



Guidelines for Library Service to Braille Users

Background

In November 1994 the Intergovernmental Council of the UNESCO General Information Program approved the new revised text of the UNESCO Manifesto for Public Libraries. The Manifesto was developed in co-operation with the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) Section of Public Libraries. The Manifesto proclaims two significant statements:

"The Public Library, the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups.

This Manifesto proclaims UNESCO's beliefs in the public library as a living force for education, culture and information, and as an essential agent for the fostering of peace and spiritual welfare through the minds of men and women.

...The services of the public library are provided on the basis of equality of access for all... specific services and materials must be provided for those users who cannot, for whatever reason, use the regular services and materials, for example linguistic minorities, people with disabilities or people in hospital or prison."

Among the missions of the public library identified in the Manifesto is the development of information and computer literacy skills and the support for and initiation of literacy activities and programmes. The Manifesto urges decision-makers at national and local levels and the library community "at large and around the world" to implement the principles of the Manifesto. UNESCO has endorsed braille as the only tactile script parallel to print.

Public libraries have a fundamental responsibility to braille users and providing access to braille books and services is an integral part of the purpose and missions of libraries as supported by both IFLA and UNESCO.

Society accepts the strong association between literacy, education and individual economic and social well being as well as the prosperity of a community, its neighbourhoods and nation. Surveys of blind and visually impaired people conducted in North America and Europe by organisations such as The Swedish Library of Talking Books and Braille, the Washington State Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (WSLBPH) and the CNIB Library for the Blind reinforce what is accepted amongst the general population i.e. that strong reading or literacy skills enhances employability, opportunities for higher learning, and independence. In all three studies those who learned braille as their original reading medium and used it extensively were more likely to develop positive reading habits, were employed at higher rates and most likely to acquire graduate degrees. Neither technology nor taped recordings are acceptable substitutes for an ability to read and write in both the sighted and blind communities. The foundation of literacy in both communities is the ability to read and write print or

braille. The following principles are intended to extend the spirit of the Manifesto to all types of library service for blind and visually impaired users where literacy and access are critical factors in empowering those unable to use print.

Principles of Library Service to Braille Users

Braille is the parallel to print as the reading medium for blind persons.

Libraries should be willing to promote the importance of braille and facilitate access to this resource for members of the community who are blind. The following key principles are fundamental to all types of libraries where the service can be accessed by a blind member of the community. Libraries should:

1. Provide seamless access to braille collections through whatever means are appropriate to their countries such as cooperative endeavours, referrals to sources of supply, interlibrary loans or resource sharing with other libraries or the development of collections as applicable.
2. Encourage the inclusion of all braille holdings in National or Regional catalogues as appropriate.
3. Promote the inclusion of braille in ongoing literacy programs.
4. Include braille or print braille versions of books in library programs such as story hours, literary discussions in order to encourage young blind children to read along with their sighted peers.
5. Include braille collections in their catalogues of library holdings or where technically feasible link to other library braille holdings.
6. Educate Library board and staff regarding braille as the means of literacy for blind and visually impaired persons.
7. Use braille as a medium for communicating with blind and visually impaired braille readers within the community.
8. Promote the availability of library services in braille in the community served.

Guidelines for Developing Braille Collections

The following guidelines are the minimum that are required for adding or accessing braille books or information from other networks and sources for use by a braille reader in the community:

1. The accurate reproduction of the contents of a published print edition of a work shall be a foremost requirement of books or materials transcribed to any medium that results in a braille product such as hardcopy braille or electronic disk.
2. When content such as graphics or illustrations or advertising for magazines have been omitted there should be a statement to that effect.
3. Braille books shall conform fully with the currently applicable codes as approved by the recognised standard setting body in each country.

4. Each Braille volume should include the following:
 - A title page including the complete title, the authors name, the number of braille volumes, which make up the title and the pages in each volume.
 - Statement of copyright date and copyright holder as it appears in the print version.
 - The publisher's description of the book and information about the author from the book jacket.
 - Magazines should include on the front cover the title, month and year of issue; volume and issue number.
 - Magazines should include the names of main editors.
 - Editorial address of the commercial magazines
5. Tactile illustrations should be encouraged in the provision of information.
6. Packaging of hardcopy braille shall be of a quality to protect the braille book from damage in the mail or during transportation and should be able to be easily repackaged by the user for return.
7. Labeling should be provided in both print and braille on the cover.
8. National copyright requirements and legislation must be observed.
9. Bindings should be appropriate to support the book and protect the height of braille dots while safeguarding pages and preventing them from being easily ripped out. Books should be able to lie flat for reading.

Approved by IFLA Professional Board, August 1998.