Research Papers

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EXPECTATIONS OF THE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES FROM LIBRARY: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract :

There have been changes in attitude and behaviour of people with disabilities towards library and its services. They expect the best from the library. The best, in the eyes of the people with disabilities, is not reflected by library collection alone. Library should also provide instant and hassle free access to its collection. With the help of Assistive Technology (Adaptive Technology), libraries can provide the people with disabilities a peaceful access to all its information resources. In addition to this, library should make its building disabled friendly to enable the smooth movement of the people with disabilities in the library. In this paper, an attempt is made to understand the expectations of the people with disabilities from library. The results discussed in the paper were obtained from a case study conducted at the Sir Dorabji Tata Memorial Library, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. The results would help the library managers to plan their library services in tune with the changing needs of the people with disabilities.

KEYWORDS :

Library services for disabled; Inclusive library; Assistive Technology.

INTRODUCTION:

Satisfying information needs of the users has been the primary objective of libraries worldwide. The Five Laws of Library Science, proposed by S. R. Ranganathan, also reflect this fact. The user is considered as an important guest in the library and everything has to be done in order to entertain him. User is the centre point around whom all the actions of the library revolve.

The library managers should take utmost care in planning and providing the library services to their users including the people with disabilities. The needs and expectation of the people with disabilities should be given priority in order to enable them to join the main stream of the society. The expectations of the people with disabilities are similar to that of the people without disabilities. They too want to access all kinds of information stored in a variety of formats to become the knowledgeable citizens. Library should respond positively to these expectations and should try to fulfil them by implementing assistive technologies and adopting accessible building designs.

LIBRARY AND THE DISABILITY:

Library may expect all kinds of people in its premises to use the information and knowledge stored in a variety of documents. The visitors may include the people with disabilities also. Library, being a social institute, has both moral and constitutional obligation to serve the people with disabilities. It should make all necessary arrangements to meet the information needs of the people belong to this special category.

Expectation of the people with disabilities from library:

Here is an excerpt from a case study conducted at Sir Dorabji Tata Memorial Library, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai to understand the expectation of people with disabilities from library. It will highlight the areas in the

library that need an improvement or complete makeover in order to make it disabled friendly.

Research Methodology:

The study adopted an Interview Method for collecting data from the respondents. The type of the Interview was unstructured. The questions were formed according to the situation during interaction. The method provided flexibility to the researcher to understand the feelings of the respondents clearly and helped to obtain additional information wherever required.

Accessible Library Building:

The structure of the the library building should be accessible by people with disabilities. One of the respondents of the study felt that 'SDTM library has good infrastructure facility and has made good efforts to accommodate people with disabilities. Provision of ramps, railings, wide entrance doors, elevators, accessible toilet rooms are made available in the library. It helps the people with locomotor disabilities to move here and there easily. But still there are few things that need improvement in order to make it more accessible for the people with disabilities. For example, non availability of tactile maps in the library has made it difficult for the people with visual impairment to make out what is where in the library. The library should make arrangement for tactile map indicating all the sections and departments in it. There is no provision for tactile floors or tactile foot path in the library to assist the people with visual impairment. Because of this, the people with visual impairments have to depend on others to move here and there in the library.

One of the respondents said, "The chairs kept for the users to access the OPAC machines in the library should be moved to some other place. They are kept just besides a small lane that leads to the M. K. Tata Learning Centre for the Visually Impaired. There are instances where people with visual impairment hurt themselves after dashing to these chairs".

(Image 1 & 2 : Model Pictures of Tactile Pathways)
(Image 1 Source :
http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/3/35/Tactile_paving_in_a_Mass_Rapid_Transit_station_in_Sing apore_-_20131105.jpg/220px-Tactile_paving_in_a_Mass_Rapid_Transit_station_in_Singapore_-_20131105.jpg).
(Image 2 Source: : http://www.tiresias.org/happytourist/images/tactile_floor_strip.jpg)

Accessible Elevators:

One of the respondents and a regular user of the library opined, "I appreciate the staff for assisting us in our movement from one floor to the other in the library. But, still a provision of Braille buttons, voice indications/ announcements, should be made available in the elevators so we can move around the library independently".
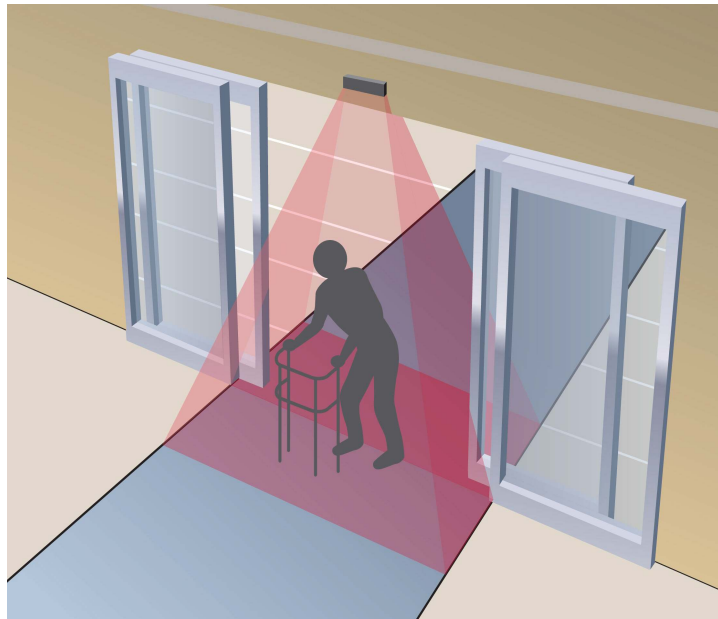
(Image 3 & 4 :Model Pictures of Accessible Elevators)
(Image 3 Source: http://www.gazettechicago.com/index/2012/10/new-elevator-expands-notre-dame-accessibility/)
(Image 4 Source: http://www.kip.ru/realtime/2013/01/)

Accessible Entrance Doors:

A regular user of the M. K. Tata Learning Resource Centre for the Visually Challenged, SDTM Library said, "The entrance door to the centre is not disabled friendly. A provision of foot-sensor automatic door should be made to enable the people with disabilities move freely in the centre.

