

Accessibility in Motion: From Library Floors to Digital Doors



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Make today matter

A bit about myself

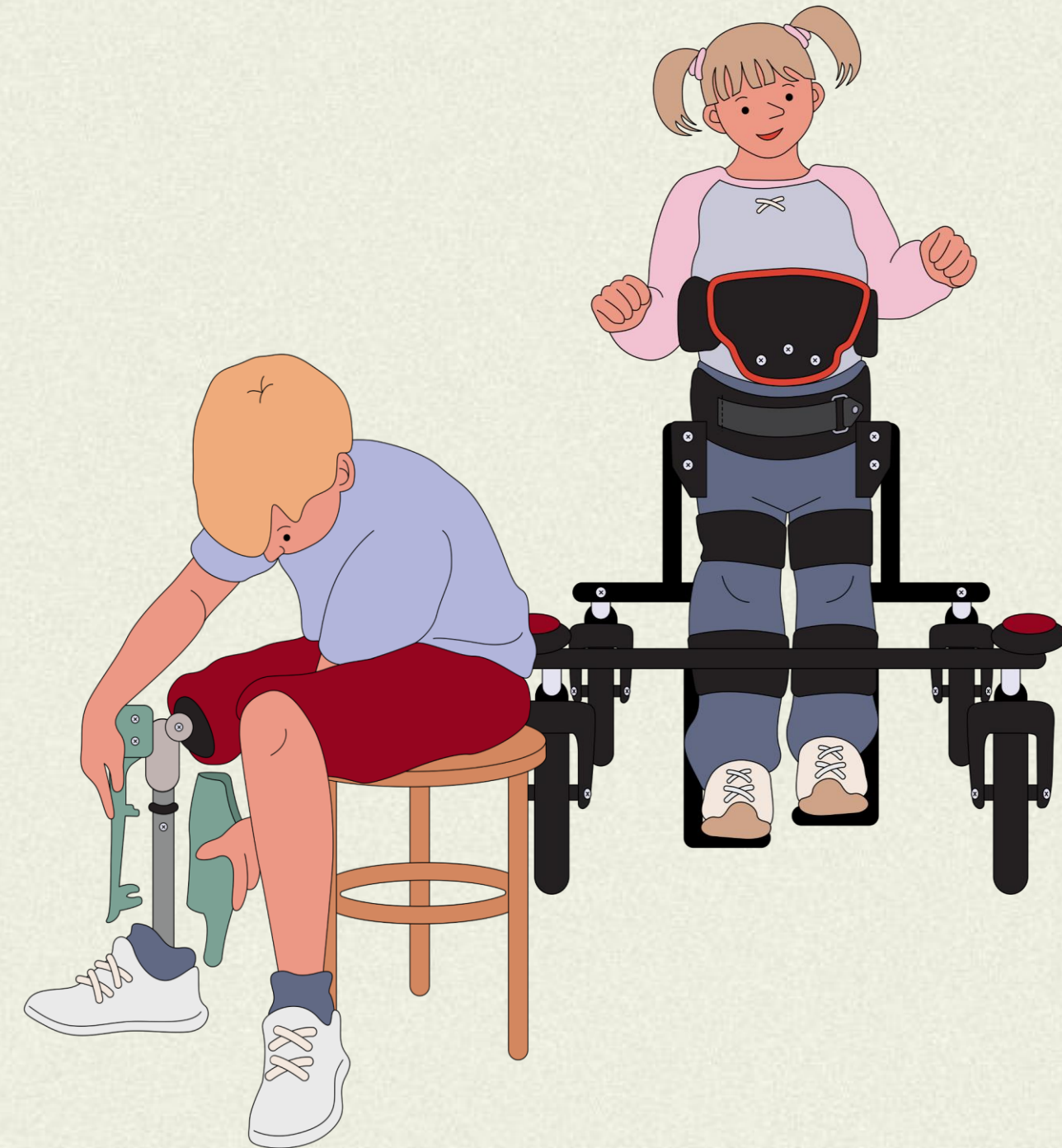
I am the UX Librarian at the University of Pretoria.

Fun fact: I aspired to be a Neuropsychologist.

