

Project ENABLE Webinar Transcript: Public & Academic Librarians

Part 1: Central Issues and Strategies for Public and Academic Librarians to Provide Inclusive Services

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Myhill: Good afternoon, welcome to the Central Issues and Strategies for Public and Academic Librarians to Provide Inclusive Services webinar. My name is William Myhill and I will be facilitating today's webinar. This webinar is presented by Project Enable - a collaboration of Syracuse University's Center for Digital Literacy and the Burton Blatt Institute. It is funded by the Institute for Museum and Library Services.

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We are now ready to begin.

Today, we are pleased to present Central Issues and Strategies for Public and Academic Librarians to Provide Inclusive Services. The first of two free webinars to learn about creating inclusive library services and programs to effectively serve all patrons with disabilities. This webinar will address the issues of identifying the library needs of diverse patrons with disabilities, evaluating library accessibility, developing inclusive library collections, applying Universal Design principles and Universal Design for learning strategies to library programs and services. And selecting and using assistive technologies.

Our panelists today are Adina Mulliken, assistant professor and social work librarian at CUNY Hunter College in New York City. Mark Allnatt, head of Onondaga Public Library's STAR program, here in Syracuse, New York, Dan Weiss, director of the Fanwood New Jersey Memorial Library, and Meg Kolaya, director of the Scotch Plains New Jersey Public Library in New Jersey. We begin with Adina. Adina Mulliken, as stated, is an assistant professor of social work librarian in the City of New York's Hunter College. Previously served as librarian for social work in allied fields at Syracuse University, where she began to develop her knowledge of web accessibility. A library assistant in the ethnic studies center at Keen University and began her career as an employment consultant of people with disabilities in northeast Philadelphia.

Welcome, Adina.

Mulliken: Hi, thanks, William.

Myhill: You are welcome to go ahead, Adina.

Mulliken: Okay, well, I am interested in talking about web accessibility, which is part of accessibility and I think some of the other librarians are going to talk about other topics. I first started learning about web accessibility back in 2006 when I was working at a reference desk and a blind graduate student started coming to the reference desk and asking for help. A lot of librarians spent some time with her, and I think that we all learned something from her. Particularly that it's not easy to learn how to use a screen reader software on the fly while you're answering a reference question. That's a little bit of an understatement.

She was from a country where she was using a different screen reader than what was available, in a different language and also was used to managing human readers a little bit more than working with the screen reader. And so, the disability office at that school eventually hired a trainer to give her some help with the screen reader. I kind of kept getting to know her because I knew she wasn't going to be getting reference help from the screen reader trainer. So we worked on using the library catalog with her Java screen reader. It was also about that time that I heard a presentation at ALA about web accessibility and found out that that might be part of the reason why we're having trouble using the library catalog- that maybe it was the interface itself, instead of just our screen reader knowledge.

So from there I kept learning. I'm sure that I learned more from the student than she learned from me. I think that as librarians we're in an especially good position to work on the issue of web accessibility to make websites and our library resources more accessible to students with disabilities, partly because we're one of the professions that interact directly with users, as well as some technology. So I think that we're in a good position for that.

And I think that it has a big impact on students who are blind because I've worked with students who are blind, but students with disabilities in general, and I think in academia, the statistics of students who are blind that graduate with Bachelors degrees is much lower than students without disabilities and I have heard a number of blind users say they think that web accessibility and digital accessibility is a big factor in that. So I think librarians have a really good position to bring up issues and to learn about issues related to web accessibility.

Would you like me to continue, William? I have answers to some of the questions that you had suggested I talk about.

Myhill: Please, go right ahead, Adina.

Mulliken: Okay. So, you asked how much an academic librarian needs to know about web accessibility. I think that that's something that we're thinking about. We're figuring it out as it goes along. I think systems librarians are likely to know more about coding, particularly the coding standards for web accessibility, which the most common standards that it seems universities are adopting these days are the World Wide Web Consortiums, WCAG 2.0 web accessibility standards and so I think that most librarians these days are posting subject guides or some kind of webpages, even if we're not web developers. We're all doing e-mail and web word documents and I think there's some basics to web accessibility that are important for everybody. Things like how to use headings, how to add descriptions of pictures, how to tell if a PDF is accessible. Knowing to plan some time to add captioning if you're creating a video and some audio description.

I think there's some things that maybe all librarians will learn about web accessibility and the thing that I guess I have more questions about is about collection development because generally, collection development librarians are not web developers. We're not in a position to be able to do some in depth testing of the electronic resources we're buying for accessibility. I'm not really sure what might end up happening with that, but I think maybe the same as with copyright and institution managers and other things that a few librarians develop a little more expertise and can support other people in the library, as far as that goes. I have some examples of web accessibility here, I thought it might be helpful to see some concrete examples. I'll share my screen here and show you that.

[Pause]

Okay, I'm going to pull up the PDF here. One of the steps to making PDFs accessible is optical character recognition or OCR. What OCR does is make it so that the screen reader, text to speech adaptive technology can read the PDF out loud right away. People who are blind and often some people with learning disabilities use text to speech software. JAWS is the most common screen reader used in this country and there are other screen readers used by blind people and the Kurzweil 3000 is some adaptive technology used by people who have learning disabilities to read articles out loud.

And so, I'll show here, for most users, it's possible to highlight a line of text or an individual word if the PDF is OCR. But that's kind of a quick easy way to tell whether or not the PDF has had that optical character recognition done.

