

# LAS LEARNING ALERTS

*Library Association of Singapore*



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*The LAS Learning Alerts, an initiative by the Training and Development Committee, aims to keep librarians informed about the latest trends and updates within our library network.*

Please contact us at [training@las.org.sg](mailto:training@las.org.sg) if you wish to contribute materials for LAS Learning Alerts.

## Accessibility, Diversity and Equity

In this issue, we share insights on accessibility, diversity, and equity from librarians working in public and academic libraries in Singapore. In two interviews, our interviewees discuss notable case studies and success stories of libraries implementing DEI initiatives, including community outreach programs, diverse book collections, and inclusive programming for underserved populations.

## Accessibility Adventures at Punggol Regional Library

Can you share an overview of the initiative and your role in supporting or continuing its work?



**Kavita Ilangovan**  
**Senior Manager,**  
**(Accessibility)**  
**National Library Board**



NLB began its accessibility journey in 2018, driven by a team of passionate staff committed to making library services more inclusive. In the early stages, we conducted multiple trials, collaborating with disability organisations to better understand the needs of persons with disabilities (PwDs). One of our first initiatives was making storytelling sessions accessible to individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Over time, our focus expanded to enhancing services and infrastructure in preparation for the opening of Punggol Regional Library (PRL), which introduced a range of new accessible features in the library to cater to PwDs. In 2024, I took on the role of Head of Accessibility, leading a team of librarians dedicated to improving and expanding the accessibility services launched at PRL. My role involves reviewing these services, evaluating their impact, and exploring opportunities to introduce them across other libraries.

## What were some key accessibility and inclusivity considerations in this initiative, and how have they shaped your work?

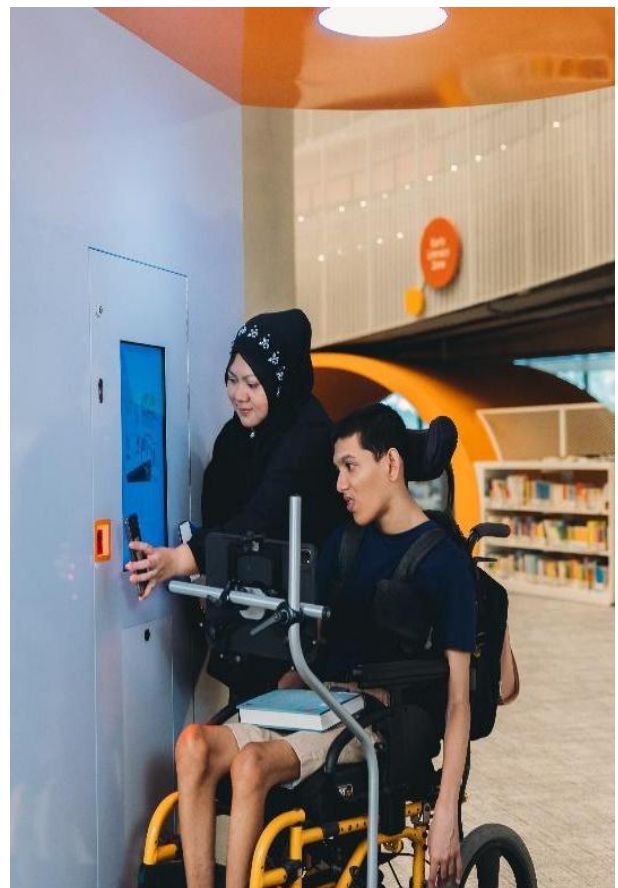
With the opening of PRL, we introduced NLB's Accessible Membership, which provides accessible members with extended loan and renewal periods, free reservations of items, as well as priority access to our Calm Pods in PRL—quiet spaces for adults and children with disabilities to go to when they need a private and calming sensorial experience.

To support diverse accessibility needs, we incorporated assistive technologies such as high-contrast and large-key keyboards, trackballs, joysticks, and a magnifier. Our Accessible Collection includes resources for PwDs, their caregivers, and the general public, featuring books on disability-related topics or stories with characters with disabilities to promote awareness and understanding.

