

OLBPD DIMENSIONS NEWSLETTER

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The Year in Review, and Moving Forward to 2019

As 2018 comes to an end, the Ohio Library for the Blind and Physically Disabled (OLBPD) has enjoyed another busy and productive year. OLBPD circulated approximately 532,991 items to 13,875 active readers. The collection has more than 63,000 titles, including new Playaway books as well as described Blu-Ray and DVD titles. Patrons using BARD downloaded 146,165 books and magazines and OLBPD answered over 2,200 BARD service and tech support requests. OLBPD inspected over 450,000 returned books, and less than one-percent were damaged or missing media. OLBPD added nearly 8,000 copies of high-demand digital talking books to meet patron reading needs. OLBPD answered over 22,000 patron phone calls requesting service and over 6,700 mail and email requests.

This year has really been characterized as one for assessment and preparation as we reach another turning point in how library services will change and evolve over the next few years. In fact, plans are already underway by the National Library Service (NLS) to start moving ahead on projects since they were announced or updated during their national conference in June. NLS is studying the feasibility of using a modified smartphone as the next-generation talking-book player. The study includes evaluating smartphones currently on the market; what modifications they would need before they could search the NLS catalog and play talking books; how difficult they would be for patrons to set up and use; and how much they would cost for NLS to buy and maintain. By this time next year, NLS may even be close to hosting focus-group testing of one or more of these devices.

The National Library Service is also creating a prototype voice user interface (voice UI) for searching the NLS catalog and playing talking books. From this prototype, they hope to learn more about the technical requirements of voice UI, and what patrons would expect it to do. A possible pilot with patrons from around the country could begin next spring.

NLS will also be assessing patron acceptance of magazines produced using text-to-speech rather than human narration. Using text-to-speech could allow timelier production of magazines at lower cost. As part of this, NLS will also assess what level of quality assurance patrons expect for magazines produced with text-to-speech. For example, will patrons mind if a few words are

The Year in Review (continued)

mispronounced? One candidate for production using text-to-speech is Talking Book Topics. A possible pilot could also begin next spring.

In the year ahead, NLS will also be exploring “self-service” tools such as a virtual agent on the NLS website or BARD Mobile app that would interact with patrons and be available to provide assistance. NLS will also be testing a streaming service that would enable patrons to listen to books without having to download the entire book. Streaming would allow patrons to start listening to books faster, and it may help reduce the volume of traffic on NLS servers.

NLS is “excited about the potential of each of these ideas,” Director Karen Keninger said. “But first we need to determine if they really will improve our service, assess how patrons will react to them, and, of course, figure out how much they will cost. That’s what we’ll be doing in the year ahead.” It remains uncertain whether any or all of these ideas will actually become a reality. Nevertheless, NLS is always looking for new ways to keep pace with technology to help improve services for patrons.

Similarly, OLBDP is also exploring how it will evolve and improve local services in the near future. Our parent agency, Cleveland Public Library will be celebrating its 150th anniversary in 2019. Cleveland Public Library’s history of providing library service to blind individuals dates back to 1897 with a reading club for blind patrons. In 1903, a collection of books in embossed print were made available for circulation to the public. Over the next year, OLBDP will be asking patrons to participate in a survey to help us evaluate current services and plan future initiatives and projects to help improve services here in Ohio. OLBDP will also be actively pursuing the means to expand our capabilities to locally produce more audio and braille library materials of Ohio interest. OLBDP will also be evaluating our physical space here at the Library in Cleveland, and exploring ways to offer more accessible library services to visitors and patrons.

Finally, while all the possible changes may begin to feel a bit overwhelming, rest assured that we remain committed to providing a service “that all may read.” Some patrons have already shared feedback that they are concerned with such a heavy emphasis on technology, and incorporating current and new technologies into our library service. Please keep in mind that despite the introduction of technologies, the premises of an accessible and usable library service remain unchanged. Technology will be used to enhance services for those that use it and provide another level of service options to enjoy. For those who simply prefer less technology, library materials will remain accessible and available in much the same way as they are today.

OLBDP will strive to continue providing readers with the best service possible, and keep patrons informed of the progress on the next generation talking book player, braille e-reader, and other future service enhancements as they are announced by NLS. Thank you for a great 2018 and for all of your continued support, and we will all be working hard for an even better 2019.

Braille e-Reader Update

NLS has selected a contract to purchase e-Readers designed specifically to read NLS materials. Details are forthcoming. Initially, NLS plans to purchase enough devices to conduct a pilot project with a few network libraries possibly beginning late 2019. The pilot will cover all aspects of acquisition, quality assurance, distribution, cleaning and maintenance, technical support, training, media distribution, and other relevant topics. NLS expects the pilot to last two years before they will be made available.

A braille e-Reader would be similar to a refreshable braille display that communicates electronic information by raising and lowering different combinations of pins in braille cells. NLS is making plans to distribute e-Readers to patrons who read braille as an effective alternative and possible replacement to hard copy braille books and magazines embossed on paper.

Newsweek and Reader's Digest Magazines

In October, the American Printing House (APH) for the Blind suspended production of Newsweek and Reader's Digest magazines. In response, the National Library Service has added Reader's Digest to its magazine collection starting in November. All patrons who were subscribed to Reader's Digest will be set-up to receive it through magazines-on-cartridge (MOC). For those patrons who were subscribed to Newsweek, NLS has not announced any plans to add Newsweek. Patrons in search of a suitable alternative can consider magazines like The Week or other serials such as Atlantic Monthly, The Economist, or The Nation. Patrons can contact OLBDP for more information.

2019 Braille Regional Challenge

Clovernook Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired, in collaboration with the Braille Institute of America, will be hosting the Ohio Regional Braille Challenge on Friday, March 1, 2019. The Braille Challenge, now in its 18th year, is the only national reading and writing contest in braille for students who are blind and visually impaired. Regionals are open to students of all abilities. Students from all over Ohio will gather at Clovernook Center to test their braille skills in five categories: reading, comprehension, braille spelling, chart and graph reading, proofreading and braille speed and accuracy. Student contests are organized by grade level. All test formats are UEB.

For those top academics, the Ohio Regional Competition is the first step to the coveted Braille Institute Braille Challenge Finals held in Los Angeles on June 21 and 22, 2019. To register and request a permission form contact kathy@pinchange.com or braillechallenge@clovernook.org or call 513-702-4878 and reference Ohio Braille Challenge.

Winter Library Closings

OLBPD will be closed this winter season on Christmas Eve Day, Monday, December 24th; Christmas Day on Tuesday, December 25th; New Year's Day, Tuesday, January 1st; Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Monday, January 21st; and Presidents' Day, Monday, February 18th. Please remember to place requests early to ensure enough books through the holiday season.

OLBPD Winter Holiday Reading List

Here are some holiday and seasonal titles for readers to enjoy during the chilly months ahead. Please remember that these titles may contain descriptions of sex, strong language, or violence.

“Merry and Bright” by Debbie Macomber – DB 89198; Romance

“Hiddensee” by Gregory Maguire – DB 89905; a Nutcracker adaptation

“Mr. Dickens and His Carol” by Samantha Silva – DB 87973; Humor and Fiction

“The Noel Diary” by Richard Paul Evans – DB 89832; Cozy Holiday Mystery

“Seven Days of Us” by Francesca Hornak – DB 89399; Humor and Fiction

Season's Greetings

In keeping with the traditional season's greeting, the staff of OLBPD wishes our readers a happy holiday season, and peace, good health and good reading in the New Year.



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