

An Exploratory Report on the History of Services to People with Print Disabilities in British Columbia

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Table of Contents

Overview.....	3
Literature Review.....	4
National Context.....	9
Early Federal Initiatives and Services.....	9
The Task Force on Access to Information for Print-Disabled Canadians.....	12
The Council on Access to Information for Print-Disabled Canadians.....	14
Initiative for Equitable Library Access.....	15
The Canadian National Institution for the Blind.....	16
Exploring Services in British Columbia.....	19
The 1920's – Early Services in BC.....	19
The Introduction of Talking Books.....	21
The Formation of Alternate Format Production Programs in BC.....	22
The Library Services Branch and the CNIB: Unlikely or Likely Partners?.....	24
BC Public Library Services Branch and InterLINK.....	27
Next Steps.....	29
Conclusion.....	31
Acknowledgements.....	34
Sources.....	35

Overview

The British Columbia 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 British Columbia (BC). CNIB withdrew its services from BC's public libraries, and the SPPD formed to evaluate what should be done in light of this. Although it began as a small ad hoc committee, the formation of a formal working group soon followed. The SPPD now 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.

The mandate of the SPPD is to locate and research resources to serve community members with print disabilities in BC. The working group is divided into three subcommittees: Information Seeking, which explores existing resources, including hardware, software and collections; Advocacy, which seeks the support of publishers, providers of services and governments; and Training, for learning and teaching about different types of print disabilities, resources and assistive technology.

In Fall 2010, the SPPD identified a need to establish a historical context on which to base their research and recommendations. Accordingly, the SPPD organized a professional experience project with a student at the University of British Columbia's School of Library and Information Studies (SLAIS) to research the history of services to people with print disabilities in BC. The information seeking project was completed over the course of the 2010/2011 Winter II term, working out to approximately 10 hours/week.

This report outlines the research conducted during the four-month period; it includes a survey of national initiatives and programs, an examination of services offered in BC, and a list of next steps. The history of organized services to people with print disabilities in Canada spans over a century; given the extensive timeline that needs to be covered to obtain a comprehensive history, and the number of organizations, institutions, non-profits, and federal and provincial government branches involved in its past, this report presents an exploratory account of the history of print disability services in Canada and BC. As a result, the "next steps" section will outline areas that, due to the time restrictions of the project, are not covered in the report but may be of interest to the SPPD.

Literature Review

A review of current literature on services to people with print disabilities was conducted prior to commencing the research project on the history of services in Canada and BC. The primary motive for doing this was to compile an overview of current issues and resources relating to print disability services in North America. Canadian content or issues directly affecting Canadians was the principal focus of the literature review.

Contemporary library and information services in North America provide access to information in a range of formats in both physical and digital spaces that engage and support patrons in their information seeking activities. Services are designed to further support and interact with users, and library mandates aim to serve a range of users and information needs.¹ Despite this awareness and interest in providing access to information, there are patrons whose information needs are still not being met, the reasons for which are many.

The lack of print resources in accessible formats impedes a blind or visually impaired person's ability to satisfy their information needs. The majority of books being published are not made available in an accessible format, such as large print, Braille, analogue or digital audio, or digital text.² In recent years, with the advance of electronic publishing and accessibility features being built into consumer tablet computers and electronic readers, it has been presumed that print materials are now accessible to people with print disabilities. Products such as Apple's iPad include assistive technology for the blind and visually impaired, for those who are deaf or hard of hearing, and to assist users with impaired physical or motor skills.³ Nevertheless, there continues to be a gap between print production and alternative format production.⁴ Readers with print disabilities "do not have the level of choice regarding their reading that is associated with the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions' (IFLA) ambitions to promote unrestricted access to information."⁵

The inadequate number of alternate formats for people with print disabilities can be attributed to several factors. The cost of transforming print publications into accessible formats is still high despite technological developments.⁶ As well, copyright restrictions

¹ J.E. Davies, "An Overview of International Research into the Library and Information Needs of Visually Impaired People," *Library Trends* 55, no. 4 (2007): 785-786.

² Article cites 95 percent, but as it was published in 2005, this statistics in out of date. R. Kavanagh and B. Skold, eds, "Libraries for the Blind in the Information Age: Guidelines for Development," *The Hague: IFLA Headquarters* (2005), <http://www.ifla.org/VII/s31/pub/Profrep86.pdf>.

³ Apple Inc., *Accessibility*, <http://www.apple.com/accessibility/ipad/vision.html>.

⁴ Kevin Carey, "The Opportunities and Challenges of the Digital Age: A Blind User's Perspective," *Library Trends* 55, no. 4 (Spring 2007): 769.

⁵ Helen Brazier, "The Role and Activities of the IFLA Libraries for the Blind Section," *Library Trends* 5, no. 4 (Spring 2007): 864-865.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 864-865.

often place legislative barriers against reformatting and distributing texts in accessible formats.⁷ Although certain consistencies exist across countries, each nation's copyright laws are distinct from other jurisdictions. Researchers and practitioners in providing accessible formats and services to people with print disabilities have outlined additional arguments regarding the ways in which more resources and better services can be offered.

Helen Brazier argues in her article, "The Role and Activities of the IFLA Libraries for the Blind Section," that the existence of separate libraries for the blind could be unnecessary.⁸ Brazier argues that, with advances in technology, we should look to "major brokers of information, such as public libraries, to provide a comprehensive service for all members of the community."⁹ As well, Brazier points out that it is now widely recognized that resources and services that target the blind can be equally useful to people with other kinds of disabilities that inhibit or interfere with their ability to read print materials.¹⁰ Worldwide, there are libraries that are dedicated solely to serving blind and visually impaired persons; oftentimes, these library collections are not promoted as available or of use to individuals with physical handicaps or learning disabilities. Brazier also points out that, in recent years, more libraries have recognized the importance of offering a dedicated collection and accompanying services to community members with print disabilities. Resulting changes have been "as minor as altering the type and layout of library documents and presentations to make the content more accessibly to the partially sighted."¹¹

As mentioned earlier, mainstream audio books and accessible electronic texts are becoming more readily available for people with print disabilities to purchase. However, as Mary Anne Epp points out in her article, "Closing the 95 Percent Gap: Library Resource Sharing for People with Print Disabilities," many persons cannot afford to pay for audio or digital books, or the accompanying electronic device required to play alternate formats.¹²

The range of services catered towards patrons with print disabilities also has a direct effect on the success of a library's program. Eric Davies points out in "An Overview of International Research into the Library and Information Needs of Visually Impaired People" that a "one size fits all approach is of little value in discovering needs and is manifestly inappropriate in service design."¹³ There are varying degrees of impairment amongst people who are blind or visually impaired, which makes identifying and determining the diverse nature of user needs a challenge to say the least. Nevertheless,

⁷ *Ibid.*, 864-865.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 866.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 873.

¹² Mary Anne Epp, "Closing the 95 Percent Gap: Library Resource Sharing for People with Print Disabilities," *Library Trends* 54, no. 3 (Winter 2006): 412

¹³ Davies, "An Overview of International Research," 786.

libraries and organizations committed to serving people with print disabilities must discover who their patrons are, what they need, and how they can be best served.¹⁴

User engagement and user needs assessments are an important part of developing and maintaining a services program for people with print disabilities that is comprehensive and collaborative. Davies outlines several assessments in his article, including one conducted by the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) that was published in 2005. The study, entitled *The Needs of People in Canada Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired and Implications for Policy and Programs*, examined the needs of blind and visually impaired individuals. A combination of surveys, focus groups and interviews were used over a two-year period to collect information on the challenges people with visual impairments face and the sufficiency of the services and support provided by organizations.¹⁵

Davies notes that research and studies on the information and service-based needs of people with print disabilities should be more rigorous: “larger and more representative sample sizes and sharper, replicable methodologies” are needed.¹⁶ Libraries and organizations can then draw on the information provided by such studies, both for shaping their programs and for deciding how to best conduct user surveys and manage service and collection assessments.