We also look into the programmes tailored to different disability groups. For example, sensory stories allow participants with autism to attend such programmes in a relaxed environment, and sign language interpretation is offered for deaf-friendly events.

Additionally, PRL's bookshelves are designed to be no taller than three tiers, ensuring accessibility for wheelchair users and individuals with mobility challenges.

These considerations shape our ongoing work as we continue to refine our services, ensuring that our libraries remain inclusive, welcoming, and beneficial to all.



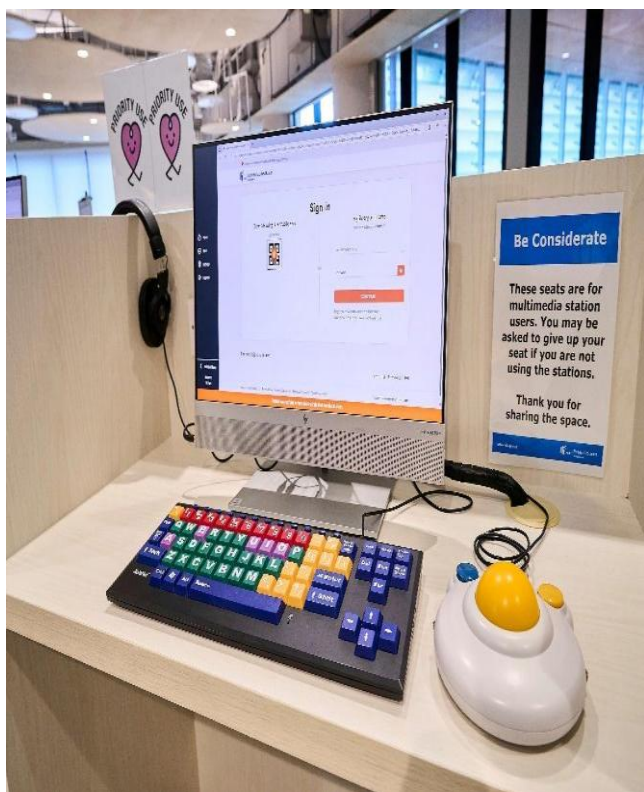
Borrow-n-Go Station

## How have you engaged with the community or stakeholders to ensure the initiative remains relevant and effective?

Community engagement is essential to our approach. Recognising our initial gaps in understanding, we collaborated with disability organisations to conduct focus groups and gain deeper insights into the needs of different PwD communities.

During the planning stage, Tampines Regional Library was the newest library at the time, and we invited disability groups to visit and share the "pain points" they experienced there and at other public libraries. As a result of their feedback, PRL now features wider spaces between shelves and expanded gantry widths to improve accessibility.

We also worked with persons with visual impairments to identify e-resources best suited to their needs, ensuring better accessibility. One of our key innovations, the Borrow-n-Go station, was developed for users with mobility challenges who found it difficult to lift books into the boxed area at standard borrowing stations. This system allows them to borrow items by simply passing through a dedicated passageway without having to lift the books - an improvement made possible through direct feedback from PwDs.



Multimedia Station with Assistive Technology

To maintain relevance and effectiveness, we continuously seek input from PwDs and their caregivers. Currently, NLB is reviewing its accessibility services with the aim of expanding these offerings across more libraries.

As part of this effort, we will be engaging PwDs and their caregivers through focus group sessions, programmes, outreach efforts, and other platforms to gather feedback on existing provisions at PRL and explore ways to further enhance our services.

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## What impact have you observed since being involved, and what feedback have you received from users?

Since the opening of PRL, we have observed a significant increase in visits from PwDs and their caregivers. Beyond providing accessible programmes and services, we have also created opportunities for PwDs to take on active roles as programme leads and performers, allowing them to showcase their talents. We have also created spaces to showcase crafts done by PwDs which are also available for purchase.

The response from the PwD community and library patrons has been positive. A father of a PwD dance performer shared that the library has transformed to a fun and supportive space to express his son's passion for dance. He said that PRL feels special and different, as it offers a welcoming environment where they can relax and explore a variety of engaging activities.

