



PIERRE GORMAN AWARD GOES TO CAMPASPE LIBRARIES

Opportunities for libraries to improve services should be taken when they can. An excellent opportunity to expand and develop services to people with disabilities in the Campaspe region is about to become reality through the support of the Pierre Gorman Award.

The Pierre Gorman Award has been administered by the State Library of Victoria since 1997 and is supported by the Pierre Gorman Foundation. This biennial \$25,000 award is provided by the Library Board of Victoria to Victorian public libraries for service development and delivery to people with a disability. The award honours and recognises the amazing contribution made by the late Dr Pierre Gorman CBE, who was devoted to improving services for people with disabilities, and was himself profoundly deaf.

The Campaspe Regional Library project, Being Connected – Libraries and Autism, builds on the existing fantastic working partnership the library service has with Community Living and Respite Services (CLRS) and Supporting Parents of Children with Aspergers and Autism Spectrum (SPOCAAS) in Echuca.

The project will focus on improving the library's physical environment by undertaking a sensory audit at all main service points across the Shire of Campaspe. The driver behind undertaking a sensory audit is that quite often library buildings are designed to be accessible, friendly and welcoming but in doing so can sometimes include features, fabrics, colours, lighting, sounds and equipment that may affect people on the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Sensory sensitivity or sensory overload can be quite distressing and can impact on enjoyment and use of the library for these patrons.

The audit will be conducted by an experienced equal access consultant to assess the library environments to investigate and recommend the modifications required to improve library facilities for people with ASD.

In addition to the audit, the library service will also undertake a communication accessible assessment to work towards achieving the communication access symbol at all



library service points. Achieving this will enable the library service to indicate that not only are the facilities welcoming and friendly, but the staff are able to use various methods of communicating and will look, speak and listen to allow people with disabilities to get their message across. A training component will also be provided by our partner organisation throughout the project to support staff in learning appropriate communication methods.

The award will also allow the library to purchase a mobile interactive learning station. This will be accessible to people with special needs and act as a flexible and visually stimulating communication tool.

The third component of our project will focus on inclusive programming and information. The library staff will collaborate with staff from CLRS to create a resource called *This is My Library Book*, which will be able to be used by people with disabilities, reinforcing that libraries are for everyone and how people can get best use of the library.

An inclusive calendar of events with a focus on literacy-based activities, such as regular book club and a summer reading club program will also be developed.

We expect this project will have far-reaching benefits within our own service and for all libraries across Australia seeking to provide improved facilities and services to people with Autism Spectrum Disorder. We look forward to sharing project outcomes with the Australian library network.

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IMAGES (clockwise from far left):

1. This distinctive book feature at the Echuca library is designed to highlight the support this branch provides to all service points in the region.
2. Pierre Gorman worked tirelessly to improve library services for the disabled.
3. The Echuca branch of the Campaspe Regional Library Service already works closely with agencies helping people with disabilities.
4. Library Services Manager Jenny Mustey.