## Library Use Measures

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Background: Page 105

See text for Explanation of symbols.
## Library Use Measures

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<td>▼</td>
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<td>69.24%</td>
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<td>●</td>
<td>2.09^</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Background - Page 106

see text for Explanation of symbols
The Host County Halo Effect

While there are notable exceptions, it would appear that the residents of counties that host subregionals are more likely to be participants in the NLS program than residents in non-host counties. This does not mean that individuals who are registered in other counties receive substandard service. It is true however, that residents of non-host counties are less likely to be aware of the NLS service or to have direct access to it through a deposit collection.

The consultants observed a clear linkage between outreach efforts undertaken by subregionals and the penetration of these subregionals into their markets as measured by NLS registration. The maps on the next two pages along with the map on page 87 offer three different approaches to looking at the "host county halo effect." The earlier map provides a visual representation of the percentage of estimated eligible borrowers that are registered for NLS service. As you can see, host counties, identified by the red dots, generally fare better than non-host counties. However, perhaps even more evident from looking at the map is the great disparity in market penetration that exists statewide.

The second map (on the next page) ranks each county based on their rank among the counties served by a subregional. Eight of the thirteen host counties rank either first or second among all counties served regardless of whether the host counties have a high concentration of seniors. One fact is important to note: a county cannot be ranked higher than the number of counties that are served by a subregional. Since only one of the subregionals serves more than thirteen counties, only one has counties that are shaded in white.

The third map shows the distribution of deposit collections throughout the state. While all of the subregionals maintain some deposit collections, a few are more active in this regard. It should be noted that host counties are frequently urban centers and therefore might be expected to have a greater number of deposit collections. However, a look at the charts that follow the maps reveals that deposits are very heavily weighted towards host counties, even more than might be predicted by population.
Many questions might be raised regarding the reasons that host counties tend to receive a higher level of service than non-host counties. We will attempt to address a few of them here. First, it is only logical to assume that NLS service will be more visible, and therefore more used in host counties. The walk-in service available at subregionals offers an additional service aspect that is not generally available in other libraries. Even those libraries that host deposit collections are able to provide only limited walk-in service compared to subregionals.

Second, it is more likely that general staff working in libraries that host subregionals will be knowledgeable of the NLS program and will refer library patrons to the service as the need arises. Since library use is highly correlated with distance, most users of libraries hosting subregionals will be residents of that county.

A third factor that heavily influences the halo effect is the degree to which talking book center (TBC) managers are able to be involved in outreach efforts. The consultants' interviews with TBC managers revealed that many are severely limited in the time they can devote to getting the word out about the NLS program. While most TBC managers have visited other public libraries in their service area and occasionally make public appearances on behalf of the NLS program for civic organizations, the pressures of providing readers' advisory service and "getting the mail out" preclude extensive outreach involvement.

However, it is clearly evident that outreach efforts do work. With few exceptions, the subregionals that concentrate on outreach have the highest percentage of registrations. Bainbridge, Brunswick, and Macon are particularly active in their outreach efforts and it is apparent from registration figures that their efforts are succeeding. The disparity in registration percentages between host counties and non-host counties is largest in the subregionals that lack the time or the administrative directive to get into the outlying counties.

**Circulation of Materials**

The numbers and percentage of registrations are only one measure of service. Registered individuals must actually use the services offered through the subregional libraries if
they are to be considered effective. The chart on the following page shows the distribution of materials circulated by subregional libraries. Circulation is broken down into two categories; circulation of all materials including large print and newsletters, and circulation of recorded discs (RD), recorded cassettes (RC) and Braille.

It is obvious from a casual look at the chart that a number of talking book centers are heavily involved in providing materials in addition to those supplied through the NLS program. However, a look at the RD, RC, and Braille circulation provides a better "apples to apples" comparison in regard to operations directly related to the NLS program.

The Brunswick, Dublin, and Macon subregionals have the highest circulation of these categories of materials per capita when compared to the estimated number of NLS qualified users in their service areas. They, with the addition of the Albany subregional, are also leaders in circulation per capita when all materials are included.

A somewhat different picture emerges when circulation per registered borrower is considered. While Brunswick is still a leader in this category, the Rome and Valdosta subregionals lead this list. To a certain extent, this is due to the fact that Rome and Valdosta have relatively low numbers of registered borrowers.

Another factor that influences circulation is the use of the "automatic selection" feature available on the READS II software. This allows talking book center staff to select materials based on a user's profile without a patron making a specific request by title or author. Interviews with TBC managers reveal that some subregionals use this feature extensively while others rarely, if ever, use it.

The use of this feature and the mailing of materials to users without a specific request should not be looked at as an artificial inflation of circulation. Contacts with consumers both in focus groups and over the phone demonstrated that some users depend on a constant flow of materials and appreciate the automatic mailings. However, the variation in the degree to which this feature is used and the disparity in the degree to which materials such as large print and newsletters account for the overall circulation of
<table>
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<th>Subregional/Regional Name</th>
<th>Circulation Including Large Print and Newsletters</th>
<th>Circulation of RDs., RCs, and Braille</th>
<th>Estimated Population (OPB)</th>
<th>All TBC Circulation per capita</th>
<th>RD, RC and Braille Circulation per capita</th>
<th>Estimated NLS Qualified Users</th>
<th>All TBC Circ. per Est. NLS Qualified</th>
<th>RD,RC, and Braille Circ. per Est. NLS Qualified</th>
<th>Number Registered Individuals</th>
<th>All TBC Circ. per Registered User</th>
<th>RD,RC, and Braille Circ. per Registered User</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valdosta Subregional</td>
<td>33036</td>
<td>23902</td>
<td>251368</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>3519</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>98.0</td>
<td>70.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta Regional</td>
<td>141894</td>
<td>141894</td>
<td>2614835</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>36608</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3186</td>
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<td>State of Georgia Totals</td>
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<td>606498</td>
<td>7703202</td>
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<td>0.08</td>
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<td>7.8</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>14162</td>
<td>59.1</td>
<td>42.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RD = recorded disc
RC = Recorded Cassette
subregionals points out problems with using circulation as a factor in calculating state aid.

ASCLA/NLS Standards & Guidelines

It is legitimate to ask how well Georgia's subregional libraries perform in relation to national standards. "Standards and Guidelines" for the Library of Congress Network of Libraries for the Blind and Physically Handicapped are published by the Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Services (ASCLA), which is a division of the American Library Association. The most recent revision of the standards and guidelines was published in 1995 and was the result of extensive work by a committee composed of consumers, professional librarians working in regional and subregional libraries, and representatives of state library agencies, NLS, and other organizations that exist to provide services to people with disabilities. While the standards lack any force of law, they are used by NLS to evaluate regional libraries and are used by regional libraries to assess subregionals.

In many ways, the NLS standards are a poor fit for Georgia. As was mentioned earlier, Georgia is quite unusual both in terms of the number of subregionals that offer service and in the "wall-to-wall" coverage of the state by subregional libraries. A combination of history and the structure of subregionals in Georgia has resulted in a rather unique framework for service. Whereas subregionals are envisioned as local supplements to regional library service in some states, Georgia subregionals are essentially mini regional libraries.

The size of subregional collections is one evidence of this fact. The chart on the next page shows the approximate number of volumes held by each of the subregionals. The Library of Congress National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (LC/NLS) produces approximately 2,100 new full-length cassette books each year. The NLS/ASCLA standards call for subregionals to maintain at least one copy of each title distributed by LC/NLS in the last 24 months. Allowing for locally produced recordings, Braille volumes, etc., a subregional library might be expected to house a collection of approximately 4,500 volumes. The smallest collection reported by any of Georgia's thirteen subregional libraries
## Talking Book Volumes Held by Subregional Libraries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subregional Library</th>
<th>Approximate Minimum # of Talking Book Volumes Required by ASCLA/NLS Standards*</th>
<th>Approximate Number of Talking Book Volumes Held</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albany Subregional</td>
<td>4500</td>
<td>19000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athens Subregional</td>
<td>4500</td>
<td>25950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augusta Subregional</td>
<td>4500</td>
<td>27613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bainbridge Subregional</td>
<td>4500</td>
<td>22000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brunswick Subregional</td>
<td>4500</td>
<td>54987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbus Subregional</td>
<td>4500</td>
<td>33608</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin Subregional</td>
<td>4500</td>
<td>27000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gainesville Subregional</td>
<td>4500</td>
<td>37181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LaFayette Subregional</td>
<td>4500</td>
<td>19743</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macon Subregional</td>
<td>4500</td>
<td>34753</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rome Subregional</td>
<td>4500</td>
<td>28833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savannah Subregional</td>
<td>4500</td>
<td>14400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valdosta Subregional</td>
<td>4500</td>
<td>17686</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* standard requires subregional libraries to maintain at least one copy of each title distributed by LC/NLS in the last 24 months
is 14,400 volumes (Savannah). The largest collection contains 54,987 volumes (Brunswick).

Talking book center managers defend the large collection sizes on the basis of service to their clients. Many indicate that historically the Regional Library has been an unreliable source of materials for the users of the subregionals and that they must maintain extensive backfiles of popular and classic titles in order to serve their patrons adequately.

It is clear that there have been real problems related to quality of service at the Regional Library for an extended period of time. In addition to the dismal and inefficient facilities provided for the Atlanta operation, staffing levels are extremely low. Staffing has also been erratic and the Regional Library has been forced to operate with temporary staff and frequent staff turnover. It is no wonder that the subregionals, in an effort to offer quality service, have gradually shifted from their original focus of outreach and visibility to fulfill the role of primary supplier of talking book services.