This feedback reinforces the impact of our initiatives in fostering a truly inclusive and supportive environment in our libraries.

## Based on your experience, what are some practical steps librarians can take to incorporate accessibility, diversity, and equity into their own work?

A key first step is gaining a basic understanding of the different disability groups. It's crucial to engage with the communities you are aiming to serve, as direct input from them ensures services are tailored to their needs. Without this, there's a risk of implementing solutions that may not be effective. Most importantly, librarians should enjoy the process, remain open to feedback, and be willing to adapt and improve as they learn more along the way. Continuous review and flexibility are vital in making services truly inclusive.

## NTU Library's Singapore Sign Language Sign Bank Project

### Can you share an overview of the initiative and your role in supporting or continuing its work?

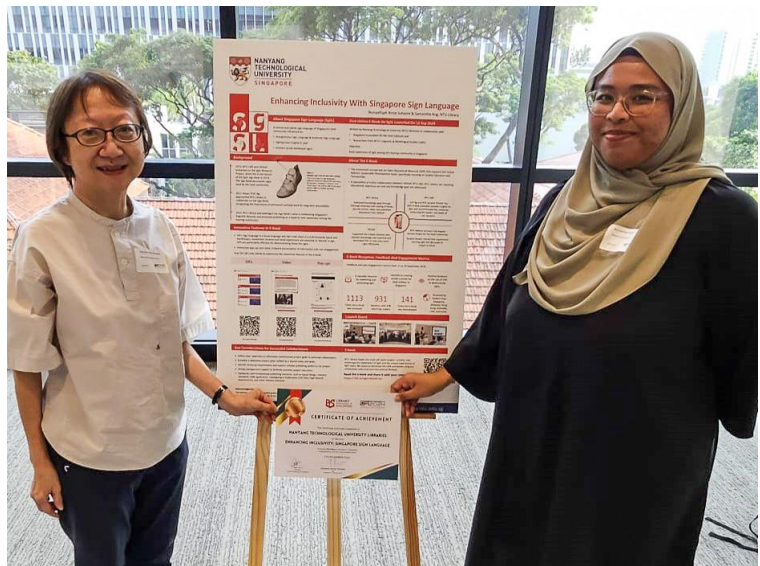
In 2021, Singapore Association for the Deaf (SADeaf), NTU's Linguistics & Multilingual Studies and Library began a joint collaboration to further develop the Singapore Sign Language (SgSL) Sign Bank. This Sign Bank serves to collect and document signs used by the Deaf community in Singapore and to promote SgSL to the public. It is a unique collection reflecting Singapore's diverse linguistic culture and in the words of our collaborator, Associate Prof Ng Bee Chin, "each sign is a testimony to a vibrant culture and a living language" (Nanyang Technological University Library, 2024, p. 21).

To raise awareness of SgSL among the hearing community, we launched an e-book on 11 September 2024 covering background information about sign languages, factors influencing SgSL and introduced selected SgSL words.

### What were some key accessibility and inclusivity considerations in this initiative, and how have they shaped your work?

As the e-book was designed with the hearing and sighted community in mind, we considered the following:

The use of clear visuals and descriptions. For example, for the chapter on Singapore colloquial expressions, we provided examples showing how these may be used in our everyday conversations.



**(Left)**  
**Samantha Ang**  
**Deputy Director**

**(Right)**  
**Nursyafiqah,**  
**Assistant Manager**

**Nanyang Technological University  
Library**

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The e-book is optimised for viewing on desktop and mobile devices. As sign language is a visual language, we included GIFs of the signs and step-by-step descriptions.

The use of inclusive language throughout the book. We used terms that are respectful and culturally accepted.

SADeaf enthusiastically supported the project from the outset. Nursyafiqah collaborated closely with them to select words and signs and SADeaf contributed new GIFs for the book. Members of the Deaf community also graciously reviewed the book and offered valuable comments and suggestions which we have incorporated in the e-book.

