

Ulverscroft Foundation: Frederick Thorpe Award

**Report on the visit to Celia Library, Helsinki, Finland
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1. Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the Ulverscroft Foundation for making this award available and providing the opportunity for international cooperation and professional development. There are many worthy projects and much to be done internationally in terms of providing library services to the print-disabled. So much information is available in the print world, comparatively very little in accessible formats. I am very grateful to have received this award which enabled me to learn about developments in technology to improve library services to print-disabled people.

Also many thanks for the hospitality shown by both Celia Library and the Finnish Federation of the Visually Impaired (FFVI) staff. Special thanks to Minna von Zansen who was my host and organised a very interesting and full programme. I am very grateful for the time everyone spent with me. Their kindness and willingness to share experiences and knowledge is greatly appreciated. I am also very thankful that Finnish people are very good at speaking English; of course this whole visit would not have been possible without a way to communicate.

Thanks is also extended to RNZFB and specifically Neil Jarvis, Executive Director of Access and Innovation, for supporting my application for this award and allowing me to use it.

2. Purpose of the visit

The Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind Library provides a nationwide service to blind and partially sighted people. It is the only library in New Zealand (NZ) solely dedicated to providing access to information in alternative formats, such as audio and braille. The library has recently completed the transition from a cassette-based delivery system to a DAISY (Digital Accessible Information System) audio “burn on demand” CD service. The system burns audio books and magazines, specifically requested by readers, onto multi-title CDs. Each CD can hold up to six DAISY titles or about ten magazine titles. As far as we are aware, RNZFB is the first organisation in the world to be burning multiple titles, which a borrower has specifically requested, onto one CD.

RNZFB lends the Plextor PTX1 Pro player to library members to listen to these DAISY books and magazines. The player is internet capable already so the next step would be to investigate the possibility of streaming or downloading material directly to the player.

Celia Library in Finland is the first library serving people with print disabilities to use the DAISY protocol for streaming directly to a DAISY player. The project was to visit Celia Library to learn how they have provided a streaming service directly to the DAISY player, how the new delivery system has been embraced by their users and if it improves access to other types of information, such as newspapers, regional or government information. It is good to learn from the experience of the experts and there are possibly many similarities between the two countries in terms of population size and distribution, and challenges in terms of broadband access. It is helpful to experience how such a service has worked elsewhere.

3. Outline of the visit

A very full and interesting programme for the two weeks' visit was compiled. This covered the following areas:

- Introductory tours of Celia Library and the Finnish Federation of the Visually Impaired
- Celia Library marketing activities, especially to people with dyslexia
- Implementation of the DAISY protocol and DAISY distribution in practice
- Book clubs and the e-library
- FFVI's museum and oral history programme
- Acquisition of content and cataloguing
- Services to children, including e-services, and "Little Celia"
- Celia's e-Library project
- FFVI's information services and accessible format production
- DAISY online service from the users' perspective and player distribution
- DAISY audio production and other accessible formats
- Presentation for senior users of the library and children's storytelling
- Presentations to Celia Library about RNZFB and its library service, and about New Zealand.

4. Celia Library

This is a library providing services to the print-disabled in Finland. It started in 1890 by Cely Mechelin (hence the name Celia Library) and since 1978 has been state funded. There is an Act which governs the way it should operate: Act on the Library for the Visually Impaired 1996. There are 52 employees and they serve 13,000 individuals and 1500 institutions such as retirement homes, schools, libraries and daycare centres. Currently 75% of new readers are vision impaired. During 2011 one million loans were made to readers and 7000 textbooks were sold.

5. Overview of the DAISY online service

The main purpose of the visit was to see how the DAISY protocol is being used to distribute audio material directly to the player, how the service was introduced to the readers and any challenges which needed to be overcome.

The online project conducted jointly by Celia Library and FFVI was to deliver talking book services directly to a DAISY player. The delivery platform was developed together with Pratsam, a Finnish IT company, and integrated into the library management system (LMS), Pallas Pro. The DAISY player being used is the Plectalk PTX1Pro from Shinano Kenshi.