User engagement is an important aspect of a successful user needs assessment. Kevin Carey’s article, “The Opportunities and Challenges of the Digital Age: A Blind User’s Perspective,” argues that the traditional “top-down” relationship between librarians and visually impaired persons needs to be substituted with a more mindful, co-operative process.¹⁷ Librarians should act as facilitators for visually impaired persons, and assist in providing access to information and emerging digital technologies.¹⁸ However, Carey notes that not only do librarians need to better understand the needs of print impaired persons, but also these patrons need to better understand their own information and service needs.¹⁹

The provision of services to people with print disabilities is affected by several factors. In addition to navigating copyright and legal issues, a range of user needs and information-seeking behaviours, and different social and professional attitudes towards services to visually impaired persons, the proliferation of accessible formats and the advance of digital technology have also had an affect on the success of collaborative print disability services.²⁰ Libraries need to make all forms of information available for patrons with print disabilities if they wish to provide a comprehensive service.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 785-786.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 791.

¹⁶ *bid.*, 792-793.

¹⁷ Kevin Carey, “The Opportunities and Challenges,” 781.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Epp, “Closing the 95 Percent Gap,” 412.

Although certain early formats, such as Braille and large print, do not require any additional assistive technologies, other formats, such as audio and digital content, require readers and players. With the proliferation of alternate formats, Braille, large print and analog tapes are not the only alternate formats available; web-Braille, Braille translators, screen readers, magnifier programs, audio books and digital talking books all make previously inaccessible reading materials available to people with print disabilities. However, Epp points out that “the convergence of technology, the diversity of alternate format products, and [the] proliferation of new playback and storage devices are simultaneously expanding and decreasing access.” Not only do libraries need to plan their services with all alternate formats in mind, including those formats they decide to not make available, but they also need to ensure that their patrons learn to use the formats.²¹ It is important that library services include training for blind and visually impaired people on how to use assistive equipment.²²

Alternate format technology has often reflected and at times anticipated developments in consumer electronics.²³ As well, most visually impaired people lose their sight during middle age or later and do not learn to proficiently read Braille.²⁴ Frank Kurt Cylke, Michael M. Moodie, and Robert E. Fistick note in their article, “Serving the Blind and Physically Handicapped in the United States of America,” that talking books have overtaken Braille.²⁵ As digital technology has advanced, digital talking books have overtaken analog technology.

The Digital Accessible Information System (DAISY) refers to a format standard for digital talking books and related technology. Digital talking books are an XML based format; XML documents can be semi-automatically translated into a number of formats (see Figure 1). For DAISY books, the original XML document can be translated into several different accessible formats, including large print or synthetic speech. Elsebeth Tank and Carsten Frederiksen’s article, “The DAISY Standard: Entering the Global Virtual Library,” explains that DAISY books can offer persons with print disabilities a significantly improved reading experience “much closer to that of the sighted reader using a print book.”²⁶ Depending on the manner in which the digital book is produced, in addition to having the audio of the print text, readers can navigate between headings, chapters and pages, and they can hear descriptions of images.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 415.

²² Matthew Sunrich and Green Ravonne, “Assistive Technologies for Library Patrons with Visual Disabilities,” *Journal of Access Services* 4, no. 1 (2007): 29.

²³ Frank Kurt Cylke, Michael M. Moodie, and Robert E. Fistick, “Serving the Blind and Physically Handicapped in the United States of America,” *Library Trends* 55, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 786.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 802.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Elsebeth Tank and Carsten Frederiksen, “The DAISY Standard: Entering the Global Virtual Library,” *Library Trends* 55, no.4 (Spring 2007): 940.

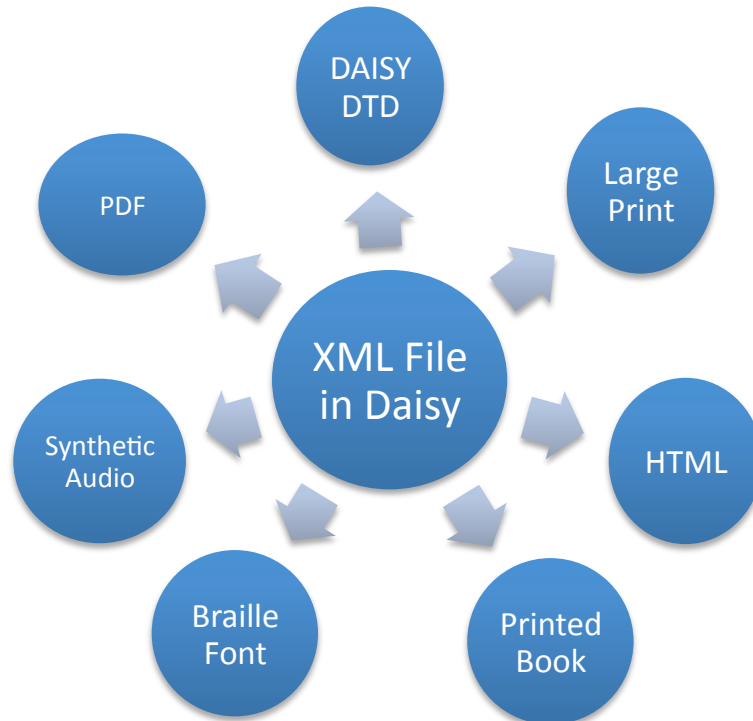


Figure 1. XML documents can make cross-publishing a more easily attained reality.²⁷

When organizations attempt to digitize items themselves, oftentimes they turn the print materials into PDF documents. However, PDFs are developed specifically to preserve the content and layout of a document. As a result, a PDF does not allow an alternate format producer to alter the metadata and layout, add image descriptions, or alter the indexing or footnotes.²⁸ Producing alternate formats, be they audio or electronic texts, takes people, time, and money.

Despite interest from nonprofits, private organizations, and public institutions such as libraries, access to information for print disabled persons remains poor. The print-impaired community is diverse, not only in age, background and education, but also in interests, tastes, and employment. To believe that persons with print disabilities should just read what is available is not only unfair, it is discriminatory. While standard subject librarians can take the supply of published material for granted, the “alternative format librarian is loath to reject any material.”²⁹

²⁷ Thomas Kahlisch, “DAISY: An opportunity to improve access to information for all,” *Information Services and Use* 28 (2008): 158.

²⁸ Kevin Carey, “The Opportunities and Challenges,” 773.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 768.

National Context

An overview of the history of national initiatives was conducted prior to examining the provincial history of print disability services in BC. This was done to provide a national context to the regional history of serving the blind and visually impaired in BC.

Alternate format initiatives for persons with print disabilities have existed on a National level in Canada through the federal government and through private or nonprofit organizations such as the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB). As the focus of this report is on the history of services in BC, only the efforts involving the Federal government and CNIB will be examined.³⁰

Early Federal Initiatives and Services

The Canadian Federal government legislated postage-free mailing for alternate format reading materials for Canadians with print disabilities through the Post Office Department in 1898.³¹ Arguably, Canada was the first country to legislate a service such as this, and it is still provided today.³² The National Library of Canada did not formally espouse access to information rights until the Library established the Task Group on Library Service to the Handicapped in February 1974 to study and define the future of library services to this community group.³³ The Task Group was composed of four subgroups: the Subgroup on Canadian Libraries and Agencies Currently Providing Service to the Handicapped; the Subgroup on Copyright; the Subgroup on Production and Cataloguing Standards for Nonprint and Special Print Materials; and the Subgroup to Make Recommendations Concerning a Coordinated National Program of Library Service to the Handicapped.³⁴ In 1976, the Task Group presented a report with recommendations on how to improve library services to the National Librarian, Dr. Guy Sylvestre. The report proposed the construction of a national library service for handicapped Canadians, with responsibilities shared amongst national, provincial, and municipal government.

³⁰ A more in-depth account of the history of national print disability services in Canada would uncover more associations and private organizations whose efforts effected blind and visually impaired persons across the country. Due to the confines of the project, they were not examined. The Canadian Library Association has an Interest Group on Library Services to Individuals with Print Disabilities. However, in terms of the ways in which the CLA historically shaped services, a review of the CNIB and National Library provide sufficient background on print disability services offered nationwide for the scope of this report. The CLA Interest Group was not proposed until 2003, and it was not established until 2004. It gained full support from CLA at the association's 2005 annual general meeting.