(Image 5 & 6: Model Pictures of Aaccessible Entrance Doors)
(Image 5 Source: http://halmapr.com/news/beainc/files/2010/08/BEA-G3detector-BLOG.jpg)
(Image 6 Source: http://www.nabcoentrances.com/images/hi-res_AcumotionA_dwg4X.jpg)
Accessible OPAC:

One of the respondents highlighted a point, "the OPAC machines kept in the library doesn't support the JAWS (Job Access to Speech) software that we use for accessing information in the library. We can search the Web OPAC but, it is also not fully readable by us. The management should make it accessible for the people with visual impairment".

Accessible Computers:

A respondent said, "SDTM library has established M. K. Tata Learning Resource Centre which is very useful for the people with visual impairment. The air conditioned centre with some of the outstanding Assistive Technology Softwares like,

JAWS, Kurzweil, SARA, Magic Magnification, Prisma etc has made it possible for the people with visual impairment to access the library resources without any hindrance".

(Image 7 & 8: Model Pictures of Accessible Computers)
(Image 7 Source: http://meganhoopesmyers.files.wordpress.com/2011/07/wheelchair-access-color.gif)
(Image 8 Source: http://blog.cytalk.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Blind.jpg)

Accessible Documents:

A respondent with visual impairment opined, "We can access most of documents posessed by the library without any difficulty. But, there are certain files stored in the Digital Library Section which are not supported by the JAWS software. The library staff should make them accessible for us".

A respondent said, "The library should also house Visual Documents (Video Cossets) with running sub-titles to enable the people with hearing impairment to understand the concept clearly.

(Image 9 : Model Picture of User Using Braille Slate)   (Image 10: Model Picture of User Reading Braille Book)
(Image 9 Source: 1http://static2.bigstockphoto.com/thumbs/7/7/4/large2/4778218.jpg)   (Image 10 Source: 2 http://nlb-online.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Braille.jpg)

(Image 11: Model Picture of SARA machine)   (Image 12: Model Picture of Zoom-Ex machine)

(Image 11 Source: https://encrypted-bn3.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcRn2MsTpepBppU6V72dVk-E3Xg1xrudEd8ppy6Ii0iPGsUkHi2b
(Image 12 Source: http://www.abisee.com/products/zoom-ex.html)

(Image 13 Model Picture of Braille Embosser) (Image 14: Model Picture of Person using Braille Embosser)
(Image 13 Source: http://www.dbt.org.au/Images/IndexBasic.D.qua.jpg)   (Image 14:
http://www.viewplus.com/images/InkConnect_Mike.jpg)

Need of exclusive and dedicated staff:

One of the respondent expressed his views, "I acknowledge the service of the library staff but, if there is a provision of a staff member who is exclusively meant for the service of the people with disabilities, it would help us to have better information about the library. That staff member should be well trained in handling the people with disabilities. He should be aware of the sign language and the other known standard techniques to interact with the people with disabilities effectively. As of now,, we have to run from pillar to post to get small problems solved by the authorities".

Library Disability Policy Document:

"There is no clear policy document that states the rights and privileges of the people with disabilities in the library. How many print-outs a person can take from the library free of cost? What if he fails to return the book within the due date prescribed? Is there any concession in the penalty charges? How much can be charged for photocopy service? How many days will take for the library to fix the problems after registering the complaint? The library should have a clear policy document to answer such FAQs and should make it available online and in Braille form.", said a respondent.

Overall impressions and suggestions of the study:

Following are the overall impressions and suggestions obtained from the study for the improvement of SDTM library services for the people with disabilities.

1.Provision of Tactile Maps and Tactile Foot-paths inside the library.
2.Provision of Braille Buttons and Voice Announcements in Elevators.
3.The OPAC should be made accessible by the people with visual impairment.
4.Barrier free pathway that leads to the M. K. Tata Learning Resource Centre for Visually Challenged.
5.Provision of Foot-sensor Automatic Door for M. K. Tata Learning Resource Centre for Visually Challenged.
6.To make the documents stored in Digital Library Section of SDTM library accessible by people with Visual Impairment.
7.Appointment of an exclusive library staff to assist the people with disabilities.
8.Provision of Clear Disability Policy Document that describes the privileges made for the people with disabilities in the library.

CONCLUSION:

Libraries strive hard to fulfil the information needs of their users. The library should provide equitable access to its resources by all its users without making any discrimination. The SDTM Library, TISS has made sincere efforts over the years to satisfy the information needs of the people including the people with disabilities. It has established an ultra modern computer lab with all the available Assistive Technologies for the welfare of the people with visual impairment. It has modified its structure to enable the easy movement of the people with disabilities in the library. But, still it is not ideal, like any other library. The results obtained from the study will be used for the improvement of the library. After all, the library is for the users. There satisfaction is our motto.

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