Extension Services to Visually Challenged from
Anna Centenary Library, Chennai

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Abstract
Paper depicts the resources and services of the Braille Division of the Anna Centenary Library, Chennai. Authors explain the purposes of using Google Groups by the visually challenged library users and the extent of use of the social media for communicating various facilities and services, including special programmes organized for the visually challenged is highlighted. Paper specifies in brief the responses of the library staff with regard to the use of Google Groups for communicating various library extension services.

Key Words: Anna Centenary Library; Visually Challenged, Social Media, Google Groups; Youth for Seva.

The Library Background:
The new library building of Anna Centenary Library was constructed on modern lines with beautiful architecture to cater to the needs of the public and academic community. A large number of academic institutions are there in the vicinity of the library, including Indian Institute Technology and Engineering and research institutions. The library is built over a massive area of 3.75 lakh square feet. The library has accommodated more than 1.20 million books and other information resources. The collection in the library holdings encompasses books on all major languages of India, besides providing access to few lakh e-books and several thousands of e-journals. A very special feature of this library is that it would straight away have a digital edge, being a partner of the World Digital Library. This will facilitate access to primary sources of knowledge of several countries and cultures across the world. This will help the scholars who are engaged in research and writings in the disciplines of social and cultural heritage.

The library is fully air conditioned and the floors are covered with carpets. The services include a Braille Section on the ground floor for the visually challenged. The facilities being extended to the visually challenged include blind as well as low vision members. To be specific, the facilities of the Braille Section are

- Conveniently located in the ground floor
- Disabled friendly ramp facility available
- Braille converters, Braille printers and Braille readers available
- Audio CDs with book contents for listening
- Help desk for the Braille users
- Refreshable Braille Display
- More than 1500 printed books in Braille format, 1100 Audio books and 150 e-books
Assistive Technology

The section is equipped with Braille Refreshable Display. An entire book in Tamil, or any other Indian Language and English can be stored and indexed in the Braille Reader. The visually challenged can select a book of any language, stored in the Braille Reader and read line by line and page by page. The navigation controls are in Braille format which can be operated and navigated with ease. Each Reader can store 1000 books of 300 pages on an average.

The Braille Section has Braille Converter software that converts text composed in Tamil, English or any other Indian Languages in to Braille text for visually challenged. The section has double sided Embosser that embosses Braille texts. The Embosser has lots of handy features that enable printing of Braille Book faster, easier and economical. The section possesses computers installed with assistive software tools that help in:

- Operating computers with voice commands
- Text to Voice file conversion
- Daisy formatted books reading
- Easy search and find facility
- Reading audio book and reference texts

Talking books service

If you want to listen to a good story, you probably have to go to the Anna Centenary Library at Kotturpuram. The library has a list/group of storytellers and book readers in addition to the list of scribes who help visually challenged students while writing their examinations.

Extension Programmes

A large number of visually challenged users rely upon the services of Braille Section. Number of qualified and trained professional library staff works in Braille Section. There are volunteers from IT sectors, engineering colleges and industries for extending services to the visually challenged users mainly to Read out Texts and to Write. Database of the volunteers is maintained by the Braille Section. On intimation they come and extend the services in the library. While conducting extension services, the volunteers come to the specified spot to render services. The members are also from ‘Youth for Seva’ Group. In order to facilitate communication among the visually challenged and the volunteers, Google Groups, is found helpful, and created by the library's Braille Section. Here is an example of posting on Google Groups for service by the volunteers to be rendered at M/s Swabhiman Trust and M/s Netrodaya Institution for Blind.