My background is in Psychology, which has really shaped how I look at people – not just as users, but as humans with different needs, abilities and cultural backgrounds.

I'm passionate about creating products, services, and websites that are accessible to everyone, because I truly believe that good design should include – not exclude.

I'll share a bit of a story that inspired my passion for accessibility...



Let's ponder on this...

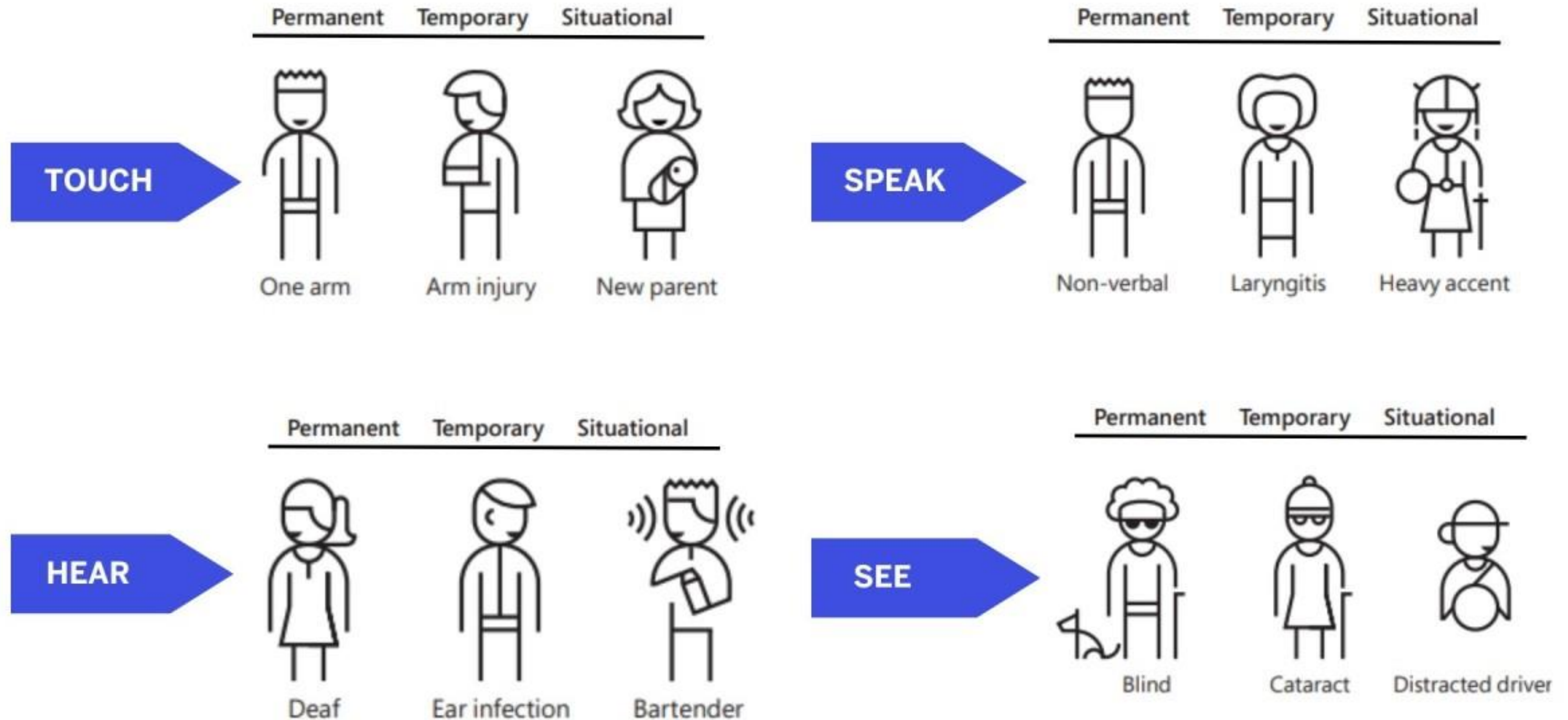
Imagine you've hurt yourself - possibly broke an arm or a leg, you've had an eye operation, and in those moments, life was not the same again.

Now imagine this being your permanent reality...

How would life change for you?



