

# Making Libraries Accessible for the Deaf community

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## Statement of issues:

In an ideal world, libraries are fully accessible to everyone, including the Deaf community. To do this, action needs to be taken on the following issues:

1. Terminology
2. Captioning
3. Audio recording available in alternative formats
4. Communications

## Discussion & Recommendations:

### 1. Terminology

AAD members prefer to be described as being Deaf (with a capital D). This term applies to those who use Auslan (Australian Sign Language) to communicate and also applies to those who identify themselves as members of the signing Deaf community.

The term deaf (with a small d) is a general term used to describe the physical condition of not hearing. It also describes people who are physically deaf but do not identify themselves as members of the signing Deaf community.

The term 'hearing-impaired' and/or 'hard of hearing' is used by those who acquired some form of hearing loss in late childhood or adulthood, or those with a mild or moderate hearing loss. These people usually communicate using speech, lip-reading and residual hearing often amplified by hearing aids. They do not usually use Auslan or identify themselves as members of the signing Deaf community.

### **Recommendation #1:**

Use of the wrong term can offend. Culturally Deaf people do not like the term 'hearing-impaired', perceiving it as negative and clinical. Hearing-impaired people do not like the term 'Deaf' nor 'deaf', thus when referring to a mixed group of people, it is appropriate to use more than one term. For example, 'Library services are accessible for Deaf and hearing-impaired people in Australia'.

### 2. Captioning

Captioning is a vital part of the lives of Deaf people. Captioning gives Deaf people access to information, which would otherwise be inaccessible. This is true for any visual medium involving audio material.

Captioned material should include:

- **Videos/Films/DVDs.** Most captioned videos available at libraries are recent popular releases or documentaries, thus Deaf people do not have access to a wide range of films such as older films, alternative films and the like.

Another problem facing Deaf people is the increasing number of videotapes with closed captions. This means Deaf people need to purchase closed caption readers at the cost of a few hundred dollars to be able to 'read' videotapes with closed captions. This hinders access to information as not everyone has access to such equipment.

Moreover, the National Library of Australia's film/video service is now located at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) in Melbourne. This creates problems for Deaf people who live outside Melbourne.

Finally, the NLA needs to promote the availability of captioned videos more widely. A quick survey of universities reveal a lack of awareness of the availability of captioned material at NLA.

#### **Recommendation #2**

- 2.1 Seek funding to caption ALL videos, films and DVDs at all libraries throughout Australia.
  - 2.2 NLA and state libraries each purchase a number of closed caption readers so that Deaf users can borrow such equipment when borrowing closed caption videos.
  - 2.3 Reciprocal arrangements to allow Deaf people to borrow videos, etc. from NLA's film/video partner library in Victoria.
  - 2.4 Promote availability of captioned material widely to other libraries and the general public.
- **CD-ROMS, DVD-ROMS.** Computer software that includes video and audio clips such as reference material and games can be made accessible for Deaf users by including captions.

#### **Recommendation #3**

Ensure all CD-ROMS and/or DVD-ROMS such as 'Endeavour: Captain Cook's Journal 1768-71' on CD-ROM are fully captioned.

- **Web captioning.** The web is seen as a mixed blessing by the Deaf community: on one hand it provides them with access to a wealth of information in text format, but on the other hand, lack of captioning for audio material shows that barriers still exist.

#### **Recommendation #4**

Ensure all audio material on all libraries' websites is fully captioned.

### 3. Audio recordings available in alternative formats

Audio recordings such as oral history and folklore should be available in alternative formats such as a printed transcription or in Auslan. The digitisation of oral history audio recordings should include print transcripts and/or Auslan video translations.

#### **Recommendation #5**

Make available all audio recordings in print or Auslan format for the Deaf community to access.

#### 4. Communications

To enable the Deaf community to access library services, libraries need to be aware of Deaf people's communication needs.

#### **Recommendation #6**

- 6.1 Provision of TTY for direct telephone calls. Ensure staff are trained in correct TTY protocol and relay service procedures. Many staff 'forget' how to use TTY's over time, thus refresher training is necessary. Training programs should also take account of staff turnover, rosters and rotations.
- 6.2 Email access with quick responses, ie. 24-hour response time.
- 6.3 Option of SMS notification services, eg. to let the Deaf person know their book is ready to be picked up.
- 6.4 Information in plain English. Deaf people's first language is Auslan and English is their second language. To minimise confusion, plain English assisted with visual cues should be used wherever possible.
- 6.5 Deafness-awareness training for all staff, including new staff.
- 6.6 Option of Auslan interpreters for tours, lectures and the like. This option should be publicised widely in Deaf publications throughout Australia. AAD can assist with the dissemination of information.

#### **Final note:**

It should be pointed out that improved services as above will benefit not only the Deaf community but also:

- Hearing-impaired people;
- People from non-English speaking backgrounds;
- Older Australians;
- People with language acquisition difficulties; and
- Ability to demonstrate video/CD-ROMs in noisy public places.

#### **References:**

Australian Association of the Deaf Inc., *Guidelines for the Portrayal of Deaf People in the Media*, 2002.

Brewer, Judy (2002) Overview of the Web Accessibility Initiative: *Impact of the Web on People with Disabilities*, [www.w3.org/Talks/WAI-Intro](http://www.w3.org/Talks/WAI-Intro)