The staffing of the subregionals also offers an interesting picture. The charts on the following page compare the current staffing of subregionals with the level of staffing recommended by the NLS/ASCLA standards. Interviews with TBC managers and the observation of subregional operations by the consultants provided no evidence that staff in subregionals are anything but extremely busy. Nevertheless, a comparison of current staffing to standards indicates that several of the subregionals have more staff than is called for by the standards. As was mentioned earlier, most TBC managers also bemoan the fact that they are unable to do as much outreach work as they would like. One may ask how this can be possible?

The consultants conclude that the subregionals are generally understaffed for the work that they are doing and that they often lack the time to carry out an effective and coordinated program of outreach. The problem is that subregionals are attempting to be mini regional libraries. With the exception of Braille service, they share very little of the burden for NLS service with the Regional Library. The reason for this is clear. The Regional Library has not had adequate staff to provide the support normally associated with the regional role.
### Subregional Staffing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subregional Library</th>
<th>Estimate of # of Registered Readers*</th>
<th>Professional Librarian</th>
<th>Readers' Advisory</th>
<th>Other Professional/Paraprofessional</th>
<th>Technical/Support Staff</th>
<th>Total Staff Required by LC/NLS Guidelines</th>
<th>Current Staffing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albany Subregional</td>
<td>1161</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athens Subregional</td>
<td>1098</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augusta Subregional</td>
<td>1445</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>2.73</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bainbridge Subregional</td>
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<td>0.80</td>
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<td>0.66</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>4.79</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brunswick Subregional</td>
<td>1422</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbus Subregional</td>
<td>681</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin Subregional</td>
<td>1536</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gainesville Subregion</td>
<td>930</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>2.08</td>
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<td>LaFayette Subregional</td>
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<td>0.50</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Savannah Subregional</td>
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<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>2.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Georgia calculates deposit collections as four users. LC/NLS calculates deposits as a single user.

The figures above are those being used by OPLS for FY 2001 budget planning purposes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subregional Library</th>
<th>Estimate of # of Registered Readers*</th>
<th>Professional Librarian</th>
<th>Readers' Advisory</th>
<th>Other Professional/Paraprofessional</th>
<th>Technical/Support Staff</th>
<th>Total Staff Required by LC/NLS Guidelines</th>
<th>Current Staffing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albany Subregional</td>
<td>1161</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>1.16</td>
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<td>Augusta Subregional</td>
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<td>0.37</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>2.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bainbridge Subregional</td>
<td>1226</td>
<td>0.49</td>
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<td>0.41</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>3.05</td>
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<td>Brunswick Subregional</td>
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<td>0.41</td>
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<td>0.66</td>
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<td>Savannah Subregional</td>
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<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.80</td>
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<tr>
<td>Valdosta Subregional</td>
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<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>1.04</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figures above count deposit collections as a single user.
Another evidence of the fact that some of Georgia's subregionals operate as mini regional libraries is the space devoted to the NLS program. While the consultants wholeheartedly applaud the subregionals that devote space to offer other services such as adaptive technologies in their centers, most of the centers are very large. This is primarily due to the extremely large collections of talking books that are maintained. It is important to note that the issue of the space occupied by talking book centers was a frequent point of concern mentioned by the directors of host libraries.

TECHNOLOGY

NLS and Technology

Technology has influenced, and will continue to influence library services to individuals with disabilities. The Library of Congress, National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) is not immune to this influence. In fact, in many ways, the NLS and technology are inseparable. The network began as a mechanism to distribute reading material in alternative formats (embossed books) and has continued to introduce new and improved recorded formats over the past seventy years.

The Library of Congress NLS program has a history of innovation. For example, the NLS program was influential in the development of the original "long-play" records. However, in recent years, NLS has been the subject of considerable criticism for not moving forward on a replacement of the 15/16 ips four-track cassette tape with a more technologically advanced, recorded format.

The consultants discovered that Georgia's library directors are quite well acquainted with the controversy and most openly shared their thoughts about the current format of a majority of talking books. Many see the fact that cassette tapes are still in use as a failure on the part of NLS. They wonder why the program didn't move to Compact Disc technology; they openly question whether talking books created by the Library of Congress are necessary given the wide availability of books-on-tape. They characterize the talking book machine as a dinosaur that is outmoded and difficult to use.
Following is an explanation of where the NLS program is and where it is likely to go in the future. The explanation is based on interviews with several NLS staff members and an examination of both print and web-based documents produced by NLS. However, the discussion also includes some speculation on the part of the consultants as to the future of the talking book.

Background

Some background understanding regarding content and format is necessary to fully understand the NLS program and some of the decisions that have been made from time to time. First of all, it is important to recognize that most publishers exist to make a profit. They are unenthusiastic about ideas that undercut this most basic business motivation. For most of its existence the Library of Congress, along with other entities wishing to record copyrighted materials, needed to obtain copyright clearance in order to produce recordings for the blind and physically handicapped.

Although a high level of cooperation always existed with publishers that nearly always resulted in the permission being granted, the process was cumbersome and time-consuming. This often contributed to the delayed release of talking books. Late in 1996, a bill was signed into law by President Clinton that provides an exemption from copyright for authorized entities (including NLS) to reproduce and distribute previously published non-dramatic literary works in specialized formats exclusively for use by blind or other persons with disabilities.

The "specialized formats" language, which is included in the law, is important to note. The NLS program has always employed specialized formats (formats not widely available commercially) as a way to afford publishers and authors some assurance that recorded books will not be distributed in a way that affects the commercial viability of the intellectual property involved.

The NLS program has typically achieved the "specialized format" protection by producing materials in ways that also extend playing time. For example, talking book recorded discs used a slower speed than the commercial standard of 33 1/3 revolutions per minute; cassette talking books
employ both a slower speed (15/16 inches per second versus the commercial speed of 1 7/8 inches per second) plus a unique tracking design to prevent the use of talking books by those not authorized to use the program. In both cases, the format also provides for extended playing time.

Many people who are critical of the current talking book format and the machines used to play the cassettes, have not stopped to consider the fact that NLS must, by law, protect authors and publishers by employing specialized formats.

The Books-on-Tape Question

Many of Georgia's library directors have promoted the idea of replacing talking books with commercially available books-on-tape. For many years, the variety and volume of titles available in the commercial books-on-tape format was extremely limited. However, the explosion of the popularity of this format in recent years has resulted in a much broader selection. Why not then replace talking books with books-on-tape?

While there are issues related to NLS recording standards and a desire of most talking book users to receive only full-length versions rather than edited or condensed versions, perhaps the primary roadblock to the books-on-tape approach is the cost of mailing.

Federal law prohibits the use of the "free matter for the blind" mailing provision for the distribution of commercial audiotapes. This means that, short of a change in postal regulations, that libraries or libraries and users would have to pay the "library rate" for mailing commercially produced books-on-tape to and from distribution centers. Furthermore, libraries would be faced with the purchase of materials that are now provided to them at no cost through NLS.

The cost of mailing (both ways) the number of talking book materials distributed by Georgia's NLS network libraries in the last fiscal year would have exceeded $1.3 million. This total is higher than the entire amount allocated by the State of Georgia for subregional operations. This obviously leaves nothing for the purchase of materials or
for readers' advisory and staff time preparing mailings and maintaining the tapes.

Furthermore, the importance of distributing talking books to the home must be stressed. Mobility is a major issue for most users of the NLS service. While some visually impaired individuals are highly mobile, some are not. Moreover, many NLS users are both elderly and disabled. Delivery to the home is an essential component of the service.

However, the United States Postal Service is not the only mechanism for home delivery. Many people are becoming increasingly aware of the possibility of downloading digital content to home computers. This provides a good segue into a discussion of the next generation "digital" talking book.

The Digital Audio Book - The Next Generation

Many have criticized NLS for not moving from the cassette tape to another audio format more rapidly. As most commercial music cassettes have been replaced by compact discs, questions have been raised as to why the NLS program has not moved in this direction. Interestingly, some of the answers to this question become clear when we look at the commercial sector.

Although some compact disc books are available commercially, publishers have, for the most part, continued to use the audiocassette format for spoken word materials. This is largely due to the installed base of playback equipment. While the CD has largely replaced cassettes in the home, the cassette has continued to be the format of choice in automobiles. This too is changing; however, the fact that the majority of autos on the road have cassette players rather than CD players has limited the market for books on CD.

The NLS program is faced with a similar situation. The federal government investment in cassette talking book machines is significant. A replacement of this installed base would be costly.

The NLS program has been confronted with several other problems in deciding on a new format. One is playing
time. While data-compression techniques have improved, a typical compact disc still cannot contain the six hours of content that can be placed on a four-track 15/16 ips cassette. The replacement of one tape with three or four CDs would probably not be perceived as progress by those users who are familiar with the operation of talking book machines.

Three other important issues regarding CD technology were considered by NLS in making their decision to forego a conversion to this technology. The first consideration was cost. Reproduction and distribution costs for CDs are roughly comparable to those of cassettes. There would be little or no savings in a move to CDs.

Second, NLS questioned the longevity of CD technology. Any transition to another technology will be just that - a transition. The total replacement of recorded discs with cassettes will have taken nearly twenty years when the last disc-based periodicals are retired. NLS believed that CD technology would be superceded by the time it was fully implemented.

