Tip Sheet 13
Library Accessibility – What You Need to Know
Library Staff with Disabilities

Overview

People who have disabilities are part of our community, so it follows that people with disabilities are part of the library staff. The disabilities can be congenital, acquired through an accident, or develop as part of the aging process. In today's technologically advanced world, there is no reason why accommodations can not be made to enable people with disabilities to work within the library community.

Screen readers and text enlargement software programs enable persons with visual disabilities to access on-line information; ergonomically designed furniture enables persons with lumbar disabilities to work in relative comfort; ergonomically designed keyboards and large grip pens enable persons with disabling diseases such as arthritis and carpal tunnel syndrome to work with greater ease; good lighting, correctly adjusted monitor displays and the elimination of glare enables staff with declining vision to continue to work efficiently throughout the workday; people who are deaf benefit from good lighting and software programs which give the user a visual cue instead of auditory alerts when programs change.

Job sharing is a concept which helps people with disabilities get through the work week and contribute to the community. For example, a person may have a disability which may prevent them for lifting heavy loads; pairing this person with another staff member who can do the lifting when needed is a solution and a reasonable accommodation.

Administrators can assure that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) mandates and rules set forward by Section 508 regarding electronic information are adhered to for staff in the same manner as they are for the general public. Staff should be aware of their rights as well as those of their co-workers and assist whenever possible to allow the library staff to be a reflection of the community while rendering the best service as possible.

Tips

The tips listed below are meant for managers, staff with disabilities and staff who are currently not experiencing a disability but work with staff who do. For tips relating to specific disabilities see the tip sheet on that topic. In general it is important to/for:

- Assure that good lightening is installed in all work and break areas including stack and storage areas. Glare should be eliminated.
- Know what types of ergonomic equipment and devices could assist staff to perform daily tasks and assure they are available. Staff with disabilities should not hesitate to ask for equipment which will help them continue to work.
- Request that a staff person from the Depart of Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) visit the work site and make recommendations for an workplace which is enables staff to perform tasks.
- Acquire electronic media which staff needing assistive technology can access. As library staff ages and vision declines the need to enlarge text will increase, adherence to Section 508 Guidelines is essential.
- Conduct and attend work shops where disabilities can be explained, allowing time for staff to dialogue.
- Allow staff to job share. All staff should understand the importance of job sharing and be willing to participate in job sharing, each contributing his or her strengths to the task at hand.
- Allow staff (if comfortable in this role) to explain his or her special needs.
- Allow staff to ask co-workers: "How can I help?" without invading a co-workers privacy. If told, "I do not need any help" respect the decision.

Resources

Job Accommodations Network
http://www.jan.wvu.edu/

Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA)
http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/rsa/index.html

U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration
http://osha.gov/

Working With a Disability
http://careerplanning.about.com/cs/personalissues/a/disability_act.htm and
http://careerplanning.about.com/b/2007/08/24/working-with-a-disability.htm

This Tipsheet is one in a series developed by the Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies, a division of the American Library Association. See: www.ascla.ala.org.