

# English Language Learners

This category covers public library service to individuals for whom English is not a dominant language.

## Overview

Many Wisconsin residents are not literate. The National Assessment of Adult Literacy defines literacy as “the ability to use printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential.” In Dane County, Wisconsin, The Literacy Network, elaborates by stating, “Our learners achieve life goals through literacy, such as: reading to children, reading a newspaper, talking to their child’s teacher, filling out job applications, developing a résumé, entering training programs, and improving basic skills to move into a GED program.” Three general types of literacy services are offered in Wisconsin: adult basic education (ABE), English as a second language (ESL), and family literacy. A variety of literacy agencies and programs provide these services.

Among the population of people with limited literacy skills, there are those for whom English is not a dominant language. These individuals are English Language Learners (ELL). Immigrants in Wisconsin come from many places for a variety of reasons and may or may not be literate in their home countries, depending on their educational opportunities. Using a public library can be especially difficult for those for whom English is not a dominant language, and libraries need to be sensitive to individual literacy needs and histories.

Outreach services in specific areas around the state such as migrant housing serve high populations of people who use English as a second language. Some businesses that employ large numbers of non-English-speaking people have onsite classes. Early childhood programs such as Even Start and Head Start may provide adult literacy instruction, as do some private organizations and private schools. Many social service agencies that serve minority populations have literacy, basic English, and citizenship classes. Job placement services may pay for literacy services. Occasionally, public school districts offer adult literacy instruction. Some larger businesses offer literacy instruction as part of their overall employee education programs or target some employees for ESL instruction. Several universities offer English-language classes to faculty or spouses of students. Even with all of these agencies providing services, it is not unusual for students to wait 3 to 12 months to be matched with a tutor, especially in urban areas. Few Wisconsin libraries offer direct adult literacy instruction. When they do, it is usually a family literacy project done in collaboration with a local literacy provider.

## Considerations

Not surprisingly, language is a huge barrier to public library use for people who do not speak English. General anxiety about government institutions can prevent some people from using a library, especially if they do not speak English. They may not be familiar with the concept of a public library, and they may fear filling out any government forms. People with low literacy skills may not have experience with libraries or computers, and knowing they will have to use a computer can discourage public library use. English speakers may be embarrassed about their low reading skills and avoid libraries to prevent people from knowing they cannot read well. Because they do not read and are not library users, they may not know of the library’s non-print resources or print materials that could help them learn to read. For some families already stressed by daily demands of just coping with life, adding a library return deadline to their already-complicated lives is impossible.

[dpi.wi.gov/pld/yss/serving-special-populations](http://dpi.wi.gov/pld/yss/serving-special-populations)



Krista Ross, SWLS, describes her experience helping librarians work with English Language Learners in her community and developing grants to improve library services for them.

## Resources

- American Library Association (ALA): [Outreach Services to Adult New and Non-Readers](#)
- [Proliteracy Worldwide](#)
- [Wisconsin Literacy](#)
- [Digital Literacy](#)
- Serving Non-English Speakers in U.S. Public Libraries: [2007 Analysis of Library Demographics and Programs](#)
- [Guidelines for Library Services to Spanish-Speaking Library Users](#)
- [UW School of Library and Information Science Continuing Education](#) (often offer Spanish for Librarians course)
- [50 Bilingual and Spanish/English Integrated Books for Children and Teens](#)
- Distributors of Children’s Books in Foreign Languages/Bilingual
  - [Star Bright Books](#) (24 languages including Hmong)
  - [Books 4 School](#) (Bilingual Spanish books and nonfiction)
- St. Paul (MN) Public Library: [Sharing More Than Books](#)

## Source Material

- [Adults with Special Needs](#) and [Youth with Special Needs](#) manuals
- [National Assessment of Adult Literacy](#)



## Related Videos

Limited Literacy and Information Skills

—Ruth Ann Montgomery

Some people from cultures such as the Hmong are non-print oriented and might be unfamiliar with all of the library's materials. Many adults who do not speak English well may fear that they will not be able to ask for help, that they will not be able to understand questions the librarians ask, and that the library will not have any materials in their language. Because most public libraries do not offer direct literacy instruction, it is critical that they become part of the literacy network. Without collaboration, it is difficult to get adults to come to the library. When families who use English as their second language are involved, working with agencies can be a good way to get the parents to begin visiting and using a public library.

Librarians should not hand a form to complete in English to someone who cannot speak English well, direct them to an online catalog, or give them directions in English. A smile is the same in every language. Respect for other cultures should be reflected in every transaction with the public and be a core value for all staff. Persons who do not speak or read English well are not likely to understand how to search an electronic catalog or find what they want and place a hold on it, and they are unlikely to ask for assistance. Conversely, it is difficult for librarians to leave phone messages or explain to non-English speakers that the library has the materials they requested.

A good collection of non-English and bilingual adult literacy materials, especially in Spanish, is needed in some libraries. Libraries should make this decision based on local population demographics and not wait until the people become library users to invest in materials of interest to them. People who do not speak English may very much appreciate reading materials in their own language, listening to music from their home culture, and watching videos in their own language. These types of materials are not typically carried by traditional library supply sources, but they are often readily available in local grocery stores that specialize in ethnic foods. Especially, Asian and Mexican grocery stores often carry a wide variety of videos and music, and the store staff can often offer selection recommendations.

If possible, it is helpful if the materials in other languages are housed together in one area. Adults who are learning to read often are motivated by their desire to read to their children, so it is important that they be able to find children's books they can read. Many adults who do not speak English can read in their own language, but their children are likely to read only in English if they are attending American schools. Bilingual picture books are helpful for these families because the adults can read in their dominant language and the children can read in English. Materials of this type are readily available in English and Spanish but harder to find in other languages.

Adult picture dictionaries are often bilingual and come in many different languages. Libraries also need instructional materials for tutors to help them plan lessons and find appropriate materials for their students. Bilingual staff and reference services, recorded messages in languages other than English, and answering machines/services monitored by bilingual staff can be extremely helpful for non-English-speaking patrons. Additionally, language translator devices are an increasingly popular and inexpensive tool for libraries to use and circulate.

Only a limited amount of typically-available material has specific interest and use to adults who do not read or speak English well. Librarians should not expect their general services brochures or presentations to be specific enough to encourage people with low literacy skills to use their services. Librarians can create specific materials

and presentations that give these patrons a reason to come to the library. Literacy providers noted that outreach efforts such as a librarian going to a location to meet people who have literacy needs may be more effective than inviting them to events at the library. Librarians can send information to, or ask to visit, classes at technical colleges or at literacy councils. If the target audience does not speak English, all print materials should be appropriately translated.

Word of mouth is the best way to market services to non-English speakers, but that can work against a library if the staff is not trained to make an effort to welcome and assist people who do not speak English when they do visit the library. Libraries should be familiar with alterdominant radio and television stations that serve specific populations such as the Hmong and Hispanic. Some communities have websites that post information for local ethnic groups in some communities, and libraries should consider using them. Churches with services for non-English-speaking families, social service agencies, laundromats, and specialized grocery stores are all good places to post information for people who do not speak English.

## Best Practices

- Greet every library user who comes into the library with a smile, especially if they seem to be speaking a language other than English. Invite them to let you know if they need help. If you see them struggling to reach a shelf or if they seem to be searching for something, do not wait for them to ask; offer assistance.
- Ask someone in the community to translate the signs on the library door such as hours, the card application forms, and basic library brochures into a language other than English.
- Draft a short article or make a list of the materials the library currently has that might be useful to adults who are learning to speak English. Then call or stop in and introduce yourself to the major literacy providers in your community. Find out if they have a newsletter, and ask if they will print your article or list in their next edition.
- Collect brochures from social service and health agencies that are translated into other languages and put them out at the library.
- Send at least one staff person to the next literacy training session sponsored by the library system or state literacy conference.
- If the library has materials in a language other than English, gather them on one shelf or area and put up reproductions or small flags of the countries that use the language(s) to give patrons a visual reference.
- Fines and replacement costs of materials can prevent English Language Learners from using a library. Working off fines or earning back library privileges in an alternate way is often appreciated.
- Purchase citizenship study materials in English and other languages.
- Provide information on the library's hours, a phone number for a bilingual staff person, and a number where a message can be left to be answered in the person's dominant.
- Offer story hours and family programs in languages other than English.
- Offer basic computer skills classes taught in languages other than English.

