting (not complete darkness)
- Lower sound volume for the film
- Availability of fidgets
- Weighted blankets.

### Key Learning Outcomes

- Small libraries can provide programs for children with special needs.
- External providers can be contracted to run programs for children with special needs.

## Study Tour | Glenview Public Library

Glenview Public Library has one main library, serving a population of 45,000. The Library has been successful in developing and running inclusive programs for children of all abilities. Partnering with local schools has been key to their programs being successful.

### **Programs and Partnering**

Glenview Public Library run, in partnership with a local school, a monthly program called the Friendship Club. The Friendship Club is an inclusive program for any child that would like to make friends in a supported environment, including children with special needs.

The program involves volunteer friendship ambassadors. Friendship ambassadors are children in grades 4 to 12 interested in developing friendships with children in grades 3 to 8. A volunteer special needs teacher provides training to become a friendship ambassador. Two or three ambassadors are allocated per friend. This forms small supportive friendship circles, providing many opportunities

for making the 'friend' feel cared for.

The Friendship Club gatherings feature different activities each time. The range of activities includes therapy dogs, music, craft, adaptive karate and movie and pizza nights.

The program has been very successful, with other libraries running similar programs. The program has proven itself to be a community-builder, a community service opportunity, an avenue for teaching diversity and a successful approach to stamping out bullying by creating advocates inside the schools.

### **Key Learning Outcomes**

- Inclusive friendship clubs are very popular and meet a need for teenagers with disabilities.
- Any activity can be developed to be part of an inclusive program.
- Partnering with local schools can be instrumental in the success of a program.

## Study Tour | Arlington Heights Memorial Public Library

Arlington Heights Memorial Public Library has one main library, serving a population of 76,000. Arlington Heights Memorial Library is committed to improving access for children with special needs. The library offers a range of resources and programs to help with access, including: circulating iPads with communication programs, a page for families of children with special needs on their web page, targeted and inclusive children's programs, special needs collection resources and newsletters.

### Programs

Arlington Heights Memorial Library provides an example of an amazing inclusive program for children of all abilities. This program is Storytime Yoga for Families. The program is held on a Saturday afternoon and is open to children of all abilities and their families. A professional yoga teacher, who has experience in working with children with special needs, is contracted to run the program. Due to health and safety risks only a qualified yoga teacher is

able to run these programs. The yoga program is a wonderful fusion of literacy and movement. Stories, oral and written, are used as a stimulus for yoga positions and movement. Children are guided through poses of animals, plants, elements of nature and the environment around them. By combining literacy with movement children are able to connect with and immerse themselves in the story in a very different way to the traditional sit, listen and focus approach. The traditional approach can be very difficult for children who are unable to sit still.

Storytime Yoga provides a range of possible benefits for all children. For children with developmental delays or physical restrictions some of these benefits can be significant in coping with day-to-day life.

Yoga can help children with:

- Relaxation
- Physical strength
- Flexibility
- Anger management
- Body awareness

The benefits of Storytime Yoga are discussed in the article, **Yoga as a Bridge for Serving a Cross Section**

**of Your Library Population** by Lesley Mason (2014).

### Key Learning Outcomes

- Family yoga is a very popular inclusive program that all children can benefit from. It can help develop literacy, body awareness and relaxation.
- Lend out iPads with software for children with special needs.
- Use the library website to help improve access for families of children with special needs.

# Study Tour | Glen Ellyn Public Library

Glen Ellyn Public Library has one library, serving a population of 29 000. This library is an excellent example of partnering with a local school and also making inclusion a focus of the library strategic plan.

## Partnering

Glen Ellyn Public Library in partnership with teachers from the local high school run a 'life skills' session for a special needs class from the high school. This program is held every three weeks. The teachers and librarians collaborate to plan a session that is meaningful, achievable and which also extends the students. An integral part of the program is that students are required to ask a librarian at the desk a prepared question. Prior to visiting the library the students practice using their social skills in the classroom and in the lunchroom. The library program extends the learning for the students, giving them the opportunity to practice their skills in safe, structured but real life situations.

The program is successful because of the collaborative

planning before. This allows the librarians to find out what works and what does not work for the class as well as for individual students. The librarians are able to ask:

- Is there is a particular reading level that works best for read-a-louds with the class?
- What type of accommodations would work best for the students?
- Do any of the students have any specific triggers that it might be helpful to know about?

The following blog link describes this program in more detail. <http://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/2014/10/mind-your-manners-teaching-life-skills-in-the-library/>

The Glen Ellyn Public Library is also an excellent example of how to ensure that inclusiveness is an integrated focus of the library. Glen Ellyn has achieved this by including it in their strategic plan and by listing specific inclusive objectives to achieve the goal. The following is the excerpt from their strategic plan:

**Goal II: Enhance the Member Experience by Increasing Community Engagement**  
**A. Increase Library Visibility Outside of the Building**

- 1 Register New Members at Offsite Locations
- 2 Increase Library Participation in Community Events
- 3 Increase the Number of Offsite Programs

## B. Improve Service to Diverse Populations

- 1 Generate youth and adult programming for those with special needs.
- 2 Train staff in inclusive library service.
- 3 Host a multi- ethnic/cultural event.
- 4 Address homeless as a community issue.

(Glen Ellyn Public Library, 2014, Para 4-5.)

## Key Learning Outcomes

- Partner with local schools to provide meaningful library experiences for students with special needs.
- Include specific objectives for the inclusion of children with special needs in the libraries strategic plan.



# Study Tour | Gail Borden Public Library

Gail Borden Public Library is a large service with two libraries, serving a population of 145 000. Gail Borden Library has focused on providing access to children with special needs and their families through a number of elements, including marketing, physical spaces and programs.

## Marketing

This library is a good example of how libraries can use their web site to provide information and services to the families of children with special needs. Gail Borden has dedicated a page on their library web site to services for children with special needs. By dedicating a page the library are sending a clear message that inclusion is important to the library.

Topics covered on the web page include:

- Why use the library with your child with special needs?
- Tips for using the library with your child.
- Programs run by the library.
- Resources available at the library, including books, CDs and toys.
- Resources in the community,

including workshops and lectures.

- Other useful resources and web links.
- Useful local organisations. ([http://gbplyreadysetread.blogspot.com.au/p/blog-page\\_21.html](http://gbplyreadysetread.blogspot.com.au/p/blog-page_21.html))

This is a fantastic starting resource for families of children with special needs in the Gail Borden area.

## Physical barriers

The library has also focused on physical barriers with the development of the Early Learning Center. This space has been developed with an understanding of the importance of play for all children. The kids' space includes the following:

- Manipulative toys
- Educational toys
- Concept toys
- Activity boards
- Toys for creative expression
- Puppets, capes etc.
- Toys for dramatic play
- Kitchen, house
- Craft section
- Large motor activities
- Puzzles
- Books.

The open-ended and multi-sensory nature of the toys and activities in this space helps to

make it accessible to a broad range of children.