³¹ Canadian National Institute for the Blind, "CNIB Presents Canada Post with Prestigious Award to Honour Outstanding Contribution To Canadians Living With Vision Loss," <http://www.cnib.ca/en/services/library/news/Pages/canada-post-award>

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Guy Sylvestre, *Task Group on Library Service to the Handicapped: Report Presented to the National Librarian* (Ottawa : National Library of Canada, 1976), 2.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

Prior to analyzing what should be included in the National Library’s service to handicapped persons, the Task Group surveyed existing services in Canadian libraries.³⁵ A questionnaire was prepared and mailed to public libraries with collections over 100 000 volumes, university and college libraries, regional libraries, provincial library agencies, provincial education departments, schools for the blind, and selected associations serving the handicapped.³⁶ Out of the 500 questionnaires mailed, 208 were returned; of the libraries and organizations that responded, nearly 60% did not provide materials for handicapped readers.³⁷ Many of the libraries that did provide audio and special print materials only had a small collection with no special services or dedicated staff to assist handicapped users.³⁸ Each province and territory had at least one agency or library providing materials for the handicapped at the time of the questionnaire, and the Canadian National Institute for the Blind had a collection and resource services available nationwide (see Figure 2).³⁹

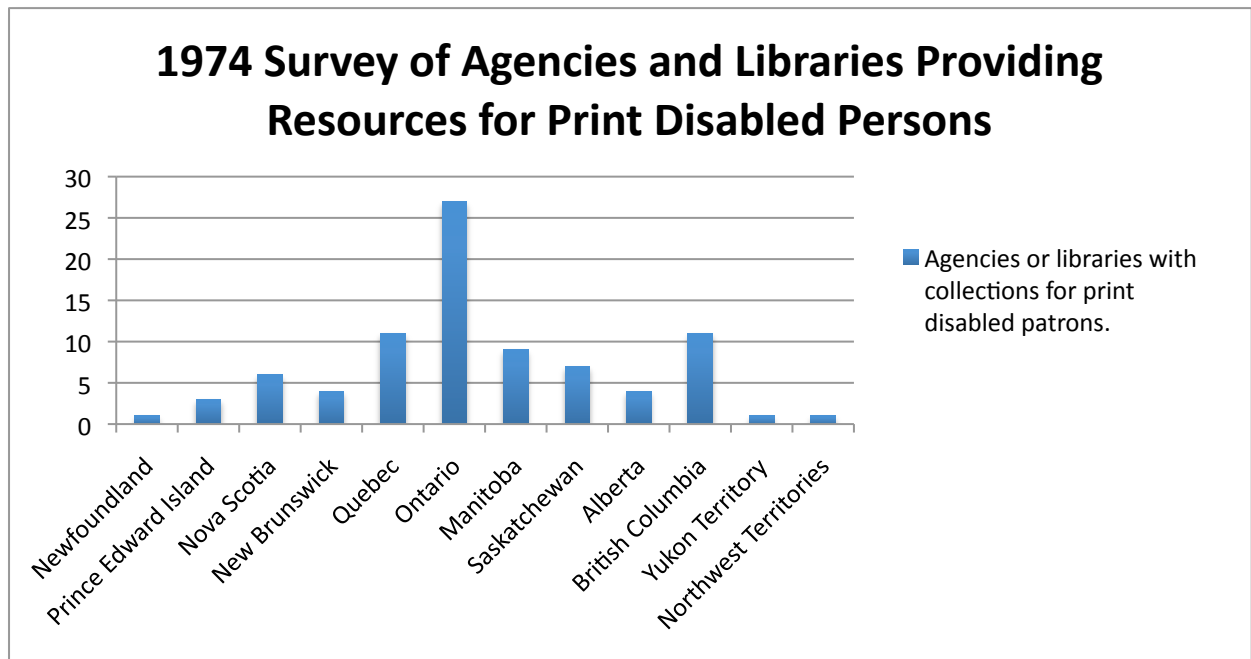


Figure 2. The number of organizations with collections for print disabled patrons, by province/territory. Each division of the CNIB is included in this count (e.g. Manitoba, Quebec, British Columbia-Yukon, etc). Newfoundland was the only instance where the CNIB office was the only organization offering alternate format collections in the province. Both the Yukon and Northwest Territories had programs run by local libraries.

The questionnaire also surveyed which alternate formats were available in Canada. Institutions with alternate format collections were asked to provide a count of all titles

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 14-18.

available to the visually impaired. The total number of titles was organized by format, and it included Braille, large print, discs, reels and cassettes.⁴⁰ The availability of audio books was one of the main concerns of the Task Group, but the provision of Braille and large-print materials was also examined when analyzing available services.⁴¹

From the questionnaire, the Task Group concluded that existing library services were “fragmentary and inadequate.”⁴² The Task Group observed that private associations were the main source for alternate format reading materials, and as a result services were inconsistent across the country.⁴³ Accordingly, the 1976 report presented to the National Librarian recommended that: “The establishment of a coordinated national program of library service to the visually, physically, and perceptually handicapped unable to use conventional print materials be undertaken as soon as possible.”⁴⁴ The Task Group asserted that responsibilities should be shared amongst the national, provincial and local levels of government. The proposal specifically outlined that local public libraries should be responsible for patron services, and that the emphasis of the program should be on “the provision of recreational and general information reading materials.”⁴⁵

The Task Group noted the contribution of private organizations in the 1976 report, and recommended that they be included in the development of the proposed national program.⁴⁶ However, the Canadian National Institute for the Blind was the only institute individually recognized for their contribution to services for the blind. The report outlined: “From the outset, the Institute’s program of library service aimed at national coverage and has attempted to meet both the educational and recreational needs of legally blind Canadians.”⁴⁷ However, the Task Group stated that the Institute’s services should be significantly broadened to include the reading needs of “both blind and other visually, physically, and perceptually handicapped people.”⁴⁸ As such, the report recommended that the Institute be a major production faculty for the National Library’s service, and continue to be involved in the testing and evaluation of user equipment. As for direct distribution, the report outlined that the Institute may wish to let public libraries assume responsibility of the distribution of resources to users; the report included the caveat that the Institute would continue to serve persons with print disabilities in “areas without developed library service.”⁴⁹

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 66.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 66-67.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

The Task Force on Access to Information for Print-Disabled Canadians

Following the report produced by the Task Group on Library Service to the Handicapped, the Canadian National Library instituted services for handicapped persons, which involved information and reference services, and brought about the inclusion of library materials for the handicapped to the union catalogue.⁵⁰ The Federal government also recognized the rights to equitable access to information of Canadians with disabilities in various reports, such as *Preparing Canada for a Digital World* and *The Scott Task Force*.⁵¹ However, despite this recognition, the federal government failed to act in many ways. The Canadian government did not follow the Task Group on Library Service to the Handicapped's recommendation to establish a coordinated national library program for people with print disabilities. Two decades after the 1976 report, the majority of published print materials remained inaccessible to persons with print disabilities. But then, in 1997 the Right Hon. Jean Chrétien promised: "by the year 2000, we will make the new information and knowledge infrastructure accessible to all Canadians."⁵²

In June 2000, the Task Force on Access to Information for Print-Disabled Canadians was formed with the support of Mr. Roch Carrier, the National Librarian of Canada, and Dr. Euclid Herie, the President and CEO of CNIB. The Task Force presented a report, titled "Fulfilling the Promise," to Mr. Carrier and Dr. Herie in October 2000. The report outlined issues regarding access to not only print, but also digital information for print-disabled Canadians, and presented recommendations for future actions. The mandate of the Task Force was to review and synthesize recent Canadian reports that discussed or were related to access to information for print disabled Canadians, and to consult with service providers and producers to ascertain what would be needed to support a sustainable national library service that met the needs of print-disabled persons.⁵³

The Task Force recounted John English's 1999 report, "Future Roles of the National Archives of Canada and the National Library of Canada." English's work formed the basis for the discourses of the Task Force.⁵⁴ The Task Force's report highlighted two main recommendations from English for the National Library of Canada:

1. Access to AMICUS (bibliographic database service containing 20 million full bibliographic records, 562,000 authority records and 35 million holdings of 500 Canadian libraries, including NLC) should be a

⁵⁰ Working Group to Define a National Network for Equitable Library Service, *Opening the Book: A Strategy for a National Network for Equitable Library Service for Canadians with Print Disabilities* (Ottawa: Canadian Library Association, 2005), 11.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Canada, The Council on Access to Information From Print-Disabled Canadians, *Fulfilling the Promise: Report of the Task Force on Access to Information for Print-Disabled Canadians*, (Ottawa: Library and Archives of Canada, 2000), <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/accessinfo/005003-4300-e.html>.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

- free search service, available in Canada and internationally on the internet with web browser interfaces that are suitable for individual researchers and library and archives staff, including those using adaptive technologies to overcome visual impairment and physical disabilities.
2. The National Library of Canada should establish a partnership with the CNIB. Such a partnership might include NLC facilitation of access to electronic government information and NLC acquisition and preservation of digital publishers' files in order to make them accessible to alternative format producers.⁵⁵

In comparing these recommendations to those presented in the 1976 report, it is obvious that access inequalities still exist; however, the information landscape that people with print disabilities must navigate has also changed drastically. Alternate print and basic audio are no longer the main accessible formats available to print impaired persons. The digital world has created both new barriers to overcome and new alternate formats to better service people of all abilities.

