

Tips for Providing Accessible Services

- Do not assume that a person with a visible disability will need special assistance.
- Do not assume that a person with no visible disability will not need an accommodation.
- As with any library user, if you see that a person may need assistance, ask how you might be of help.
- Always speak directly to the person you are helping, not to their companion, assistant or interpreter.
- Be patient – with yourself as well as the library user you are helping. Relax and be prepared to spend a little extra time with communication and assistance.
- Assist users with completing library forms if they are unable to fill them out independently. Many people will be able to sign completed forms even if they cannot fill them out completely.
- Make reasonable modifications to policies, practices, and procedures when necessary, unless doing so would fundamentally alter the nature of the service, program or activity being provided.
- Install large, clear directional and stack end signs to make it easier for people with a variety of disabilities to navigate through the library and find materials. Universal or easily recognizable symbols are a useful addition.
- Provide assistive technologies that make it possible for users with disabilities to use library materials and participate in public programs.
- Establish relationships with local agencies or service providers as a source of information about how to provide appropriate services, and to develop a good system of information and referral for users.
- Include people with disabilities in planning for and providing services appropriate to the needs of their communities.
- Never pet or talk to service animals when they are working.

Tips for Creating an Assistive Technology Program

- Establish a team of people to develop and maintain the program. Team members should include:
 - The library's ADA coordinator or a staff member responsible for developing services for people with disabilities
 - AT users - current and potential library users with disabilities
 - Teachers and staff from local schools and other community agencies where consumers learn to use AT
 - Library IT staff who will install and maintain equipment
- Consider why the library is developing the AT program
 - Solely to make library resources accessible?
 - To provide a demonstration site where consumers learn about AT and learn how to use it?
- Decide who can use the AT workstations
 - Only people who need AT solutions?
 - Other people with disabilities who need extra time?
 - Users whose mental illness makes it impossible to use computers in a mainstream location?
- Determine how the library will ensure that people who need the AT will have priority use.
 - Register users and restrict use to them?
 - First come / first served?
- Decide how much responsibility staff will have for training or assisting users.
 - Will staff just know where AT is located?
 - Know what software and hardware is available?
 - Know how to launch and troubleshoot programs?
 - Know where to refer users for training?
- Make a marketing plan.
 - Information on the library's website and print materials regarding services for users with disabilities.
 - Brochures for target audiences, distributed through local schools and colleges, Department of Rehabilitation office, employment offices and recreation centers for people with disabilities, etc.

Accessibility for People who are Blind or have Vision Disabilities

Most people who are legally blind have some sight. Many people with significant vision disabilities do not use white canes or dog guides. Some who are blind and many who lose vision later in life do not use Braille.

- Be prepared to give clear and specific directions to your library using public transit. Tell how many blocks the person will need to walk from the nearest transit stop(s), when they will need to turn left or right, what side of the street the library is on and how to find the main entrance. Describe landmarks along the way.
- Be ready to give orientation to the library and provide clear directions to service desks, restrooms, accessible computers, etc. Don't say, "It's over there" and point. Tell the user how many feet away something is or how many paces to take, which direction to turn, landmarks along the way, etc.
- Introduce yourself as you begin talking with a person who is blind, "Hello. I'm a librarian. How may I help you?"
- Speak in a normal tone of voice.
- Help a borrower select materials by reading titles and other information from the catalog or item covers as you scan shelves.
- Provide large print versions of library brochures, flyers or forms by enlarging them on a copier. Make these copies for free if print materials are free for others.
- Provide information about the appropriate Regional or Subregional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped for talking books and magazines.
- If you are walking with a blind person, ask if they would like you to guide them. Allow them to grasp your arm just above the elbow and walk normally, describing stairs, turns or obstacles along the way.