## Key Learning Outcomes

- Use your libraries website to reach out to families and friends of children with special needs. Develop a library web page for children with special needs, including program information, library and community resources, social stories and information on how to have a successful library visit.
- Create a kids' space that is focused on play through open-ended and sensory activities.



## Study Tour | Deerfield Public Library

Deerfield Public Library has one library and serves a population of 18 000. This library is another excellent example of a relatively small public library focusing on inclusion for children with special needs.

### Programs

The library run a number of regular inclusive programs, from story times, movie nights to a teen's friendship pizza and games night. The latter was one of their most successful programs. This program was a drop in program and did not require attendees to register or complete forms.

Another of their very successful inclusive programs is 'Brickology'. This program caters to children of all abilities. It provides open-ended activities that enable children to participate at the developmental stage and pace that is most appropriate for them. The program is outsourced to an organisation that regularly runs Lego programs for children with disabilities. The program is run in the program room. Three activities are provided for the

children and parents are also involved in the activities. A librarian is in attendance at the program to develop relationships and support the children and families.

### Marketing

The library promote their events through their website, the local schools and also by asking parents of children with disabilities to blog about it on the networking and blog sites that they are part of.

### Key Learning Outcomes

- Provide inclusive programs on a range of topics.
- Ask the families of children with special needs to help your events through the online and in person networks they are part of.



# Study Tour | Evanston Public Library

Evanston Public Library has three branches, serving a population of 75,000. This public library provides another very good example using partnerships to focus on creating inclusive libraries.

## Partnerships, Outreach and Marketing

The Evanston Public Library was the first library in the greater Chicago area to hold a community expo for families of children with special needs. The Community Engagement Librarian described the fair as an example of the libraries desire, “to turn outward in our work, listen to peoples aspirations, discover what barriers exist in reaching those aspirations, and then identify the shared work we can do to overcome those barriers”.

The expo was held in a community room at the Evanston Public Library. The expo was made up of information booths from the major organisations and associations that provide services and support for children with special needs in the Evanston area. The expo was very successful, with other

libraries in the Chicago-area expressing an interest in hosting something similar.

Expos are an excellent way of achieving the following:

- Promoting the library as being supportive of families of children with special needs.
- Demonstrating that public libraries are an excellent source of information.
- Providing a neutral environment in which information and services can be distributed to families of children with special needs.
- Creating an opportunity for families of children with special needs to find out about the resources available in their own community.
- Providing a networking opportunity for organisations and associations that provide support and services to families of children with special needs.
- Providing an opportunity for families of children with special needs to connect with other families in their own community.
- Reinforcing that library as disability friendly place.

## Key Learning Outcomes

- Develop partnerships with organisations and associations involved in the provision of services to children with special needs and their families.
- Host or be involved in expos for children with disabilities.



## Study Tour | Adelaide Hills Council Libraries Program

The Adelaide Hills Libraries program, Library Lions, is a literacy based early childhood program developed for children with special needs. The team leader of the libraries children's and youth services, in partnership with service providers for children with special needs, developed the program.

### Programs

The program uses a variety of communication methods including, Makaton (keyword) sign language, communication cards, picture cards, and props. It also includes a variety of sensory objects and activities to provide greater accessibility to the stories, songs, and rhymes of the story time session.

The program promotes interaction and involvement with literacy at whatever stage and/or capability of the child. The pace and developmental level of each session is dictated by the children involved. The needs of all children are taken into consideration when developing each session. Specific examples of this include: a child with autism who

is comfortable participating when she is provided with a large cushion under which she can lie; another child with vision impairment will participate if he is able to view the book up close before each page is turned. Siblings of the children with special needs are welcomed and included in the sessions with the aim that they will feel important and accepted too. The siblings also have an opportunity to meet other children in their community who have brothers or sisters with special needs. Each session is followed by a free play session for the children and an opportunity for coffee and a chat for the parents/carers. This provides a valuable opportunity for families to meet and to support each other.

The goals of the program are to:

- Enable children with special needs to access, and become involved in, literacy based programs within the library.
- Assist the parents/carers to access the library and its resources.
- Provide a safe and welcoming environment for parents/carers and their children with special needs to attend library programs.

- Encourage parents/carers and their children with special needs to feel welcome at all times within the library.
- Provide opportunities for parents/carers of children with special needs to meet and support each other.

The process of establishing the program involved:

- Securing permission from the Library Manager to trial a story time session for children with special needs.
- Obtaining a grant from the Friends of the Library to purchase resources.
- Researching other story time sessions for children with special needs - only to discover that very few resources on how to develop and run such a program exist.
- Developing partnerships with local allied health workers and organisations that work with children with special needs.
- Developing and trialling a story time for children with special needs with the assistance of the above groups.
- The program is run weekly, for approximately 30 minutes, in the library's

# Study Tour | Adelaide Hills Council Libraries Program

community room. One staff member runs each session.

## Marketing

Sessions are promoted through word of mouth, flyers, the library's website, local organisations for children with special needs, and the occasional article in the local newspaper.

## Training

Staff do not have formal training in working with children with special needs; they do however, have many years of experience in working with children in a formal setting and a genuine interest and desire to be involved with the program.

Benefits of the program include:

- Increased confidence in the library environment by the families that attend the session, evidenced by the families visiting the library on days when the program is not run.
- The families provide support for each other, thus increasing their local support network.
- Library staff have developed relationships with the families and as a consequence are more confident in their interactions with the families of children with special needs.

## Key Learning Outcomes

- Talk to families of children with special needs. Ask families what are the barriers that they face; what do library staff need to be aware of in regards to their child; and what was successful or not successful in the session for their child?
- Develop partnerships with service providers that work with children with special needs in your community. These groups are vital to making contact with families of children with special needs. They may also assist in the development of your program.
- Finally, do not be afraid. Children with special needs and their families just want to be part of their community; libraries can help provide opportunities for that to occur.

# Survey Findings

The findings of the online survey undertaken by eighteen participants support the model of an inclusive public library. The following is a more detailed discussion of the findings of the online survey as they relate to the following questions:

- **What are public libraries currently doing to improve access for children with special needs and their families?**
- **What are the barriers to access from the perspective of the public librarian?**

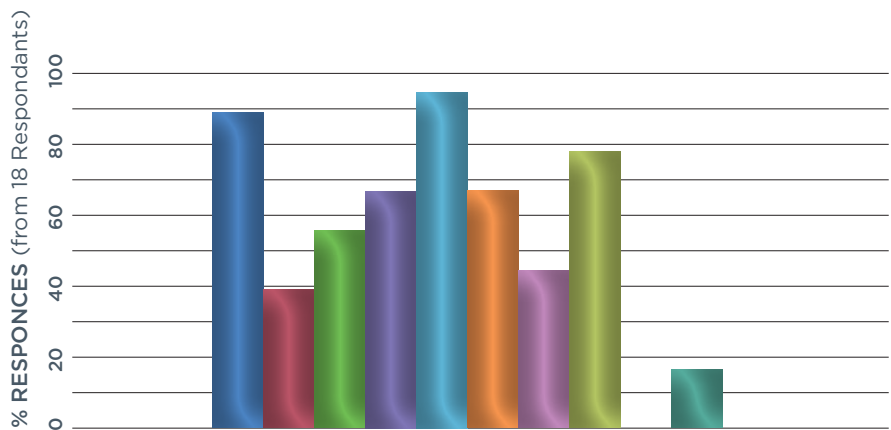
The 18 participants undertaking the online questionnaire answered every question in full. Nearly all libraries (94%) described themselves as being in an urban environment and over half (61%) as being a large library. Libraries from a higher socio-economic area formed over half (60%) of the libraries interviewed and over half (60%) had a community with a predominately English speaking background.

