

# DELIVERING LIBRARY SERVICES FOR DISABLED PEOPLE

## GUIDANCE NOTES ON WORKING WITH CUSTOMERS WHO HAVE DISABILITIES

### PEOPLE WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

#### Background information

Visual impairment affects people in many different ways. There is no 'typical' blind person, so their ability to read print will also vary, ranging from standard print with a reading aid, to large print to needing all print to be translated into Braille or spoken word.

Some visually impaired people, particularly in the upper age ranges, may also have mobility problems which may affect their ability to access and get round libraries.

In a RNIB survey, the three most frustrating aspects of everyday life experienced due to sight problems were reported as:

- Not having information in a readable form
- Not being able to get around easily
- Not being independent

And the three things that would make life easier were:

- More understanding about what it is like to be blind
- Labels in large print, tape or Braille
- Information in the format the individual wants (large print, audio tape, computer disc or Braille)

In dealing with an enquiry, these are the questions you may need to address:

- ***Is the information available?***
- ***Is it in a format that the individual requires?*** – if not, can it be transcribed; where can this be done; how long will it take and will there be a charge?

#### What you need to checkout:

- What information is already available in **alternative formats** in my library?
- What are the principal **sources of information** and news on daily living for visually impaired people – e.g. Royal National Institute for the Blind; National Library for the Blind; Talking Eyes service; Talking Newspapers Association of the UK; Calibre fiction tape library?
- How I can access or advise on **transcription facilities** ( changing items to large print, audio tape, computer disc, Braille etc.) if the customer needs the information in an alternative format to the one that we have available?
- What **equipment** is available in my library to help visually impaired customers – magnifiers; audio cassette players; screen reading technology such as Kurzweil machines; adapted computer hardware and software?

### **What you can do...**

- Speak to make contact as your smile of welcome may go unnoticed – introduce yourself as a member of the library staff who is available to help.
- Don't assume that a person is totally blind even if using a white cane or a guide dog.
- Don't assume that a person who can see to do one thing can see to do everything
- Speak normally and clearly.
- Don't try to guess what a person can or cannot see. If you need to know, ask them.
- Don't assume that the person wants to be guided. Always ask if, where and how the blind person would like to be guided.
- Remember that, like a sighted person, a blind person may not welcome the unexpected touch of a stranger.
- Let the person take hold of your arm near the elbow.
- Keep your arm relaxed and place them slightly behind you as you walk.
- If they have a Guide Dog, approach from the opposite side. Do not try to take charge of the dog or distract it by stroking or petting it.
- When assisting, make sure the person is aware of their surroundings by giving a brief commentary – changes to floor surface, steps, slopes, hazards to avoid etc.

- Direction giving instructions should be explicit – not ‘follow me over here’ for example.
- Directions may refer to a clock face, where 12 is ‘straight on’.
- Always allow the person to use available handrails etc.
- When you leave the person you have been guiding, tell them you are leaving; what objects/ items you have left with them; what you will do next e.g. ‘I’ll be back in five minutes to see if you need anything else’ as appropriate.