# Homelessness and Poverty

## Overview

A welcoming and respectful attitude is one of the most important things that makes a library accessible to people who are homeless and/or living in poverty. Needs of these populations should be considered by libraries in all aspects: planning and collaborating; accessibility; staff training; programs, collections, and services; and marketing.

## Homelessness

Homelessness is defined as the lack of permanent housing resulting from extreme poverty or, in the case of unaccompanied youth, the lack of a safe and stable living environment. Homelessness is obvious in large cities but can be just as devastating in rural areas and small towns where there are few, if any, services available and no emergency shelters. A significant portion of adults who are homeless suffer from mental illnesses. Families account for a portion of all homeless people, and a majority of those families are headed by single mothers. The federal McKinney-Vento Act defines homeless children and youth as “individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.” Many children and teens are not living in their own homes because they were abducted, ran away, or were forced out of their family homes by an adult. Youth who run away are usually running away from something rather than to something.

The number of homeless in Wisconsin is due to numerous factors, including insufficient appropriate and affordable housing, domestic violence, alcohol and drug issues, and lack of employment skills. For those looking for work, shelter living makes finding employment very difficult because the shelters often lack: telephones to follow up on job leads or to receive notification of an interview; facilities for bathing; laundry facilities; and storage. People who are homeless often face discrimination not only in employment but also at public libraries. Without a home address, many libraries do not issue library cards.

## Poverty

Poverty is a complex issue to define. Political and statistical classifications offer numbers, but do not always portray what it is like to be poor. Living in poverty generally means being without adequate food, shelter, and clothing, but can also include insufficient or unstable employment health-care, transportation, employment, etc. To better understand the day-to-day experiences of people living in poverty, try Spent, an online interactive activity from the Urban Ministries of Durham, NC, designed to show what is like to be poor in America. Understanding the home situations and the needs of families living in poverty is required to provide effective library services. One starting point for public librarians is to look at the free and reduced lunch figures for their school district. These figures often are used as a general poverty indicator.



Kelly Hughbanks, Milwaukee Public Library, describes her experience working with children and families who are poor and homeless in her community and developing grants to improve library services for them.

## Resources

- Story Time and Program Accommodations for Youth Who Live in Poverty, [YSN Ch. 7 p. 105](#)
- American Library Association (ALA): [Outreach Resources for Services to Poor and Homeless People](#)
- “[A Librarian’s Guide to Homelessness](#)” (video) by Hesed House, Inc.
- [Library Service to the Homeless](#) by Amy Mars
- Wisconsin HUD: [Homeless Information](#)
- Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction: [Education for Homeless Children and Youth](#)
- [Wisconsin Association for Homeless and Runaway Services](#)
- [Wisconsin Institute for Research on Poverty](#)
- UW Extension Family Living Programs: [Making Ends Meet](#)
- Play [Spent](#) – an online poverty simulation

## Source Material

- [Adults with Special Needs](#) and [Youth with Special Needs](#) manuals
- [National Assessment of Adult Literacy](#)



## Related Videos

Collaborating on Special Services  
—Sharon Grover

## Considerations

Public libraries cannot independently address all problems related to poverty and homelessness. Efforts are most effective when they are made in collaboration with existing programs and other community agencies such as shelter providers, food distribution sites, affordable housing advocates, and interfaith social justice networks. These agencies often can provide demographic data, translation assistance, speakers for programs, transportation assistance, and may be able to include the library in their grant projects or assist the libraries with library sponsored grants.

Due to a variety of factors, youth who are homeless or have economic difficulties are an underserved library patron group. Their parents may not understand or appreciate the value and importance of independent reading for their children. Their lives are complicated by issues and concerns such as paying bills, having enough food, transportation problems, accessing medical care, and dealing with social service agencies, all of which make going to a public library a low priority. Often no public libraries are located in the neighborhoods where these children live. Public transportation may not be available, and the neighborhoods often are not safe enough to allow children to walk to and from the library on their own. Families living in poverty often may not be aware of the wide range of services and materials available at the public library. Other major barriers include issues of library fines and fees and language barriers for immigrant populations. Disadvantaged families feel that when there is a block on their card, they are no longer welcome to come into the library, that they are not only banned from borrowing materials but from the building itself.

Families who struggle with child care costs may send their children to the library without supervision after school, on school vacation days, and for entire days during the summer. It is especially important for public libraries to support after-school programs. Some children spend hours at the library on their own because they have no other place to go or because their own homes and neighborhoods are difficult or dangerous. These situations are not exclusively related to poverty, but there is often a larger percentage of these situations among families who are poor. Some youth come to stay warm, some say they are hungry or ask library staff for food or money to buy food. These situations are challenges for libraries, but some libraries have managed to turn these challenges into opportunities. Doing so starts with a desire and willingness to solve problems and to be part of a community solution to problems of poverty.

## Best Practices

### General

- Greet every library user who comes into the library with a smile. Invite them to let you know if they need help. If you see them struggling to reach a shelf or they seem to be searching for something, do not wait for them to ask; offer assistance.

### Specific

- Public libraries can offer training for social service agency staff to familiarize them with particular resources their clients may find helpful at the library.
- Get to know the social service agencies in your area. See if they have a card or short brochure you can use to pass on to individuals in need in at your library.
- Review the library's policy on the need to have an address and identification to get a card.
- Fines and replacement costs of materials can prevent people who are homeless and/or living in poverty from using a library. Working off fines or earning back library privileges in an alternate way is often appreciated.
- If there is a summer lunch program for children who live in poverty, investigate the possibility of the library being a distribution site.
- Know the location of the summer lunch programs so you can refer children and families at your library.
- The school district's homeless coordinator and staff for the local family homeless shelters may be able to help the library with planning services to meet the needs of their students and clients.
- Staff should be familiar with library policies regarding patron behavior and know how to interact respectfully with people who are homeless or have economic difficulties.
- Train staff to be observant about children who seem to be at the library all day without leaving for meals and who are not supervised. Know the related library policies and the process for reporting potential abuse and neglect situations to get help for the families.

# People Who are Displaced or Live in Residential Care, Foster Care, Detention, or Treatment Facilities

This category covers public library service to individuals who are displaced or live in residential care, foster care, detention, or treatment facilities and their families and caregivers. This includes families affected by personal disaster during a community emergency; older adults transitioning to or living in residential care facilities; foster and kinship care; teens in detention facilities and treatment centers; and youth with a parent in jail or prison.

## Overview

The home and family situations described in this section vary, ranging from permanent to temporary, independent to dependent, and pride to stigma. While general information is offered, library services should not be generalized—find out who is in your community and their specific needs. Needs should be considered by libraries in all aspects: planning and collaborating; accessibility; staff training; programs, collections, and services; and marketing. Possible factors to consider for who are displaced or living in nursing homes, foster care, or detention facilities include transportation, poverty, geography, living arrangements, and support systems. While attention should be given to specific needs, these populations should be treated with the same respect and humanity extended to all library users.

## Families Affected by Personal Disaster during a Community Emergency

Some people become temporarily homeless because of a house fire or natural disaster and may be in turmoil because of the immediacy of their loss of housing. Public libraries can be a refuge in these situations. Library activities may help get people's minds off their family problems. The library can help people feel a sense of normalcy in their lives if they frequented the library before the disaster.

## Transitioning to or Living in Residential Care Facilities

Many older adults do not have needs that differ significantly from the general population, but two primary factors that contribute to the number of seniors with special needs are poverty and poor health, which often results from poverty. Health conditions are a main reason that older adults transition to residential care. Many facilities offer a range of living options, from independent units to nursing room care. Libraries need to pay attention to seniors who have exceptional needs, their families, caregivers, and the professionals who work with them. Libraries should reach out to senior residences, senior centers, and other facilities that serve or care for older adults by offering book delivery services, off-site programming, and awareness of adaptive materials and resources.



