

Research for the Services to People with Print Disabilities Working Group: A Preliminary Report

By Danielle Westbrook.

The BC Library Association's Services to People with Print Disabilities Working Group (SPPD) was established after the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) was unsuccessful in its bid to secure funding from the Province of BC and withdrew its services from BC's public libraries. The working group consists of over 20 members representing public, K to 12, and post-secondary libraries; the Canadian Federation for the Blind; and the Learning Disabilities Association of BC.

Since January 2010 I have been conducting research for the SPPD as part of a Professional Experience Project. While the focus of my project is to investigate the history of the provision of books in alternate formats for people with print disabilities in BC, my research has necessarily included a survey of national initiatives and programs offered across Canada.

Did you know that since 1898, the Canadian legislature has provided free postage via Canada Post for literature and reading materials being delivered to blind Canadians? Or that the CNIB first began offering talking books on 78 RPM records in 1936? Through establishing a national context for my research, I hope to be able to situate provincial services amongst national trends, proposals, and programs.

In addition to examining the history of services offered nationally, my research thus far has also

examined reports created for the Federal Government regarding the rights of Canadians with print disabilities to equal access to information. In addition to outlining services offered, these reports also highlight the ways in which task forces and members of charitable organizations, school systems, and libraries have outlined the ways in which programs have not adequately served the vast number of Canadians with print disabilities.

The research I have gathered so far is comprised of both primary and secondary resources from a variety of sources. In addition to searching library and education databases for articles on services offered in North America, I have also used AMICUS to search both the Library and Archives of Canada collection and the collections of other Canadian libraries. As well, Memory BC: The British Columbia Archival Information Network has been a useful resource.

At present, I am investigating services and initiatives offered through public and academic libraries in BC, library federations, and the use of programs offered by the CNIB. I hope to further explore services that have been offered outside of the lower mainland, so that I can gain a clearer picture of the ways in which individuals with print disabilities have been served across the province.

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