Finally, NLS had valid concerns about the durability and cost of repairing CD playback equipment. Approximately one-fifth of NLS's 120,000 talking book cassette machine inventory is repaired each year. The prospect of moving to a more delicate mechanical technology that would require more frequent and more sophisticated repair was seen as being very costly.

In short, the NLS decided to forego CDs and instead pursue longer-term options. In doing so, they made several assumptions. First, any replacement technology should be digital. Included in the advantages to a digital solution over an analog solution are:

1. Better sound quality
2. The ability to listen to an entire book without manipulating the medium
3. Enhanced navigational capabilities
4. Ability to provide full-text in electronic form as well as the voice recording. (Allowing multiple output formats such as Braille, large print, etc.)

The second assumption that NLS has made is that the current four-track, 15/16 ips system will continue to be in
use for five to ten years after the new format is introduced. This is in keeping with past experience and recognizes the difficulty of introducing a new technology to diverse and widely scattered users, many of whom are not technologically advanced.

The third assumption has to do with the earlier "specialized formats" discussion. NLS must, by law, limit the production of audio books to a specialized format that enables them to limit the distribution of materials to the targeted populations. However, NLS does not believe that it is in the position to develop and implement a technology of its own. In order to be affordable, any solution must be an adaptation of a commercial product.

These then are the constraints under which NLS has operated in their pursuit of a digital talking book. While they have been slow to move to a new solution, they have not been inactive. Conversations with NLS technical staff and a reading of documents on digital initiatives reveals some progress.

Two recent events signal progress toward the eventual goal. The first is the availability of web-Braille. Braille users can now access 2,700 Braille books via the World Wide Web if they have access to specialized output devices. This computer-based solution may provide a glimpse of the future of the talking book as well.

The second event is the opening of a new state-of-the-art digital recording studio. NLS now has the facilities to produce digital masters.

The Consultants' Opinion

NLS is currently monitoring several technologies and tracking them to determine "crossover points" on a financial model. Included are a number of solid-state digital storage media sometimes referred to as "flash cards" or "memory sticks."

The consultants believe that the eventual replacement for the cassette book will consist of multiple distribution mechanisms. Elsewhere in this report, it is noted that some talking book users are technologically sophisticated. It is likely that these users will be afforded the ability to
download digital books in the near future. In fact, NLS has a sample of an audio book using the "RealAudio" format available on their web site. However, the consultants also believe that NLS must provide a distribution system that can be used by the majority of talking book users who are less technologically inclined. We believe that some form of a recordable memory stick may provide the appropriate solution.

The next talking book machine may be a device containing a decoding chip that will "play" a digital book encrypted on a solid-state memory stick or flash card. The machine would have few, if any, moving parts and could be very durable and highly portable. A port or ports to which Braille output devices and/or monitors could be attached could be provided to allow for output in formats other than spoken word. The machine might also include a function to allow for the compression of speech with little or no distortion by removing minute pauses.

Distribution of the recordings might happen in several ways as well. Some people may continue to receive their books on these memory sticks through the mail. Others may use a separate model of the digital talking book machine or a peripheral device attached to their home computer to download their books to reusable memory sticks provided by NLS.

In the consultants' opinion, it is likely that part of what is described above (the service to the technologically advanced users) will take place, at least in a demonstration mode, within a five-year time span. We believe that the wholesale replacement of the talking book cassette machines however, is not likely to begin sooner than a decade from now.

This means that libraries should presume that a system that provides for the physical delivery of talking books will be required for at least the next ten years. We do believe however, that we will witness a significant change in the means used to order materials. A constantly increasing number of users are likely to order their own materials using their home computers to access web-sites maintained by network libraries.
Technology and the "Ordering Process"

The new model for ordering talking books is currently emerging in Florida. The state recently installed a computer system that provides a centralized database of talking books that can be directly accessed from anywhere in the state.

A web catalog that allows librarians and end users to request talking books through a centralized repository of materials can be both efficient and effective. This model has the potential of altering the way in which talking books are ordered in much the same way that patron-initiated interlibrary loan is revolutionizing resource sharing.

Georgia should be moving toward the Florida model. Directors and talking book center managers should recognize that good readers' advisory service can still be available using this method. There is nothing to prevent the maintenance of special talking book readers' advisory desks. However, this model also opens up the possibility that NLS users can develop a localized readers' advisory contact with a librarian at the library in their own community. The Florida model presumes that every library becomes a potential ordering point for talking books.

The Florida model also has the advantage of making a closer connection between NLS services and other library services. For example, it is more likely that NLS users would be reminded of the availability of reference service if they were in regular contact with librarians who also provide that service.

Other Electronic Services

Georgia's Galileo system is well known and respected throughout the nation. However, little has been done to make Galileo attractive to or accessible to users with special needs. A good number of libraries do offer terminals with adaptive software that can enlarge print. Some visually impaired individuals are able to use Galileo because this type of adaptive technology is available.

Nevertheless, the consultants have two suggestions related to the Galileo system. The first is the expansion of content to include a coordinated set of web-pages targeted toward
individuals with disabling conditions and the agencies and organizations that work with the disability communities.

The consultants found hundreds of pages of materials on the World Wide Web related to individuals in Georgia who have disabilities. However, no single site provides a good entry point into this type of information. We believe that the Office of Public Library Services, in cooperation with Galileo, should work toward the development of a coordinated point of entry to the Galileo information system designed specifically with special needs users in mind.

The content would provide visibility for all library services including NLS services while, at the same time, offering a valuable source of relevant information to people with disabilities and the professionals who work with them.

Secondly, the consultants would suggest that this point of entry be highly accessible. Color choices should consider color-blindness. Type should be enlarged. Audio output of some basic information should be provided. Furthermore, Galileo should explore the idea of providing a special configuration page that would allow users to adjust what they see based on a set of initial settings. While it is recognized that Galileo takes users to a variety of sites that are beyond their scope of control, those pages designed and maintained by Galileo should be a model of accessibility.

Public libraries should also attempt to make their web-pages, online catalogs, and web catalogs highly accessible. The Office of Public Library Services should develop and offer a training program in accessible web-design for public libraries in the state.

OUTREACH

Outreach to NLS Certified Persons:

For many years, Georgia has approached making people aware of the NLS program through the establishment and ongoing existence of the subregional libraries themselves. As part of this study the consultants interviewed the person who served as the head of the Georgia Regional Library at the time subregionals were established. According to the
former Regional Director, the subregionals were established “to increase the visibility of the service, to get the service out into the libraries where people are.”

He also said that he and the subregional librarians spent “a lot of time on the road, talking to librarians and groups around the state about the service.” As the buying power of state-aid to subregionals has diminished, so too has a significant amount of travel by subregional managers outside host-counties. Extensive travel for the purpose of promoting service is now the exception rather than the rule. Some efforts to publicize the service do exist and many subregional managers do speak to civic and service organizations close to home. Many, if not a majority, of public library system headquarters display a Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped poster somewhere in the public area of their facilities.

Directors of libraries hosting subregionals have taken a number of other approaches to publicizing the NLS service as well. In a number of host libraries, library directors have chosen to place the subregional service in highly visible locations and, in a few instances, facilities have been specifically designed to give the subregional library a prominent space. Other subregional libraries are more difficult to find within the host library or are located in buildings separate from the public library system’s main library facility. All of the subregionals have at one time or another in the past sent periodic newsletters to their users, to social service agencies, to key individuals, or to other libraries. While some of the newsletters are quite elaborate and are published at regular intervals, others are quite meager and are distributed at irregular intervals as time allows.

Someone from every subregional is available to speak to community groups about the service when invited to do so. This task is occasionally carried out by the director of the host library; however, subregional managers bear the primary responsibility for these speaking engagements. Public presentations generally focus on talking book service; however, a few subregionals also place an emphasis on speaking to groups about assistive devices as well. During our site visits and interviews, none of the subregionals indicated that they have a formal communication plan that aggressively and systematically
promotes the service throughout their entire subregional area.

All of the subregionals place deposit collections in various locations outside their library. Locations of deposits include other libraries, nursing homes, retirement homes, senior congregate housing sites, hospitals, and schools. Working with the hosts of those deposit collections often calls for a good deal of personal interaction and promotion of the service because activity directors and the people responsible for the deposit collections at the site change frequently.

All of the subregional libraries indicate that they have promoted the talking book service to the public libraries within their area; they believe that, for the most part, staff in local libraries know where they find application forms and are aware of how to “sign somebody up for the service.” However, once a new user is enrolled, the involvement of local library staff members typically ends and local libraries often have no more contact with the user.

At least one subregional library has expended some energy on trying to extend the service into local libraries by placing deposit collections of talking book cassettes and a machine or two in each of the libraries and holding periodic training sessions with local libraries on topics of services to people with disabilities. However, this approach, like that of placing deposit collections in institutions and homes, requires ongoing attention and staff time that is usually not available. Furthermore, the staff in local libraries change and funding changes at the local level often force service priorities to change as well.

Overall, public library services to NLS certified persons is concentrated in and isolated within the subregional libraries. People calling their local library for assistance that relates in some way to blindness or disabilities are referred to the subregional manager or staff. While this is a generalization based primarily on interviews with public library system directors, participants in the consumer focus groups, who were users of the talking book centers, affirmed this fact.