Mary Driscoll from Dane County Library Service describes her experience working with people who live in residential care, at-risk youth, and jail populations and developing grants to improve library services for them.

## Resources

- Adapting Story Times and Program Accommodations for Youth in Alternate Living Situations, [YSN Ch. 10 p. 163](#)
- American Library Association (ALA): [Disaster Response: A Selected Annotated Bibliography](#)
- [Wisconsin Association of Senior Centers](#)
- ALA: [Guidelines for Services to Older Adults](#)
- ALA: [Outreach Resources for Services to Older Adults](#)
- Excerpt, [101 Ideas for Serving the Impaired Elderly](#)
- Iowa Foster & Adoptive Parents Association: [Foster Care & Adoption-Friendly Children's Books](#)
- Creating a Family: [Books for Kids Adopted from Foster Care](#)
- Wisconsin State Law Library: [Foster Care and Child Welfare](#)
- [Library Services to Youth in Custody](#)
- Colorado State Library: [Institutional Library Development](#)
- Sesame Workshop: [Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration](#)
- [Libraries, Literacy, and Juvenile Correctional Facilities](#)
- [Prisoners' Right to Read](#): An Interpretation of the ALA's Library Bill of Rights
- [Outreach Resources for Services to Incarcerated People and Ex-Offenders](#)
- [Correctional Education Association-Wisconsin](#)
- St. Paul (MN) Public Library: [Sharing More Than Books](#)

## Source Material

- [Adults with Special Needs](#) and [Youth with Special Needs](#) manuals



## Related Videos

Homelessness and Poverty

—Kelly Hughbanks

## Foster and Kinship Care

Both foster and kinship care arrangements provide care for minors removed from their homes through the intervention of a social service agency. Foster care is considered the least intrusive out-of-home care intervention for families who experience difficulties severe enough to require that the children be removed from the home. Foster family care typically involves adults who do not know the children prior to the placement. Kinship care is a form of foster care in which children are removed from their own homes to live with a relative, either temporarily or for the long term. Kinship care alleviates stress for both the family and the child and is preferred to placing children in a foster home with strangers. Grandparents are the most likely relatives to be involved with informal care giving in kinship foster care or regular foster care arrangements when birth parents can't care for their children.

## Teens in Detention Facilities and Treatment Centers

When teens are adjudicated to a juvenile correctional facility, they come under the jurisdiction of the Division of Juvenile Corrections (DJC), within the Department of Corrections. DJC tries to balance protection with youth accountability and competency building, so that when juvenile offenders return to the community they can lead responsible and productive lives. Teens in detention facilities and treatment centers may or may not have access to public libraries. DJC manages three secure correctional facilities for youth: Ethan Allen School, Lincoln Hills School, and Southern Oaks Girls School. The Mendota Juvenile Treatment Center in Madison is a high-security treatment facility for male juveniles. It provides psychological evaluations and treatment for youth whose behaviors create a serious threat to themselves or others and whose mental health needs cannot be met in other DJC facilities.

## Youth with a Parent in Jail or Prison

While it can be difficult, it is possible to offer library services to jails or prisons, especially when libraries partner with other agencies and organizations. Keep in mind that jails are administered locally, usually by sheriffs, and generally hold individuals awaiting trial or serving short sentences. Prisons are state or federally operated and hold individuals convicted of crimes. If offered, library service to jails often depends on local needs and resources. Some outreach services offer programming for children and families left behind. Library service in prisons is administered at state and federal levels.

Children with an incarcerated parent are more likely than other youth to end up in prison themselves. In her book *All Alone in the World: Children of the Incarcerated*, Nell Bernstein writes that as many as ten percent of all children in the U.S. have a parent who is in a jail or prison and indicates that maintaining relationships between parent inmates and their children is critical to maintaining positive family relationships. Children are often left behind in greater poverty than before the parent was incarcerated. The children's sense of security, confidence, and self-worth is shattered when the parent is incarcerated.

## Considerations

All groups mentioned here face economic challenges, stress, as well as a sense of isolation. The schedules and demands of caretaking can leave little time for outings to the library. Transportation may be a problem for older adults, foster care families, and for adults caring for children whose parent is in jail or prison. Concerns about incurring fines or replacement costs for materials can deter many from using the public library. People who owe money stop coming to the library. For some, living conditions are so unstable that trying to keep track of library materials is almost impossible. When living arrangements are in flux, library policies can make it difficult for some individuals to get a card. Children may not be living with a parent, so a required parental signature is not possible. People in residential facilities can't use public library services unless the library brings services to them.

Library staff need background information on understand the economic realities of foster parents and grandparents raising their grandchildren, and the challenges facing youth who have a parent in jail or prison. Staff need to understand the connections between poverty and the prison system to understand the unmet needs of teens and parents who end up in jails and prisons. All staff need to appreciate that library programming can play an important role in the lives of children separated from their parents or for isolated older adults. There should be staff awareness of the range of seniors' needs, and seniors should be included on all levels of library outreach.

## Best Practices

### General

- Greet every library user who comes into the library with a smile. Invite them to let you know if they need help. If you see them struggling to reach a shelf or if they seem to be searching for something, do not wait for them to ask; offer assistance.
- Fines and replacement costs of materials can prevent people who are displaced from using a library. Working off fines or earning back library privileges in an alternate way is often appreciated.
- Include up-to-date materials on parenting, grandparenting, and criminal justice issues in the collection. There are picture books for young children, as well as non-fiction titles for older youth that deal with these issues.
- Craft programs such as card making can help children and adults make a connection with family members from whom they are separated.
- Invite support groups serving these families to hold their meetings occasionally at the public library, and when they do, put out resources that might be of special interest to them. Provide children's activities during the meeting so the families do not have to worry about child care.
- Help raise public awareness of the issues these populations face through displays. Send information about new library materials or programs to schools, support groups, or social service agencies and ask them to include the information in their newsletters.

## Specific

- One important function of public libraries during a community crisis is to provide information to the media. Reporters frequently contact the library as a crisis unfolds to verify information, get the contact information, and to help them understand the local situation. This helps funnel non-emergency calls away from rescue agencies.
- Slow down when interacting with older adults. The librarian may be the only human being the senior will talk to on a given day because some seniors have less social contact than many other people in a community.
- Many older adults are active computer users, but others are not comfortable with computers and may be intimidated by the need to use an online computer catalog to locate materials in a library.
- Society often attaches a stigma to youth who live in foster care, group homes, or other out-of-home settings that set them apart from other children. There is a need to help normalize life for children and teens in the foster care system.
- Many libraries have collaborated on projects to bring literacy services to inmates. Some libraries have placed children's books and educational toys in family visitation areas in jails and prisons. Others have collaborated with literacy providers to improve the literacy skills of parents in jails and prisons and to help them stay connected with their children.

# People in Underserved Areas or with Diverse Backgrounds

This category covers public library service to individuals living in underserved urban and rural communities and to individuals of diverse geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

## Overview

The LSTA Grants to States Program prioritizes library services to underserved urban and rural communities and to individuals of diverse geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. In Wisconsin, these targeted populations vary across the state and within library systems. A population that might be underserved in one county might be better supported in another area. A community might be dealing with special needs that are nonexistent in the next town over. More than any other category identified in this resource, people in underserved areas or with diverse backgrounds is location specific.

Examples of what this category might describe include:

- Outreach to Hmong families to connect them with parenting and early literacy resources
- Services to at-risk teens in rural or isolated areas
- Collaboration with school agencies to provide reading materials during lunch break for kids receiving free and reduced meals during summer school
- Computer literacy services geared toward adults with limited English skills
- Programming designed to meet the needs of new immigrant families

## Considerations

Because outreach to these populations is dependent on the library's location and general community needs, considerations will also be location and population specific. The needs of targeted populations may overlap with other categories in this resource, such as services to English language learners or those who are living in poverty. Similarly, if you are unsure of existing needs or how to define a population, utilize the resources listed under [Defining and Identifying Special Populations](#). Making contact with local social services agencies will aid you in identifying and developing targeted services. In many cases, people in underserved areas or with diverse backgrounds are either using the library minimally or not at all. Needs should be considered by libraries in all aspects: planning and collaborating; accessibility; staff training; programs, collections, and services; and marketing. You will need to go beyond established outreach measures to attract and meet the needs of specific populations.