Now, I'll pull up another PDF where it wasn't done. For sighted users you could see that when I try to highlight a word, it's like highlighting a whole big box on the screen, or sometimes depending on how I click, it highlights the whole PDF instead of letting me highlight an individual word. This PDF I have up at the moment is a pretty complicated form which there are more steps that need to be done in addition to the OCR to make the PDF accessible, particularly forms. I think that it's easier to sort of show part of those additional steps, I call the additional steps tagging, but it's easier to show how that works in a Word document.

Jumping over to a Word document... and I should have said also, for people who are not mouse users with text-to-speech software, it can give you an idea of whether the PDF is OCR-ed. Now I'm in a Word document here and the title is using JAWS 14 with Proquest Plug-in for ref works. And it has a bunch of headings down the page, things I can visually see are sections of the page. So you could imagine, if you're a blind screen reader user and got to this page and started with a screen reader user at the beginning and you knew you wanted the part that's highlighted here about finding folders, it would take quite a while for the screen reader to read through all the text at the beginning to get down there. Screen reader users can jump quickly to the parts of the page, but the person who creates the page designates its headings. And all you have to do, if you want to do that is highlight the part that you want to make into a heading - like that- and instead of using the bold or the formatting options on the font section of the home ribbon, you can go to the styles section of the ribbon here and click on headings. There's heading level one, heading level two, it can go all the way to heading level six, but I'm going to click on heading level two. If you're a keyboard user, instead of using the mouse, the way you could do it is hit ALT to get to the ribbon and I'm already on the home ribbon, but I'll hit H and then you could hit L to jump to the styles part of the home ribbon. And if you're sighted, you could see that when I hit ALT it shows me the letters so I don't have to remember all these letters. And then you can tab around and get to the different headings, whatever you want to use. So now, if you're a screen reader user, especially with the JAWS screen reader, you'd use the letter H, and it would quickly jump you down to the headings. I click on this page and there's one for finding folders.

Another thing that's really nice about the headings, and I'm kind of addicted to using these all the time myself, even when I'm just taking notes- you can go to the view ribbon, hit W for the view ribbon, and you can go to navigation pane and click the checkbox for navigation pane with your mouse or you could use K if you're a keyboard user. And it brings up like a link to table of contents on the left side of the screen. So if you have a long document, you could quickly jump through to the headings that are farther down the page that you can't see. If I wanted to get to the part about previewing citations here, I could click the link and it jumps me down to the next page and I can a lot more quickly get through the document.

One of the things about accessibility is that they may be especially critical for people who are blind, but they're useful for a lot of users. I thought I would also mention, in addition to some of those concrete aspects of web accessibility that I wanted to show, there are examples- and I think it's a little trickier for libraries- accessibility of our subscription resources. It's not something that one librarian or one library can easily influence.

I think it's becoming more common that university administrations and library administrations are aware of the need to put accessibility statements into our license agreements and so that's maybe becoming easier for librarians as we have more support for moving ahead on that, although it's definitely not something that all our vendors are likely to agree to, some of them still say that they're web accessible. Alexander Street Press, for example, and a lot of the streaming video databases are not screen reader accessible, they acknowledge you can't get to the play button and stuff with the screen reader.

I think this is kind of an unusual situation, there's competition to some extent. Most of the time there's only one social services abstract database and you can't buy that from different vendors, so we don't have a choice if the vendor's accessible or not, but there's a streaming video, they're called Canopy, and I've seen that their player is keyboard accessible, at least. So maybe in some situations there will end up being some market competition for accessibility. I don't know how that will end up moving forward as far as accessibility of our databases, but I'm excited about a new webpage that I found out is available, just a couple weeks ago. I'm going to show that on my screen here.

This a website that was developed a few years ago, and it's gone through various iterations, mostly built by Deborah Wiley Huff, who had a group of us discussing it, but she did the work of building this Libraries for Universal Accessibility website. Just a couple weeks ago, a librarian from the University of Kentucky named Laura Delancey [phonetic], got this page put together. I think she had a lot of people working with her too, but it's a VPAT repository. You can see, I hope there are a lot of library vendors listed here and she and some other people contacted the vendors and got permission to link to their Voluntary Product Accessibility Template. That's what VPAT stands for. And also, if the vendor has some kind of statement about accessibility available, she linked to those as well. I hope that that's going to be a nice centralized place that librarians can go and learn a little bit about the accessibility of different vendors.

One of the challenges with the VPAT statements is it's a standardized form that vendors fill out to say how well they meet various accessibility criteria. The person who's reading the form needs to understand something about accessibility to have a good understanding of what the form means. That's always kind of tricky, but I think it gives you at least some idea, no matter how familiar you are with web accessibility and it's a step in the right direction.

Another thing I wanted to mention is that the librarian from the University of Kentucky, Lauren Delancy [phonetic] is coming out with an article in Library High Tech in I think January. What she did is she evaluated the vendor's voluntary product accessibility templates for accuracy. She had some interesting results. She found 19.6%, I think, if I remember right, in what they've reported, that report being fully compliant with 64% of the applicable VPAT items. She sent me the abstract here. I think it'll be an interesting article to read and it's good to keep in mind that there are few steps to go, still, here, before these vendors are going to be accessible, but I think checking resources like this to see how accessible the vendors say they are is one good step to take and always asking the vendor can be helpful to at least let them know your library is concerned about accessibility.

