

Training for library staff on services to people with disabilities

By Deb Thomas.

Margarete Wiedemann, Chair of the Special Needs Interest Group (SNIG); Shelley Hourston with the BC Coalition of People with Disabilities (BCCPD); and Deb Thomas, Co-chair, Services to People with Print Disabilities Working Group (SPPD) have recently applied for a Vancouver Foundation Grant to create a toolkit that will provide the resources needed to present in-person and online courses on services to people with disabilities for library staff. Other partners in the project are Citizens for Accessible Neighbourhoods (CAN BC), the Virtual Learning Community (VLC), and the Education Institute (A project of The Partnership).

The toolkit would include a list of topics of interest (based on the 2012 survey of library staff), a list of presenters, a list of training partners and what they can contribute to the training, and step by step instructions for organizing in-person workshops and for creating webinars and MOOCs. The developer will also produce one in-person workshop (in collaboration BCLA, BCCPD and CAN BC) and one webinar (in collaboration with the Education Institute and VLC) as proof of concept.

The background to this initiative is that, in 2010/2011, SPPD surveyed people with print disabilities in BC to

help us better understand the needs of people with print disabilities in regard to library services. Their strongest desire, stated many times in a variety of ways, was "to have access to the same selection of books offered to all Canadians in their local library." In addition, they wanted knowledgeable library staff that understand their particular challenges, know how to use assistive technology, and know about accessible formats. Then, in the spring of 2012, SPPD surveyed library staff in British Columbia to better understand what kind of information or training they need to better support and serve people with disabilities. Of the 117 respondents, over half had not taken accessibility/disability-related workshops or training.

The proposed toolkit and the training it would facilitate will help close that gap in available training on this topic, particularly for front line library staff. The Vancouver Foundation will notify us as to whether we have been successful in receiving a grant in mid-December.

Deb Thomas is Deputy Chief Librarian of Burnaby Public Library and has been working with the Services to People with Print Disabilities Working Group of BCLA for the past 3 years.