DISABILITY IS A SPECTRUM



Source: Microsoft Inclusive Design Toolkit

Invisible Disabilities



Let's be kind and patient

What this talk will cover

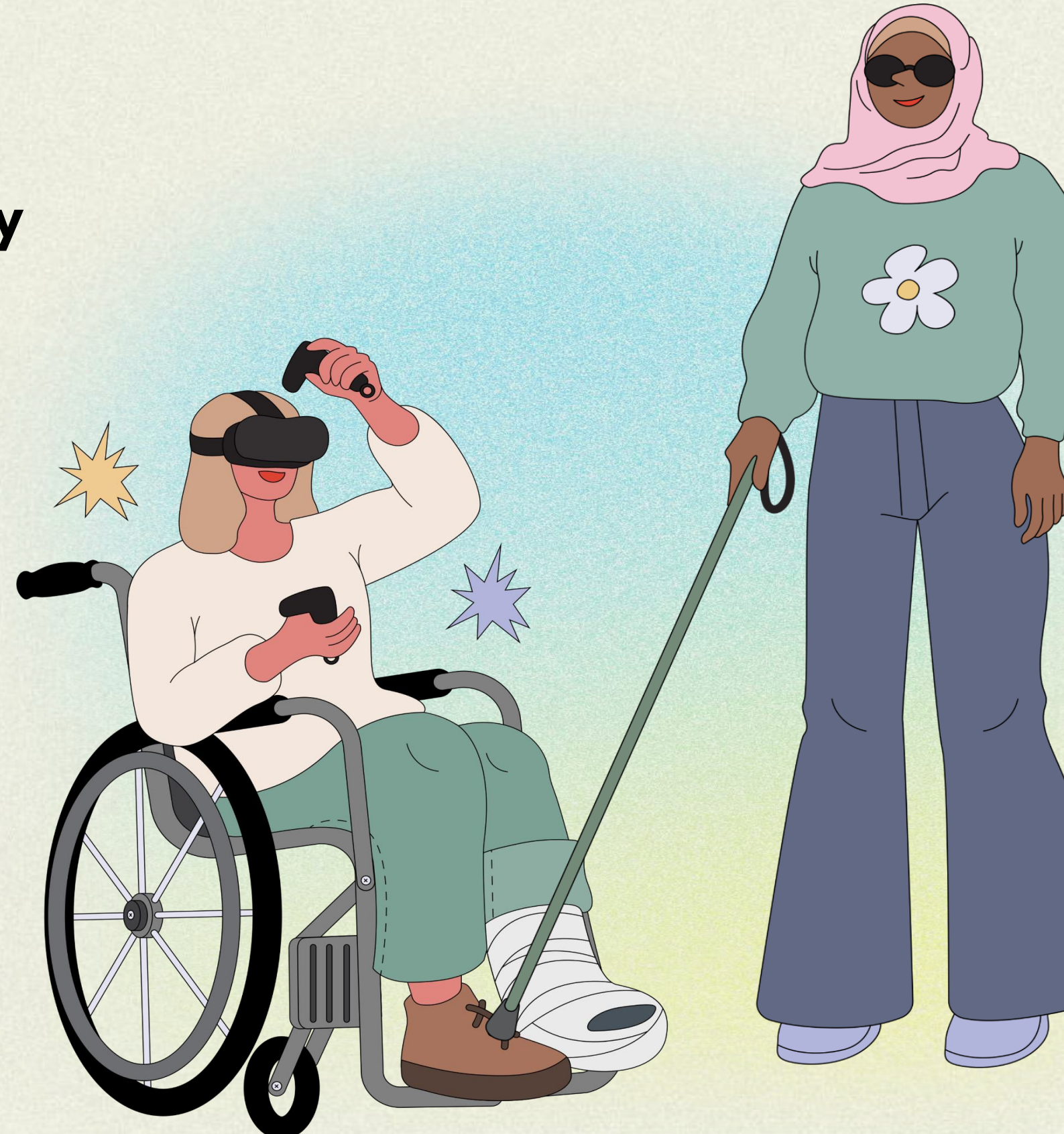
1. Why Accessibility Matters

1. Digital Doors – Accessibility in the Online Library Experience

