

24 June 2008

Mr Joshua Davies
Department of Broadband Communications

Dear Joshua

The Royal Society for the Blind of S.A. (RSB) is the primary provider of services to people who are blind or vision impaired in South Australia, currently delivering a full range of vision rehabilitation services to over 10,500 South Australians.

People who are blind or vision impaired are heavily reliant upon "Digital Information" in this modern world. Information such as:

- Community Information
- Daily Newspapers
- Audio Books
- Internet

These are just some of the areas that, rather than present opportunities, present barriers. Whilst the digital revolution is assisting the majority within the community, over 90% of the internet is inaccessible to people who are blind or vision impaired who are using screen reader and screen magnification software. Other areas that also present a barrier are such things as:

- Broadband Modems
- Wireless Routers
- Other peripherals that enable connection to a broadband service

Affordability of a broadband service is also an extremely important issue, particularly for people who are blind or vision impaired. For a person who is blind or vision impaired to purchase a computer there is currently a 200% additional cost over and above the basic equipment to ensure that it is accessible. As mentioned above, access to information, particularly in an audible format greatly impacts on the amount of download capability on a connection plan. For instance, for a person who is blind or vision impaired to access a copy of the daily newspaper in an audible synthetic voice format requires a minimum of 1gb per month and to receive six audible books per month a further 1gb. These requirements are not covered on basic internet plans. The majority of our clients would be solely reliant on the pension and so those who could benefit the most from a broadband service are the ones least able to afford it.

The solution to the above issues are:

1. Legislation to ensure that Government, Business and the Community develop web based information in accordance with W3CWIA-Level 3 Standards.
2. Provide audio description to convey visual information for DVD's, flash videos etc.
3. Create a procurement policy for the Government which also encourages business and the community to ensure that all equipment, software and associated information is created in such a way that the whole of the Community participate in their use independently.
4. Replace the current postal concession for talking books based on audio cassette technology, with a subsidy system to assist people who are blind or vision impaired deal with the costs of internet access.

Should you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony Starkey', written in a cursive style.

TONY STARKEY
Access Project Officer