Similarly to the 1976 Report, the Task Force identified the main Canadian stakeholders in the production and provision of alternate formats. The report outlined that, as of 2000, the National Library of Canada had 250 000 audiobook, Braille or large print materials available for Canadians through AMICUS, Canada's union catalogue.⁵⁶ However, this was out of a total of more than 20 million records. The Canadian public library system, at the time composed of over 3600 branches, was experiencing a lack of resources that jeopardized services to people with print disabilities. The report noted that most public libraries had either access to, or kept their own large print lending collection; they often had home delivery services that patrons with print disabilities could take advantage of; and some public libraries were beginning to purchase electronic reading materials.⁵⁷ However, few libraries provided patrons with accessible technology for public workstations or to access electronic texts; and even fewer maintained Braille materials for loan.⁵⁸

The Task Force on Access to Information for Print-Disabled Canadians also analyzed the resources and services provided by post-secondary institutions in Canada. Although the library collections of colleges and universities were already represented in AMICUS, because institutions catalogued and treated alternate formats differently from the rest of their collections, they were not found in the university or college library catalogues, and as a result were absent from the AMICUS union catalogue.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

The report identified the CNIB as possibly “the largest and most experienced alternate format producer and distributor in Canada,” with 100 000 blind or visually impaired users. As well, The BC Library Services Branch is recognized for 25 years of experience producing alternate format materials for sale in Canada. The report did recommend that the CNIB expand its services to all print-disabled persons, and not just the blind and visually impaired. The Branch’s contributions will be further analyzed in the next section of report, which will examine the history of print disability services in BC.

The Task Force concluded their report by referring to the Right Hon. Jean Chrétien’s promise to make information and knowledge infrastructure accessible to all Canadians, no matter what their abilities. The report outlined that the National Library of Canada is “the most appropriate” organization to manage and lead a national program and supporting council on access to print information. The Force asserts that the National Library should keep accessibility, portability, and the individual as the main focus of the national program. As well, it is recommended that self-identification provide sufficient reason to grant a person with a learning disability access to alternate format resources.⁶⁰ The roll of publishers and the ways in which the federal government can encourage the publication of alternate formats when materials are first published is also discussed.

The Council on Access to Information for Print-Disabled Canadians

Following the “Fulfilling a Promise” report, Mr. Carrier established the Council on Access to Information for Print-Disabled Canadians in 2001.⁶¹ The Council was organized to analyze the recommendations presented to the National Librarian by the Task Force on Access to Information for Print-Disabled Canadians. In January 2008, the Council presented “Fulfilling the Promise: A Progress Report” to Library and Archives Canada (LAC). Acknowledging that they worked “with the spirit and intent of the recommendations of *Fulfilling the Promise* rather than their exact wording,” the Council addressed their recommendations to the Government of Canada, as opposed to a specific department.⁶² This report did not present a great deal of new analysis on the services and programs that existed while or before the Council produced their report. The Council did not make any recommendations regarding re-establishing the National Library of Canada’s Adaptive Technology program.⁶³

“Fulfilling the Promise: A Progress Report” presented recommendations based on the counsel provided eight years earlier in the original report, “Fulfilling the Promise.” The reports presented to the National Library of Canada, now a part of Library and Archives

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Canada, The Council on Access to Information From Print-Disabled Canadians, *Fulfilling a Promise: The Progress Report*, (Ottawa: Library and Archives of Canada, 2008), <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/accessinfo/005003-3000-01-2008-e.html>.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

Canada, between 1976 and 2008 discussed similar concerns; as the Task Force on Access to Information for Print-Disabled inquired: “If the questions and problems are so clearly identifiable and the solutions so evident, it is no surprise that Print-Disabled Canadians ask: What is the difficulty in implementing them?”⁶⁴

Initiative for Equitable Library Access

In October 2007, the Federal Government established the Initiative for Equitable Library Access (IELA) through the Library and Archives of Canada. With funding in place for a three-year term, the IELA was founded to research and “develop a strategy to improve access to library services for Canadians with print disabilities.”⁶⁵

The IELA released “A Progress Report on the Initiative for Equitable Access” in February 2009. The report provides an overview of IELA activities since 2007, including consultations with a number of Canadian stakeholders, such as: public libraries of all sizes; disability groups; provincial and territorial government representatives; members of the Canadian publishing industry; and alternate format producers.⁶⁶ The report also outlines a 2008 survey of Canadian Public Libraries that was conducted for IELA by the Canadian Library Association (CLA). The CLA survey was shared with the Canadian Urban Libraries Council and representatives from the Provincial and Territorial Public Library Council; responses were generated from all provinces and territories.⁶⁷ The responses revealed a “strong interest in the issue of equitable library access and gave IELA a clearer sense of the landscape in terms of specific challenges, opportunities, and issues.”⁶⁸ The survey findings also exposed that few libraries had a designated person to assist patrons with print disabilities.⁶⁹ As well, multiple format collections were found to contain more large-print books and cassettes, with CDs and then downloadable books occupying the next largest shares.⁷⁰

The 2009 IELA report also outlined the tools and training that would be required to support equitable library access nationwide. These steps included: the Electronic Clearinghouse, a multiple format production program to assist publisher in creating accessible electronic files quickly and securely; an accessible Internet portal, to help guide and increase user access to information; and service standards and training to guide libraries on how to develop and maintain equitable services.⁷¹

⁶⁴ Canada, Library and Archives of Canada, *Fulfilling the Promise*.

⁶⁵ Canada, Initiative for Equitable Library Access, *Letter to All Stakeholders*, (Ottawa: Library and Archives of Canada, 2009), <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/iela/005002-920-e.html>.

⁶⁶ Canada, Initiative For Equitable Library Access, *Change. Choice. Hope. A Progress Report on the Initiative for Equitable Library Access*, (Ottawa: Library and Archives of Canada, 2009), <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/iela/005002-910-e.html>.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

In March 2009, a non-profit and key stakeholder in services to visually impaired persons, the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, submitted a proposal to the IELEA to create a new organization to serve Canadians with print disabilities.⁷² While this new non-governmental organization would be built upon the Canadian National Institute for the Blind's current infrastructure, it would be a separate organization.⁷³ It would act as a production and resource centre for the country, and would help build a network across Canada to help Canadians with print disabilities access information.⁷⁴

The Canadian National Institution for the Blind

Outside of initiatives and work groups lead by the National Library of Canada, the Canadian National Institution for the Blind (CNIB) dedicated resources, time and money towards developing their Library collection and services to blind and visually impaired Canadians. The CNIB is a registered Canadian charity. From its inception in 1918, the CNIB set about advocating and providing community-based support and services to blind and partially sighted Canadians.⁷⁵ The CNIB evolved out of a number of schools and organizations for the blind, including the Canadian National Library for the Blind, formerly known as the Canadian Free Library for the Blind or the Free Braille Library, which was formed in 1906.⁷⁶ Dr. Charles Carruthers was the President of the Canadian National Library for the Blind when it was amalgamated with the CNIB and became known as the CNIB National Library.⁷⁷ Dr. Carruthers was one of the seven founders of the CNIB, alongside Sherman Charles Swift who served as the Librarian of the Free Library for the Blind in 1911 (length of appointment unknown).⁷⁸

As a national charity, the CNIB has offered access to its services and Library nationwide. Since its beginning, the CNIB Library has made use of Canada Posts stamp exemption for all Braille books being mailed anywhere in Canada, and mailed Braille resources to blind and visually impaired individuals nationwide. The CNIB kept its headquarters in Toronto, Ontario, but began to open new offices and divisions in other provinces. The Library remained centrally located in Toronto, and patron access and services was shaped over time to allow print disabled people to: receive materials in the mail; create profiles that outline their preferred format, language, subjects and authors they are interested in, and the frequency of service desired; search information and

⁷² Canada, Initiative for Equitable Library Access, *Letter to All Stakeholders*.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Canadian National Institute for the Blind, *Our History*, <http://www.cnib.ca/en/about/who/history/>.