1. Library Floors – Accessibility in Physical Spaces

1. Bridging the Gap – Physical Meets Digital

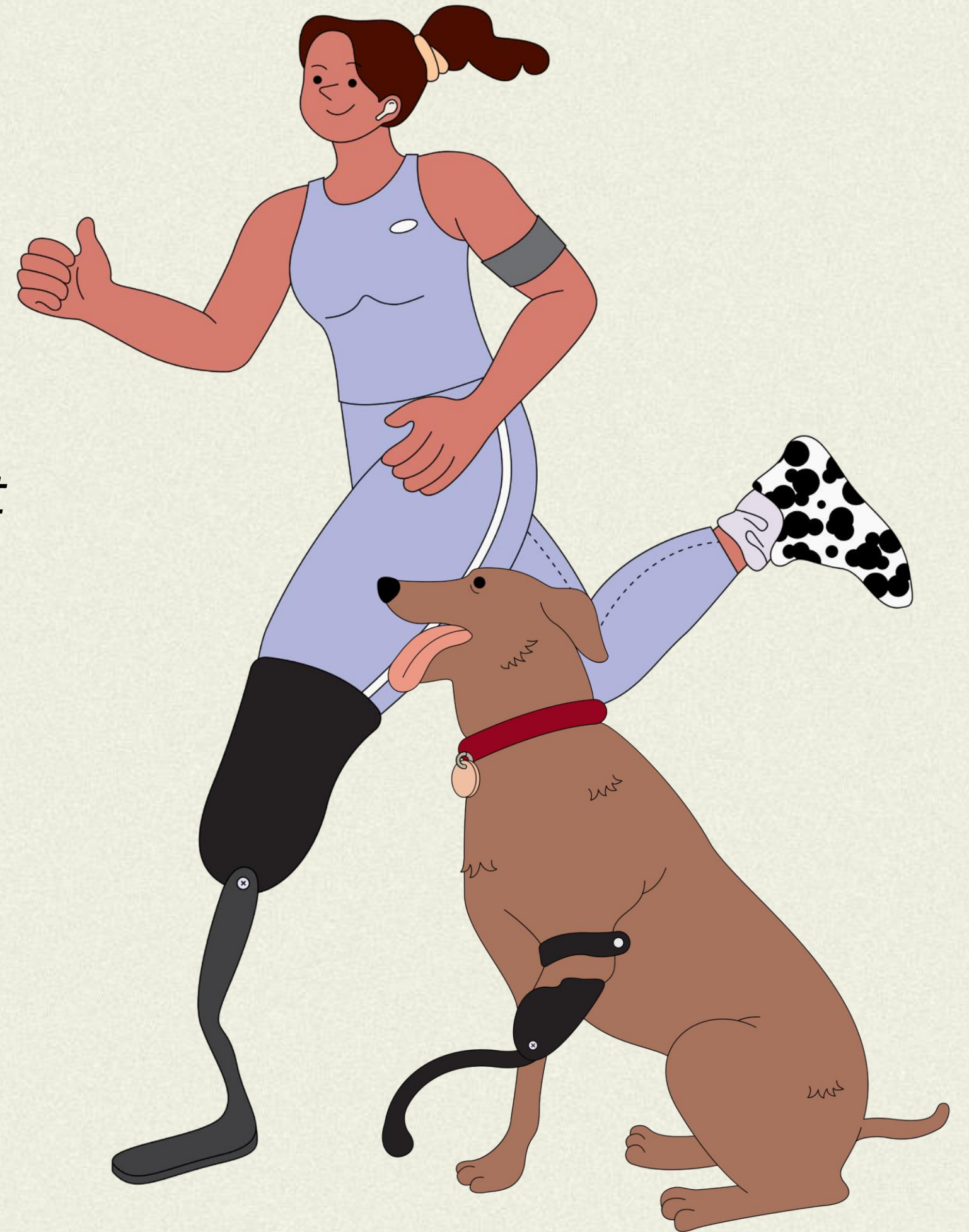
1. Practical Accessibility Actions for Libraries



Accessibility In Motion

If a student can enter the library but can't access its website - have we really made it accessible?