Myhill: Adina, this is really a fantastic start to our discussion today. I'd like to make an opportunity for people to raise some questions if they have them now and also to prepare to move on to our second speaker, but Adina, do you have any remarks to wrap up before we move on and then begin to introduce some discussion?

Mulliken: I think that's most of what I wanted to say. I also just wanted to point out, I tend to talk a lot about accessibility of vendors. But I think a lot of the blind users I work with seem to particularly be concerned with accessibility of PDF. So I think that's another issue where maybe in some ways, it's easier for librarians to, to have an impact, because that's something that, in some libraries, they have a

librarian who's doing some work in house with making PDFs accessible, and that can sometimes speed things up compared to something where a library book needs to be scanned at the disability office or that kind of thing. So, I think that's pretty much what I wanted to talk about.

Myhill: Thank you, Adina.

In mentioning the accessibility of the PDFs, I may have missed it, I apologize, but with regards to conducting the OCR, Adobe Pro does offer this functionality to actually make the conversions. I know you're aware of that, but it does require having a more expensive version of Adobe. But oftentimes people have purchased the more expensive version and have access to it and don't even know that they do.

Mulliken: Yeah, I found that too. A lot of schools have access to a site license or something like that. I think last time I looked, it cost about \$70 or \$80 so it's not as expensive as some applications.

Myhill: If you looking at your Adobe application, and you look under the Tools bar, you'll be able to see if you have that option, already in your software that would allow you to create the readable text. Something for you to look at. Again, thank you Adina. For everybody, this is the beginning of our discussion today. We thank Adina for bringing this content to our awareness and for introducing us to these ideas and some of the ways we can navigate around accessibility issues.

We're going to now turn to Mark Allnatt. Now Mark Allnatt is head of the Onondaga County public library's STAR or Special Technologies and Adaptive Resources program, which provides library services to people with disabilities. He's been developing the STAR program since 1995. When after eight years in the local history department, a degenerative eye disease took his sight. Previously Mark held internships in the national archives at the State University of New York's Binghamton Special Collections Library and Historical Society Museum in Jamestown New York.

Welcome, Mark, please go ahead.

Allnatt: Thank you, William, and I'm glad to be here today. I have a slide presentation to go along with my talks. I have a lot of specific information I wanted to communicate and can you tell me, do we have the slides up at this time?

Myhill: Yes, it's all ready to go.

Allnatt: Beautiful. I will try to read you these and speak slowly and clearly, but if I make an error, please correct me. We're basically going to answer six questions about accessibility to digital information for patrons, especially in the public library, but much of this applies to academic as well.

So if we could have slide two. It asks the question, what common barriers do public library patrons with disabilities encounter? And for digital information, I've identified three main types of obstacles.

One, the individual does not have adequate functionality in one of their senses, (sight, hearing, touch) or the cognitive processing necessary to access a digital resource without enhancement by an assistive technology. In other words, the resource as it was designed to be accessed by individuals is not accessible to the

person with disabilities. So that's obstacle number one.

Slide three continues with a second barrier which is that the digital resource was constructed in such a way that no present assistive technologies can adequately access the information. And thanks to Adina for talking about PDFs. E-books using that format is one of the examples I was speaking of. It doesn't matter what technology you purchase, necessarily or how hard you try, some of them just cannot access the resources. So that's an unfortunate barrier that we need to address.

Slide four says the third common barrier people run into is the resource is accessible through assistive technologies, but is so complex or inadequately structured that the individual becomes overwhelmed with the quantity of information and cannot locate the specific content desired. Hence Adina's example about putting headings in is very relevant. If there's just too much information, it becomes difficult for people to find the specific information that they're looking for. And so, they get frustrated.

If we can move to slide five, we have our next question. What role do patrons with disabilities play or need to play in removing barriers to library access? And I think this is an important question, because it emphasizes the philosophy that the person with a disability does have a responsibility. Most individuals that I've worked with want to learn how to access information themselves. So...they need to take some responsibility for that as a student, as well as a patron. I think public libraries sometimes make the mistake of treating people with disabilities as a patient that needs to be taken care of, instead of a student that wants to learn. But in order to make that happen, the person with the disability needs to do the following, which is learn to use the assistive technology appropriate to their need. We have a few basic examples here. Screen magnifiers is one type that people with low vision or learning disabilities can use, screen readers, as we've heard about, for more severe vision loss and learning disabilities and braille output for individuals that may have both vision and hearing loss or just need the tactile input from a refreshable braille display, are three of the main types.

If we move to slide six, we see the second slide, patron roles. This one, I've said, they need to take advantage of digital resources prepared specifically for their access. And here are three wonderful ones that are available. Bookshare.org is available for accessible e-books. They have over 300,000 titles last time I checked. The talking book braille and audio reading downloads website is at NLSBARD.LOC.gov. We have a lot of people coming into the library to use our internet connections to download digital books from there. And the third site is learningally.org for accessible textbooks. This organization used to be recordings for the blind and dyslexic. And about two thirds of their holdings are actually textbooks, I believe, are from the fourth grade through college and professional level materials.