The criteria for inclusion in this service is that the borrower is an existing Celia Library member but hasn't used a computer before and lives in certain parts of Finland (Eastern Finland and the area around Helsinki).

FFVI organised the distribution of players and internet connections by employing coordinators around the country who installed the players, routers and provided initial training and support. Training in the use of the player was for a minimum of two hours. The nine support people employed received two days of training before installing the technology in people's homes. On an ongoing basis, helpdesk support was provided by FFVI, for player and internet connection issues, and Celia Library, for library-related queries.

The internet connection is free to users but can only be used for the purpose of receiving material from FFVI or Celia Library. This is achieved by locking the password into the player. FFVI managed to negotiate a special deal with an Internet Service Provider (ISP) and this is funded by the Finnish Slot Machine Association.

The intention was that the DAISY online service should provide the same reading experience as those receiving CDs by post. Books are streamed, rather than downloaded, because no royalties need to be paid since readers can't retain the books and it is possible to prevent the books from being copied. Readers can borrow up to 30 titles for streaming at any one time however in reality no one has this amount on loan because of the other limits in place. The loan period is for one month, at which time the loan expires; it is possible, however, to renew a title.

Readers use the title selector key to move between the various titles they have borrowed for streaming and may stop and start reading any of the books. The player will remember where they are up to in each book. It is possible to order books by

- phoning the library or via the online catalogue. The books are then available instantly.
- joining a “book club” based on genres of interest, eg travel, biography, mystery. Librarians choose four to five books for each of these clubs monthly and they are automatically available for streaming in the middle of each month; a good way to get bestsellers and popular titles fast. (“Book club” books are sent on CD as well but people need to wait for the CDs to be burnt and sent out by post.)

There are around 420 borrowers using the online DAISY service.

The service is a streaming one because of the copyright costs involved if books were downloaded. Currently Celia Library pays Euro 32 cents for each book issued on CD because they aren’t returned; the cost would be the same for each title downloaded. The streaming service ensures that the book cannot be captured and kept so there are no royalty costs.

Increasing the number of borrowers using the online service would reduce costs for the library further and the service is more instant for the borrower. On average there is a one week turnaround for receiving books on CD.

Significance for RNZFB

Logistics of delivery: Distribution of the players for the streaming service required the support of non-library staff. It was a large project recruiting and training staff to install broadband connections, use the player, and especially to manage the process for installations outside the Helsinki area.

Training and ongoing support: It was interesting to note the “division of labour” in providing support to borrowers using the download service. In the first instance, the support calls go to an IT-type help desk run by FFVI which deals with any technical queries as well as any issues about connectivity and use of the player. If it is determined that the caller’s query is about the types or frequency of material being received, it is passed on to librarians at Celia Library.

Funding and economic benefits: FFVI managed to obtain a good price for internet connections with an ISP for those receiving the download service. They are people who have not had internet access before (so effectively are new customers for the ISP) and are only able to use the connection for receiving reading material (ie not for doing other internet activities). Such a deal with an ISP is very interesting and could be applied to the NZ setting to obtain access at reasonable rates for library borrowers.

The economies of providing a streaming service are evident. There are no CD-burning, packaging and postage costs, and for Celia Library, no payment of royalties required.

6. Collections

Audio books: Celia Library has approximately 30,000 talking books in its collection (plus 6000 braille, 2000 electronic and 700 tactile books). There are also over 6000 textbooks which are available for sale. It adds more than 1000 talking books to its collection each year and the majority are produced locally. This is 25% of the total number of books published in Finland annually (ie. 4000). This is an impressive amount since globally there is only about 5% of printed material available in accessible formats. This is quite an achievement and a necessity; who else produces talking books in Finnish? In the English-speaking world there is the opportunity to exchange or buy and sell from other organisations.