## Resources

- American Library Association (ALA): [Strategic Planning for Diversity](#)
- [Association for Rural and Small Libraries](#)
- ALA: [Outreach Resources for services to Rural, Native, and Tribal Libraries of all Kinds](#)
- ALA: [Outreach Resources for Serving People of Color](#)
- ALA: [Outreach Resources for Services to Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender People](#)
- ALA: [Outreach Resources for Services to Bookmobile Communities](#)
- St. Paul (MN) Public Library: [Sharing More Than Books](#)

## Source Material

- [Adults with Special Needs](#) and [Youth with Special Needs](#) manuals



## Related Videos

Homelessness and Poverty

—Kelly Hughbanks

## Best Practices

### General

- Greet every library user who comes into the library with a smile, especially if they seem to be speaking a language other than English. Invite them to let you know if they need help. If you see them struggling to reach a shelf or if they seem to be searching for something, do not wait for them to ask; offer assistance.
- Invite support groups serving these populations to hold their meetings occasionally at the public library, and when they do, put out resources that might be of special interest to them. Provide children's activities during the meeting so the families do not have to worry about child care.
- Help raise public awareness of the issues these groups face through displays. Send information about new library materials or programs to schools, support groups, or social service agencies and ask them to include the information in their newsletters.
- Public libraries can offer training for social service agency staff to familiarize them with particular resources their clients may find helpful at the library.

### Specific

- Review the library's policy on the need to have an address and identification to get a card.
- Fines and replacement costs of materials can prevent people in underserved area or with diverse backgrounds from using a library. Working off fines or earning back library privileges in an alternate way is often appreciated.
- If there is a summer lunch program for children who live in poverty, investigate the possibility of the library being a distribution site.
- Know the location of the summer lunch programs so you can refer children and families at your library.
- Draft a short article or make a list of the materials the library currently has that might be useful to adults who are learning to speak English. Then call or stop in and introduce yourself to the major literacy providers in your community. Find out if they have a newsletter, and ask if they will print your article or list in their next edition.
- If the library has materials in a language other than English, gather them on one shelf or area and put up reproductions or small flags of the countries that use the language(s) to give patrons a visual reference.
- Offer story hours and family programs in languages other than English.
- Offer basic computer skills classes taught in languages other than English.

# People with Disabilities

This category covers public library service to individuals with disabilities and families and caregivers of people with disabilities. Example disabilities include developmental disabilities, brain injury, mental illness, emotional behavioral disorders, mobility, hearing, speech and language disabilities, learning disabilities, and vision.

## Overview

The term “people with disabilities” is a broad description used here for individuals with one or more disabilities to be considered in a library setting. The needs of families and caregivers of people with disabilities should also be included. The following is a brief summary of various disabilities.

### Developmental Disabilities

Developmental disabilities include people with normal intelligence who have disabilities such as cerebral palsy and autism, as well as people who have cognitive disabilities.

The term cognitive disability or intellectual disability is used to describe individuals who have a disability that limits their ability to learn and reason. According to the American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, intellectual disability is a disability characterized by significant limitations, both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior, which covers many everyday social and practical skills. This disability originates before the age of 18. In 2010 President Obama signed Rosa’s Law (Pub. L. 111-256), which amends the language in all federal health, education, and labor laws to remove “mentally retarded” and refer instead to “Americans living with an intellectual disability.”

### Brain Injury

The term “brain injury” is typically used in a medical context to describe an injury that caused brain damage. In an educational setting the term “traumatic brain injury” (TBI) is used more often and reflects the ongoing learning issues that can be a consequence of trauma. Brain injuries can be the result of such things as shaken baby syndrome, vehicle accidents, oxygen deprivation, heart attacks, strokes, and brain tumors. A trauma to the brain can impact cognition, speech, language, memory, and attention.

### Mental Illness

Mental illnesses are medical conditions that disrupt a person’s thinking, feeling, mood, ability to relate to others, and daily functioning. Just as diabetes is a disorder of the pancreas, mental illnesses are medical conditions that often result in a diminished capacity for coping with the ordinary demands of life (National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, 2012). Types of mental illness include depression, bipolar disorder or manic depressive disorder, schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, anxiety disorders, and borderline personality disorders.



Ruth Ann Montgomery, Arrowhead, describes her experience helping librarians work with people with limited literacy or information skills in her community and developing grants to improve library services for them.

## Resources: General

- Association for Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies (ASCLA) Policy: [Library Services to People with Disabilities](#)
- [Outreach Resources for Services to People with Disabilities](#)
- [Great Lakes ADA Center](#)
- [Respectful Disability Language](#)
- [Accessibility Guide](#) for Instruction Librarians
- [Tech Resources for Students with Disabilities](#)

## Resources: Specific

- ASCLA: [Library Accessibility Tip Sheets](#)
- Reach Out and Read: [Children with Developmental Disabilities Literacy Promotion Guide](#)
- [Libraries and Autism](#)
- [2012 ADA Signage Standards Take Effect](#)
- [Wisconsin Talking Book and Braille Library](#)
- WI DHS: [Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing \(ODHH\)](#)
- ODHH: [Tips for Communicating with Deaf or Hard of Hearing People](#)
- ADA Service Animals [Fact Sheet](#)
- Adapting Story Times and Group Activities for Youth with Cognitive Disabilities, [YSN Ch. 2 p. 18 “Adapting Story Times”](#)
- Adapting Story Times for Children Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, [YSN Ch. 3 p. 33](#)
- Tips for Communicating with Youth Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, [YSN Ch. 3 p. 38](#)

(continued on the next page)



## Related Videos

Limited Literacy and Information Skills

—Ruth Ann Montgomery

## Emotional Behavioral Disorders

The term “emotional behavioral disorders” concerns educational disabilities primarily attributed to youth ages 3-21 years old. Pursuant to Wisconsin Stat. s. 115.76 (5) (a) 5., emotional behavioral disability means social, emotional or behavioral functioning that so departs from generally accepted, age appropriate ethnic or cultural norms that it adversely affects a child’s academic progress, social relationships, personal adjustment, classroom adjustment, self-care, or vocational skills. Emotional behavioral disorders and mental illnesses are not the same issues; some children have other behavioral disorders that stem from mental illnesses while others do not.

## Mobility

Most people will experience a mobility limitation at some point in their lives. Mobility limitations can be temporary, such as sprains and breaks in bones, or they can fluctuate between limitation and free movement when caused by something such as arthritis. Individuals with permanent mobility impairments may depend on assistive devices or mobility aids (e.g. wheelchair).

## Hearing

More people have a hearing loss than any other disability. In this population, people may describe themselves as hard of hearing, having hearing loss, or deaf. Hearing loss can be temporary or permanent and can occur at any age. Hearing loss and deafness can have serious impacts on literacy, especially if the loss occurs before or while language is developing. Some people with hearing loss use sign language, but others communicate in writing. Some read lips and use speech. The Deaf and Hard of Hearing community includes people who are born deaf, people who lost their hearing as children, and adults who become hard of hearing later in life. It also includes people who are both blind and deaf. A person with hearing loss may or may not have speech or language issues.

## Speech and Language Disabilities

Speech and language disorders can be perceived as a disability separate from other disabilities. Language disorders and speech disorders can exist together or by themselves, and the problem can be mild or severe. According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, when a person has trouble understanding others (receptive language) or sharing thoughts, ideas, and feelings completely (expressive language), then he or she has a language disorder.

## Learning Disabilities

A learning disability refers to a disorder in one or more of the basic processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language. It may show up as a problem in a student’s ability to listen, think, speak, write, spell, or learn mathematics. Children and adults with learning disabilities have normal intelligence but have difficulty learning and using basic skills; however, often there are ways that they can learn to work around the challenges their learning disabilities cause.