### **What impact have you observed since being involved, and what feedback have you received from users?**

When news of the e-book was publicised, we received warm feedback from members of the Deaf community who considered the publication as a resource for them to explain and raise awareness of SgSL. The e-book has been featured twice on The Straits Times, has garnered more than 4,000 views, more than 1,000 downloads and has been distributed to over 300 libraries worldwide.

### **Based on your experience, what are some practical steps librarians can take to incorporate accessibility, diversity, and equity into their own work?**

Since our work frequently involved conducting online and face-to-face workshops and creating e-learning content, we follow these common guidelines:

- Make presentation slides are accessible using MS PowerPoint accessibility features.
- Add captions / subtitles in instructional videos.
- Choose online presentation platforms with accessibility features like auto-captioning and recording so that participants can review them as needed

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Additionally, we can refer to resources to guide our practices like Nanyang Polytechnic and National Council of Social Service (NCSS) jointly published “Organising inclusive events: A practical toolkit to build social inclusion” and NCSS’s “Inclusive language guide”

Nanyang Technological University, Library. (2024). Singapore Sign Language: An introduction [eBook]. <https://ebook.ntu.edu.sg/sgsl-ebook>

Nanyang Polytechnic and National Council of Social Service. (2020). Organising inclusive events: A practical toolkit to build social inclusion. <https://www.sgenable.sg/docs/default-source/i'mable/i'mable-resources/inclusive-event-toolkit-2020.pdf>

National Council of Social Service. (2023). Inclusive language guide. <https://online.fliphtml5.com/borqx/bjxp/>



The SGSL team with Ms Rahayu Mazam, Minister of State, Ministry of Digital Development and Information at the LAS Conference 2024.

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## Learning Resources

### Universal Design: Best Practices for Libraries

May 23, 2022

Krista Macy, *M.Arch.*



### Universal Design for Libraries

Universal design (UD) is the design of buildings, products or environments to make them accessible to people, regardless of age, disability, or other factors.

This video presentation by the University of Buffalo introduces the concept of UD for libraries. It includes:

- Differences between Universal Design and Accessibility
- The 8 Goals of Universal Design
- The business case for Universal Design
- Examples of Universal Design in Libraries
- Library Design Case Studies
- Resources to implement Universal Design

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## Learning resources



### Project Enable

Project Enable is a website dedicated to the professional development of library Professionals from all types of libraries to build capacity for providing equitable access and services to students with disabilities. It includes online training modules, assessment and additional training resources.

### IFLA Multicultural Communities: Guidelines for Library Services

These guidelines promote fairness and equity of access in library services to multicultural communities. They provide a basis for the planning of library services to all groups in the community; criteria against which existing multicultural services may be assessed; an equitable basis for the acquisition of materials and the provision of services; and they encourage understanding and engagement among the multicultural groups represented in all societies. For the full-text of the guidelines, please visit: [Resources – IFLA](#)

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## Upcoming webinars and conferences:

### *Library Community at Work: Developing Custom AI Workflows for Metadata Management*

[Link](#)

**Tuesday, May 13, 2025  
11:00 AM ET / 8:00 AM PT**

Libraries are finding new ways to use AI to improve their work. This webinar will highlight two projects from the Alma community that show how AI can help libraries manage their records more effectively.

### *Introducing scoping and systematic reviews: An Open Education Resource by librarian authors*

[Link](#)

**Tuesday, 27 May 2025  
1:00 pm to 2:00 pm AEST  
FREE (Members) - \$22 (Non-Members)**

In response to student and staff needs, librarians at Federation University created an Open Education Resource to introduce a complex topic in an easy to understand, step by step way. This lunchtime session will describe the process of creating the resource from inception to publication, and demonstrate the content, features and interactive elements of the resource.

### *Best of Core Forum: Calling It Quits: How to Evaluate Library Services and Decide What to Stop Doing*

[Link](#)

**Tuesday, July 15, 2025  
1:00 - 2:00pm CDT  
\$79**

Following a period of disruption, library leaders need to realign service offerings with current organizational priorities and resources. In this interactive session, we will introduce a new model that we designed and applied at our large research library to redefine, reevaluate, and right-size research service offerings to better align with current staffing levels and support work-life balance for staff.