

The services for the blind and print disabled people in Hirakata City Library (Osaka)

Atsushi Hattori
(Hirakata City Central Library)

1. The services for print disabled people in the Hirakata City Library.

Hirakata City has a population of roughly four hundred thousand people and is located midway between Osaka and Kyoto.

The Hirakata City library is the main public library. There is one central library, seven library centers, 10 local neighborhood branch libraries and two book mobiles that help circulate books to 27 book stations. The services for print disabled users are mainly carried out at the Section of Services for the Print Disabled and Elderly People in the Central Library. The Central Library has five employees, myself blind, a deaf librarian, and three non-handicapped people. The services for users with print disabilities have been offered since 1973. Currently, we mainly provide services such as lending audio books and visual materials to deaf and hard-of-hearing people.

This presentation describes how actively the community library serves print disabled users and at the same time, explains how important it is to have librarians with the same print disabilities to realize the substantial services to those target people at the library.

The Hirakata City Library has the following services for users with print disabilities including the visual impairment.

1-1 Providing braille and audio books

There are 2,068 audio books (cassettes, CDs in DAISY format) and 3957 braille books in our library. We lend them to print disabled users, which total almost 100 blind and visually impaired people. Recently, braille books in general have not been frequently used and probably the same can be said in your library. Most users prefer audio books. But there are not enough audio books in our library for our active users. Therefore inter-library loans are carried out through the co-operation with other public libraries and also other libraries for the blind in Japan on a regular basis. We have two important tools to search audio and braille books on the internet. One of them is "NAIIV Net"*1. The other is the "National Union Catalog of Braille and Recorded Books"*2. We can obtain information on audio and braille books in libraries and institutions all over

Japan from these data-bases. Our libraries belong to the Kinki Library Network for the Visually Impaired. This association also collects audio and braille book catalogs from their members and gives the updated catalog information back to us. Therefore, we can make full use of these tools and the network to provide good services.

If the requested audio or braille book can not be found, we produce it*3. Several narrators and braille translators are registered at our library. With their help we can produce materials for print disabled people. In addition, we also purchase audio materials produced by specialized publishers. Such audio materials as well as those produced at our library are lent to people with sickness as well as the elderly.

1-2 Lending large print books

Some publishers sell large print books in Japan, and our library has actively collected almost 2,000 titles. These books are used by elderly people and the partially sighted.

1-3 Face to face reading service

This service provides a narrator to read books for print disabled users. The narrator reads the book that the user requests at the library. One reading service is two hours, and the user has to make a reservation for the reading in advance. Print disabled people are able to use this service at any of 10 service access points including the central library. There are currently 18 users that access this service, most being visually impaired. This service is carried out almost 600 times each year. The users come to the nearest library service point from their homes by themselves or with the use of the guide service system provided by the public administration.

1-4 Providing visual materials

Visual materials such as videos and DVDs are sold by some publishers. Some of them have closed captions for the deaf and audio descriptions for the blind. These are mostly entertainment and animation movies produced in Japan and foreign countries. We still do not have enough of these materials, but recently we have been actively trying to obtain more, so the numbers of such materials have been increasing little by little.

This January we held an event to run a film with closed captions and audio descriptions so that deaf and blind people could enjoy the same film together.

We also try to produce visual materials with closed captions and or sign language for deaf and hard-of-hearing people, though it is at a slow pace.

1-5 Services for deaf and hard-of-hearing people

The Hirakata City Library has services for the deaf and the hard-of-hearing providing visual materials.

One of the services provided is to organize a story-telling session with sign language for children. It is held on the fourth Saturday of every month. A deaf librarian and other hearing staff members read picture books and play small games using sign language. This is a story-telling session that both deaf children and audible children can enjoy together.

Another service is book-talk with sign language for deaf and hard-of-hearing adults. This service is held three times a year. The staff tells old stories about local history as well as talks about social issues or politics, the staff also introduces books related to these themes using sign language. This service is handled by a deaf librarian and other hearing staff members who can use sign language.

This type of local library is truly something familiar to users in the community, it considers the need of each user, and provides detailed services for print disabled people. There are many service access points in Hirakata and therefore it is possible for users to easily realize services such as face to face reading based on the assumption that users come to a library.

2. The meaning of disabled people working at the library

In our section, we employ two librarians one deaf and one blind*4. Together we have the ability to freely add our own personal ideas and plans related to the services for print disabled people. This is a great advantage for the users of the Hirakata City Library in providing good services.

Two deaf librarians work in our section including one in another area. It is not clear how many deaf and hard-of-hearing people work at the public libraries in Japan. But regrettably, the number is still very small. Other result their work and other people's support for such disabled people at their workplace are paid much attention.

On the other hand, the number of blind librarians working at the public libraries in Japan is 22, including me. We take an active role in our own libraries daily operations. We have our own association*5 to study common issues and to exchange information about our work with each other.

If the print disabled people work at the library, the users who have the same disabilities can comfortably visit the library. In addition to this, our colleagues understand the characteristic of his/her disability very much and they can treat

disabled people naturally. Our disabled librarians make an effort to acquire up to date knowledge and the latest technology. Consequently, the quality of services is much better at a library staffed by print disabled people.

Therefore it is easy to understand that it is important for print disabled people to work together with other non-disabled people to promote services for the print disabled in public libraries.

Notes

*1 NAIIV Net is a membership network service. This data-base is run by the National Association of Institutions of Information Service for Visually Impaired Persons. This association consists of almost 90 libraries for the blind in Japan. Some public libraries also participate in NAIIV Net to provide services for the blind. Many blind individuals are also members of this network and they access it with their PCs directly. They can search audio book (cassettes and CDs in DAISY format) catalog (260098 titles) and braille book catalog (187841 titles). In addition to this, NAIIV Net provides braille data (102912 titles). If blind people find out about the braille data of their requested book using this network, they are able to download it to their PC and read it by using a voice synthesizer or a braille display at once.

Members (library for the blind): 86

Members (public library): 47

Members (individual): 5628

*2 National Union Catalog of Braille and Recorded Books is not run by membership. Anyone can make use of it through the internet. This data-base is run by the National Diet Library. We can also search audio and braille book catalogs on the website like the NAIIV Net.

Audio book catalog (cassettes and CDs in DAISY format): 284,160 titles

Braille book catalog: 129,565 titles

*3 Libraries for the blind can produce audio books to lend to blind people without permission from the author under the law of copyright in Japan. However public libraries have to get permission of the author to do so. The Hirakata City Library handles the procedure to lend audio books to blind and print disabled people.

*4 I, a blind librarian, mainly handle the work of producing audio books. For example: as some Kanji (Chinese characters) have several different readings I must select the

appropriate one, and also change the visual expressions such as diagrams, photos, illustrations into text alternatives so that blind people can understand them by listening. And I also coordinate overall services for blind and visually disabled people.

A deaf librarian handles the work mainly about the purchase and production of visual materials. Our library has some collaborators registered as editors to produce visual materials with closed captions. The deaf librarian instructs the editors how to use the PC and software related to the production of visual materials. And he also coordinates overall services for the deaf and hard-of-hearing.

*5 Association of Visually impaired Librarian of Public Library (Nagoya-kai)

<http://homepage2.nifty.com/at-htri/nag-intro.htm>

(All numbers in the texts and notes are presented as of the 1st April in 2009)