Accessibility in Motion is about progress - continuously removing barriers from how people move through our spaces and interact with our digital platforms.



1. Why Accessibility Matters

Accessibility goes beyond compliance, or a tick-box exercise – it's about equity, inclusion, and user dignity.



Physical Spaces

A ramp or automatic door isn't about ticking boxes – it's about independence and equal access.

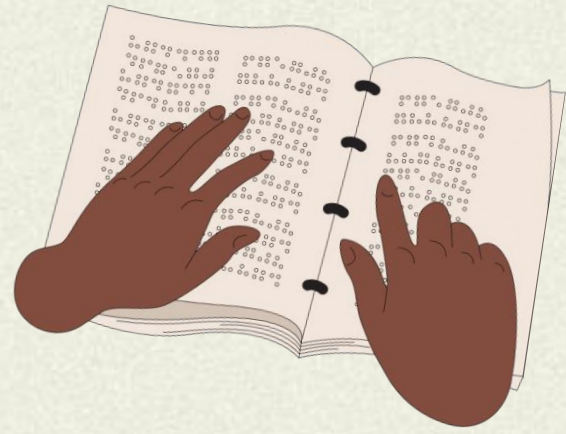
Quiet zones or low-sensory rooms support students with anxiety or sensory sensitivities.



Digital Spaces

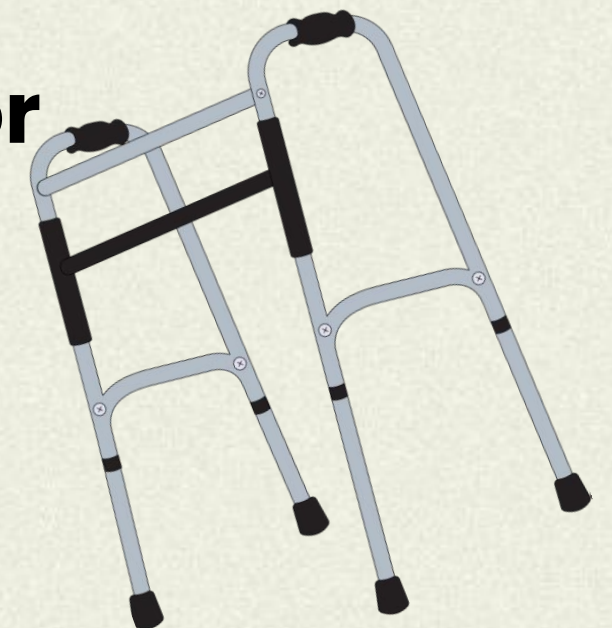
Screen reader-friendly websites help blind students navigate catalogues with ease.

Captioned videos assist not only deaf students but also those in noisy spaces or with different first languages.



At the University of Pretoria Library, accessibility is central to supporting the university's inclusivity and transformation goals.

It promotes fair and equal access to knowledge for all and supports global goals like UN SDG 4: Quality Education, which advocates for inclusive and equitable learning opportunities for everyone.



Barriers Observed

Digital Spaces:

Complex navigation, inaccessible PDFs, and missing alt text limit access for users relying on assistive technologies.



Physical Spaces:

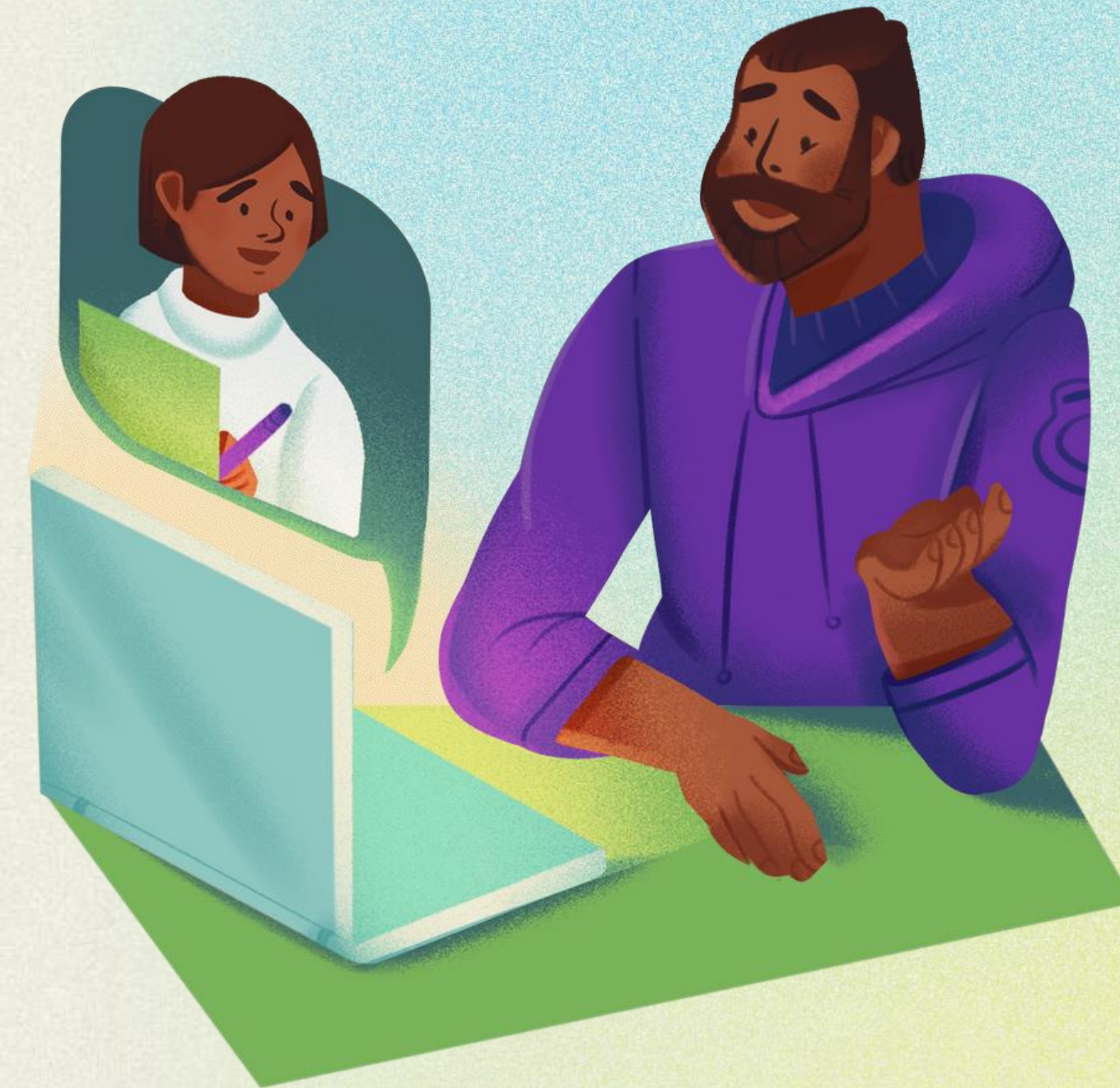
Confusing layouts, unclear signage, and non-inclusive furniture make it hard for some users to navigate and engage comfortably.