Okay moving right along. Go to slide seven, we have the third role that the patrons need to assume for their own behalf. That is to advocate for well-constructed and/or more user-friendly interfaces. I have two examples here, one is that mobile apps, which are becoming popular, tend to have about 25% or less of the links and textual content that's on a full online catalogue website or library homepage. And we have Amazon.com, the full website has 75 text links. The accessible site has only 18. I'll give you the address in just a moment, but the

reason there is an accessible Amazon site is because there was a structured settlement reached between the National Federation of the Blind and Amazon back around 2007, 2008, where Amazon agreed, OK, we will provide a less complex website for people with disabilities to interact on. And the address for that is Amazon.com/gp/aw/h.html. So that, that's an example that took advocacy to make happen.

Moving on to slide eight. We asked the question, how do you define assistive technology? I've taken the definition from section 3 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998. And I wanted to use the definition, partly because I like it and partly because I think most librarians are aware of the ADA. But we may not have heard about the Tech Act of 1998, which is also very important.

So if we can switch to slide nine, we'll see how that is defined. It says that assistive technology is an item, piece of equipment or product system whether acquired commercially or off the shelf, modified or customized that's used to increase, maintain or improve the functional capabilities of a person with a disability. And I like this- this is a government definition that has three positive words, improve, functional, capabilities. I think that puts a very positive spin on the whole aspect of it.

So...slide ten, we find what are some common types of assistive technology used to access digital resources? We've already been talking about these. Screen magnification is one category and when we say magnification, these really include many more features than simply enlarging the print as Adina already demonstrated. You can highlight, you can change the foreground and background colors or color contrast. Some of these have screen-reading capabilities, they have location features built in, if you're having trouble finding the cursor on the screen- they're really very feature-rich programs. We have screen reading programs and text to speech. Again, a screen reader uses text to speech to turn the text into audio via a synthetic speech engine, but that's only half of its value. The other half is providing the navigation controls, the ability to zero in on a specific piece of information. I laugh sometimes when I hear "this program, will read everything on the screen." I think, that's great, but I don't really want to read everything on the screen, I would like to find the fact I'm looking for and then read me that piece of information.

Speech recognition software with microphones is another type if the individual can't use their hands and they need to talk to the computer and tell it what to do. Then we have refreshable braille displays for individuals that need the tactile input.

So, the next three slides, if we could switch to slide eleven, are some examples of sources. If you're familiar with this technology, hopefully you'll find something new, but if it's new to you, I'd just encourage you to get a feel for the landscape and realize this is not a take it or leave it world anymore, and if you have resources, or don't have resources, you have a lot of options. Just kind of take in the fact that there's a lot of choices available for people, a lot more than there used to be.

So, on slide eleven, we have screen magnification software, Microsoft magnifier comes with the Windows Operating System, and zoom comes with the Mac Operating System. So, if you have one of these systems on your computer, you

already have an option that you can start with. Then, there are free products, and I've given you a site that lists over 50 screen magnifiers for download. The address to that, if you go to this website, click the link for downloads, it is...www.magnifiers.org/index.php. If you go there, you can find a number of choices available to you.

If we go to slide 12, we have the deluxe, as I call them, screen magnification products. Deluxe means that it's going to cost you more, but also that it has more features and so, we have a product called MAGIC from freedomscientific.com, we have a product called Vocatex Plus, and that's from micro.com. And there's ZoomText from aisquared.com. These products have been around – Vocatex is newer – but they have good reputations. Some of them also offer screen-reading features as well. So, they're a multiuse product.

Slide 13, we have some screen reading software. There is a narrator that comes with the Windows Operating System and Alex comes with the Mac Operating System. I didn't know quite what to make of it when I tested it, but Alex breathes as it's reading the text. I don't know, I guess that's supposed to highlight to you that something important is coming, but my computer is now breathing, so I thought that was unusual. And I only got the Windows and Mac operating systems here, Android is, we're on the screen, but their Operating System also has some built-in accessibility features. You can always check out the Operating System as the first line investigation.

A great product that's free, that's really getting good reviews is called NVDA for Nonvisual Desktop Access. And it's from www.nvaccess.org. You'll notice it's not dot-com because this is a free product. You can even download it onto a thumb drive, put it in your pocket, and plug it into any computer, wherever you go. So far the reviews coming in are very positive.

Slide 14, we have screen readers continued and we have a site that has 15 different products from low to high cost. It also includes some scanning and reading products - 3,000 for people with learning disabilities. This site is a great one, let's see if I can get the address right here. It's a long one. It's from the accessible instructional materials website. So the address is http://aim.cast.org/learn/e-resources/software-based/screenreaders_tts. I think that "tts" might be text to speech.

Slide 15 gives us one more source for screen readers. These are the deluxe ones. We have JAWS, which we mentioned already. Those are from freedomscientific.com. We have System Access, which is available from Serotek, at serotek.com/systemaccess for their product. That's a little different in that you don't actually of install the product on your PC, it's in the cloud, you have to log in at a computer to get access to it, but once you purchase it you can tap into it from anywhere. And Window Eyes is the third one, also available from gwmicro.com. So those are some screen readers.

Slide 16, we have speech recognition software, with microphones. Again, dictation is available with the Apple Operating System and speech recognition comes with the Windows Operating System. I actually had an assistive technology consultant tell me that the Windows version is not bad for something that just comes with your Operating System.

In the deluxe category, we have the product called Dragon which, Nuance carries a suite of speech recognition products. [Dragon Naturally Speaking](#) is the most general of these programs. They have them with dictionaries for legal, medical and other professionals. The dragon naturally speaking is designed to work with general word processing and might be most applicable in the public library setting. So, the link to that is www.nuance.com/dragon/index.htm. Ok, lots of addresses. We're coming to the end of the technologies here.