When they were asked if they used other public library services, many partially sighted individuals said they also
used large print materials or commercial books-on-tape. A few indicated use of descriptive videos, but only a handful indicated that they ever call the reference desk of a library for information or use a computer at a public library to access online information. Most said that they got that type of information elsewhere, or that they called the talking book center with their reference requests. At the same time, a good number of focus group participants indicated that they owned and used computers and many others indicated interest in learning to use computers. Most of these individuals wondered aloud whether that wasn’t something the subregional librarians could do for them (rather than expecting that their local library might provide the training).

There are a number of potential target audiences for public relations efforts about the NLS service. Through interviews and focus groups, the consultants learned that individuals who have been blind since their youth almost always heard of the service through their physician or another health or social service professional or from a school, such as a school for the blind (focus groups included graduates of the Georgia Academy and of similar schools in several other states).

Indeed, many elderly participants in the focus groups who had been blind since childhood could not recall how they first heard about the service: they had “always known about talking books!” Young people with serious visual impairments are usually made aware of the NLS program through other agencies. Consequently, any public relations efforts by public libraries and subregionals toward reaching young people who are blind need to be focused on maintaining good relations with these agencies.

The real targets for a public relations campaign to extend the service are 1) people who lose their sight after they leave school and 2) the caregivers, social service agencies and physicians who work with people who have disabilities that would make them eligible as adults. One caveat should be noted: not all sighted people choose to use public libraries or to read regularly for recreation and information, and the expectation that everyone who is eligible for NLS service would use the service if they only knew about it is unrealistic. There are very few "new" readers among NLS users who become eligible for the service later in life.
Most have been avid readers of print materials before they qualified for talking books.

In the consumer focus groups, most people who had been library users before they became eligible for NLS service sometimes learned about the service from a library staff person or a friend. Still others began to use the service after a family member or friend who was a library user learned of it at the library and encouraged the person in applying for the service. All of this points to the effectiveness of having posters in all public libraries to catch the attention of sighted people and of having public library staff throughout the state who are knowledgeable about the program. Information has to be available at that “teachable moment” when someone realizes he wants to know about services available to people with disabilities.

Since many readers of print materials in libraries eventually become eligible for talking book service, it is important for libraries to create a continuum of service. Users of regular print materials need to be aware of large print materials; users of large print materials need to be aware of books-on-tape and talking books. In the same way, those who use library computers to access information resources need to be aware of assistive technologies.

The widespread practice of promoting the NLS service in the medical community, especially with doctors and health-care providers dealing with diseases and disabilities that qualify people for NLS service, is a necessary ongoing activity. It includes making personal contact and getting attractive and informative brochures into waiting rooms and offices. Similarly, the ongoing tasks of identifying and becoming a part of local networks of service providers are also necessary. The teachable moment is a separate experience for each person.

While an effective public relations campaign is an ongoing activity that has to happen at the local level to make it personal, there is a need for state level coordination and development. In this framework, promotion of the NLS service is only part, albeit an important part, of the overall promotion of library services to people with disabilities. Coordination of the development of a public relations campaign concerning library services to special needs populations, consulting assistance on local staff training
and on up to date assistive devices and technology, and increased networking and outreach with state level organizations should all be carried out and funded at the state level.

Outreach to non-NLS Certified Persons
From Public Libraries:

In interviews around the state, staff at all Georgia headquarters libraries expressed their desire and their willingness to provide the best possible library service to all their residents, including persons with disabilities. Because of an aggressive library-building program in Georgia over the years, library building accessibility is generally good, at least in public library headquarters buildings, and library staff are familiar with the basics of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Most headquarters libraries are either entered at grade level or have entrance ramps that meet ADA standards. Most have either automatic entrance doors or power assisted doors. Most have at least some accessible restrooms and an increasing number of libraries have accessible computer workstations.

The most universal service offered to users with special needs is large print books. Most libraries are building sizable collections of books-on-tape. It is recognized that these collections are primarily used by sighted individuals; however most library directors feel that the tape collections also fill a need for persons with disabilities. A few libraries' collections also include closed-captioned videos and descriptive videos. Some libraries also house demonstration collections of talking books, talking book machines, and even a few Braille volumes.

Bookmobiles in many systems provide outreach services to schools, day care centers, and nursing homes. Some libraries offer delivery service for the homebound either through their bookmobile or as a separate service. A number of public libraries that have no formal outreach service nevertheless will hand-deliver materials to patrons on an informal as needed basis. There are numerous assistive devices in Georgia's libraries, many of which were purchased with grants offered through the Georgia Office of Public Library Services.
The most common devices available are magnifiers and closed circuit television enlargers (CCTVs). Occasionally other types of equipment are available including: Kurzweil Readers, Braille printer, Loud-R Electronic Ear, TTY machines, closed caption decoders, conference hearing assistance systems, portable hearing assistance systems, and adapted computers. Unfortunately, most library directors report little or no use of these devices and some staff members confessed that they were even uncertain of how the devices worked or the disabling conditions for which the devices are best suited.

This raises several important concerns. First, it should be recognized that many, if not most, disabling conditions also impede mobility in one way or another. A large percentage of people with severe disabilities are either unable to personally visit libraries or lack the transportation to get to library buildings. This is not to say that efforts to make buildings accessible are not helpful. An increasing number of people with disabilities are able to use libraries and other public facilities because of improvements made under ADA. However, since so many potential library users cannot come to libraries or find it very difficult to do so, mechanisms to deliver information and other library resources to the place of residence are extremely important.

Flexible library policies and alternative ways to conduct library business also improve library access for persons with disabilities. Some libraries advertise telephone renewal, special loan periods, telephone reference, remote access to the library’s catalog and a willingness to provide adaptive services for library programs on request. All libraries visited by the consultants, including all public library system headquarters, were familiar with their role as a referral agent for National Library Service eligible persons.

Although all libraries want to do a good job serving their entire community, their ability to do so is often hampered by a number of factors. First of all, there is a lack of knowledge about special needs populations in the area. Are there any? Who are they? How many are there? What disabling conditions impede their ability to use traditional library materials? What should the library be doing that it’s not doing? How can the library reach them?
Secondly, there is not a clear understanding of what services can be expected from the subregional libraries. Services available from the subregionals vary considerably. The consultants frequently heard comments such as: "The subregional stopped the large print rotation. Were those books from the state money or did they belong to the library that hosts the subregional?" "Do I have a right to complain about the level of service my library receives?" "What is the local library role in serving people with disabilities?" "What can I expect from the subregional? What's their job? What's my job?" All library staff interviewed knew about the NLS forms and the library's function as a referral agent. But in most cases there is little follow-through and after a referral is made the library does not learn if the patron ever took the next step or if satisfactory service is being provided. Few libraries have any notion of how many residents in their jurisdictions are using the talking book service. While a few subregionals provide detailed information to the libraries they serve regarding the number of users from their counties and the number of items these people circulate, most provide either an occasional reporting of the number of registered borrowers by county or no information at all.

According to most libraries, communication between most subregionals and member libraries is minimal and most often takes place at the instigation of the local library. There is also a lack of knowledge about talking books and talking books machines versus commercial audio books-on-tape. Few directors are aware of the extent of the "free-matter" postal subsidy or of the fact that commercial books-on-tape cannot be mailed under the free-matter provision.

Many directors wonder why the NLS service is needed at all and suggest that books-on-tape that would serve both sighted and special needs users might be a better investment. Many questions were also raised regarding the technology used for talking book machines and why NLS hasn't yet moved on to other, more user friendly formats.

Inadequate funds for local libraries and subregionals is a third factor that impedes the efforts of libraries on behalf of special needs users. There are many questions about how the state money is spent by subregionals along with recognition that the money is probably not adequate to do
the job (at least the way things are currently structured). However, specifics about the funding formula are unknown by most library directors and there is a general lack of confidence in using circulation numbers as a basis for funding.

As for local funding, many libraries are struggling just to stay even and meet the needs of the most visible people in their communities. If special needs populations are not seen and heard from, it is difficult to justify a reallocation of scarce resources. Several library directors said something to the effect that, "If there was a demand, we would be happy to respond." However, the combination of low expectations for library and information service on the part of potential users and the lack of relevant services and, more importantly, adequate service delivery mechanisms from libraries leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The use of assistive devices in libraries is a case in point where the lack of knowledge about special needs populations combined with scarce resources leads to questions concerning the need for special needs services. As was mentioned above, most if not all libraries have various pieces of equipment from state grants. In most places directors report little use of the equipment (CCTVs and TTYs). Some equipment is viewed as obsolete, unworkable, or too difficult to implement (JAWS computer software). Lack of use of this equipment reinforces the library opinion that there are no special needs populations who need service. Directors say, "I don't hear any complaints so we must be doing okay."

All these factors--lack of knowledge about special needs populations, no clear understanding of the role of subregionals, and inadequate funding--are further complicated by the absence of a person or persons at the state level or in regions who can provide consultant services and guidance in serving special needs populations. This is especially important because most libraries do not have the resources to hire a staff member who specializes in outreach services.

Services that could be provided by state or regional specialists include:

- Statewide public information effort about library services for special needs populations.
- Increased networking and outreach between state and regional agencies and libraries.
- Demographic information on special needs populations.
- Consulting assistance in identifying and responding to needs.
- Continuing education for library staff on issues surrounding services to special needs populations.
- Better communication from the Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (LBPH) and from the subregional libraries on services and clients served.
- Improved statistical reporting on LBPH users.
- Regular evaluation of services provided from LBPH.

Increased funding to local libraries could provide for:
- Library staff time to devote to special needs populations, to attend continuing education, and to partner with local social service agencies.
- Improved collections, especially more large type and books on tape.

