

# **Adults with Special Needs A Resource and Planning Guide for Wisconsin's Public Libraries**

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## Foreword

Public libraries can make a major contribution to the quality of life of adults who have special needs, regardless of their personal circumstances or economic background. *Adults with Special Needs: A Resource and Planning Guide for Wisconsin's Public Libraries* is designed to provide guidance and practical suggestions to public libraries to ensure that all adults with special needs have convenient and equitable access to materials and technology at public libraries to meet their informational, educational, cultural, and recreational needs.

This resource and planning guide recognizes the changing face of Wisconsin. Our state population is increasingly diverse and aging. More adults with special needs are living in their own homes and communities, and a significant number live in poverty in both rural and urban areas. This publication offers strategies public libraries can use to provide adults with special needs the means to use library services effectively, foster personal growth, and obtain information necessary to be successful and productive members of their communities.

Collaboration with other agencies is one of the six strategies in the publication. This emphasis on working together will bring to the table public libraries, jails and prisons, and agencies that work with adults who have a wide range of special needs. Public libraries are encouraged to form partnerships with these organizations in their local communities to assure quality library services for these largely underserved population groups. Mutually beneficial programs and activities are likely to develop through this cooperation to the benefit of many adults who have special needs throughout the state.



Elizabeth Burmaster  
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# Introduction

## Definition of Adults with Special Needs

For the purposes of this publication, adults with special needs (ASN) are defined as people age 18 and older who are poor or have disabilities or both. Adults with special needs include, but are not limited to, persons who are economically and educationally disadvantaged, those for whom English is a second language, and adults who are institutionalized or incarcerated or homeless or who have cognitive, emotional, or physical disabilities.

## Public Libraries in Wisconsin

Wisconsin has 387 independent, statutorily recognized public libraries organized under 17 public library systems. There are 380 public libraries that provide services through a public building and 7 county library services that offer services through other public libraries but that do not have a building open to the public. Public library systems are county and multicounty administrative units that receive state aid to coordinate library development and resource sharing among the public libraries within their service areas. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI), through the Division for Libraries, Technology, and Community Learning (DLTCL), is responsible for statewide library development, resource sharing, and administering state aid to public library systems. Within Wisconsin, the DLTCL also administers the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA), a federal grant program for libraries.

## Background of the Adults with Special Needs Initiative

This publication is a follow-up to *Public Library Services for Youth with Special Needs: A Plan for Wisconsin*, published by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction in 1999. It is hoped this publication will assist Wisconsin's public libraries and public library systems in providing service to adults with special needs throughout Wisconsin. It is designed to guide library staff in planning, implementing, and evaluating services for ASN, offer a range of resources and strategies useful to all size public libraries no matter where they are located in Wisconsin, and provide information unique to Wisconsin.

Content is based on DLTCL's experience in administering LSTA grants for users with special needs, the 1998–99 Task Force on Youth with Special Needs, various articles, publications, and Web sites, and input from social service agency personnel and Wisconsin librarians who provide services to adults with special needs. Wisconsin public librarians and social service agency staff who work with adults with special needs met in February 2002. They reviewed the publication outline, offered content suggestions, envisioned a Wisconsin future, and identified community needs. Throughout the writing process, various committee members reviewed and edited portions of the publication and conducted agency interviews. The opinions and advice of numerous individuals and more than 70 Wisconsin social service agency personnel were gathered in interviews and incorporated into the publication. A complete listing of persons contacted is included in appendix 2.

U.S. census data for Wisconsin and library survey data contain valuable information for library planners. Chapter 12, "Supporting Data," includes census information that focuses on areas of special needs including

age, ethnicity, living arrangements, educational attainment, poverty, and disabilities. It also includes a compilation of three special needs surveys conducted by the DLTCL from 2000 to 2002.

1. The Survey of Library Services to Adults with Special Needs was conducted online on the DLTCL Web site during summer 2002. The response rate for this survey was 77 percent; 293 of 380 public libraries responded. The responding libraries account for public library services to 86 percent of the population of Wisconsin. The survey questions and a summary of the results can be found in chapter 12.
2. The Public Library and Branch Building Accessibility Survey was included as part of the DLTCL 2001 Public Library Annual Report form distributed in January 2001. The response rate was 98 percent.
3. The Accessible Workstation Survey was part of the DLTCL 2000 Public Library Annual Report form distributed in January 2000 and had a response rate of 97 percent.

There are three appendixes for this book.

1. “Appropriate Vocabulary When Talking or Writing About People with Disabilities” is a tip sheet on using “people-first” language. It explains current acceptable terms and indicates terms that should no longer be used when talking or writing about people with disabilities.
2. “Agencies and People Contacted” is a list of the people who agreed to be interviewed as part of the information gathering needed for this publication. The interviews were conducted by most of the regional system special needs consultants, as well as the author and project consultant.
3. Excerpts from the *Wisconsin Public Library Standards* are included in appendix 3 to help librarians understand how the services and collection development elements recommended in this book relate to the overall basic level of service that libraries are asked to try to achieve.

The final section of this book is a brief glossary of terms and acronyms related to special needs.