## Resources: Specific (continued)

- Story Time Accommodations for Children with Challenging Behaviors, [YSN Ch. 4 p. 51](#)
- Managing Challenging Adolescent Behavior in the Library, [YSN Ch. 4 p. 51](#)
- Adapting Library Services and Programs for Youth with Learning Disabilities or Who Have Attention Deficit Disorders, [YSN Ch. 5 p. 63](#)
- Adapting Story Times for Youth with Mobility or Orthopedic Disabilities, [YSN Ch. 6 p. 77](#)
- Adapting Story Times for Children with Communication Problems, [YSN Ch. 8 p. 117](#)
- Adapting Story Time for Children Who Are Blind or Have Significant Vision Loss, [YSN Ch. 9 p. 131](#)
- Adapting Story Time for Children Who Are Deaf-blind, [YSN Ch. 9 p. 132](#)

## Source Material

- [Adults with Special Needs](#) and [Youth with Special Needs](#) manuals
- NAMI: [About Mental Illness](#)
- [American Speech-Language-Hearing Association](#)
- [National Eye Institute](#)
- [American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities](#)

## Vision

The definition of legal blindness is central vision acuity that does not exceed 20/200 in the better eye with a correcting lens or a field loss no greater than 20 degrees. It is a frequent misconception that people who are legally blind have no vision. According to the National Eye Institute, the two most common causes of vision loss for children in the U.S. are strabismus and amblyopia. Strabismus (crossed eyes) involves a lack of coordination between the eyes resulting in each eye looking in a different direction instead of focusing at the same time. If not treated, strabismus can cause amblyopia (lazy eye), which involves the loss of visual acuity in one eye because that eye is not used in early childhood.

## Considerations

To target the needs of people with disabilities, libraries must truly know their communities and consider these needs in all aspects: planning and collaborating; accessibility; staff training; programs, collections, and services; and marketing. Possible factors to consider include transportation, language, and support systems (e.g. families and caregivers). People may prefer person-first language (putting the person before the disability) when speaking or referring to people with disabilities (see Respectful Disability Language at right). While attention should be given to the needs of people with disabilities, this population should be treated with the same respect and humanity extended to all library users.

Some people with **disabilities** cannot read or do not read very well, which may result in the misconception that a public library does not have resources they can use. Currently, however, there is a push in K-12 education to teach all children to read, write and do mathematics, sometimes at a less complex level, incorporating accommodations and instructional modifications. All reading materials, including those with reduced complexity, should be age appropriate whenever possible.

People with disabilities may not realize the public library has resources that would be of help or interest to them. Flexibility and understanding may also be needed in regard to behaviors that may be distracting but unintentional or not within their ability to control. In general, however, the behavior of people with disabilities should be guided by the library's policy on behavior for all patrons. Safe, public places where all patrons are welcome are important, and the public library may be one of the few public facilities where individuals can spend unstructured time. This opportunity helps them follow their personal interests, make choices, and practice their social skills.

Being able to read is reported as one of the biggest issues for many people who lose their **vision** later in life. Trying to keep up with what is happening and changing in their community and the world around them is difficult for people with severe vision disabilities or blindness. Many people who have severe vision disabilities use assistive equipment and service animals to guide and help them.

Concerning library users who have **hearing loss**, libraries need to be considerate of the differing perspectives on the Deaf community. Language is the barrier that most often prevents people who are deaf from receiving public library services; the staff may not understand or be sensitive to people who are deaf, have a hearing loss, or have a speech disability. When communicating with people with **speech and language or hearing disorders**, show patience, be honest if you do not understand something, and utilize non-verbal gestures and responses.

## Best Practices

### General

- Review or create an ADA assessment and plan for the current library facility, and discuss any problems with the library board and municipal board to keep everyone aware of the need for an accessible library. Availability of parking (and location of handicap parking) and the need for prompt snow removal and a clear path of travel to the entrance are general travel issues for people with certain disabilities.
- Greet and smile at everyone who comes into the library. If staff are aware of a patron who is deaf or has a hearing loss, wave hello as it is voiced. If a patron who uses a white cane or has a service dog enters the library, the librarian should greet them, make an introduction, and invite them to let the staff know if they need any assistance; do not wait for them to ask. Show respect by talking directly to the person, not to a companion.
- Consider outreach opportunities. If there are routine simple tasks that might make a good volunteer project for people with disabilities, invite an agency to work with the library to set up such a project.

- If a local hospital or nursing home has a unit for people with disabilities, call and offer a rotating collection of materials that might be of interest.
- Assess your collection, and market resources to targeted audiences. Purchase materials in alternate formats or adaptive equipment; e.g., a device to scan and enlarge text, closed-captioned videos, and signed videos.
- Send library collection, program, and services information to regional and local agencies that offer services for people with disabilities, and ask them to include the information in their agency newsletters for their clients.
- A barrier to public library use is unfamiliarity with the range of available library services and resources. For example, assess what the library offers for a person struggling with mental illness or adults seeking assistance for parents who have lost their hearing. Consider compiling a brochure or handout that highlights how your library serves people with disabilities.
- Arrange staff training about interacting with people with specific disabilities. Recognize stereotypes about people with disabilities and help dispel these misconceptions.
- Libraries should adjust their programs for older elementary, middle, and high school students to allow youth with these types of disabilities to participate. They should also be encouraged to attend family programs or programs of interest to all ages.
- Consider developing a special directory packet that includes staff photos and first names so youth and adults with memory problems can refer to them as memory cues.
- Consider purchasing toys for your library from [The Toys"R"Us® Guide for Differently-Abled Kids®](#) supported by the [National Lekotek Center](#).
- Model the use of adaptive equipment (acoustically friendly rooms, closed sound system/hearing loop, transcription, microphone, [TTY\\*](#)) and make it a natural part of every program. This modeling helps raise community awareness of the technologies that are available and helps promote community acceptance. In this way, the library becomes an advocate for people with disabilities.
- Staff need to be sensitive in general to people who have communication problems and be aware of general ways to appropriately interact. They may need to work with patrons who use artificial speech devices such as speech boards, computerized speech, or devices that are programmed with common social phrases such as "Please," "Thank you," and "Can you help me?"
- Check with the school district to see whether special software is used by students with learning disabilities and purchase it.
- Review program and activity formats for children with learning disabilities and modify them for youth who can't read at grade level or who do best within a structured situation.

### Mobility

- Many kinds of mobility aids can be found in Wisconsin public libraries, including wheeled walkers with a seat and basket, wheelchairs, motorized scooters, and shopping carts and baskets. Keep equipment in a visible location and encourage self-service. Use a variety of means to tell the community about the mobility aids you offer.

- An accessible path should be maintained throughout the building, including book stacks, that is no less than 36 inches wide (42 inches is preferred). Book stacks that form aisles should not be attached to the wall at the end because this creates a dead end and forces people who are using a wheelchair to back up to get out again. Walk through the library or sit in a wheelchair and check to see whether there is a continuous path that makes it possible to get to all areas of the library.
- All staff should be familiar with appropriate ways to assist people who use wheelchairs, walkers, canes, or other mobility aids. All public libraries should periodically review the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or attend training on the ADA.
- Review emergency evacuation procedures to be sure they take into account people who might be using wheelchairs, other assistive devices or who can't move quickly.
- To accommodate people with mobility limitations, DLT recommends as a minimum that public libraries have the following types of equipment on their workstations. Typically, not all the adaptive technologies are loaded on one computer.
  - Workstation tables or carts accessible to people in wheelchairs and preferably adjustable
  - An alternate input device such as a trackball or joystick
  - Keyboard and mouse cords long enough to allow a patron to put the keyboard and/or mouse or trackball on a wheelchair tray
  - 19-inch or larger monitor
  - Software to enlarge text such as ZoomText
  - Software to read the screen such as JAWS or Window Eyes

## Vision

- All staff should know how to interact appropriately when assisting someone who is blind and how to guide them when needed to walk from one location to another. Be as descriptive as possible about what is being done or the materials offered.
- All staff need to know that guide dogs and other assistive animals are permitted by law to accompany their owners in public buildings. Librarians may not request proof that the animal has special training, but it is acceptable to ask what kind of tasks the animal is trained to do. That will help staff determine whether the animal is a working animal or a pet. Service dogs usually wear a special harness, vest, or leash identifying them as working animals. Staff should know not to touch or talk to an assistive animal.
- All permanent signage should meet ADA standards (updated in 2012); such as room signs, especially the bathrooms, section indicators on the end of stacks, and other commonly used informational signage.
- For people with vision impairments, provide library card applications and other forms in large-print or non-print formats, have bright lights for reading, and textured furniture for tactile clues. Ensure that your library website and online catalog follow web development principles that support the use of text readers and other adaptive equipment.