Outreach to Other Agencies and Organizations:

A wide range of human service agencies in Georgia were contacted and representatives were interviewed by phone or in person about Georgia public library services to persons who have visual impairments or other physical disabilities. Interviews included discussion of Georgia's network of talking book centers. Agency representatives included people who have some type of physical disability, people who work directly with persons with disabilities, and people who work with agencies that serve persons with disabilities.

Network of Agencies

One purpose of the interviews was to develop a picture of the network in place in Georgia that provides services to persons with disabilities. A key to providing excellent library services to special needs populations is integrating the library into that network of service providers. Incorporating the library into local, regional and state
networks accomplishes several important communication functions. One function is that the network can assist the library in either a formal advisory capacity or informally in designing services that are responsive to the needs of persons with disabilities. A second function is to aid the library in getting the word out about library services. Finally, a third function is to provide a resource for library staff continuing education with the goal of improving knowledge about community services and the staff's ability to interact with people of varying abilities. During the course of this study the following agencies were contacted:

- American Foundation for the Blind- Frances Mary D'Andrea, Director, Southeast Region
- Arts for All - Pam Fordham, Assistant Director
- Blind and Low Vision Services of North Georgia - Bob Crouse, Executive Director
- Blinded Veterans Association - Bob Willis, past president
- Center for the Visually Impaired - Annie Maxwell, Manager of Volunteer Services
- Georgia Academy for the Blind - Ann Werdin, Librarian & Joann Dankel, Education Supervisor
- Helen Keller National Center for Deaf Blind Youth & Adults - Susan Lascek, Executive Director
- Institute on Human Development & Disability - John Weber, Director
- Jewish Family and Career Services - Webb Spraetz, Developmental Disabilities Director
- Shepherd Center - Pat Herndon, Librarian
- Southeast Disability and Business Assistance Center-Pam Williamson, Assistant Director
- Georgia Division of Rehabilitation Services - Kay McGill, State Liaison for Blind, Deaf and Deaf-Blind

An important component of any public library outreach effort will be continued contact with these agencies. An advisory group could assist the state in critiquing and improving service to persons with disabilities. Alternatively, OPLS could utilize some existing group for this type of review. For example, the Georgia Division of Rehabilitation Services formed a coalition last year to provide input into the department's state plan. The coalition
includes representatives from most of the agencies listed. Many of the organizations provide workshops and presentations on disability issues and would be a good resource for library staff training.

Library Materials and Services

Agency personnel were asked what they thought were the most useful library materials and services that should be provided to their clients. They were asked to comment on both general public library services and service from talking book centers. For public library service their answers included:

- Access through interior doors/make sure pressure meets guidelines
- ADA information out and accessible
- Alternative formats including Braille
- Alternative methods of service delivery if building is a barrier to use
- Assistive technology
- Audio books
- Braille/tactile signage
- Closed circuit TV reading system
- Descriptive videos
- Employ persons with disabilities/be a model
- Use consumer peer counselors as contact persons with potential library users
- Internet/computer access in large print, speech
- Large print books
- Knowledgeable staff
- Music CDs
- Partnerships (with chambers of commerce, hospitals, schools, industry, universities)
- Referral to community agencies, 800 numbers
- TTYs (We're working to get TTYs distributed throughout the state to persons with hearing loss.)

Everyone interviewed had some awareness of talking book service. However, specific knowledge about the service varied, with those who personally used the service obviously having the most familiarity. When criticisms of the service were heard, comments focused primarily on the service from the National Library Service and not individual talking book centers in Georgia. Many of the
comments revealed that even professionals in agencies that serve people with disabilities have a limited understanding of the NLS program.

One user said her biggest complaint was that NLS is behind in publishing books. "I really get angry when I've seen an author on television and it takes me two to three years to get the book." In another interview the fact that two machines are still needed was a criticism. "I wish they'd get everything on tape so one machine would do it all. They still have some things on flimsy records." One interviewee suggested a better orientation for new users. "The most frustrating thing new talking book center users say is 'I got signed up and they sent me a bunch of books that I didn't order.' They get a little perturbed. It seems to take a little while to get sorted out with the patron and get to know them."

Some of those interviewed suggested a more integrated approach to providing library service by linking talking book service and other services such as reference. One person suggested "Have talking book centers arranged so that research could be conducted there." Several others commented on accessibility of the Regional Library. "Put the Regional Library by a MARTA station. Include a reading room and places to look up information. Have access to computers and include reading machines and scanners." The specific location of the Regional Library was faulted. "I don't think the location is great for blind/deaf-blind people."

Other ideas included looking at Florida. "They just started a web based system. It would be neat if we could have that here in Georgia." There is special concern about low-income people or those living in rural areas. "For folks with limited means libraries can be a hub for access to get people connected so they're not left in the dust. In rural communities, talking book centers become hubs of accessibility."

In addition to asking agency representatives to suggest key library services and materials for their clients, representatives were also asked to suggest ways public libraries could help them better serve their clients. First and foremost interviewees believed the library could help by providing the responsive services, adequately sized
collections in alternative formats, and the knowledgeable staff described above. The public library's reference, information, and referral function was viewed by several people as a key partnership area. "If we could look at the libraries as being part of our ADA information dissemination effort, it would be great. By joining our listserv libraries could get up to date information."

**Barriers to Library Service**

The most frequently mentioned barrier to public library service was getting to the library. Lack of mobility and transportation were the biggest barriers. One person said she very rarely used the library because it wasn't open when she was able to visit. Another frequently mentioned barrier was lack of knowledge about what is available at the public library. Lack of knowledge about talking books becomes a barrier for people who are recently blind or disabled. People who have been blind or disabled from youth have a good knowledge of talking book centers through school. The biggest challenge for the centers is reaching out to the newly blind or disabled. Another barrier is inadequate staff training. "The public doesn't know how to relate to people with disabilities." "People with cognitive disabilities may be reluctant to seek out library staff to answer a question. The staff should be aware of people who may wander in search of resources and ask if they need support, rather than expect the person to approach the librarian's desk."

**Public Information**

Since knowledge about library services was so often viewed as a barrier, agency personnel were asked about methods they use to communicate with their clients and for suggestions on how public libraries could do a better job reaching persons with disabilities. Many interviewees said that often people don't know what's available at public libraries. "I think the public library is so much more than books and people don't always think about that." General public information was not viewed as particularly helpful. More important was personal contact, word of mouth, and regular targeted mailings. "Personal contact is the most effective and leaves the biggest impression. The more we get out and spread the word through clients and former clients that seems to be very effective." "Outreach is
important because people with disabilities "might be hibernating." "In the community of disabilities they're still learning what their rights are and what they can ask for."

It was suggested that libraries need to recognize that communication is not a one-time event, but rather a continual education process. An ongoing public information campaign targeting special needs communities emphasizes the importance of public libraries as a part of the agency/consumer organization network. By participating in meetings and conferences with organizational assistance, by making presentations and offering displays the library raises its profile and communicates its willingness to serve everyone. Several interviewees mentioned the Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped as host of a recent conference on serving people with disabilities. This was seen as a good indicator of the library's positive outreach efforts. Also seen as important is ensuring that the library staff is trained to provide a welcoming atmosphere for persons with disabilities. "Library personnel need to use some ingenuity. Each person has different needs so libraries cannot develop a single formula." PR suggestions included the following:

- Get listed in the United Way 211 Help Book (Atlanta)
- Direct mail contact (letters, brochures, rolodex cards)
- A website designed with special needs users in mind
- Attend regional meetings of special education directors
- Put materials in ophthalmologists' offices
- Share good news stories
- Put information in organization newsletters
- Public service announcements on TV and radio
- Presentations and displays at conferences
- Make sure rehabilitation counselors have library information to share with clients
- Provide agency peer counselors and other staff with training sessions to alert them to what is available at the library
- United Way tours and speakers bureau
- Reach out to the schools
- Audio bulletin board
- Go to consumer groups
- Develop a list of consumer organizations and invite members to participate in library programs
- Connect with disability I&R agencies. Work with them and encourage a pipeline of information back and forth so they know libraries are user-friendly and that staff are trained
- Work with churches and identify leaders in community
- Invite DRS staff to office to have an exchange of information
- Library signage advertising staff availability to help
- Distribute a fact sheet in large print to disability agencies
- Do a better job orienting new users
- On any flyer the library prints make people aware of alternatives
TRAINING

When examining staff training in Georgia on the topic of library services to persons with special needs, it is necessary to think about talking book and Braille services as delivered through NLS, the Regional Library, and Georgia's subregionals. It is also necessary to consider how persons with special needs, including those not eligible for NLS, receive more general library services through their local public libraries.

NLS

Currently, training is available from NLS in a number of ways. First, new staff from the Regional and/or subregional libraries are invited to attend an intensive three-day orientation in Washington, D.C. It is recommended that staff be on the job for approximately six months before attending the orientation. There is no fee for the orientation, but all other expenses (travel, food, and lodging) must be paid by the participating library. The orientation provides attendees with an overview of the NLS service in addition to offering a look at NLS facilities and a chance to meet and ask questions of NLS staff.

In even numbered years, NLS coordinates a national conference, which is held in different locations around the country. In September 2000 the conference is scheduled for Los Angeles. In odd numbered years regional conferences are sponsored and organized by the various regional libraries. The conferences offer an opportunity to learn about new service developments and to network with colleagues from other states.

