

Facilities and Services to Patrons with Disabilities in the Pondicherry University Library System: An Overview

K.T.Naheem

*B.A., M.L.I.Sc., M.Phil., Professional Assistant,
Central Library, Pondicherry University, Pondicherry – 605 014.
E-Mail: naheemkt@gmail.com Mobile No. 9487957568*

Abstract:

Attempts have been made to highlight the State-of-the-art facilities and services made available at the Central library of Pondicherry University for disabled patrons who were established on 11 September 1986. At present the Library comprises of more than 3 workstations with latest configurations along with 3 HP scanners. It provides access to Internet, Dspace Archive, instructional learning materials and ICT based information services. Special software like JAWS, Kurzweil etc were provided for the use of disabled patrons. And the library is equipped with an exclusive section for the disabled community.

Keywords: Disability, Pondicherry University, Assistive technologies, Assistive Software.

1. Introduction:

Providing access to information for all users, irrespective of their physical disabilities, is a requirement for all libraries. Libraries are service organizations which give services without discrimination to their numerous users, including disabled people.

As more people with disabilities attend higher institutions, it is incumbent upon library management to provide the same level of service to them as is provided to users without disabilities. No doubt this group of people is making growing use of libraries and requires

Enhanced assistance in their search for data-based materials. With the new technologies available in libraries, users are now being provided with unprecedented access to communication and information all over the world. A crucial requirement for libraries is that the information they preserve and deliver in many formats must be made available to all including disabled users (1).

Disability can be defined as a physical or mental condition that prohibits an individual from the use of his or her body (partially, completely and with ease) to perform daily tasks. It can also be defined as meaning that one cannot learn easily (2).

1.1 ANANDA RANGAPILLAI LIBRARY: AN OVERVIEW

Pondicherry University is one of the Central Universities in India having a full-fledged Library system and it is one of the best academic libraries in India. It supports research, teaching and study at the Pondicherry Central University by providing literature in printed as well as in digital form, meeting the demands of the University members.

The University Library is named after Ananda Rangapillai, the Dubash of Lord Duplex, the then Governor of Pondicherry, during the British rule. Established in 1986, it has transformed into a Knowledge Resource Centre today catering especially to the information needs of the academia. The mission of the Library is to support and supplement learning, teaching and research programmes (3). The library is equipped with a large collection of resources including books, journals in both print and electronics formats, electronics databases, and theses covering different subject domains. Library is fully automated and provides digital library services to facilitate learning and research.

1.2. Patrons with disability in the University:

The university library serves several patrons with disability from the students, research scholars and members of the faculty and non-teaching staff of the university community. The table no.1 shows the picture of disabled community in the University (4).

Table 1. Patrons with Disability

	Student/Scholar	Faculty	Non-Teachnig	Total
Male	50	12	10	72
Female	12	2	7	21
Total	62	14	17	93

2. Objective of the Study:

The objective of the study was to highlight the various facilities and services available at the Central library of Pondicherry University to provide a learning environment friendlier to the disabled community in the university.

3. Facilities & Services for Disabled Patrons:

The mission of the Central library is to support the programs of the University and to fulfill the study and research needs of our students and faculty. Integral to this mission is the provision of services to patrons with disabilities that encourages independent use of the library to the fullest extent possible. To achieve this goal the following facilities and services are provided for the disabled community.

3.1. General Facilities:

It is important to ensure there is physical access to the library facilities. By physical access one would mean that any person irrespective of their physical, sensory or cognitive abilities is able to access and use all sections of the library independently, safely and comfortably. While retrofitting physical access into a library, there are various components of the building that need to be looked at. Also unlike the common belief physical access not only benefits people with physical impairment, but also enables people with sensory and cognitive disabilities.

Having just an accessible entrance will not make the service accessible. Considerations need to be given to simple aspects such as ensuring that people with vision impairments are able to negotiate within the library without hitting against obstacles, people with hearing impairments are able to receive all the information they need, people with cognitive disabilities are able to find their way between similar looking book stacks. Also as important as thinking of the accessible entrance to the facility is the accessible egress plan from the building in times of an emergency for people with disabilities (5). Following are the general facilities provided by the central library for the use of disabled patrons parking vehicles, Building Entrance, Reserved Section, Elevators, Wheel chairs etc.

3.1.1. Parking: A reserved parking area is provided near to the entrance of the library to enable patrons with disability to reach the library without having to walk much.

3.1.2. Building Entrance: Step free pathways with ramp with supporting rods leading to the library were provided for the benefit of the patrons with disabilities.

3.1.3. Reserved Section: A reserved section is provided for the use of patrons with disabilities for study, reference and discussion.

3.1.4. Elevators: Elevator is provided access to or from the ground floor to other floors of the Library. Ask staff at any service desk for immediate assistance.

3.1.5. Wheel Chairs: A wheelchair stored in the Circulation Services Department, is available for use within the University Library.

3.1.6. Rest Rooms: Wheelchair accessible rest rooms are provided in the ground and first floor of the library.

3.1.7. Drinking Fountains: Wheelchair accessible drinking fountains are provided in the ground and first floor of the library.