So slide 17 gives us refreshable braille displays. The American Foundation for the Blind lists 30 refreshable braille display products. These are a little more temperamental if you haven't seen one. They're refreshable pins that pop up and down, that simulate the braille cell. And last time I checked, there were some concerns about their durability for multiple user situations and they work better if they have the same user. They also can be quite expensive. But if you need them, they're great and this site is at www.AFB.org/ -and you can search from there, or the rest of the site is www.AFB.org/ProdBrowserCatResults.asp?CatID=43. Long number, but I found the same address in Jane Vincent's recent book. It's important, so there's the full address.

For slide 18, we have other, which there are other sources. There are switching devices and other tools that people can use. If you missed all the other addresses, this one you might want to take down. The American Foundation for the Blind publishes a journal titled Access World with comparisons and evaluations for all types of assistive technology. It's great, you can look up any product and when something new comes out, they get it, compare it, evaluate it and it's an excellent resource for librarians that might be new to certain types of technologies. Their address is www.afb.org/aw/.

Okay...we're, coming down to the end of our slides. So on slide 19, we asked the question, are there any fundamental assistive technologies that all public libraries need? I've said here that these are determined by a library's patrons and therefore they may vary from one library to another or even within the same library over time. Generally however, they can be viewed as a pyramid with the most likely needs forming the base and the least likely the peak. Screen magnification is an excellent place to start and will likely benefit the largest number of people, even those with vision loss, not severe enough to be called a disability. We love our large screens, it makes people happy. Last time I looked, it wasn't a bad thing.

Slide 20, I've just given you an example of the pyramid. That's how I think of it, where if you don't have anything and you want to know where to start, start at the base with screen magnification. Most libraries have large-print collections, so you know you already have some users that will benefit from large print. And next most-likely would be screen readers, next most-likely speech recognition, next most likely, braille output and the other choices would be the least-likely to be needed, but if they are needed, then they're often the only choice that a person can really access with.

Slide 21 says how you balance the need for and value of assistive technologies with their costs. First, remember that every individual has the right to expect reasonable accommodation to library resources and services offered to the public. We don't have to be told by the government that it's a right. I think most people in the library feel instinctively, that we're here to serve everyone. So, they have a right to access the information, we have a sense that we need to make some

accommodations, some effort to make that happen. Also, be sure of the need before committing substantial funds. Don't just go buy everything and I've seen that happen and it doesn't get enough use, and members wind up giving up thinking it was a waste of time. It winds up being a discouragement to people.

Slide 22 continues balancing the needs by saying, “take into consideration the expected number of uses or hours of usage when compiling the cost/benefit analysis”. Remember that a small number of individuals might make frequent library visits and compile hundreds of hours of usage per annum. I have a few people that come once a week, and they come faithfully. One of our libraries has a person who goes there every day, so you might say, do we do this just to accommodate one person? We would like to think that we would, but if you have to justify it on your budget, it sounds a lot better if you say this got 200 hours of use last year to say, we helped one person. Even though, from a quality standpoint, that's equally important in my opinion.

Slide 23 says what innovative model or promising practices would you recommend? I've said take the team approach. I highly recommend partnering up with an assistive technology consultant or a person with a disability from your community. It's just better to have more than one person involved in the different skills to come up with a good product.

Let's see, slide 24. Continuing the model practices. Of course consult stakeholders, library staff and patrons, local groups serving persons with disabilities or the elderly. This can also lay the groundwork for publicizing the enhanced inclusive service. It doesn't do much good if we go to all this trouble to acquire inclusive technology and then people don't know about it. That could be a good way to get good input for decisions and also get the word out when you're ready.

And finally, my final slide says, publicize, publicize, publicize. Prioritize your actions, try out the designated products before making purchases and make sure to test everything. Of course you have to arrange funding and then test it once you get it in place, which is why I wanted to make sure we had an assistive technology consultant in our grant projects so we wouldn't roll out something that didn't work for people.

So that's the conclusion of my slides. I hope that you learned something there and there's certainly more that I can learn because this field is constantly changing. So, I'll turn it back to you, William.

Myhill: Thank you very much, Mark, you provided a great deal of very useful information. And your particular comments from your experience with these products is extremely valuable. We'll take this information and move on to our next two panelists who will present together to get yet another perspective on the issues that we are talking about today and then we can open it up for a broader discussion with our, all of our participants and among our panelists.

I'd like to now turn to Dan and Meg. Dan Weiss and Meg Kolaya are directors of their respective, neighboring public libraries – Fanwood Memorial and Scotch Plains, in New Jersey. Collaboratively Dan and Meg have developed the 2008 award-winning project Libraries and Autism: We're connected - a customer service and training video for library staff to help them serve individuals of all

ages with autism, and their families, more effectively.

Welcome Dan and Meg please go ahead.

Meg: Thank you.

Dan: Hi, everybody. Happy to be here for this panel this afternoon.

Meg: The next to the last slide of the previous presentation, I think sets the tone for how we got involved in this. People were coming to us asking for services and we weren't sure exactly how to do it, so we did reach out to experts in our area who knew about different kinds of things going on. That was crucial to making the project get started and get funded.

Dan: And I think we also embrace, as, as Mark just said that you know, every patron has the same right to expect reasonable accommodations to the resources and services. So, here are some of the points that we hope to cover today. As William said, our project Libraries and Autism: We're Connected, which we started in 2008, primarily is devoted to thinking about customer service, to folks with ASV and their families, kind of make libraries more welcoming and user-friendly.