Celia Library issues around one million items per year. An interesting statistic collected is the frequency of use of the collection. Overall, 76% of the collection is used, 93% of fiction books and 70% of non-fiction are borrowed, with biographies and history books being the most popular of these at 78%.

The library management system (LMS) used is Pallas Pro; however, investigations are currently under way for a new system, possibly Aurora (produced by a Swedish company, not Aurora Information Technology in Australia).

Audio newspapers and magazines: These are compiled and distributed by FFVI. Newspaper publishers send the content overnight by FTP in XML (as it is important to have some markup for headings and articles). This is converted to HTML and then into DAISY using DAISY Pipeline. Magazines are received from the publisher as PDFs and converted to text with markup, and a DAISY file created. There are also some regional newspapers which are recorded locally and distributed centrally. There are 14 regional associations in Finland (as part of FFVI) which have their own small recording studios (using Plectalk Pro recording software). FFVI provided training on how to record material. FFVI's newspapers and magazines can be accessed via a pc or Nokia smartphone and some are available on the DAISY online service. There are 6000 users of this service.

Significance for RNZFB

Use of synthetic speech: FFVI make a large number of newspapers (around 35) available in audio. This is possible because they have automated their data flow systems and use synthetic speech. In fact it is so

automated that if the content doesn't arrive FFVI's system notifies the publisher automatically. Because this is ephemeral material the quality of pronunciation is not so important; the promptness and currency of the information is. It is an efficient way of making current information available quickly.

7. Service models for online delivery

Of particular interest are Celia Library's concepts for providing services to library borrowers. It aims to replace its "on demand" CD borrowing with an internet-based service of streaming and/or downloading (with watermarking). This would be in the wider context of a global library and interlibrary lending, especially amongst the Nordic countries. They aim for a variety of distribution methods compatible with different types of players and reading programmes. They have identified three ways in which people can access this service:

1. The borrower uses a pc to log into Celianet and requests books to read. The system transfers a copy of the book files from the digital archive to the distribution server so the borrower can read the book via streaming. Celianet is the online catalogue where it is possible to borrow or return books, reserve a book in production or change personal information.

<https://ws234.celialib.fi/scripts/intro2.dll?&sesid+1310560460&ulang+eng>

2. Using the DAISY player, the borrower connects to the distribution server and listens to the titles which are marked as on loan to them. Usually the borrower has joined a "book club" and receives books that library staff have selected for that book genre. It is possible to subscribe to several book clubs at a time.

3. The borrower can contact the library to request books that they would like to read. Library staff initiate the lending process through the LMS and the books become immediately available via streaming.

The key components in this system are the LMS and the digital archive; from this core many distribution methods are possible.

It is anticipated that between 2014–15 online lending will increase and on-demand CD lending will decrease. An issue with increased volume of streaming may be the demand on bandwidth. Celia Library books are compressed to 64kbps. As the amount of streaming increases, the bandwidth available may not be able to cope with the volume. (RNZFB compresses books to 32kbps, in hindsight this may have been a good decision even though there is some decrease in sound quality.) One solution to this may be to have copies of the distribution server in different locations around Finland to spread the demand load.

Ideally a future global library would consist of a global database of DAISY books held by contributing libraries where individual print-disabled borrowers could search for material and borrow the item from the relevant library. There would be interloaning between libraries also. For this to be

successful, collaboration in production and copyright issues need to be overcome. As a start, the Nordic countries are working on a model to make this happen for their region. Print-disabled readers would search the database and download from the contributing library (if copyright permits) or request an interloan through their own library.

Significance for RNZFB

Connections between the LMS and the digital archive: The LMS, and specifically the catalogue, is linked directly to the digital archive that holds the DAISY talking books. This means that it is possible for librarians to view the DAISY files from the catalogue and select the book for issuing. It is helpful for the librarian to see at a glance that the DAISY book is complete and available for borrowing. This in turn is linked to the member record showing all titles on issue.