Assistive Technologies: hand-held magnifiers, high intensity lamps, CCTVs / closed circuit televisions, reading machines, text enlargement, scanning/voice output and screen reader software, refreshable Braille displays and embossers

Service Animals: Dog guides keep their handler on a direct route and maintain a steady pace while ignoring distractions; stop at curbs and at the top or bottom of stairs until told to proceed; turn left or right, move forward or stop on command; disobey commands that would put their handler in danger; recognize and avoid obstacles, e.g. narrow passages and low overheads; and, bring their handler to elevator buttons.

Recognize them by a rigid leather harness and leash.

Accessibility for People who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Deafness is usually an invisible disability that you often will not recognize until you begin to communicate with the user. Very few people are completely deaf. Not all people who are deaf or hard of hearing know American Sign Language. Few people are skilled lip-readers.

- Get the user's attention by gently touching their shoulder, getting in their line of sight and waving, or tapping on the table or counter top.
- Position yourself so it is easy to see your face.
- Keep eye contact with the user. Don't look away at a computer screen or down at the desk top; don't speak as you turn to retrieve materials.
- Speak naturally – don't exaggerate, shout or speak slowly.
- Use short sentences and simple language.
- Repeat, rephrase or spell words if you are not understood.
- Use gestures, write, or type back and forth on a computer as needed to add clarity to communication.
- Look at and speak directly to the user, not to an interpreter.
- Market IM reference services to people who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Be sure staff members who provide service using telephones are trained to receive and make calls using TTY or video relay services.
- Provide assistive listening devices, interpreter services, or real-time captioning services for public programs upon request.

Assistive technologies: one-to-one or wide-area assistive listening devices, public TTYs / text telephones, videophones

Service animals: Hearing dogs alert people to sounds unique to their environment, e.g. smoke alarms, stove timers, alarm clocks, baby crying, ringing telephone, doorbell, unusual sounds that may indicate danger or emergencies; and, watch for dropped items. Recognize them by an orange leash or vest.

For more tips, see the handout:

Communicating in the Library with People who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing from the Gallaudet University Library.

Accessibility for People who have Developmental Disabilities

According to the California Department of Developmental Services, "*The term developmental disability refers to a severe and chronic disability that is attributable to a mental or physical impairment that begins before an individual reaches adulthood. These disabilities include mental retardation, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, autism, and disabling conditions closely related to mental retardation or requiring similar treatment.*" People with developmental disabilities use libraries for the same purposes as other library users. Their interests are generally similar to the interests of others their age.

- Take time to communicate effectively. As with other users, confirm that you understand what information or materials the user is seeking and confirm that you have helped them find what they need.
- Provide interesting, age-appropriate fiction and non-fiction materials at low reading levels.
- After helping a user search in the catalog for materials that may be of interest, walk with them to the shelves where the materials are located.
- Recognize that some people may be unable to easily control their behavior in new or unknown situations. Be prepared to tolerate a range of behaviors that may be unusual if they are not dangerous or unduly disruptive for other library users.
- When planning programs or activities, build in opportunities for people with developmental disabilities to interact with each other and with people who do not have developmental disabilities.

Service animals: Dogs trained to serve children with autism can guide them and protect them from danger, interrupt them from engaging in repetitive behavior (e.g. flapping hands in front of their face) and redirect their attention, draw attention to their name being called, get help when needed, calm them and help attenuate anger, aggression and mood swings, provide a focal point through "Deep Pressure" hugs, and provide comforting touch that makes it possible for the child to sleep quietly through the night.

Accessibility for People who have Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities (LD) may affect a user's ability to read, write, spell, process speech, remember sequences or do math. Many people with learning differences have average or above average intelligence; they develop coping mechanisms to function and learn effectively.

- Take time to communicate effectively. As with other users, confirm that you understand what information or materials the user is seeking and confirm that you have helped them find what they need.
- Be prepared to repeat answers or explanations in more than one way.
- Provide materials to help people with LD and their parents and teachers understand the nature of their LD and how to cope with it.
- Easy-to-read, large print, audio and video materials may also be of interest to people with LD.
- After helping a user search in the catalog for materials that may be of interest, walk with them to the shelves where the materials are located.
- Some users whose learning disabilities are organic may qualify to receive recorded books and magazines from a Regional or Subregional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped.