## So what are public libraries currently doing to improve access for children with special needs and their families?

Participants were given a list of eight possible barriers to public

**Table 1**

**Has your library made attempts to address any of the following barriers?** Select all that apply.



- Library staff (attitudes, sensitivities, awareness)
- Other library visitors (attitudes, sensitivities, awareness)
- Library's physical environment (lighting, noise, universal design)
- Information technology (hardware, software and website design)
- Programs on offer do not cater for children with special needs
- Collection resources not appropriate
- Communication difficulties
- Libraries do not know the characteristics and needs of children with disabilities and their families within the library's community.
- No
- Other, please describe

library access for children with special needs and their families. Participants were then asked to choose all of the barriers that their library had attempted to address. They were also given the option to note barriers that their library was focusing on,

but which had not been listed. As can be seen in **Table 1** there are three access barriers that the greatest numbers of libraries have attempted to address. These barriers in order of highest response are:

# Survey Findings

- Library programs do not cater for children with special needs.
- Library staff attitudes, sensitivities and awareness towards children with special needs and their families.
- Libraries do not know the characteristics and needs of children with disabilities in libraries community.

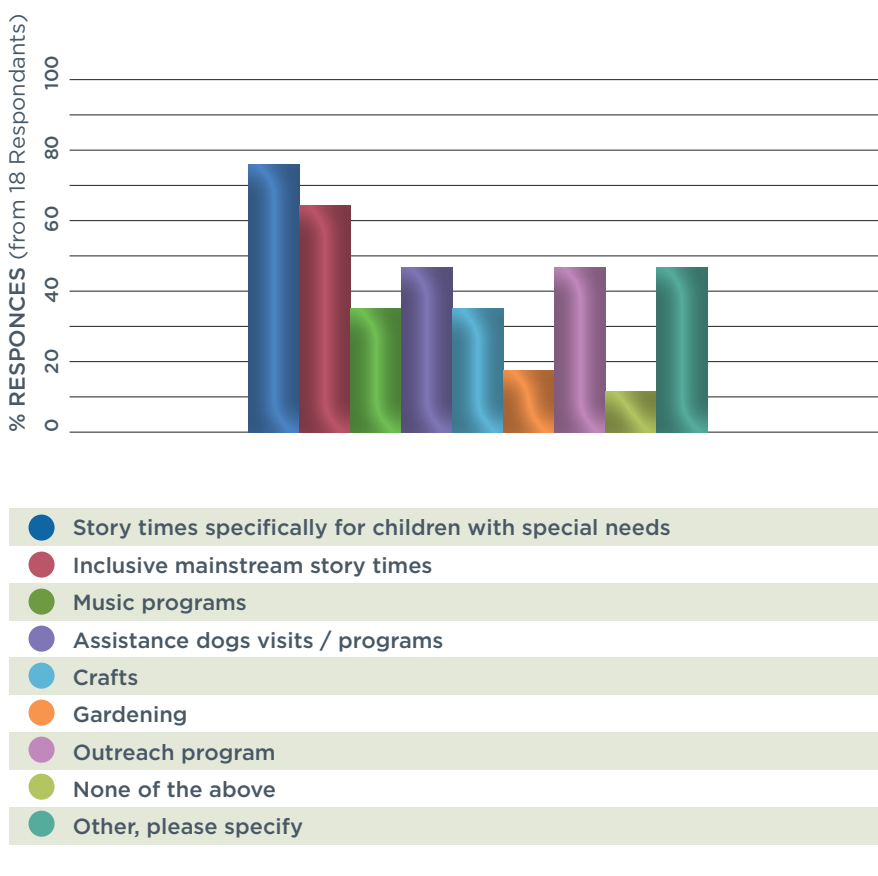
A barrier that was not listed in **Table 1** but which was noted by two of the participants was an economic barrier. The libraries of both of these respondents waived fees and fines for children of special needs and their families.

When asked about the kinds of programs that the libraries ran regularly for children with special needs the results showed a more even spread of responses. **Table 2** illustrates this spread. The biggest response (72%) was story times targeted to children with special needs; 61% ran an inclusive story time for all children; 44% had therapy dog programs and 44% provided an outreach program. Participants were also given the opportunity to list other programs that they provided for children with special needs. Of the eight

**Table 2**

**Does your library offer any of the following library services or programs for children with special needs on a regular basis?**

Select all that apply.



responses given, activities that focused on social interaction made up the greatest number (62%) of responses in this answer choice section.