## Hearing

- Remind staff that if a person who uses sign language approaches them to ask for assistance, the first step is to ask verbally how they would like to communicate. They will likely indicate that they can read lips or that they will use paper and pencil; let the patrons choose the method they prefer to use.
- Learn a few basic words in sign language. "Thank you" is an easy one. "Can I help you?" is an important phrase.
- Train staff to flash the lights every time they make an announcement. This is a universal alert signal for people who are deaf and hard of hearing. Make this a routine procedure every evening to announce that the library is closing, even if staff people walk through the building and tell people who may not hear the announcement.
- If requested, the library must provide a sign language interpreter for programs and meetings held at the library at no cost to the patron. This is required by the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act). In general, the library must provide an interpreter who meets the standards of the person making a request.
- Librarians can get assistance from agencies and individuals who work with people who are deaf or hard of hearing such as videos that teach sign language or teach parents how to share books with their children who are deaf.

## People with Limited Literacy or Information Skills

This category covers public library service to individuals who have difficulty reading, writing, and speaking English as a dominant language and/or using computer technology in daily life.

### Overview

At one time, literacy was defined simply as the ability to read. Today, as information and technology drive American society, that definition has been broadened. The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 defines literacy as an “individual’s ability to read, write, and speak English, compute, and solve problems, at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family of the individual, and in society.” Regarding information skills, this is sometimes referred to as computer literacy, or more frequently digital literacy. The Digital Literacy Task Force from the American Library Association’s Office for Information Technology Policy defines digital literacy as “the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills.” DigitalLiteracy.gov expands on this definition to include basic skills such as using a computer or mobile device, using software and applications, using the internet, communicating on the web, and practicing online safety.

To put these definitions in context:

- Ninety-three million Americans (43%) read at the two lowest levels of literacy. In Wisconsin, more than a million adults qualify for literacy services, but less than 10% are receiving help.
- The U.S. is the only industrialized nation where young people currently are less likely than their parents’ generation to be high school graduates.
- We live in a time of unprecedented change and transition as a result of the technological revolution. Adults with limited literacy skills are unable to engage in their communities, work and families without help from local literacy programs.
- In difficult economic times, adults who struggle with literacy are the first to lose their jobs. Without basic literacy skills, they cannot re-enter the workforce or participate in worker retraining programs.

(Source: Wisconsin Literacy 2009-2010 annual report)

In Wisconsin, most federal literacy dollars go to organizations that provide work placements and to the technical colleges rather than to public libraries. Literacy councils are prevalent in Wisconsin and typically organized in larger communities, receiving funding through various sources. They typically provide tutor training and may also offer the training to the tutors of other area community-based organizations. Some literacy community-based organizations (CBOs) are volunteer staffed, and some have paid staff. CBOs in both cases have little funding for community literacy services apart from the money they raise themselves. The literacy services offered by CBOs, literacy councils, and some technical colleges may include services to county jails and state or federal prisons, as well as detention facilities for teens. Early childhood programs such as Even Start and Head Start may provide adult literacy instruction, as do some private organizations and private schools. Job placement services may pay for literacy services. Occasionally, public school districts offer adult literacy instruction. Even with all of these agencies providing services, it is not unusual for students to wait 3 to 12 months to be matched with a tutor, especially in urban areas.

[dpi.wi.gov/pld/yss/serving-special-populations](http://dpi.wi.gov/pld/yss/serving-special-populations)



Kelly Hughbanks, Milwaukee Public Library, describes her experience working with children and families who are poor and homeless in her community and developing grants to improve library services for them.

### Resources

- ALA: [Outreach Services to Adult New and Non-Readers](#)
- [Proliteracy Worldwide](#)
- [Wisconsin Literacy](#)
- [Digital Literacy](#)
- St. Paul (MN) Public Library: [Sharing More Than Books](#)

### Source Material

- [Adults with Special Needs](#) and [Youth with Special Needs](#) manuals
- [The Digital Literacy Task Force from the American Library Association’s Office for Information Technology Policy defines digital literacy](#)
- [Workforce Investment Act of 1998](#)
- Wisconsin Literacy 2011-2012 [Annual Report](#)



### Related Videos

English Language Learners

—Krista Ross

## Considerations

Because most public libraries do not offer direct literacy instruction, it is critical that they become part of the literacy network. Literacy networks often offer literacy and digital literacy tutoring. Literacy tutors often bring their students to the library and help them get a library card, which the students might not do on their own. Some literacy providers like to bring their classes to the library for instruction on library organization, shelf location, and online catalog use. Without collaboration, it is difficult to get adults to come to the library.

Some barriers that keep people from using libraries include lack of access to reliable transportation to get to a public library, location of the library, availability of parking, and hours the library is open. People with low literacy skills may not have experience with libraries or computers, and knowing they will have to use a computer can discourage public library use. Because they do not read and may not be library users, they may not know about the library's non-print resources or print materials that could help them learn to read. For some families already stressed by daily demands of just coping with life, adding a library return deadline to their already-complicated lives is impossible.

Literacy providers note that an important niche for public libraries is family literacy. The library has both the materials and programs that may entice parents to come to the library with their children, read with them, and ensure their children have access to reading materials. Schools, day care providers, Head Start, and Even Start are important partnering agencies for public libraries in this initiative to break the cycle of illiteracy.

Library collections should have adult literacy and digital literacy materials in print, video, and audio formats as well as software programs for adult students. Libraries also need instructional materials for tutors to help them plan lessons and find appropriate materials for their students. Students need books, videos, and software to help them study for their GEDs and HSEDs. Libraries must give attention to in-house marketing of materials for new adult readers and computer users. Make materials easy to find—it is often helpful if they are in one area. There should be good signage; use wording such as “Computer Help” or “Find What You Need Here,” rather than “Adult Literacy Materials.”

Public libraries need to advertise the needs and activities of the literacy agencies, and the literacy agencies need to help promote library activities and services with their clients. Literacy providers noted that outreach efforts such as a librarian going to a location to meet people who have literacy needs may be more effective than inviting them to events at the library. Librarians can send information to, or ask to visit, classes at technical colleges or at literacy councils.

## Best Practices

- Greet every library user who comes into the library with a smile. Invite them to let you know if they need help. If you see them struggling to reach a shelf or if they seem to be searching for something, do not wait for them to ask; offer assistance.
- Send at least one staff person to the next literacy or digital literacy training session sponsored by the library system or state literacy conference.
- Invite local literacy providers to conduct an in-service for their staff and trustees.
- Train staff to identify basic reading levels so they can recommend books that adult new readers can read to their children.
- Staff should provide assistance to people who have difficulty completing forms, in print or online.
- Look carefully at the library's basic services brochure. Try identifying words that could be simplified, and rewrite the brochure using a very basic sentence structure for adults who cannot read well.
- Fines and replacement costs of materials can prevent people with limited literacy or information skills from using a library. Working off fines or earning back library privileges in an alternate way is often appreciated.
- Include literacy providers when planning a reading or computer skills event, such as National Library Week, Digital Learning Day, or the start of a summer reading program.
- Invite literacy groups to meet at the library occasionally or host an open house for groups to celebrate literacy events at the library.
- Adaptive technologies such as a screen reader and enlarger, originally designed for people with vision impairments, can be very useful to people with learning disabilities and for people trying to learn to speak and read English. Users can follow along with the spoken text and improve their comprehension and pronunciation skills.