Assistive technologies: reading machines, text enlargement, scanning/voice output software, thought organization tools, talking calculators, talking dictionaries

Accessibility for People who have Mobility or Dexterity Disabilities

People using wheelchairs, scooters, walkers, canes or crutches and those whose disabilities affect their ability to reach, lift, or grasp may need accommodations or additional assistance. Invisible mobility disabilities include cardiac or respiratory conditions that cause fatigue or difficulty walking, climbing stairs or breathing.

- * People with mobility disabilities often call to check on accessibility before going to a new place. Be prepared to describe accessibility of your library and to provide directions using public transit and information about accessible parking.
- Keep paths of travel clear.
- Provide height adjustable tables or writing surfaces. A simple clipboard can be offered as a writing surface.
- Position yourself so it is easy and comfortable to communicate eye-to-eye.
- Assist with reaching or carrying materials if needed.
- Remove or replace materials from backpacks, bags or baskets if requested. If a library user asks you to help them pay a fine by removing money from their wallet, be sure to do so where the person can watch you.
- Do not touch or push a wheelchair, or move a cane, walker, etc. unless you have permission to do so. A mobility appliance is an extension of the user's body.
- Assist with completing library forms if the user is unable to fill them out independently. Many people will be able to sign completed forms.

Assistive technologies: automatic door openers, alternative mice or input devices, easily adjustable tabletops and keyboard trays, voice-recognition software

Service animals: pull wheelchairs, assist handlers if they fall, assist with balance, carry or pick up things, open and close doors, cupboards and refrigerators, turn lights on or off, assist with dressing or undressing. Recognize them by vests.

Accessibility for People who have Psychiatric Disabilities

The majority of people with psychiatric disabilities are not identifiable by observation. It is important for staff to keep in mind that unpleasant or odd behavior is not necessarily a sign of mental illness. Most users with psychiatric disabilities will not need special accommodations.

- Model and encourage from other users respect for people who are exhibiting unusual or uncommon but harmless behaviors.
- Make reasonable accommodations for service needs, for example, greater privacy during a reference interview or while using a computer.
- If a user seems fearful, lost or confused, ask if you can call someone to come help them.
- Gently keep a user who is rambling or talking unintelligibly on task by asking if they have a question or if they are looking for something you can help them find. Repeat clarifying questions. If other people are waiting in line, ask the user to step aside and wait a moment, then get back to them.
- Politely and firmly explain to a user whose behavior is aggressive, dangerous or disruptive for other users how they are expected to behave in the library. Be ready to show them a list of library rules or a user behavior policy.
- Avoid expressing opinions about whether or not you think someone needs medication. Homeless people with psychiatric disabilities often have no means for sustaining regular medical habits. Some people find the side effects of treatment unmanageable. Others self medicate with alcohol or drugs.

Service animals: Emotional support animals help people regain the ability to venture out in public, sometimes to return to work, by helping control panic attacks, agoraphobia and depression.

Accessibility for People who have Speech Disabilities

While some people with speech disabilities have speech that is difficult to understand, others may only be able to speak very quietly or slowly. Some will communicate through writing. Others may use assistive technology.

- If you do not understand what a user is saying, acknowledge it. Never just smile and nod.
- Relax and take the time needed to communicate effectively.
- Ask the user to repeat or spell words if you miss something.
- If necessary, repeat what you understood the person to say and ask if your understanding is correct.
- If a noisy environment is making it difficult for you to understand, move to a quieter location.
- Do not finish the user's sentences. Your assumption about what the person is communicating may be wrong.
- Consider writing as an alternative.
- As a last resort, if you cannot find a way to communicate effectively, consider asking if there is someone who can help by interpreting for the speaker.