Through that project we've expanded our horizons. So, we're going to be talking a little about Universal Design principles, Universal Design for learning strategies and how those might apply to issues at the library, both the physical space and the services. Thinking about how libraries can make an effort to serve patrons with ASD and their families as well as other individuals with different developmental issues. And how you can go about evaluating your library's accessibility. Our Libraries and Autism Project is kind of based in the notion of customer service, the idea that service is what we're providing, largely speaking. And as our projects have evolved, we've been drawn more to the idea of helping people to examine their own attitudes and perceptions about disability and what disability means and what inclusion means and things like that- awareness. And then, some of the limits that we might encounter in trying to provide that inclusive service. So, that's slide two. And here's slide three.

Meg: So universal access is something that has been a popular term lately with architecture. It started with Universal Design. The whole concept that if it's good for somebody with a disability, it's probably fine for everybody. It just makes it easier for anyone to access an area if it has a ramp or whatever.

Dan: I think you have to think about the notion that things like ramps and curb cuts on the street, things like that were often referred to as handicap accessibility. And then the thinking really has moved on from that to, as we're saying here, Universal Design or universal access. Making things useable to the greatest extent by the greatest number of people regardless of their age or ability, it becomes the easiest way. So something simple like stairs, even one short step can be an obstacle that's impossible to overcome for somebody in a wheelchair or with some other access issues whereas a ramp works well for everybody. So universal access and design explores the notions of barrier-free and again, you can think about this in the physical sense. I think the two previous presentations, were speaking in large part about individuals with issues, with physical issues, like blindness or low vision. You could keep in mind that these concepts work well when you're branching out to individuals with developmental issues as well. So, flexible, and various approaches that can work well to serve all differences

and all needs in all individuals.

We went on to explore what's called Universal Design for instruction, which I suspect is more of an academic library construct. And so I won't read this slide because there's a lot on it, I believe they'll all be posted later. But at the Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University they developed seven principles of Universal Design. They include things like equitable use, flexibility, keeping things simple and intuitive, perceptible information, having a certain tolerance for error built in, low physical effort and making sure things have an appropriate size and space for approach and reach and manipulation and things like that. It covers a range of physical issues and developmental issues as well.

Meg: The one thing that's missing from all of those is the thing that we value the most, I think, in libraries, which is interaction between the staff and the patrons. When we started our project, we did a search about libraries and autism and were shocked to find very little about cognitive impairments. There were a lot of people who have been doing a lot of great work for many years on physical disabilities, but the cognitive part of it was not there. So in the last two years, there have been several excellent books that have come out that we would recommend to you and we don't have them written down here, but we can tell you what they are.

Dan: I think we have links to them later. But you might also want to keep in mind, these principles for design, these are good ideas, not only for library spaces, but also, you can apply these principles to library services, and to library programming.

So, I think we can move on to slide five. We wanted to think about the challenges involved in trying to serve patrons with ASD - Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Meg: What we noticed immediately was that most of our staff didn't have a clue what autism was, even though it's all over the papers and the television and it's sort of become a very popular topic. There are even characters on a lot of the shows on television now. But, our own staff didn't really know. So we had to reach out and have some experts come in and give some training to our staff so that they could find out what the basics of autism was. We think that's important. And one thing that comes out loud and clear is that if you have trouble communicating, sometimes the only way you can communicate is through behavior. And so, what our staff were interpreting as bratty kids having tantrums were really just kids on the spectrum who were acting out because they were overwhelmed with the physical situation that they were faced in when they came to the library. The other thing that was brought into, big time, was that one of the specialists we use, Dr. Jill Harris from Children's Specialized Hospital said that inclusion is so important because if you can model behavior by the staff that people who are acting a little differently are accepted, that gives a message to the public and your other patrons that they should also be more accepting and that's a constant problem - balancing the different kinds of patrons that you have all the time.

Dan: And as we say in our workshops, being inclusive is not just a nice thing to do, or a morally-positive thing to do, but it's the law. So the Americans with Disabilities Act, which was enacted in 1990 was always intended to include individuals with developmental disabilities. But in many ways, it's easier to deal with folks with physical disabilities. And so, we have, in this country, I think, become reasonably

adept at addressing some of those needs and it's encouraging to see now that there are more steps being taken to be inclusive and accommodating to those with developmental issues.

So we thought a good place to start for everybody is to try to evaluate your own library or your own space and you can kind of break it down into thinking about the services that you provide, which could include the staff, and then your physical space and then the kinds of programming that you offer.

As Meg was saying, these two books we've come to like a lot - again they'll be referenced later, at the end. One is called *Planning for Library Services to People with Disabilities*. The author is a woman named Reha Ruben. She has a terrific section called library stand with a whole nice checklist of issues for assessing your space and are you in compliance with ADA and what about the staff training and staff attitudes and other kinds of formats of things you offer. So, a nice broad-based checklist.

The other book, which is terrific, is called *Including Families of Children with Special Needs*. It's by an amazing woman from the Brooklyn Public Library named Terry Banks. It has a lot of great information. She also has some good strategies for evaluating your space and your services, and a lot of great things to say about inclusion. So we'd encourage you to take a look at both of those.

Meg: Programming was something that we quickly became focused on, on how to apply, having our patrons feel comfortable coming to our programs. So, we've done a lot of research on that, which you can see on our webpage, which is www.librariesandautism.org. That's referenced at the end too.

