



## Occupational Health and Safety – City of Greater Dandenong Libraries

The City of Greater Dandenong is approximately 25 kilometres south east of Melbourne and has one of the most diverse populations in Australia with 51% of its 130,000 residents born overseas from 150 different birthplaces. The City is the manufacturing hub of Victoria with the rate of social disadvantage relatively high with household income levels below the metropolitan average and the unemployment rate at 9%.

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There are two well used and busy libraries in Dandenong and Springvale that have nearly 1 million visits per year. To meet community needs, the libraries have some of the longest opening hours in Australia, with both libraries open 72 hours per week. The buildings have limited space for their rate of usage and are both 35-40 years old.

For staff who work in this hectic environment over the breadth of hours, special attention is paid to training a workforce in safe work practices from manual handling to conflict resolution. Just as important are the systems, documentation, reporting and follow-up relating to any incidents as they occur.

A spate of injuries five years ago led to a concerted effort to reduce the risk to staff in injuring themselves. With the injuries mainly relating to manual handling, many changes were made to address manual handling issues in the library. Staff were trained in manual handling techniques and also briefed on the mechanics of the spine and the effects that poor lifting and manual handling techniques can have over time.

An ergonomist performed a risk assessment on all work areas in the library and further changes were made as a result.

- Many pieces of equipment were replaced, including trolleys and scanners. Dump bins were replaced with custom made motorised dump bins to eliminate bending and twisting.
- A task analysis was completed for all library tasks, and this is now used as a guide for training new staff and for staff returning from injury or illness.
- Compulsory time restrictions were placed on tasks that had a high rate of repetition and manual handling, including shelving, shelf reading, returns. This means that staff are required to work as a team to ensure that tasks are continuously rotated.
- The time restrictions and safe work practices have been consolidated by the Libraries' OH&S committee to form OH&S commandments which are posted in all staff areas in the Library. These commandments are now policy and compulsory for all staff to follow.

- Both libraries have had minor renovations to bring about further opportunities to improve work flows.

Training for staff to minimise work related injury continues with staff attending general health and wellness sessions and learning further stretching exercises, with the emphasis on building stronger core muscles to minimise risk of back injuries. All staff also complete recommended stretching exercises before each rostered shift.

Task analysis documentation is being updated and all staff will be attending refresher training in early 2009.

Greater Dandenong Libraries provide training and guidelines for library staff in resolving conflict which can occur in a busy community facility.

All staff received training in practical and in-depth conflict resolution. The training sessions place staff in real life scenarios, where they can practice various conflict resolution techniques in a supportive learning environment.

Staff also developed a code of practice in dealing with difficult situations that can involve anything from reported thefts to breaching computer use guidelines to lost children etc. A reporting procedure ensures that team leaders and supervisors are made aware of such incidents and any trends can be identified and dealt with promptly.

Both libraries are well used by the local young adults. Incidents are minimal, given the opening hours, but occasionally staff report ongoing issues with individuals. Libraries have now developed a partnership with Council's Youth Services team where individuals who display ongoing problem behaviours are counselled by professional youth intake workers. The library works with Youth Services, the parents and the individual to devise an Acceptable Behaviour Contract, so that the individual is clear on behavioural expectations and the consequences of non-compliance.

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## Do you intend to change the world?

I am at the Library of St Gallen in Switzerland, flicking through their thousand year old medieval codices. The gold leaf shimmers on the page as I leaf idly through the Evangelium Longum. No one hovers over my shoulder or presses a pair of white gloves into my palm; I am free to delve into any of their 144 volumes, fingers still sticky from the jam biscuit I ate fifteen minutes ago. Suddenly, with a keystroke, I'm back at my desk, resisting the temptation to go make another cup of tea. Thanks to the internet, copyright-free ebooks, audio books, music and software all cost nothing to download, and they are becoming increasingly available to everyone, thanks to volunteers who scan, dictate, record and ultimately upload content that sits happily, and legally, in the public domain.