Training takes place in a more informal way through periodic NLS consultant visits. The NLS consultants use the NLS ASCLA standards and guidelines document as a yardstick for regional library service. The consultants provide the regional libraries with a detailed account of their findings subsequent to their visits. NLS consultants are also available by phone to answer questions as needed. NLS also provides training in using the READS II system and other network software.

During the time the consultants were on site, staff members of the regional and subregional libraries were participating in
READS II training via the telephone. While there was concern that the READS II software lacked printed documentation and training materials, most subregional staff indicated that the telephone training had been reasonably successful and that telephone support was also quite good. The consultants were told that more information on the product will be available during the first quarter of 2000 through a CD-ROM tutorial and an online help system. According to NLS, their first priority was dealing with potential Y2K problems.

NLS also provides a Network Library Manual ("the big red notebook") which is updated periodically and includes NLS procedures, history and the law. Information can be found as well about NLS mission, objectives, and services, book and magazine collections, equipment, contact names and the service network.

**Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (RLBPH)**

The absence of sufficient and permanent staff at the Regional Library in recent years has prevented the offering of much more than basic training at the Regional library. A notebook is available to employees and volunteers, which contains procedures and information on library services. This offers a useful supplement to the on-the-job training received by new hires.

The regional librarian occasionally visits the subregions and provides consulting over the phone on an as requested basis; however, the regional librarian is the first to admit that the level of contact between the Regional Library and the subregionals is less than optimal. As is also true at the subregional libraries, the pressures of providing basic service and getting the mail out on time intrudes on important tasks that are less pressing.

The regional librarian attends state meetings of public library directors and convenes meetings of subregional managers. There is no formal ongoing statewide training for subregional staff, other than that available through NLS.

The regional librarian is available to help public libraries through the Office of Public Library Services' program of continuing education offerings. The regional librarian occasionally provides programs and/or consulting services.
on special needs service topics for libraries around the state.

Subregionals

Training at the subregionals is primarily focused on job training for new subregional employees, which for talking book center managers usually includes the opportunity to attend the NLS orientation program. The arrival of new equipment and/or software is another occasion for training, as was the case with the provision of new computers and the READS II software to the subregionals. Some cross-training of TBC staff is taking place in a few of the subregional host libraries. Public library staff in some host libraries cover talking book center services when regular staff are on vacation or sick leave. There are also a number of instances where subregional staff have regular non-talking book center assignments within the host libraries.

With a few exceptions, outreach beyond the subregionals to the public libraries in their service areas is minimal and irregular. In most cases it primarily focuses on ensuring that there are applications at member libraries. Talking book center managers in a few of the subregionals do make concerted efforts to work with area public libraries. However, little formal training of local library staff is in evidence. More typically, talking book center managers have identified a single contact person in each public library system headquarters who handles all matters related to talking book service.

As noted elsewhere in the report, communication between most of the talking book centers and public libraries in their areas is at a minimum. While newsletters are published by several subregionals and while other talking book centers provide periodic reports, very few offer regular reports that share county or library system specific statistics on NLS program use.

There is some contact among talking book center managers. Some depend on each other for answers to procedural questions and for ideas on how to handle specific situations. The TBC managers also meet with each other once or twice a year in connection with public library director meetings and some attend the regional and/or national conferences.
Training Needs

Network Staff

This report includes some recommendations for changes in the structure of services to the blind and physically handicapped in Georgia. However, the recommendations include a transitional period in which services will continue in much the same manner as they currently exist. While there are some specific training needs that accompany the organizational change recommendations, all network staff in Georgia, both at the Regional Library and at subregionals, currently need and will continue to need ongoing training about the national NLS service, about their local operation, and about issues related to disabilities.

Some specific needs include:

- New staff member orientation to include operational policies and procedures, and the structure and philosophy of service to the blind and physically handicapped within the subregional library.

- New staff member orientation to include operational policies and procedures, and the structure and philosophy of service of the host library including how services to special needs users are integrated into the library's overall program of service.

- New staff member orientation to include the operation and the structure of service at the Regional Library and of the National Library Service in Washington, D.C.

- Regular communication and updates on operational procedures and policies on the subregional, regional and national level for all network staff.

- Periodic customer service training to include information about blindness and disabling conditions, sensitivity training, and telephone customer service for all network staff.
• Periodic training about library service including readers advisory, reference and referral, a review of materials in the general library collection that may be of special interest to persons with disabilities, instruction in various assistive devices available at the library, and introduction to various social service agencies and the services they provide for all network staff.

• Periodic training on specific issues related to the management of subregionals for all talking book center managers.

Mechanisms that might be used in staff development include:

• Attendance at the NLS orientation workshop for new staff after six months on the job.

• Development of written policies and procedures handbooks to be used in conjunction with the NLS manual.

• Regular review and updating of these policy and procedure handbooks.

• Visits to the Regional Library by new subregional personnel within three months of their hiring including an orientation to Regional Library services.

• Visits by the regional librarian to talking book centers that hire new managers within six months of their hire.

• Annual visits by the regional librarian to the subregionals coupled with follow-up reports of observations and recommendations (modeled on the NLS consultant visits to regional libraries).

• Regular communication by the regional librarian to subregionals via e-mail, listserv, and an electronic newsletter.
- Regular meetings of subregional managers at various sites around the state to discuss issues of mutual concern.

- Attendance at workshops offered by the Regional Library on a statewide or regional basis.

- Attendance at national and/or regional conferences to include conferences of related social service providers as well as library conferences.

- Membership and participation in various consumer organizations, such as the American Council for the Blind.

- Periodic surveys of network staff to determine their training needs and priorities.

- Promotion of the regional library as the place to call with questions on subregional services.

**Public Library Staff**

If Georgia wants to establish itself as a leader in the provision of library and information services to people with disabilities, the level of awareness of issues related to such service must be raised among all public library administrators and staff members.

Training for public library staff not currently associated with LBPH services should focus on two areas: first, ensuring that they are familiar with the purpose, philosophy, structure, services and operation of NLS, Regional Library, and subregional services to the blind and physically handicapped; and second, ensuring that they are prepared to serve all people with disabilities who come to, or contact, the library.

A Harris Poll conducted in 1991 showed that some 58% of all Americans felt uneasy around persons with disabilities and that 47% actually felt fearful. These statistics stem from a fear of "doing or saying the wrong thing to persons with disabilities." While one would hope that this situation has improved in the intervening years as people with disabilities have become more visible and vocal,
undoubtedly, some of these attitudes and fears still linger. A regular training program for all library staff can address some of these barriers to good customer service.

Specific training areas for general public library staff should include:

- LBPH purpose, philosophy, structure and operation including an explanation of who is eligible for service, how the service can be obtained, and what services that can be expected from the Regional and subregional libraries.

- Periodic customer service training to include information about blindness and disabling conditions, and sensitivity training. (Some in the hotel industry, for example, use a disability etiquette program called "Opening Doors" that teaches practical service skills to hotel employees. The program, designed to become part of the hotel new-hire orientation, includes a video that demonstrates actual hotel employees interacting correctly with guests with disabilities. In addition, "Opening Doors" includes simulation activities for staff to experience hearing, visual and mobility impairments.)

- Periodic training about library services to include a review of materials in the general library collection that may be of special interest to persons with disabilities or their families, instruction in assistive devices available at the library, an introduction to various social service agencies and the services provided, and a review of the Americans with Disabilities Act as it affects library service. All staff should be able to direct patrons to a range of library services as appropriate, including those available through LBPH and at the library.
The training for public library staff can be accomplished in a variety of ways including:

- Development of model written policies and procedures by Regional Library staff and subregional staff that can be incorporated into local library handbooks.

- Development and distribution of a new employee orientation package by the Regional Library that focuses on providing service to persons with disabilities.

- Incorporation of information about serving persons with disabilities into regular library staff meetings and/or training. (The job description for the regional librarian should include the expectation that a significant portion of time is devoted to the provision of consulting assistance to public libraries.)

- Incorporation of information about LBPH into Georgia's new director's manual.

- Annual visits by the subregional librarian to public libraries in their service areas.

- Regular written communication by the subregional and/or regional librarian to public libraries.

- Attendance at workshops offered by the Regional or subregional libraries.

- Utilization of local social service agency expertise in employee training workshops.

- Membership and participation in various patron organizations, such as the American Council for the Blind.

- Promotion of the Regional Library as the place to call with questions on subregional services and/or services to persons with disabilities.
The Public - Increasing Patron Sensitivity

In order to ensure that individuals with disabling conditions feel welcome in Georgia's public libraries, efforts must be made to increase the sensitivity of other library users to special needs patrons.

Some methods for increasing the sensitivity of public library patrons toward people with disabilities can include the following:

- Providing a model of good customer service.
- Offering employment and volunteer opportunities to persons with disabilities.
- Presenting and co-sponsoring programs and displays concerning disabilities in cooperation with local social service agencies or consumer groups.
- Offering materials about library services in alternative formats.
- Publicizing the library's desire to accommodate persons with disabilities at every opportunity. (For example, including a notice on all library publications and posting a sign at the patron help desk.)
- Including persons with disabilities in pictures in library publications.
- Publishing helpful communication hints. Use as a bookmark or flyer in connection with a library display or program.
Some Other Issues

Attitudinal Barriers

The biggest attitudinal barrier limiting the provision of public library services to persons with disabilities in Georgia is the feeling that there are few people with disabilities in the community, or that because few complaints are heard, there are few persons who are not already receiving adequate library service. This lack of knowledge about, and awareness of, persons with disabilities and their needs, coupled with a shortage of funds and the belief that some other agency (LBPH) is providing the service, limit the provision of public library services to persons with disabilities. Two states offer possible models of how these barriers can be overcome.