Dan: So, here we are in slide seven. Again, when we started to develop our libraries and autism program, working with experts in our area, it did come to us that customer service is really at the root of being able to be inclusive and be successful at including other populations or all populations into the library service. And then at the root of customer service is great communication. So we do talk about, to library staff, so customer service, why should you care about customer service? In many ways, it seems like it can just be common sense or in a very basic way, the golden rule, just do for others as you'd have them do for you. You know the kinds of things that you don't like when you're on the receiving end of service, whether you're at a restaurant or department store or a library. But sometimes, the kind of service that you can provide or can't provide is prescribed by the hierarchy that you work in or the management or the manager that you work for. And some of successful customer service is in the hands of the customer. So there are a lot of challenges there. On our website, we have about an 18 or 19-minute video- which we'd encourage you all to take a look at- which is focused largely at serving children and young adults and their families with ASD. The strategies for customer service and the different skills and techniques that we address in the video- which we don't have time to go into, I think, this afternoon- really work quite well to serve that population and also work extremely well just as more of the universal model for kind of best practices library service for anyone that uses the library.

Meg: So, some of the things, we won't go through all of them, but one of the things that is basic is to determine, what is the patrons style of communication? When they walk in the door, you can see, if they're bringing a device with them, that they use

as their communication device, then you can use that. If you don't, then we have some great ideas for ways that you can communicate through pictures, and that's a pretty basic thing. We're in a very multicultural area here, as I'm sure most people are and certainly colleges are, I think, are more and more multicultural. So it's helpful to be able to communicate with someone if you can't actually speak their language or talk. We urge people to develop books that have pictures in them of the different spaces so that you can point to them and direct people in a different way than you're used to doing.

But all of those things only work if your staff has practiced doing that, so, we urge people to have a staff meeting, look at our video, and then do some troubleshooting with trying to communicate with our communication board, which is basically pictures of different services that we offer or restrooms, things like that, that people want to know where they are.

Dan: We've also been thinking a little bit lately about, as I said before, people's attitudes and perceptions. Because, in many ways, disability is just in some ways, kind of the way that you're looking at things. To have the right frame of mind, we talk about using person-first language. A lot of what we're talking about now has to do with respect and empathy, which can be more difficult concepts to speak about and to deliver than putting in a voice recognition piece of software or an automatic door opener, but they can be crucial in making good interactions with the public. Some things like person-first language might seem small or inconsequential to some, but we always point out that you wouldn't say, that's a cancerous child. That's a child with cancer. So it's a person who has autism.

We encountered a program in Minnesota called Wakanheza [phonetic]. There's a reference to it shortly, but it's a series of strategies developed to deal primarily with violence- domestic violence on the tribal reservations up there. It was embraced by the Saint Paul library as the basis of their customer service strategies. It speaks about a lot of different things. One of the things that Meg and I really took away from it was what they called the moment. That is the notion that you don't really know what happened before and you can't really be sure what's going to happen next, but you can decide to try to be empathetic and proactive in the moment.

Meg: And nonjudgmental.

Dan: And nonjudgmental in the moment. Probably you'll make some mistakes, but that's a better approach than just letting things slide by.

Meg: The quote that is on there is from a guy named Ari Ne'eman who is the first person with autism to serve on Barack Obama's Mental Health Council. And he is an incredible person. If you look him up, there's all sorts of articles and magazines that he has done. His philosophy is that he thinks all this money is being raised for autism, and it's all going into finding out what causes it so that, I guess, they think they can cure it, but his attitude is he doesn't want to be cured, he's perfectly happy with what he is. So, his saying "nothing about us without us" is his organization's slogan.

Dan: Very inspirational gentleman. It's worth taking a look. His organization is called the Autistic Self-Advocacy Network. He makes a lot of good points about the nature of disability, and I think Mark touched on it, the responsibility of those

with the disability or the issues to be involved in getting services.

So I think we're going to hurry along. I'm sure we're pushing our time limit. Another issue we'd like to get at is limits of inclusion. I'm sure we all like to that we're trying as best we can to make our libraries welcoming and useable by all people. But you're always in a bit of a tug-of-war, I guess, between trying to accommodate people in some ways and serve all people. When we started this, we would do some workshops and get questions like, "what would you do about this young boy who runs around the library and is pounding on the keyboard and ripping pages out of a book and his parents are ignoring him?" We'd go back to our experts with this, and ask what kind of advice would you give? She would always say, "well, you guys have rules, right? And you have Policies and Procedures?" So she would always encourage us to start there. That, well-defined rules and procedures that are applied fairly...

Meg: In a positive way. Maybe with pictures.

Dan: ...Can be constructive, and will be taken well. And we speak about programming with the notion that there are many different approaches to programming, I guess you could say the same thing about service in general. So there's the inclusion model, you know, programming like a family programming let's say. Where some activity that is appropriate for a broad range of ages and abilities and people can work together in groups. So it really doesn't matter who is what. Something like, maybe, an after school chess club. Chess doesn't really require a lot of social interaction necessarily. So those are a couple of quick examples of inclusion that could work really well.