# Defining and Identifying Special Populations

For the purposes of this resource, special populations refer to people of all ages who have difficult, limited, or minimized use of the library. This includes, but is not limited to, persons who live in foster care, nursing homes, detention facilities, or who are displaced; people with disabilities; those for whom English is a second language; people with limited literacy or information skills; people who are living in poverty or are homeless; and people in underserved areas or with diverse backgrounds.

These categories stem from LSTA guidelines for outreach; your library's community will likely have unique needs. Ultimately it is your responsibility to truly understand the community you are serving and determine who is underserved because of difficulty using the library. "Special" populations and "special" needs denote those who need special attention because of social marginalizing. While attention should be given to special populations, they should be treated with the same respect and humanity extended to all library users.

Barriers to public library use identified by Wisconsin librarians and social service agency personnel include:

- Inadequate access including physical barriers to a public library building and geographic, neighborhood, and transportation barriers in getting to a public library
- Knowledge, culture, and climate within the community and inside the library. Outside the library, barriers include lack of familiarity with library services, limited language and literacy skills, attitudes about library use, competing demands, and inadequate emphasis on agency cooperation. Inside the library, barriers may include unwelcoming and uninformed staff and patron attitudes, unclear or inflexible library policies, little inclusion of persons with special needs in planning, and a perception that services to special populations are expendable.
- Lack of appropriate resources including materials, programs, services, equipment, technology, and staff time.

Public libraries can use the following strategies to overcome the barriers:

- Include special populations, families, and advocates in planning, implementing, and evaluating public library services
- Welcome special populations, families, and advocates to the public library in a responsive, sensitive, and appropriate manner
- Offer a diverse range of resources, services, and programs that are relevant to the lives of special populations, families, and advocates
- Collaborate with community agencies to provide the best possible services to special populations, families, and advocates
- Ensure that public library collections, services, and buildings are fully accessible and inviting to special populations, families, and advocates
- Market public library services, collections, and programs special populations, families, and advocates



Shawn Brommer, SCLS, describes her experience working with librarians to define and identify special populations and developing grants to improve library services for them.

## Source Material

- [Adults with Special Needs](#) and [Youth with Special Needs](#) manuals
- [McKinney-Vento Act](#)

Regardless of the exact size and shape of the effort, planning for services to special populations should include the following:

1. Look at the library:
  - Who uses the library?
  - What barriers might there be to use of library services for special populations (facilities, collection, services)?
  - Are some library services specially designed for special populations?
  - What services have been requested?
  - Does the library meet or exceed Wisconsin Public Library Standards in service to special populations? Are there standards that the library does not meet?
  - What services to special populations are available through the library's system membership?
  - Possible approaches:
    - Contact the system's special services/outreach consultant.
    - Examine the library's regularly collected statistical measures.
    - Consult the current issue of the Wisconsin Library Service Record and compare the library to others of similar size.
    - Contact PLDT for statewide survey results.
    - Conduct a facility accessibility inventory (organizations such as Wisconsin Independent Living Centers offer such services).
    - Consult Wisconsin Public Library Standards
2. Look at the community:
  - What are the demographics of the community? Which special populations are represented?
  - What community organizations and agencies provide services to special populations?

# Serving Special Populations in Public Libraries

The first thing to do when considering services to special populations is to create a plan. Some advance planning and preparation can go a long way in helping a library make wise programming choices. Because resources are limited, public library staff need to identify priorities and offer those services that will meet a community need and deliver the greatest benefit. The planning process and the planning document do not need to be lengthy or involved. The extent of the planning effort depends on the staff and budget resources the library is willing and able to devote.

Planning is a continual cycle of assessment, forecasting, goal setting, implementation, and evaluation. A library that maintains a regular planning cycle can emphasize various aspects at different times. Or, after examining community demographics and talking to others in the community, a library may decide to focus on one particular special population. The amount of work to be invested in every step depends on library resources and past planning efforts. But no matter the size of the library, it is important to know the library and the community and its needs before deciding on how best to serve special populations.

The plan itself can be short and simple enough to fit on one page or less, but it is important to be clear about where the library is headed, how special populations will benefit, and exactly what will be accomplished and when. The library should be able to recognize success when it happens and make midcourse corrections when necessary. Written plans help clarify ideas that in turn provide the information needed for good communication with the library staff and the community.

## Standards Related to Special Needs Populations

The [Wisconsin Public Library Standards](#), fifth edition, put out in 2010 by the PLDT, indicates that all Wisconsin residents need and deserve at least a basic level of library service. The standards provide a way to measure a basic level of quality for public library service and also provide a pathway to excellence in library service. The following standards, taken from that publication, relate to serving special populations.

### Services to Populations with Special Needs

Persons with special needs include individuals of all ages who often face barriers to their use of public library services, or need specific resources at the library or accommodations to make the most of their time at the library. The barriers can be physical, as the case of persons with physical disabilities who can't leave their homes without assistance, who live in residential care facilities, or who are incarcerated. Transportation to the library can be a barrier for people living in poverty. Non-physical barriers exist as well. People who don't understand how public libraries work, fear using libraries, assume there is a cost to get a library card, or fear incurring fines have barriers preventing them from using the library. These groups might include people who are adult new readers, who have developmental disabilities, and new immigrants with limited ability to speak English. People who have some types of mental illness may experience psychological barriers. People who have lost their jobs may find embarrassment to be a barrier. Because persons with special needs are often not traditional library patrons, often they are invisible members of the community. However, good planning will identify all the library's potential



Linda Stobbe, NWLS, describes her experience working with librarians to provide services to special populations and developing grants to improve library services for them.

## Resources

- [The Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies \(ASCLA\) – Important Issues](#)
- ASCLA: [Library Accessibility –What You Need to Know](#) – Tipsheets
- [Think Accessible Before You Buy](#) – Questions to Ask to Ensure that the Electronic Resources Your Library Plans to Purchase are Accessible
- [Improving Library Services to People with Disabilities](#) – Course Information
- [Wisconsin Public Library Standards](#)

## Source Material

- [Adults with Special Needs](#) and [Youth with Special Needs](#) manuals

constituencies, including individuals with special needs. The library can then develop specific strategies for reaching them and providing materials in formats they can utilize.

## Governance and Administration

- The library is in compliance with federal laws that affect library operations, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Fair Labor Standards Act.
- The library board meets monthly (with the library director in attendance) at a time and in a physically accessible location convenient for the board and the community and in accordance with the state law on open meetings and the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- The library board is invited to participate in the diversity and ability awareness training provided to staff.
- Annually, the library implements a number of generally accepted publicity techniques; the choice of which techniques to employ will be based on the characteristics of the community, including the needs of persons with disabilities, adult new readers, and those with limited English-speaking ability.
- The library uses non-print media (such as cable TV or radio) and accessible formats (such as large print or audiotapes) to promote its programs to persons with disabilities and adult new readers.

## Serving Special Populations: A Resource for Wisconsin Public Libraries

- The library develops specific strategies to inform patrons with disabilities, non-English-speaking patrons, and adult new readers of its materials, programs, and services, including dissemination of publicity materials in alternate formats, in languages other than English, and using basic vocabulary.

### Staffing for Public Libraries

- The library board has adopted a set of personnel policies outlining the conditions and requirements for employment of library staff, and these policies are consistent with state and federal regulations, including the Fair Labor Standards Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and relevant court decisions. The board reviews the policies at least once every three years.
- The library has a written personnel classification plan describing the job duties of each staff member, any educational and experience requirements, the physical requirements of the job, and salary range. The plan ensures that all qualified individuals have an equal opportunity for employment.
- The library has staff trained to assist patrons with disabilities in the effective use of assistive devices and adaptive software used in the library.
- The staff receives diversity and ability awareness training for communicating with library patrons and coworkers, including persons with physical and mental disabilities, those from diverse cultural backgrounds, adult new readers, and individuals with limited English-speaking ability.