⁷⁶ Jim Sanders, *A Closed Book: Library Services for Print-disabled Canadians*, (Ottawa: Library and Archives of Canada, 2003), 2 and W. Stewart WALLACE, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Canada*, Vol. IV, Toronto, University Associates of Canada, 1948, 400p., pp. 76-81.)

⁷⁷ Canadian National Institute for the Blind, *Founders: Charles Carruthers*, <http://www.cnib.ca/en/about/who/history/founders/charles-watty-carruthers/>.

⁷⁸ Canadian National Institute for the Blind, *Founders: Sherman Swift*, <http://www.cnib.ca/en/about/who/history/founders/sherman-charles-swift/>. The length of his appointment was not found in any secondary or primary resources.

resources online; find CNIB materials at their local library; and access assistance by phone.⁷⁹

As the CNIB offices grew in number, so too did the formats available through the CNIB Library. In 1918, Braille was the only format available. However, by 2007 the Institute had increased the number of formats that circulated to Braille, print-Braille, Tactile, DAISY audio, online digital audio, online resources, e-text, e-Braille, and descriptive video.⁸⁰ As new formats became available, not only more accessible books, but also magazines, newspapers, and music scores became available to CNIB clients.

In terms of the CNIB's national library program, service implementations began to shift in the early 1990s to allow for an Internet data library system to become a reality.⁸¹ An online catalogue, automated circulation, and early digital books and online accessible resources made new services possible, and altered the manner in which all services could be delivered.⁸² By 1997, the CNIB had established a training and operational strategy to ensure that the CNIB Library would be functioning in a digital environment and producing accessible digital information materials within a few years.⁸³ Even with the advance of electronic resources, the CNIB Library kept print and audio materials and continued to deliver them to clients for free through Canada Post. The CNIB Library launched its Visunet Canada Partners Program in 1999. This provided libraries and library consortia in Canada the opportunity to access the CNIB Library and its collection for an annual fee.⁸⁴ With the expansion of the Internet, the CNIB charted out a plan for an Integrated Digital Library System in 2000.⁸⁵ The CNIB Digital Library became the public access point for the Library's Internet data library system in 2003, and provided a secure and accessible online interface, as well as instant access to electronic text and Braille, and digital audio files.⁸⁶

Once the CNIB Digital Library was established, the CNIB was able to offer online resources such as the Encyclopedia Britannica online, which is not produced in audio or Braille due to the length and expense.⁸⁷ As well, the Library was better able to collaborate and work with other libraries through their Visunet program, and begin circulating digital technology with improved features and quality, such as the DAISY audio books.⁸⁸ With the digital library interface, the CNIB Library also began reporting all

⁷⁹ Margaret McGrory and others, "The Impact of the Integrated Digital Library System on the CNIB Library," *Library Trends* 55, no. 4 (Spring 2007): 975-976.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 975.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 976.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 974.

⁸⁴ Working Group to Define a National Network, *Opening the Book*, 9.

⁸⁵ Margaret McGrory and others, "The Impact of the Integrated Digital Library," 974.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 977.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

catalogued records to the National union catalogue AMICUS, ensuring that CNIB's holdings could be found both nationally and internationally.⁸⁹

As the CNIB Library continued to expand its collection and services, its national and international profile continued to grow. The president and senior board members would often contribute to national discussions on how services to people with print disabilities should be improved and managed. One such example is the Task Force on Access to Information for Print-Disabled Canadians: the president at the time received the report along with the National Librarian, and a CNIB board member from Toronto was a member of the Task Force.⁹⁰

In January 2004, the CNIB released a position statement titled "Nationwide Accessible Library Service to Print Disabled Persons." The paper supported many of the recommendation presented to the federal government through the Task Group on Library Service to the Handicapped, the Task Force on Access to Information for Print-Disabled Canadians and the Council on Access to Information for Print-Disabled Canadians. Moreover, it clearly outlined that "a private charity cannot, nor should it be expected to, sustain the service through charitable financing at international standards to meet the anticipated growth in demand due to unprecedented incidence of vision loss of the aging baby boomer population."⁹¹

The CNIB has not only created a library collection with accompanying services for blind and visually impaired Canadians, but has also developed and implemented an infrastructure for the production, storage, and retrieval of electronically produced master files.⁹² These master files allow for alternate formats with features required by print disabled persons. However, the cost of providing equitable alternative format services while also trying to keep up with the ever-increasing demand for accessible materials is becoming too great for the CNIB's budget. As a result, the CNIB recommended a nationwide network be established, supported by not only public and academic libraries across the country but also private partners such as the CNIB Library. The CNIB Library also noted in their position statement the importance of coordination: "coordination is essential as print-disabled populations, estimated to total three million persons in Canada, are relatively small compared to the general public and often isolated."⁹³

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 988.

⁹⁰ Canada, Library and Archives of Canada, *Fulfilling the Promise*.

⁹¹ Canadian National Institute for the Blind Board of Directors, *Nationwide Accessible Library Service to Print Disabled Persons*, <http://www.cnib.ca/en/about/who/believe/pages/print-disabled.aspx>.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

Exploring Services in British Columbia

Local and provincial initiatives to provide services to people with print disabilities were introduced before the federal government identified a need to evaluate alternate format collections and analyze the feasibility of a national program. The graph (Figure 2) shown in section three, National Context, based on the 1974 survey of services offered in Canada, reveals that organizations were already working at a local and provincial level to ameliorate the lack of access to information for people with print disabilities.

The history of the availability of services to visually impaired persons in BC dates back to the Canadian Free Library for the Blind. The Free Library was formed in 1906 and utilized the Post Office Department's free postage program for Braille. While more informal lending programs could have been in place earlier, primary or secondary resources have not yet been located to support this thought. Once the CNIB Library was established in 1918, it became the main source for alternate format reading materials in BC.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, other programs and initiatives were present as early as the 1920's. During the second half of the twentieth century both a provincial production program and several institutional services also began to flourish.

The 1920's – Early Services in BC

The 1920's were a time of growth for collections and services for the blind and visually impaired in BC. In addition to what would have been a period of expansion for the CNIB Library, a School for the Blind was established at Point Grey in the city of Vancouver. Although the school library likely only held materials with content directed towards children and teenagers, the collection totaled 300 volumes by 1927, and it was the school's intention to steadily increase their holdings.⁹⁵ The mandate for the school library was to purchase materials that were in high demand by students, and use a loan library for more general literature.

BC's public libraries were also attempting to serve the information needs of blind and visually impaired patrons in the 1920s. By this time, the Victoria Public Library had Braille magazines and a few dozen Braille books in its collection.⁹⁶ Other libraries are cited as "doing at least a little along these same lines."⁹⁷ However, a 1927 British Columbia Library Survey of library services for the blind observed that most public libraries found that they were not able to provide adequate services to blind readers. Besides keeping a few Braille magazines and reference works, the libraries stated that not only were Braille books more expensive, but their larger size meant they took up

⁹⁴ Christina Ross Frame, "Library Service for the Blind," *British Columbia Library Survey* no. 5 (1927): 2.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

more shelf space and were harder to keep in repair.⁹⁸ The report analyzing the 1927 survey outlined that BC public librarians thought that it was “best to centralize book service for the blind in a limited number of large special libraries, conducting their circulation chiefly by mail... rendered possible through the free postal transmission of Braille books.”⁹⁹

The larger BC libraries were also members of the Pacific North-West Library Association, and were able to make use of the association’s unique union catalogue of books with embossed type.¹⁰⁰ Membership to the association permitted some of BC’s libraries to borrow embossed books from state libraries, public libraries, and the resource collection at the Oregon Employment Institution for the Blind at Portland.¹⁰¹ BC Libraries had to pay “an American postal charge of 1 cent for 2lb. 3 oz.” on all books coming from the United States.¹⁰²