Other States as Models

The Bureau of Braille and Talking Book Library Services in Florida is often cited as an exemplar in providing services to persons with disabilities. Their emphasis is on encouraging talking book patrons to use their local public library more both for access to talking books and Braille materials and for general library services such as reference and referral. This is in part being made possible because of technological advances allowing for the creation of a central talking books database on the web, thereby enabling patrons and/or local libraries to request materials directly online. This model of service requires more emphasis on training for public library staff around the state who will have increasing contact with talking book patrons.

In Florida, training and staff development in the area of services to people with disabilities come through the Bureau or through the Special Services Caucus of the Florida Library Association. For subregional staff there is an annual three-day training conference which covers everything from policies to automation. New subregional staff members participate in a one-day orientation program. Because of rapid technological changes (Keystone automation system, word processing, e-mail, web access) continual training is now taking place.

In the early 90's, following the passage of the ADA, the Bureau was heavily involved in outreach to public libraries
around the state. Those outreach efforts included a general mailing to every public library about the ADA plus the sponsorship of two statewide conferences. The conferences covered obligations under the law, the needs of persons with disabilities, and how to provide services. LSCA grant funds provided travel money to encourage library attendance. The Bureau's quarterly newsletter, which goes to every public library, was then, and continues to be, an important avenue for getting information out about LBPH services and public library services to persons with disabilities. Another venue for training is the Florida Library Association. The flurry of outreach undertaken following ADA has now diminished and the efforts of the Bureau are currently focused on ways to encourage the integration of the talking book service into every public library.

In Massachusetts, the Board of Library Commissioners recently undertook a project with the goal of preparing libraries throughout the state to serve people with disabilities. The state's purpose is to encourage public libraries to examine services to special needs populations within the overall context of their library and their community, rather than supporting the piecemeal approach of funding an item of equipment here or more large print materials there. The Board is training public librarians in techniques they can use to better understand the potential audience and their needs and then finally helping them design services to meet those needs.

A consultant (Rhea Joyce Rubin) was hired to construct a special needs planning process manual based on the Public Library Association's Planning for Results. Published in September, 1999 the document was used as the keystone for a two day training conference for public librarians. The conference included sensitivity training with simulation exercises and a panel followed by demographic information and instruction in strengths and weaknesses/opportunities and threats identification as part of a local planning process. With the planning manual in hand, conference participants then returned to their communities to begin the process at their libraries. Participants returned in February for a one-day meeting to concentrate on the goals and objectives portion of the process and to receive instruction in completing grant applications to address issues identified during the planning process.
Each grant awarded will provide $20,000 of Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funds to the recipient library to develop services for people with disabilities as identified in the library's planning process.

In both these models, in Florida and Massachusetts, the focus is on engaging public libraries more directly in service to special needs populations. And in both these models there is a person at the state level providing the necessary leadership, encouragement, and coordination.

**Service to the Unseen**

Many potential library users are prevented from using traditional public library services because of mobility limitations. Fortunately, certain new technologies offer ways in which libraries can reach into the homes of these potential "unseen" users.

Many users of the NLS services never venture into public libraries for a variety of reasons. Earlier suggestions in this TRAINING section have addressed ways in which libraries can make sure that people with disabilities who can get to the library will be able to access services and feel comfortable doing so. However, libraries must also consider the individuals who are simply unable to physically come to the library.

Library directors and library staff need to be made aware of adaptive technologies and assistive devices that can be employed to enable these individuals to access library and information services. The Regional Library and the Office of Public Library Services have a special responsibility to offer the kind of training that will encourage library administrators and staff to consider special efforts to make online catalogs, web-sites, and other electronic resources more readily available.
PATRON (LIBRARY USER) SERVICES

The Request for Proposal for this study raised a number of questions regarding the use of the NLS program by individuals eligible for the program and the use of public libraries by individuals with disabilities. Following is a summary of responses to these questions; however, it should be noted that information on these topics is also scattered throughout the report in response to other specific topics.

Use/Non-Use of the NLS Program by Eligible Participants

There are a number of reasons that some Georgians who are eligible for the NLS program do not use the service. Some of these factors, such as lack of time and lack of interest in reading are no different from those that affect the use of traditional public library services by the general population.

Another important factor that affects use of both the NLS program and site-based public library services is public awareness. Both general public library use and talking book service use suffer from a dearth of targeted publicity. Some people who are eligible for the NLS program simply do not know it exists. This is particularly true of individuals with conditions other than visual impairment; however, many who lack visual acuity, especially those who lose their sight later in life, are also unaware that the NLS program is available.

Parents of youth who are eligible for the NLS service generally hear about NLS through physicians or professionals connected with an educational program. In focus groups people who have been blind since their childhood, especially those who attended schools such as the Georgia Academy for the Blind, usually could not remember how they learned of the program; it seemed to them that they had always been users.

However, some children, especially those with conditions other than vision impairments, slip through this network of professionals serving children with disabilities and they and their parents are unaware of the service, or choose not to use it. It should also be noted that the mainstreaming of the majority of children with disabilities means that
information on programs such as NLS must reach many more teachers and other professionals than was the case when visually impaired children were segregated. Since this situation can result in eligible users being unaware of the service, special efforts must be made to reach the large variety of professionals who work with children with special needs in school districts across the state.

As mentioned earlier, adults who become eligible for the NLS service who were not readers or library users before they became eligible are unlikely to become users of the program. While there are those who develop an interest in reading later in life, this is the exception rather than the rule.

Children and adults for whom reading and schooling were unpleasant experiences or for whom libraries were uninviting and/or threatening are also less likely to seek out and use the NLS service. Again, life patterns and priorities that are developed over many years are hard to alter.

There are also some people who have been avid readers of print materials and users of libraries who fail to make a transition to talking books even if they are aware of the program. Some consumers of the NLS program who participated in the focus groups conducted by the consultants pointed out that listening to a book requires different skills from the more conventional method of reading print. Consequently, there are some who are eligible for the NLS service but who have difficulty making the transition to “reading by listening” who choose not to make that effort. Some individuals even register for the NLS program and then infrequently or never use it.

Most people who are hearing impaired do not qualify for the NLS program; however people who are both visually impaired as well as hearing impaired do qualify and many are able to use talking books with special amplification devices. Some individuals with profound hearing loss can not use talking books. Fortunately, some of these individuals are sighted and can use traditional print materials and most others who have both hearing and vision disabilities are able to benefit from the Braille materials available through the NLS program.
It should be noted however, that the reading of Braille is typically a skill that is developed early in life. It is the rare individual who learns to read Braille later in life. This fact limits the audience for this format of material. However, while the number of people who are able to read Braille is small, the availability of these materials is extremely important for those who can.

As the health of an older person eligible for the NLS service deteriorates, it is less likely that he or she would make the effort to start using the service if they hadn’t already begun to do so. This underscores why it is so important for libraries to make people who are just beginning to lose their sight aware of the NLS program.

New users from among this "frail" elderly category are sometimes introduced to the program by concerned relatives or caregivers. Several caregivers who were interviewed had enrolled their elderly relatives in the program and found the NLS service a "godsend" for occupying the time of the elderly relative. One talked about the cassette tapes as a soothing diversion for a very elderly woman who was in constant pain.

Some people interviewed and a few of the consumers who participated in focus groups also suggested that there are a few proud individuals who either do not want to acknowledge their disability or who see the service as a government "handout" program they refuse to accept. One focus group participant related the story of his personal resistance to the program. In retrospect he was glad that an individual at his church was so persistent in encouraging him to try the program. Libraries are unlikely to capture this kind of user unless they undertake vigorous outreach efforts.

In analyzing the NLS usage data in Georgia, the consultants generally found a higher percent of users in the subregional host counties than in the counties further away from the Talking Book Centers; a condition that we referred to as the "host-county halo effect." A partial explanation for this imbalance is the inability of subregional managers to travel to the further counties within the subregional area for extensive outreach speaking and networking. Given the statistics demonstrating this fact, at least in some areas of the state, one reason that some eligible Georgians are not
using the NLS program is that they live in counties where
the program is less visible and less well known by
healthcare providers and caregivers.

Use/Non-use of Public Libraries by NLS Network Patrons

With two types of exceptions, the consultants found few
users of NLS services who also actively use their local
public library’s services. One NLS user interviewed said
he sometimes uses the NLS cassette deposit collection at
his local public library to supplement what he receives
through the mail from his subregional and that he has
occasionally “swapped out” a malfunctioning machine
there. This was within the context of “we’re often in town
and it’s convenient.” The second type of exception
actually used materials owned by the local public library,
that is, large print books. One NLS user said he could use
large print, “with some difficulty,” and his wife also used
large print.

Some current users of NLS cassettes were public library
users who made the transition from print to large print to
talking book cassettes. Overall, however, participants in
focus groups who were users of the NLS service did not
use their local public library and could not think of a reason
for doing so. When the consultant suggested they might
have reference questions that the reference department
would answer, they either didn’t know public libraries
offered that service, or they said they called the “talking
book librarian” at the subregional who would get that
information for them. In the perceptions of most NLS
users, the public library is a separate entity that sometimes
houses a talking book service or materials. Some NLS
users did say they knew the public library had computers
and the Internet and they wished there was a way that those
resources could be made available and accessible to them.

