

Tip Sheet 4
Library Accessibility: What You Need to Know:
Patrons with Mobility Impairments

Background

Individuals with mobility disorders or impairments may be limited in their ability to move, breathe, speak, have reduced use (or no use) of certain muscle groups, or a combination of the traits mentioned. The person may have had the disability since birth, or it may have acquired it as a result an accident, and illness, or the aging process. A mobility disorder or impairment may necessitate the use of adaptive equipment and technologies, such as a cane, crutches, walker, wheelchair, scooter, large grips pen, a grabber, joysticks, or one of many other assistive devices. Many patrons will have some of the adaptive equipment wherever they go, others will need to have it available to them.

(Adapted in part from “Those of Us Dislabeled: A Guide to Awareness and Understanding,” University of Kentucky Human Development Institute, Cooperative Extension Service, 2000.)

Tips

To address the needs of people with mobility impairments be aware that each person will have his or her unique needs and is the best person to tell staff how they can best assist. It is important that:

- Staff monitor workstations, tables and self check stations designated for people who use wheelchairs, as well as aisle ways and other public areas for obstructions and tripping hazards.
- Displays do not impede access. Hand railings should be free from decorations
- The library have an area where staff and a patron can sit to talk at eye-level with good lightening.
- The library provide tables that are accessible to people who use wheelchairs on each floor of the library and in both adult and children’s sections.
- Signage is large, bright and have high contrast. It should be mounted at a level which can be seen by children and adults in wheelchairs.
- Large-print books are located in an area where there is ready access to seating.
- All staff know the library’s evacuation plans and procedures for helping people with mobility disabilities during emergencies. Staff should know where any special emergency equipment is stored as well as how to safely use the equipment.

- Staff are aware that items such as magnifying glasses, bags, baskets, book props, page turners, signature guides, pens with large grips and grabbers are available, and where they are located.
- Staff available when needed and requested by the patron to retrieve books and other resources; or to perform tasks such as photocopying, lifting heavy books and carrying the items to the study area. If the library's rules permit, and the patron requests help to the bus or to his or her car, staff could assist with carrying items.
- Staff know what assistive technology is available at the library, how it is designed to help individuals, how to use assistive technology (AT) and can instruct patrons in its use. If there is a designated AT specialist and trainer within the library system all staff should know who the person is and how to contact him or her.
- Adaptive equipment and AT services are identified in a noticeable but unobtrusive way. For example, instead of identifying an AT workstation with a large sign, use a running screen saver with a simple message (e.g., "This computer is equipped with adaptive technology; you may be asked to move if a patron requires these services.").
- Staff ask, "What's the best way I can help you?" when a patron requests assistance. Let the person guide you.
- Assistance is offered, but wait for acceptance; don't be afraid to ask questions if you aren't sure about something.
- Privacy is respected. Do not ask questions about his or her disability or its cause.
- It is understood that a disabled person's adaptive equipment is an extension of his or her body—this is true for adults and children. Ask for the person's permission before touching or moving the equipment.
- A normal tone of voice is used when extending a verbal welcome. Do not raise your voice unless requested.
- To act naturally. It's all right to use phrases like "I am going for a walk" or "I have to run." People with mobility impairments say these things too.
- Try to make sure that you are on eye-level when talking to a person in a wheelchair for more than a minute.
- Always speak directly to a person with a disability—not the person's companion, aide, or sign-language interpreter.
- Offer a seat to people with crutches, canes, or walkers when they are waiting.

Assistive Devices and Technologies are important to have within the library for patrons use. If funding permits, it is also important to develop a circulating collection of some items, which allows people on a limited budget to try items before they buy them. Some items that are helpful to have in the library include are those that help people with disabilities have the same access as those with out. Some of these items include:

- Alternative pointing devices: trackballs, touchpads, touch screens, hand-held pointing devices, or joysticks

- One or more of the following: key guards and alternative, wireless, large-print, or ergonomic keyboards, voice input
- An adjustable height workstation with chairs that provide good support and arm rests, and adjustable keyboard tray.
- Non-tilting chairs for people with walkers and other assistive mobility aides
Table area large enough to lay down crutches and canes

- Grabbers to allow patrons with limited range to reach items that are high as well as low.
- Tote bags designed for use with walkers
- Page turners
- Baskets
- Child-size backpacks
- Swivel seat cushions
- Balance bars at counters
- Adjustable tables or bed risers to change table heights
- Different styles of pens

Resources

National Assistive Technology Research Institute Assistive Technology Planner
<http://natri.uky.edu/atPlannermenu.html>

JAN Accommodation Ideas
<http://www.jan.wvu.edu/media/ideas.html>

Library Access
<http://www.librarycouncil.ie/policies/Library%20Access.pdf>

ABLEDATA
<http://www.abledata.com>

ADA Home Page: Information and Technical Assistance on the Americans with Disabilities Act
<http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/adahom1.htm>

Web Accessibility Initiative <http://www.w3.org/WAI/>