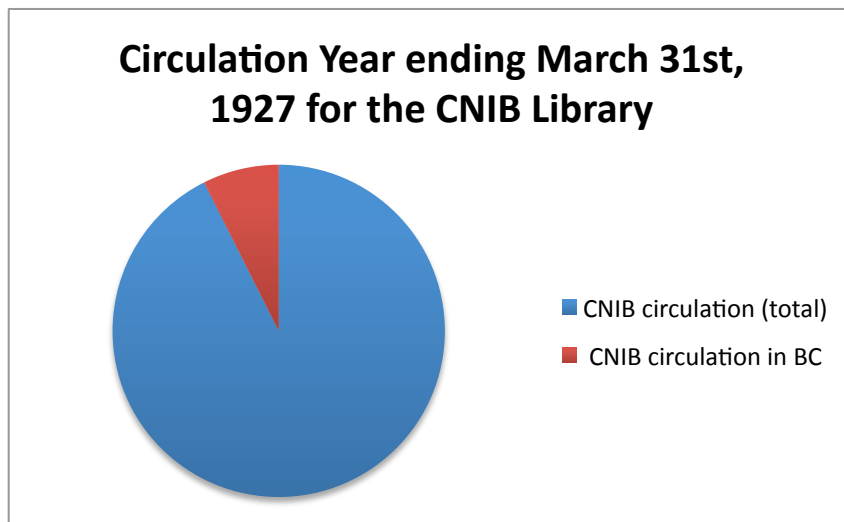


Figure 3. Although the perception of the total CNIB titles circulating in BC looks small, considering the small number of visually impaired persons enrolled in the CNIB Library program during 1927 (only sixty-two), a fair number of Braille titles are being sent to BC.

To avoid paying the postage charge for American embossed books, BC libraries could recommend patrons borrow books free of charge from the CNIB. For the borrowing year ending March 31st, 1927, the CNIB’s total circulation was over 20 000; just over 1 600 loans, or 12.5 percent, were sent to patrons in British Columbia (see Figure 3).¹⁰³ Although this circulation figure at first appears to be of little or no consequence, the fact that there were only sixty-two CNIB borrowers in BC at the time calls for further

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 3.

analysis. Based on the 1927 statistics, we can estimate that each CNIB reader in BC withdrew approximately twenty-seven volumes for the year or just over a volume every other week.¹⁰⁴ This is a notable number of deliveries given the distance the books had to travel. The 1927 British Columbia Library Survey analysis reported that blind readers credited the CNIB for its “helpfulness, courtesy, and prompt service.”¹⁰⁵ By 1927, the CNIB Library had nearly 11 000 volumes of Braille, and close to 1 800 musical scores in its collection.¹⁰⁶ As well, the CNIB district secretary for Vancouver, located at 626 Pender Street, was available for consultation for public librarians looking to better serve blind patrons. The secretary “could give a list of possible readers in that vicinity and perhaps some definite information as to their specific needs.”¹⁰⁷

The Introduction of Talking Books

The CNIB first began offering talking books on 78 RPM records in 1936, and by the 1950s the Western division of the CNIB was reporting an increase in the use of audio books by borrowers in BC.¹⁰⁸ One book could consist of anywhere from one to one hundred records, and each record held approximately twenty minutes of reading and required a slow-speed record machine to listen to the book.¹⁰⁹ At this point, the Braille book collection in the CNIB Library had surpassed 22 000 volumes of both French and English materials. Following the introduction of books on record, the CNIB began to use tape-recorded books, which were heavy and housed in cumbersome metal cases, but not as easily damaged as records.¹¹⁰ Smaller tape players that used a six-track cassette and were stored in a plastic container were adopted in 1967.¹¹¹ While these audio books were lighter and easier to use, both the machines and the spare parts were imported from England and at times quite difficult to obtain.¹¹² Following the development of the four-track playback machine in the United States, the CNIB adopted the player in 1978 in part because it only required commercial cassettes.¹¹³

Not only books became available in an audio format for persons with print disabilities, but magazines as well. By the 1980s, magazines from the CNIB Library were available in Braille, on record, and on four-track cassette tapes.¹¹⁴ By 1985, BC borrowers could choose between 58 Braille periodicals and five tape recorded Canadian magazines,

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁰⁸ Edith York, *A Study of Library Services for the Visually Impaired of British Columbia* (Canadian National Institute for the Blind – Yukon Division, March 1985), 6.

¹⁰⁹ Canadian National Institute for the Blind, *Report of Services and Cash Benefits to the Blind in British Columbia and Alberta for the Year Ended March 31st, 1953* (CNIB – Western Division, 1954).

¹¹⁰ York, *A Study of Library Services for the Visually Impaired*, 6.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

either once a week or four times monthly.¹¹⁵ The recordings were taped in the Library's Toronto studios. Two French language magazines were recorded in the CNIB's Montreal studios at this time as well.¹¹⁶

The Formation of Alternate Format Production Programs in BC

From the late 1950's up until 1978, the CNIB also produced and distributed school textbooks for the blind and visually impaired students in BC. This service was terminated in 1978 when BC's Ministry of Education agreed to take over the responsibility for the provision of alternative textbooks for the province.¹¹⁷ The Provincial Resource Centre for the Visually Impaired was created, and it immediately began providing Braille and tape-recorded copies of required texts, with the necessary equipment, to visually impaired students in BC.¹¹⁸ The Resource Centre referred students looking for reading materials other than required school textbooks to their School District to arrange an interlibrary loan, if possible.¹¹⁹

Prior to the establishment of the Provincial Resource Centre, the Charles Crane Memorial Library was established at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in 1968. The estate of Charles Crane, a graduate of the university who was both deaf and blind, was donated to the university to form that basis of the collection. The Crane library received Provincial grants and private donations during the 1970's, and by 1985 it had expanded its services and was producing recorded books in its newly equipped studio.¹²⁰ The collection at the Crane Library was open to UBC students and community library cardholders, and was available for inter-library loan. The Crane Library acquired a database in 1985 that allowed for easier searching of their collection. Library patrons were also able to use this search feature to navigate not only the Crane collection, but also holdings in the United States, including the Library of Congress' Braille collections and the Recording for the Blind's tape collection.¹²¹

By the end of the 1970s, the resources available through the Crane Library and Provincial Resource Centre were growing more specialized, and each library began focusing production efforts on specific areas of education. In 1984 the Ministry of Education decided to develop a third provincial alternate format production, acquisition and circulation facility for textbook and post-secondary resources at the Langara campus of the Vancouver Community College (VCC).¹²² The Langara Facility, officially known as the BC College and Institute Library Services (CILS), acquired a collection of

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*, 10-11.

300 titles in its first term open, thirteen of which were original recordings produced in house, while the others were either purchased or borrowed through interlibrary loans.¹²³

Although located at the Langara campus, a Handicapped Assistance Committee comprised of two representatives from each VCC campus developed the CILS.¹²⁴ The Handicapped Assistance Committee was organized in 1980, and immediately began preparing an outline for an alternate format collection and production program, and a financing plan to support it. The first committee meeting was held on June 17, 1980, and by the second meeting on September 26, the committee had already established program objectives. A committee report was presented to the VCC in February 1981, detailing the rationale and method behind the proposed program.¹²⁵

The committee report, "How Open is VCC to Disabled People?", outlined that fifty percent of respondents surveyed "expressed a general concern for the lack of learning aids, equipment, materials and resources needed by the handicapped students. They felt that on-site availability, through a resource centre, was necessary to meet the students' needs."¹²⁶ The report also looked specifically at library services, and found that while audiobooks and Braille could be obtained through inter-library loan, more often than not the desired materials were not available in an alternate format because of the specialized nature of the subject matter and programs offered.¹²⁷ Tape recorders, cassette players, visual technical equipment and other aids were available for visually impaired and blind students, but the investigation found that the VCC system was riddled with service problems and did not provide students with access to an adequate collection.¹²⁸ Respondents further outlined that "the appointment of an individual responsible for the acquisition and production of professional-quality learning resources (with the Audio Visual Department) would greatly enhance library services for handicapped students."¹²⁹

In addition to textbook and post-secondary alternate format production programs, Vancouver Tape Books was established in the early 1970's through a Local Initiatives Program to produce audio materials for blind and visually impaired children.¹³⁰ At about the same time that the Tape Books program was getting started, the Consultant Services division of the Library Services Commission of BC was participating in a Canadian Library Association survey to determine the need for specific formats for print disabled persons. In part due to the greater awareness brought about by the

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹²⁴ Julian Gray and others, *How open is VCC to disabled people?* L 82-162. Langara College Archives, 1.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹³⁰ York, *A Study of Library Services for the Visually Impaired*, 8.

survey, Vancouver Tape Books soon expanded to include adult materials.¹³¹ Circulation of the Tape Book collection was also broadened to include seven libraries in the Lower Mainland.¹³²

In 1974 Vancouver Tape Books submitted a proposal to the Provincial Secretary for the Government of BC to assume responsibility for the organization.¹³³ The proposal was accepted and the program became part of the Library Services Branch; it remained strictly an audiobook production program. By the end of 1974, Vancouver Tape Books provided four hundred titles on 2-track cassettes to BC public libraries. Annual production expanded and the program began selling audio books to Canadian Libraries in 1979.¹³⁴ In 1981 the Branch “provided copies of all new titles free to consolidated and regional library systems and made rotating deposit collections available to municipal libraries” in BC.¹³⁵ By 1985, the Branch had a recording studio in Burnaby, employed professional readers, and recorded 325 titles annually.¹³⁶ BC librarians representing major library systems across the province assisted with title selection.

