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The inclusive library: How to render inclusive Library and Information Services to blind and visually impaired people.

Title: That All May Read: Library Services to People with Print Disabilities in the U.S. on a National and a Local Level

Chris Corrigan, Reference Librarian, National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped

Mike Marlin, Director, California Braille and Talking Book Library

(Slide show is a separate Powerpoint file)

Introduction to NLS

Established by The United States Congress in 1931, the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) is a free national library program making popular fiction and popular non-fiction available to people with disabilities that prevent them from reading standard print. These disabilities include: blindness, low-vision, physical disabilities that prevent readers from lifting or handling a printed book, and qualifying organic reading disabilities. The Chafee Amendment to the legislation that governs U.S. copyright law allows organizations, such as NLS, to reproduce protected material in accessible formats exclusively for use by people with print disabilities.

The books produced by NLS are popular works of fiction and non-fiction -- material readers would expect to find in a public library or book store.

Braille books and magazines are produced by various NLS contractors at the average rate of 500 titles per year. The 2000 audio books which NLS produces annually, aptly named Talking Books, are recorded by professional, human-voice narrators. Patrons access material through the mail or via a digital download service called Braille and Audio Reading Download (BARD).

Readers who utilize the service through the mail receive audio material on flash-memory cartridges which are playable on a digital talking book player engineered especially for people with visual and physical disabilities. The players have large, distinctive, buttons which are simple to identify and use.

NLS patrons who choose to utilize the BARD service may download material onto a blank cartridge or USB drive for playback on their talking book machines, or directly to an authorized commercial audio player. In addition, large print and braille music scores are circulated directly to eligible patrons by the NLS' music section. NLS also allows users to read electronic braille and audio material through our mobile app which is available for Android and iOS devices.

Introduction to the Network

NLS circulates 23 million books and magazines every year. Material is circulated on the local level through a cooperating network of regional and subregional libraries throughout the U.S. In addition, network libraries administer the BARD download service for the patrons who live in their area of coverage.

California BTBL

An example of an NLS regional library, the California Braille and Talking Book Library (BTBL), serves approximately 10,000 patrons in the northern half of the State of California.

California circulates roughly 3,000 items per day through the U.S. Postal Service. Reader's advisory and reference service is provided primarily by phone by library staff. Reference questions include inquiries about braille correspondence courses, song lyrics, requests for academic journal articles, lists of local assistive technology vendors, and much more.

As mentioned above, NLS produces approximately 2000 braille and audio books each year and as of today has over 81,000 talking book and over 21,000 braille titles available to readers. These are small numbers compared to the overall output of material published in the U.S. In many cases, regional libraries such as the California BTBL supplement the NLS collection by recording materials on their own using volunteer narrators. In many cases, these are books by local authors that were not selected by NLS for inclusion in the national collection. This model is replicated in many NLS network libraries throughout the country.

Another major function at the network level is outreach. Network libraries go out to their communities to inform residents about the service. The California BTBL conducts outreach visits to low vision support groups, nursing homes, assisted living centers, public library staff in-service days, health fairs, and more.

The library maintains a partnership with the Western Blind Center, a facility operated by the U.S. Veteran's Administration. The California Braille and Talking Book Library furnishes them with 32 digital talking book machines on permanent loan in the facility's rooms that serve newly blinded veterans.

Libraries in the network also offer unique programs for their communities. For example, in 2009 the California BTBL hosted a program to commemorate Louis Braille's bicentennial featuring an exhibit by the National Braille Press and a talk by Michael Mellor, author of *Louis Braille: Touch of Genius*. The library also provides innovative programming including tactile board games for people with visual impairments and an assistive technology vendor fair.

The California BTBL facilitates partnerships with organizations such as Junior Blind of America, whose mission is to assist blind young adults transitioning out of high school or college, the society for the blind and its Senior Impact program which helps newly blinded seniors through procurement of equipment and training, and by coordinating and overseeing statewide telephonic reader programs.

Conclusion

NLS and network libraries such as the California BTBL serve American's with print disabilities on a national and local level. For the past 84 years, NLS has offered reading material in accessible formats free of charge. Network libraries, including the California BTBL, provide library service for people with print disabilities by offering a combination of direct reader's advisory and reference service, outreach, programs, and partnerships.