The information will be posted in a tabular form covering the details of

- Main Programme and Task
- Venue, indicating the complete address
- Date and Time,
- Details of Activities,
- Number of Volunteers Required,
- Nature of the Service to be rendered, Required Skills and Knowledge and
- Organizer: Contact Person and his/her Contact Details.
Example

1. Task: Teaching and spending time with children with Autism
2. Venue: Swabhiman is a Trust, working for the welfare of people with autism, located at Palavakkam on ECR. They engage children in various activities such as crafts, yoga, sports, music and other play therapy. Plot No: 301, Palkalai Nagar, Palavakkam, Chennai – 600041
3. Date and Time: Saturday; Timing – 10AM to 1PM; 2-4
4. Nature of Work: Engage with the children by teaching and other activities. Guidance will be provided by the facilitators.
5. Contact Details: Bhaskar – 9994650615

Use of Social Media: Members on Google Groups

The Google Groups is a service from Google Inc. that provides discussion groups for people sharing common interests. The Groups service also provides a gateway to Usenet newsgroups via a shared user interface. Google Groups became operational in February 2001, following Google’s acquisition of Deja’s Usenet archive.

Google Groups offers at least two kinds of discussion group; in both cases users can participate in threaded conversations, either through a web interface or by e-mail. The first kind are forums specific to Google Groups which are inaccessible by NNTP and act more like mailing lists. The second kind are Usenet groups, for which Google Groups acts as gateway and unofficial archive. Through the Google Groups user interface, users can read and post to Usenet groups. With Google Groups, one can create online and email-based groups. There’s a lot one can do with Google Groups:

- Engage in discussions about a specific information services.
- Create a question and answer customer support group.
- Organize meetings, conferences, or social events among library members.
- Find people with similar hobbies, interests, or backgrounds.
- Read group posts through email, online interface, or both.

To get started with Google Groups as a regular participant, learn how to find and join a group. To get started with Google Groups as an administrator, librarians have to create a group. This help center provides assistance with two products: Google Groups and Google Product Forums. A new and redesigned Google Groups was released in February 2012 with an updated user interface. The majority of this help center is dedicated to helping users with this new Google Groups interface.

Google Product Forums is the name associated with specific Google groups used to provide technical support for Google products, such as Google Maps. Mobile friendly Access Groups from anywhere, using mobile device.

Social Service: Youth for Seva (YFS)

YFS started in April 2007 as a platform to provide opportunities for youth who wanted to take active part in community development despite time constraints. Through this platform, YFS
aims to empower youth to become positive change makers who will enable organizations and institutions to work without a vested interest. The goal of YFS is to support schools, NGOs, government hospitals and other organizations including public libraries in the social sector through volunteers who can help them mitigate some of their shortcomings and challenges. Volunteering is made easy and customized to the individual’s interests and time constraints.

The YFS functions with the following objectives

- To facilitate a movement of volunteering.
- To empower and enable individuals to become positive change agents in the society.
- To enable institutions and libraries to effectively engage community to deliver services.
- To create models to address developmental needs through the culture of volunteering.
- To promote sustainable lifestyles among individuals and strengthen the required social institutions to sustain communities.

The volunteers and the Library Professional staff were interviewed to know the usefulness and the effectiveness of the services. The areas of use of Google Groups here include

1. Number of visually challenged users with Google Groups: 1500
2. Specific purposes include: Educational Opportunities, Scholarship Information, Placement information, Assistance to fill up forms such as UGC-NET, Recruit Boards, Training for Bank and Clerical Examinations, Current News and Events, Special Lectures, Information about Readers and Scribes, Book Talks, Meet-the Author Programmes, Music and Cultural Events, Orientation Sessions on Skill Improvement, Requests on Braille Press/ Resource Centers, Release of Braille Books, New Magazines, Acts and Ordinances, NVDA Software, New Products and Services, Details of Resource Persons in the field like M/s. Enable India, Bangalore National Association for Blind, Madurai, Curricula Oriented Teaching and Training up to Higher Secondary Level.
3. Utilization of the Braille Section is overwhelming and the services are being extended person to person, for 13 hours a day. There is more demand, especially for ‘News Highlights’ and ‘Job Alerts’ on Google Groups according to the staff of the section.
4. Extension programmes are being conducted frequently. Many programmes have been conducted during the past one year. The feedback is excellent regarding the performance of the library staff. The library is ISO 9001-2008 certified for quality performance.

**WEBLIOGRAPHY:**

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