The Library Services Branch and the CNIB: Unlikely or Likely Partners?

After about a decade of production, the Branch established an exchange program with the CNIB Library. The two organizations decided to exchange sub-masters produced in house, ultimately allowing both systems to increase their new titles production to 600 titles annually.¹³⁷ If the CNIB were producing a title, the Branch would choose a different title to record; this allowed both the CNIB and the Branch to maximize the number of titles produced in Canada for the blind.¹³⁸

While the CNIB and Branch cooperated to create and exchange sub-masters, they also competed against one another for provincial grants and private donations.¹³⁹ In 1985, Edith York of the British Columbia–Yukon division of the CNIB authored the report “A Study of Library Services for the Visually Impaired of British Columbia.” York’s report provides an overview of service and collection developments at the Crane Library, the Resource Centre, the Branch and the CNIB Library. York also set out to distinguish the CNIB Library from the Library Services Branch by citing the uniqueness of each organization and its services:

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 8.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

¹³⁸ Mr. Jim Looney (formerly with the BC Public Library Services Branch), interviewed by the author, April 19, 2011.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

At first glance, the provision of a similar Library Service by the Library Services branch of the Provincial Secretary and the Public Libraries of the Province appear to be a duplication of services. On closer scrutiny and evaluation, each offers unique services to the visually impaired reader and library patron.¹⁴⁰

York describes the CNIB service as greatest in semi-urban and rural areas where access to public libraries and transportation is poor.¹⁴¹ However, when York lists the regions with active CNIB borrowers, she includes both remote areas, such as the Cariboo-Thompson-Nicola Valley area and Prince George in the north, and highly populated areas, such as Greater Vancouver and Greater Victoria. Although the proclaimed intention of the report is to “look at the ways [that] these two systems might cooperate to reduce cost, offer a quality service and retain what is best in both programs,” York’s bias is slanted towards her own institution.¹⁴² From York’s description, the services and collections available in BC’s public libraries are inconsistent, where the library services available through the CNIB provide all registered members with delivery right to their front door.¹⁴³ When York’s report was released, 5712 blind persons were registered with the CNIB in BC, and the CNIB Library had 15 000 scores and instruction books in its Braille collection alone.¹⁴⁴

The Library Services Branch also conducted its own analyses that included comparisons between the services offered by the Branch and the CNIB. Pat Hayward presented his report, “Audiobook Services to the Print-Handicapped Population in British Columbia,” to the Branch in September 1992. The report commenced with a summary of the services offered to print disabled patrons through BC’s public libraries, including mail delivery of resources, home delivery for patrons, and library pick-up.¹⁴⁵ This was followed with an analysis of a collections survey. Hayward found that although the majority of respondents indicated that they considered the collection to be of a good, very good, or excellent size and variety, others still felt that the selection was poor and that there was a lack of current publications.¹⁴⁶

The report also presents an examination of the collection and services available for print-disabled patrons at both a centralized urban library and a dispersed small town or rural library. The urban case looked at the Greater Victoria Public Library, which served 580 audiobook users in 1992 and had a department that was segregated but still close

¹⁴⁰ York, *A Study of Library Services for the Visually Impaired*, 3.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁴⁴ York, *A Study of Library Services for the Visually Impaired*, 56.

¹⁴⁵ Pat Hayward, *Audiobook services to the Print-Handicapped Population in British Columbia*, (Victoria, BC: The Public Library Services Branch, 1992), 35.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

to the main branch.¹⁴⁷ The titles were arranged so that patrons could browse the collection, and it was a highly visible service to anyone walking by its downtown Victoria location.¹⁴⁸ Patrons could phone the central audiobook division for recommendations, and the Victoria system organized pick up and drop off at five branches, as well as provided a mail service and home delivery.¹⁴⁹ User comments praised the library staff “for their help, pleasant manner, patience and friendliness.”¹⁵⁰ The collection consisted of 7400 audiobook titles with a circulation of approximately 2200 per month.¹⁵¹

The rural case looked at the Vancouver Island Regional Library, dispersed over thirty-eight branches located on the Island. It served 372 audio book users, most of which lived within commuting distance to a branch; several print disabled patrons were located in remote communities and received their materials from the system headquarters by mail.¹⁵² The system offered mail delivery, home delivery, and user pick-up. The collection consisted of 2900 audiobook titles with a circulation of approximately 623 per month.¹⁵³ Although it was housed in the Vancouver Island Regional Library headquarters, the majority of the collection was spread out across the branches. Branches that were aware of a print disabled population in their community kept audiobooks on hand, although space problems often limited the size of the collection kept at each branch.¹⁵⁴

Hayward’s report also presents a study of services and user overlap between the Branch and CNIB. According to Branch statistics in 1992, of the 4133 blind or visually impaired patrons who made use of BC’s public library services, approximately 1157 were also registered CNIB borrowers.¹⁵⁵ Of the sample group randomly chosen for Hayward’s study, 36% of the public library patrons were also registered with the CNIB and made use of the audiobook collection.¹⁵⁶ Another 38% were registered, but did not make use of the CNIB collection.

Through his study, Hayward found that users indicated that the Branch and CNIB both offered good audiobook services. However, Hayward notes that where the services

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 36. The Library Services Branch notes that not all public libraries in BC ask print disabled patrons if they also subscribe to the CNIB Library service, and so these libraries provided estimates for the report. As well, other libraries only take note of whether a patron is also using CNIB when they first register for alternate print resources/services. These libraries have no record of whether patrons may have since stopped using the CNIB service.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

differ is access: while the Branch's collection is available to users who are visually and physically impaired, the CNIB limits registration to legally blind persons.¹⁵⁷ Hayward also points out that although the CNIB is able to offer a larger and more varied collection because of its access to the Library of Congress collection, public libraries in BC are able to provide personalized service and a variety of delivery options.¹⁵⁸ Similarly to York's report, Hayward looks at the Library collections offered by public libraries and the CNIB as complimentary: "Audiobooks and talking books are expensive and not readily available for purchase. Very few of the current users would have access to them if the free library services of LSB and CNIB did not exist."¹⁵⁹

BC Public Library Services Branch and InterLINK

The Library Services Branch continued to produce audiobooks for BC public libraries and for sale through the 1990s and into the 2000s. In 2001, the Library Services branch became the Public Library Services Branch.¹⁶⁰ By the start of 2003, the Branch produced a minimum of 200 titles annually, and had a collection of approximately 12 000 titles.¹⁶¹ The Branch served about 6000 audiobook users, and on average about 41 books circulated per patron.¹⁶² Coordinated production with the CNIB continued, however the Branch now also worked with other Canadian audiobook producers.¹⁶³

In 2002, the provincial government decided to cancel funding for the Branch's audiobook production program.¹⁶⁴ Following an outcry from BC libraries and library patrons, the BC government offered a \$200 000 grant to the InterLINK Library Federation to continue to produce and supply audiobooks for the province.¹⁶⁵ The InterLINK federation, comprised of public libraries in the lower mainland, accepted the grant, which was to support production over an initial five-year period starting in 2003.¹⁶⁶ In addition to the grant, fundraising profits and funds from InterLINK federation libraries allowed the program to produce between 50 and 60 titles each year for the first three years of its operation.¹⁶⁷

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁶⁰ The Branch produces the public library statistics reports on an annual basis. Although an exact date for the name change was not located, the report produced in 2001 is the first report with their new name.

