

# Services to People with Print Disabilities (SPPD) Working Group

By Deb Thomas.

The BC Library Association's Services to People with Print Disabilities Working Group (SPPD) was born out of a need to look elsewhere for resources to serve this community after the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) failed in its bid to get bridge funding from the Province of BC and withdrew its services from British Columbia's public libraries.

## Birth of the SPPD Working Group

It began as a small adhoc committee co-chaired by Margarete Wiedmann (convenor of the Special Needs Interest Group) and Deb Thomas (convenor of the Public Librarians Interest Group). Our first meeting on August 3<sup>rd</sup> was attended in person or by phone by 9 members. A brief history of the province's relationship to CNIB and its recent negotiations for funding – and BCLA's role in those negotiations – was presented. We then discussed who should belong to the group. There was interest in having representation from other library sectors, specifically academic and school, and from the populations served – as well as broad representation from BC's public libraries. There was a brief discussion on the future of different formats for people with print disabilities. Finally, we decided on three subcommittees that would pursue different aspects of the work of SPPD: Information seeking (about available resources – hardware, software and collections), Advocacy (with governments, publishers, providers of services), and Training (about different types of print disabilities, available resources, and assistive technology).

## Current Group Membership

The formation of a formal working group and the posting of a message to the BCLA listserv inviting members has helped to swell our membership to 23 at last count. Members include representatives from public libraries in Burnaby, Surrey, North Vancouver, Vancouver, Victoria, Lillooett, Vancouver Island, the Fraser Valley, the Okanagan, and the Thompson-Nicola region as well as representatives from Public Library Interlink, the Canadian Federation for the

Blind, CILS (Langara College's program that provides accessible learning and teaching materials to students and instructors who cannot use conventional print because of disabilities), Vancouver Community College's Visually Impaired Adult Program, and the Provincial Resource Centre for the Visually Impaired (serving K-12). An invitation has also been issued to the Learning Disabilities Association and they expressed interest in joining the group.

Activity slowed considerably over August and September as members were vacationing, catching up after vacations, and gearing up for the busy fall months.

## Next Steps

The work of SPPD is again underway and members are investigating two opportunities for achieving its goals – a professional experience project with a student from the School of Library, Archival and Information Studies (SLAIS) at the University of British Columbia to assist with the "information seeking" piece, and cooperation in a project proposed by the British Columbia Coalition of People with Disabilities (BCCPD) to research and "document the communication and knowledge gaps (for library staff and people with disabilities) that prevent or limit public library use" for people with disabilities.

At the October 21 meeting, SPPD members plan to establish chairs for and membership in our subcommittees and decide on concrete actions for the next few months.

For more information about the group and its work, contact Deb Thomas ([deb.thomas@bpl.bc.ca](mailto:deb.thomas@bpl.bc.ca)) or Margarete Wiedmann, ([MWiedmann@cnv.org](mailto:MWiedmann@cnv.org)), co-chairs.

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