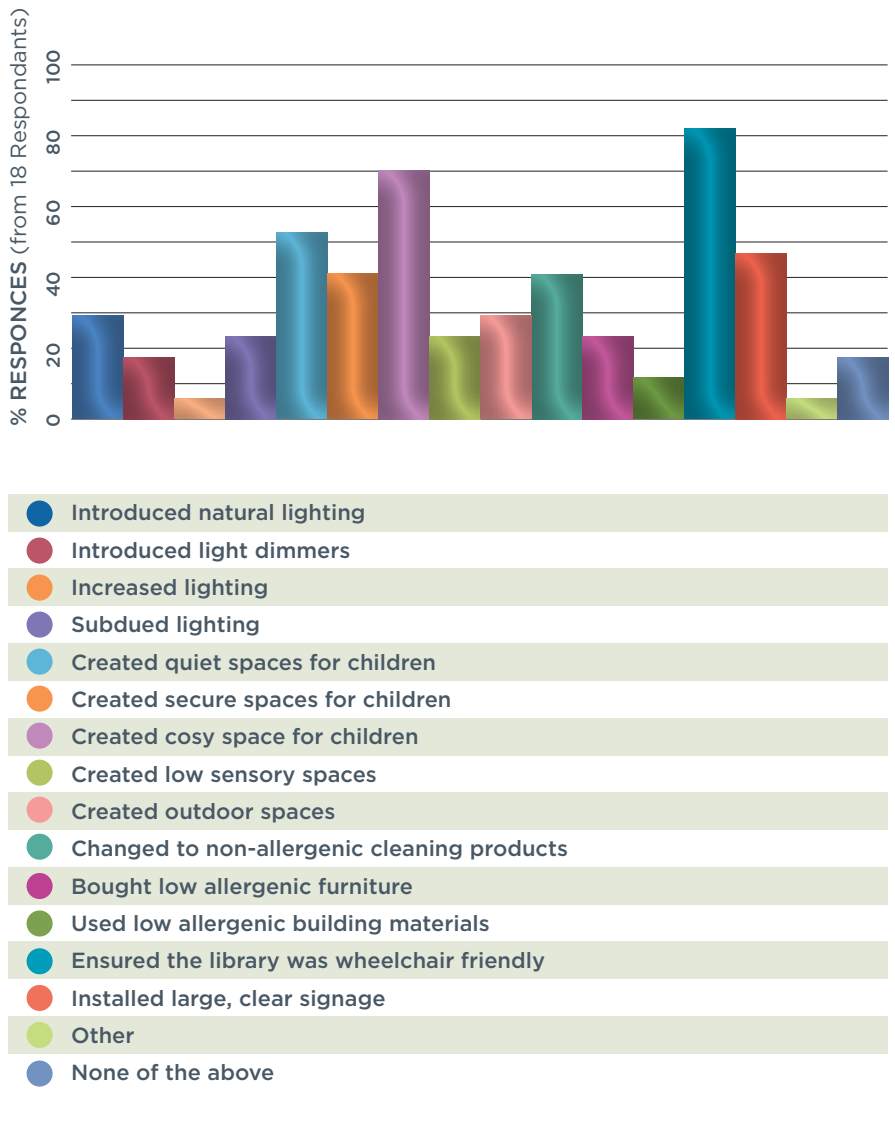
# Survey Findings

In order to find out what physical environment changes libraries had made to improve access, participants were asked the question, “**Has your library made any of the following changes to the physical environment with the intent to improve access for children special needs?**” The most common response (77%) was, “Ensured the library was wheelchair friendly.” The next most common response (66%) was “Created cosy spaces for children”. **Table 3** shows that the remainder of responses were more evenly spread, for example 50% of respondents reported that their library had created quiet spaces for children and 44% had installed large clear signage.

Participants were then asked how their library indicated it was disability friendly. Responses to this question showed very little variance. The two most common methods, at 55%, were the promotion or presentation of community disability awareness programs and the use of images of people with disabilities in their newsletters, flyers etc. Other popular responses were: provide fidget toys for children

**Table 3**

**Has your library made any of the following changes to the physical environment with the intent to improve access for children special needs?** Select all that apply.



# Survey Findings

(50%), provide hand held magnifiers (50%) and the use of signs, decals, flyers, newsletters or social media (50%). It was interesting to see that 44% of the libraries had developed and made available through print or on the web social stories for children with special needs. These are stories that use pictures and text to prepare children for the experience of visiting a library.

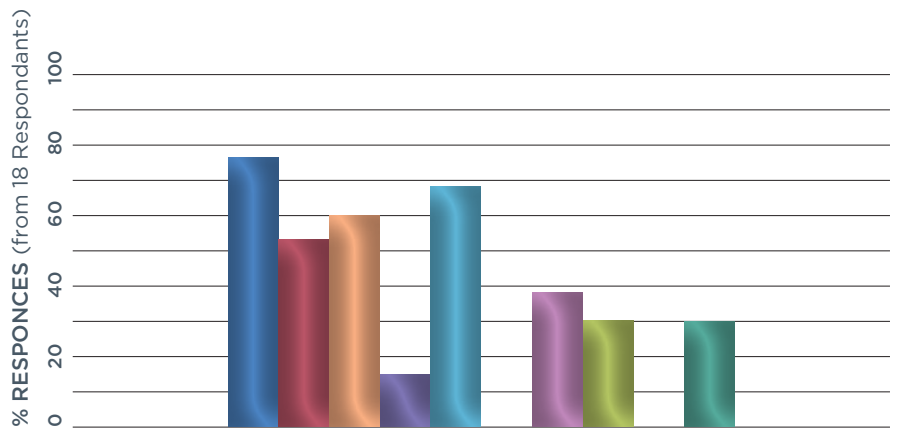
Finally when asked about the future plans for increasing access to their library for children with special needs and their families the responses were varied. The greatest number (38%) responded that they wanted to focus on staff training and development. The next most common response (16%) was introducing or developing technology, in particular iPads for children with special needs to use as a communication aid.

## What are the barriers to access from the perspective of the public librarian?

Participants were asked what they thought the greatest barrier to access for children with special needs and their families was. They were able

**Table 4**

**What do you think are the greatest barriers to access for children with special needs and their families?** Select up to three answers.



- Library staff (attitudes, sensitivities, awareness)
- Other library visitors (attitudes, sensitivities, awareness)
- Library's physical environment (lighting, noise, universal design)
- Information technology (hardware, software and website design)
- Programs on offer do not cater for children with special needs
- Collection resources not appropriate
- Communication difficulties
- Libraries do not know the characteristics and needs of children with disabilities and their families within the library's community.
- I do not think there are any barriers
- Other, please specify

to give up to three answers.

**Table 4** shows that the variance in percentages between responses was not considerable. The largest number (55%) of participants responded that library staff attitudes and sensitivities was one of the greatest barriers. The next most

common response (50%) was that library programs do not cater for children with special needs and 44% selected the library's physical environment (noise, lighting etc.) as a barrier.

# Survey Findings

## What prompted the library to focus on increasing accessibility for children with special needs and their families at their library?

The most common reason (27%) for focusing on accessibility for this group of the community was requests from the families of children with special needs. The second most common reason (18%) was that the participant saw a need in the community. Only 5% of participants had been prompted by government laws to focus on this area. Interviews with participants revealed a passion and a belief in the importance of increasing access for this group. Over half of the participants had a child with a disability.

## Discussion

The findings of this study concur with research findings in previous studies undertaken by Murray (1999) in Australia and Hill (2012) in New York. Both of these studies also highlighted that librarians considered lack of staff training in disability to be a major barrier to library access for children with special needs.

Several other findings are worth noting. In particular, despite

only 11% of the respondents identifying technology to be a barrier for children with special needs, 66% of the libraries have addressed the issue of technology for children with special needs. One possible conjecture to why this might be is that technology maybe an easier barrier to address than for example community attitudes, which 38% of respondents considered to be a barrier. Similarly, 66% of libraries have addressed the appropriateness of their collections for this user group – yet not one respondent considered this area to be a barrier to access. Again, is it because this an easier barrier to tackle? It would be useful to know from families of children with special needs how much of a barrier technology in libraries is.

A content analysis of the literature on disability access to libraries by Hill (2013) found that 50% of articles written in a ten-year time frame focused on the topic of electronic accessibility. It is therefore very interesting that only 11% of public librarian respondents in this study answered that information technology software, hardware or web design was a barrier to access

for this group. None of the respondents named technology as an area that the greatest impact on improving access could be made. This reinforces Hill's question as to whether research is being undertaken in the right areas on the topic of disability access.

Two participants in the interview raised the issue of economics as being a barrier to public library access. Considering that free access is a key principle of public libraries this would be another interesting area to explore. During the interviews very few of the participants discussed funding as being a barrier to improving access for children with special needs and their families. The general attitude was that issues of funding could be worked around and that you could make improvements within current constraints. Limitations on funding were not seen as a valid excuse for lack of focus on access for children with special needs and their families.