¹⁶¹ Canada, Public Library Services Branch, Province of British Columbia, *Audiobooks*, (Ottawa: Library and Archives of Canada, 2003), <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/accessinfo/005003-3012-10-2001-e.html>.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ Working Group to Define a National Network, *Opening the Book*, 10.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ Robert Clancy, *Business Review of Public Library InterLINK's B.C. Audiobooks Program*, (Vancouver, BC: Library Consulting Services, March 2006), 12.

¹⁶⁷ Working Group to Define a National Network, *Opening the Book*, 10.

By 2009, InterLINK's audiobook output slowed to 37 titles per year, after peaking in 2006 at 90 titles.¹⁶⁸ At this point, the program was under review and active just six months of the year.¹⁶⁹ Although it maintained a collection of approximately 15 000 audiobooks, not all were produced in-house; unabridged titles were also acquired commercially, through producers in Canada, the United States, and England.¹⁷⁰

In 2010, production ceased altogether. The Interlink board indicated its support for any initiatives that would assist in providing materials for the print-disabled but did not feel it could continue to fund production without substantial investment to update its production facilities and cover staff costs.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Rita Avigdor (Manager of Operations, Interlink), email message to Deb Thomas (Deputy Chief Librarian and Bob Prittie Metrotown Branch Manager, Burnaby Public Library), June 21, 2011.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ Canada, Initiative For Equitable Library Access, *Audiobook and eBook Publishing in Canada: Part III: Digitization and the Production of Digital Editions*, (Ottawa: Library and Archives of Canada, 2008), <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/iela/005002-2140-e.html>.

¹⁷¹ Rita Avigdor (Manager of Operations, Interlink), email message to Deb Thomas (Deputy Chief Librarian and Bob Prittie Metrotown Branch Manager, Burnaby Public Library), June 21, 2011.

Next Steps

This exploratory report presents the historical research collected over a four-month period on the history of services offered to people with print disabilities in Canada and BC. A closer examination of the development of BC programs by year may shed light on more day-to-day operational changes or strategies. However, by looking at main events or highlighting particular milestones, my intention was to provide an overview of the major themes, struggles, and successes found in the history of print disability services. Potential sources of information that were not exploited during this project include: the BC library federations, Canadian publishers, and non-profit organizations outside of the CNIB.

The BC library federations include: Public Library InterLINK; North West Library Federation; Kootenay Library Federation; North Coast Library Federation; North Central Library Federation; and the IslandLink Library Federation. Although the federations covering remote and rural areas of BC were contacted during the second half of the project, the relatively short notice did not provide them with enough time to survey and receive responses from member-libraries, or gather primary or secondary resources. It should be noted that the rural Library Federations have only been in existence for a short time and may not have a great deal of historical documentation already collected; the Kootenay Library Federation is the oldest and it was founded in 2006. As well, because the Public Library Services Branch has historically provided audiobook production and distribution to rural and remote communities in BC, any documentation collected from the federations may not be unique from the records kept by the Branch.

Nevertheless, the federations may act as intermediaries between the SPPD and individual libraries, or be in the best position to put the SPPD into contact with librarians and staff who are the most knowledgeable and/or interested in services to people with print disabilities in each library system. Out of these relationships, investigations into collections, equipment and training needs for alternate format services, such as the 2010 survey from the Branch, can be expanded upon and more widely promoted amongst BC libraries of all sizes.

The involvement of Canadian publishing houses in the development of alternate reading formats for print-disabled readers is another research area the SPPD may be interested in, if only to gain a better understanding of what formats publishers have adopted as the most economical and accessible. As well, a comparison between provincial production and commercial production may illuminate service gaps.

While this report focuses on the history and involvement of the CNIB, there are other private and non-profit organizations that helped shape both national and local services. Accordingly, the SPPD may also want to investigate the history of the Canadian Council for the Blind, and the Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians (formerly the National

Federation of the Blind: Advocates for Equality). Specifically, an examination of services they advocated for in the past, as well as their participation in the national discussion surrounding print disability services could provide a clearer picture of what the interim years, between major milestones, looked like. Additional successes, conflicts or struggles may also become more evident.

Conclusion

While this report by no means presents a conclusive look at the history of services to people with print disabilities in BC, it does recount some of the major events and milestones found both provincially and nationwide. From the examination presented here, collaboration is a theme woven throughout the narrative. However, if a national program is to be successful, it requires not only nationwide cooperation, but also federal funding; likewise, provincial initiatives within a national program require funding from the provincial government and the support of local libraries and organizations.

Mary Anne Epp, who has experience working with national organizations, such as the Canadian Braille Authority and the Canadian Association of Educational Resource Centres for Alternate Format Materials, and local programs, namely the British Columbia College and Institute Library Services, discusses collaborative alternate format programming and services in “Closing the 95 Percent Gap: Library Resource Sharing for People with Print Disabilities.” Epp states that: “to bridge the gap, some libraries and other service providers have successfully collaborated and have moved beyond their traditional organizational isolation to inform intersecting networks of complex relationships.”¹⁷² Resource sharing and co-operative programming should involve all institutions interested in providing information and services to print disabled persons, including: public and private educational institutions, public libraries, specialized national libraries, charitable institutions, private foundation libraries, format-specific institutions, and commercial sectors.¹⁷³

However, a successful print disability service network, whether it is provincial or national, will need to incorporate more than collection building, access and delivery; Epp argues that a network needs to proactively do more for print disabled persons if it is to succeed. Epp outlines:

They also provide the means and methods to produce and develop standards. They act as advocates for better legal support, cooperation with the publishing industry, and more enlightened public policy to improve the delivery of products. They collaborate to expand service eligibility, provide access to adaptive equipment, and train staff and users.¹⁷⁴

Throughout the history of services to people with print disabilities, there have been instances of organizations and/or library systems working together. As well, representatives from organizations and library systems across the country have participated in working groups and committees that have focused on how to best serve Canadians with print disabilities. But for the most part, this collaboration has been

¹⁷² Epp, “Closing the 95 Percent Gap,” 416.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 416-417.

limited to collection development or production; collaboration needs to happen across many service points, and involve funding for all participants from all government tiers.

Previous efforts to service print disabled communities in BC have been successful. Figure 3 in the fourth section of the report reveals that the CNIB was able to serve sixty-two patrons throughout BC during 1947, delivering 27 alternate format volumes per person. However, the number of people who would now like to use alternate format services, as well as the number of potential users, is much greater. The province is better able to meet the information needs of persons with print disabilities if all interested parties work together and receive funding together.

In February 2010, the BC Public Library Services Branch released the results from the *Survey of BC public library collections, services & facilities for persons with disabilities*, a province-wide survey held between December 2009 and January 2010. In total, 89 percent of BC public libraries responded. From the responses, over 500 000 volumes of alternate format materials were accounted for in the province.

The responses also revealed that only 35% of surveyed libraries had staff or staff hours dedicated to print-disabilities services, and half of the surveyed libraries (52 percent) reported that they provide assistive technology or adaptable workstations in the library. As well, 60 percent of respondents stated that their website was accessible, 21 percent answered that their website was not accessible, and 19 percent did not know.

Uncertainty surrounding accessibility was evident throughout the survey. 52 percent of respondents answered that they were only somewhat confident that “frontline staff and volunteers [were] aware of the collections and services that [their] library provides persons with disabilities.”¹⁷⁵ Near the end of the survey, 79 percent of respondents stated that their library staff needs more information and training about the print-disability services and alternate format collections available.

Needless to say, this unawareness of the existence and potential of services in libraries has had a negative effect on the programming made available for print-disabled community members. Only 29 percent of respondents (18 out of 63 surveyed libraries) stated that their library offered programs specifically designed for patrons with a disability, and just 13 percent accommodate patrons with disabilities in their regular programming.

Looking over the survey results, it quickly becomes evident that meeting the needs of print-disabled communities in BC will take more than timely alternate format production and distribution. Although age-appropriateness and interest level are still important

¹⁷⁵ Public Library Services Branch, *British Columbia Public Library Collections, Services and Facilities for Persons with Disabilities Survey Results* (Vancouver, BC: Province of British Columbia, February 2010), 4.

elements of creating and managing an alternate format collection, so much more is needed. If BC public libraries are interested in providing services and collections that are effective and meaningful, they must also provide training for librarians and library staff and ensure the library as a whole is an accessible and welcoming place for people of all abilities.

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