Digital publishing is one of many growing literary and ecological services. Libraries are becoming increasingly

...approximately  
seventy books are  
being converted to  
audio every month

conscious of environmental concerns, and many are prioritising the digitisation of copyright free content. The advantages to libraries themselves are plentiful; valuable books are available to all yet can be physically archived and protected from degradation through use, reducing costs associated with the handling and management of books, and access is not restricted to the physical availability of the book. Rare texts are protected, and the production of new books is greatly reduced. It is a win for all. By digitising their texts, libraries are on their way to becoming an ecologically sound industry, and simultaneously promote intellectual freedom and growth.

I recently interviewed Michael Hart, founder of Project Gutenberg, the world's first and largest database of public domain ebooks, and a passionate advocate for the distribution of free content. He believes we are entering a brand new age of knowledge due to the spread of free electronic books. "I think this is all going to change the world as much as did the Gutenberg Press, and I think the Gutenberg Press created [much] of The Industrial Revolution, The Scientific Revolution and elevated the entire world literacy rate [and] education rate."

The original Gutenberg press was invented in 1440, and was the first machine to enable mass printing of books, or indeed the mass production of anything. Before then, books were hand scribed and very rare, each said to have cost as much as the average farm. After the rapid spread of the press, and subsequent flood of books suddenly available to the middle classes, literacy escalated and the world shot into a revolution of knowledge, and later the Age of Enlightenment. Now, with easy access to information, enabled by people like Hart dedicating their time, if not lives, to the distribution of knowledge, we have the potential to enter a new Age of Enlightenment; a time where information is freely available to all. With global access to a wide knowledge base, and the ability to freely exchange and develop ideas, there is a huge potential for a worldwide advancement in economy, climate awareness, political freedom, and third world conditions. Change needs more than blind action; it needs knowledge and understanding.

One woman making an enormous contribution is Kara Shallenberg. She converts public domain texts into audio books for LibriVox, <http://librivox.org>, a project that aims to convert all books in the public domain into audio. LibriVox has a phalanx of volunteers, dictating chapters of books and releasing them on the internet for free download through LibriVox servers. Shallenberg works in her home studio where she reads and edits her recordings. I asked her how, with no professional voice training, she has developed a voice so clear and polished; "My son, Henry, who is almost 12, is an insatiable audiobook addict. When he was little, oh, 3 or 4, I started reading his bedtime stories into a tape recorder so he could listen again in the daytime and I could get things done. I always wished I could let other kids enjoy the recordings

I made for Henry... [so] when I discovered LibriVox it was a match made in heaven!" With her contribution, and that of nearly two thousand other volunteers, approximately seventy books are being converted to audio every month. Project Gutenberg has around four times that average, with over three hundred books a month, or around seventy books a week. There are now about one hundred thousand books spread across Gutenberg's many servers and mirror sites, and over a thousand audio books on Librivox. These are all free.

We all have the power to promote change and support a positive ecological impact. Lift a copy of Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* from the virtual shelf. Put *The Just So Stories* on your iPod and listen to it on the way to work. By developing and sharing your knowledge of the world in a sustainable way, you are changing it for the better.

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## 'Ergo', service and access at UQ Library

The University of Queensland Library applies flexible practices to both the physical and online environment to ensure students with disabilities can access and manage the information they need for their learning and research.

And it was highly commended for its efforts when it was recognised at the UQ Vice-Chancellor's Equity and Diversity Awards ceremony during the University's Diversity Week celebrations in May.

"I was honoured to accept the acknowledgement on behalf of the Library, which recognised the Library's work in assisting clients," said University Librarian and Director of Learning Services, Keith Webster.

"We have established a working party which focuses on activities aimed at improving library support for people with disabilities," said Mr Webster. "The group designed a workshop for library staff that is run annually and sets out to raise awareness of the University's disability program, library facilities, and software available to clients with disabilities."

These facilities include special accommodation and access to computing facilities and software packages that assist in making resources more accessible.

All fourteen branches of the UQ Library allow for wheelchair access and provide a variety of seating configurations for clients with various needs, including height adjustable desks.

The Library provides equipment to meet the needs of those with a sight disability, including a Braille embosser, ergonomic keyboards and large flat screen monitors, and new lifts are equipped with Braille buttons. Braille tape is used as an interim measure in old lifts until they are refurbished.

Each of the University's campuses rooms in the library are equipped with assistive software including Jaws, Open Book, Duxbury Braille translator, Dragon Dictate Naturally Speaking, Zoom text, and voice synthesizer software.