Supportive library leadership was also generally not raised as an issue in regards to developing an inclusive library in the interviews or survey findings. One possible

## Survey Findings

explanation for this is that when asked about the level of support from library managers the results were high, 68% of respondents said that their managers were very supportive, and only 6% of respondents said their managers were unsupportive.

This indicates that libraries that focus on inclusivity have very supportive library managers. Clearly, library managers have an important role in the development of an inclusive library. This role is represented in the inclusive libraries model as the foundation upon which an inclusive library can be developed.

Finally, when asked what participants thought were the greatest barriers to access, one librarian made the following comment, **“I don’t think the families see libraries as having anything relevant for their children. Libraries are places full of books and their children don’t read and possibly won’t read so why would they visit?”** It would be interesting to see if families of children with special needs hold this belief.

### Limitations of the study

The major limitation of the study was that it focused on public librarians who had knowledge or experience in this area. A broader study of librarians without knowledge and experience in this area would help inform why more public libraries are not focusing on access for this group. Similarly, and perhaps more importantly, including families of children with special needs would give a better understanding of the issue from the perspective of the user. Further research would inform the effectiveness of the model for children with special needs and their families.

# Recommendations

The Inclusive Libraries Model is a tool for public libraries to improve access for children with special needs and their families. Specific recommendations for each element of the inclusive library model are detailed below.

## Management

- **Supportive management at all levels is a required foundation for the model to be a success.**
- **Develop a Disability Access & Inclusion Plan for the Library.**

## Training

Training courses in the following:

- **Disability awareness for all staff.**
- **Universal Access in Libraries.**
- **Access to Children's Services.**
- **Developing a Disability Access & Inclusion Plan.**
- **Universal Design for learning**
- **Improving Access to Functions, Festivals and Fun Activities.**

## Partnerships

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

- **Consider the following partners:**
  - Local, state and national organisations for children with disabilities.
  - Educational settings that have special education classes – schools, kindergartens, day care etc.
  - Health care providers
  - Disability Councils
  - Respite groups
- **Partner to provide programs for children with special needs.**

**Tips:** Think outside the square.

  - maybe yoga, art therapy, therapy dogs, music concerts, etc.
  - Volunteers
- **Embed the library in the disability community in your area.**

**Tips:**

  - Join disability councils and forums.

- **Partner and talk with your families to find out about their needs and how your library can support them.**

### Tips:

- Ask families to post library services on the websites and online support groups they are part of.
- Visit information coffee mornings for support groups.

# Recommendations

## Programs

Develop and provide a range of programs for children with disabilities. These can range from targeted to inclusive. Both kinds of programs have their place and by providing both you are giving families an opportunity to meet the needs of their child at the child's stage and pace of development.

- **Any theme can be developed into a targeted or inclusive program if you plan for the 'how' of delivery.**
- **Use universal design for learning and multiples intelligences theory when developing programs.**
- **Programs that have been successful include:**
  - Therapy dog literacy sessions
  - Sensory story times
  - Friendship groups
  - Family yoga
  - Art therapy

## • **Tips for making a program inclusive:**

- Use visual supports such as pictorial schedules of the activity and pictorial symbols of the animals in a song.
- Include sensory activities, such as fidget toys, movement activities, finger rhymes.
- Cater to different learning styles by repeating the presentation of an activity or story using a different format each time; for example books, props, songs, felt boards.
- Reduce distractions by having smaller numbers of attendees, holding the program in a separate room, reduce the amount of visual and sensory input.
- Use routines to help children that find unpredictability and change difficult.
- Monitor the pace of the session – a more interactive but slower pace works for most children.

## Collection Development

Collection development needs to be looked at from the perspective of the general collection as well as developing a special collection.

- **Make sure your children's collection is inclusive of children with disabilities. Do you have books that have children with disabilities as protagonists, and where the disability is not the central focus?**
- **Develop audio and book kit collections of popular titles for all ages.**
- **Develop HiLo (high interest, low difficulty) collections, without the label easy reads.**
- **Books with tactile pictures.**
- **Books with sign language illustrations.**
- **Develop parenting collections on the topic of children with disabilities and their families.**

# Recommendations

## Physical barriers

- **Provide low-sensory spaces, including using natural lighting instead of bright artificial lights.**
- **Provide adaptive equipment where needed, for example:**
  - gardening tools
  - craft tools
  - iPads with communication software.
- **Ensure that activities are accessible at differing heights, to ensure that children who sit, lay, crawl, walk or are in frames or wheel chairs can participate.**
- **Create children's area with open-ended and sensory play equipment.**
- **Develop activity zones in your children's area.**
- **Create cosy and quiet spaces for children.**
- **Develop a children's garden that allows children to engage with nature in a variety of ways; for example, sensory plants, physical digging, edible tasting etc.**

## Marketing

Find out who your families with special needs are. Find out their needs and how your library can support them.

- **Use images of people with disabilities in your library material.**
- **Develop 'social stories' for your library and post on your website.**
- **Use partnerships to help reach out to this group of the community.**

### Tips:

- Ask for your flyers to be sent out to their mailing list.
- Ask to have an article written in their newsletters.
- Ask to promote your services on their website, Facebook etc.
- Ask how you can be the conduit for their information.

## The holistic perspective

The Inclusive Libraries Model is an excellent way of focusing on the separate elements of an inclusive library; however, is it possible for libraries to bring each element together to examine inclusivity from a holistic perspective? One of the easiest ways for libraries to be holistic when considering inclusiveness is to ask the

question, 'How will children with special needs be able to access this?' with every decision that is made in the library. Very quickly this will become part of everyday practice, and not something that is considered separately, out of context or in response to an issue that could have been prevented.

## Conclusion

The Inclusive Libraries Model provides an entry point and structure for public libraries wanting to improve access for children with special needs and their families. The next stage of the research is to explore the topic from the perspective of families of children with special needs. This next stage will inform the effectiveness of the model for children with special needs and their families.

A final word; do not be afraid to 'have-a-go'. Children with special needs and their families want to be part of their community; libraries can help provide opportunities for that to occur.

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## Appendix A | Literature review in full

### Introduction

Within the library profession there is widespread support for increased access to libraries for people with disabilities. This support is reflected in the literature in the field of library and information science, as well as in document guidelines produced by library professional bodies, for example the Australian Library and Information Association and their document, *Guidelines on Library Standards for People with Disabilities* (1998). However, the major focus of the literature within the field is on access for adults and in particular adults with sensory disabilities. (Hill, 2013) A literature search on the topic of access to public libraries for children with special needs and their families in the field of library and information science reveals a significant gap. There are no empirical research studies into this topic.