4. Assistive Technological Facilities: Hardware & Software

The Central Library of the university endeavor to provide assistance and instruction, which lead users to independent research, regardless of their ability. The Assistive Technology Computers are enhanced computers designed to provide specialized software and hardware resources to patrons with disabilities. Assistive technology can be as simple as a wrist band that allows an individual to hold a pen or pencil, walkers and wheelchairs, and an ever-expanding arsenal of „hardware, software, and peripherals that assist people with disabilities in accessing computers or other information technologies (6).

The Library offers a variety of assistive technological facilities covering hardware, software and other peripherals for the use of patrons with disabilities. These

equipments were kept in the exclusive section devoted to the disabled patrons near to library entrance. The most common of these technologies are listed below:

4.1. Hardware's: Three terminals with latest configuration were kept for the use of disabled patrons inside special section devoted for them. These systems are connected with the peripherals like Scanners and Head phones.

4.2. Software's: There are wide ranges of software's are available in the market which can be used as assistive and productivity software's for the use patrons with disability. The most common assistive and productivity software's which are available in the Central Library are listed below:

4.2.1. Assistive Software's:

4.2.1.1. Jaws: Jaws software is a screen reader, designed to assist people who are blind or visually impaired. Jaws can automatically open when the Computer is booted up and guides the user through almost any programme on the computer. Through a few simple commands Jaws reads out the user's exact location on the computer for example, when using the internet, Jaws reads aloud the contents of the address bar to inform the user which webpage is displayed on the screen. Jaws will also inform the user of what programme they are using, and exactly how to use it. The user can also use Jaws to navigate between programmes and files, by listening to the instructions provided by the synthesized voice. An example of one of the basic commands in Jaws would be "Insert + J" which would open up a programme if it has not already done so automatically (7).

4.2.1.2. Kurzweil 1000: Kurzweil 1000 is a scanning, reading and writing software programme, for use by people who are blind or visually impaired. Through the use of scanning technology, text is converted to speech by synthetic voice. Kurzweil 1000™ is award-winning software that makes printed or electronic text readily available to people who are blind or visually impaired. It combines accessibility, communication and productivity tools to ease and enhance their reading, writing and learning experience.

The software speaks text aloud in a variety of natural-sounding voices that can be modified to suit individual preferences. In addition, it provides users with document creation and editing as well as study skills capabilities for note taking, summarizing and outlining text. Kurzweil 1000 delivers quick access to a wealth of information including online books, magazines and encyclopedias so users can pursue any reading interests. They can also take their reading wherever they go by sending files to Braille note takers and embossers as well as portable devices such as DAISY and MP3 audio players (8).

4.2.2. Productivity Software's:

The most common productivity software's which are provided to the patrons with disabilities includes Adobe Acrobat 8, Adobe Reader 9.2, Microsoft flavor's like Office Access, Excel, Outlook, PowerPoint, Publisher, Word, Browsers like Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, Google Chrome, media players like VLC media player 1.0.3, Win amp, Windows media player.

5. Services:

The staff members in the library recognize the specialized help sometimes required for individual patrons with disabilities, and they will attempt to provide the necessary assistance to the fullest extent possible. Services which are provided include helping patrons to retrieve, copy, checkout, check-in and renew library materials. Staff at the Circulation Desk will arrange to retrieve books. Given the availability of staff and resources at the time, it may also include assistance using the resources or equipment most appropriate to the users' expressed need.

6. Conclusion:

The overview of the existing facilities and services to patrons with disabilities in the Pondicherry university library system depicts the steps taken by the authorities for to justify Universities mission i.e., “Expansion, Excellence and Equity” in the right manner.

Bibliography:

- [1] V. O. Ekwelem. Library services to disabled Students in the digital era: challenges for outcome Assessment. *Library Philosophy and Practice* (e-journal).
- [2] ICT Facilities and Services at M. K. Tata Memorial Learning Centre for Visually Challenged by Mallikarjun Angadi & Muttayya Koganuramath, 7th International CALIBER 2009).
- [3] <http://lib.pondiuni.edu.in/profile.html> (Accessed on 23.01.2014)
- [4] <http://www.pondiuni.edu.in/content/vital-statistics> (Accessed on 23.01.2014).
- [5] Inclusive Libraries - A step towards making libraries disabled friendly <http://barrierbreak.com/about-barrierbreak/press-releases/inclusive-libraries-a-step-towards-making-libraries-disabled-friendly> (Accessed on 27.01.2014).
- [6] Meredith College. 2009. „Disability Services Student Handbook: 2008 – 2009.” Available at: http://www.meredith.edu/students/counsel/disability/documents/DS_Student_Handbook_08_09_000.pdf (Accessed on 23.01.2014).
- [7] <http://www.freedomscientific.com/jaws-hq.asp> (Accessed on 23.01.2014).
- [8] <http://www.kurzweiledu.com/kurzweil-1000-v13-windows.html> (Accessed on 23.01.2014)