Copyright issues: Although the copyright laws in Finland are different to those in NZ, it is interesting that the service in Finland is streaming only because of the royalties which would need to be paid if the service were a download one. The situation in NZ for our current CD distribution service is such that it is necessary for borrowers to return the books and magazines lent to them and systems are put in place to ensure this happens. Equally processes would need to be put in place to ensure that downloaded material was only “lent” rather than kept permanently. A legal opinion may need to be obtained to clarify the situation in NZ for a download service.

Broadband bandwidth and coverage: Celia Library has approximately 420 borrowers using this service and the service is being contained at around this level for a few reasons including the amount of bandwidth required. This will also be a potential issue for RNZFB, together with the fact that broadband is not equally available around the whole country; a similar experience to Finland. Limiting the number of borrowers using the service and taking note of coverage around the country would make a project more manageable initially.

“One size doesn’t fit all”: The service model recognises that not all borrowers have the same level of technical ability in being able to choose and order books from the library. Although the library operates in a very technical environment, it still accommodates those borrowers who need some additional assistance to obtain reading material.

During a recent visit to RNZFB, Shinano Kenshi presented some ideas on how DAISY online delivery could be introduced to NZ. My visit to Celia Library was very helpful in being able to understand how this works.

8. Additional highlights

Marketing to other print-disabled groups: Celia Library is actively promoting its services to the wider print-disabled community, especially to people with dyslexia. This is of interest to RNZFB since at present we are providing services only to the blind and low vision community; however we realise that there are many more people in NZ who could use our services. Celia Library estimates that approximately 10% of the Finnish population have some degree of dyslexia. It is probably the same in NZ. The way they are marketing to this group has been helpful to learn about. They have compiled a pack of promotional material, have created an animated hedgehog mascot (to appeal to children), and have distributed material to schools, related associations and health professionals as well as exhibiting at events and conferences. Physical items such as beanie hats, mouse pads and bags are given to children and ways of connecting with dyslexic children electronically have been set up. This includes a website about dyslexia (with a quick test which has proven to be very popular), an online catalogue, e-library website, special interest collections and a facebook page which has over 7000 “friends”. Their results so far have been impressive. Celia Library have kindly shared their presentation from the IFLA-LPD 2012 conference about their project aimed at people with dyslexia, which can be shown to RNZFB staff.

Museum and oral histories: FFVI has a museum and actively collects oral histories. RNZFB is currently developing its archives in preparation for celebrating its 125th anniversary in a few years’ time. It was interesting to see how the museum had been set up and its scope for collecting items based on the themes of education, employment and daily living. The museum was established in the 1990s and requests for contributions from around the country were made through the Federation’s magazine. The museum curator is an oral history expert who runs training weekends twice a year so that people from around Finland can learn how to collect oral histories from their local communities.

“Little Celia”: I was treated to a magical storytelling experience in “Little Celia” which was designed to appeal to several senses: sound, smell and touch. A story set in the forest involved the feel of moss, deer antlers and feathers, sounds of water and the forest, the tinkle of a fairy and smells of pine and spices. The effort put into providing a memorable reading experience for children and trying to engender the love of reading from an early age, is exemplary. Each “Little Celia” borrower is issued with their own cute tactile library card. To me, this epitomises the passion with which staff at Celia Library provide services to print-disabled people.

9. Many thanks

It was a very full and engaging two weeks at Celia Library and FFVI. Everyone was very welcoming, friendly and generous with their time and sharing of knowledge about how they provide services to print-disabled people. I enjoyed learning about Finnish culture and history. I was lucky enough to be there during Celia Library's recreation day and experience sailing in an old sailing ship in the archipelago around Helsinki. It was very special to enjoy the beautiful islands and to view majestic Helsinki, "Pearl of the Baltic", from the harbour.

Thanks again to everyone who made this visit possible and I extend a sincere welcome to staff from Celia Library and FFVI to visit RNZFB.

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