### Longitudinal review of the literature

In 2013 Heather Hill undertook a major literature review in the area of libraries and accessibility. Hill analysed published research literature in the field of library and information science over the period 2000 – 2010, identifying the major issues and trends related to accessibility and disability. The major findings of her review were that 25% of the research deals with electronic accessibility (for example web access). Although it was the next most common focus, the issue of services provided to people with a disability made up only 12% of the research. As noted above she also found that the most common disability researched was visual disability. Learning disabilities were the next most common, making up just 9% of the literature. Hill notes that her review confirms previous studies into this field of literature undertaken by authors such as Davies (2007), Saumure and Given (2004) and Williamson, Schauder and Bow (2000). These studies also showed that very little of the research undertaken involved investigation and most of the articles described difficulties and possible solutions. Hill points to a significant gap in researching what people with disabilities actually want from libraries and how that service can be best provided. Hill also highlights that this is reflected in the research methodology of the literature with only 36% of the research undertaken actually involving people with a disability, even to the point of having able-bodied people undertaking tests for accessibility (H. Hill, 2013).

## Appendix A | Literature review in full

### Accessibility in school libraries

Finding current research literature into library access for children with special needs is very difficult. The limited numbers of studies that are available focus on school libraries. One possible explanation for this is that the inclusion of children with special needs in mainstream schools has led to a more immediate need for research into access to school libraries for children with special needs. Although the results of research into school libraries is worth noting it is important to clarify that school libraries are very different to public libraries and as a consequence the results of such research is not readily transferrable to public libraries. Some of the obvious differences between the two library types include:

- Public libraries cater for individuals from birth through to adulthood (and beyond).
- The families of children with special needs are also users of public libraries, not just the child.
- Programs within school libraries are predominately curriculum led.
- Teacher-librarians within schools are more likely to be informed which children within the school have special needs, what those special needs are and what requirements need to be put in place to assist the child's access to the library and its services.

A good example of the research undertaken in the field of school libraries is a recent study undertaken by Renee Hill in 2012. Hill focused on school librarians serving students with special needs in central New York State. One of Hill's main areas of focus in her study was the knowledge level of school librarians serving students with special needs. Hill notes that in previous research undertaken in this area by

Small, Shanahan, and Stasak in 2010 it was found that school librarians, **"...reported lower knowledge levels about serving students with special needs than any other topic about which [they] ... were asked"** (R. Hill, 2012, pp. 2-3).

Another study undertaken by Murray in 1999 had very similar findings. Murray focused her study on school librarians in Victoria, Australia. She found that school libraries did not have any formal strategies or policies in regards to providing access to school libraries for children with special needs. Further to this, school librarians were unaware of how they could increase access for this group of students.

In her research Hill (2012) did find improvement from previous studies into the level of confidence amongst school librarians in their knowledge of how to serve children with special needs. However, the results continue to reflect a need for improvement. The majority, 50%, of the respondents rated their knowledge in this area as average and only 9% considered their knowledge to be high. Hill (2012) found that the majority of school librarians used professional journals, collaboration with special education teachers and other teachers as well as professional development to gain knowledge about best practices and about the students with special needs. However, only two of the 43 survey respondents received information from the parents of the students with special needs, and none of school librarians preferred to get information from parents. Interestingly speaking directly to the students with special needs is not mentioned as a possible source of information anywhere in Hill's research. Hill does however discuss the importance of involving parents, as

## Appendix A | Literature review in full

they can provide first-hand knowledge on issues of accessibility for their child. Hill (2012) proposes that, **“...one area with potential for advancement is in library services offered to the families of students with special needs”, which she believes would help provide an environment that is welcoming and inclusive.**” (p. 10)

### Information needs of people with a disability

The lack of research into what children with special needs and their families want and need from libraries is mirrored in the research into access to libraries for adults with disabilities. Heather Hill (2013) found that of the research into disability and accessibility in the library, **“Little research explored the more fundamental questions of what people with disabilities might want from an information provider and how best to provide that service.”** (p. 141).

Hill gives examples of researchers whose findings concur with hers. One of these is the research into library and information science literature about visual disabilities undertaken by Davies (2007). Davies states, **“More has to be discovered about people’s preferences for service delivery and information and their perceptions and experiences of what is offered”** (2007, p. 793).

### Role of technology

Williamson, Schauder and Bow (2000) in a study into the information seeking needs of adults with blindness in Australia had very similar findings. The study noted the lack of major research into the information needs and information seeking behaviours of people with disabilities. The study also raised the issue that information technology is often considered to be the answer to many

of the access issues for people with disabilities. However, Williamson et al. highlight that the issue of access and disability is in fact more complex than this, often involving societal and economic issues as well.

### Universal design

Ekwelem in 2013 researched access to academic libraries by university students with vision or mobility difficulties. He also found that despite changes in technology, adult university students with vision impairment or mobility difficulties continued to experience problems when accessing academic libraries. He states that, **“...people with disability cannot use a library that has been designed for non-disabled users.”** (p. 4) Ekwelem considers universal design as a possible theory for addressing the access issues faced by this group. One recommendation from his research is that, **“Universal accessibility should be made an integral component of the overall service development plan.”** (p. 27)

Ekwelem’s findings are similar to those found in the 2010 study by Leong and Higgins. Leong and Higgins surveyed young adults between the ages of 12 and 20 in Singapore who were wheelchair bound. The study found that the information needs of young people with a physical disability were no different to young people who were not wheelchair bound. They found that the barriers young adults with physical disabilities experienced were predominately related to architectural and physical access. Universal design is a possible solution to addressing some of these accessibility issues. Leong and Higgins also found that the school libraries of the participants involved in the research were

## Appendix A | Literature review in full

on third or fourth levels and that none of the participants used their school library. Renee Hill (2012) also discusses the role of universal design. She states ***“it is important for school librarians to be vigilant about moving toward incorporating universal design principles to enable access to the largest range of patrons.”*** (p. 10)

Universal design, according to the Center for Universal Design (1997), ***“...is the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.”*** (p. 2)

One of the most well-known examples of universal design is the curb cut into footpaths. These were first introduced to enable people in wheel chairs to cross the road. They are now used by virtually everybody who crosses the road, including people with strollers, trolleys, sore hips, bicycles, etc. (Banks, et al., 2014)

The theory of universal design also applies to learning and has a potentially very important role in library access for children with special needs. The theory of universal design for learning is well known in the field of education. The theory applies the concept that a learning style or approach that works for one child with a particular need may also work for a range of children (CAST, n.d.) The use of picture schedules for children with autism is an example of this. Picture schedules illustrate the steps in a process or the order in which activities will occur. The use of such schedules is recommended for children with autism (University of Florida: Center for

Autism and Related Disabilities, n.d.). However, these schedules are also of assistance to children who are visual learners or need structure. Universal design in learning could be used in public libraries in the areas of signage, written material and children’s programs. Practical examples of the use of this theory in a public library context are detailed in Banks et al. (2014).

### Disability awareness training

Another area of research that has relevance to the topic of access to public libraries for children with special needs and their families is disability training for library staff. The studies into this area are few, but still important in their findings. These studies have considered the lack of disability training for library professionals as being an instrumental factor influencing access to libraries for patrons with disabilities. Koulikourdi (2008) notes that:

***...librarians have to deal with an increasing range of potential users with print-related disabilities, users with vision or motor impairments, users with less visible conditions (such as autism or dyslexia) and patrons with a range of other needs who are unable to use a library designed for the average and by implication non-disabled user.*** (p. 203)

She then goes on to state that to serve these patrons librarians need to be able, ***“...to identify them, understand their needs, their information seeking behaviour and the problems they encounter in the library environment.”***

(Koulikourdi, p. 203).