The consultants have conducted numerous telephone and
mail surveys of the general public on behalf of public
libraries. When interviewing individuals who do not use
libraries, the consultants usually ask survey participants to
identify reasons they don’t use public libraries. The most
frequently given responses are “no time,” and “no need to
use the library.” As was stated earlier, these reasons are as
applicable to people with disabilities as they are for
individuals without disabling conditions. However, it is troubling to note that the consultants found very few people who actively used both NLS services and general public library services. It is quite apparent that there is a disconnect between public libraries and NLS users.

Many library directors described what can be characterized as a "hand-off" of the visually impaired to talking book centers. In some cases this was seen as a positive thing in that someone else was now taking care of that person's library needs. In other instances directors bemoaned the fact that once a library user was referred to the talking book center they received little or no feedback as to whether the patron was receiving adequate service.

The section of this report on the subregional libraries presents information that shows that there is very little relationship between what was characterized as "library use factors" and NLS registration, while the correlation between age and registration was somewhat evident. Since so many NLS users become eligible for the program later in life, one would expect that public libraries would play a major role in the process of transitioning individuals from traditional library services to the NLS program. One would also expect that public libraries would continue to meet certain kinds of information needs not typically addressed by the talking book program. This does not appear to be happening in any substantial way. Clearly, public libraries and network libraries need to work together more closely to address all the library and information needs of people with special needs.

While the consumer focus groups included a few people of color, African-Americans were underrepresented given Georgia's overall population. While no record of the racial characteristics of NLS program participants is maintained, the observation that few Blacks were in evidence in focus groups is not particularly surprising. There is considerable evidence that indicates that public libraries have done a less than adequate job of reaching minority communities.

The consultants recently conducted a study that explored why many African-American residents of a Chicago suburb did not use the local public library. One person pointed out that having public library service available to the Black community was a first or second generation experience for
many African-Americans who are now working age adults. In general, the tradition of using library services is not as well established among people of color as it is among Whites.

Public awareness is also a factor in why some NLS users do not make use of local public libraries as well. Many public libraries do not actively promote themselves and their services outside the library facility itself. Very few public libraries that do not host subregional NLS services make an effort to develop contacts and promote library services among health care, education, veterans' service and social service professionals.

In contrast, many practitioners in the helping professions are aware of the NLS service and do promote it as an option for their patients, students, and clients. Consequently, some NLS eligible patrons know what the NLS service is and what it provides, but they are unaware of public library services that might be useful to them.

**Library Use by Persons with Disabilities Not Covered by NLS Service**

Given the lack of hard evidence about the numbers of people with disabilities on the local level in Georgia, it is difficult to determine the extent to which Georgians with disabilities do or don’t use public libraries. Most evidence that public library use by individuals with disabilities is limited falls into the anecdotal category. In some cases library directors and subregional managers shared anecdotes of people with identifiable disabilities being regular library users; however, some library directors were unable to identify any library users with visible disabilities. Many directors commented that they seldom, if ever, saw any more than a handful of people with visible disabilities in their facilities.

There are some notable exceptions. A few Georgia libraries have been fervent in reaching out to people with disabilities. Several have also been active in offering employment opportunities to individuals with disabling conditions. For example, cleaning service in the Sara Hightower Regional Library headquarters in Rome is provided by a crew of workers with developmental disabilities. Sara Hightower and several other libraries and talking book centers, including Hall County and the
Oconee Regional Library, also employ paraprofessional staff members who have disabling conditions.

The importance of having staff members with disabilities in libraries is hard to underestimate in terms of the service program that libraries offer to disability communities. At least two positive things typically take place when library workers with disabilities are visible. First, others with disabilities see the library as a more hospitable institution and are therefore more likely to use other services. Second, other library staff members become more sensitive and aware of issues related to disabilities through their close association with a co-worker.

Many of the statements and comments made earlier concerning Georgians with NLS eligible disabilities also apply to those with other disabilities. For example, some people, regardless of their physical capabilities, are simply not interested in reading. However, there is some evidence to suggest that since there isn't a specific library program like NLS for persons with other disabilities, that very few referrals to libraries are ever made.

Interviews with representatives of a host of advocacy and service organizations revealed a fairly high level of awareness of the NLS program but a lack of knowledge of other ways in which public libraries could assist the clients and/or consumers of other agencies and organizations. Many were not aware of the availability of assistive devices and adaptive materials in libraries.

Lack of adequate transportation is also a major factor that limits the use of public libraries by people with disabilities in Georgia. While most public library facility entryways are accessible, getting to the door in the first place is an issue. This is, of course, an issue in many other states; however, it is not less important simply because it is a widespread problem. In some areas of the state where special transportation systems are available, the consultants heard that people with mobility problems were sometimes able to get to libraries and various other services, but were unable then to schedule a convenient return to their homes. In other cases the public transportation that was available was unreliable or non-existent.
Once they have made the effort to get to a public library, people with disabilities may encounter additional problems. As has been mentioned, most public library headquarters facilities in Georgia are handicapped accessible; unfortunately, this does not always mean they are barrier free. An exception is the Oconee Regional Library, home of the Dublin Subregional Library. The director of the library has found that making the library barrier free has lead local physicians to send their patients to the library for exercise and as an "outing." The visibility of the library among people with mobility difficulties has increased; people have told their friends it’s a good place to go. The staff welcomes people with disabilities and has been trained to handle medical problems that arise within the library. Visible signage identifies the subregional library itself as the “special services” department rather than naming a specific disability to be served. The result is an inclusive and welcoming area for all people.

Meeting the Library and Information Needs of People with Disabilities

For the most part, focus groups with consumers of the services provided by subregionals reveal a high level of satisfaction. In a few sessions, users expressed their desire for more local news, especially information that they could get from local newspapers and publications if they were recorded and made available. The Macon Subregional does an exceptionally good job of providing this service in all its counties; however, in other areas of the state the service is very limited or not available at all.

Occasionally participants talked of wanting new titles faster, of being able to get more older classics on tape or of getting other specific titles that have never been recorded. Some users of the service would like to be more independent in terms of finding materials for themselves, particularly via their own computers and assistive devices.

It is interesting to note that most focus group participants fell into one of two categories. People tended to be either extremely well-acquainted with technology and assistive devices or completely unacquainted with computer technology. There seemed to be very little middle ground. It appeared that those at the technological end would have little trouble adapting to downloading talking books to their home computers while the other group would likely be
totally lost if computer expertise was required to access talking books.

While the less technologically oriented group was almost always in the majority, virtually every session included some "techies" and it was clear that these technologically skilled participants would like the NLS service to be much more advanced than it is.

Perhaps the most significant problem in regard to unmet needs that was identified by the consultants is related to low expectations of library services on the part of people with disabilities and on the part of advocates and professionals working with disability communities. Lack of experience with exemplary public library services that go beyond the traditional circulating book collection resulted in few innovative suggestions for improving library services.

Representatives of organizations that work with people with disabilities generally failed to think of the public library as a partner as well. During a site visit to one community, a consultant interviewed the head of a local advocacy organization who was passionate about what she was doing. She identified herself as someone who didn’t use the public library and found the information she needed on the Internet. In the course of the interview she talked about assistive devices she wanted to see. When the consultant suggested the local public library had those devices and could help her, her reaction was to think aloud about getting the devices into her office—not about partnering with the library to use the devices there.

User Satisfaction with NLS Network Services

Consumer focus group participants and users interviewed via telephone are highly satisfied with the talking book service in Georgia. Representative comments included, "best thing Congress has ever done," to "I don’t know what I’d do without it," to "no problem," to "they’re so good; they just send me new books whenever I send some back."

In some focus group sessions the subregional staff stopped by at the beginning of the session to greet participants and to meet them in person. While most participants voiced a strong attachment to the people in the subregional libraries, many had not met face to face.
In only one subregional area did the focus group participants voice any dissatisfaction with the service they received. Their orders had apparently gone unfilled from time to time and they found they “got better service when they went into the talking book library in person.” Few seemed to have a sense of what the regional library in Atlanta did, or at least had been doing in recent times because interlibrary loan requests were being sent elsewhere.

A number of focus group participants had lived in states other than Georgia and had availed themselves of services of other regional and/or subregional libraries. While all offered favorable opinions regarding service in Georgia, few were critical of services received in other states. The major advantage in Georgia seemed to be the highly personal contact that they had been able to establish with subregional personnel in Georgia.

Users of the talking book service feel a strong attachment to the people who serve them in the subregional libraries. Whenever they have a problem with the machines or with the content of the cassettes they receive, they simply “swap out” the machines or send back the cassettes they “don’t like.” Users feel they have a voice in what the staffs of the subregional libraries do; however, the input is usually limited and very informal in nature.

A few subregionals have conducted user surveys on occasion and a few have convened groups of consumers to gather their ideas. The talking book center managers in several subregionals (Brunswick LaFayette, and Macon are examples) are very active in community organizations and on committees related to accessibility issues and consequently gain considerable input from a broad spectrum of individuals.

However, the actual users of the NLS program seem generally satisfied with the overall program and resigned to whatever decisions are made in Washington. It was clear that many knew that the program was dependent on the federal government and on the decisions of Congress. The Congressional connection was seen both as a positive and as a negative—positive in the sense of national recognition of the difficulties faced by people with visual disabilities.
and negative in the sense that Congress was "political" and sometimes unpredictable.
Library Services
to
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Part II- Findings

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by

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