### Collection and Resources

- The library cooperates in collection development with other local, area, and state-level libraries of all types, including the Wisconsin Talking Book and Braille Library, to provide a wide range of resources in a variety of formats to meet the needs of the community.
- The library provides access to resources in a variety of formats to ensure equal access for persons of all ages with disabilities, in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Formats may include books on cassette and in Braille, electronic formats, and closed captioned, described, or signed video.
- The library provides access to adult basic-skills and English-as-a-Second-Language materials with reading levels and formats appropriate to meet the needs of patrons who are adult new readers or who have developmental disabilities or limited English speaking skills.
- The library has, or provides access to, electronic information resources for its staff and its patrons, including those with disabilities. This may be accomplished through a variety of means, including online database searching, CD-ROM databases, digitized materials, locally mounted databases, remote full-text databases, and access to the Internet.
- The library provides assistive technology to ensure access to electronic resources for persons with disabilities.

### Services

- The library maintains policies and/or procedures regarding the public services it provides, such as reference and information services, programming services, services to children and young adults, and services to patrons with special needs.

- The library participates in system-level planning for services to special needs populations and youth.
- The library provides reference and readers' advisory services to residents of all ages and levels of literacy in person, by telephone, and by text telephone (TTY) the entire time it is open. Other means of providing reference service are also considered; e.g., fax or email.
- The library provides reference and readers' advisory services to patrons with disabilities in formats they can utilize.
- The library supports patron training in the use of technologies necessary to access electronic resources, including training for persons with disabilities in the use of adaptive equipment and software.
- Public programs provided by the library are free of charge and in physically accessible locations for children, young adults, and adults. The library provides the necessary accommodations to enable persons with disabilities to participate in a program and advertises the availability of the accommodations in the program announcement.

### Access and Facilities

- The library takes action to reach all population groups in the community. Appropriate services may include homebound services; deposit collections for childcare facilities, schools, institutions, and agencies; books-by-mail services; bookmobile service; programs held outside the library; and remote access to the library online catalog and other resources.
- The library ensures access to its resources and services for patrons with disabilities through the provision of assistive technology and alternative formats, in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- The library's online catalog and other electronic resources are accessible to persons with disabilities through the use of adaptive and assistive technology.
- The library has a telephone system adequate to meet public and staff needs including at least one TTY, with numbers listed in both white and yellow pages. A voice mail system or answering machine provides basic library information to callers during times the library is not open.
- The library has allocated space for child and family use, with all materials readily available, and provides furniture and equipment designed for children and persons with disabilities.
- The library building and furnishings meet state and federal requirements for physical accessibility, including [ADA Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities](#) (ADAAG).
- In compliance with ADAAG, the library provides directional signs and instructions for the use of the collection, the catalog, and other library services in print, alternate formats, and languages other than English, as appropriate.
- The library's accessible features (such as entrance doors, restrooms, water fountains, and parking spaces) display the International Symbol of Accessibility.

# Collaboration on Services to Special Populations

Collaboration with community agencies provides the best possible services to special populations and their families and advocates.

## Effective Strategies

- Allocate staff time to identify and to work with community groups, agencies, organizations, and networks that serve special populations.
- Partner with community agencies in joint ventures, including sharing resources and co-sponsoring programs.

## Possible activities

- Provide library space for agency meetings and activities.
- Encourage groups to set up displays in the library.
- Provide library brochures, bookmarks, and bibliographies to agencies.
- Seek agency suggestions regarding library resources for their clients.
- Partner in grant applications.
- Invite agency staff to library workshops.
- Offer library tours for agency staff and clients.
- Contribute articles to agency newsletters.
- Public libraries are a source for information about agencies and services available in the community.
- Maintain a public bulletin board for community notices.
- Maintain a website that provides links to community resources for special populations.
- Publicize agency events.
- Libraries and systems gather and share with their members information on regional and county agencies serving special populations.
- Libraries and systems gather and share with their members information on residential facilities for special populations; e.g., nursing homes, correctional facilities, and group homes for adults with developmental disabilities.
- Libraries and systems inform area agencies that work with special populations about library services for them.
- Libraries and systems provide continuing education opportunities that bring together libraries and community agencies that serve special populations, including library staff in residential facilities and institutions.
- Libraries and systems work with area agencies to determine priorities and needs.



Sharon Grover, Hedberg Public Library (Janesville), describes her experience collaborating with community organizations on behalf of special populations and developing grants to improve library services for them.

## Source Material

- [Adults with Special Needs](#) and [Youth with Special Needs](#) manuals

# Evaluating Special Services

Evaluation is an important part of the planning cycle, whether part of a library's strategic plan or as part of a grant. The clear goals and measurable objectives written during the planning process can indicate whether the library is headed in the right direction. Is a program effective as designed, or are changes required? What improvements can be made? Is the library making progress in achieving the goal? Is the goal one the library should continue pursuing?

An evaluation is also an important communication tool. It provides information the library can use to let people know the difference the library is making in the community. As a public institution accountable to and dependent on taxpayers, the library needs to talk about the return the community is receiving on its investment. Designing an evaluation program and writing measurable objectives when planning services to special populations can be challenging. One reason is that libraries do not usually collect user statistics based on special needs; in addition, users with special needs may not be easily identifiable. Also, progress may be incremental when working to overcome long-standing barriers to public library use by persons with special needs.

It is important to determine the effectiveness of a program and to communicate its benefit to the community. How can that be done? First, do not identify a measure that is so burdensome to collect that it is unlikely to be done. Make the evaluation process as simple, easy, and accurate as possible. Think about procedures the library already uses and how they might be applied. If the library does not currently collect the needed information, how can it be gathered? Keep in mind that comparison statistics are important. Collect "baseline data" before the program begins. Ensure that the measures chosen help the library determine its progress in reaching the goal.

The *NEW Planning for Results: A Streamlined Approach* (Nelson 2001), an American Library Association planning guide, outlines three basic types of measures:

1. Count the number of people served by a service or program.
  - a. Count a person once no matter how often he or she uses a service (total number of different users).
  - b. Count a person every time he or she uses a service (number of times a service is used).
2. Ask the people being served how well a service met their needs; e.g., through surveys, focus groups, or interviews.
3. Count the number of service transactions that were provided by the library; e.g., circulation, number of reference transactions.

The time to think about the evaluation is when the objective is written. Ask: Who will collect the needed information, when will the information be collected, and how will it be collected? When writing the objective, include the following three elements (from Nelson 2001): a measure, a standard against which to compare that measure, and a date or time frame by which time the standard should be met.

## Sample Objectives

Number of people served

- By (the date) all library staff (the standard) will attend a disability awareness training session (the measure).



Leah Langby, IFLS, describes her experience working with librarians to develop and evaluate grants that improve library services for special populations.

## Resources

- [Making Cities Stronger: Public Library Contributions to Local Economic Development](#)
- [Shaping Outcomes: Making a Difference in Libraries and Museums](#)
- [Evaluation of LSTA Grants](#) (Iowa)
- [Inspiring Learning: An Improvement Framework for Museums, Libraries and Archives](#)
- [Program Planning and Evaluation](#)
- [Sample Measures by Program Type](#)
- [It Takes a Village to Raise a Reader: Creating Grant-Worthy, Outcomes-Based Early Literacy Programs](#)

## Source Material

- [Adults with Special Needs](#) and [Youth with Special Needs](#) manuals
- [Wisconsin Public Library Development Team Publications](#)

- Ten families (the standard) will attend a family literacy event (the measure) by (the date).
- Twenty-five percent of persons attending family literacy events (the standard) will apply for a library card (the measure) by (the date).

How well the service is provided

- By (the date) 75 percent of library staff (the standard) will report that the disability awareness training program helped them provide better service to library customers with special needs (the measure).
- By (the date) at least 75 percent of persons with a physical disability who visit the library (the standard) will indicate that the library does a satisfactory or more than satisfactory job in eliminating physical barriers within the library (the measure).

Service transactions

- Electronic Spanish language materials (the measure) will be accessed at least 50 times per month (the standard) by (the date).
- Circulation of literacy collection materials (the measure) will increase 10 percent (the standard) by (the date).