Koulikourdi found, ***“that very few library staff are trained in facilitating the access of***

## Appendix A | Literature review in full

***disabled users and how to act towards them. Unfortunately, there is inadequate knowledge of the needs of those who do not or cannot use standard libraries.***” (p. 211)

The importance of disability awareness training for library staff is also highlighted by Renee Hill (2012). Hill found that, ***“More than one survey respondent indicated that exposure to concepts related to serving students with special needs would have been a useful component of LIS Master’s program studies.”*** (p. 11)

Murray (1999) also states that: ***“University departments offering courses in librarianship and information management should be encouraged to cover library services to people with disabilities in mainstream curricula, so that newly trained professionals have been sensitised to some extent to the needs of this client group.”*** (para. 14)

### **How-to-manuals**

Finally, within the area of access to public libraries for children with special needs and their families there are a number of documents and how-to manuals that give guidance to public librarians on this topic. Examples of these are, **Including Families of Children with Special Needs: A How-To-Do-It Manual for Librarians** by Banks et al. (2014) and **Library Accessibility - What You Need to Know** by the Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies (2010). These documents do not purport to provide empirical research into access for this library user group. As such, they are practical documents into developing public library programs, resources and strategies for children with special needs

and their families. These documents do; however, support the importance of public librarians finding out what children with special needs and their families would like and need from the library. Banks et al. (2014) in relation to this issue states, ***“We cannot undertake an effective assessment of our libraries without involving the community we wish to reach.”*** (p. 79)

### **Summary**

In summary, there is no empirical research into the topic of access to public libraries for children with special needs and their families. The great majority of research focuses on adults with vision impairment and on technology as a solution to issues of access to libraries. A review of the literature available reveals that there is gap in knowledge on what children with special needs and their families want and need from public libraries. There are also no studies into this topic from the perspective of the public librarian. It is the aim of this research project to address these gaps in knowledge.

## Appendix B | Scholarship opportunities and beyond

The Catherine Helen Spence Scholarship has been a fantastic opportunity for me. The award has given me the confidence and enthusiasm to extend my professional learning and experience.

Since being awarded the scholarship I have:

- Been awarded the research grants:
  - Public Libraries of South Australia, Rod East Award, 2014
  - Australian Library and Information Association, Twila Ann Janssen Herr Research Award for Disability Services 2014.
- Enrolled in a PhD at the University of South Australia, focusing on the research undertaken in this report.
- Published an article, **'Increasing access to public libraries for children with special needs and their families'** in the Australian Library Journal. The DOI of my paper is: 10.1080/00049670.2014.951167 and the permanent online link is: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00049670.2014.951167> and the permanent online link is: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00049670.2014.951167>
- Presented on this research at:
  - AUSLIB Australia and New Zealand Public Libraries Conference, 2015 – paper available in the conference proceedings
  - Research Applications in Information and Library Studies (RAILS) 2015 conference – paper to be published in the Australian Academic and Research Libraries Journal

I am also hoping to present my research at:

- Association for Library Services to Children (part of American Library Association) national conference 2016
- Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) national conference 2016

For further information on my research and where it leads follow my blog at:

<http://librarylionsroar.weebly.com>

# Appendix C | Survey questionnaire

## One-on-one Interview and Online Questionnaire for Library Professionals

### Demographic information

**1 Please select all that apply. How would you describe your library?**

- a) Small
- b) Medium
- c) Large
- d) Urban
- e) Rural

**2 Please select all that apply. How would you describe the community your library serves?**

- a) Higher socio-economic
- b) Average socio-economic
- c) Lower socio economic
- d) Predominately English speaking background
- e) Predominately non-English speaking background
- f) Other, please describe

### Why be inclusive?

**3 Please select all that apply. What benefits do you think improved access to public libraries will bring children with special needs and their families?**

- a) Motivation for the child to develop or practice a skill
- b) Increased social interaction for the whole family
- c) Increased borrowing of library resources
- d) Development of support networks within their own community

- e) Feelings of being connected with the community
- f) Feelings of being accepted
- g) A greater interest in reading
- h) Opportunities for life long learning
- i) Increased awareness of and referral to othersupport organisations within the community
- j) Other, please describe

**4 Please select all that apply. What benefits do you think public libraries will experience by improving access for children with special needs and their families?**

- a) Re-examining of library practices and procedures
- b) Development of more inclusive library practices and procedures for all (what works for one group often benefits others)
- c) Increase in user base of the library
- d) Staff development
- e) Other, please describe

**5 Please select all that apply. What benefits do you see for the general community if public libraries improve access for children with special needs and their families?**

- a) Improvements in access for the whole community (what works well for children with special needs often works well for others)
- b) Acceptance of diversity in their community
- c) Increased understanding of children with special needs
- d) Greater awareness of disability existing within their community

## Appendix C | Survey questionnaire

### What are the laws?

**6 Please select all that apply. Are you are aware of any disability or special education laws that govern your library?**

- a) Federal laws
- b) State laws
- c) County laws
- d) Unsure

**7 Does your Council have any community disability inclusion policies?**

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Unsure

### Are public libraries inclusive?

**8 In general how would you rate the access to public libraries for children with special needs and their families?**

- Very good
- Good
- OK
- Poor
- Very poor

**9 How do you think your library rates in regards to access for children with special needs and their families?**

- Very good
- Good
- OK
- Poor
- Very poor

**10 Please select all that apply. What do you think are the barriers to access for children with special needs and their families?**

- a) Library staff (attitudes, sensitivities)
- b) Other library visitors (attitudes, sensitivities)
- c) Library's physical environment (lighting, noise, universal design)
- d) Information technology (hardware, software and website design)
- e) Programs on offer do not cater for children with special needs
- f) Collection resources not appropriate
- g) Communication difficulties
- h) Libraries do not know the characteristics and needs of children with disabilities and their families within the library's community.
- i) I do not think there are any barriers
- j) Other, please describe

**11 Please select all that apply. What do you think prevents libraries from addressing barriers to access?**

- a) Awareness of the problem
- b) Lack of knowledge on how to address the barrier
- c) Financial resources
- d) Staffing resources
- e) Staff reluctance
- f) Other

**12 Please select all that apply. Has your library made attempts to address any of the following barriers?**

- a) Library staff (attitudes, sensitivities, awareness)
- b) Other library visitors (attitudes, sensitivities, awareness)
- c) Library's physical environment (lighting, noise, universal design)
- d) Information technology (hardware, software and website design)

## Appendix C | Survey questionnaire

- e) Programs on offer do not cater for children with special needs
- f) Collection resources not appropriate
- g) Communication difficulties
- h) Libraries do not know the characteristics and needs of children with disabilities and their families within the library's community.
- i) Other, please describe
- j) No

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

**14** Does your library have a policy for access for children with special needs?

- a) Yes
- b) No

**15** Please select all that apply. What prompted your library to address the issue of access for children with special needs and their family?

