

Findings & Recommendations

Finding 1

Public library services to individuals with special needs have been largely relegated to the thirteen subregional libraries. Only a few public libraries other than those that host subregionals offer adequate services to people with disabilities.

Recommendation 1A

The State of Georgia, through the Office of Public Library Services and the Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped needs to undertake a comprehensive program of training, consulting assistance, and targeted program support that will result in an improved level of library service to Georgia residents with disabling conditions.

Finding 2

Georgia's Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped is understaffed, underfunded, and unable to fulfill its statewide mission. The Regional Library in Atlanta serves primarily as Georgia's fourteenth subregional library.

Recommendation 2A

Georgia should reorganize its Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped over the next five years to separate it into six distinct functional areas. They are:

- 1. Statewide coordination of services to people with disabilities**
- 2. Special needs consulting and training**
- 3. Machine lending and repair**
- 4. Talking book fulfillment service**
- 5. Braille Fulfillment Service**
- 6. Readers' advisory service and special services (recordings for the blind, Braille on demand, etc.)**

Recommendation 2B

Georgia should move toward outsourcing functions 3, 4, and 5. Outsourcing of Braille fulfillment service is probably possible within two years. Outsourcing of machine lending and repair services may also be possible within 2 to 3 years. Outsourcing of talking book fulfillment service should be targeted for five years from the implementation of these recommendations.

Recommendation 2C

The Georgia Regional Library for the Blind should work with NLS to develop a web-accessible version of the READS II software that would allow consumers and library staff in any library in Georgia to place requests for talking book materials from any location in the state.

Recommendation 2D

The Department of Technical and Adult Services should seek new quarters to house the Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped for the next five to seven years. Such facilities should meet NLS standards and should be more accessible and hospitable for walk-in use than the current facility.

Finding 3

Georgia's subregional libraries operate as mini regional libraries rather than as the outreach entities they were originally intended to be. This is in large part because they have been unable to depend on an appropriate level of support from the Regional Library.

Recommendation 3A

The thirteen Georgia subregional libraries should work with the Office of Public Library Service and with the Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped to transition over a five year period into entities that provide outreach services, training and assistance to public libraries in providing all types of library services to individuals with disabling conditions. Planning for this transition should fully involve consumer groups representing a large variety of disability advocacy and service organizations.

Recommendation 3B

A guiding principle in the transition of subregionals from direct service providers into outreach/support organizations should be the maintenance of high quality NLS/talking book service. Talking book center managers should be involved in the development of requests for proposals for contracted services and in the development of training to prepare library staff members to use the online request system.

Finding 4

The workload involved in providing basic talking book center service frequently impedes the ability of subregional libraries to conduct necessary outreach efforts.

Recommendation 4A

Subregional Libraries should move from being direct service providers to being outreach/support organizations over a five year period of time by gradually reducing the number of counties they serve over the five year period. Each subregional should be asked to shift a specific number of counties (probably two or three per year depending on the number currently served by the subregional) to service by the Regional Library each year.

Recommendation 4B

The state of Georgia should continue to provide support to subregional libraries under the current formula during the transition period. The shift of counties will require that the State provide some additional support for the Regional Library during this period. At the end of the transition period, subregionals should receive ongoing funding for outreach and support activities. This support should come in the form of a personnel grant dedicated to these services. Outreach workers would be responsible for the areas currently covered by the subregionals.

Recommendation 4C

Host libraries that desire to continue to act as subregional libraries for the counties within the host library's public library system area should be allowed to do so; however, State support for this service should be limited to a formula based on the estimated population of NLS eligible users in the area. Host libraries and/or the public library system would be expected to subsidize these operations.

Finding 5

A relatively small number of public library directors have an adequate understanding of the NLS service. At least some of the dissatisfaction with the NLS service that was expressed by directors in the course of this study is based on a misunderstanding of the scope and purpose of the program.

Recommendation 5A

The consultants believe that this report and the meeting with library directors will go a long way in providing library directors with a better understanding of the NLS program; however, we also recommend that the Office of Public Library Services invite representatives of LC/NLS to make a formal presentation at a director's meeting. One component of the presentation would be an opportunity for the NLS staff to answer questions submitted to NLS by the directors in advance.

Finding 6

Georgia's organizational structure of a Regional library and thirteen subregional libraries is neither the most efficient, nor the most effective mechanism for providing talking book service.

Recommendation 6A

The State of Georgia should develop three Requests for Proposals; one each for Braille fulfillment service, machine lending and repair, and talking book fulfillment service. The target for the first two RFPs should be two to three years into the implementation of recommendations. The target for the talking book fulfillment service should be five years into the implementation of recommendations. This will allow time for NLS to come to some firm decisions on the future format of talking books, which will have an impact on the nature of the RFP.

Recommendation 6B

The Office of Public Library Service, the Georgia Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, and the subregional libraries should jointly work toward a system in which some consumers place their own requests for talking books and others place requests through their local libraries. This will require the development of specialized software and extensive training.

Finding 7

The majority of Georgia's public libraries are doing an inadequate job of integrating services to people with disabilities into their regular program of service.

Recommendation 7A

The function of the outreach workers in subregional areas should not be limited to outreach and support for users of the NLS program. Rather, the outreach workers should be regional experts in services to all disability communities including but not limited to the visually and hearing impaired, individuals with developmental and learning disabilities, and people with mobility limitations.

Finding 8

Library staff members in most of Georgia's public libraries lack the knowledge and resources to adequately respond to the library and information needs of people with disabilities.

Recommendation 8A

Outreach workers should be required to provide training and consulting services to all public libraries within the area currently served by the subregional library.