2. Digital Doors

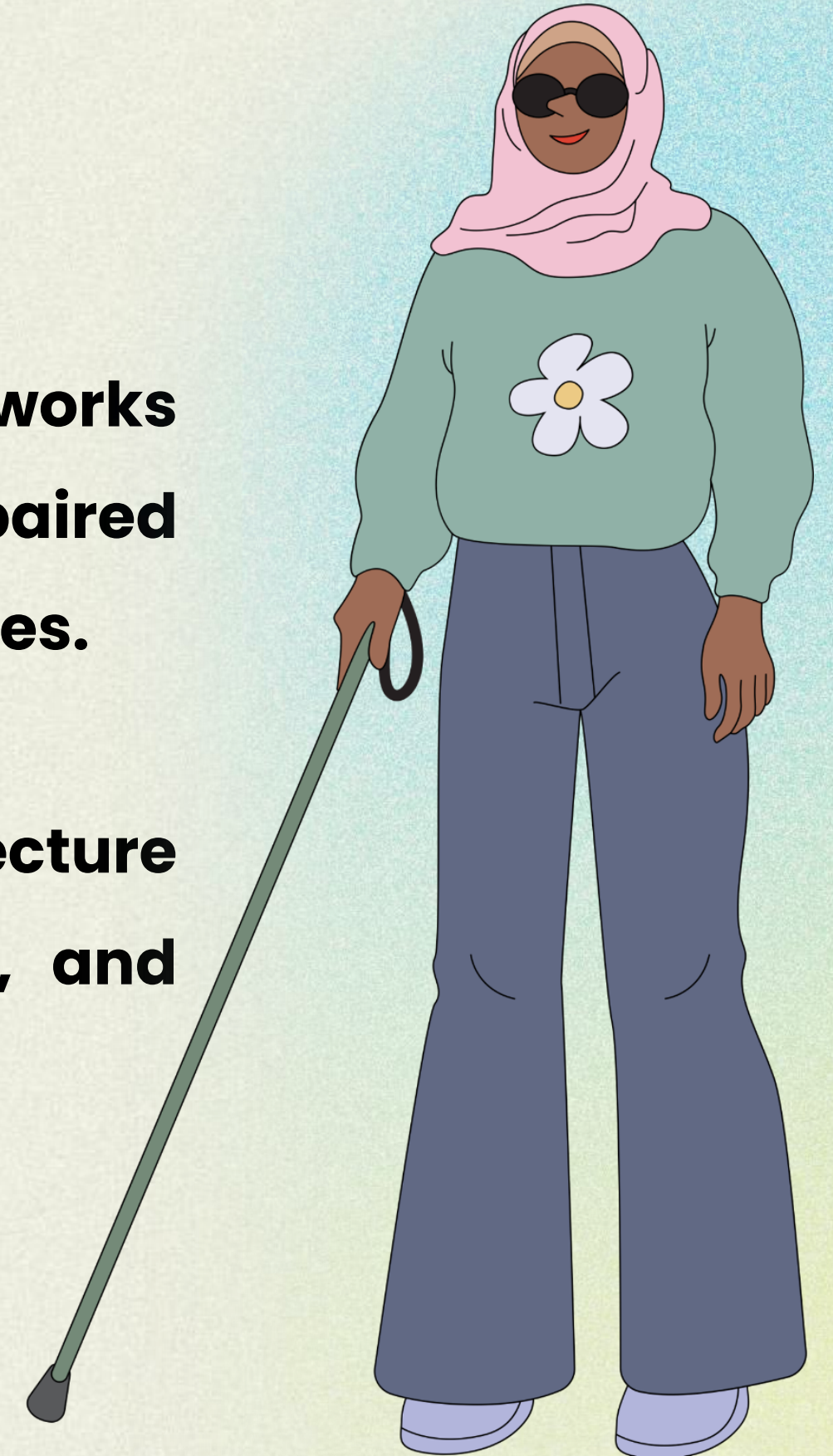
The library website has become the main front door – and for some users, it’s the only one they can enter – not every student is campus based. If the door isn’t accessible, we’ve locked them out of knowledge.

To open that door wider, I conducted usability testing with students from the ADIS Unit, including those who are blind, partially sighted, and physically impaired – to understand how they experience and navigate our digital library.



The study focused on assessing how well the library website works with the screen reader technologies used by visually impaired students, who rely on keyboard shortcuts to navigate webpages.

The findings revealed that the website's information architecture needs refinement - with clearer tagging, proper labeling, and descriptive alt text for all graphics to ensure full accessibility.



3. Library Floors

Physical accessibility is about more than ramps and elevators – it's about navigation and signage, comfort, and sensory experience.

Ongoing Initiatives:

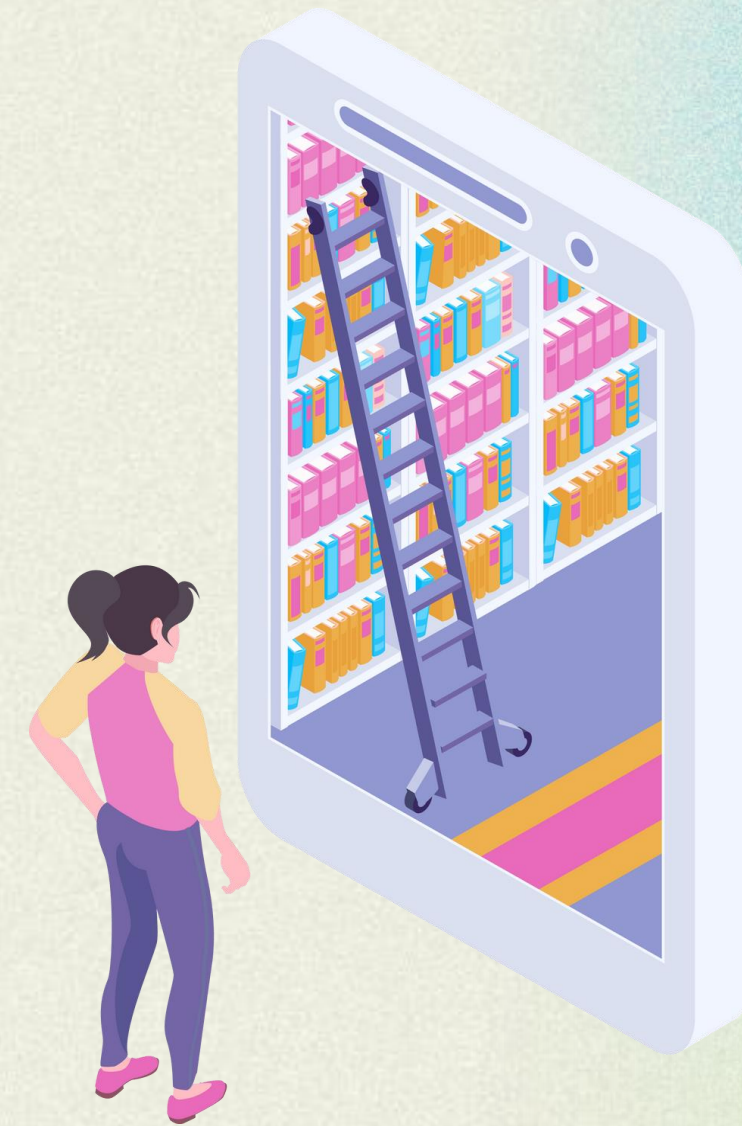
- **Improving signage, lighting & colour contrast**
- **Accessible furniture: adjustable desks & chairs**
- **Wayfinding & tactile signage for easy navigation across floors**
- **Modern lifts with braille and voicenavigation**

4. Bridging the Gap

Bridging the digital and physical library means creating one connected experience for users. When online tools and physical spaces work together, the library becomes easier to use and more inclusive.



The Physical



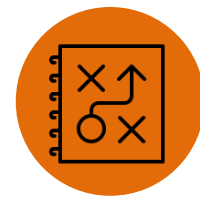
The Digital



The Challenge

Physical and digital often works in silos.

Users move between them, but the experience is rarely seamless.



The Opportunity

Treat both as an ecosystem, not separate services.

Every click, step and interaction should feel connected.



Ask Yourself

How can the digital expand into the physical, and vice versa?

What does a seamless library journey look like?

Collaboration is

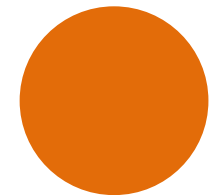
Key:

Creating accessible library experiences requires strong collaboration between UX researchers, IT teams, designer, and disability support units.

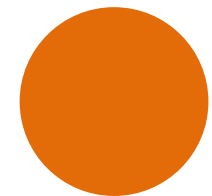
Each plays a vital role in designing inclusive spaces and systems. Most importantly, students with disabilities must be involved throughout the process - their lived experiences and assistive technologies provide essential insights that ensure accessibility is practical, meaningful, and human-centred.



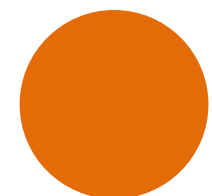
Practical Accessibility Actions for Libraries



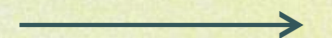
Engage Real Users - Include students with disabilities in testing and design decisions.



Simplify Everything - Fewer clicks, clearer signage, and plain, easy-to-understand language.



Start Small but Start Now - Incremental improvements create lasting change.





Thank you for listening!



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