- a) My library has not addressed this issue.
- b) Requests from families of children with special needs
- c) Requests from organisations that work with children with special needs and their families
- d) Government laws
- e) Library policy
- f) Council policy
- g) Other

### Library staff

**16** Please select all that apply. Are library staff provided with training in any of the following areas?

- a) Disability awareness
- b) Multiple intelligences theory

- c) Universal design
- d) Universal design for learning
- e) Other, please describe
- f) None

**17** Please select all that apply. Are security staff provided with training in any of the following?

- a) Disability awareness
- b) Universal design
- c) Other, please describe
- d) None
- e) No security staff employed

**18** Please select all that apply. Are cleaning staff provided with training in any of the following?

- a) Disability awareness
- b) Universal design
- c) Other
- d) None

### Physical environment

**19** Did any of the following influence the development of the physical environment of your library?

- a) Government disability and discrimination laws
- b) Principals of 'universal design'

**20** Has your library made any of the following changes to the physical environment to improve access for children special needs?

- a) Introduced natural lighting
- b) Introduced light dimmers
- c) Increased lighting
- d) Subdued lighting
- e) Created quiet spaces for children
- f) Created secure spaces for children
- g) Created cosy space for children
- h) Created low sensory spaces

## Appendix C | Survey questionnaire

- i) Created outdoor spaces
- j) Changed to non-allergenic cleaning products
- k) Bought low allergenic furniture
- l) Used low allergenic building materials
- m) Ensured the library was wheelchair friendly
- n) Installed large, clear signage
- o) Other
- p) None of the above

### Community needs

**21 Has your library developed relationships with external individuals or organisations that work with children with special needs and their families?**

- a) Yes
- b) No

**22 Has your library undertaken any of the following to understand the characteristics and needs of children with special needs and their families within the library's community?**

- a) Identified the make up of children with special needs in your community (ages, disabilities, ethnicity etc.)
- b) Identified children with special needs and their families in the community
- c) Found out what they want by asking them.
- d) Developed connections with organisations that work with children with special needs in your community.
- e) Other
- f) No

### Disability friendly

**23 Please select all that apply. How does your library indicate that it is disability friendly?**

- a) Signs indicating that assistance dogs are welcome
- b) Images of people with disabilities in newsletters, promotional materials, library signs etc.
- c) Signs indicating that borrowers can ask for assistance with communication
- d) Promote and/or present community disability awareness programs
- e) Provide fidget toys for children with special needs
- f) Provide handheld magnifiers
- g) Provide iPads or other communication devices for use within the library
- h) Develop library social stories for children with special needs
- i) Promote the library's disability policies
- j) Other
- k) None of the above

### Library services and programs

**24 Please select all that apply. Does your library offer of any of the following library services or programs?**

- a) Story times specifically for children with special needs
- b) Inclusive mainstream story times
- c) Music programs
- d) Assistance dogs visits / programs
- e) Crafts
- f) Gardening
- g) Outreach program
- h) Other
- i) None of the above

## Appendix C | Survey questionnaire

- 25 Does your library run programs or services for children with special needs?**
- a) Yes. Please answer the following questions.
  - b) No. Please go to question number 32.
- 26 Please select all that apply. When you design a program or service do you consider any of the following theories?**
- a) Universal Design for Learning
  - b) Multiple intelligences theory
  - c) Universal design
  - d) None of the above
- 27 Please select all that apply. When designing programs specifically for children with special needs what do you include?**
- a) Sign language
  - b) Sensory activities
  - c) Communication boards
  - d) Picture schedules
  - e) Adaptive communication devices
  - f) Big books
  - g) Props
  - h) Puppets
  - i) Craft tools designed for children with special needs
  - j) Music
  - k) Cushions
  - l) Play
  - m) Socialising
  - n) Quiet spaces
  - o) Fidget toys
  - p) Other
- 28 Please select all that apply. How frequently do you run a program for children with special needs?**
- a) Weekly
  - b) Fortnightly
  - c) Monthly
  - d) Quarterly
  - e) Twice a year
  - f) Once a year
- 29 Please select all that apply. What is the limit on attendee numbers for story times for children with special needs and their families?**
- a) 0 - 10
  - b) 10-20
  - c) 20-50
  - d) Other
- 30 Please select all that apply. Who are the presenters of your regular programs for children with special needs and their families?**
- a) Library staff
  - b) External Allied health professionals
  - c) Contracted external presenters
  - d) Volunteers
  - e) Other
- 31 Do you have volunteers assisting with your regular programs for children with special needs and their families?**
- a) Yes
  - b) No

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## Information technology

### 32 Does your library provide any of the following to assist with access to the library's computers?

- a) Technology or supports to assist with the physical strength required to operate a computer
- b) Technology for children with vision impairment
- c) Technology for children with poor dexterity (simplified keyboards, larger mice or joysticks etc.)
- d) Braille printers
- e) Technology to assist with data input (voice recognition etc.)
- f) Apps for children with disabilities
- g) iOS devices
- h) Disability friendly catalogues and websites
- i) Adjustable seating and positioning
- j) Other
- k) None of the above

## Collections/Resources

### 33 Please select all that apply. Does your library have any of the following collections?

- a) Audio books for children
- b) Braille books for children
- c) High interest and low difficulty books for children
- d) Books and other resources about children with a disability for parents
- e) Children's books about disability
- f) Special needs toy library
- g) Communication software for use within the library
- h) Information and referral on services for children with special needs and their families in the community

- i) Other, please describe
- j) None of the above.

## Other barriers

### 34 Has your library addressed any other barriers not already discussed?

- a) No
- b) Yes, please describe.

## Promotion

### 35 Please select all that apply. How does your library promote its services and programs to children with special needs and their families?

- a) Signage around the library
- b) Flyers
- c) Newsletters
- d) Newspapers
- e) Direct contact with special needs organisations
- f) Other
- g) None of the above

## Response outcomes to the library's focus on inclusion.

If your library has had a focus on inclusion please answer the following questions. If not, please go to question number 39.

### 36 How long has your library been focusing on inclusion?

- a) Under one year
- b) 1 – 3 years
- c) 3 – 5 years
- d) Over 5 years

## Appendix C | Survey questionnaire

**37** Using the scale below, please rate how the following groups have responded to the library focusing on including children with special needs and their families.

	Very supportive	Supportive	Indifferent	Not supportive	Opposed
Library manager					
Leadership within the library					
Leadership within the Council					
Other library staff					
Other library patrons					
Wider community					
Families and caregivers of children with special needs					
Children with special needs					

**38** How have any changes made to increase access been funded?

- a) Library funds
- b) Friends of the library
- c) Donations
- d) External bodies
- e) Other

### Future

**39** What are the future plans for your library in this area?

### Recommendations

**40** Do you have any other recommendations for increasing access to public libraries for children with special needs?

**41** Is there anything else that you would like to say?