Meg: We also know that sometimes special programming can be more effective. So we've done a lot of work with sensory story-telling, which involves a lot less noise and music. There's gobs of information about how to do a sensory story-time. And then, we also have a special book club that we started here that now is being modeled at six other libraries called NextChapter, all one word, together, that was started by the University of Ohio. It's to promote literacy with people who are not necessarily readers. So, you pick a book, we have two groups now, lots of volunteers and everyone takes a turn reading a paragraph or a page and it goes around the circle. That's been great because our group started when most of our members were in their mid-teens. Now they're in their 20s and what happens when you age out of school is there's really very little social opportunity for people who are used to being in that kind of situation. So....

Dan: The library can be a great provider of those kinds of opportunities. Not only in programming, but for volunteer opportunities.

Meg: Right.

Dan: And even for employment.

Meg: Right. The other thing that we found out is that it's very tough for some people with ASD have intellectual abilities that allow them to get into college, but once they get there, they've never lived on their own and they don't know appropriate behaviors. So the example that we heard about was a very bright young man who was physics major, but he kept correcting the professor. He's in a mentoring program at Adelphi University, but it's hard to get a job. We've found that many of our teen members of our book clubs have become our pages and if they are

numbers people, then you will find that your shelves will be in perfect order. But don't try to move them to a different part of the library week by week, just give them one area that they feel comfortable in and they're familiar with.

Dan: So, we appreciate the opportunity to be involved this afternoon and it's fantastic that the conversation about inclusion is going on in libraries and broadening. We have on our last slide just some resources that people can access including our website. Autismandlibraries.org, the titles of the two books that we mentioned, and some other links about Universal Design, the Wakanheza project and a great website called disabilityisnatural.com. So you can take a look at those when they get posted.

And William, I think that's about it for us. We could go on and on, but time is short.

Myhill: Thank you, Meg, thank you, Dan, for going through such a great selection of issues that face all librarians and when working with people who have autism spectrum disorders, these are great resources you shared with us. We do have really only a few minutes left. We've covered a lot of material. I'd like to be able to hear any kind of questions or comments that anybody has.

You can use the text box underneath the chat window, you can use the sign for raising your hand if you have a question, and among our panelists, if you have individual questions or comments for one another, I welcome those. We'll give people a moment. And if we don't have a question or comment, I will turn to one of our panelists in a moment.

So, while we're waiting, Adina, we heard from you at the very beginning, and I'm wondering if you have some additional comments, reflections that might be useful to us based upon the material and discussion that Mark and Meg and Dan have provided.

Milliken: Well, I thought they had really good, helpful, useful interesting points to make. I was especially relating to what Meg and Dan were saying about Universal Design and what Mark said about if you're needing to sort of justify your activities or your costs for a screen reader or other adaptive technology that it can be useful to sort of, well, Mark was saying, to, present the number of hours that people have used the assistive technology rather than the number of users. I think the blind population, of course, is a small population and if you break down to individual disabilities, it may be a smaller population sometimes, but I think the impact can be really significant and so, if you can find ways to evaluate the impact of providing accessible websites or whatever accessible features you're offering, that can be a good way to help people that you need their support, administrators or whatever to sort of understand why it is important to do the things that you're wanting to do.

Myhill: Thank you, Adina. Mark, would you have any closing comments or reflections you'd like to add?

Allnatt: Yeah, I learned something from Dan and Meg and Adina, so, I was glad to be able to hear that. My emphasis was on enabling people to be independent, which I hear a lot. But I think it's good to emphasize that the staff interaction is also very important. Not only in instruction, but just for the encouragement. I hear so many people that say I could ask a family member or someone else, but they don't

understand me, they don't understand the resources, they don't know my needs, so it becomes a very emotional issue. And so they come to the library looking for a professional who doesn't have all that emotional baggage to deal with and can deal with them as a person and has knowledge to share and encouragement to give and I think they really look to us many times for that dimension. I was glad to hear that being emphasized also.

Myhill: Mark we have a question that I think is being directed towards you. It says, "I use Dragon and I find that when I'm using my school's and/or a public library there is no seclusive or secluded room given its distraction. STAR was an exception since I visited it."

What do you recommend?

Allnatt: Well the speak recognition technology needs a quite environment because if there's too much ambient noise then the computer can't distinguish the speech very well. So we actually inherited a small room here, a 9x10 room that was supposed to be a copy center, but they didn't need it for that. So we were able to move the technology in here. I wasn't sure at the start how people would respond – I thought people would think we're shutting people away. But instead I found that it's a relief because it limits the distractions for people, it keeps a nice, quiet environment so the technology works the way it's supposed to work and you can work one and one. If the person needs to be more expressive or can't sit still you're not distracting anyone. There are so many positives that I've never had anyone complain about being shut away. So with the Dragon that is one of the ones that is difficult to use unless you have a secluded place to use it.

Myhill: Alright, thank you very much. We have hit the two o'clock mark on the Eastern Coast and so we're going to wrap up now. I thank you all for your time today – participants and panelists.

This webinar has been digitally recorded for archiving. We will be developing a complete, accessible transcript of this webinar, along with full audio and video recordings that will be available for free review from Project ENABLE. Project ENABLE, the parent project that is conducting this webinar today has its own website that has a variety of training modules that have been developed initially for K—12 school librarians. We are now extending those modules to be available for instructional purposes to academic and public librarians so you can see the logo Project ENABLE or Google Project ENABLE to get access to those materials.

Thank you again for all of your time today. We are wrapping up. You will hear follow-ups from us with regard to this project, and when the materials will be available for review, since you've provided us with an email so that we can contact you.

Have a great day everybody – goodbye.]